

The Doppelganger

I have lived my life like the man in the iron mask. Parts of my person detained in the shadows. Never able to show my true identity, shackled within the prison of myself. I have been forced into invisibility and ridicule from an un-approving society because of my sexuality.

I have always known my sexual identity. Throughout my life, I have learned in very unexpected ways that I would always have to keep my identity a secret for my own self-preservation.

On the evening of November 9, 1989, while eating dinner with my father and grandparents, I had my first unpleasant experience with intolerance. A story came on the news about homosexuality. The news reporter was discussing how a group of scientists found that homosexuality might be a genetic flaw related to the pituitary gland. My grandfather, an avid racist and discriminator, made a disconcerting and disgusting comment regarding how homosexuals are being punished by god with the AIDs virus. My father also engaged in the conversation with my grandfather, adding his ignorant thoughts regarding the matter. Fearful from the comments that were now ensuing at the dinner table, I sat there thinking about how if anyone ever finds out about me, I am doomed. I learned that night that even my family could not ever see me for who I am. I would have to learn a way to become invisible for my own survival.

As a teenager, I was very lonely. I was constantly feeling trapped in my own mental prison regarding my sexual thoughts and feelings. When I was thirteen years old, I surrounded myself mostly with female friends. The few male friends I had, I felt an unusual disconnection with. One of my friends named Lisa began dating around this time and would always tell me about her new prospects. I would sit there and listen to her stories and try to imagine what it would be like to date. I knew I would never make a connection with anyone like me, due to keeping my cards close, and because I did not know if anyone else was like me. I spent many years like this, with my emotional well-being gagged and bound.

When I was 18 years old and a senior in high school, I was beginning to come into focus and tell people in my life such as my father and mother of my sexuality. I also began dating someone in secret. My parents disapproved of my sexuality. I lived with my father. He was so uncomfortable with my lifestyle that he stopped looking me in the eyes for about three months. When he was eighteen, he was a Sargent in the army. For the remainder of his life, he was an avid womanizer. He could not accept that his son was gay. My mother also gave me a lot of grief and would ask me if I was sure about who I am. My mother was very religious and had a lot of trouble accepting the reality that her son was gay. Her beliefs taught her that homosexuality is a sin, and the only form of repentance is to change or not act upon your desires. Needless to say, I kept a lot of my life cloaked from both of them to avoid ridicule and shame.

While in high school during my senior year, I was provided with an early out program which gave me the opportunity to have half days and work. I worked for a local bank as a part-time teller. I worked with nine other employees, all of whom I thought I had a good rapport with. Before I started my job, my father explicitly told me, “do not tell anyone about your sexual preference.” I think back now, wondering if he told me that out of shame, or if it was to protect me. I did exactly what he said and wore my usual guises that kept people off my tracks.

One of my coworkers found out about my sexuality at my bank job and blabbed to everyone. The next day, a middle-aged coworker of mine was disgruntled over the sales figures which had me in the lead. This person started making snide comments in my direction. Seeing that I was not feeding into her negativity, she decided to try and twist the knife deeper and took advantage of an anti-robbery mechanism in our computers by sending a message across all the screens saying, “ I hope you meet a fag with Aids, contract it and die. From the bottom of my heart, I hate you. Lisa.” I abruptly walked into the break room out of humiliation, gathered my lunch, called my father to pick me up and headed for the door. On my way, the manager of the bank pulled me into his office. He saw the message that was sent, but did not seem to care. He told me if I leave, not to come back.

My father came and picked me up. On the car ride home, he started screaming and yelling at me about how I should not have told anyone my secret about being gay. He

did not consider that I was sitting next to him trembling in fear and disgusted in how careless I was to have accidentally let someone see a part of me which I tried so hard to camouflage.

Two years ago, I was working for another company doing customer service in a tight-knit office based out of a warehouse. There were ten of us, and we were all permitted to have pictures and other personal belongings on our desks. All of my coworkers had pictures of their husbands, wives and children. I was the only person with an empty desk, no pictures to show. The lack of pictures wasn't by choice, but rather necessity. I could not have pictures of my significant other on my desk or wall at work. I would be treated like a human resources nightmare. Comments would fly daily with anti-gay rhetoric in the warehouse at this location. Even with laws against such things being said, they never truly protected me. The harm was already done to my psyche. I found myself forced into a deadlock of again withholding my happiness and clouding myself to others.

Whenever I do my taxes each year, there is one last fact that shows me my place in society. As I fill out my tax forms, whenever I reach the area of relationship status, I am always forced to mark single. I have been in long-term relationship for over a decade. The boxes available to me are single, married, divorced, separated or widowed. I am none of these, not by choice. I am partnered. I am so unaccepted by society, that due to the lack of being able to get married in the state of Pennsylvania, my own government does not recognize my identity.

I have come to realize in my life by now that most people generally hate my sexual identity either behind my back or to my face. Even though society appears to be open to gay culture, it is only “acceptable” to be homosexual when you are invisible, and no one has to see it. As long as I remain disguised and take on a non-threatening visage as a gay person, I am accepted and free of scorn.