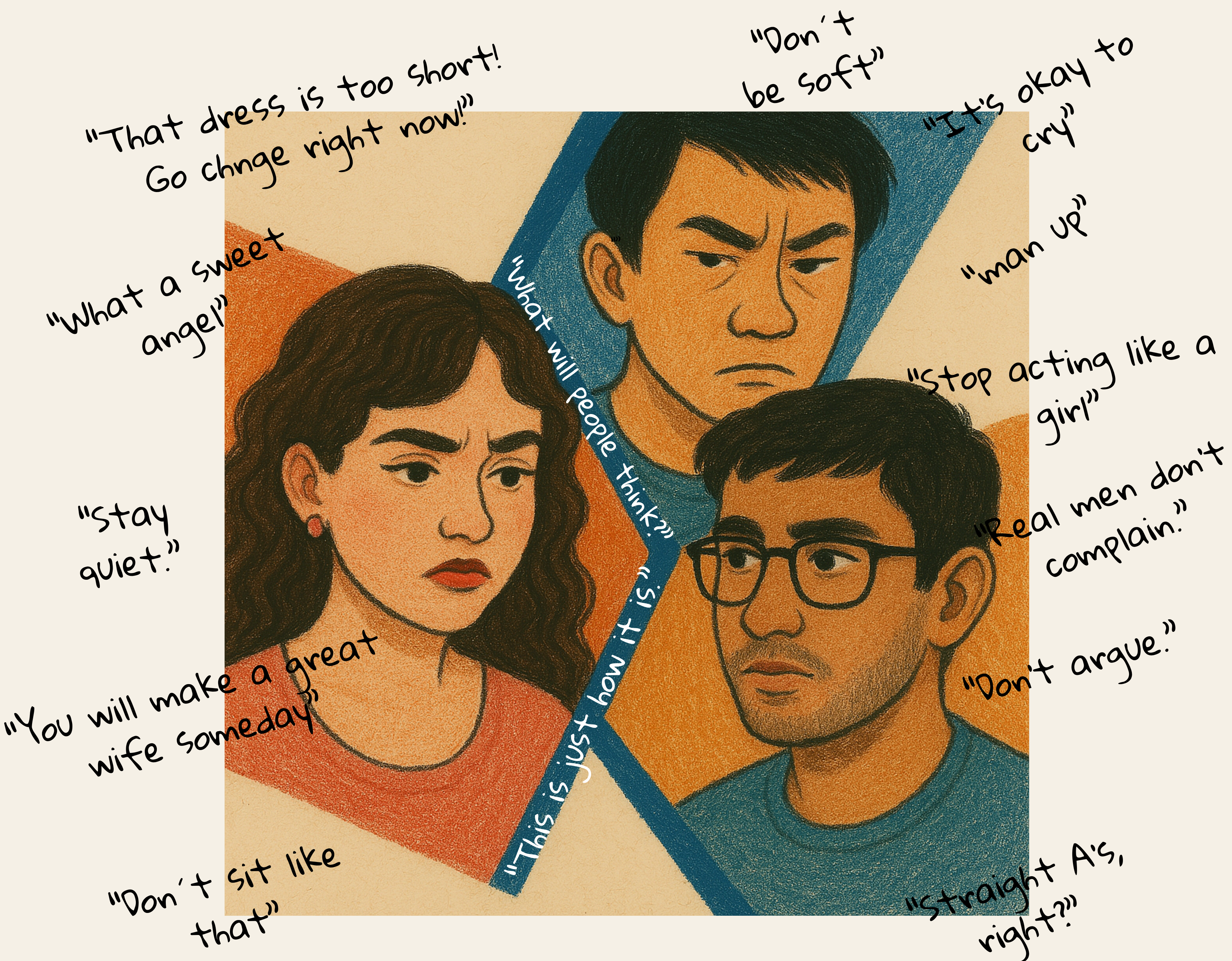


# The Way Gender Roles Shape The Way We're Raised

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# How Does Gender Mold Our Childhoods and How We're Raised?

Gender sets molds for parents and expectations for children. Without even a nano-second of thought, as soon as we know the gender of our baby, we already set gender roles for them. From the time we discover the gender of our baby using pink or blue cakes, to the time they're born, and we're already signing them up for dance or baseball, we enforce performativity on our children. We're actors who have been cast without even auditioning. We're pressed into a shape before we can even say our first word.

Whether it be from a cultural standpoint or more traditional views, we are all expected to meet these expectations. "Act like a boy", "Act like a girl", we're told this all our lives. We're treated differently because of what's in our pants. "Women are supposed to be small, fragile, delicate" while "Men are supposed to be tough, cold, strong". Women are to be protected and cared for while Men are to protect, and to be aggressive.

