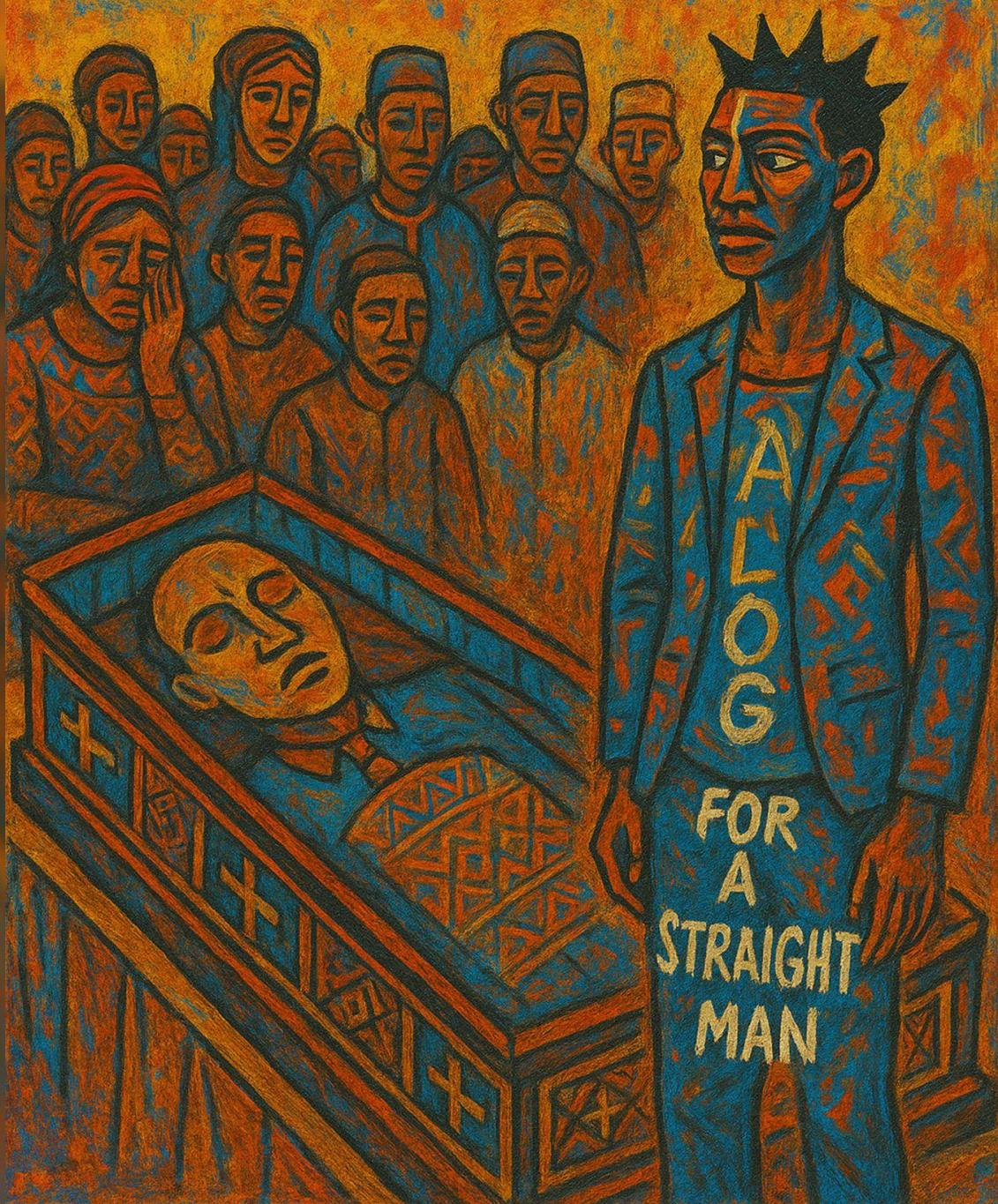


EULOGY FOR A STRAIGHT MAN



LET'S BEGIN

Before we begin this journey, I've put together something to augment your experience. Now, it's by no means cinematic, but it should set an emotional prompt for each part of this read. For me, it's a testament—my witness.

