

A Distant Relation
By Rehana Lew Mirza

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Rehana Lew Mirza
rehana.mirza@gmail.com

Scene 1: Lab Rats Don't Live That Long for A Reason

Martha, a late 30s, perky lady, stands in a single spotlight and speaks out in a deep, knowing voice.

MARTHA

In a world where men have periods....

Lights shift to include Bill (also Dr. Hill), an aggressive scientist and Heather, an early 40s, though appears to be mid-twenties, mixed race woman scientist.

BILL

You got a fucking pad? Who's got a fucking pad?

HEATHER

You got your period?

BILL

Not yet, but I feel that bitch up in me.

MARTHA

Gross, I'm about to eat lunch here.

BILL

You can eat me out, Martha. Maybe it'll help with the cramps.

HEATHER

Shut up Shithead.

MARTHA

Just. Take some aspirin.

BILL

Fuck aspirin. Eat me out Martha.

HEATHER

Wow. That's rude.

MARTHA

Yeah. I think that -

BILL

Fuck what you *ladies* think. Fuck if I hurt your feelings. I got blood coming out of my penis hole. Does anyone care about that? HELLO? Anyone?

Heather pulls out a super thin tampon.

HEATHER

Look how much I fucking care. I've even created tampons for men.

Heather tosses it to Bill, who catches it. He looks down at the tampon, bemused.

MARTHA
You know

BILL

What is this?

MARTHA
back when women
had to deal with

HEATHER
'sa tampon

with...
with...
things like this...
things of a sensitive
nature...
we were discreet!

BILL
fuck do I do with this?

HEATHER
... figure it out.

BILL
hell no I'm putting this up my hole
-- am I fucking myself here?

BILL

And why the fuck did women wear tampons versus pads?

MARTHA

So we could feel sexy. But that's besides the point. Women also suffered silently. These things aren't talked about.

BILL

Fuck that. Fuck you. Eat me out.

HEATHER

Enough already.

BILL

On what planet do you two live on anyhow? Periods are talked about all the time. Fucking women. Can't take a little ... it's natural Martha. Natural.

HEATHER

I think she's just requesting that you shut up a little

BILL

WHATEVER, do you have your period coming? No. So I can yell as loud as I want and you can do nothing. You're such a woman. I don't even know why you were hired. Men work here because we understand basic things.

Heather turns to Martha.

HEATHER

Okay. Seriously. Enough.

Lights shift. Bill disappears.

MARTHA

See?

HEATHER

Well, you have a vivid imagination.

MARTHA

I'm just trying to show you ... *(same sotto voice as the beginning)* a world where men have periods...

HEATHER

You really think that's what my research is leading towards --

MARTHA

Yes.

HEATHER

Perhaps that's an exaggeration.

MARTHA

I'm just saying, you might want to devote your time towards better scientific inventions than genetically re-wiring men to have periods. Seems a little ...

HEATHER

I'm just trying to even the playing field.

MARTHA

By giving them periods? *(same sotto voice as beginning)* In a world where men have periods... it won't even the playing field. Men will be men.

HEATHER

You gotta stop doing that voice. And look, if I want to focus on... who are you? Are you a geneticist? No, you're nobody. You're nothing.

MARTHA

I actually. I thought I was your girlfriend but...

HEATHER

I knew it was a mistake to talk to you about this. You don't know the business of science.

MARTHA

Well, as usual, I asked if you'd like to have lunch, you said yes, and then I began the process of luring the bear out of the cave. And I'm still trying.

HEATHER

I'm not hungry anymore.

MARTHA

Oh come on, because I showed you what men with periods really looks like? It's just a logic flaw in your research -

HEATHER

And now you sound just like them again.
'Logic flaw, logic flaw, logic flaw.' Fucking dicks. All of them.

MARTHA

I'm in the mood for Italian.

HEATHER

I could just... so ...

MARTHA

How about you?

HEATHER

I said I'm not hungry.

MARTHA

Well, you can't just starve yourself for the sake of science. Logic flaw.

HEATHER

(throwing papers down) What's the point.

