

By Maggie Tu

“Mommy, what’s sex?”

Lacey’s legs were swinging under her chair, and she was tossing her curls and grinning as she tossed a piece of pork for the dog, Coco. She giggled, licking her fingers as Coco missed and gazed around bewilderedly for the chunk that had landed right on her head. Mom’s chopsticks halted halfway to her mouth and spilled three grains of rice. Dad pushed up his glasses and coughed awkwardly, which resulted in him choking on his mouthful and consequently coughing for real. I raised my eyebrows, brandished my spoon like old fashioned teachers with their long teacher sticks, and announced: “It’s - ”

“ - not a conversation for the dinner table.” Mom’s tone was firm and I still hadn’t asked her permission for a night outing in a couple of days, so I shrugged and patted Lacey on the head, chiding in a mocking baby voice “Naaaaw, we’ll tell you when you’re older!” as I left the table.

I had managed to soak the entire front of my hoodie from splashing myself doing the dishes when I heard Mom sighing loudly and clicking her tongue.

“Why is the fridge so dirty? Who knocked over the yoghurt tub?”

I watched Lacey glance up from her ipad and back down again. She was doing the funny twitchy thing she does with her lip when she’s trying to not look guilty.

“Aiyah, can you help me clean it tonight?” Mom said, looking pointedly at Dad. His gaze went up to Mom, then lingered on Lacey, then back to down his phone. He shook his head once.

“I don’t have time... I’ve got too much to do, I have to finish some things for work and then make my lunch for tomorrow and then there’s some other things... I don’t have time...” he trailed off as he picked up the phone and paused his video on the trade war. Mom threw her hands up in exasperation and looked desperately at me. “It’s fine, I’ll do it.”

It turned out that Lacey had knocked over more than just a tub of yogurt. I dragged myself up the stairs, past my mom wiping the bench in the kitchen and my dad in the dimmed living room with his phone, and had just begun to sport a magnificent double chin while scrolling through my phone when Lacey poked her little head around my slightly ajar bedroom door. I raised my eyebrows at her.

“What d’you want?” I asked, rather brusquely. Something seemed off when I realised Lacey was frozen to the spot.

“Sorryyy, I know I’m a meanie. What’s the matter?”

She didn’t usually come to my room. I heaved myself off my pile of blankets and took the ipad that Lacey was offering to me with a tiny, slightly trembling hand. I laughed at her; “It’s not *that* heavy...oh.”

Naked women. Half-naked women. Women in shiny black latex, brandishing studded whips and chains and whatever the hell *that thing* was. Women clad in lingerie tied up, or forced down into painful looking positions, their hands grabbing and their mouths gaping open and their eyes screwed shut. All below text that urged “keep watching!”

My whole body jerked, like when you miss a step on the stairs. There was the involuntary gasp as you realised what had happened, and your brain is trying to prepare poor back and limbs for the horrid bumpy path down to the bottom while also desperately flailing to find something to grasp onto. I closed my eyes but the stairs were never ending and the bannister was out of reach and my heel was reliving the memory, the pressure where it had tumbled over the cold hard edge, like a helpless boat over a waterfall, and I was still registering the fright of having even slipped. Meanwhile, Lacey had broken free of her shock.

“I didn’t mean to, it was an accident, I didn’t make it like this on purpose! I was trying to watch a movie so I went on Netflix like you do but I accidentally went on Daddy’s one and I didn’t know how to go back, please don’t tell anyone, I never want to look at yucky things like this!” Lacey paused for breath and gulped.

Now I was the one who was frozen. She was such a precious thing, so small and chirpy and carefree. But not anymore. The Lacey in front of me was even more distressed than when her favourite goldfish was floating and she’d thought it’d died, but actually it was overfed because Lacey thought it was funny how their tiny mouths blew bubbles while gulping for food.

I could’ve told her it was nothing; a glitch that sometimes made it show disgusting things, and she was just very unlucky to see. Or I could’ve told her that this stuff was normal; that in about ten years’ time, all the boys her age would be bragging about how fast a porno made them cum, or aggressively humping each other out of nowhere while yelling “NO HOMO!” But I didn’t. Because behind my closed eyes, I saw the pages that my father had left in our computer history. And the badly hidden Sports Illustrated calendars in his bedside cabinet. So many of them. I relived when I was combing through closed tabs trying to find an old wiki research page for my report on bunnies in year six, but had found a weird link to a playboy bunny magazine website instead. And the time I left my youtube account logged in and my previous searches came up with “plus 18 movies” and “sexy videos”. I relived the horror; the searing at the front of your brain, burning with the rest of your body as it fights horror with shock and worst of all, confused disgusted arousal.

I bent down and looked Lacey dead in her frightened watery eyes. My throat caught a little on my first words.

“Sorry Lacey, I don’t know what’s happened. But if it’s Daddy’s account, maybe you should go ask Daddy.” Lacey’s face brightened as she grabbed the ipad back and ran down the stairs. “Of course! Daddy will know how to fix it!”

She left me crouched outside my bedroom, staring down at my fluffy bunny slippers. I sighed sadly and retreated, the door creaking slowly in joint despair. “Oh sweetie, I don’t think anyone will be able to fix this.”