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## A Poem For a Small Town Queer Kid

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Your feet dangled in the air,  
Your back against the wall,  
Your body tense,  
Held up by his fingers around your neck,  
Threatening at every moment,  
To choke that beautiful, queer happiness out of your body.  
Only to be thrown aside a moment later in disgust.  
His yells echo inside your ears, violently ringing like the church bells you've come to fear,  
But not too loudly so your younger siblings wouldn't hear the family's shame.  
At that moment, you sprinted back into the closet,  
Closing the door before the outside light would shine through the cracks in walls you built,  
A last ditch effort to protect yourself from the outside world.  
That day you learned some people would rather you die "straight,"  
Than thrive queer.

That night you took out your weapon of choice and went to work,  
The cold metal was the only thing you knew that could bring in a sense of calm,  
The pain in your flesh distracting from the pain in your soul.  
Your fail-safe weapon,  
Used to fight off any pain inflicted on you like it was Advil,  
Pain inflicted upon you because people wouldn't let you enjoy that wonderful, queer happiness.  
You believed that engraving the words into your body would release them from your mind.  
But those engravings bound you like cattle branded for slaughter.  
You believed it was all your fault,  
That the marks on your thighs showed your weakness.  
But those marks were the product of a chaotic inferno,  
Fed through constant gaslighting.

That night you cried out to the highest power you could think of.  
You begged either to be made straight,  
Or to be bestowed the relief of death.  
Asking, "What worth did a faggot like you have anyway?"  
You wished the hands around your neck had done the job earlier,  
So, your belt wouldn't have to.  
The presence of your siblings surrounded you,  
Adam Kizer (16), Ash Haffner (16), Leelah Alcorn (17), Tyler Clementi (18),  
They had been here before,  
Contemplating if the possibility of hell below was worse than the hell you were in.  
That night you planned on following in the footsteps of too many before you,  
That night you heavily considered risking the fire for the possibility of a blissful nothingness for the rest  
of eternity.

But that morning you woke up.  
And every morning after you continued to wake up.  
Dear small-town queer kid,  
I am so proud of you for that.  
And not only did you wake up,  
You fought with every fiber of your being,  
You came back out unapologetically,  
You said, "fuck you" to those hateful bigots,  
Your engravings are now only faint traces on your skin,  
You saw through the gas-lit flames,  
You no longer craved that nothingness,  
You embraced that joyous, queer happiness.  
Small-town queer kid,  
I am so, so proud of you.

And finally, thank you.  
You never thought you would affect me,  
Because you never thought you'd live long enough to become me.

a poem for a  
**small town**

**QUEER** kid

Indigo Martin