

At Least it's Not the Storm

“Oh wow! It's so foggy today, how come you were still able to see the road?” Eva mumbled as she readily got off the motorcycle.

“We just gotta check if the headlights are bright enough and it should be fine. Oh and of course, drive slowly. Hey, at least the storm's not here yet, otherwise I wouldn't even be able to drive.”

“What do you mean?”

“My dad always told me that a storm is bound to come when it becomes foggy. I don't know if that's actually true but it seems logical to me.” I shrugged my shoulders and threw my gloves under the seat. “He used to drive me up the mountains in this exact weather. Like father, like daughter, huh?”

“I've seen your dad from afar, the facial expressions, the mannerisms, even the keys that you both like to hang onto your pants, and the multi-tool! You are like a mini version of your Dad! That's why I could recognize him from a mile away.”

Indeed, Dad shaped me into the person that I am today strictly according to the blueprint of himself. The day after my 8th birthday, when it became legal for me to get on a motorcycle, he put me onto his motorcycle and drove me to Sham Shui Po to do all the “manly” stuff. He first took me to ApLiu Street where you see middle-aged dudes being so passionate about a leather wallet or a half-broken walkie-talkie, which I didn't, and still don't really resonate. But I respected them and felt oddly at ease, a feeling that you wouldn't usually get when you heard dudes from all directions smoking and shouting “how much for this?” I just felt like I belonged there and would see myself bargaining for five dollars off of a used desk lamp when I got older. Afterwards dad would bring me to the Gadget outlet and show me in great detail the mechanism of each gimmicky gadget, like a garlic dicer with a string that you have to pull to make the blade spin, or a multi-tool shaped like a key to hang onto your keychain. At first I didn't really care, but the more he talked about them, the more I wanted to know, half of this desire was driven by his radiating enthusiasm and passion, which has never gone dim even for now.

At home, usually on a Sunday, he would start teaching me how to fix appliances, like randomly disassembling a fan to clean it and also introduce to me every single part, and congratulate me with a juice box when I successfully used a drill to unscrew a screw. He even started teaching me how to wash a car. I am sure that he didn't bring me to these conventionally “masculine” places or do masculine chores with the hope of nurturing me to be more manly, but merely just to find someone to accompany his bi-weekly shopping spree

and housekeeping. He will never fully understand the impact these instances had on me growing up, he just wanted me to understand how a multi-tool can come in a clutch when you've got a loose screw in your glasses when you are out and about.

I grabbed Eva's hand and rubbed her thumb with my thumb as we walked towards the estate building, "I would be lying to ya if I said I didn't see the resemblance."

She tugged my hand a bit and exclaimed, "Now you have got me curious! What does your mom think of this?"

"Oh she hates it!" I laughed a little bit and her eyes widened, as if begging me to tell her more details.

"My aunt used to run a kids clothing store and she always gifted clothes to me. One that my mom adored was a pink sparkly dress with little pink petals. She always put it on me and styled my hair into two tiny pigtails, until one day I looked at myself in the mirror and started crying. 'Mom, I don't want to wear this dress! I hate that I feel the breeze inside the skirt, it's cold and inconvenient.' Then she would make me wear a pair of leggings which only made me cry more loudly. I wished I had the power to rip open the skirt and jump into my cozy jeans, but at last it would be mom who finally gave in and helped me change outfits."

"Hold on, let me try to picture you wearing a pink dress." She looked at me up and down, "Nope, ain't no way."

"And then my dad would be like, 'let her wear pants! Then she could sit more comfortably on my motorcycle!'"

"Awww, I could tell your dad loves you so much."

"Well yeah definitely, but oftentimes maybe not in the best way." I said as I led her to the front door of the apartment building.

My dad wanted me to be incredibly independent and accountable for others. He would gradually throw away all my stuffed animals when I was around 12 because apparently, getting too attached to a dead thing is not acceptable, it indicates that you are weak and fragile, which is the last quality he wants his daughter to have. At the time I was devastated but I held back my tears until I entered the bathroom because I would never want to show my weak side to my dad. In retrospect, maybe he just didn't like all the stuffed animals collecting dust on the sofa and taking up space. Later he did try to redeem himself and make me feel better by giving me a mini toolbox with all the basic tools like screwdrivers, pliers, measuring tape, bubble level, etc, which I would excitedly bring out from my wardrobe next time there was a clock to be fixed.