We're given different outlines and criteria to meet too. "Women can't work laboring jobs", "they're caregivers, created to take care of children", "they are meant to be kept quiet while the man is talking".

"Men don't cry", "You can't wear pink", "don't be so gay".

These teachings are so ingrained into our society that we don't even know how badly this affects each and every one of us. It further pushes the divide between these two groups, because neither one wants to be the other.



# The Split

Born on a summer's day, formed by two, and will be split that way as well. My parents both believed in different things, one traditional, the other is a more modern belief. Being raised with two polar opposite ideologies was very much stressful, as if I were to split my soul in half. One parent tries to make me the ideal man, teaching me how to work with tools, do outside work, and essentially “make a man out of me”, all because I was a guy -was the official reason. The other parent took a more vulnerable approach, teaching me that it was okay to cry, that it was okay to show emotion and be vulnerable. They taught me that men can be victims of verbal, sexual, or physical abuse. What a nightmare. To be associated with two very different things, not knowing which to pursue. Like a rag grafted from two ripped up blankets. What should I do? What do I believe? Who should I be? Naturally, growing up in a patriarchal society, all the boys on the school yard act all macho-man, trying to prove to one another that they're the manliest man to have ever man-ed. So it was only normal for me to go with what everyone else wanted to. So I did. I ate more to get bigger and look more intimidating. I changed aspects of my everyday life, from the way I talked, dressed, my hobbies, the way I sat, to the very way I thought. Society and the soul influence were telling me to act a be a certain way, all to avoid being labeled as a *gay faggot*.

“You're a guy”. “Because you're a guy”. *You are a guy*.

These words resonate within me like a tattoo on the soul. They're such powerful words to me. They are the very embodiment of what I should and should've been. It wasn't just a phrase to me, it was an expectation. An expectation I wasn't meeting, and it felt like I was letting down every single generation that came before me. Was I really a man if I didn't know any of these things that I was supposed to. These expectations were everything I wasn't. I love to bake, I love to wear eccentric hats, I love to wear the color pink, I love to do my hair up, I love all these things.

But I'm a guy.

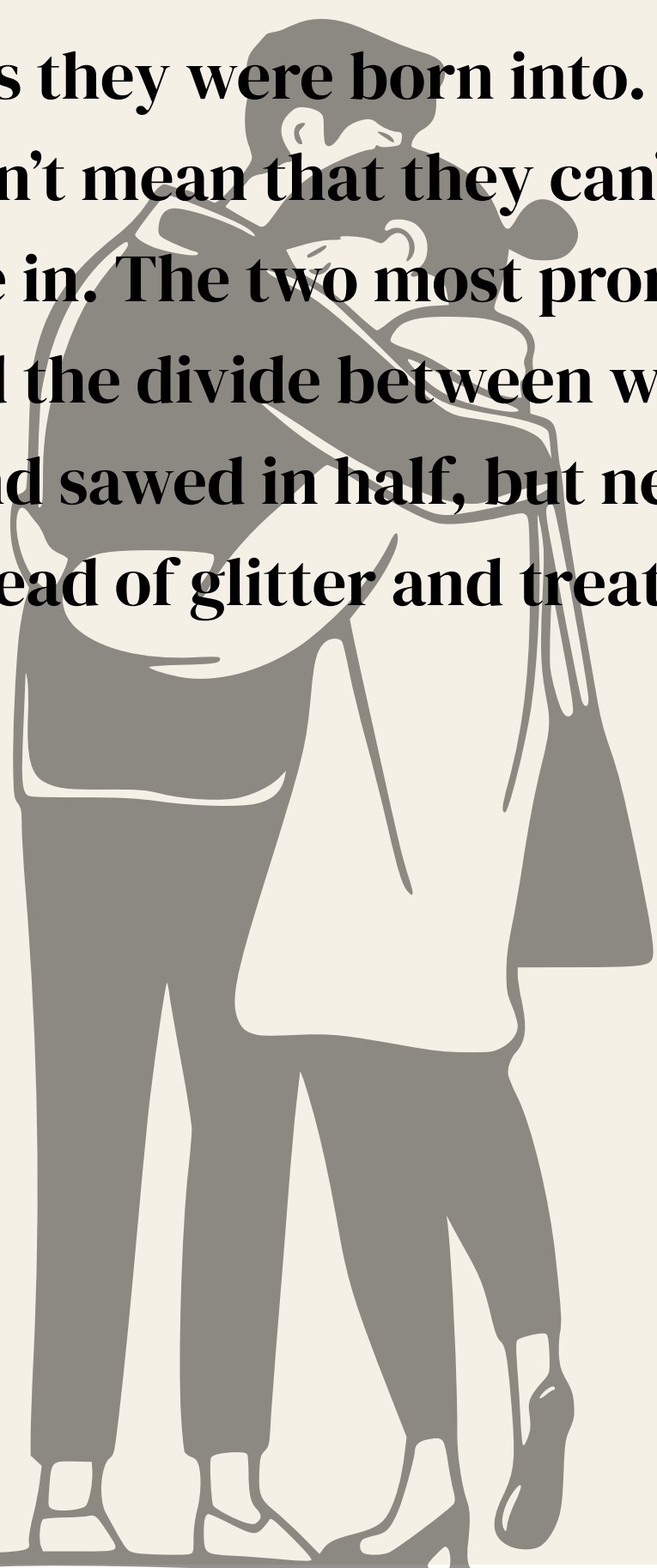
I *shouldn't* love to bake, I *shouldn't* love to wear eccentric hats, I *shouldn't* love to wear the color pink, I *shouldn't* love to do my hair up, I *shouldn't* love to do all these things.

