

Anaya and the Curse



Ariel Childs

Ayana sat alone on the back steps of the orphanage. The air smelled like dust and cooking rice. Behind her, children ran and squealed in the courtyard, jumping rope, kicking a ball, braiding each other's hair. But not one of them looked at her. They said she had the curse. A birthmark shaped like a dark flame stretched above her left eye. Her light brown skin made it more noticeable—something no scarf could hide. To her village, it was a sign of evil. That was all they saw. Not her gentle voice. Not her thoughtful hands. Just the mark. When she was a baby, her mother had carried her to the village seer, begging for help. He gave her a healing cloth and told her to wait. But when nothing changed, she returned again—desperate.

The seer shook his head. "There's nothing I can do," he said. "She is cursed forever. If you keep her, your whole family will be ruined."

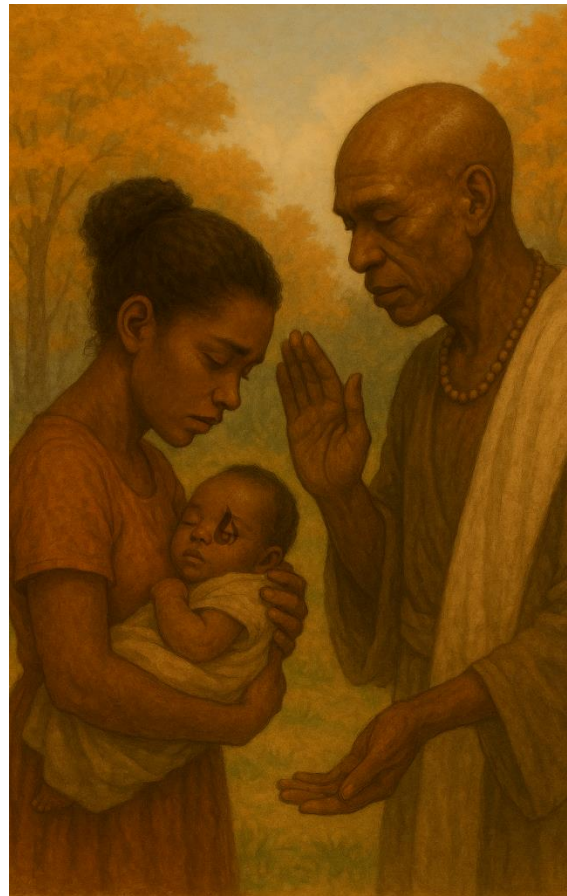
So her mother brought her to the orphanage and left her on the doorstep. Ayana had been there ever since.

"I wish I had a friend," she whispered one evening. "Why does God hate me?"

At dinnertime, the smells of lentils and flatbread drifted through the air. The others lined up with plates in hand. Ayana stood apart, watching. She wasn't allowed to eat with them anymore—not after what happened. One night, a boy sitting beside her started laughing and suddenly choked. People panicked.

"It's Ayana," someone cried. "She made it happen!"

After that, no one touched her. No one talked to her.



That night, she ate alone on the stone steps. Then, as the sun lowered behind the hills, she walked to a small shed at the edge of the orphanage grounds where she slept each night. Her cot was hard, but at least she had her paints. Each evening before bed, she wandered into the woods nearby, gathering wildflowers. She crushed petals with a stone and mixed them with water to make paint. Then she sat and painted on scraps of old cloth—cloudy skies, thorny bushes, cracked earth. She painted how she felt: forgotten.

That night, lying curled under a thin blanket, she wept. “No one wants me,” she whispered. “I’m cursed.”

The next day, as she picked yellow blooms from the edge of the woods, a gentle voice spoke behind her.

“Where are you going?”

Ayana flinched and turned. A woman stood there in a long grey dress, holding a bag and a small notebook.

“To the woods,” Ayana said softly.

“Why?”

“To get flowers... for paint.”

The woman’s eyebrows lifted. “What a clever girl you are.”

Ayana blinked. *Clever?* No one had ever called her that before.



“I can barely read,” she mumbled. “None of the teachers let me in their classroom... because of the curse.”

The woman stepped closer. “Where do you sleep?”

