

Different in More Ways Than One.

Providing Guidance for Teenagers on Their Way to Identity, Sexuality and Respect

I Coming Out and Identities

Why did he even mention the existence of the sports group to Jan? And he really did come, can you believe it?

Jan makes him so completely confused, it would be better if he had never come to Amsterdam. At first Mark was quite happy to finally have another enthusiastic and talented swimmer in his class, and not to be the only one.

Two young guys are hanging out outside his house in the housing estate, nonchalantly walking around. They were obviously waiting for him. For days now, they have been following him around, yelling stupid comments. I'll just pretend they're not really here. He crosses the street, seemingly indifferent to their taunts, and heads for his door. Peter is standing in his way, with an evil grin on his face. Mark gulps, doesn't see Peter and suddenly bumps into him.

"Hey, you fucking faggot, don't think I'll let one of your kind grope me like that!" sneers Peter, taking one step towards Mark.

"Shut up, damn it!" screams Mark. Peter and Freek back off, bewildered. It doesn't even take two seconds for Mark to turn the key in the lock and open the door. Furious, he slams it shut after him.

"Mark, what's wrong? Your father is trying to recover from his shift!"

Mark doesn't even bother to look at his mother. Could the whole world please leave him alone?

"Mark, I am speaking to you." Mum is holding him by the sleeve.

"You know what? Living in this shitty place is so bloody brilliant!" Mark snaps back at her through clenched teeth. He tears himself loose quickly and runs into his room.

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I must think about something else. Do my maths homework or perhaps phone Mareike. Irene still thinks that she fancies me. Alright, then...

He stares at the telephone, dials Mareike's number, hears her voice and hangs up right away. He runs back to the door and locks it.

He sees Jan smiling at him and hugging him at the end of the game. A kiss on the right, a kiss on the left, they all say goodbye in the same way. Only Mark's heart starts fluttering madly, his whole body is as though electrified when he feels Jan's body so close to his own. I must have gone completely mad, thinks Mark, hopeless. A bloke shouldn't be able to turn me on like that. It's Mareike's voice, not his hug that should make me feel this way. I can't go to school any more. I must avoid Jan.

"Mark, could I please talk to you after the lesson?" That's the last straw. His mother receiving a letter from the school yesterday – telling her that due to frequent absences Mark might not be allowed to move up into the higher class – was already bad enough. And now the teacher wants something from him. Mark can already imagine what it will be.

He should not have yelled at Jan, let alone push him away so roughly. The fact that Jan had hugged him so enthusiastically when they had won could not excuse his reaction. But the worst was the way in which Jan had looked at him, and then without a word turned on his heel and walked away. Mark's stomach turns over every time he thinks about it. The whole hour long, Mark keeps staring at Jan's empty chair and doesn't manage to think clearly. Jan's face has been haunting his dreams for weeks, turning him on, and his heart starts to beat wildly when he sees Jan, even from a distance.

"We've got to talk, right away," says the teacher to Mark. "Since the school year has started, you have become another person. You play truant, you'll barely let anyone at school talk to you, and now this. I would have thought you'd be pleased to have a fellow swimmer in the class, and that you and Jan would become best friends."

"A super-swimmer he might be, but that's not enough", replies Mark hotly "I just don't want him to touch me like that!"

"Mark, you must apologise to Jan!" The teacher looks at Jan, pensive.

"Having hugged you doesn't mean Jan is gay. And even if he was, I won't tolerate homophobia, or any other type of discrimination."

Homophobia, homophobia, the word is pounding in Mark's head, and suddenly he begins to cry.

"Come on now, what's wrong with you?" The voice of Mr van der Kolk sounds bewildered.

He holds Mark by the shoulders, cautiously. "You have always been such a keen student. And being homophobic simply isn't like you. Jan has enough problems as it is, what with being new in this school and everything. And he likes you, I noticed it from the very first day. Mark, I expect an explanation for your behaviour in front of the whole class. You will face up to your responsibility, is that clear?"

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“Jan likes you, just you.” The teacher’s voice goes on and on in Mark’s head.

“Mark?”

“I can’t do it.” Mark’s voice trembles.

“Then you will have to speak to our school psychologist. This thing with Jan, your absences, all that must be sorted out. Quickly.”

The school psychologist looks friendly. “Among other things, I insulted and pushed back a schoolmate, that’s why I am here.”

Mr de Vries nods almost imperceptibly. “What happened?”, he asks as Mark stops speaking.

“Why does he have to touch me when I win?” cries Mark. “If he had only kept his hands to himself.” He stops, despaired.

“Is it because he hugged you that you lashed out at him?”

Mark nods silently.

“Perhaps it was important for Jan to show you how proud he was of your performance, because he likes you. There’s nothing abnormal about that, Mark, don’t you think?”

“No”, yells Mark, and runs to the door. “It’s absolutely not normal, it’s perverse.”

Nobody knows what he’s going through. Peter and Freek wouldn’t hesitate to beat him up, if he ever... Best not to think about it. He must go through ten sittings with the school psychologist – that was the agreement with Mr van der Kolk.

“Nice to see you again”, greets him Mr de Vries.

Mark nods silently. How could he make it clear to the advisor, that at night he dreams of Jan, that he even has erections because of him, and that at the same time he would most of all like to shake him off?

“Here you can say anything you want, however crazy it might be”, says Mr de Vries quietly, suddenly breaking into Mark’s chaos.

“I don’t even understand myself. I didn’t mean to hurt Jan, but ...”.

Desperately, Mark wipes off his tears with his pullover sleeve.

“But he confuses you quite a lot?” The school psychologist’s question sounds almost like a statement.

Mark looks at him quickly. How did he understand that? “I think about him all the time”, slips out of him so suddenly that he does not have the time to reconsider it.

“You like him so much that it makes you scared, is that right?”

“Yes”, whispers Mark in tears. At last he has told someone about it. He takes a quick glance at the psychologist. He still looks ever so friendly.

“You are not the only guy to fall in love with other guys, Mark.”

“You don’t mean that seriously.”

“I know how difficult it is to speak about being in love with boys. But you are not alone. There is even a gay and lesbian group for young people, here in Amsterdam. I am quite sure that they would be happy to meet you. Maybe you’d like to take their brochure “Boys who fancy boys”. You just have to call them. Think about it Mark, will you? If you need me give me a call, okay?”

Mark doesn’t look at the psychologist. But he nods.

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2 Relationships

Her hands shaking, Almira grabs the telephone. The writing blurs again and again before her eyes. In a few seconds her life has been destroyed, as though by bombs.

“Hello, Julie Bäcker speaking?”

Almira sobs uncontrollably.

“Almira, is that you? Good heavens, what happened?”

“I have to go back to Kosovo.”

A breathless silence at the other end. “My God”, whispers Julie, ages later.

“Stay where you are darling, I will be right there in a moment.”

“They can’t just simply deport you. You’ve been living here for eleven years.

That’s almost half your life” Julie, bewildered, keeps reading over and over the notification from the Aliens’ Registration Office.