MARTHA

Well, you are the biologist but I believe we feed ourselves to sustain our body functions so that we can continue to live.

HEATHER

Dr. Hill -- he's not going to publish me. Any of it. I've been stuck in this research fellowship longer than any human in history. And no one will give me a job because I'm not published, and have been in a research fellowship for longer than anyone in human history. Who does this to themselves? Only idiots.

MARTHA

Most people believe that having a PhD in Biology and Genetics makes someone quite smart. Don't be so hard on yourself.

HEATHER

Fine. You're right. Dr. Hill is the problem. I hate Dr. Hill. If I could only give Dr. Hill a period, maybe he wouldn't be such a man, with his glass ceiling and his old boys club and his swim whenever he wants to.

MARTHA

You know what will make you feel better about that? Some good old fashioned Italian meatballs. Always warms the insides.

HEATHER

Oh my god, Martha, you're worse than my mother.

MARTHA

Your mother never made you Italian meatballs, did she?

HEATHER

No. I hate her too.

MARTHA

Don't say that. You shouldn't speak ill of the ill.

HEATHER

And who are you, Mother Theresa? Lay off the guilt. Besides she's not your mother.

MARTHA

I could think of her like a mother... if we were to... I mean, we've been together for ten years now, might be nice to settle down and have-

HEATHER

I mean, my research is *Important*. This is ground breaking work. Did you know that men have the capability to breast feed if they really had to? But they never *have to*. So they don't. They're just nature's backup plan. That's all they are. So what I'm doing is actually making them more important than they really are. Even if they do believe themselves to be the most important thing on the planet at all times. That's what I'm doing by giving them periods. Letting them earn their worth for once.

MARTHA

You're impossible, Heather. An impossible woman.

Enter Bill, actually Dr. Hill.

DR. HILL

I would agree with whoever the hell you are. Girlfriend right? We have rules about girlfriends in the Lab.

MARTHA

We were just going to lunch.

DR. HILL

By all means... take a lunch.

HEATHER

Dr. Hill, by that do you mean you think I shouldn't take a lunch? Because I can just grab a sandwich and...

MARTHA

Um, no, I drove all the way -

DR. HILL

You shouldn't keep your girlfriend waiting, is all I'm saying.

HEATHER

Okay.

They start to exit.

HEATHER

It's just that... well, it's been three months.

DR. HILL

Excuse me?

HEATHER

It's been three months - have you read the paper I gave you?

DR. HILL

Are you sure you want to be having this conversation right now? With your...

HEATHER

Sure, why not. Makes you accountable, with a stranger here, right?

DR. HILL

Well then, yes, I've read your paper. And it's not suitable for publication.

HEATHER

Dr. Hill, I have been in this Lab, doing research, for nearly ten years now. I would like to be published.

DR. HILL

You're young yet, you have time.

HEATHER

I am (*mumbling*) forty-two and ... well, look, I would like... I deserve to be published.

DR. HILL

Wow, your stock just plummeted.
But you look so young!

HEATHER

Thank you, I suppose. But it doesn't matter how young I look. I have been toiling on this genetic research between men and women -

DR. HILL

Ennhhh. I told you to take a different angle.

MARTHA

I told her not to give men periods.

HEATHER

Martha, shut up. Whose side are you on anyhow?

MARTHA

I'm just saying.

DR. HILL

Cute. This is why no girlfriends in the Lab. It's not just about giving them periods. And giving them uteri. It's about changing the one chromosome and 78 genes from something different into something similar. It's about making men in to women. It's about eradicating the male species. That type of research is unacceptable, Dr. Ramos. Also, no girlfriends in the Lab.

HEATHER

Okay, what makes my research about gendered changes in men so different from the studies of gendered changes in women.

DR. HILL

Well clearly the latter just makes more sense.

HEATHER

And why are you so hung up on the girlfriend thing?

DR. HILL

I mean, clearly women mess everything up in the Lab. Not you. Just a general like, "my woman messes shit up." Never mind, you're not getting it.

HEATHER

No. I'm not. What are you trying to say, Dr. Hill?

