LOVE WITHOUT WORDS

Cary Hobbs

[Assignment: Write a narrative in which you explain an experience important to you, from which you learned a valuable lesson.]

(1) The day's heat was stifling, and persistent beads of sweat tickled the back of my neck. The bus, with the man-made wooden floor, jolted my bones with every bump it attempted to conquer on the twisted dirt road. I remembered at that point in time, while my thoughts were being as rattled as my bones, how poor the Burmese people were compared to the standard of living I was brought up in. Their tattered clothes, overworked bodies, and shoeless feet made me feel guilty about discarding an old shirt in the cleaning box. Usually, my old shirt was better than anything these people had. Though their appearance, to me, classified them as poor, unhappy people, I found one thing to be odd in the situation—they were always smiling when they were together. That's something poor people just don't do!

(2) After being jolted again away from my thoughts and back to the immediate scenery, I saw we were approaching a Burmese temple out in the middle of a wheat field. "Oh," I thought. "not another temple to climb." It felt good to stand on firm ground once again. After closing my eyes to regain my balance, I let out an exhausted sigh and scanned the large, open, terraced field I was standing in. There was not much of anything, just our old, decrepit bus, yellow wheat encompassing a few sprinkled brown trees, and... a small girl peering curiously at us from behind a plowed terrace.

(3) Once the little girl realized I had noticed her, she ducked back behind the terrace. I knew at that time that I wanted to learn more about this little girl, so when the teacher who led our group called for our procession to the temple, I politely explained the situation and asked if I could pursue my newfound interest. After getting the go-ahead from my teacher, I excitedly hurried toward the terrace to find the child.

(4) Slowly and cautiously, so as not to frighten her, I peered over the terrace and to my surprise, there was a small, ramshackle hut which proved to be the home of my little peeping Tom. There she sat on a fallen tree, eating with an elderly woman and a very small baby. The old woman saw me, grabbed the baby, shouted something to the little girl, and ran to the hut. Hurt and sad because I had frightened these people, I turned to go back, but I noticed the little girl stayed. Cautiously, the girl's flat, bare feet and her dirty, scarred legs slowly brought her toward me. Smiling so she would not be frightened, I pointed to a place, sat down, and begged her to come over next to me.
(5) Her appearance melted a spot in my heart. She wore no shoes, a small brown, ripped dress and, oddly enough, she had a gold-colored "paste" on her face. This I had never seen, and my mind burned with the question of what that paste could be for. She sat down next to me, smiled, and touched my arm. Here we were, two human beings from opposite ends of the world. Her brown and calloused skin made my fair, soft skin look bleached white. She had her big, curious brown eyes and I had my blue ones, each pair studying the other. She studied my watch, my shoe laces, my earrings, smiling and prying at all of them. I wonder if I was the first white person that little girl ever saw—or ever would see.

(6) Both of us sat communicating only with smiles and touches. I was dying to know what she was thinking about me. She kept touching my face, then hers. After a few moments she got up and ran back to her hut. I eagerly waited to see what the cause of her hasty departure was. She came back with what looked like a jar of mud—with a gold tinge to it. She opened the jar and dug her little fingers into the paste-like contents of the jar. Bringing her hand up with a smile, she rubbed the paste on my cheeks. Her fingers gently rubbed the cool, sticky "makeup" on my face. Standing back to observe her masterpiece, she took the jar back to the house, and then came back. After only a few moments I heard my name being called by my teacher. My name seemed so foreign and scary to me. It sent shivers down by spine. I knew I would never see my friend again. She repeated my name with a voice that suddenly sounded enormous in my empty thoughts. "Yes," I said as I pointed to myself. Getting up to leave, I put my hands in my pocket as I felt a tear form in my eye. That was when my fingers curled around the small object in my pocket. I pulled out a small, green tube of watermelon-flavored chapstick. Smiling, I turned and gave it to the girl. She looked at me with sudden confusion, so I took the chapstick and showed her what it was for. She smiled, repeated my actions and licked her lips with a surprised look on her face.

(7) My name was called again, and I knew I had to leave. Taking her hand, we walked back to the bus where I met up with the rest of the group. Odd looks were exchanged, but no immediate questions were asked. Hours seemed to pass before the bus started. I watched her apply and reapply her gift and then lick her lips that were now thickly coated with the chapstick. As the bus pulled away, she waved as frantically as I did.

(8) After getting back on the bumpy dirt road, my teacher came back to talk with me. He said that the paste that was on my face was what the Burmese use as makeup. "She obviously thought you were beautiful," he stated, then got up and left me with my thoughts. To this day her hauntingly beautiful face flashes in my mind when I apply my makeup. How odd and sad and wonderful. I made a friend, half a world away. Someone so different
from me yet so much the same. Names weren't needed in our case--I will never know hers--but, for a brief instant, there was peace in the world.