*Because I'm a guy.*



On the other hand, we have a more gentle way of life. One where showing emotion isn't a sign of weakness. Being vulnerable is allowed, and accepted. Men can cry, men can express themselves, they don't need to know everything or need to be strong for others. This parent always made sure that I knew that I (and men in general) were human beings, not rocks pulled from a cold river. They built a new path on the slippery road called life. Because of them, I was told I was allowed to pursue any type of relationship I wanted without being crucified and ostracised. These ideas were such an abstract from the norms, but it was a parenting style that was ahead of its time. It was the anti-poison to growing up into a misogynistic monstrosity, a womanizer, an "alpha male", or worse of all, the second Donald Trump. Such compassion changed my entire perspective on gender roles and shattered all those toxic traits that built up. It scares me though. It feels wrong, you tell yourself. You shouldn't open up because that's not what men do. It's not familiar, it's a foreign feeling. *Was I allowed to feel these things out loud? What if they take my vulnerability and use it against me? What will others feel about me? Will they think I'm weak? Will I be judged? Am I still a man?*

A constant tug-of-war inside me. I still ask myself the question, "who should I be?". I wish I could answer these questions, not only for me, but for others that are in the same situation as I am, but I can't. Through existing in these polar worlds, I understand both viewpoints. We can't blame either parent for their way of parenting, because that's the only parenting they have experienced themselves. I don't hold resentment for either one, because societal pressures and social constructions molded everyone into believing and fulfilling the gender roles they were born into. However, just because they don't know any other parenting style, doesn't mean that they can't change to be more accepting. The split is a complicated scenario to be in. The two most prominent figures in your life, always fighting about how to raise you, and the divide between what to believe in is exhausting. Like being put in a magician's box and sawed in half, but never being put back together. Like breaking a party cracker, but instead of glitter and treats inside, it's just endless amounts of confused and torn thoughts.



*A split in the brain*  
*Torn between two extreme worlds*  
*Where do I go now?*





# Freedom I didn't Earn

Manraj Sahi



I'm a brown boy living in Canada, and I've started to notice something. In my family and in my culture, being a boy gives me a kind of freedom that girls don't always get. I can go outside when I want. I can hang out with my friends. No one asks me too many questions. No one worries too much about what I'm doing or where I'm going. People just trust that I'll be okay.

But it's not the same for the girls in my family. Before they go out, they have to ask for permission. They have to say where they're going, who they'll be with, and when they'll be home. If they stay out too long, people start to talk. If they make a mistake, everyone seems to notice. People expect them to always act a certain way to be quiet, careful, and perfect.

What's strange is that we live in Canada now. We live in a country where boys and girls are supposed to have the same rights. But even here, many brown families, including mine, still follow the same rules they did back home in India. The culture hasn't changed much, especially for girls. Even in a new country with more freedom, the old rules still follow them. Girls are still told to be extra careful, to stay inside more, to dress a certain way, and to worry about what other people will say.

Sometimes, people say I'm smart, strong, or grown up. But I think they say that just because I'm a boy. If I were a girl, I don't think they would treat me the same way. I get more chances. I get to make mistakes. I get to do what I want most of the time.

We were all raised in the same home, but the rules are not the same for us. I can be loud, I can change my mind, and people still support me. But if a girl in my family did those same things, she might be told to stop or act differently.

Now that I see this, it doesn't feel fair. I feel lucky to have the freedom I do, but I also feel a little sad because I know not everyone gets that. Girls have to be more careful.

They carry more pressure. They are judged more quickly, even when they haven't done anything wrong.

In my culture, people talk a lot about sons. They say things like "he's the son," and they act like that means I'm more important. But I don't think that's right. Girls are just as strong. They're just as smart. They just don't get treated the same way.

So when I go out, when I live my life without limits, I try to remember that not everyone has the same freedom I do. And I hope one day, that changes.

