Exceptions

I met kuya Dakarai once.

I didn’t find that day special enough to really commit it to memory. He was someone I’d never met before, sure, but he was my cousin and I had tons of those–so many that it wasn’t really out of the ordinary for me to meet a new one. A day spent playing with one of my cousins? I did that every day and five-year-old me didn’t think much of it.

Kuya did have one distinct feature about him though. He had dark black hair and dark brown eyes but what I had marveled at the most was that his skin was *also* dark. It was darker than mine, than of my parents, than of anyone I had ever met before. Having never seen anyone with black skin until that moment, I was in awe.

Eventually that day ended and I didn’t see him again after that.

It wasn’t until much later–when I understood the concept of race–that I realized that kuya Dakarai was an excluded member of the family. We weren’t related through blood, but through his marriage with my cousin. It was a wedding that my family looked heavily down upon. My dad told me that ate Liza had her wedding abroad and came back to the Philippines with a wedding ring on her finger, mortifying her parents. All I could think of was, *Why go so far?* Our family loved weddings and in my ‘Family is everything’ based culture, it was practically unheard of to have private weddings. Why would she rather hold her wedding alone in a foreign country than have even just her immediate family at one of the most important days of her life?

“Maybe Liza was ashamed,” my father said casually, as if the answer was obvious.

“Of *what?”*

“Of her husband. By the time her parents found out she was married, there was nothing they could do to stop it.”

My eyebrows furrowed. “Do they not like him or something?”

My dad was silent at first. “Well, what could they do? Dakarai’s their son in law–they had to like him.”

*So that’s a no.* “Do *you* like him?” I asked him out of pure curiosity alone. It just confused me why my uncle and auntie wouldn’t like someone that seemed perfectly fine to me. Of course, I’d only met kuya Dakarai once before he and ate Liza left the country, so maybe there was more to it. Maybe there was some sort of explanation that would make me understand-

“Uh… Of course. Sometimes the only thing that makes us different is their skin but… You know how those people are,” he said with a shake of his head. “They’re dangerous sometimes.”

I froze. “Huh?”

“Black people can be violent, Teresa-”

*“Dad!”*

I never usually argued with my father but I *hated* when he got like this. Then he’d scoff and bring up statistics of attacks, of violence, and of murders all supposedly caused by people of a different skin color. All things that I knew weren’t *true.* It confused me how someone so kind could have such a drastic personality change. He was someone who encouraged peace and *knew* what it was like to be looked down upon for being different and yet the moment someone black was mentioned, all of that fell away to reveal an ugly monster that couldn’t possibly be the father I knew.

My father was accepting and kind but… I suppose there are exceptions to everything.

In my close-knit family of cousins and aunties and uncles and elders, kuya Dakarai was an exception. Family was family, family was everything– Until kuya Dakarai was mentioned. He might’ve been part of the family but nobody really considered him one of *us.* “You know how his kind are” was a statement that everyone seemed to love but if he was family, wouldn’t ‘his kind’ just be… us?

They say that there are exceptions to everything but maybe the world should do away with exceptions. Maybe there are some things in the world that should just be facts. Maybe we should just accept that all people deserve to be treated equally, that all people deserve to be respected and that all people should just be seen as… people. And maybe that’s just it. Maybe there’s no ‘except for’ or ‘but what about’ at the end of the sentence.

Maybe the world, unlike my family, can live like there are no exceptions to be accepted.