

## God's Will

I was 17 when I came out to myself as a lesbian. I had always felt that there was something odd about my sexuality, but it wasn't until I was 17 that I was able to tell myself: I am a lesbian.

As soon as I came out to myself, I desperately wanted to come out to my mother. We were in Saudi Arabia at the time and I browsed through gay websites and wondered what my mother would say about them. We are very close, my mom and I. We never kept secrets from each other. I was always open and honest with her about everything. I never attempted to hide my boyish qualities or to tell her that I didn't want to get married when I grew up.

I asked my friends for advice and everyone, without exception, said: Don't tell your mom! They said it was too early for me, that I had barely just come out to myself, that she wouldn't understand, that I should wait till I'm older, stronger, and wiser. But I couldn't lie to her; it was too big a secret to keep. So only three weeks after I first came out to myself, I told my mother I was gay. I remember the situation very well. I was shaking with fear and I spoke quickly. To my surprise, my mother took the news very calmly. She listened to me closely and the first thing she said was: "*Rabbaytik mnee?*"<sup>1</sup> It sounded like half-way in between a question and a statement.

Then she asked me: "Do you seek female love because I didn't love you enough?" "Yih!" I said. "Of course not! On the contrary!" (My mother always spoiled me). We had a short but very heartfelt talk about my sexuality, and I was overwhelmingly grateful for her reaction. Her major concern was that I shouldn't tell people – not because she was ashamed of it – but because she feared that they would hurt me. We come from a very small town in the North, so my mother worried that if I told one person, the entire town would find out, and she knew their reaction would not be so supportive.

My mother is a devout Muslim woman. Her belief in God is so powerful that she surrenders everything to His will. Anything that happens is because God

wills it. And so she didn't question or challenge my homosexuality. "*Allah heik ketiblik*",<sup>2</sup> she said. She told me it made no sense for her to try to change God's will. Shortly after, I told my father, and he had the same reaction: "We cannot change what is God's will. If it is meant for you to change, you will change on your own". This is an odd reaction for Muslim parents, who usually get scared of their children's actions being sinful. Not my parents. When they thought about it and discussed the matter between themselves, they deduced that my living a lie was a bigger sin than my sexuality. They told me that it was better for me to be honest with myself and my parents than to be a hypocrite.

Both my parents worry about my future. Every once in a while, my dad asks my mom if I have changed. He worries about who would be there to support me when I am older. My mother always worries about society's homophobia towards me. But my parent's faith is the source of their compassion and unconditional love towards me and all of their children.

I consider myself a religious woman. I often hear a lot of criticism about being a veiled lesbian. Members of the gay community don't quite understand; they think that homosexuality and religion are contradictory identities. But I am very comfortable with my faith, especially the faith that my parents have set as an example for me. At the end of the day, I am confident that God knows me and understands the deepest parts of me. People often think that Islam is the least tolerant of religions towards homosexuality. But that's a sad misconception that has lately been enforced on us by all the Islamophobia from the West. Like all religions, Islamic faith is distorted by politics and social institutions, but the essence of it is about love, acceptance, and the value of each individual's human dignity above everything else.

### ENDNOTES

1. I raised you well.
2. This is what God has written for you.