

Fairy Tale - The Nice's

Once upon a time, in the country of Flatland and just outside the village of Surfaceville, there lived a family... a mom, a dad, a daughter and a son, named the Nice's. The Nice's were the model of all families in and around Surfaceville, at least it seemed. Dad was a hard worker and community servant, Mom was a caring citizen, and the kids were examples of high achievement and, of course, niceness.

In Flatland, and especially in Surfaceville, there were a number of important rules to follow. These rules were never written down, but everyone knew them, and the Nice's were particularly committed to them.

1. Feel things but don't actually talk about what you feel
2. Think things but don't actually say what you think
3. Do everything you can to make sure that the people around you like you and stay happy

For little boy Nice, he learned at an early age to how to follow these rules. He did well in school and worked really hard to live up to his name: NICE. His teachers always chose him as their favorite, but he didn't ever quite feel like it was enough... in his mind, there was always something more to do.

Many of Nice Boy's classmates liked him, but they also seemed to have a quiet disdain for him... he was so good, so eager to do the right thing, and was such an "example" that it was annoying. Boy Nice had learned that being the good kid got him the attention of his teachers and of people in charge, but that sometimes it backfired, and made him feel more alone with his classmates.

The unwritten rules of Surfaceville were followed closely in the Nice home. You could always tell when Nice Dad was worried, or angry or upset or frustrated, but he never talked about. Nice Mom tried to but didn't quite know how. And Nice Girl and Nice Boy mostly just tried to do what was expected of them... It was the same thing with Nice Grandpa and Grandma that lived in the next town over. They would talk about the weather, about doing tasks, but never about anything that seemed to matter.

Because of the unwritten rules, it was hard for people in Surfaceville to have relationships. Sometimes, because they knew they couldn't break the rules, they would just stand there and look at each other... all the time knowing that the other person had something that they felt or that they wanted to say, but they couldn't... and vice versa.

By the time that Nice Boy reached Junior High, he had a well-grooved path worn in his reputation as the good kid. That fall, that took on a new expression. Nice Boy started some classes at the local Good Church, where he could learn about religion. In the midst of the classes, something started to happen with Nice Boy. He experienced some new things... spiritual things that opened up new parts of life for him. But he knew he couldn't talk about it. Even though the Nice Family went to the Good Church each Sunday, Nice Boy hid that he got up early to read the Holy Book, not being sure what others would think. He had never seen his family openly read or talk about spiritual things.

This wasn't the first time that Nice Boy felt like hiding things... sometime he hid good things... sometimes he hid things that weren't necessarily good or bad. Nice Boy almost always had a girl that he liked in school, but he never told Nice Mom or Dad about it. He wasn't sure what they would think. And he never quite knew how to sort through the things that he was feeling about these girls. It seemed like he quickly dove into deep feelings, and tried to express things in the midst of those relationships. Maybe he thought that was a place where the unwritten rules of Surfaceville could get broken... but in reality, the relationships weren't any deeper, he just hoped they would be.

Nice Boy also hid some bad things. In particular, he hid that he had found Nice Dad's box of colorful

pictures. When Nice Boy looked at the pictures he felt something... it wasn't a good feeling, but it was feeling something.

Again, as Nice Boy reached junior high, he had found some kind of connection with spiritual things. There were some ways that was very real, but other ways that those pursuits turned into another way to be the model of Nice-ness. He had lived in Surfaceville for so long already...that was all that he knew, that it was hard to live any other way.

Also, by this time, and in the years to follow, the townspeople noticed that Nice Boy was good at sports and music, as well as being smart. The people in charge paid attention to Nice Boy, and that felt good. This also brought some challenges with it, because all these people wanted Nice Boy to excel at their thing. And Nice Boy didn't know what to do, so he tried to do them all.

Much of the time that worked just fine, or so it seemed. Nice Boy worked and worked to be good at everything he did, succeeding on many fronts. By the end of his school years, he had earned top honors in academics, in sports, in music, and even voted the Surfaceville Festival King, but it still felt empty somehow. Most of the time, Nice Boy was on the verge of exhaustion, trying to keep all these activities going. And then there was the girlfriends to pursue... this one, and then this one, and then this one... only a few in those years but each of them requiring more and more attention, as he looked for more and more meaning out of the relationships.

About that time, the time came for Nice Boy to leave home. He had visited other villages before and even some areas that were slightly different than Flatland, but he had never spent any significant time outside of Surfaceville. This new time period brought many new opportunities, but also many questions.

Nice Boy moved to Hillyland to go to college, and there he got to meet new friends from villages and lands far and near. One thing Nice Boy realized is that not every village had the same unwritten rules that Surfaceville had. In other villages and lands people spoke what they thought and shared what they felt. This was new to Nice Boy in many ways. He liked it but in some ways didn't know what to do with it. Could he share what he really thought, or were people just looking for him to say what they wanted him to say? And if he did say what he actually felt, what would people think of him?

During this time, Nice Boy built relationships with friends like he never had before. He met other young men that were sensitive and caring like he was, and he got to express himself by doing music. Many of the new friendships he developed weren't based on outward things, but more on inner depth. Much of this happened as a part of their common pursuit of knowing the Life Source... the One that Nice Boy had first encountered back at his hometown Good Church. But now Nice Boy was beginning to understand what it meant to have a real relationship with the Life Source.

Nice Boy had grown into Nice Young Man, and met a new girl, named Strong Young Woman. Strong Young Woman was beautiful, both inside and out, and seemed to appreciate Nice Young Man for who he was. Their relationship didn't come without it's challenges, though. Strong Young Woman came from one of the villages that lived by different rules, and in most ways, much healthier rules. She spoke what she thought, she asked questions, she cared about people, but in the same breath didn't care what people thought. It took awhile for her and Nice Young Man to learn how to communicate, but once they did, it was rich and meaningful for both of them. Strong Young Woman and Nice Young Man married and as they began life together, they committed themselves to one another and to serving the Life Source who had connected them and done so much in them.

Since that time, Nice Young Man has been trying to settle into becoming Strong Man.... almost like

getting used to wearing clothes that aren't yours originally... but they are meant to me yours. Strong Man doesn't live by the rules of Surfaceville as much anymore, but it is still hard to shake free from the patterns that he had lived in for so long. Thankfully, he has Strong Woman by his side, who still challenges him to grow and learn. And he knows that the Life Source is always faithful... fiercely committed to transforming him into the Strong Man he was created to be.