To start, open up this playlist:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3oYHhBoJ6Klxw229WBdzl1?si=slSOP69qSZmE5TYs8ZaFjg>

You should play it in its given order, no shuffle. I've tailored it to fit the average reading time for each part, so you may exceed the music score for the given part or find yourself under it. No worries, the playlist is just an *emotional* assistant.

You are now free to continue reading. I hope it has the intended effect.

Whatever that is.

Should you finish reading before the song ends, I'd like to ask you to let it play out and think and reflect on it before proceeding to the next part.

N.B.: If you don't get it soon enough, the italicized words have sarcastic connotations or are there to emphasize a particular scenario.

There's a version of me they'll never stop praying for—he never lived, but they speak his name in tongues.

PART ONE

THE REALIZATION

CUE: The Only Thing By Steven Sufjan

A SONG FOR THE DEATH OF INNOCENCE

Growing up, they tell you that being gay is an agenda, an indoctrination into Satan's cult, by the oddest thing ever: Love.

It's an abomination, a less than human state of being.

The greatest of all sins.

Nigeria's stance on same-sex relations remains the same, standing on the rotted frames of patriarchy, tradition, and demonized religion, fastened by the saying, "It's not a part of our culture" (if only they knew).

You tend to hear that it's a Western import, and we buy into it. I mean, what else could prompt a man to look into another man's eyes with nothing but burning desire? Or as my crude countrymen would say, "How you go allow another man to dey burst your nyash? You dey alright?"

These white people have come again with their wahala, and we've got to decolonize them.

Let's start by shaming who loves who.

Should one day I'm caught loving a man, I hope the police catch me before the community does. Better Jail than their witch hunt. It's funny the things we choose to prioritize.

Whispers about adultery like it's chic, and down low men chase weak imitations of love in secret, shame streaked across the street in discarded rings and boxer briefs.

The young girls know rape and femicide like lingua franca, our kids remember the thwack of a cane in their bones, tribalism works like currency.

And still...

People ask why two men are holding hands.

I suppose all sins are equal after all.

My early childhood didn't include much screen time, which gave me more room to go outside and touch grass. I wasn't allowed to watch:

- Cartoon Network
- Nickelodeon
- Disney Channel
- Disney XD
- Movies in the cinemas

Don't worry, I later caught up with all the popular shows. What I did have at the time to watch, though, were Psalty, Superbook, AutobeGood, Smile of a

Child, Dooley & Pals, and VeggieTales. Essentially, the entire Christian kid roster.

My family at the time believed that Western shows and TV stations were gateways for the Devil to use God's children, and they didn't want their kids subscribing to a degenerate agenda. "Oh, how America has fallen," they would cry when Ben 10 came on the screen, before they quickly changed it to CNN.

They encouraged reading, with a few exceptions, though most of my books remained religious, like Psalty the talking Bible. I never got to join the Harry Potter fandom(at least not openly) since witchcraft was just one of the many other ways to waylay the children of God. However, I did discover Percy Jackson, and I got away with it, but not much else got through their all-seeing eyes. Nothing that even whiffed like woke was allowed in the home.

I grew up on music; though, Dansaki ringing on my mother's phone as we mopped kitchen floors on a Saturday morning. Piano lessons to play in Church, the recorder that my School gave us so we could play it during carols, strumming the guitar or fiddling with the violin for the school orchestra, and singing *Oh Susannah* whenever I could. All before the expectations for the African child set in and took up all that space.

