

Be Fair

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The dazzling light above me shone fiercely. I stood in front of a mirror, a big, full-length mirror, staring at my reflection, absent-minded, not noticing the floating cloud on the sky, the noisy twittering outside the window, the sudden fluttering of the birds on the twigs, and the light pink wedding gown on my body. Yes! I was getting married.

"Oh, you beautiful bride!" Ruth said as she walked in, her reflection shown on the mirror. She put a bunch of daisy and a box of present on the table. Ruth, my neighborhood, was also my best friend. I turned back, my shadow projecting a black-gray shape on the floor. "Thank you!" I said, giving her a big smile.

"Are you still thinking about that?" she asked, her right hand covering mine, on which wore a jade bracelet. "She will be here! Come on. She's your mother!"

"I don't know. Maybe," I said. "Is Tom here?" Tom was my little brother, who lived in Australia.

"I didn't see him. Maybe he will come with your mother. I'll check." Ruth consoled me, trying to give me hope. She went out. I stepped near the window, peering the floating cloud and plunging into my childhood.

Dad passed away early, so Mom brought us up alone. In this poor family, Tom and I must share many things: a bar of ice cream, chocolate bread, candy, and housework. Mom could always divide them equally. At least-- for her-- it was. For example, if an apple was bisected, the bigger part would always be Tom's. "Because he was younger, he needs more nutrition," she explained. Or, when sharing housework, the heavier distribution would always belong to me. "Because you are older and stronger," she explained. I took all. But years later, I knew the explanation was far from that, or more than that.



When we entered junior high, the rules remained the same -I still took less food and more housework; however, I started to doubt about the equality of the rules, and asked questions such as "Why should Tom eat more? Shouldn't I need nutrition?" or "Why should I do much homework? Tom is stronger." Many times, these thoughts came to my mind spontaneously, though I knew I should never thought of that, for Mom worked hard. When seeing her coming home with an exhausted face and sweat falling down her neck, I just could not ask "why." In those years, my brain was just like a haunted house, and these thoughts grew, echoed, groaned, and tried to find a way out.

"My June. What are you thinking?" Suddenly, a voice drew me back

from my memory, and I was held in the arms, shocked. "Are you ok?"

Smelling the familiar smell, I knew it was Henry, the groom, to whom I was giving my hand. I said rigidly, without turning back, pretending to be angry, "You shouldn't be here! It's a no-no to see the groom. Bad luck."

Rather than answering my question, he hugged me more tightly, as if he were holding his treasure. "I heard from Ruth that you are still thinking about your mother." "Don't think too much. We are getting married, and you will have a new life."

Silence was my response, and I burst out a quick-fire shouting. "Hey! You shouldn't be here. Go back." I said strictly, as if I were exiling a rule-breaker.

"Ok! And promise me not to think too much," he said, not letting go his arms.

"Mm...I promise," I answered. I felt choked, a sudden guilt rising from my stomach; I struggled out from his arms right away.

"Bye!" he said. The door opened and closed again; he was out. Walking near the window, I peered through the blue sky. A bird swooped down.

Sexism: the belief that women are weaker, less intelligent, and less important than men.

A few years later, I read the meaning word-by-word, dumbfounded. I was punched by this noun and its definition, for the word unlocked my mind and explained the questions I'd doubted and the rules I'd followed as well. Tom was the treasure in my family. Everybody paid attention to him. He laughed. Mom was happy. He cried. Mom was worried. And I, in order to win my family's attention, did my best to get pride: I brought home medals one after another, I was the class leader in my classroom, and I even painted calligraphy well. But years passed, I still got no attention from them. Not a bit, not an atom. They remembered Tom's birthday every year, but forgot mine. In every Chinese New Year, I could always "accidentally" see much money in his red envelopes. The word sexism explained all. Just like what Ruth told me when I discussed this with her, "Male could get attention. Bias, unavoidable."

Tom went abroad; I went to work. His going abroad was of course supported by Mom; however, I did not want to ask her why, how, and anything so-called fair, because that would break my heart. At work, I met Henry, my colleague, a nice and thoughtful man, who purposed to me. I turned down. For me, falling in love was one thing, but getting married was another, not to mention how much I worried about Mom. One night, I decided to invite him to dinner and introduce him to Mom.

"Mom, this is Henry. My boy friend," I said, seeing her taking a bit of rice from the bowl, chewing, and making a quick smile. "Hi!"

The dinner was simple, but the atmosphere was extraordinarily weird.

