

BOB & RAJ

Bob was dying of AIDS. His family was gathered around him in the hospital.

“What was your happiest day ever?” his brother Rafi asked.

Bob thought back to days on the beach with his lover Julian, the warmth of the sun on their skin. He knew he could not tell this story. He was so cold. Julian was dead.

“I suppose it would be when I married Sarah. We were all happy as a family for once, maybe the only time we were all gathered that we did not fight, for the sake of the in-laws to be sure.”

Bob’s mom laughed, crying softly.

“And all my friends were there. Some came from as far as Europe. Some I had not seen in years. They said such nice things. I realized how lucky I was with my college education and the activism, and my work..”

“You see! You cannot say your Bar Mitzvah? No faith! What do you think will carry you through, your works, your hedonism, now, Robert?...” Bob’s brother Jeremy was very angry. He could not accept, many things.

Even at his Bar Mitzvah Bob had known he had a terrible secret. He was a guileless boy and could not carry it off. Yet he denied his homosexuality for years, to himself too.

“It is his work that brought him to this,” his mother cried. “I warned him,” she spoke to Bob’s father who rarely responded, “did I not? But who listens to an old lady. Sure I never had experiences. You know what I got for them? You don’t think I admire your desire to be of service, to gays and junkies not me, but I warned you. All the good you do you pay for it. All my years of civil rights work and for what? They raped me, those animals! Now you are dying, stricken. Do not touch! I commanded...”

“Ma...” Bob pleaded. She sobbed and held him. Maybe he was being punished, he thought, in a way. Her had never come out to them. But were they so naïve as to now still believe... or were they voluntarily blind?

From the quiet corner came the rarely heard voice of the father, “You should have taken the job I got you out of college. All this do-gooder work just got you sick and now who will pay the bills for it, your volunteer job?? Insurance, my boy, you deserved it!” The old man sighed deeply and turned back to the TV.

“Listen, all of you. There is something you need to know.” He tried to sit up, but the sores hurt too much. “Sarah has left me.”

“What have you done?” Jeremy demanded.

“Stop punishing your brother,” their mother admonished, “Can’t you see he is punished enough! Let him keep his sins so secret, even from his mother.”

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble,” Bob explained as he had practiced, “He comes out like a flower and is cut down.”

“And flees like a shadow, and continues not, you shadow!” Jeremy rebuked him.

Then Sarah entered.

“You bastard! I’m pregnant! It’s yours. There’s only ever been you.” They hugged.

When Bob married her he wanted desperately to believe he was straight. When he met Julian he could no longer deny the will of god. He was gloriously gay and told Sarah. She took it hard and left him. But when Julian died she proved herself a good woman and came to comfort him. To prove she was not afraid she made love to him. They used a condom but clearly there had been an accident. Bob had not moved back in with her.

“But you! You were unfaithful! I cannot keep secret your sin any longer. Mom, Dad, Bob cheated on Sarah, with a man!” Mom sobbed more. Dad was silent. “Now you are punished for it! It was an abomination, not just adultery. Now you will die for it!”

And the Lord answered over the intercom “Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?”

Doctor Raj came in to check on the patient and proclaimed the prognosis good. Turns out Bob’s happiest day ever was yet to come.

“You will live to see your child born, and many more years too!” Raj stated.

“That’s what I came to tell you, you bastard,” Sarah exclaimed, “I kept it secret until I knew for sure. Both the baby and I are HIV-negative!”

In that one moment of euphoric relief Jeremy jumped on his brother and hugged him. Their mother jumped on her boys and hugged them too.

It was the father who had to remind them all, “don’t forget to hug Sarah, you fools, she’s going to have my grandchild, and he threw her on the bed with the others.”

Raj withdrew again and left them to sort it all out in peace.