“Anyway. I’m gonna quickly go up and grab my laptop, then we’re gonna head back to university.” I took off the shiny, hand-made ring from my left ring finger. “Can you just keep it until I come back? I don’t want them to ask questions about it, then I’ll have to probably say I have a boyfriend or something.”

“Of course! But it still boggles my mind how your parents still haven't figured out your sexuality yet. Like isn't it obvious enough? You know, the short hair, the set of classic “butch lesbian” uniform.” She said as she dragged me to the bench nearby.

“Babeeeee! I gotta go up now” I patted her head.

“No, we've got plenty of time! Tell me more. Are you sure they're not just trying to actively reject their speculations, you know, like lying to themselves. Or maybe they just don't care?”

I finally gave in and sat down next to her. “Well... Yes and no. He never questioned my sexuality, but he also is the one who screams at the TV ‘do you know being gay was illegal back in the days?’ Gosh do I hate but also love my dad so much. I could only conclude that he made me who I am today, which happens to be someone whom he despises. The irony, huh?”

She played with the ring in her hands, and wore it onto her right ring finger as well. The two matching rings stacked on top of each other, shining together under the faint light. It is only then that I realized that my ring was so much bigger than hers which made me euphoric.

“I’m so impressed that even if you are nurtured in a homophobic environment, you still managed to be true to yourself.” She took my hand and interlocked our fingers.

“I guess it’s something that you just cannot deny.”

When I got the results that I got enrolled into a girls secondary school, Mom got worried that I would turn gay because of the lack of men’s touch, it was my dad who reassured that the school has a good banding, is geographically convenient, and that it is not that easy to turn someone gay. I doubt it was solely because it was a girls’ school, but I did get my first ever crush in F.3. I always got butterflies in my stomach whenever she stood close to me, and whenever she put her head on my shoulder, I swear my heart could have just exploded right then and there. That being said, I was not fully acknowledging and accepting my sexuality at the time because I knew being gay would mean getting kicked out of the house door. Occasionally when news about the LGBTQ+ community in Hong Kong comes up, I would always hear comments from Dad like, “Of course they don’t get the same benefits as straight couples, they are mentally ill.” Having feelings for a girl during the day

and sitting at the dinner table hearing all these comments practically against me was heart-wrenching. I tried to cope with this by telling myself that “this is just a phase”, or “maybe I am bisexual, I will like a guy when I leave a girl’s school and meet more guys.”

Around the same time I started wanting to cut my hair short. I got extremely passionate about playing basketball because I found from observing the tomboys at the court that the sport can really showcase the arms muscles, and boy does that tank top look dope. There was never a day where I didn’t fantasise being one of those tomboys performing on the court while all the girls admired from the corridor upstairs.

Mom was being rational when she said that I’d get mocked by the entire class if I cut my hair short and it looked bad and told me to wait until I was done with secondary school. Therefore, being the “patient” girl that I am, right after the last DSE Exam, I happily galloped to the hair salon. During the initial cut, I never felt scared or regret, I knew this was something I had to do to ease my mind. Once the big chop was over, it was as if a big stone had been lifted off my chest. After shaving the sides and trimming the top, I looked at myself in the mirror and the rush of gender euphoria came coursing through my veins, nourishing every inch of my body. “This is truly who I am, this looks right, I finally look like me.” Safe to say I left the salon with an even bigger smile on my face. At that point, I knew I couldn’t lie to myself anymore. I have to accept who I am.

However, when I was taking the bus back home, I got worried if my parents would judge my style, but oddly enough, the first words Dad told me after seeing my new hairstyle was, “You look so cool! This suits you.” He complimented that I looked confident, strong and independent. He said he didn’t need to worry that I would be taken advantage of because I seemed to know how to protect myself and fight back.

Since then, I started to dress even more masculinely as I found myself the most confident in them and liked how the outfits complimented my hair so well. Mom would make a few comments here and there like “do you want to look like a boy?”, or “you really don’t want to wear a dress?”, but she eventually got so used to my nonchalant response of “I don’t know, whatever, who cares” that she’d stop asking. Dad would most likely reply, “let your daughter wear whatever she wants, as long as she feels good in them.”