The dinner finished soon, Henry left, and nothing happened, too quiet to believe. What I imagined, such as Mom's interruption or Mom's extreme reaction, did not happen.

"Mom, how do you feel about Henry?" I asked, rejoicing, leaning against the wall.

She sat on the sofa, watching the TV series, not turning back. "Fine," she then responded with monotone voice, as if Henry were a stranger and the meal was a joke.

"What if I stayed with you, not marrying him?" I asked.

"What a stupid thing!" she suddenly shouted, not even taking a look at me. "You are a woman. Women's responsibility was marriage and family, and that's all."

Our conversation ended. I replied nothing. A word tried to creep from my throat, but I gulped it. If she did not care about my life, I should not care about hers. We were indifferent. And

ironically, the next conversation started with a fight.

"Ma, why do you do that?" I decided to tell her my feeling and the anger imploding in my heart because one day I accidentally found in the inheritance sheet that Tom would get all the property and I, nothing.

"Do what?" Mom was washing dishes. She did not even take a look at me.

"I know you don't love me. You don't!" I shouted as if I were a dissenter marching in a parade, lifting a flag high and yelling "murders!"

Mom did not say anything. Maybe she was thinking about my words, or she did not even hear what I was talking about.

"I love you just as Tom does. Why can't you be fair?" I cried, "I am your daughter!"

Dishes crashed against the sink, making a heavy clang. She put down the dishes, still not turning back, her shoulder shivering with wrath. Sun beams shot in from the window, and I was dazzled.

"What do you mean I don't love you? How dare you say that?" She shouted like a tiger. "If I don't love you, I won't bear you or feed you. I will send you to the orphanage when you were a little baby. Did I make you hungry?"

"How?" I said, couldn't believe that she pretended to cover everything, including the thing I already knew, "I saw the inheritance will!"

Stunned, dumbfounded, Mom was shocked, and then she knew what happened. With a cold and indifferent face, she declared word by word, "You selfish girl. You are just a GIRL, A FEMALE. What do you want? How can you want more?"

I was a female. I know it was a fact, a hard-and-fast truth, but I still could

not believe it was claimed by her, like a trial, declared by the judge that *I was guilty*, not for any sin or crime, but for something I was born to be-- gender. I stared at her eyes for seconds. I ran away.

I didn't cry until I ran away from home. Streetlamps flew above like silky rains, whirling. I could hear my breath and feel my heart beating and myself sweating. Not knowing how far I had run, I just wanted to run away from the place I called *home*. I took my cell phone from my pocket, dialing a phone tagged "Henry."

Twenty minutes later, I sat on Henry's scooter and made a decision right on it. "Henry! I do!" I said. "What?" His voice floated from his helmet.

"I say I do. I am willing to be your wife," I said. The wind was strong, grazing through my face; my voice was weak, so weak that I could not even hear my words. I was freezing, tightly hugging him by his waist.

The sounds of firecrackers broke my thoughts and the slide-flying memory. I looked down. The guests were entering the hall, laughing as well as talking loudly; the party was to begin. I looked at the top of the tower on the other side of the city. The sun was to sink; the sky turned to orange yellow.

I walked near the mirror, looking at myself and considering a dilemma. On one hand, I was hungry for fighting to make my life reasonable. I had done my best to win attention from my family, and the failure somehow made my life meaningless. Getting married was definitely the best way to compensate myself. On the other hand, I was guilty because I was not prepared enough. I cheated on Henry and myself. Getting married was not fair and reasonable for both of us. Maybe my life was totally a lie. And...Mom was a burden. Although I decided to get married, I still could not help but think of her. "Ridiculous," I whispered.

"Sis!" a voice appeared. I turned back, surprised. "Tom!"

"You are beautiful!" Tom said and came hugging me. "Congratulations!"

"Do you come alone?" I asked, hearing the switching of the doorknob.

"Mom...." I whispered, seeing her entering. I knew it was high time for me to

cry desperately or shout out of control. I didn't, but there was something in my throat.

Tom went out; Mom and I were left in the room.

"Mom," I said again, staring at the flower tiles on the floor and trying to break the ice. The following silence proved that *I failed again* and it reminded me everything I've done. I was not important. A loser.

"I'm sorry." I heard her apology, which was totally out of my expectation.

Not lifting my head, I turned back with tears swelling in my eyes. My tears straightly dropped down the floor. My eyes got wet. I did not know why she said that.