

Magic Mirrors

American writer Gail Lumet Buckley said, “Family faces are magic mirrors. Looking at people who belong to us, we see the past, present, and future.” As a child, I always adored my mother’s face. From her smiles and adoring eyes, I received all the approval, all the affection, and all the acknowledgement I needed in my younger years. Home was where I wanted to be, because at home resided my childhood heart. For my peers, the home, filled with the timeless, familiar faces of the family, continues to serve as a sanctuary from the toils of teenage angst. But, through the eyes of afflicted youth, family faces reflect times of humiliation, present realities of struggle and survival, and futures as unclear as the reason why so many queer youth should be subjected to lives in which suicide seems like the only escape. Queer teenagers account for 60 percent of adolescent suicide—and less than ten percent of the teen community. Why should queer youth suffer? Why did coming out to my mother result in disownment and degradation? Searching for these answers in the darkness of hate and religious blindness mirrors the search that so many queer teens have after intolerance meets the truth of not being heterosexual. We begin to search for new homes in the midst of a harsh world. We rebuild our hope. We face our fears for the future.

Clinging to her bible, my mother’s eyes of affection changed to those of disdain, as she rebuked me for disgracing the family, for purposefully turning away from God, and for being disgusting and shameful. While I was at school, she had read my journal, invading the place where I divulged my hopes and dreams, my aspirations and inclinations, and everything near and dear to my heart. She discovered the homosexual feelings of her once golden son and tore out pages soiled with the tears of her outrage. I found my journal in tatters when I returned from school. Not soon after, my mother confronted me. When I confirmed I was gay, she came at me,

grabbed my neck, and sank her nails into my skin. I could feel her fury. But more, I sensed a change in her eyes, sullen and dark as if she had not slept for days. And yet, this was a new truth for her. At once, the disgrace of having a queer son tore me from her heart—and from my very home. Blood dripped down my neck and onto the shirt she ripped as I rushed from the room. I ran to another house. The police came. From that house, I was taken to one owned by a church family. The next morning, I returned to a cold house, occupied by the cold eyes of a suddenly broken family. Even though I will have residence until my eighteenth birthday, I lost a home that day. I lost the place where once resided my childhood heart—the one that adored only the eyes of an affectionate mother.

Refuge replaced with rejection and the addition of parental and societal disdain leads abandoned queer youth to self-hatred and a sense of hopelessness. At home, my family not only supplied a place for me to live, but also the security of shoulders to lean on and a support system in times of need. Alone, I discovered the emptiness of a life without the safety of unconditional love. I felt a vast void in surviving within a world that suddenly seemed like a dark abyss. I felt alone. Hopeless. Homes serve as places of security and hope. Hope fills the void of teenager's heart, which, in its initial naivety, needs direction and guidance. Without hope, individuals resort to ways to gain back their spirit or they give into their despair. Suicide springs from this loss of hope. At a rate of 60 percent of teenage suicides, hopeless queers account for a disproportionate amount of suicides in relation to suicides committed by heterosexual teens. Intolerance, which solely contributes to queer homelessness, is therefore in direct correlation with the deaths of youth—queer youth. At the loss of home, there is also a loss of hope.

My mother's face has changed. And in it, I only see her present disgrace and despise. But I can still recall the past, when I found a home in the eyes of my mother's approval. I have

changed, too. I now know the consequences of blindness; I have experienced firsthand hatred destroying hope. Hatred destroying the household. Residing in the sanguinity of a childlike heart, however, there is the anticipation of a future. Sharing love, strength and tolerance spreads the hope of a more perfect future. Through present realities of struggle and survival, there is hope. Why should queer youth suffer any longer? To see someone capable of mending and reshaping a broken world, one need only look in a mirror.