

Different

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*To Papa, who taught me how wonderful Different can be.
And to Abigail, who stuck with me through it all.*

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Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Have you ever felt different? I have. But I have also discovered the incredible truth that I am not alone; that with our Redeemer's power, broken pieces can be made whole, and our pain can someday help ease the pain of others.

In addition to experiencing ADHD myself, I have observed it in different forms and manifestations among friends and family, including a relative whose experience includes a professional ADHD diagnosis and subsequent medication.

It is not my intention to give a complete picture of ADHD, broken homes, or anything else that causes someone to feel different. Rather, may you catch a glimpse of the compassion God has toward us in our pain and desires for us to have toward each other.

No, this is not a true story. I have created fictional characters and placed them in a fictional story world. However, as I write, Hosanna has become my friend, and as you read, I hope she will become your friend too. May you draw closer to the best Friend of all, Jesus Christ.

– Susanna Wenger

CHAPTER ONE

Hiding

“Hosanna!” Donovan called my name from the doorway of my room, but I didn’t really hear it. I focused on the daisy I was sketching—black ink lines, graceful blooms waving in the grass. Then with my paintbrush, I swirled ivory and cream together on my palette. I tested the hue on a scrap of paper, then added another touch of ivory.

My younger brother’s voice went on and on, until suddenly I tuned in. “I just don’t know what to do,” he was saying. That didn’t seem like Donovan. Why didn’t he know what to do? And it almost sounded like he was reading something.

Paper crinkled, and I glanced over my shoulder. Then I stared. He *was* reading something. I spun around in my desk chair and jumped to my feet. “Where did you get that?”

Donovan pranced from one foot to the other, fingers in a white grip on the edges of the letter, his mouth turned up in his eleven-year-old grin. “It was on the couch in the living room.”

He looked back at the letter and kept reading. “Really, Suzanne, why can’t I just be normal? I get so embarrassed when—”

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I dove for him, not caring if the paper crumpled. Donovan could *not* read the letter I was writing to my cousin.

With the letter securely in my hands, I sank back into my seat. “You shouldn’t snoop.”

He grinned. “But you left it out there.”

His grin was carefree and sometimes mischievous. I loved it. I loved my little brother. But reading my letter? I shouldn’t have left it in the living room. I must have forgotten it. But I couldn’t even remember having it out there.

“Anyway, why are you embarrassed?” he motioned toward the letter. “Is it because of what Sarah said about you?”

No way. What had Donovan overheard?

“Is it?” he insisted.

I tried to keep my voice emotionless. “What did she say?”

“Oh, Sarah was talking to one of the other girls at church on Sunday, and she was saying something about Hosanna Diller and how she’s *different*.”

I stared at him. “Really?”

Donovan hitched up his pants and stood on one foot. “Yup, that’s exactly what she said. ‘A little different.’”

I kept staring at him. Donovan exaggerated sometimes. And yet I could imagine Sarah saying something like that. I turned back to my desk, ignoring my brother’s excited prancing. I picked up my paintbrush. “You shouldn’t eavesdrop either.”

I looked back at him, hoping he only saw the disapproval in my eyes, not the . . . other things.

Donovan kept grinning. “I just happened to walk by, you know. I didn’t mean to eavesdrop. Anyway, I can’t help hearing things *that* interesting.”

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I ignored him and brushed paint onto the daisy petals in swift, tense strokes, then dabbed the centers with yellow. Gripping my brush tightly, I swished it in the water and began to trace the stems with pale green.

No more chatter from Donovan. I turned my head. The doorway was empty.

I shoved my chair back and stood, bumping my desk. The jar rocked, and water splashed onto the painting. Watery green and yellow crept across the white spaces.

I crossed the room and shoved the door shut.

My hammock chair spun lazily in the corner of my room where it hung from an overhead beam. I sighed and plopped into it, spinning to face the corner, away from my desk and the marred daisies.

I nudged the wall with my foot. I loved my hammock chair. Dad had hung it for me on my fourteenth birthday.

I sighed again, wishing I was still only fourteen. Maybe then everything would be more excusable. Weren't other girls my age a lot more mature than I was? They seemed like it. I tried so hard to act at least as mature as my friends. I desperately hoped that they wouldn't realize . . . lots of things. Things that I wished weren't true. Things that I wished no one else would know. What *had* Sarah told the other girls, anyway?

But I didn't really want to know.

Suddenly I jumped up. It was time to get busy. My older brother Bryan was bringing his girlfriend Angela for supper tonight for the first time.

I went to my desk. The painting was nearly dry, but big ugly splotches wrinkled the paper, and the picture was a pool

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of mingled colors. I tore several paper towels off the roll and started to clean up my desk.

