THE HALF OF IT

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"“Love is messy, and horrible, and selfish...and bold.” -Ellie Chu

“The Half of It” is a queer Asian-American film that covers almost all major teenage dilemmas including figuring out one’s sexuality, oneself, and coping with absent or dead parents. Deep down, we have all wanted a queer movie with proper representation of characters with more realistic backgrounds and not just a weird, campy gay kid, who is bullied because of their ‘differences’ - such as being an immigrant, or more usually, for being queer in itself.

Ellie Chu is a shy and introverted Chinese-American teenager who writes essays for her classmates in exchange for money. Ellie is a shy, introverted kid who is intimidated by the people around her and is skeptical about the concept of having friends at all. I mean, the only friend-like relationship in her life, is the one she shares with her English teacher, Mrs. Geselchap. Ellie’s insecurities stemming from her identity as an Asian-American are shown in a very subtle way that is deeply sensitive to the issue at hand as well.

She is challenged to face herself as she stumbles upon a school jock, Paul Munsky, a tall kid who means well and is always goofing around. Paul has minimal expectations from the world, his top two being, first, getting Aster to like him back, and secondly, finally having someone to share and enjoy his taco sausage creation with. Paul convinces Ellie to write a love letter to the girl of his dreams Aster Flores on his behalf, because apparently, Munsky isn’t the best writer. Ellie tries holding herself back despite having a secret liking for Aster but is forced to agree to Paul’s proposal when she faces a cash crunch. Aster is from a very conservative Christian household who is having to try really hard to fit into the ‘popular and pretty girl’ mould which, she actually does not enjoy in the least.

As we go about the movie, we see Ellie and her dad bonding over movies like ‘Casablanca’ and ‘Ek Villain’ and in such moments, they lose themselves and their problems don’t bother them as they can be who and how they want. Not only do they feel like outsiders in a foreign town, but they are also weighed down by the expenses of living. Even though Mr. Chu has a job as a station master at the railway station along with a PhD in Engineering, Ellie has to share financial duties after the death of her mother.

The film handles queerness and coming to terms with your sexuality in such an honest and realistic way for instead of just stating whatever we need to know, the film uses silence and visuals to show us all about Ellie and how she actually feels. It tells us how every beautiful thing is eventually ruined. Times like leaving your best friend or your first love are universal experiences that happen to everyone. We are sad at such events even though we know at times what the future might hold for us. There are small cultural details in the film which are so wholesome, that one’s heart might burst with awe. For instance, Ellie’s dad making extra dumplings which is basically how Asians say they love each other, and the whole of Paul and Ellie’s friendship in general, and little interactions between the characters. There are a very few WXW movies that are actually interesting and not weird, which is how most movies seem to depict gay characters as. “The Half of It” is that one movie I would recommend every teenager to watch. It is neither boring nor just filled with unnecessary amounts of sex and would give it a solid 9/10.