DR. HILL

Nothing a smart girl like you won't figure out eventually. Then again you are forty PLUS. Your brain cells are starting to die. Though, you look so young.

Dr. Hill exits.

HEATHER

DICK. This is why... *(Yelling out the door)* I am still going to do my research!

Dr. Hill re-enters. Heather and Martha jump.

MARTHA

You maybe should have waited until he made it out the doorr....

DR. HILL

No, no worries. But Dr. Ramos, one more thing. We unfortunately won't be able to hold your fellowship place for you next year. I'm terribly sorry. Funding cuts. I have a friend who has a lab in Rochester. I can recommend placement with them if you like.

HEATHER

That would be very kind of you Dr. Hill. Thank you.

Dr. Hill re-exits.

HEATHER

DICK.

MARTHA

Wait this time. Okay he's gone.

HEATHER

"Let me introduce you to my crony who's a replica of me, who won't appreciate a woman in the lab unless she's an assistant." Oh, dear lord. I'm poor with no career, no prospects -

MARTHA

What about me?

HEATHER

And I have my fucking girlfriend in my lab. (beat) which won't be my lab at the end of this year. I am going to have to move in with my mother. I am forty something and moving in with my mother. There is no humiliation left in the world. It's all been heaped onto my head.

MARTHA

You can always live with me.

HEATHER

(beat) I like my space.

MARTHA

And yet you'd live with your mother?

HEATHER

Logic flaw, okay? Logic flaw, logic flaw, logic flaw! Here take my face and rub it in the ground. Oh wait, there's a tube of acid over there. Take my face and rub it into some acid. How about that?

Martha takes Heather's face. She holds it still. She kisses it. They hold still together for a moment.

HEATHER

What am I doing with my life?

MARTHA

It's just a mid-life crisis, honey. Women are allowed to go through it too. (beat) Just don't... don't cheat on me with a 2nd year grad student, okay? I'll have to kill you.

HEATHER

All right. Come on then.

Heather stands.

MARTHA

Where are we going?

HEATHER

Italian you said, right? And then I gotta go break the news to the mother that I barely have spoken to in the past five years that I'm baaaaack.

MARTHA

You sure you wanna do that?

HEATHER

I know you mean moving in with my mother, but I'm going to respond as if I think you mean the Italian. And yes, I've never been more sure of meatballs ever in my entire life.

MARTHA

Heather, you are an impossible woman.

HEATHER

Everything else seems impossible to me.

MARTHA

Maybe it's not a matter of changing everything that's out there, maybe it's a matter of changing what's... in there. (*points to her heart*).

HEATHER

Who are you Mother Theresa and Gandhi rolled into one? You've been reading Eat, Pray, Love on the beaches of Goa? What's wrong with you?

MARTHA

I'm just saying... move in with me.

HEATHER

Honey, I love you but I just got my ass handed back to me and my fellowship was terminated. I can't even think about that right now.

MARTHA

But you can think of crazy things like eradicating the male species?

HEATHER

Why is wanting the impossible such a bad thing?

MARTHA

Because the possible is standing right before you.

HEATHER

... I like my space.

MARTHA

I'll still give you space.

HEATHER

I like my space, Martha.

MARTHA

All right. If that's what you want... I'll give you space.

Martha starts to march out.

HEATHER

Hey. What happened to those meatballs?

MARTHA

Get your mom to make them for you.

And she's gone. Heather looks down. Throws her research in the trash. Lights shift.

Scene 2: No Matter How Old You Are, It's Still Momma's house.

Heather stands as everyone carries things out around her. Everything is empty. Black stage. One box in front of her.

HEATHER

Here's the thing about genetics. Everyone wants to know, who did she/he get this from? How did this happen? So I tell them: it starts with 46 chromosomes, 23 pairs, one pair determining gender and the other 22 containing genes that tell the body how, when, and where to make all the structures that are necessary for the processes of living. And if human eye color is determined by at least three different genes that reside on two different chromosomes, how do you expect us to easily parcel out an answer for why your child is gay?

