



Lauren M. McCafferty

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Discrimination is a disease. It lies dormant in the hearts and minds of many people, waiting to be provoked, to be unleashed. It is a disgusting sickness, with symptoms including sneering, pointing, name-calling, and a plain and simple hatred varying in intensity from mild to passionate. This disease does not discriminate: man, woman, black, white, old, young- all are prone to hate. The irony of this is white-hot: the very thing that seeks to segregate these individuals unites them.

I could not begin to count the discriminatory acts I have faced since my “coming-out.” In my own school, teachers gawk and students snicker, not bothering to hide their disgust. At least a hundred “traditional” couples may stand in the hallway with their tongues down each others’ throats and go unnoticed, but as soon as two girls make a display of affection as innocent as hand-holding, the hatred in the hearts of onlookers - be they boys, girls, students, or teachers - is stirred, awakened. Whispers, stares, and glares follow me like my shadow, always lurking at my back.

Amidst a crowd of ten boys who jeer and jibe, there is one who stands back, silent. His stare is not of disgust, but of curiosity mingled with fear. I know that look. He does not hate me, yet he won’t stand up for me. He’s afraid of being rejected by his friends, who snicker as my girlfriend and I pass. It may, in fact, be he who most frustrates me. I want to shake him, scream at him, do anything to make him understand: his silence does not harm me as much as his friends do, but it certainly does not help me. I want him to have courage. I want him to understand that if his “friends” cannot accept his opinions and beliefs, they’re not really his friends. I want him to stand up for me, but, more importantly, I want him to stand up for himself. He cannot help me until he helps himself.

I could say nothing, just pass by, swimming quietly through their sea of insults. I could stop and call him out right there, humiliate him in front of his peers. I could stand up to all of them. So many courses of action; which is best? It’s hard to decide.

I don’t want to humiliate him in front of his peers, and I don’t want to start a fight. Instead, I smile at him. He is baffled for a moment, but then shyly smiles back. We have an understanding. I won’t make him choose me over his friends, and he won’t humiliate me. A simple smile, and progress has been made. The next step? Perhaps to invite him to a meeting of the local Gay-Straight Alliance, or to get him involved in some other anti-hate coalition. I keep swimming for now, but I am satisfied; although he does not stick up for me, I know that his journey to stop the hate has just begun.