I'd always felt different, always been different, even before I understood the meaning of the word, or what I felt made me weird. During my primary school days, sometimes I would join the boys in rolling in the sand and scraping our knees on monkey bars, and other times I'd play with the girls, toying with dolls and action figures. Barbie and Cinderella always argued over who got to date Superman and things like that. I'd get the dolls from the class girls and bring the action figures from home. Not many people thought it odd then. Why would they? It was just harmless fun and kids exploring their hobbies, and I explored everything: pottery, Lego sets, football, Leapfrog, video games, spy kits, tinko, hopscotch, and Concentration. Yet, I was still the odd kid. Always troubled, always struggling in class, barely ever sat, eyes out the window,

constantly in trouble, and worrying the teachers. Turned out, I'm just neurodivergent(diagnosed, yes).

I recall playing Mommy and Daddy with other kids in the sandpit, but for some reason, I always did the Mom duties, wearing the aprons, cooking the plastic, and taking out the kids. Sometimes the boys would call me a sissy, but I didn't mind. At the end of the day, they would call me to join them and play football or tag.

Sexual awareness came to me a lot earlier than most people. In the 4th grade, I was repeatedly **touched** by one of the school chefs, up until he left the school later that year. I don't know why he left, but I was grateful for his absence and the relief that came with no longer being told to shush.

I didn't tell my parents. Not until way later. I didn't have the words to tell them that my asshole was a little *looser*, that I knew how people copulate before they could sit me down for the sex talk. I simply kept quiet and let life move on. It was easier to do as a kid, perhaps because I couldn't fully grasp what had been done to me, but it didn't get easier growing up. I acted out often, became anxious around people, was reserved, and was already wary of the world before I even graduated to using a pen in class instead of a pencil.

As I neared my teens, my thoughts became more sexually inclined, which didn't help the constant gymnastics my mind was always doing as an avid daydreamer. I would often think of a man and a woman *doing* it, and I would picture myself as the woman, passive and always under the man, happy to please. I'm sure that plenty of psychologists out there could tell me why that was so, but I couldn't explain it then, and I'm not sure I can now. There were lots of Hows and Whys down the road for me. The journey had just begun. I call it the death of innocence.

PART TWO

THE PERFORMANCE

CUE: Youth By Daughter

A SONG FOR THE FRACTURING OF SOUL

I later finished primary education at a new school, an experience I'm grateful for. It was a year to be a whole new person, to give myself a new sense of worth and prove that I was better than everybody else. I always acted like I had something to prove to the teachers and my classmates, and I only burned out and isolated myself. When the Common Entrance Exams came by, I buried my face in books, romanticizing the *back-breaking* weight of UGO.C.UGO just so I could get into all my choice schools - I did.

The weeks before boarding school are a harrowing memory. I was suddenly scared for my life, scared that I wouldn't see the next day. I still can't comprehend such an irrational fear. As the evenings would set, I would see a

man in black, his face all blurry so that I couldn't make out who it was, but he was everywhere: in the kitchen, on the roads, in my room - *everywhere!*

As the nights drew near, my fears would spike, his unmoving presence would send shivers down my back, and a paralysing despair. Every evening, he would move a little closer, and I was so sure that the day he got close enough to touch me, he would snuff my life and it'd be over. When my parents turned off the lights at night, I'd wait for the sound of their door closing before hastily turning the lights back on and watching the blurry black man on my bed, scared of nothing and everything.

On one of those days, I came up to my mother, scared out of my mind, and told her about my torment. I told her of the Man in Black who would always stand in a corner, never doing anything, except edging a little closer with the passing days. I told her how scared I was of him getting close enough to touch me, and she told me to pray against it. She instructed me on how to pray for deliverance, and that's what I did. Pray; it's the solution to everything, except Mr. Man in Black, who seemed immune to God.

Despite my earnest prayers, he edged nearer, and when I was alone at night, I could hear my name echoed in whispers, and I would whimper against the voice, begging him to leave me alone. He didn't get the message, so I continued telling my mother until she snapped one day and threatened that I wouldn't go off to school if I continued like that. Like I was unwell. Immediately, I shut up. Boarding school was my ticket out of all this: a new life, a new me.