“They say the war is over”, whispers Almira. “But my family originally comes from Bosnia, and they’d make my life a living Hell if I went there. And if they ever find out that I’m a lesbian they’ll kill me,” Almira looks at her girlfriend.

“In Kosovo too, people were murdered. I saw them beat up my sister and my cousins, and threaten to kill my uncle. Death awaits me there. There is no further education there for me, no home, no love. Only violence, only destruction. I can’t go back, Julie.”

“No, of course not. We’ll find a way, Almira. I love you, I won’t let you go. Never, do you hear me?”

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“What happened, Almira? You have been staring at the walls for weeks. You were given a six in three subjects. And I really thought you wanted to achieve something here in Germany. If you continue this way, you’ll never get an apprenticeship”.

“It does not depend on me”, says Almira softly. “I have no future in Germany.”

“Nonsense”, fumes the teacher. “Of course it depends on you. If you really want to achieve something, you will do it. But of course not with this performance. It’s too bad Almira, I was wrong about you.”

If you only knew that I’m a lesbian, you’d probably approve of the deportation notification one hundred percent, thinks Almira and puts away her work, quietly.

“But surely something can be done against a deportation notification,” Julie looks at her classmates defiantly, as they leave the lecture room after the lesson.

“Hey, the war in Kosovo is over, Julie. All these people, they’ve been here long enough. You’d better look for another girlfriend” Georg grins maliciously.

Others nod.

“What kind of people are you?” Julie looks around, shocked. “And you want to become educators?”

“Oh honestly, you only want to prevent this deportation because you fancy her, don’t you?” , pipes up Karin.

“You have simply no idea of what war and trauma can do to a person, even years later”, replies Julie.

“I think you’re overdoing it way too much again, Julie. As always.”

Georg leans back nonchalantly.

“In school nobody understands me. I feel so lonely. The teacher thinks I’m lazy.” Almira shows Julie the messed-up German essay.

“The students are just as bad”, sobs Julie with resignation. “They couldn’t care less what’s going on here.”

“Why don’t we look for help on the Web?”

“Almira honey, that’s a wonderful idea!”

Moments later they sit in front of their computers, with great concentration.

“Support Group for Refugees, here it is” says Julie suddenly. “Exactly what we were looking for.”

“And see here,” laughs Almira. “I’ve found a European Chat for young Gays and Lesbians.”

“Smashing,” smiles Julie. “I’ll call up the Support Group, ok?”

“In the meantime I’ll enter the URL of the Triangle – Chat.”

“Appointment at the Support Group in one hour”, announces Julie.

“The Chat is open.” Fascinated, Almira types something in.

“Show me.” Julie takes a seat next to her.

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<Almira> *hello, I am a lesbian living in Germany, soon to be deported back to Kosovo. What can I do?*

<Mark> *Hey, I'm from the Netherlands. If you have a German girlfriend, marry her. Should be possible, according to the German Life-Partnership Law, if you are both over 18.*

<Julie> *Hey, I'm the girlfriend. Do you really mean it? That would be great. We're both over 18. But we have to go now. Should we keep you posted?*

<Mark> *Absolutely. Nice chatting with you. See ya.*

<Aaron> *I'd also like to be updated. You can meet me here often in the Chat.*

<Almira> *Great. Thx, we'll be back. Cheers.*

"I'm afraid it doesn't look very good for the refugees from Kosovo. Our authorities don't want to understand, that minority groups like Bosnian Muslims still have a hard time there." The counsellor looks steadily at Almira. "What's more, you're a lesbian. Sending you back there is irresponsible."

"If we got married – according to the new Life-Partnership Law – we could avoid deportation?" Julie's voice sounds imploring.

"Yes, that would certainly be possible. According to § 23 of the Aliens' Law, after the marriage Almira would be entitled at first to a limited Residence Permit for three years, then she'd get a limited renewal, and in eight years' time she could apply for German citizenship."

"But what would happen to my parents?", asks Almira.

"It would not prevent your parents from being deported", says the advisor softly.

"I can't stay here without them", sobs Almira. *"Without my parents I can't live here."*

"You should come here with your parents. We'll do everything we can to save them." The advisor hesitates. "Is it because you're in love that you want to get married, or is it just an attempt to save Almira?"

"I love Almira", replies Julie. *"Perhaps I wouldn't have come to this idea without this threat but now I see it as a great opportunity."*

"I don't want to lose my parents", whispers Almira. *"I don't know if they'll ever understand, me marrying a woman."*

"Almira, for you going back to Kosovo would be the end. You've grown up here, you've spent more than half your life in this country, your whole socialisation has taken place here, you're used to this culture, you want to get an education. You love a woman. To have such a life in Kosovo is unthinkable. And then there is the trauma that you and your parents have gone through. There is no chance to get a therapy there. Returning to Kosovo means a whole new trauma for all your family. You told us that some members of your family were badly beaten up and received death threats before your very eyes."

Almira weeps silently. "Both my parents have gone through this. Mum tried to protect me. She is strong. But Dad went to pieces. I cannot leave Mum alone with him. Dad needs us both."

"Do your parents know, that you and Julie want to get married?"

"Perhaps they'd put up with that, but they couldn't stand to be separated from me. For my Dad it would be the end."

"There must be a solution for you and for your parents, Almira. I can't promise you anything. Marrying Julie would certainly save you. And we must save you."

The advisor smiles encouragingly at Almira. "Come tomorrow with your parents. Together we'll fight for them."

the end

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3 Different Lifestyles

*“Alexander, do me a favour, give me the invitation to the Parents’ Evening, please. Hans would like to come and he wants to make a note of the date.”
Flabbergasted, Alexander stares at his father. “Oh, come on, Dad. Why does Hans have to come with us?”*

“We’ve been living together for five years. Hans is like a second father to you, isn’t he?”

“Yes, but – honestly, can’t you go there just with Mum anyway? That’d be miles better, really.”

“Darling, being gay is quite normal. You see Mum only every second weekend and the everyday things, your homework – Hans and I look after everything that concerns you. Don’t we? At your school, they should have gotten the idea by now, Hans is just as responsible for you as I am. He has permission to write letters to the school for you, and to talk to the teachers about your achievements. All in all, he’s more for you than I myself. I don’t want to hide Hans, or disavow him.”

“Yeah, sure, I understand that. But even so, it doesn’t have to become common knowledge. My life’s already stressing enough without this. You always think that accepting homosexuality is easy for every single person on Earth – just because Hans and you know thousands of lesbians and gays. Believe me, the school is a complete desert in this respect. I can already picture the teacher standing in front of me. Her face will be full of spite, she’ll smirk, but why, of course, she’s completely tolerant,” groans Alexander.

“Don’t you think you’re overdoing it a little, Alexander?” His father looks at him closely. “Hans and I’ll get it right. The time will come when your miserable journey through this desert will draw to an end.”

“Okay, then I’ll go and get myself buried. By the way, Hans has pinned the invitation to the Parents’ Evening on the wall,” sighs Alexander.

