



# Video Story Transcript

## COMPLEXIONS OF LOVE: BIRACIAL CHILDREN AND FOLKS WHO ARE JUST “TOO DARK”

**By: Storyteller Mama Edie McLoud Armstrong**  
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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
[https://youtu.be/l\\_MOjCe0mHA](https://youtu.be/l_MOjCe0mHA)  
<https://youtu.be/cren2UznPqY>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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My name is Eddie McLoud Armstrong.

My first home in 1951 was in a neighborhood called Bronzeville. It was named Bronzeville because of the varying hues of the people who lived there. It was a predominantly African-American community on the South Side of Chicago. And Bronzeville was actually considered the Mecca of African-Americans in this city. And there were many areas in major cities around the country like Bronzeville because during that time, during the Great Migration when African-Americans had been coming to major cities and even smaller cities. This was a time of great promise. It was still a time of struggle but there were people who were able, they were able to find jobs. Some of them, they weren't that happy with but they were happy to have a job. They, and they were willing to do anything. They were willing to do the laundry, sweep the floors, open the doors, raise white children, and see their own children whenever they could sometimes only on weekends. But some people were even able to start their own businesses. And that was a wonderful thing as well.

Well, in the midst of this resurgence, this renaissance, if you will, of African-American life, there were people who were also great performers. There were writers and authors who were informing us and inspiring us, to lift ourselves up. To lift each other up. To hold on to hope and to keep on keeping our eyes on the prize. And that was a wonderful thing but, you know, we had a little something going on within the African-American

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community. And this was not only within African-American communities. This was something that happened among children of African descent around the world. And it had to do with color.

Now, one might say, "What does color have to do with anything?" Unfortunately, it can have something to do with a lot of things. We had been conditioned to believe that the lighter you were, that the straighter your hair was, the more beautiful you were. So that means that if you were dark and your hair wasn't so straight, that means what? You couldn't, you could never qualify for being beautiful? That thinking was not very healthy. And for generations, people grew up thinking that way.

Sadly, we have to acknowledge that there are people today, especially among women, who have never become comfortable enough to allow other people to see the natural texture of their hair. They will wear a wig. They wear a weave. They'll put chemicals in there to get it straight, to get it curly, to look like somebody else's hair. Now, seeing situations like that have now become normal. Would it be as normal to see a white woman or a Euro-American woman with cornrows? Little white girls with beads in their hair? Some of them are doing it these days with locks, with an afro wig. Oh, yeah. There are people who would buy afro wigs. But would it be as normal for us to see white women emulating the kind of hair that we had. And if not, why not? In my mind, it should be no more normal for one than the other. The color thing, the hair thing; it's the surface of what goes beneath. What, it has everything to do with how one feels about one's self.

Now, when you have a situation, for example, where there are people of color, who are biracial. And even not just biracial, who are obviously mixed, though, with other heritages, when it becomes a big deal, it makes a person uncomfortable. We put too much focus on the exterior of the per... person. And when you have so much focus going on the outside of the person, then you shift focus away from the things that really matter. And that's serious. So, this color situation has social, psychological, and even economic ramifications.

I have a cousin whose father was Mexican and her mother, my mother's sister, was of course African-American. Now, on my mother's side of the family they were very light complexion. Now, my dad was very dark. And so, in fact, my dad was one of those examples of people where, for example, when he came to talk to my mother's great, great aunt, who cared for her because my mother's mom had passed away. And so, she had brought Daddy to the house to let him talk to her because he wanted to propose. But Mommy had Daddy wait in an adjoining room but he could hear part of the conversation. And my aunt told my mother, "Well, you can't marry Jackie. He's a nice man but you can't marry Jack."

And mommy said, "Well, why not?"

She said, "Because he's, he's just too dark." My mother was crushed and she thought that it was a cruel thing to say. My father happened to be handsome. But it's an interesting thing because sometimes we may hear people say something like, "Well, he was dark but he was handsome." You get a different spin on things if you say, "He was dark and handsome." Saying it differently means something. If you say he was dark but handsome, it means that you don't expect that he can be handsome because he's dark. And again, there's something wrong with that kind of thinking. And so, my father, I feel like my father, ended up feeling for the rest of his life that he had to prove his worth, to prove his value because of the color of his skin, because of the complexion of his skin. And it really had nothing to do with it. I can tell you that my father stayed married to my mother who came to be a rheumatoid arthritic and could not walk. Raising four children, putting them through Catholic schools, working two jobs. They stayed married for 47 years, until my mom passed away. If he had something to prove, he did it. I'm just sorry for the reason why.

I was starting to tell you about my cousin. Now, my cousin was a little bit of a different story. Kind of the same story but just from another direction. Because I didn't realize that, first of all, she looked more Mexican

than she did African-American. We didn't care about that. We thought she was pretty. I thought she was beautiful. Of course. I was one of those people who thought, well, she light, she got long, straight hair. I know she's beautiful. So, I felt like I wanted to look more like her. I didn't find out until years later she wanted to look more like me. She even told me that she wasn't comfortable at all with the Mexican side of her heritage.

And I told her I said, "Well, why? I don't understand."

And she said, "Because I guess, it's because I don't really look so much like anybody else in the family. And I, kind of, feel like I don't belong. And maybe not as well loved."

I said, "Carlotta, did we ever say or do anything to have you not feel loved?"

She said, "No."

And I said, "Well, what make you say something like that?"

She said, "Edith, I really don't know."

I said, "Well, girl, we got to do something about that." I said, "Now, I live in a community where there are a lot of Mexicans. There are a lot of people from African countries, from Caribbean countries, we've got Asians, we got everybody up in my neighborhood." And I said, "I have Mexican friends. You need to come to Chicago." She was living in Niles, Michigan at the time. I said, "You need to come to Chicago, meet some of my friends. Let's explore the Mexican side of your heritage so that you can find the things that there are to love about that part of who you are. This is sad to me."

And she said, "Well, I guess so. I guess, maybe, I'll come now."

Now, we were both adults at this time. I guess I was in my early 30's and she's about six years my senior. But she never came and eventually she moved to Denver, Colorado with her three children. Her marriage had dissolved and she was married to a very light complexion young man. And, but she went to Denver, I suppose, looking for some place to be comfortable with herself and who she is. And somehow, we lost track of her. We can't find her anymore. She became so uncomfortable with us, in being part of our family, that she really just kind of disappeared. And that's a pain that I have. I feel like there's a hole inside my heart. I miss her. I still love her. And I'm very sad that we live in a nation that would have media participate in the kind of propaganda that would pit us against each other - light skin against dark skin.

And it was almost going back to the slave times, you know. The slave, the field worker versus the, the house worker. Divide and conquer, doesn't get it for anybody. And children from biracial families, who are struggling with this, they need to know that we love them no matter what their complexions are. And nobody is too dark. Nobody is too light. We can just be too little loved.

And so, I share that story to remind us all that love really shouldn't have any complexion. And wouldn't it be wonderful if we could just be the flowers in a garden? Like a song, by Tite Curet Alonso, "Las Caras Lindas," he talks about the beauty of my black people. Just a tiny bit, I'd like to share.

*(Singing)*

*Las caras lindas de mi gente negra*

*Son un desfile de melaza en flor*

The beautiful faces of my black people are like a parade of molasses in bloom. How beautiful. Let's be the flowers and let's encourage each other to bloom.