

*I love you.*

She sits in the cafeteria, holding her forgotten sandwich in her hand. Sitting on the other side of the cafeteria is the girl, Jane, happily chatting with her group of friends. As she speaks, she absently tosses her hair, and it catches the gleam of the sunlight filtering in through the cafeteria window, visibly sleek and shiny.

She's gorgeous, with a constant smile on her pretty, appealing face. Her big eyes, sparkling hazel in the sunlight, smile along with her mouth, creating a heart aching image of beauty. *Jane. What a plain name for such a beautiful girl.*

The girl sighs as she watches Jane, her eyes narrowed as her heart begins to ache with longing... even as she knows that such a love is forbidden, says her parents, says her teachers, says society. *But I love her so much...*

She's always loved girls. She just hasn't been able to show it. She's always been afraid of what would happen if she showed it. She opens her eyes and looks around, seeing all of the hate and violence towards people who are only trying to love. All because their partners are of the same gender.

*Why?* she thinks, shaking her head slightly. *We're human beings too. We laugh and cry, eat and breathe, joke and gossip just like they do. So why aren't we allowed to love?* She shakes her head again, wanting to cry out from the unfairness of it all. Sometimes it all seems too much; the way that she must keep quiet about her feelings inside and who she really is, and sometimes she feels as though she will burst like a caterpillar from its cocoon. Maybe then she will be able to flaunt herself and love herself for who she is, just like the butterfly she saw that morning as she walked to school.

Suddenly the cafeteria doors swing open, and the girl blinks. Tearing her eyes away from Jane, she blinks in shock as she sees who have come in. Two girls have entered the cafeteria, and at the sight of them the whole cafeteria has hushed.

They walk through the crowd of students, hands clasped together, ignoring the looks of incredulity and disbelief that are thrown at them. They see none of this; they only have eyes for each other. Even when the looks turn into glares, they walk together, arms wrapped around each other's waist, with only distant looks of happiness that comes from being in each other's company. They almost seem oblivious to where they are, acting as though they are alone instead of in their high school cafeteria, where their fellow classmates are eyeing them with revulsion.

Whistles and whoops erupt from the students around them, none of them friendly. "Hey look, it's the lesbians!" someone shouts, and it's almost as if those words were a cue for even more remarks. "Dykes!" someone yells, and soon the hallway is filled with the voices of students screaming that one word. The lunch aides make a small move, as if they know that they should do something, that they should go to the defense of the couple and protect them from the hard words of the students, but they hesitate, and that hesitation says more than enough to the students. Emboldened, they grow louder, their voices growing angrier and angrier as their taunts grow louder and crueler. And yet, the two girls only clasp their hands more tightly, gazing into each other's eyes. *Don't listen to them,* their shared gaze says. *Listen only to me. Look only at me.*

She sees and hears all the hate filling the cafeteria. *How can they stand all of this?* She feels none of the hate in the air, only a strange sort of pity for the couple. However... it's not really pity. *Am I feeling... jealousy?* She watches the couple, the way that the girls

lovingly twine their fingers together and press against each other, the way that they have each other to get through all of this. *They're in love. And they aren't afraid to show it.*

The sight stuns her, and she looks away. She meets Jane's eyes. For a moment, they are frozen, nonexistent to the rest of the cafeteria. Then Jane smiles. A small smile, but a smile nonetheless.

*Maybe it's finally time for me to be free.*