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“Good morning everyone”, Mrs Steiner greets her class and glances over the pupils’ heads. Alexander squirms restlessly back and forth on his seat. As his eyes meet those of the teacher, Alex stiffens like a stone pillar.

“Now then,” begins the teacher, drumming her fingers on her desk. “Alexander, wouldn’t you like to tell us something about your two fathers, and about how you manage?”

Thirty-two pairs of eyes are fixed on Alex.

“I manage all right” cries out Alex and his voice sounds squawky, raven-like.

“Two fathers? What does she mean? ”, asks Kathrin, who just doesn’t understand when she’s putting her foot in it.

“Alex?” The teacher raises her voice and looks at him provokingly.

“What does it mean?” Suddenly Alex loses his temper. He stares at his classmates, straight in their eyes. “My father is gay. He loves another man. So I have two fathers and one mother.” He wants to make his voice sound proud, but in reality it trembles suspiciously.

“But it’s perverse”, cries out Erkan. “Revolting. In their place, I would creep in the darkest corner of the earth and pray I become normal again, instead of standing out like that. Yuck!”

“My father’s normal,” says Alexander with a quiet voice.

“Are there other opinions about this?” Mrs Steiner looks around.

“It’s possible to undergo treatment”, remarks Kathrin.

“My father does not have to undergo any treatment,” hisses Alexander.

“He’s absolutely okay, and so is Hans. People like you, who don’t accept this, you are the ones who need a therapy.”

“What do you want?” Erkan stands up menacingly. “What the Hell are you saying? Come here, twit, I’ll show you who’s normal and who isn’t, you revolting faggot.” He grabs Alex by the shoulders and shakes him.

The class is still. Mrs Steiner runs her fingers through her shock of hair, but stays glued on the spot, and drops of sweat form on her brow.

Koray stands up deathly white. “Excuse me” he whispers. “I’m feeling sick.”

“Sissy”, hisses Erkan at him, and spits in despise on the floor between Koray and Alex. “One more perverse word, man, and you’re dead,” Erkan warns Alexander, before slamming a powerful punch at him. Alex resists the blow without dropping to the floor through sheer luck.

“That’s not acceptable, Erkan”, says the teacher, helplessly. “Now you apologise to Alexander and you, Koray please sit down again.”

“Me? Ask a perv for forgiveness?” sneers Erkan. “He’s the one who must apologise to me, Mrs Steiner, just to make matters clear.”

“Nowadays homosexuality is absolutely normal”, says Mrs Steiner uncertainly. “Alexander’s father can’t help it if he’s become that way.”

“Alright, I’m leaving now, that’s quite enough for me, Mrs Steiner,” whispers Alexander. Before Mrs Steiner even tries to say anything, he has already left the room.

to be continued

“It’s really very nice of you, to receive me on such short notice.” Mrs Steiner, embarrassed, stares at the tips of her shoes.

“Mrs Steiner, it seems to me that Alexander is in a very difficult position within his class – didn’t you ever talk about homosexuality in your class before?”

“It’s not part of the teaching programme,” replies Mrs Steiner with an almost defiant look on her face.

“Yes, unfortunately”, admits Mr Wyler, the advisor. “So we’re agreed. Next week I’ll be attending your lessons.”

There’s absolute silence in the class.

“I’m very pleased to be with you today. I won’t bore you with figures, but it’s not quite unavoidable – sorry folks. But you don’t have to write anything for me”, grins Mr Wyler and some of the pupils, boys and girls, grin back at him.

“About one in every ten young people is homosexual. Hmm... in your class that would mean about two pupils. Imagine you couldn’t talk about it to each other, that you always had to hide for fear of being excluded.” Mr Wyler considers the class for a few moments “Some of you must have a very good idea of what it feels like to be excluded, don’t you?”

“But you don’t have to flaunt it – being different, I mean,” says Erkan softly.

“Human beings all differ from one another”, says Mr Wyler. “Surely, there are lesbians and gay men who live openly – who have fought for the right to live like that, to be allowed to marry, and to be able to get common custody for their children. Just as there are homosexuals who tell no-one about their feelings. Some marry a partner of the other gender and live their feelings for the same sex only in secret. There are lesbians and gays who live in communities, some who live together without marrying and others who want to live alone, even if they do have a relationship with someone. Not much difference, really, with respect to heterosexuals.”

“But the important thing is that two human beings truly do love each other.

That’s what’s important”, Alexander dares to say.

“A nice final word for this lesson”, pipes up Mrs Steiner.

“Just in case one of you wants to talk to me about it, I’ll leave my telephone number here.”

In the courtyard Mr Wyler turns around once again. “Hey, you were sitting in that class, right?”

Koray nods. “Thank you, Mr Wyler. Maybe I’m one of those three. I’d like to come to your counselling hour some day.”

“Sure,” says Mr Wyler.

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4 Mental and Social Well-being

Today I'll pay a visit to Chloé in Fontenay. We've been together for more than one year, now, and at last I'll be able to see her home.

I remember the day I first saw Chloé. We had been chatting in a triangle-youth-chat for three whole months before we found out, by chance, that we were almost neighbours. Not France, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy – not at all, just Fontenay and Paris. And it's really only a stone's throw from one another. So, of course, we made a date.

Elsa and Chloé: a meeting in real life

Good heavens, I'd been wracking my brains, wondering if Chloé would be ugly or just really silly –one never knows with chats. I preferred not to tell my mother about this chat thing. It's stupid, really, because I was chatting away on the web, and Mum would never have imagined how dangerous that could have been. But now it doesn't matter anymore, Mum likes Chloé, and that's the only thing that matters.

Hey, I must rush, otherwise I'll never get to Fontenay today. I grab my jacket, glance at the mirror, take the key from the hook and I'm off.

Chloé's father is the real trouble, I think two hours later, feeling uneasy.

"In one hour you must be back, is that clear?" he glares at Chloé.

Chloé's fear freezes me to the bone.

"Come, Chloé." I help her up and run away with her, as fast as I can.

"Is your father always like that?" Pensively, I throw a couple of pebbles into a pond.

Chloé nods warily. "He loves me, that's all." Her voice sounds sad. "I'm his only child – he only means well."

"But it's not right to lock you up in your own home."

"Yeah, I know" Chloé grins, embarrassed.

"You never told me that he spies on you."

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“You’d never have understood it. Daddy has a heart of gold, if you only get to know him right.”

“I can’t really imagine that”, I whisper.

“Let’s not argue about this please. You’ll have to drive back just now, and I’ve been so happy to see you.”

I draw Chloé carefully close to me and kiss her lips.

My body is like electrified. I feel her excitement and get flushed all over.

“You disgusting slut.” He drags me by the hair, and pushes me roughly towards the pond. “Don’t you ever come here again, bitch.”

Chloé’s desperate eyes meet mine.

And that’s the last I saw of her.

“Honey, what’s wrong with you?” My mother looks at me worried.

“Why doesn’t Chloé come anymore? Did you have an argument?”

“It’s not because of her, mum.”

