

Home

by Jenny Nguyen

“There is no way I’m wearing that. Absolutely not.” Seven year-old me had strong opinions, especially about dresses. I was determined that that day would be another day I’d leave the house wearing my deep-pocketed overalls.

My mum sighed – we must’ve had this argument at least a hundred times at this point. In hindsight, I acknowledge that she had her reasons – overalls weren’t exactly wedding attire, especially when I was the flower girl to a traditional Vietnamese wedding. Much to my chagrin, that day was not an overalls kind of day.

A few days later, I overheard my mum laugh with my auntie on the phone about the wedding incident. I heard her muse aloud about why it was always so difficult to dress me, why I always wanted to dress like such a *boy*, and how she hoped that I’d soon grow out of it.

I remember vowing to myself that day that I didn’t need her.

I told myself that one day, I’ll have my own home and I’ll get to wear anything I want.

“Have you come out to your parents yet?” someone asked me.

“Oh, not exactly. I mean, they know. You could say there were some signs since I was young. We’ve just never spoken about it.”

The art of the unspoken: my parents found comfort in not acknowledging certain things, it seemed less real, less confronting that way. I found comfort in it too, not having to endure the discomfort of having to explain and justify myself. I told myself that they must’ve have had some suspicion from the “bestfriend” I had in high school, that perhaps they had time to brace themselves and process the idea. I wasn’t quite sure my dad would be as open-minded but I thought there was a chance with my mum. A part of me hoped that one day, I would be able to bring my girlfriend home – introduce her as such – and for my mum to love her like her own daughter. My heart broke when during the postal vote, my mum was adamant about voting no. My sister was furious, she asked my mum why. My mother retorted that she believed what she believed, that we shouldn’t ask for her opinion if we didn’t want to hear it. I stayed silent. She said it as if I wasn’t in the room, as if she didn’t already know.

“Well,” someone said to me, “if my family didn’t accept me, I’d leave.”

I opened my mouth to respond – but decided against it. What I wanted to say is: it’s not quite as simple as that. My parents came to this country with dreams of a better future for their children: they come from a different time and place. Despite my hyperbolic proclamation at age seven, to uproot myself from my family would be to sever my ties with my ancestry, erase my gratitude and indebtedness for their sacrifices, and dishonourably discharge

myself from my cultural duties to care for them through sickness and in health. I understand the value of chosen family, and I do choose for my parents to be included in that. It is not a perfect relationship, but it is one in which I am unconditionally committed to.

“Do I know you from somewhere?”

“I don’t think so,” she said to me with a slight smile – intrigued, perhaps a little amused.

The day I met her, I could’ve sworn that we had met before. There was something about her that was strangely familiar. We rooted ourselves in our ancestry, spoke about how our families came from different parts of the same motherland. We quizzed each other on our favourite foods – unanimously agreed that there is no better dish than a home cooked meal. We acknowledged our shared understanding that our mothers loved us unconditionally in the way they best knew how – and how sometimes we wished they’d one day extend that to the ones we’d love. We laughed like we had known each other since yesterday. It felt like we could talk endlessly about anything and everything until a tomorrow that would never arrive. Some time, somewhere, somehow... I was convinced our paths must have crossed before – maybe our souls were connected in a past life. Perhaps it was my mind playing tricks on me. Or perhaps, a part of me knew there was just something about her: that it would be precisely here that my heart would find its home.