



THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2016

Junior Runner-up: Tan Wan Gee, 14, Singapore

3. Are We Really So Different?

Dear Santa,

All we want for Christmas,
is equality.
Equality
for those deemed inferior,
for those deemed unworthy,
for those deemed shameful,
for those deemed loathsome,
just because they do not match society's expectations.

Difference is a
mere
construct
of our intolerance
and
fear
of what we do not find
familiar.
At the end of the day,
we all share
the same blood

the same flesh
the same origins,
the same term of
human.

Are we really that different after all?

All I want for Christmas,
is for my mother to be happy.
I see lines etched on her face,
deep and
painful,
like roads carved onto plains meant to be
untamed.
She cradles my face
in hands callused and
weary,
telling me in a voice so
frightened and helpless,
girlie,
don't ever let your legs show,
don't ever let your emotions show,
don't ever let yourself show.
you are their tool,
and they will always
make you remember that.
My mother,
who cloaks herself in the danger of
night
as dark as her skin,

just to buy groceries for the family.
My mother,
who wraps herself in the scars of her past,
the words
walking out dressed like that,
you deserved it
pulling the corners of her lips into a
grimace.
My mother,
who is trodden on for her skin colour,
for being different,
is not happy.
So please,
Santa,
grant her happiness?

All I want for Christmas,
is respect.
It is not so much their
words
that cut me so deep I
feel like I'm bleeding from
every
orifice.
Rather, it is the looks that I receive.
The looks that scream,
pig,
disappointment,
worthless.

I am shamed for
the extra weight I carry.

I am shamed for
the string of *Bs* on my report card that
sting like
hornets.

I am shamed for
not being as smart as my brothers who
wear shiny diplomas and arrogance like a
second skin,
for bulging in places deemed
unacceptable,
for being
who I am.

No matter how hard I work,
I am still shoved into the dirt
simply because I am
different,
and thus,
not worthy of respect.

So please,
Santa,
grant me respect?

All I want for Christmas,
is for my brother to be free.
I see the
agony
flickering in his eyes

on

off

on

off

like a faulty lamp,

interspersing with

indignation.

He bounces back and forth between my mother

and my father,

between

let him be who he wants to be

and

he is a disgrace, and a dishonour to this family.

He is a

male

trapped in the skin of a female,

change

trapped in the skin of ignorance.

My mother and my brother

have their mouths sealed shut by the age-old belief that

males are

infinitely superior to

females,

and submissiveness

is a given.

Thus, they can only cower,

and hope for the day when their words can

soar forth from their lips

uninhibited.

Until then,
my brother is chained down and
caged,
by the words
disgrace,
unnatural,
disgusting
all because he is
different.
So please,
Santa,
grant him freedom?

All I want for Christmas,
is dignity.
I am not a terrorist.
I am not a danger to society.
I
am not
the actions of
extremists.
And I,
we,
should not be left to suffer from the
blame,
the
utter
loathing,
that is associated with my religion.

I want my father to be able to come home from work,
without exhaustion staining the undersides of his eyes.

I want my mother to be able to kiss my forehead
and wish me goodnight,
without that despair
in her trembling
hands.

I request this dignity because
these same eyes are the eyes
who shed tears of joy
upon my birth,
and these same hands are the hands
who have carried me patiently from one stage of my life
to another.

I should not be
beaten down
and denied dignity
just for being different.

So please,
Santa,
grant me dignity?

All we want for Christmas,
is equality.
Not because difference is something
associated with
shame,
but because
it is our right

to be treated equally.

It is this right
that empowers us to call for

change.

For true
equality.

For liberation,
because we aren't so
different
after all.



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