

## Wrong

By Raya Mewborn

It feels like time has come to a stop. The bell dismissed us for lunch who knows how long ago, yet neither of us made a move to leave the classroom. Neither of us dares to move at all. Can she tell how nervous I am? There's no way that she can't. My breathing is shallow and ragged. It's like the air got lost in my chest somewhere on its way to my lungs. Am I shaking as bad as I think? I answered my question as I try to ignore my hands as they tremble violently, I fidget with my fingers, in an attempt to ease my nerves to no avail. Why am I so nervous? I have no reason to be. Everything should be fine, business as usual. Just a normal conversation between two *friends*. I have no reason to be nervous right? So why am I so on edge? I can physically feel the air thicken, now it feels like I'm choking on the weight of my own words. I've never felt this way before, I wonder if she feels it too? The tension is so dense it's palpable. "What's wrong?" I somehow manage to force it out, my voice coming off way more aggressive than I intended.

Who is she? She was my best friend, well best friend is putting it mildly, we've known each other our whole lives, she was my family, we did everything together and told each other everything. But it's not like we even needed to speak most of the time, it wouldn't be a stretch to say that we could read each other's minds. It was supernatural how in sync we were. We completed each other. We were truly each other's other half and I thought that we'd be like that forever. I'd hoped we'd be like that forever.

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There were known truths of the world. Things that everyone knew as facts and didn't dare question. Things that were black and white, that were definitely right or definitely wrong. Things like the sky being blue and the grass being green. All of this was common knowledge, it was the indisputable truth. Or at least it's what I believed to be true. Certain things that never needed to be taught, things you just wake up one day and know. One of these definite, indisputable truths was that being different was one of the worst things you could be. Anyone with a half-functioning brain could notice that those who were different were treated in a particular manner. Children were ruthless. It was like they made it their mission to seek out the "weird" ones amongst them and ruin their lives in any way, shape, or form just because they could. And it seemed as though there was one type of "weird" that was universally hated above the rest. People who were gay. It became a bad word, a word as bad as a vulgar curse, probably even worse. It was *forbidden*. Not to be thought, let alone said under any circumstance except when used to insult someone for doing something stupid or something you didn't like. I didn't know what it meant or why it was so bad. But I knew it was wrong, it had to be. I saw how "gay" people were treated and I didn't want that for myself. I didn't know what it meant to be gay, but I knew that I didn't want to be that. I didn't want to be like *them*, because they were different and nothing good could ever come out of being different. It became one of those things I just woke up and knew like the color of the sky and the grass. It was fact, it was the truth. Not only is being gay bad but being it was one of the worst things a person could be, if not the worse.

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I've never been a believer of God but if they did exist in some higher plane then it was for the sole purpose of spiting me. I can't exactly pinpoint when it was I came to the conclusion but I was now facing the grave realization that I was in love with her. My other half, my best friend.

*I'm gay.*

Well, I'm not sure if it was love but I absolutely had feelings for her that go far beyond the realm of platonic. This wasn't the way I should feel about my best friend.

*Wrong.*

It was wrong. It was bad, it was disgusting. I didn't know what to do with these feelings. I knew that they should be taken to be grave, never to see the light of day. I had plenty of other reasons to hate myself; I didn't need to add being gay to the list. I knew that in every way imaginable it was wrong, but even so, I've never felt this way in my life, this feeling of pure unadulterated happiness. I couldn't help but want to share my feelings with the world, to shout it from the rooftops but instead, I settled for telling one of our mutual friends. I knew I shouldn't feel this way, let alone want to tell someone about it, yet despite the conflicting thoughts in my mind, I did it, I told. I did the unthinkable, I said the forbidden swear and for the first time in a long time I was... actually, I don't know what I was feeling, I want to say it was happiness or pride but it was probably more like an overwhelming sense of relief. This was no longer my burden to bear, and for the first time in a long time, I didn't feel so alone.

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Why does she look like that? I've seen her mad a million times over but this is something else entirely. No, it isn't anger. She looks...scared? No, that's not the right word either, to be honest, there isn't a word in my vocabulary to describe the look on her face but if I had to describe it I'd say it's somewhere between horrified and disgusted. It's scary. I'm scared.

"I can't..." her voice is barely audible, just above a whisper, it was so quiet that I wasn't completely sure that I hadn't imagining it.

"You can't, can't what..?" Everything felt so heavy, the words on my tongue, my heart in my chest, I couldn't breathe, it's too much, it's all too much. This isn't how this was supposed to go, she wasn't supposed to find out this way, she wasn't supposed to find out at all. But if I ever did decide to tell her then I wanted to be the one to do so, on my own terms, and not her "overhearing" some stranger in the hallway. It's not right.

*It's wrong.*

"Do you like me?" her voice breaking, as she tries to hide her uncertainty with a laugh, it comes off wobbly, the complete opposite of her normally confident demeanor. It's not right at all.

*It's all wrong.*

"It's a joke right? I mean I know it's not true, I know you don't like me, but now everyone else in our grade thinks you're, you know..."

*So very wrong.*

"They think you're gay, isn't that disgusting? You should tell them that it's not true, so people won't bully you. You could never be *gay*. That's *disgusting*. *It's wrong.*"

*Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.*

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No, I must've not heard her correctly. Wrong? It's not wrong. Was the way I was feeling really wrong?

"No, they're right."

It was only the second time I had ever said it out loud.

"They aren't wrong..." Though how the entire grade found out still remains a mystery to me. She was speechless, but I think that that was for the best, this was one of the times where neither of us needed to speak, it was clear we already knew what the other was thinking. Nothing else needed to be said, the look on her face said plenty, alongside what she had already said painted an incredibly vivid picture. A picture of a future in which we'd no longer be in each other's lives, a picture in which we'd separate, never to speak again. The entirety of our friendship flashed before my eyes in an instant, and I wondered if this was the right decision. It hurt, it hurt so bad, I couldn't help but think that this is what dying felt like I was suffocating or drowning or maybe like I was falling off the roof of a really tall building plunging to my untimely demise, the pain was excruciating in every sense of the word. I genuinely thought I was dying. My best friend, my family, my first love, we went from being each other's everything to being nothing more than strangers, not even worth a sparing glance, not even worth acknowledging the other's existence. For the longest time, I wasn't happy and honestly, I'm not sure if I am now, but if there was one definitive, indisputable truth that I am sure of. It is that being gay isn't disgusting, it isn't wrong,

*I'm not wrong.*