

Side Effects of the Unaccepting

Life. One of the many terrible side effects of being alive. It is the reason for my troubled existence, and the reason why I'm once again stuck in the dusty, dated lobby of Msnotmiss Sue, my therapist, on yet another Saturday morning.

"You know we're only doing this because we love and care about you hon," says Pop, cleaning his Ray bans on his soft, cream coloured sweater, the one that Daddy got for his birthday and he only wears on the weekends.

"All we want for you is a happy, *normal life*".

There it is. That word again. *Life*. This time, it came with that mysterious adjective, the one often used to describe my 'weird fetish' with the word *not* in front of it. For some reason, my dads still think that they can cure my hetero-ness with a cheap strip mall therapist who smells of dollar store perfume and stale cigarettes. I smile at them to acknowledge that I heard their usual waiting room 'we're doing this for you' speech and go right back to counting linoleum tiles.

I get to 32 before Msnotmiss Sue finally calls for me to come in and take a seat. She offers me a gluten free chocolate chip cookie off of a plate that I swear hasn't moved since last week, and I attempt to decline without looking too grossed out. After all- *she's* supposed to be judging *me*.

We go about our usual therapist back and forth as she tries to pick out why I may be so hetero and I refrain from yelling at her that either she's a terrible therapist or I am completely fine. Or both.

I stare at the clock.

It stares back.

The hour long session feels like at least 3, and I practically sprint out of the room as the clock hanging crookedly on the wall over the door strikes 9:30. "I could have been sleeping you know," I mumble as we get into the car.

"I take it the session didn't go to well, then?" Pop says through a smirk and raised eyebrows, pausing to look at me before getting into the drivers' seat of our bright green Toyota minivan.

Daddy turns on the radio and my dads quickly begin to sing along to the top 20 hit list, even though they don't know the words to any of the songs. I try to maintain my gloom, but can't help but smirk at how off key they both are.

The moment that we stop the car in front of our small, yet well-kept bungalow, and the music is turned off, the tension once again returns to the car like an invisible fly. We all know it's there, and yet none of us seem to know how to stop it. It's kinda funny how that happens, when you're apparently so screwed up that even your parents seem to wanna 'fix' you.

"Well, I have a bunch of homework." I exclaim to my dads who actually seem relieved to get me out of the car first. I can feel their eyes burning into my back as I walk to my room to all the homework I'm not going to do. I know I'll regret it, but I look over my shoulder at my dads and see Pop holding Daddy in his arms, his soft convulsions making it clear to me that he's crying.

I turn around and run to my room, tears stinging my eyes, warmly dribbling down my cheeks. I angrily swipe at my face, falling onto my bed and slamming the door in one fluid motion. I've kinda had to do that a lot lately. My crying is interrupted by a sharp, electronic *Bing* that vibrates my side from my pocket. I roll over and pull out my phone, checking to see who it is.

"Hey Bianca :)"

How was therapy???"

I sniffle back the last of the tears, comforted by the reminder that at least one person still cares for and understands me. I loosen my grip on my pillow and manage a response.

"It sucked, as usual... :("

My stomach does flips as I wait for a response. Not only is this, like, the only person that pays positive attention to me, but they're also a *boy*.

":(

Ru any less hetero??

Cuz I still wanna meet u:)"

I bite my lip to keep from exploding with emotions, and close my eyes. Although we've only been texting for about a week, and although I still haven't managed to get him to tell me exactly who he is, other than my 'secret admirer from school', I truly feel he cares about me.

We text until about lunch time, and my dads call me down to get food. They act like everything is just fine dandy (what's new?), even though Daddy's eyes are still red and puffy from crying, and try to make small talk about school and the weather. "I'm going out tonight." I finally blurt out. "It's with friends from school".

My dads look expectedly surprised. I haven't gone out with friends, or even had friends, since I came out last year at our grade 8 graduation, and they aren't about to ask any questions. "Well that's great, honey!" They say in near perfect unison. They laugh, and I escape to my room to pick out what I'll wear. Of course, I failed to mention that it's just one friend, who also happens to be a boy, but they don't need to know the details. I decide to wear just leggings and a sweater so that my dads don't get too

suspicious, and stuff my favourite dress, the cute blue one from downtown with the lace bits, into my rainbow messenger bag.

I decide to leave at 6 so that I've enough time to get into town on bike. I pull on my green army jacket to face the chilly October afternoon, and head off to meet the boy of my dreams.

Each pump of the bike pedals feels small and slow, although I'm pedalling as fast as I can. I can see my breath fog up in the cool air, trailing behind me, and I try to focus on my breathing to calm my bustling mind. Right before I get to the edge of the forest where we'll be meeting, I drop my bike into a bush and enter a nearby 7-11 in the town's square to change and freshen up. I buy breath mints just in case.

"You look awful pretty tonight doll. You meeting up with a special lady?" The 30-something year old cashier asked me, surveying my purchase with a (somewhat) knowing smile.

"Heh. Yeah. Something like that". I pay and leave the store before any more questions can be asked, the cashier left noticeably puzzled by my response.

I notice that a slight drizzle of rain has started to fall, and that the foot traffic has declined considerably from when I first got here. *At least there won't be a lot of people to judge us.*

A smile slowly creeps onto my face as I get closer to where he told me to meet him. As I approach the old bridge connecting the two sides of the river, the town and the pathway leading into the forest, I start to become anxious. *What if he doesn't show up? What if I'm on the wrong bridge? What if... What if...* All of the possible shortcomings of the night slowly start to play through in my mind, until I feel a warm hand gently fall upon my shoulder.

"Hey Bianca. I'm glad you showed up." I jump a little and try to wipe the goofy smile off of my face, trying to think of a good response as I slowly fill with relief.

“You hetero freak.” I turn around, shocked, and instead of being faced with the boy of my dreams, I am surrounded by 4 kids from school. I recognize them all-I used to be friends with two of them, and the others were in various classes with me. “What’s the matter? Did you actually think a *boy* would show up?” They all start laughing, and begin to close in on me.

I try to look for a place to go or someone to call to for help, but it’s already getting dark, and there’s no one walking around this time of night in October. I start to feel tears stinging the corners of my eyes. *The one person who I thought truly cared for me isn’t even real...* I look down at the rushing water below. *My used- to- be- friends and family all hate me...* I’m pinned against the railing, *even my dads want to ‘fix’ me...* and I jump.