

# LIBERATE

## 2021 Channel Island LGBTQ+ Writing Awards

Less than a handful of words by Ali Coubrough-Barnett

“That’s fine. I just don’t want to see it.”

That’s what she said when I told her I was bi. She then picked up the basket full of wet washing and walked into the garden to hang it on the line. It was never discussed again.

I was around twenty-three and madly in love with Katie. I thought she was going to be my forever, so coming out to mum had to be done. But this wasn’t the first time I had fallen head over heels for a girl. From the age of twelve I had had the biggest of crushes on Hannah, a feisty red-head in my class. She was a sporting goddess, with an intelligent mind and quick wit. I was besotted. But with no-one to talk to about my feelings, I convinced myself that I probably had a disease; there was something wrong with me, something I was too ashamed to tell anyone about. There were many other girl crushes after Hannah and some short, secretive relationships, but only the ones with boys were made public and lasted more than a few weeks.

So there I was. Standing in the kitchen with nine words repeating over and over in my brain. Nine words split into two sentences. But were they two separate sentences? Were they two separate, unconnected ideas? Or was the first part actually a blessing with ‘conditions’ attached? Would they be more accurately punctuated with a semi-colon; the second part clarifying the first in more detail?

Perhaps a conjunction was needed instead of a semi-colon. A conjunction is a word that joins two parts of a sentence. But what kind of conjunction? There are many types that have different linguistic functions. How about a co-ordinating conjunction? These words join parts of the sentence that are of equal importance to each other, like and or but.

“That’s fine AND I just don’t want to see it,” seems to sting a little less than “it’s fine BUT I just don’t want to see it.” Were accepting it and ‘seeing’ it of equal importance? Or was ‘seeing’ it more troublesome?

So maybe a subordinating conjunction is needed. A subordinating conjunction shows the relationship between parts of a sentence, when one part is of more importance than the other, like although or because.

“That’s fine ALTHOUGH I just don’t want to see it,” seems to sting a little less than “it’s fine BECAUSE I don’t want to see it,” which quite frankly, doesn’t even make sense.

Would a contrasting connective work better? They are words that are used when two parts or sentences contradict each other, like however or whereas. Neither would appear to soften the blow.

So it would appear that connecting the two sentences doesn’t lessen the impact in any way. What if the two sentences were said the other way round? Would the meaning have been different? Would that have eased the blow in any way? Would that have left the situation more open to potential change?

There is one word that takes a little of the sting out. The word ‘just’. It is the only stipulation. But is a huge one.

Less than a handful of words would go on to shape the decisions I would make for myself for the next twenty years. But there was no malice in those words. It was a different time when these things were not really understood and definitely not openly discussed. I could talk about my gay friends in general conversation but would have to mask my internal wincing at some of the vocabulary I would hear.

But this isn’t then end of this story. It was just the opening chapter. The narrative that followed was filled with the usual highs and lows, happiness and heartbreak. But how it ends is in my almost fifty year old hands. And the last twenty-five or so years have brought many joys, the main one being my gorgeous daughter who has known, from a very young age that she can love whoever she wants.

That’s fine. Full stop.