

The Other Side

Adapted from the book by Jacqueline Woodson

There was a fence. It stretched though the town. That summer it seemed bigger.

We lived in a yellow house on one side of it. White people lived on the other. Mama said, "Don't climb over that fence when you play." She said it wasn't safe.

I could see the fence. That summer I could see a girl in a pink sweater on the other side of the fence. Every morning she climbed up on the fence and stared at me.

Sometimes I stared back.

She was always alone. We just looked at each other.

One day my friends and I were jumping rope in our yard. She climbed up on the fence. She asked if she could play. My friend said no to her-but she didn't ask anyone else. She just answered. I don't know what I would have said. Maybe yes. Maybe no.

The other side of the fence seemed far away. When I asked Mama why we shouldn't talk to the girl, Mama said, "Because that's how things have always been."

It rained a lot that summer. On rainy days, the girl sat on a fence in a raincoat. She got all wet. She looked like she didn't care. Sometimes I saw her dancing in the rain, laughing and splashing. But she was alone.

Mama wouldn't let me go out in the rain. "Stay inside where it's warm and dry," said Mama. But when it rained, I always looked outside and saw the girl. She was always near the fence.

When the sun returned, I would walk outside. The sun would already be high in the sky. I stood with my hands up to the sky. I felt brave. I felt free. I danced. I danced close to the fence.

Suddenly, the girl asked my name.

"Clover," I said.

"My name's Annie," she said. "Annie Paul. I live over here." She smiled.

And then I smiled. And we stood looking at each other, smiling.

"It's nice up on this fence," Annie said. "You can see all over."

I touched the fence. I reached up and touched the top of the fence.

"A fence like this was made to sit on," Annie said. She looked at me from the corner of her eye.

"My mama says I shouldn't go on the other side," I said.

"My mama says the same thing. But she never said I couldn't sit on it."

"Neither did my mama!" I said.

So, that summer, Annie and I sat together on that fence.

And when my friends looked at me funny, I just pretended I didn't care.

Sometimes, Mama watched us. I waited. Maybe she would tell me to get down. But she never did.

"I see you made a new friend," she said one morning.

And I smiled and said yes. Mama smiled too.

That summer me and Annie sat on that fence and watched the whole wide world around us.

One day Sandra and the other black girls were jumping rope near the fence. Annie and I asked if we could play.

"I don't care," Sandra said.

And when we jumped, Sandra and me were partners. When we were too tired to jump anymore, we sat up on the fence, all of us in a long line.

"Someday somebody's going to come along and knock this old fence down," Annie said.

And I nodded. "Yeah," I said. "Someday."

What does the fence represent?