“Elsa, I think we ought to speak about this. You’ve lost at least five kilos in the past weeks. Something’s wrong with you. I would just like to know what’s getting you down.”

“I know mum. Sorry, I must go now. See you later!” Quick, I must get away.

If I look out the window today, everything is grey. Even though the sun is shining. My breakfast tastes like cardboard. The laughter of the others in the schoolyard drones in my ears. I hear them speaking to me, I answer at times.

But please don’t ask about my feelings. Compared to me, a robot seems almost human. I hang on to schoolwork because nothing else makes any sense.

Of course Mummy’s right. But I don’t have any time. Last week we wrote a fairytale. Modern and made up by us. My story began this way: “One day an extraterrestrial power put a cheese cover over the world. But nobody noticed it...” The rest of it was quite scary and ended fatally. I got top marks for it, but that does not help me anymore.

“How much does that fairytale have to do with you”, Mrs Dupont asks after the lesson. I shrug.

“You’ve been looking down in the mouth for a few weeks now. Trouble at home?”

I shake my head silently.

“Unlucky in love?”

I look at her, surprised.

“It’s about a girl, isn’t it?”, asks Mrs Dupont softly.

“It’s not because of her” I whisper and already the dam has burst. “It’s her father”, I sob.

“Elsa, I’ll give you the telephone number of people who help young gays and lesbians, the Ligne Azur. They can certainly help you. Things will be all right, you’ll see.”

“How do you know of this hotline?”

“You are not the only lesbian girl in this school.” Mrs Dupont winks at me. For the first time in weeks I feel a little glimmer of hope.

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I tell Marie, my advisor, about the nightmare that has been haunting me for months, and that I can't make out. A monster drags me down into a little pond, and laughs revoltingly.

And suddenly I see the scene very clearly before me.

"Chloé's father – dragged me away by the hair and then insulted me. He pushed me into a pond." For the first time I feel the repulsion again, I had quite forgotten it.

"Goodness gracious, Elsa, Chloé's father grabbed you? I didn't know that. Maybe your nightmare shows how much Chloé's father has hurt you. Have you ever mentioned this attack to anyone?"

Silently, I nod. "Do you think this is why I feel this way? I thought it was because the only thing Chloé talks about these days is suicide, and because I can't help her. I couldn't defend myself against her father. I feel so bad."

"Yes, I can see why. You've seen how much her father can hurt you. Of course you feel helpless. Exactly as helpless as when you want to help Chloé and don't know how to."

"Do you think there is some kind of link between the two?" I ask with a small voice.

"It is very possible, to say the least, Elsa. If Chloé's father hadn't threatened you so much, you could be dealing with the situation much better. Maybe you feel exactly as you did then.

"I felt so ashamed of myself. I felt so dirty. As though he had been covering me in spit from head to toe."

"That's just what he did", says Marie. "Talking about it is a good thing. It's the only way to come out of your helplessness. And once you get over it, then you can start thinking about what you can do for Chloé, okay?"

Everything that Marie says sounds so logical, and simple and good. I had never thought that any one situation could get me so deeply shaken. But Marie is right. I remember, how secure and protected and how open I felt with Chloé. In this situation my defences were down, and of course I was also vulnerable. But I couldn't go on with it after the attack by Chloé's father. Only now can I finally come to terms with that.

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5 Gay-specific Counselling

“Oh, would you please be so kind as to clean my bedside locker as well.”

Eileen turns around. “I am not the cleaning woman. One day I’ll be your doctor.”

“Then please call Dr Mayer. I don’t want to be looked after by a nigger.”

Without a word Eileen lays the enema on the night table and leaves the patient’s room.

“Hello Eileen”, beams up Kristin. “Hey, how was your day?”

“My mother thinks I’m not capable of looking after people and patients mistake me for the cleaning woman – it’s been a great day. And how are you?”

Kristin reels back, frightened. Her heart beats wildly. Just don’t say anything wrong again.

“I’m so happy to see you,” She tries a little laugh.

“I didn’t make the world,” growls Eileen. “So please don’t blame me.”

“I didn’t mean it that way.” Kristin just wishes she could run away. Why is it always so difficult with Eileen? Don’t they love each other anymore?

“Come on, I have cooked something lovely for us two. Will you set the table?”

Eileen takes Kristin by the arm and kisses her slowly and tenderly. “Better now?” she asks softly.

So everything is okay, anyhow. Kristin sighs, relieved.

“Can you please take the fish knife? And the nice wineglasses. And the serviettes don’t match the china at all. Don’t you see?”

“Hey, it doesn’t matter anyway” Kristin throws an angry look at Eileen.

“I prefer to eat this way.”

“A nice-looking table is important for a good meal, Kristin. I don’t enjoy the food if everything is just thrown on the table in any old way.”

“It’s not just thrown there. It’s just my style, not yours.”

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“Why don’t you tell your parents that you are a lesbian?” Eileen draws back a bit, away from Kristin, who immediately pulls the cover up to the tip of her nose.

“I’m not ready for it. My parents wouldn’t understand it. I for one haven’t completely understood it yet.”

“But are you sure that you love me?”

“Yes Eileen, I am quite sure. But it doesn’t have to become common knowledge. Do I have to be pigeonholed like that?”

“It’s not a pigeonhole, it’s an identity. Just like my being black. You carry it with you all your life.”

“And like I come from the lower classes”, asks Kristin.

“Why do you always ramble on and on with this idiotic lower classes discussion? You’re not getting downtrodden because of that, are you?”

“No, but everyone gives me to understand that I should be ashamed of myself, because at home we don’t have classic music, I don’t go around in brand-name clothes, and because I don’t understand three-quarters of the foreign words that the teacher uses. And because I’ve never been to the opera, or to a theatre, or to the States during the summer holidays. But I’m not ashamed of my father’s job as a factory worker. I love my family.”

“So what?”

“If I had this kind of reaction when patients take you for the cleaning woman, or when my classmates ask you where you come from, or where you grew up, then probably you would leave me right away.”

“You can’t compare the two things. Completely wrong. Hey, I just need to walk down the street and people yell “nigger” at me. You can’t even imagine how it is, when one feels insecure, all the time and everywhere. Except for Ghana – that’s why I want to go there. You don’t even dare tell your parents that you live with someone like me.”

“It’s not true, Eileen. It’s not because you are black. I can’t make them understand that I love a girl. And I love you, I really do.”

“Really? That’s what counts most of all for me, Kristin. Because I love you too, so much.”

“So it’s all right, isn’t it?”

“Kristin, you have of late been daydreaming a wee bit too much, in my opinion”. Mrs Metz glares sternly over her glasses. “Feeling attracted to girls is a very normal stage of puberty. One should try oneself out. You’ll see, the right boy will come along after all. We all go through this phase. But the school must not be left behind, is that clear?”

“Sometimes I feel so much behind Eileen” Kristin dares to take a glance at the face of the advisor.

