

An excerpt from:
The Power of Victory
By: Haley Conroy

It was the first day of spring when she came home for the first time. The tree blossoms opened as she traveled by, bringing spring with her. The day was a celebration of many things, but for her it was the beginning of love, freedom, and adventure. For those around her it was as if she was bringing life itself to them for the first time. There was no way for her to understand the strength and power she possessed, but soon she was able to recognize her role and began to see that she was very different. She was like magic and held the power of peace, joy and goodness for all who met her. Her elegance, beauty and power lead to her being named Victoria.

The first year home was as good as it had started. Every day was a treasure and the wonderful memories made were numerous. Every sense was filled with the beauty of life and all it had to offer. Victoria lived life to the fullest and felt as normal as anyone else. The world seemed perfect and all those who lived in the presence of Victoria were protected from any harm. All knew their incredible fortune and were very grateful, but still, it was easy to take things for granted, even more so as the years passed. When life is so perfect it is hard to remember that not all were so fortunate and that even Victoria had her limitations.

The day came when Victoria was realizing her true power. Although it was a subtle change, she felt different than before. She was beginning to see for herself the powers she possessed that made her different. Unfortunately, this realization came due to other changes. She was still so white and pure, like fine porcelain, with eyes that glistened like a starry night. Peace and joy were with her everywhere she went and she had a glow about her that made even the most troubled person and darkest day so much brighter. Victoria had a power that was infectious to everything and everyone around. But this day was different. Those who saw her this day noticed a glow surrounding Victoria that seemed dimmer than ever before. Although still radiant, this day was different. A force that could not be explained had definitely entered the village. No one had seen it enter, in fact, no one had seen it at all. It was something only Victoria could feel, but even she couldn't explain it. No matter, the effects the force had inflicted on Victoria were minimal and the village soon returned to normal as they began to forget how brightly Victoria had glowed before the dark force entered or the absolute perfection that defined the village before. Today it was still perfect enough, so no one worried.

The force lived, but it seemed to live solely on the breath of Victoria. Sometimes others could sense its presence, but none could identify it. Those who could detect its existence and see its effect began to call it Greyson. Not really a dark force that has brought evil or bad changes, but not pure goodness either. Somewhere in between. Somewhere hidden in the darkness, in the depths of the village, out of sight and out of mind. Greyson was certainly subtle and quiet. So much so that even Victoria didn't realize just how involved he was.

After years of patience, Greyson finally decided to test his ability and strength. He needed to know the true capability of his power and the effect that Victoria could have on him when she discovered who he was and why he had come. Just then, he made his move. She gasped as she felt his presence and as he stole some of her breath. Greyson would never take all of her breath though, because he didn't want to get rid of her. He just wanted to see what would happen. Almost a game for him to play. Suddenly she was suffocating in the fullness of the air that had always sustained life. It was as if her magic was being taken from her. In her calm, fear loomed. Her future uncertain, Victoria had no idea how to fight this beast that was cloaked in invisibility. How do you win over a force that can't be seen or understood? Its presence felt, yet untouchable.

The days stretched on, and Victoria became more determined to fight, but nothing changed. She was significantly weakened and forever changed. Just at the point she felt like giving up, her breath began to return. She had hoped her fight had paid off and that she had won the battle, but in the back of her mind she knew that Greyson was responsible. He wasn't done controlling her yet and he didn't want her to give up just yet. He had more work to do and so did Victoria. He gave her breath back, but slowly so as not to be too obvious. His experiment had worked and he knew now of what he was capable.

Victoria finally recovered completely. The village started to forget just how significant Victoria's attack was. Some even questioned if she was actually attacked at all. Perhaps it was just a routine illness that was worse than normal. Maybe everything was normal all along. The radiance glowed again around Victoria. Everywhere she went was made better and the village treasured her presence. They didn't realize her glow was dimmer than before because she was still far more radiant than any other. Her magic was back and Victoria continued on, seemingly stronger than ever. But, still she feared Greyson. The village may have forgotten, but she didn't. She knew he was real and she knew he would strike again.

The time came when Greyson could take no more. He was nervous and unsettled. It had been too long. He must act, but he must not act to the extent he did before. He must be subtle and patient, but that would be hard. He wanted a quick challenge where the winner takes all, but that would not be the grand finale that he desired. A plan was made, but Greyson was not satisfied. There had to be a way to show himself to the village and be a true victor and village hero. He knew he was strong enough and when he took Victoria's breath her power would become his and he could become even stronger and more powerful. Being capable was not the issue, but approach was everything.

Summer came and there was much to do in the village. Victoria did her part to help and her power was used to motivate the village to keep moving forward through the heat and exhaustion. Victoria was feeling the exhausted herself. She had worked hard and for a long time now. If the village was to prosper through the winter they had to keep working through the record heat and they had to ration what they had. Hard times had fallen on the village for the first time since the arrival of Victoria. Many wanted to give up as they didn't see it possible. Victoria was the one that made it happen and gave the village the vision of what could be. She

created the hope and courage necessary for the village to be successful. But, it was hard on her and there were times when she would tire. Once, she was so tired that she fell and had trouble getting up and walking again. It was a quick episode, but one of which she took note. The villagers were working too hard to notice.

