

**Prompt:**

*We are often faced with tough decisions and issues to deal with. We carry secrets and private thoughts that may or may not be suitable for others to learn about. In a thought provoking essay relate such an event when a secret was revealed and how it affected all those involved.*

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"Mum, I'm gay."

The horrified look on her face is my biggest fear. She's lived her whole life battling one tragedy after another. She has been caged, staying in an unhappy marriage for the sake of her children.

And now to hear this from her only son. The words terrify her. She cannot comprehend the meaning of this. She just doesn't understand; is it something she did? Is it her fault? Maybe her children did need a father after all. Maybe she could have prevented this if she'd seen the signs. Maybe she shouldn't have let him play with her *duppattas*, laughing away the concerns of her own mother.

Maybe she could have done something.

And I cry when I think of this. Because I know it may be true, even though it hasn't yet happened. I cry because she might love me less. At the unfairness of such love, based on such trivial criteria. But mostly, I cry because she might blame herself. Because it isn't her fault, if only she could understand. It's taken me years to comprehend, but it's not mine either.

I cannot really blame her. She is a Muslim. She is Pakistani. She was raised, conditioned, to hate me. What am I to say to that?

To distract myself, I fight. I volunteer at an LGBT foundation. I walk the streets, chanting for women's rights. I collaborate with the HRCP to arrange a minority rights conference at my school. I paint, I write, putting all my love, all my despair, all my thoughts onto paper. I cannot state that I am gay, so I fight for everybody else. And in that community, with those activists, I find peace. I find a history, I find lineage. In glitter, I trace my ancestors. I understand, finally, that love is made; relationships are built, not on blood, but on acceptance. Looking at those men and women, bold, brave, bright, I find my family. I realize it is our suffering that brings us together.

I think of my mother's suffering.

She too broke the rules. She is also an outcast. Against the wishes of her family, she became a doctor. Shocking society, she left a man she didn't love. Why do I look at her troubles negatively? She has transgressed as well, perhaps more than me. She would certainly understand. In our suffering, we are bound. With empty hands, we

have no choice but to help each other; she and I. I underestimated my mother. Who am I to undermine her troubles? How dare I suggest she is like the rest of society when I know she isn't?

I imagine her, then, looking at me. Bemused. When I've made my big confession. "That's it?" she would say. And then she would walk off, leaving me beaming.

But even if she doesn't accept me, I have understood this: my existence is not based on one person. I have an entire tribe now, rights to fight for, slogans to shout. A whole family tree, waiting to be decked with rhinestones.