“Do you think your feeling can have something to do with the fact that you are a few years younger than Eileen? You’re barely sixteen yet, at that age it’s frequently difficult to be a lesbian. Eileen is a few years ahead of you.”

to be continued next page

“We often argue about silly things”, says Eileen. “Things that are really just laughable. What colour should the serviettes be, for instance.”

“Perhaps neither one of you dares to think about your feelings for other girls yet, and you project your fear into such little things?”

“But I do know that I love Eileen”, protests Kristin. “It’s just the rest that’s so difficult.”

“What do you mean, “the rest”, Kristin?”

“Well for one thing, Eileen often gets harassed because of her skin colour. And then she thinks I don’t understand her and that I’m not supportive enough.”

“And what does that have to do with the colour of the napkins”

“Maybe Eileen opposes me so strongly because I’ve not told anyone at home that we’re together yet.”

“Because you don’t want them to know that you’re dating a nigger.” Snaps Eileen angrily.

“This is complete bullshit, Eileen” yells Kristin. “See? Here we go again!”

“You are two very normal girls, just like the others. The fact that you’re lesbian, or in your case black, doesn’t change anything. But the world around you says that your feelings are wrong, because they should be directed towards boys. This judgement on the part of the people around you makes having a harmonious relationship very difficult.”

“I’m not quite sure” wonders Kristin.

“I couldn’t care less about ‘the people around me’” yells Eileen. “The only thing that interests me is what Kristin thinks of me.”

“Okay.” The counsellor looks at Kristin. “What is your feeling about this, Kristin?”

“I love Eileen and I think she’s absolutely great. But I often feel inferior to her.”

“And you Eileen, what do you think of Kristin?”

“Same thing. And sometimes I think that Kristin doesn’t understand anything about my problems at work, or anywhere else.”

“And how do these fears come about, both of you?”

“I don’t know”, says Eileen. “That’s why we’re here.”

“That’s a pity. We unfortunately have to stop for the moment. If you want, you can come again and we try to track down the reasons.”

“I don’t think she’s understood us.” Kristin steps disgruntled on an empty Coke tin.

“There’s something jammed up about her, that has nothing to do with us”, says Eileen.

“I don’t know if she believes us when we tell her we’re perfectly happy with being lesbians.”

“That’s right” smiles Kristin, “Unfortunately, neither do the others”

the end

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6 Sexualities

- <Antonio> *This is a chat for young gays and lesbians, right?*
- <Almira> *Hi Antonio, nice to meet you. Yes you're right. Where do you come from?*
- <Antonio> *Lady, never give out such info in a chat. *stern* I live in Italy.*
- <Almira> *And I in Germany. There are also people from other European countries.*
- <Antonio> *Have you been here long?*
- <Almira> *Yep.*
- <Mark> *Hello there everyone*
- <Koray> *I'm also new to this chat, hi.*
- <Elsa> *Hi guys 😊*
- <Mark> *How are you Elsa? Is everything okay with Chloé, I miss her*
- <Antonio> *A big hello, especially for Koray ;-)*
- <Koray> *Lonely greetings, likewise*
- <Elsa> *Chloé's still not OK, but I'm slowly getting better*
- <Mark> *Sorry for the others, but I must chat with Elsa for a while – if it bothers you we'll retreat to the whisper corner, okay?*
- <Almira> *I'm listening with great interest*
- <Koray> *Joining in*
- <Antonio> *Have got a thousand questions, am sitting on tenterhooks, but I'll be patient ;-)*
- <Mark> *I'm happy to hear that. Elsa, did you get anything out of the counselling?*
- <Elsa> *Yes, the woman is really great. She's been very helpful. I hope that Chloé will come today, then we could decide together how to help her. That would be good. I'm really not feeling as helpless as a few weeks ago. How are you Almira?*

to be continued on the following two pages

<Almira> *The advisor of the support group has spoken with my parents. Now they know that I'm a lesbian and they have accepted it without making a big fuss. The main thing is that they won't lose me. But it's still a long way to go.*

<Elsa> *Sure. I think of you. All the best.*

<Almira> *thx*

<Koray> *I don't understand it all, but I wish you all the best ;-) What questions do you have? @Antonio*

<Antonio> *oops – alright then: I'll spill it all out...*

<Antonio> *I've been living for the last two years with a boy, and I really love him...*

<Mark> *Best of luck*

<Koray> *oh if only I could have such a relationship *blush**

<Antonio> *Be patient guys, the big surprise is on its way *;-)**

<Antonio> *I have been extremely attracted to a girl for the past six months. At first I didn't want to believe it. Admitting to myself that I'm gay was hard enough. And now I have to redefine everything from the start, I just don't know how to do it.*

<Koray> *Are you absolutely sure about that?*

<Antonio> *Yes, absolutely 😊*

<Elsa> *And you still live with your boyfriend?*

<Antonio> *Yes, of course, I love him as well.*

<Mark> *Does your friend know about your feelings for her?*

<Antonio> *To be honest, no.*

<Mark> *Not good, I'd say*

<Elsa> *Does she know about him?*

<Antonio> *Yes, she knows everything*

<Koray> *So what are you going to do?*

<Antonio> *If I only knew... I thought, perhaps you'd have an idea???*

<Mark> *You should speak to your friend*

<Almira> *This here is a chat in which we come together without any counselling. But there are chats – may be also in Italy, I don't really know – in which advisors take part, who could help you.*

<Antonio> *The worst part of it is I don't know if I should stay with my boyfriend any more.*

<Koray> *I understand. I'd be happy if I had fallen in love with a girl – but it looks as though I am hundred percent gay*

<Mark> *Same here – I just don't feel anything for girls 😊*

<Elsa> *I can't understand Mark. I find that only girls are wonderful :-)*

<Almira> *In solidarity with Elsa*

<Antonio> *So what should I tell my boyfriend?*

<Koray> *What about the truth?*

<Antonio> *Yeah, but what's the truth?*

<Mark> *That you're probably bisexual, isn't it?*

<Elsa> *It may sound old-fashioned, but I don't trust people who sleep with blokes and girls at the same time.*

to be continued

<Antonio> Why not?

<Elsa> They want to have it all – without having to decide – I think that's cowardly

<Mark> Hey Elsa, why that?

<Almira> I understand Elsa – if Julie suddenly came to me saying that she'd fallen in love with a sweet young boy, I'd dump her immediately – and I'd despair at the thought

<Koray> If I personally fell in love with a girl I think it would be okay *embarrassed grin* but if my friend did... no way!

<Mark> That's right Antonio. What would you say if your friend came to you and told you a thing like that about himself?

<Antonio> Sorry, I have to think about all this. I'll be back later. Thx and Bye

<Antonio> Hello, I'm back again

<Aaron> Hello Antonio 😊

<Koray> What have you got to, Antonio, and how are you ?

<Antonio> I have spoken with Paolo and told him everything

Mark> Holding my breath

<Koray> Tell us about it

<Antonio> Like Almira predicted, he's left me

<Mark> WHAT? Oh, I'm so sorry, Antonio, really

<Aaron> What happened? *please explain*

<Antonio> I'm probably bisexual: I've been attracted to this girl for a long time, but my boyfriend doesn't accept it.