Eventually, I was shipped off to boarding school, along with the stowaway Mr. Man in Black, but I was thrilled for the first time in a while. Pleased for the freedom and excited to be away from scrutiny. I had only traded one prison for another. Boys' hostel was a prison, but eventually became my refuge (much later). Open bathroom stalls were the de facto, and I often shrank, conscious of my thin naked body under the gaze of anybody whose eyes crossed mine. That same gaze was available to me, and every naked body I saw in the showers was a painful flashback to the Chef, scaring and disgusting me. I found it vile and often left the bathroom shivering despite the hot northern sun. To avoid this problem, I'd wake up at ungodly hours to take my bath before most people woke up. Unwatched and unwatching, punctual to everything and avoiding trauma like so.

The summer of JSS1 brought quite a change to my life. I got my first phone, and it was such an exciting thing to finally be connected to the rest of the world and understand what my peers said in conversations I had no business being in, but hooray! There's:

- Fortnite

- Instagram
- Vine
- The Internet
- An actual life!

And pornography....

Despite having the phone, I couldn't use social media for quite a while, not even WhatsApp. I had a parent monitor to track all my activities on the phone and could only use Google Hangouts, which almost no one was on. I was irked at the idea of having my every activity watched, including my search history(not that anything was going on at the time). To bypass this, I downloaded Phoenix browser, which allowed me to search for anything without answering absurd questions about the benefit of that thing in my life.

BIG FUCKING MISTAKE!

In the excitement of this freedom, it didn't take long for me to discover porn. All the boys at school talked about it, everyone with a gadget at least. I didn't look it up just because of peer pressure, but genuine curiosity.

Like I said,

BIG FUCKING MISTAKE.

The overflow of nakedness filled every corner of my eyes, scaring and rousing me. Instantly, I was hooked.

I always watched. Never did anything else, never touched myself. I watched it the way you'd watch your Indian professor on YouTube explain Data Structures and Algorithms, academic voracity rather than just sexual appetite. Back at school, I wasn't ashamed to flex the lingo. I knew all the positions and storylines, saying this with morbid embarrassment. The boys would roar in excitement and approval, and I'd feel like *one of them*. In hindsight, it's clear I was trying to prove something, just didn't know it then, or what I was trying to prove.

JSS1 to JSS2 were nightmares. Something was fundamentally wrong: in the ways I carried myself, constantly checking the way I walked, one foot after the other, because I realized my steps were a little off from everyone else, or how I continually readjusted myself whenever I stood or sat, restlessly nabbing at anything that would signal to everyone "Hey everyone, tall, lanky weirdo over here!" but I would dismiss it as my ADHD doing its thing.

I tried to reconcile with God, especially when I realised that I was watching porn a lot more sexually than academically. Back at home, I was seen as a prayerful kid, one with lots of spiritual potential, and I kind of wanted to earn that merit back, but it was hard to feel spiritual when I was looking at

MILFs behind closed doors, and there was never satisfaction. Just a constant cycle of apologies and relapse.

Trauma was catching up to me still, in the fears of nightmares and the pseudo-schizophrenia of the Man in Black, these days, just a few feet from me. Every night, he'd take a goading step toward my bed, and my throat would close up, petrified, like he could touch me. One night, I mustered the courage to stand up to him and walked up to the corner of the dorm where he stood, but when I got there, he vanished. Sure enough, as soon as I returned to bed, he was standing there again. The sheer comicness of the scenario was enough to be my psychotic break; instead, I spent all night talking to God, asking him to help me.

Prayer consumed me, as I'd mutter in the dead of night, asking God to take him out, praying for deliverance, and wondering why me? One night as I readied to sleep, I noticed he wasn't there, not in the line of my vision where his silence would taunt me, but I could still feel him, like a vice grip at the back of my head. He was present in the chills I'd get whenever I finished a porn video, chills that would make me cry, gasping for God's mercy, but there were like a million miles between me and God's peace.