Dad embraced every bit of my masculinity. I’ve never liked playing with make-up, never liked dressing femininely, never wanted to buy merchandise of famous male celebrities, and absolutely hated my long hair. He adored me when I actively participated in every appliance fixing project. He would be grateful that I was not one of those girls who spent hundreds of dollars every month on dressing up, or get the room hoarded with famous

celebrities' faces. He gave me money to buy myself a new wardrobe of clothes. He introduced to me the concept of masculinity at a young age which I inherently felt comfortable and a sense of belonging.

"Thanks to Dad, I'm not like the other girls," I said in a fake girly voice, while pretending to tuck my "long" hair behind my ear. "Ok, jokes aside, I really have to go up! Be right back."

I double-checked if I had any rings on my hands before I rang the doorbell.

"Hi Mom and Dad, I'm just stopping by very quickly to grab my laptop." I kicked off my shoes and sprinted to my room.

"The drive just then must be tough on ya, huh? It's getting really foggy." Dad looked out the window.

"It's ok, I could still drive. At least it's not the storm, right?"

"Are you sure you don't wanna stay for dinner?" Mom asked endearingly.

"No, I really have to get going, I have something to do on Campus, and plus my girlfriend is waiting downstairs —" I caught myself with the grave mistake, but it was too late.

"You've got a girlfriend? Are you out of your goddamn mind?" Dad shouted.

"I... uh... I..." I couldn't find the right words to answer, but I knew I had to come to terms with it. "Yeah, I have a girlfriend. We've been together for a few months now."

"Why, Maisie, why? Are you insane? Why would you do this? I thought there were plenty of guys in university." Mom sat down on the sofa and covered her face with her hands.

"Because I am attracted to girls, I had feelings for a girl. I confessed and we got together. It's as simple as that, just the same as any straight couples."

"How dare you say it's the same as straight couples. You are a girl, you are not supposed to like other girls." Dad's voice got more and more frustrated.

"I am not hurting others, I am treating myself better because I am attending to my desires more, and certainly not doing illegal stuff. What's so wrong about this? I don't get it!"

"Don't hurt yourself. Don't hurt others. Don't do illegal stuff." has always been a motto in this household. I stand by it at all costs, which is why I am able to immerse myself fully in this new identity. I would announce myself as gay without hesitation every time I was asked. I feel proud of being a representation of this community. However, I am always certain that my sexuality would be the only exception to the motto.

"I thought I told you already that being gay was —"

“Yeah, I know being gay was illegal back in the days, but it was also illegal for females to vote back in those days. Laws aren’t updated out of the blue, they are outdated for a reason. Can you be any more uncivilized?”

“If you want to talk about being civilized, you should know that you have the responsibility to be a wife to a husband, and a mother to children.” Mom tried her hardest to refute.

“It is unnatural, it is unethical. It’s just plainly wrong!” Dad screamed at the top of his lungs.

“If it is unnatural, then it is you who is the culprit. You made me who I am today and you know it. And frankly I wouldn’t want to have children just for them to suffer in Hong Kong even if I was straight. And when did who I love suddenly become other people’s business, when did other people get to judge who I date? I thought you are all about independence and critical thinking, and now you’re telling me to listen blindly to people who judge my relationship? What hypocrites!”

Surely I inherited the bad-temper from Dad as well. They lacked words to fight back.

Unlike other parents, my parents had always indicated that they allowed me to date. Ever since I was young, they have always said that it is completely normal to fall in love with someone, and that as long as the relationship brings joy to your life and not vice versa, they would support whole-heartedly. Dad especially stated several times that he believes that I have enough critical thinking abilities to identify who’s good for me and who’s not, and that I would build the romantic relationships such that it would be beneficial, like being the driving force for each other to study more or exercise more, like using love as a tool to lift each other up and improve together. He said he would greet my boyfriend with open arms if he seemed to be a nice guy. The harsh reality is that I believe I have met the love of my life, but we will never be blessed by my parents just because it’s a “she”, not a “he”.

“Do you know how much it kills me to see you treating your daughter-in-law so well ever since Brother introduced her to you? You’ve caught me acting weird before and brushed it off as just me being jealous, but how I wish I had only been jealous for myself.”

My parents have given nothing but love to my sister in law ever since my brother brought her to meet them for the first time. They bought her new iPads and iPhones. They allow her to live in the same household and cook her meals, wash her clothes, basically treating her like her daughter. I wasn’t envious of her because their love for me remained the same, but I was more heart-broken that my partner will never be able to feel the same parental love from my parents.