<Aaron> I'm sitting in front of the monitor and can only shake my head. What really matters is that two people truly love each other, isn't it?

<Antonio> But in my case it's more like three people.

<Aaron> What was the problem? Was it because you told him too late, or because it was a woman that Paolo couldn't accept it?

<Antonio> Everything I think

<Julie> Almira told me about you. The most important thing for me is that everything always be open and that I be informed. Then I can cope with quite a lot fairly well.

<Antonio> That's so easy to say, Julie. But I was totally upset, I couldn't find words for my feelings.

<Julie> If Almira were to fall in love with a boy I would expect her to tell me about it before starting anything with him.

<Antonio> Yeah, right. If only I hadn't started anything with that girl. And what would you do after that, Julie?

<Julie> We would then want to decide together how to create a situation in which all involved would feel secure.

<Antonio> And do you really think that it would work?

<Julie> If there's anything that works at all, then that's the way!

<Aaron> I am almost certain that all people basically have the capacity to fall in love with men as well as women. It's just that there is in every person a strong distinction between the two tendencies. There's nothing to condemn, either way. I think it's really a good thing to be able to love different persons. I admire your courage, Antonio.

<Julie> Let's keep this in mind as a utopia, and let's help each other on the way there!!

<Antonio> Agreed. Thx to you all, guys!

the end

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7 The Community

This is complete and utter madness.

I would never have met Patrizia if we hadn't been fighting in the school playground and if Mrs. Gazzi hadn't dragged me all the way to her office because of that.

And here I am now, waiting for her, forever in love, with butterflies in my stomach and fluttering nerves. When I picture her face in my mind's eyes, I feel flushed all over. Teresa can picture Patrizia's deep brown eyes as they look at her with a sparkle, and then narrow to thin slits with joy. Teresa breathes deeply, or else she won't be able to stand up because of all the excitement. The others mustn't find out about them, even if they're gay or lesbian themselves. Her sexuality is her business only. As well, of course, as Patrizia's. She looks down at the courtyard. This is where she kissed Patrizia for the first time.

During the Techno-Party three weeks ago. Her heart still twinges when she thinks about it. No matter what she does to think about other things, she always ends up longing for her peaceful presence by her side.

Teresa sighs. She'd never have thought the world could be so crazy. Her story with Patrizia is so jumbled-up that no-one could ever make sense of it. Teresa lets her eyes drift across the crowd in the café. The lesbians and gays here are really nice people. Mrs Gazzi was right. There is indeed a gay and lesbian centre here in Bologna and she hadn't even known about it. How ridiculous.

Her love affair with Patrizia has started here. The first time she had visited the place, her hands sticky with sweat because of her nervousness, she was thunderstruck when she saw Patrizia sitting by the window, in the back.

Patrizia, of all people. She's a lesbian, thought Teresa, between fascination and shock. She had never realised. Patrizia was like a ray of sunshine illuminating her across the room. Teresa didn't look away.

to be continued on the following two pages

She simply asked “So you did find out, in the end” when Teresa, drawn to her as if by magic, finally arrived next to the little café table and Patrizia looked at her, confused.

“I’d never have thought that you...” Teresa doesn’t finish her sentence.

“Lesbians are not all alike” comes the laconic reply from Patrizia. “You have loads of clichés in your head”

“But Franca...”

“She’s my best friend. And she’s straight. So what?”

“So, nothing.” Stumbles Teresa.

“Will you come to the Techno-Party with me next Friday? Just with me?”

Patrizia stares at her for some time, with a little sparkle in her eyes that Teresa will learn to understand later on.

Yes, that’s how it all started.

But that was the end of a long process. Teresa’s memories flashback all the way to it.

The girls of the tenth class are standing together in the schoolyard and, as always, are giggling. The only one that Teresa likes is Patrizia, but she wouldn’t be caught dead ever admitting it. On the contrary, she often taunts Patrizia when she meets her. “So, the little lady has squeezed herself into the supertight jeans again and dipped her little face into the paint box?”

“Quit it Teresa, sod off. Your presence is not welcome here!”

“I just so totally couldn’t care less, Patrizia, you know.”

“Oh come”, says Franca “Just don’t pay any attention to the silly cow. Why doesn’t she just get lost?”

“Do you absolutely have to pipe in?“, growls Teresa. “Cause you’re the one who looks like a real whore.”

“Get lost Teresa, before I lose my temper !” Patrizia’s voice sounds dangerously quiet. “Cut it out, save your provocations for somewhere else, do you hear?”

“I was only telling you how ridiculous you look and how absolutely idiotic your conversation is.” Teresa raises the tone of her voice. “Hey look here, isn’t the boy simply adorable? Yesterday in the courtyard he even smiled at me.”

Her tone falls back to normal. “That must have hurt, didn’t it?”

“You’re just jealous because the boys don’t look at you”, counters Franca.

“Wrong Franca, I just won’t let my intelligence go to waste for the sake of a boy. Like you and the other girls do.”

“So why’re you still standing here? If our standards don’t suit you, get lost”.

Patrizia pushes Teresa back. That’s the last straw.

“Cut out the bickering. Have you gone completely mad? Patrizia, Teresa, I want you separated immediately” Mrs Gazzzi holds the girls apart, one hand on each.

“She started, she always does”, pants Patrizia.

“Obviously”, sneers Teresa. “I always do.”

“Patrizia is telling the truth. Teresa should leave us alone once and for all”, declares Franca and stares at the maths teacher.

“Teresa, after the lesson please report to me.”

to be continued

"I would like to show you something. It's in my office, okay?"

Teresa has always liked her maths teacher. She understood something about Teresa, that no-one else noticed.

"You really like Patrizia, don't you?"

"I beg your pardon? How can you imagine such a thing?" Teresa feels as though caught off-balance.

"You remind me of myself when I was your age." Mrs Gazzi winks at her.

"Oh really?" Teresa plays it cool.

"Here we are. Come in. Would you like to sit down?"

"You wanted to show me something?"

"Precisely. A brochure about the Gay Games – just one moment." The teacher rummages through the contents of a desk drawer. "What with you being so sporty, I thought, perhaps next year you'd like to take part. They'll certainly need good volleyball players"

"Hey, just a minute" Teresa looks squarely at the teacher "Are you a lesbian?"

"Yes. Does that surprise you? Why don't you go to the Gay and Lesbian Centre, and try to meet other lesbians? You're always hanging out alone."

"I just don't feel like being gawped at like a sex object."

"Who told you that lesbians are like that?"

"Everybody says it."

"So you believe everything they say. In any case it's not true. Gays and lesbians have many interests. They found sports groups, meet for Game Evenings, make politics together – whatever you want, you can share it with them."

"Volleyball would be enough to start with." Teresa turns and turns the brochure in her hands.

"Okay. Then I'll give you the address of the Gay and Lesbian Centre. Do you have Internet?"

"Sure."