JSS2, like many others, I started fooling around with girls. Sometimes it was pleasant, and other times I just didn't feel attracted. I often blamed my performance issues on trauma. Why couldn't I just be normal like everyone else?

I LIKE GIRLS!

It's the norm.

I LIKE GIRLS!

I was almost never happy at school, not unless I was with my best friend at the time. There was no name for us then; I just enjoyed his company, far more than any girl I had been with. We talked about everything and anything; our fears, opinions, thoughts on religion, and whatnot. I was allowed to cry with him, and in a world of boys don't cry, it felt like a prayer answered. I never told him the things that made me cry. When he pressed for answers, I'd give him plaster issues(problems that weren't that weighty, still problems, but definitely not the reason for my tears), and he'd just hug me in silence till the tears stopped. I didn't tell him my problems, not because I didn't trust him; heck, I barely even trusted myself, probably because I hadn't yet come to terms with my reality.

JSS3 first term holidays, A.K.A Christmas holidays, my family took a trip for the first time in a minute. One of those days, the family went out for breakfast, but I stayed behind and told them I wasn't hungry but that they could get me a yoghurt cup. When they had gone and I was alone, the idleness got to me, and like muscle memory, I whipped out my phone and opened that obscene site, watching the usual, but something was different about that day. My curiosity was itching, and I indulged it. My browser was ready to comply.

I hovered my fingers over the search bar.

Homosexuality...

The search returned so much on the oppression of LGBTQ+ people over the years, psychological studies on them, and the Stonewall riot. It was my first time seeing a pride flag. I should have felt warmth, maybe a sense of belonging; instead, my hot head was on to something else.

Gay People....

Flamboyant. Not exactly what I was looking for.

Naked Men...

Close enough. I recall scrolling through images of male appendages, and it felt like all my senses had come alive at last, exhilaration filling my chest. That, ladies and gentlemen, is how I ended up on the rainbow side of pornography. The first video I opened made the difference; for the first time, I wasn't watching with the claws of trauma or just some misplaced curiosity. There was desire and hunger. Their movements opened up something in me, the hand movements...

I guided my hands and let myself feel; it was something! I remember the sensation, like I wanted to pee, and how I allowed myself to feel it still, letting the motion run through, and the release was mind-numbing. I had touched something rich, but it made me feel dirty. I vowed never to do it again, and I managed to keep that promise till the next term. I was aware of something. I'm attracted to Men, and it was scary. So fucking scary. Did that dismiss the women in my life? I didn't know. Was I gay? I didn't let myself answer, convinced I would invite God's worst punishment. I was an abomination, a huge disgrace to

my family, so I decided I would bury who I am, in hopes that God would deliver me and accept me again.

PART THREE

DENIAL

CUE: Foreigner's God By Hozier

A SONG FOR THE GRIEF WE FEEL IN SILENCE

Burying myself wasn't hard(most of the time). More or less, I'm a straight-presenting male(I think), other than the times I've fanned my hands, done Bacardi on a table, or even worn a skirt. I did everything the guys liked(and I genuinely enjoy these things, save for the last one): Football, Basketball, Rugby, Swimming, and being general assholes to girls. I'm a gentleman, and I had no reason to comply in being a douche, but I also know why I did it: Survival.

Everything I did was in some form a way to avoid getting singled out, and sometimes, even today, that behaviour persists. I do regret that, though—a lot. Sometimes, if I wasn't attracted to a girl in particular I had to kiss, say during truth or dare, I'd plaster a random guy's face on her and continue. I told myself

that it would be fine, even Google agreed that people tend to experiment with same-sex relations at my age; a search I did after scoring a bit too high on an “Am I gay?” quiz. The first sign, but I assured myself that everything would go back to normal.

