

Knock Knock

Acceptance of herself had never been a challenge; it was the acceptance of others that had held her back and made her question her actions.

Queer people were a taboo subject in Gabriella's household and there had been times where comments had been made which she struggled to ignore. However, this was all she was capable of at the time.

Gabriella had been born to an Italian Roman Catholic family in a small town on the outskirts of London. She grew up with her mother, Caterina, and her sister for the most part. Her father had abandoned the family when Gabriella was eight years old and her sister had barely turned six months when he upped and left. It had been an extremely difficult time for her as she was the apple of her father's eye. A daddy's girl, her grandmother would often say. The pain of her father's departure lingered for many years after. But as time passed, she eventually learnt to be without him, to not need him anymore. Caterina had provided everything she could for her two daughters and had continuously worked hard to make sure that they never went without.

Several years later, Caterina had decided to move herself and the girls into her mother's house. She couldn't afford the mortgage on her own anymore and thought this would be the best decision for them all... temporarily of course, until she could get back on her feet. The girls loved living with their grandmother, and for many years they were all very happy together and everything worked out just fine.

Gabriella had never been a girly girl and she detested wearing dresses, much to her mother's dismay. She remembered pestering her mother to buy her tracksuits up to a certain age, until she discovered her love for denim. But it wasn't girls' tracksuits that Gabriella had her eye on; they were always pink with pretty flowers or butterflies on them,

everything she hated. No, it was the boys' tracksuits that always seemed to grab her attention, and one year in particular, a *Dennis the Menace* themed design had caught her eye. She always hated the stereotyping, even at a young age, and especially with toys. Her most treasured possession was a bow and arrow that she'd bought with her pocket money as opposed to the doll's house she had received from her aunt as a birthday present one year. After all, the bow and arrow would allow for much more mischievous fun. She reminisced back to the time when she had first played with said bow and arrow; brimming with adrenaline and overly excited, she had managed to shoot her father right in the middle of his forehead as he was walking to the dining room for their typical family dinner one evening.

"Bullseye!" she laughed, as her startled father looked on. He couldn't help but smirk at the cheekiness of his daughter's playful personality, seeing a glimpse of his younger self in her eyes.

Over the course of time, Gabriella became more of a tomboy, and she continued to hide her true self from her family where necessary. Her upbringing had never been extremely religious, but they failed to see past the 'girl meets a handsome, rich, Italian boy, conceives two-point-four children, instantly falls in love with the idea of being a forever housewife and lives happily ever after' life expectation; her idea of absolute hell. She had ambitions. She had hopes and dreams. None of them involved a man by her side. What made matters worse was that her family hardly met the criteria themselves. Her mother and father were in the middle of a lengthy, gruesome divorce, as was her uncle, who eventually started dating an English woman, and her auntie was dating an English man. It all seemed very hypocritical in her eyes and she couldn't quite fathom how her family could judge other people when they were hardly perfect themselves. Couldn't they see that

they were breaking their own rules? Would falling in love with a woman be such a terrible thing? It's not as though she had a peculiar interest in serial killers. Surely her mother would come to realise that her daughter's happiness was more important than words from The Bible or the opinions of other people and what they might say or think when they found out. Knowing her mother, her train of thought had no doubt gone from lesbians being wrong and unnatural, to imagining her daughter dating the ultimate butch woman as Caterina was very into appearances. But butch women weren't Gabriella's type anyway, her soft spot was for the femmes, and what her mother failed to realise was that even if butch was indeed Gabriella's type, it was entirely her decision. She would be the one dating them, not her mother.

The day she decided to come out was memorable, a day she would remember vividly for the rest of her life. At age fifteen, Gabriella was now very much aware of her feelings towards women. She had always known *something*, of course, however it was more evident now that she had crushes on her female teachers at high school... and quite a few at that. Although it was one teacher in particular that grabbed her attention, and her heart. This wasn't about her, though. Her German teacher at the time, Frau Compton, had decided she'd had enough of Gabriella's cheekiness and 'playing up' during lessons and phoned her mother on the last day of Spring Term. Gabriella had always been a good student; hardworking and dedicated yet always managed to incorporate a little fun in most of her classes, apart from Science because her teacher, Ms Powles, was unnecessarily stern and strict, scaring students by making them sit at a singular desk at the back of the room, facing the wall if they had misbehaved. And misbehaving to Ms Powles ranged from forgetting your ruler to underline your titles to speaking when you hadn't been asked a question. Luckily, Gabriella hadn't been given an invitation to the desk of doom during her years as Ms Powles' student. Regardless of her³ intimidating weekly Science lessons, she

absolutely loved school and would have been happy enough to attend at weekends if it were a possibility.

During the second term of year ten, Gabriella had been slightly more disruptive in her German lessons than usual, making jokes and teasing the teacher, which was all done through admiration because she had a little crush on Frau Compton. Her teacher knew she was a good student and only made the call to Gabriella's mother, not out of spite or because she couldn't handle her, but because she wanted Gabriella to reach her full potential. Although she didn't know what had been said over the phone, she knew that her mother wasn't happy because she had called her from work to tell her that they needed to have a *serious chat* when she got home. That particular evening, after the dreaded call, Gabriella was relaxing whilst watching television in her bedroom - and still living at her grandmother's house at this point - when she heard her mother walk through the door.

"Gabrie! Come downstairs, now!" Gabriella felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach and made her way to the top of the stairs.

"What?" She said, nervously.

"What's this I hear about you playing up in your German lessons?" Caterina bellowed.

Gabriella felt a swarm of butterflies engulf her stomach, she couldn't believe her teacher had done this. She felt a sense of betrayal. She was only having a laugh, it wasn't technically affecting her work or ability. "I'm not" she lied, feeling anxious.

Caterina looked up at her daughter "Well, when half term is over, we are going to sit with your teacher and talk about what the problem is."

Enough was enough. Gabriella's blood was boiling, a wave of adrenalin rushed through her body, her heart pulsating faster and harder than it ever had before "There isn't a bloody problem." She yelled. "The 'problem' is that I'm GAY!"

Her mother started to laugh before looking up at her teenage daughter in shock.

Gabriella ran into her bedroom and threw herself onto the bed. She wasn't upset, she was angry.

Her mother walked in shortly after. "What do you mean *gay*?" She asked. "Have you ever kissed a boy?"

Gabriella rolled her eyes. "Yes, mum, I have."

"Maybe he wasn't very good at it?" She said, quizzically.

"No mum, I just don't like *any* boys, okay? I never have."

Her mother sat on the bed, processing the brief conversation they had just had. Caterina walked out of the room, got into her car and drove off. Gabriella felt apprehensive all of a sudden and wondered where her mother had gone. She didn't come back until very late, and Gabriella was already fast asleep.

Eight years had passed since the outburst and Caterina had accepted her daughter's sexuality in her own strange way, mainly by ignoring it. Though, she had made Gabriella attend counselling sessions a few weeks subsequent to that awful day. But the initial

session didn't last very long, in fact, it could have probably been featured in the *Guinness World Records* book for the quickest counselling session in the history of therapy. The counsellor could see that Gabriella was happy with who she was, and instead, had collated a stack of leaflets to pass on to her mother; leaflets with an abundance of information about coming to terms with your child's sexuality.

After the session, Caterina was waiting outside in her car. "What did he say?"

Gabriella couldn't help but smirk as she handed over the selection of leaflets.

Caterina looked at them and, when she realised what they were, pushed them aside. She never mentioned it again.