"Here are some Websites that could be of interest to you. You can start with these and go on looking from there. My colleague has just told me about a chat for young lesbians and gays, that should be very good. I'll jot it down for you. So you can see what is going on in real life. You'll see, nobody reduces you to a sex object."

"And you? Are you part of the alternative society?"

"Alternative society is perhaps the wrong terms. I have many lesbian and gay friends. Before going to a nightclub, I check very carefully to see if any of my pupils could be there as well. If they are, I don't go in."

"And why not?"

"Look, my job is to teach you. My private life is something else. It's another world, you see. I don't mix the two. It wouldn't be good. You really do depend on me, and that means a big responsibility, which I take very seriously."

"I see. Thank you very much!"

"It's all right. Have fun at your sports."

the end

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8 History and Culture

“My friend from the gay/lesbian Jewish group “Sjalhomo” is probably the only person I can talk to about this,” thinks Aaron to himself as he makes his way to the meeting centre. The thoughts in his head are so mixed up that he can’t make sense of them anymore. He likes his teacher, Mr. Lanssen, who teaches History, Philosophy, and Dutch, Aaron’s favourite subjects. He has often wondered whether his teacher being understanding about so many things has anything to do with being in a wheelchair, and therefore constantly having to fight the stereotypes against disabled people. Since Aaron realised he’s gay, he started being more and more interested in finding out which famous figures in history, philosophy and literature were also homosexual. Could it be that Mr. Lanssen was trying to conceal this important information? Maybe he was crazy to give homosexuality such an important place in his life, but... everything had changed since he realised that he was gay. For many questions, gays see the world through different eyes. That’s why he had to know if any of the free thinkers, freedom fighters or great writers had been gay, too. Their lessons in school didn’t say anything about it. Over the last six months, he had distanced himself more and more from his classes and his classmates. When he’s sitting alone in his room, he has no problems learning things, but his participation to the classes is now close to zero. In History and Philosophy, he had always been a very active student.

“Aaron, I don’t appreciate losing my best pupil’s interventions in our discussions. I’ve noticed for some time now that you haven’t been participating in class. Are you having problems at home, or maybe love problems? We’ve always been able to be open with each other. What’s going on?”

to be continued on the following two pages

“Will my grades stay the same even if you’re not satisfied with my class participation?” Aaron stares at his shoes, embarrassed.

“Of course not. Since I know that something’s troubling you and that that’s why you’ve become so silent, I’d like to make you an offer. Write something on a theme related to Philosophy and History. If you can make a great presentation, you’ll be back on track, OK?”

“Thanks, Mr. Lanssen.”

To go to the university, you have to have good marks on your final exams. But could he risk working his question about possible famous homosexual personalities in History, Philosophy and Literature into his oral presentation? Wouldn’t Mr. Lanssen flunk him immediately?

Aaron is certain that there have always been gays and lesbians throughout history, but that these cases have been hushed up. He just had to find them.

“Shalom, Aaron, you seem to be lost in thought.” Josef takes him in his arms with a big smile. “Is there anything wrong, my love?”

“Oh, Josef, I have to do an oral presentation in front of my class.” And then Aaron tells him the whole story.

The others from “Sjalhomo” come closer, one by one, to listen to him.

“I’ve been wondering which famous women in history were lesbians. It’s important to know, and besides, it’s exciting,” commented Yael.

“Have you already tried the Internet?” asks Dani, who always looks up everything on the Web.

“That’s a good idea,” reflected Aaron. “Can you help me?”

“I’ve already researched your question, Aaron. After all, I’m a student of Philosophy.”

Aaron turns to stare at Josef.

“But you never even told me” exclaims Aaron, surprised.

“Better late than never,” joked Josef. “Now, Aaron, if you want to save your grade in History and Philosophy, I you should choose to study Erasmus of Rotterdam. He was born in 1469 and lived until 1536. He was revolutionary for his time; he was a theologian but also a pedagogue. In reality, he was much more of a humanist than a theologian and he was famous in his own lifetime. He even campaigned for the equality of women. He lead the emancipation movement on various levels. And the best part is that he was gay. Choose him as your essay topic, Aaron. It will be great, you’ll see. I’ll help you.”

“All right,” said Aaron with a smile.

“Mr. Lanssen, I’m preparing my presentation and I wanted to discuss the theme with you. Only if you have time, of course.”

“I’m glad you took up my offer so quickly. What’s the essay about?”

“It’s essentially about Erasmus of Rotterdam. That name must mean something to you.”

“As indeed it should. Erasmus of Rotterdam is still considered to be the founding father of enlightened thought.”

“Did you ever stop to think that maybe Erasmus had a very personal motive for representing the humanistic school of thought?”

“To be honest, no. But you’ve thought about it?”

to be continued

“Yes, that’s why I selected him. Did you know that he was gay?”

“Oh...! No, I didn’t know that. And you think that his homosexuality gave him the impetus for enlightened thought?”

“Unfortunately, it’s too late for me to ask him – it’s just a theory. But that’s the basis of my essay.”

“It’s unusual and it will perhaps make you interested in my lessons again.

That’s true, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I didn’t want to keep my homosexuality a secret from the others any more.”

“A very personal motive, then” says Mr. Lanssen with a smile. Even if I agree with your choice of topic, Aaron, I would like you to keep in mind that in Erasmus’ time, homosexuality was not as accepted and talked about as it is today, and it definitely wasn’t called that way. It’s always very tricky to force a definition on someone who can’t say anything about it any more. I’ll accept your topic with this one limitation, is that okay?”

“I’ll have to think about it a little longer, then” answers Aaron.

“May I take a look at what you’ve already written?”

“The introduction is already finished. The part about Erasmus of Rotterdam still needs to be formulated. And the last part will deal with the link to our modern times. I’ll need another week for that.”

“That’s fine,” said Mr. Lanssen, as he began to read.

History is like a field of flowers in the spring, filled with souvenirs of past journeys and biographies telling stories. One can always find what he looks for. The millennia of human history has produced millions of personal stories and in many of them people have asked themselves the same questions about being in love or being proud, being accepted or being persecuted. Such situations have already occurred many times, sometime, somewhere...

For a long time, ancient Greece – the country of Sappho - has been seen by lesbians, gays and bisexuals as a kind of paradise. But even at that time in history, Athens’ laws restricted homosexuality. It was felt that men should have a wife and children. In a limited sense, a relationship between a man and a boy was accepted as a part of the boy’s education. Sometime this relationship was one of passion, sometimes it was more for educational purposes. But for the lovers, growing up was hard.

The first persecutions of homosexuals began in the time of the early Christians. In ancient Rome, Emperor Augustine (313) subjected gay men to castration; by the end of the century, they were even being burned. Some examples of homosexuality reappear in the 12th century with “amour courtois” (chivalrous love), which was not limited to heterosexual affections. Although we don’t know much about the homosexual aspects of amour courtois, the pope declared that such love affairs should not involve homosexual dimensions. This implies that there were indeed chivalrous homosexual affairs before he made his statement.