My mother was ecstatic that I wanted to become a bio-geneticist. She told everyone that I was coming up with the cure. The cure to what, I would ask her. She said, you know. And would give me this look. This look that would make me want to punch holes into walls. The cure to me? When there are so many other fucked up things going on in the world? So many worse things happening in front of our faces and you want to fixate on whom I want to love? And this is the thing. She never wanted me to keep secrets from her. She always would rather know about the things that I knew would make her weep and wail.

I never understood why my mother held me so close, why her nails would sometimes dig into my skin, so if anyone should try to rip me away, her own grasp would tear me to shreds rather than let me go. Maybe it was just genetic drift. I was so far from who she ever could dream of being. And so she held onto me tighter.

Martha enters. Lights shift.

MARTHA

I'm sorry about your mom.

HEATHER

I guess my announcement that I'd be moving back in with her was the last straw. I finally killed her.

MARTHA

Don't say that. You know she'd been sick for a long time now.

HEATHER

... yeah.

MARTHA

So... do you need any help, with anything? Or...

HEATHER

Salvation Army came and picked up most of her things.

MARTHA

Salvation Army? That's very... *charitable...* of you.

HEATHER

I don't know. It's probably what she would have wanted. She was anti gay-rights too.

Silence.

MARTHA

I think for you she would have -

HEATHER

Look, they took the shit, okay? I didn't want to deal with it, so I didn't. A boycott on those little Santa bell-ringers is all well and good but when I got a fucking orange and yellow flower-patterned, urine-stained sofa that I want out of my face, I'm gonna call those gay-bashing shitholes and let them deal with it, if that's all right with you.

Silence.

MARTHA

They forgot a box.

She kicks the box in front of her with her foot.

HEATHER

Yeah. They wouldn't take that.

MARTHA

What's in here?

Martha starts pulling letters out of the box. She turns her head sideways to look at them. Heather turns the letter right side up.

HEATHER

My mom's letters.

MARTHA

Letters? For what?

HEATHER

When she got sick, she started writing letters. To me. *(beat, explaining)* She found it easier to write in her mother tongue. You know, Tagalog?

MARTHA

Holy ... there's a bunch of them in here. What do they say?

HEATHER

Who knows. I can't read them. And she knew that. She just loved to poke at me-

MARTHA

Oh come on, sure you can.

HEATHER

Um. No. I can't.

MARTHA

You seem to understand those Asian soaps, you know whenever those come on.

HEATHER

You could understand those Asian soaps. All they do is say, "I love you. No. I can't." And then weep.

MARTHA

Yeah, but, like, you seem to understand other things too, like at a restaurant sometimes...

HEATHER

Yeah. I can get the gist, if someone's yelling food specials at me. But reading is a whole different story.

MARTHA

Well, what if I were to read them?

HEATHER

When did you learn Tagalog?

MARTHA

I'll just sound it out and maybe you could get the gist of it?

HEATHER

They're garbage anyway. Just more lectures.

MARTHA

(holding up letter, reading in Filipino accent)

“my dearest heather”
oh – wait. That part was in English.

HEATHER

Look, before he left, my father told me most of my mom’s history. As a way of explaining her to me. It just made things worse.

MARTHA

(sifting through)

Well, she must have had something she wanted to share with you, if she wrote all these.

HEATHER

When I told her I wanted to get rid of the Y chromosome, she told me, “But then how will you find a good husband, like how I found your father. He still took me in, even after I told him what happened to me.”

MARTHA

Your mom, she grew up in a different world.

HEATHER

That’s what I couldn’t understand. How could she find fault in me, when it was men who tortured her? I at least gave her some happiness on occasion. But who was it that nearly broke her? It wasn’t her gay child.

MARTHA

She loved you, you know.

HEATHER

Stop spouting generic things at me.

MARTHA

I’m trying to help here, Heather. I’m just trying to help.

HEATHER

Even more generic!

Martha falls silent.

HEATHER (CONT’D)

She wanted for me to be with a man so badly... *(looking up, screaming)* Mom, can you hear me up there in heaven? It was men who made you into a war casualty, a comfort woman, a whore, at age 12! *(beat)* That was usually when she slapped me.