I picked up the spoiled painting by its corner and held it over the trash can by two fingers. Then I changed my mind. I grabbed a pen and wrote “Hosanna” on the paper. Beside my name, I drew an arrow pointing to the ruined daisies. Then I dropped the painting into my desk drawer.

I finished mopping up the spilled water and tossed the soggy paper towels into the trash can.

A pile of books in the corner caught my eye. I gathered up the books and thrust them into my big walk-in closet, then tossed an empty cup in after them. I closed my closet door, then surveyed my room. A bit of brown smudged the wall about a foot off the floor. I glanced down at my bare feet and realized for the first time that I hadn’t washed them after coming inside.

Brown smudges on the wall! Angela could never see those. I could just imagine what she would think of Bryan’s family then. I crouched behind my hammock chair to scrub the smudges, singing under my breath.

Oh, that I
Had wings to fly
As doves fly to their rest.
Then would I
Hasten my
Escape from the tempest . . .

“What tempest are you longing to escape?”

I whirled around at Mom’s voice. The door was open a crack, and she looked in, smiling. Then she came into my room and sat on the edge of my bed. “What’s the matter?”

I bent my head farther over the smudges on the wall, scrubbing. “I’m cleaning.”

She looked at the smudges. Then I could feel her eyes on my dirty feet.

Yes, yes, I knew brown smudges on the wall weren’t proper. It probably wasn’t even proper to go barefoot.

“Hosanna.” Mom’s voice was soft. “You often sing that song when you’re unhappy about something.”

It was true.

“Aren’t you even a *little* worried?” I blurted.

“About?”

I stared at her. “Tonight, of course.”

“Oh. Is that all?”

It wasn’t all. But I knew I could never explain. I kept scrubbing.

“You don’t have to be nervous about having Angela over.” Mom tried to reassure me. “I’m sure it will go fine.”

I switched something off inside of me and smiled. “Thanks.”

She left the room, and I bit my lip. She didn’t understand. No one did. I glanced around and tossed the rag I had been using into my closet. Then I closed the door, a little more forcibly than I meant to. It gave a satisfying slam.

A smile crept over my face. My room was clean—now. Let Angela come. She wouldn’t see anything.

I crossed my room and stood at the eastern window. Mornings, it framed the sunrise. Evenings, it captured the soft hues of the Belt of Venus, fading into the purple twilight sky.

Beyond the shadow of the house that lay across the grass, Donovan was wading in the little wet-weather creek that cut through the far edge of our backyard. Yippy, his beloved puppy, bounced on muddy paws around his young master. Donovan's pants were rolled up to the knees, and his beloved straw hat sat raggedly on his head. He would have to clean up before Angela saw him.

If I craned my neck, I could see the machine shop that Dad and the boys ran. As I watched, Bryan came out of the shop and strode up the walk toward the house. His shop clothes were streaked with grease, and a black smear decorated his forehead. *He* would also have to clean up before Angela saw him. No doubt that's where he was headed now—inside to the shower, then to pick her up.

That meant I had to hurry if I wanted to straighten up the house before she got here. But I stayed by the window.

A few minutes later, my married brother Kyle left the shop too. He saw me at the window and waved. I waved back. My eyes followed him to his minivan. I watched him pull out of the driveway.

Kyle lived only a mile down the road. Kristi would be waiting for him at the window, holding baby Gregg. My four-year-old niece Emily would be chattering at her side.

I smiled, then turned from the open window. I grabbed a red-and-white peppermint from the bag on my dresser and tucked it into my cheek. The cold flavor filled my mouth.

Hiding

I heard a slight sound by my door and turned. There was Donovan, peeking in. How had he gotten in here so fast?

"Yum," he hinted, with a mischievous smile.

"Go wash up," I said. "And take off that hat."

He wrinkled his nose. I brushed past him, dropping a peppermint in his hand.

"Thanks." He grinned sheepishly.

I was washing the picture window in the living room when Bryan walked past, heading for the front door. His clean shirt was stiff and new, and his black hair combed to perfection. All traces of grease were gone. Even his shoes shone.

"Hey!"

Startled, I met his eyes. "What?"

He laughed. "This is the third time I asked if you're excited."

"Oh." I shrugged. "I guess."

"Me too." He smiled and went out.

Angela was very polite and always smiling, but I didn't know her well. I hoped she didn't know me any better than I knew her.

I didn't know much about her family, either. She attended Ebenezer, a sister church to ours. We saw her occasionally at joint meetings, but I had never talked with her much. She had older siblings who weren't at home anymore, and a quiet mother. I didn't remember ever meeting her father.

By six o'clock, the food was ready and the house was clean. Donovan was clean too, since Mom had made him take a quick bath. He was flopped across the couch, reading *The Man in Bearskin*, and he still wore his unraveling straw hat.