During the Renaissance, some artists expressed themselves more visibly in a homo-erotic way. The writings of Plato were translated. Although homosexuality was still officially forbidden at this time, some men were gay including Leonardo da Vinci. At 24 years of age, he was persecuted because he had a relation with a boy of 17. Later, he had a relationship with young Caprotti which lasted for 25 years. Michelangelo was proud of his identity and his work was an ode to loving men.

“I just can’t wait to see how it continues,” said Mr. Lanssen. “I’ll finish reading next Friday.”

the end

Different in More Ways Than One.

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9 Different Religions

- <Teresa> *Are we going to talk today about religion today?*
- <Aaron> *Yes, that's the topic.*
- <Almira> *I think it's great that you've chosen this subject*
- <Julie> *Before we really start – and also because it's part of the subject: who wants to go to the next Europride among you?*
- <Koray> *If you tell us what it's about, I could think it over *:-)**
- <Julie> *Gays and lesbians from all over Europe meet within the framework of the Gay Pride Parades and organise an intercultural week, on different subjects. One of them could be religion, I think. But I don't want to go there without you.*
- <Koray> *You mean, that we would prepare a given topic, and then organise an event together there?*
- <Julie> *That's right.*
- <Aaron> *Through Internet, without knowing each other?*
- <Almira> *I don't have the feeling, that I don't know you. Think about Elsa and Chloé – they really found each other through the chat.*
- <Aaron> *I'm convinced. *:-)* So, who starts ?*
- <Kristin> *I come from a very religious family. I think that's why I never found the nerve to tell my parents that I am a lesbian.*
- <Koray> *What would happen?*
- <Kristin> *I have no idea. Strict Christians refuse homosexuality.*
- <Julie> *My parents feel that God must have had a reason when He created homosexuality – they think that everything has been created by God, and that's the explanation.*
- <Kristin> *Could be, but God has also allowed evil, my parents would say. Adultery for instance is forbidden, and so is murder.*
- <Julie> *In any case homosexuality is not formally forbidden in the ten commandments*

to be continued on the following two pages

<Kristin> *I should tell that to HuK. Good argument, Julie!*

<Aaron> *What is HuK?*

<Kristin> *The organisation Homosexuelle und Kirche (Homosexuals and the Church). I have been there a few times. They are nice people. They fight for equal rights. They argue for instance, that Jesus never specifically said anything about homosexuality. Neither in a positive nor in a negative sense. They also say that for example Saint Paul could not speak about homosexuality because the concept only appeared in the 19th century. In any case he supported the freedom of choice of partner. *;-)**

<Koray> *Sounds reasonable.*

<Kristin> *Of course, but the strict Christians interpret it differently.*

<Koray> *My parents also don't know that I'm gay – but for me it's not so important and I have other problems, that I think are much harder to cope with.*

<Aaron> *and do they have anything to do with religion?*

<Koray> *It's more about the relationship of the non-Muslim homosexuals with us, as also with the whole Muslim world's reaction to me being gay.*

<Aaron> *Does that mean that you don't belong to any group?*

<Koray> *Yes, that's the way I see it. Just imagine, what would happen if told a non-Muslim gay man that I'm Muslim. He'd be baffled and reply "that can't be: either you're gay or you're Muslim".*

<Kristin> *Why's that?*

<Koray> *I'm afraid it's the same all over the world In Austria in any case I am first and foremost a foreigner – who could never be gay anyway – that's the way many people see it in the gay community . But if I added, on top of it, that I'm Muslim, that's it, there's no way for them I could still be gay.*

<Aaron> *Yes, I can understand that. There are bad stereotypes even in the gay and lesbian community, aren't there?*

<Koray> *I don't know how it is with you Jews. With Christians, at any rate, I have the impression that the family isn't all that important. That's why for most Christians coming out isn't as difficult. But my family is really very important for me, and I for them. The social ties are simply too strong and important for us all – especially if we've been brought up in a different culture. I think that's good. A family should always stick together.*

<Aaron> *@Koray: A Yiddische Mamme should not be underestimated *;-)*. We'll talk about it later. What are you aiming at?*

<Koray> *I think that my family is more important than the nicest gay community (but please don't take it personally). I'll probably get married and still keep my partners. Tell us, Aaron, what happened to your yiddische Mamme?*

<Aaron> *The yiddische Mamme can hardly be ignored. There is this syndrome of over-protection. She always wants the absolute best for her child. Cannot possibly be contradicted. But back to you once again Koray – is there no Muslim gay group near you? Surely you're not the only one?*

to be continued

- <Koray> *No, of course I'm not the only one. But I think there is no such organisation here.*
- <Aaron> *A friend in Germany told me that he's an activist in the Türk-Gay group – check the Internet as well – they have their own Website.*
- <Koray> *Good idea, thanks*
- <Almira> *I'm also Muslim; but a Bosnian Muslim. In Kosovo, where I am to be deported, I would probably have to wear a headscarf, and marry. Homosexuality there can even mean death.*
- <Koray> *Oh dear, you'd better stay here, then, shouldn't you?*
- <Almira> *Yes, I think so. My parents know now that I'm a lesbian. At first I was convinced that they would disown me forever, but they didn't, Koray. Maybe your fear is a bit exaggerated?*
- <Koray> *I'll chat with these people of the "Türk-Gay" group and keep you posted, okay?*
- <Julie> *Okay Koray – next year, will you go to the Europride?*
- <Koray> *I'm working at it *;-)* Aaron, now tell us, it's your turn*
- <Aaron> *I'll tell my parents in any case, and I also think that they'll understand. For me it's important to be able to keep on trusting them, and for them to trust me. Secrets would have terrible consequences in the long run. Neither one of them would ever want that. And about Jewishness – it's not a nationality. Just to be clear. Some in our gay-lesbian group are religious, others not. But we're still Jews, because our parents are Jews.*
- <Kristin> *Would you like to say something about homosexuality and faith, anyway?*
- <Aaron> *Of course. Orthodox people of any religion are against homosexuality, I think. The three religions do not differ at all. But in the Jewish world there is a very strong liberal-progressive current, which makes up about 60%, or perhaps more of all Jews. I suppose it's the same for Christians, and I hope that there is a similar evolution in Islam. But I'm no great expert on the other religions, as I said earlier on, so I think it would be better if the others said something about that, because I can only talk about what happens in Judaism, okay?*
- <Kristin> *Sure thing, I'll take care of the liberal Christian enlightenment, shall I? *;-)*. I've also read something about liberal Islam. Many Muslim feminists are fighting for a liberal turn.*
- <Aaron> *Thx Kristin. Apart from the fact that men and women have equal rights in liberal Judaism, there is also a great openness with respect to homosexuality. In New York for instance, there are LGBT communities with 3000 members.*
- <Julie> *Wow – sounds nice 😊*
- <Aaron> *Yes, and in London there is a College in which are trained only those men and women Rabbis who do not have any problems with homo-sexuality. They are carefully checked before they can start.*
- <Almira> *Sounds wonderful. Will you tell us about it at our great event at the next Europride?*
- <Aaron> *I'd love to, I'll be there.*

the end