Covid-19 swooped in, flipping the dynamics of the entire world, and the bustle of school life that allowed me to repress my nagging thoughts was gone, leaving me stranded and quarantining me with those awful questions; a desert of confrontation. The isolation allowed me to comprehend everything that I was going through, including what my personality might look like if I stopped projecting my behaviour through the lens of heteronormativity. I was now becoming aware of something that had always been. I was beginning to understand my *different*. Sure, certain factors may have sped it up, but I knew then that I had always been this way, and I didn’t know what exactly to do with it.

A while later, I turned to anonymous apps like Omegle to try and find myself some validation, but Omegle taught me what I already knew: that the world is an awfully wicked place, but I learnt further that people like me are just one of the many scapegoats for human hatred. Depression crept back into my life, taunting me in the four walls of my room, terrifying me in the yellowed pages of my Bible. I started to isolate myself from family, suddenly feeling like a cancer to them.

One day during COVID, I told my mum about the Chef. I recollect how I tried to hold myself from crying, how every word hurt cause it felt like there was a lump in my throat. It’s shocking how raw the experience felt when I recounted the story aloud – you mean, I went through this? When I had told her everything, she was hurt – more hurt than I hadn’t told her sooner – but also relieved that I finally did. It might have been fine, then she asked, “But you don’t like guys, right?” with a piercing curiosity.

Her only question.

She didn’t ask anything about how I was coping, how it must have fucked me up after all these years, and it hurt so much. I wanted no, I needed her to see that I was hurting; Badly. I’d read enough about what conservative parents, more specifically, Nigerians, do to their unusual kids, so I steeled myself and replied, “No.” It made her more relaxed, and I smiled a big fake smile. She had no idea.

The next holiday, I lost my virginity to a woman twice my age, and it left me feeling hollow. I hated her, myself, and I was self-aware enough to know that I was sliding down the steep path to hypersexuality. My thoughts, behaviour, actions all inclined to some primal need for release that always left me feeling

dirty, used, unlovable. When I read my Bible at night, I could hardly hold it, feeling like some depraved, barbaric creature, but hey! Chronic masturbation and sleeping with mom-aged women had to be miles better than thinking about guys.

There was a guy at school I had feelings for - The canon straight friend crush. He seemed to like me, too. We held hands, shared forehead kisses and hugs, and often told each other we loved the other. I was too scared to tell him how I felt then, more so because I knew how he felt about people like me: Devil spawn, iniquitous abominations, destined for the fires of hell, and well, any curse you could come up with.

It felt weird that he said all these things, and still allowed himself to be so free with me. I nursed away the delusions that one day he'd look in my eyes and have his awakening, so I decided it was better to have these little parts of him that made me feel loved than to tell him and lose a valuable friendship. The day I used his image as a reference to masturbate was the day that I decided to die.

PART FOUR

ALONE

CUE: I Can't Breathe By Bea Miller

A SONG FOR THE SLOWLY SUFFOCATING

Suicide ideation wasn't new to me. As a matter of fact, it had been festering for a very long time.

I had done it all: Prayed to God to take it all away, said the *pray the gay* away manuscripts verbatim, made all sorts of promises to God of the things I'd do for him if he ever *delivered* me. I had cut myself and let myself bleed out as some twisted idea of a sacrifice, denied and repeatedly lied to myself. This thing wasn't going, throwing me into despair; my body suddenly felt itchy like I needed to escape it. Ditch my skin.

It hurt every time I'd look at a girl, even one that I was sexually attracted to, and know that I could never give her the romantic desire I craved, that she'd deserve, and I would slap myself, like a broken vending machine. It sure felt that way.

A piece of me died whenever I'd be sat in the middle of a conversation where people gave their opinions on homosexuality, always with the same outcome, each sentence a variation of the same thing - Hatred.

- I'd rather have a rapist child than a gay son.
- Why would someone choose to be gay?
- They should all just die!
- You no get sense! You go leave woman follow man?
- If I were the mother and I knew, I would abort that child.
- God Forbid! (Often followed by a nauseating spit.)
- I just hope they know they're going to hell.
- It's a mental disease, and they need help.

