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Age 18

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Hidden breath is what I remember from the boys who live in my past. A breath that is sublimated is one of a queer individual. Soft, hidden love leaving lips to land on locked ears is the common communication, the movement of subdued flurries through concrete lungs is the inhalation and exhalation of every young gay boy and girl, every transgender person and bisexual, of all queer youth. So much life given a boundary and so much love living hesitantly. The moment of strength and passion and exhaustion, of coming out, is the cause of the greatest challenge but also the greatest unifier in youth: queer love.

There is a question that always surfaces; it always has. “How was it coming out?” The vulnerability and connection of sharing those moments with one another is bonding in a way that transcends the awkward, sweaty-palmed moments that also accompany the start of a relationship. In this way coming out is a unifier, but coming out also often has the opposite effect of restricting the actions of queer youth. His parents were conservative Catholics and his were Mormons and his mother was culturally traditional. We stowed away in the storage closet after your big performance to hide from your parents. You left me alone in the mall,

running to get to your parents before they got to us, to me. After the movie I told you to stand over there so when my father pulls the car up he won't see us together. We had all had our moments but here we were still in the closet hiding.

One of the guys had it worse than all of us and he was the sweetest smelling rose of them all, the perfume only found on the most innocent even if he was a senior about to graduate and move out. His safety blanket was soft as well and never far away. Texting was out of the question because his parents monitored his phone and didn't give him access to the family wifi. We met at school during lunch and in the bathroom during passing periods because he was only allowed to leave the house with family friends and other Mormons. The relationship was constricted to the point of nonexistence and his parents won. This is a portrait of the challenges that queer high school students find themselves facing after coming out.

Challenges exist in every relationship, queer or not, but the necessity of hiding the one you love because their gender or sexual identity is deemed wrong by your parents is unique to queer kids. Every moment that this fact reemerged I remember the breath of the guy I was with in the moment. Breathing heavily from running or deeply in silent concealment or finding myself breathing fast in anxious frustration at what he will think of me for treating him like that and what will happen if my dad finds out. The clinching of their diaphragms and the tired, constrained look in their eyes always said, "I'm sorry." We seldom talked about moments like those

because we all knew it was part of it, that it didn't matter and that it would be a waste to give any more time to the wardens of our lives.

There need not be rival families to make queer kids in love feel like Romeo and Juliet; only a parent with a closed mind. The challenge for queer relationships in high school is most frequently parents believing they are righteous in their correctional actions when they couldn't be farther from the truth. Challenges are things that individuals overcome but, for us, there is no overcoming because it is not our problem. It is our parents. That is the greatest tragedy of all because no matter what we do, the grades we get, the performances we give, the achievements and acknowledgements we receive, they will never make our fathers see us the way he did before he found out we fantasize about falling in love with a man.

There is a undeniable, sad loss of innocence in the queer community for this exact reason. One day, we are cherished. The next day we are not what he or she or they wanted. The unholy act of waking a child up from childhood early and prematurely making a child mature is all that is accomplished by reacting to their coming out with hateful words and unreasonable restriction. What peers may do is inconvenient; what parents do is cruelty.