Hard work and dedication had welcomed the Fall season. The villagers were harvesting the fruits of their labor and preparing for the winter ahead. All were rested and contentment had filled those who lived there. To those on the outside it was perfect in every way. However, to those within the village it was becoming obvious that all was not perfect. Victoria could no longer hide the fact that she often could not walk without assistance. The world would swirl before her as she sat. The task of reaching for things to hold in her hand was a frequent challenge. There were days when all was normal and her radiance was so bright that it could be seen from afar. But those days were becoming less and less. The change couldn't be explained and occurred over a long span of time. Some felt the force coming from Greyson was causing it, but the fact that Victoria still had her power and radiance made others doubt that Greyson had a hand in it. Some had long since felt Greyson had moved on and was no longer present.. Victoria went about her days accepting her condition and had promised herself that she would not alarm the villagers. She knew Greyson was present and that there was no way she could fight him. She knew it was only a matter of time before he had taken over, but the villagers could do nothing about it and she wanted them to live in peace for as long as they could. She felt she had to protect them and show them they could make it without her.

No matter how much Victoria tried to keep her secret, Greyson knew. He had gained power over her to the point that he could feel her breath and hear her the words she whispered. He had always been in control of her breath, but now he was migrating into her being. Soon he would have total control over her. If he could just keep her away from the villagers for a while longer they would not realize that the radiance has dimming. They would forget and if they were to remember, it would be too late. Without the villagers Victoria was nothing and her power was his. Victory was soon to be Greyson's, but he must be patient and wait for the right time.

Just as Greyson was about to claim his victory, a village child was badly injured. No one knew what to do. Finally, they remembered Victoria. Victoria could sense the urgency, even though Greyson was trying to block her thoughts and slow her breath. She could feel the need of the villagers and the power of their emotions. The more she felt, the brighter her glow became. She became determined to help and save the villager's daughter. She knew what she had to do and she had to act quickly. Victoria could feel the power of her former self and she remembered, too. She remembered what it was like to be a powerful source of strength, peace and goodness. Suddenly, her radiance burst out in a flash and glowed so brightly the entire village was illuminated by it. Victoria was stronger than ever and she was now unstoppable. It might take her life, but right now she had more power than ever and she was willing to do what it took to use that power to save the girl. The girl must live and the village must know.

Victoria would save the girl, but she didn't die herself. Much to her surprise, she felt better than she ever had and she had even more power. The village was restored and her radiance extended to neighboring villages, protecting them as well. She didn't yet know from where the extra power was coming, but she had a feeling Greyson had something to do with it. However, she didn't worry about him anymore. She knew he couldn't control her any longer. Her village would be forever protected by her power and she was forever free.

Days later, one of the villagers was out when Victoria stopped to speak. He asked her what happened, and how she was able to overcome everything so quickly. He also asked if Greyson had anything to do with it. Victoria responded by telling him that she had suddenly realized that Greyson had always been inside her and was the source of her strength. It was Greyson that had caused her radiance and caused the goodness in her life. Not because Greyson himself was good, but because of him she had an understanding that few had about life. Also, the villagers rallied behind her, not Greyson. It was always her that controlled the power. Greyson could never be anything without her. Because of him she had been given many opportunities and gifts. By controlling his negative force, she became the better and more powerful one. During the times when she was weak and tired she would sometimes forget that Greyson was a part of her and she would try to push him out completely, or allow him to take her over. She would fight his very existence. However, he was her breath and without him, neither of them had life. She realized during that moment of desperation and despair that everything she needed to feed the good and radiant power that she possessed was in her, and that Greyson had his own power that belonged to her as well. She had all she needed and Greyson would always be a part of that. He gave her the strength she needed, but he would never overpower her again. He would help her achieve greatness and he would fuel the power she needed, but he would never define her or control her again. She was forever free, and her radiance would forever shine bright for the world to see. Victoria found victory within herself and no one can take that from her ever again.

NOTE: *This story is an autobiography of sorts. I am Victoria and Greyson is cystic fibrosis (CF). During my high school years I had a long-lived reaction to medications I had to take for CF. The reaction progressed along with CF, and eventually made it so I rarely had days when I could walk without assistance. I was unable to go out and do anything with friends, I had to quit the basketball team, and I could not attend college classes or get a job. On top of that, I developed seizures and I couldn't drive due to the seizures. During this time I felt nearly defeated by CF. I knew I couldn't eliminate CF without eliminating myself, but I also knew that I couldn't be defeated by it. I had to fight and stay ahead. After years without the medication that had caused the problem, I began to improve. Now, I can finally live on my own and move to the college that specializes in my field of interest to pursue my career. I still have limitations because of CF, but those limitations help give me strength by giving me something to fight against.*

CF has brought understanding and many blessings into my life, but I cannot let it dominate my life. I can't let CF become who I am and I can't allow it to destroy me. I can live with it and allow it to strengthen me, but it will never define me.