Because being free shouldn't depend on whether you're a boy or a girl.



"same house"

" cuz she's a girl"



"the men of the house"



# Born to Perform

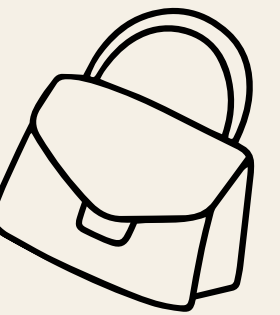
Melanie Martarelli



Since our mothers' wombs, we already have a performance designed for us.  
From the clothes we are bought, to the colors our parents paint our walls with.  
We are taught from our first breath to like certain things and act certain ways.  
Taught that there is a script to be followed.



Even the clothes themselves are a lesson  
A script written in fabric, stitched into us before we understand the words.



Boys' clothes have sharks, dinosaurs, wolves, or tigers.  
Girls' clothes have llamas, rabbits, kittens, or puppies.  
Strong, fast predators for one. Cute, fluffy, defenseless prey for the other.  
Boys' jeans have deep pockets, practical, meant to fit whatever they need.  
Girls' clothes? Shallow pockets or none at all.



Not by accident, but by design. She is meant to carry a purse.  
Another expectation.

Another way to adorn her.

Another reminder that a woman is meant to be seen,  
Her existence is tied to how she looks.

*"No one likes a messy girl!"*



The toys they play with tell the same story,  
Superheroes and action figures for boys, they save and protect people.  
Dolls and Barbies for girls, to dress up and play mommy.



And if a child dares to step outside of the "normal", most parent's first reaction is hesitation.  
Not necessarily out of disapproval, but out of fear.

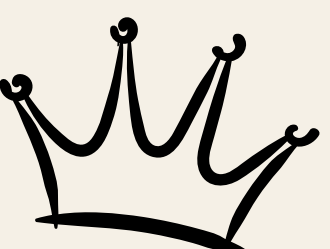
Fear of judgment.

Fear of repression.

Fear that life will be harder if not followed by the stereotypes.

*"Dress like a girl!"*

Even something as small as the words used to describe us reinforces the roles we play,  
Little girls are "sweetheart," "princess," "baby doll." Soft, cute, something to be protected.  
Little boys are "champ," or "tiger." Strong, brave, something to admire.



I was eight when I first became a queen.

Not because I asked to wear a crown, but because my best friend was already a king. That's what his parents called him, their little king, their strong fearless boy. And when I came over to play, they would laugh and say, "Ah, the King's girlfriend has arrived!"



They even joked with my father, talked about the day their king and I would marry, as if my story was already written.

As if I were already cast in my role.

"You are a woman, you need to know these things!"

But in my family, roles were always a thing.

I was raised to be the perfect girl, as if perfection was even something that existed.

I was dressed in pink and flowy dresses, bows in my hair, dolls in my room. Even my toothbrush was Disney princess-themed.

I was taught how to cook, clean, sew, and iron.

All the things a woman "should" know.

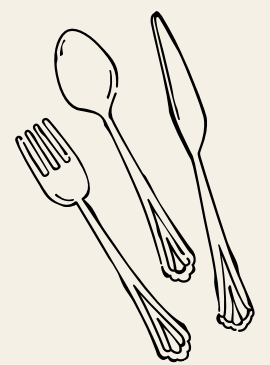
And when I had mastered them, I was congratulated. I was told, half-joking, half not, that I was "ready to marry."

As if being someone's wife was my ultimate goal.

I was even taught how to eat "properly." Fork in my left hand, knife in my right.

Never switch. Never rest my elbows on the table.

Because, as my mother told me: "When you marry a rich man, you won't feel embarrassed in front of his family."



At home, my mother always plated my father's food. Not because he couldn't do it himself, of course he could. But because that's what a wife does.

She serves.

She provides.

She shows gratitude for her husband's hard work.

It always seemed so small. Just a plate of food. Just a routine.

But to me, it felt like something bigger.

Like a quiet kind of oppression.

A sign of subservience.

"go help your mom in the kitchen will ya"

And the boys of the family? Well, "Boys will be boys."

When they played too rough. When they interrupted. When they never learned how to cook or clean.

But never if they cried. Because boys don't cry.

Like the animals on their clothes, boys are strong, loud, and they take up space.



We are taught this performance so well, we forget it is a script. And that's the point. Not to reject the script, not to say we must erase it entirely. But to acknowledge it.

To recognize that we are following it.

So that when we do, it is by choice, not by force.

So that it does not oppress, does not exclude.

So that we may move freely, unafraid of stepping off the stage.

"just let them be"



# Citations

**OpenAI. (2025). *ChatGPT* (April 9, 2025 version) [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com/chat>**