



THE COLOR OF A NAME

by: DR. ARTHUR V. PASCUA

The first thing they noticed was not his smile.

It was his name on the class list.

Elias Ramirez.

When the instructor called it during orientation at the College of Teacher Education, several heads turned.

"A guy?" someone whispered.

"I thought Home Economics was for girls."

A few students laughed.

Elias pretended not to hear.

He had learned long ago that silence could sometimes protect a dream.

Growing up in a small town, Elias had always loved helping his grandmother prepare meals for fiestas. While other boys spent afternoons playing basketball under the scorching sun, he found joy in kneading dough, arranging flowers on the dining table, and stitching torn aprons with careful hands.

His father never understood.

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"Why don't you take Engineering?" he often asked.

"Or Criminology? At least people won't laugh at you."

His uncles were less gentle.

"You'll become a cook?"

"That's women's work."

His cousins laughed every family reunion.

But his grandmother only smiled.

"People judge with their eyes," she would say while teaching him how to fold table napkins into elegant swans. "One day, they'll learn to see with their hearts."

Those words stayed with him.

Still, the first semester in college was harder than he imagined.

Whenever group activities involved cooking demonstrations or sewing projects, classmates automatically assigned him to those tasks—not because they respected his talent, but because they thought it was amusing.

When discussions shifted to educational leadership or classroom management, they rarely asked for his opinion.

"You can decorate the room," one classmate joked.

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"We'll handle the serious work."

Everyone laughed.

Everyone except Elias.

He laughed too.

Sometimes pretending not to be hurt was easier than explaining why.

One rainy afternoon, Professor Alvarez entered the classroom carrying a worn-out cardboard box.

Without saying a word, she placed it on the table.

Inside were dozens of crayons.

She asked each student to choose only one color.

The room buzzed with excitement.

Some picked blue.

Others chose red.

Yellow disappeared quickly.

Elias picked green.

After everyone settled, the professor smiled.

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"What can you draw using only one color?"

The students looked at one another.

"A leaf."

"A tree."

"A frog."

"The ocean?"

Professor Alvarez nodded.

Then she opened another box.

This one contained hundreds of colors.

"What if I gave you all of these?"

"A sunset."

"A festival."

"A garden."

"A family."

"A classroom."

The professor gently closed the lid.

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"Education," she said, "is like this second box."

Silence filled the room.

"When we believe only women can nurture..."

"...or only men can lead..."

"...or only one gender can teach a particular subject..."

"...we reduce people into a single crayon."

She looked around the room before continuing.

"But children deserve the entire box."

No one laughed anymore.

Not even the boys who had teased Elias.

Weeks passed.

The lesson faded for some.

But not for him.

During their teaching internship, Elias was assigned to a public elementary school.

On his first day, one parent approached the cooperating teacher.

"Is he really teaching Home Economics?"

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The question sounded polite.

The meaning was not.

The cooperating teacher smiled.

"Yes."

The parent hesitated.

"I just thought..."

She stopped speaking.

The teacher finished the sentence for her.

"...that only women should teach this subject?"

The parent lowered her eyes.

"I suppose."

The teacher replied gently.

"The best teachers are not measured by gender."

"They're measured by how many lives they change."

That afternoon, Elias taught children how to prepare a simple nutritious breakfast.

He also taught them how to wash dishes safely, organize their workspace, and work together.

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Before dismissal, one little boy stayed behind.

"Sir?"

"Yes?"

"My father said boys shouldn't cook."

Elias smiled.

"What do you think?"

The child looked down.

"I like cooking with my grandmother."

"So do I."

The boy grinned.

"Then maybe my father is wrong."

Elias laughed softly.

"Maybe your father simply hasn't learned yet."

Months later, the College of Teacher Education organized an exhibit celebrating future educators.

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Students displayed lesson plans, instructional materials, research posters, and community projects.

Near the entrance stood a simple bulletin board.

Its title read:

"Beyond Labels."

Pinned to it were anonymous notes written by students.

I was told boys don't belong here.

I was told girls can't become school leaders.

I almost changed my course because people laughed.

I'm glad I stayed.

Visitors stopped.

Read.

Reflected.

Some quietly wiped away tears.

On the final day of the exhibit, Professor Alvarez handed Elias a small box.

Inside was a complete set of crayons.

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She smiled.

"Do you remember our lesson?"

Elias nodded.

"The world keeps trying to hand people only one color."

She paused.

"Your job as a teacher is to remind every child that they were created with many."

Years later, when Elias stood before his own classroom, he placed that same box of crayons on his desk.

Whenever a child said,

"Boys don't do that."

Or,

"Girls can't do this."

He would quietly open the box.

Then he would ask the same question his professor once asked him.

"What can you create if you're allowed to use every color?"

The children would smile.

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Their answers were always different.

And that was precisely the point.

Because education is not about teaching children to fit inside labels.

It is about giving them the courage to color beyond them.

In every classroom where respect replaces prejudice, where ability matters more than stereotypes, and where every learner is free to become who they are meant to be, justice begins—not through loud speeches, but through ordinary people who choose fairness over fear.

Sometimes, hope begins with something as simple as refusing to believe that a person's dreams should be limited by the color others have chosen for them.

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