Ayana pointed to the shed.

A shadow crossed the woman’s face. She seemed angry—but not at Ayana.

“I’m a missionary,” she said gently. “We’ve built a new orphanage not far from here. It has a school, a church, and even paint for children who love to create.”

Ayana’s heart jumped. But could she trust this?

The woman returned later that day with a village officer Ayana recognized. He nodded kindly.

“She speaks the truth,” he said. “You’ll be safe.”

That Sunday, Ayana stepped inside a church for the first time. The air smelled like fresh bread and pinewood. The room rang with singing. Children danced. Smiles shone everywhere. And something stirred inside her. People greeted her with hugs. Real hugs. Not stiff pats, not fearful glances—but warm, full squeezes. Her arms froze at first. Then, slowly, she hugged back.

She sat on a bench, wide-eyed, as someone spoke about Jesus—how He loved her, how He wasn’t afraid of anyone or anything, how He could take



away any curse. And somehow... she believed it.

After the service, the woman showed her the new orphanage. Beds with quilts. A table with brushes, canvases, and real paint. A classroom full of books and children. “You can eat and sleep here,” the woman said. “You’re welcome.”

“But...” Ayana lowered her eyes. “I’m cursed.”

The woman knelt beside her. “Ayana, the blood of Jesus is stronger than any curse.”

At first, the other children kept their distance. But one day, a girl named Naya peeked into the art room where Ayana painted.

“Can I watch?” she asked.

Ayana nodded.

The next day, Naya brought her a wildflower. “It matches your dress,” she whispered.

Soon others came too. They sat near her at meals. They shared brushes. They laughed at silly shapes she painted. And Ayana’s paintings changed. Gone were the clouds and thorns. Now, she painted blooming trees, sunrise skies, bright petals, and smiling faces. She had felt God’s love—and had given Him her life.





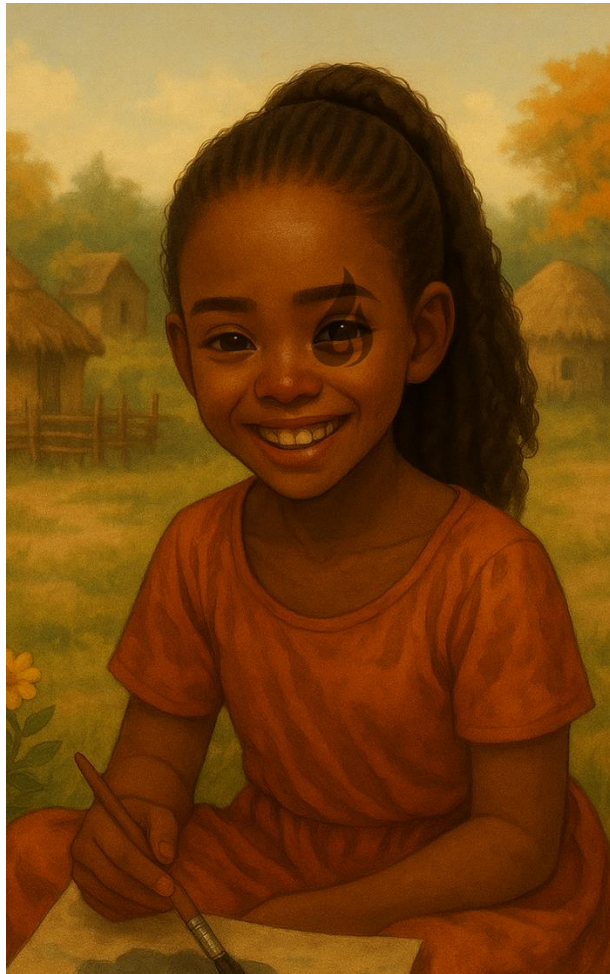
Ayana often took her easel outside, setting up near the village square. People gathered to watch her paint. Some brought flowers. Some simply stood and stared.

One day, a woman paused in front of her work.

“How can a cursed child’s face shine so brightly?” she asked. “And how can a cursed child paint such beauty?”

Ayana stood tall, her mark still visible but no longer defining.

She smiled. “Because the power of Jesus is greater than any curse.”



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