“It would be a dream come true if you guys could treat my girlfriend like your daughter, but instead I could not even be myself in front of you.”

Mom was on the verge of crying. “Can you stop talking, please.”

“No, I cannot, I have remained silent for the last ten years. You guys know how much I am willing to share my life with you, especially after I started living in hostels, because I know you care, and I want to reassure you that I am living well. I would tell you how I got an A on my recent paper, what I cooked last night at the hostel, and how I joined the dragon boat team. On weekends I’d tell you how nice the customers were at the cafe, but I’ve been keeping my mouth shut about my girlfriend.”

My romantic relationship, a sector that I deemed of high importance, has always been left untold. I could never show my girlfriend off, praise how she basically saved my life, reassure that I am very happy with my life now because of her, or even ask for words of wisdom when we have quarrels.

“Mom told you to shut up!” Dad screamed at the top of his lungs.

“Could you please leave first? We will talk about it later.” Mom pulled herself into the bedroom.

*The fog is bad, but at least it’s not the storm.*

I can never let them know that I have finally found my true love many heartbreaks later. I hate that I am so close, yet so far, to having such a close and healthy relationship with them. I hate that they are so close, yet so far to having an open and accepting attitude. I hate that they are so perfect yet so imperfect. I hate that I will never be able to fully be myself in the truest form to them, and that I will always be lying to them. I hate lying to them.

*The fog is bad, but at least it’s not the storm.*

“Maisie, Maisie!” Mom lightly patted my shoulder. “Are you ok?”

“Um,” I cleared my throat, “yeah... yeah I’m fine. I was just... daydreaming.” I rubbed my eyes to try to clear my vision. “Sorry, what were you saying again?”

“I was just double-checking if you wanted to stay for dinner.” Mom’s endearing voice warms my heart again.

“No, I really have to get going, I have something to do on Campus, and plus my uh, friend is waiting downstairs.”

“Who? Is it Eva?”

“Yeah! How’d you know?”

“You always mentioned her these few months, I see you’ve been hanging out with her a lot recently. I’m sure you guys are working hard on your finals huh?” Mom smiled.

“Yeah of course, I swear I wouldn’t have had half the motivation if it weren’t for her company.”

“That’s great to hear! Well, how about next time you bring her up as well so we can serve her some tea, you wouldn’t want your friend to wait downstairs in the cold breeze right?”

“Right... Yeah maybe next time ok?” My eyes shifted from hers.

“I’m glad you are putting the motorcycle to good use. But be careful these few days though, it’s getting foggy out there, and you know what that means?”

“A storm is coming, right? And I should make sure the lights are on and that I’m driving really slowly. I got it Dad.” I propped my backpack against the wall and shoved my laptop into it.

“Ahhh I see you’ve been paying attention to what I’m saying. Nice.”

“Aiya, Dad, you’re always getting our daughter into dangerous hobbies.” I could see her sprinting in and out of the kitchen from the corner of my eye.

“Well, I can’t help that she is just like her father.” He said as he patted my shoulder.

“Anyway, just be extra careful, ok? You’ve got a passenger behind you too.”

“Will do, Dad. It’s hard to drive in the fog, but hey! At least it’s not the storm yet. If it was the storm, then I wouldn’t have been able to drive. I would take the fog any day if it means that the storm’s not coming, right?”

“I always love it when our daughter’s being optimistic. Now go on! You don’t want your friend waiting for so long!” Mom gave me the longest hug.

“Bye Mom, bye Dad. I love you.”

I may be a coward, I may never be my truest form in front of them, but I must take this secret to their grave, or at least wait until they are old and demented enough, simply because I couldn’t afford to lose the bonding I have with them. I love them so much and I know they love me even more. Nothing is worth losing my relationship with them.

I am aware that my parents have been incredibly loving to my friends as well, so my ultimate goal now is to try to transmit their love to her through addressing her as a friend. From time to time, they ask how she’s doing because they know that she is a “very close” friend. To be honest, this is the best that I could ask for now.

“Mom packed a few tangerines into my backpack when I wasn’t looking. She just messaged me saying it’s for you too!”

“Awww your parents are so nice! Help me say thanks to them.”