I often laughed when they said these things, sometimes I'd even agree with them out loud to avoid funny looks, but I was rotting inside, anxiety resting on the valves of my heart as I continued to do everything, every search for a cure, so that I could join these conversations and be happy in my ignorance, maybe even know what it's like to other other people and feel comfortable, even joyous.

Early mornings, before the bathrooms got crowded, I'd look at myself in the mirror, my ugly, broken self, and cry, eyes red, veins bursting on my temples, and snot lining my philtrum. The salty mix always made it to my lips, and I'd sip it, drawing strength from that saline, tangy mess. When the snot would crust, my tears had dried, and I could muster my voice again, I'd speak out to God again, for something, anything.

I asked God for a lot, man. A whole fucking lot.

“God, please go back in time and give my mother a miscarriage.”

“Would you forgive me if I killed myself?”

“Do you even care???”

“I hate you, God!”

“If you don’t fix me, I’ll go worship the Devil!”

It's funny to read this now that I've written it, since, despite all the prayers and crying, there was always silence. I never felt that brush of divine comfort my mother often boasted of, a kiss of peace for his son suffering in an identity he had no control over. One that his maker apparently hates. He always remained silent, and soon enough, prayer departed from my tongue.

I know the day I attempted suicide. It's a clear memory and feels more like witnessing it in third person than feeling the experience. More academic than emotional.

I had a bipolar friend, and we used to talk about how we were going through it; sometimes we fantasized about our deaths, imagining the peace we'd feel once we stopped people, reality, life, and us.

One of us was just more serious than the other.

I stole random packs of pills from the school clinic, enough to make sure it'd be my last night, and smuggled myself to a remote corner of the school, way after the lights had gone out.

As I sat on the grass, I wondered whether to leave a suicide note, explain my reasons, how it felt suffocating to simply exist, or just let them find my body. I decided on the latter. I owed nobody an explanation.

I opened each pack slowly, acknowledging the gravity of what I was doing, but accepting that I wouldn't have it any other way. Every pill I downed was a prayer, a call for forgiveness, a call for a sign, a call for peace, each one inciting a queasy drowsiness in me. I thought happy thoughts of what it would be like on the other side, tears streaming down my face as I did everything to quell the fear that it would just be much worse on the other side. Between the pills and the night breeze, it wasn't hard to fall asleep- sweet respite for a weary soul. That's what death should feel like.

Morning came, and I felt like absolute shit, but I felt a whole lot worse when I realized that I had failed. Suddenly, fear came over me. I knew the implications of a failed attempt; Paralysis, liver failure, a whole worse quality of life that wouldn't score any points with my desire to be here in the now. Moreover, I had classes in a few. I checked myself and saw that, other than the feel of a hammer against my skull and a very reactive stomach, I was fine. I went to class and continued the day like I hadn't just tried to end it all. Later in the afternoon, I cried in the bathroom, cursing God. I didn't want to be here. I just needed it to end.

God didn't let me go; instead, digestive punishments were in store. Over two weeks, my headaches persisted, sometimes rendering me unable to think or move, and the diarrhea? I can only consider it a near-fatal experience. I remember all the times I'd grip the toilet seats like my life depended on it as my

body unloaded itself, often staining the seats and sometimes walls with blood and fecal matter. I threw up so much, too, so much that I almost turned myself over to the school out of fear of dying. Can you imagine? The suicidal kid was scared of dying. It would have been a rather mortifying way to go, though. Shitting yourself to death.

When my body cleared itself of the poison I had given it, I decided to find meaning in life again. Other than baggy, reddish-yellow eyes, I looked fine. I thought so, at least. I would smile with my friends, make jokes, and dance when I could, but I told no one about what I had tried, nor did I tell anyone that sometimes I felt like going through with it again. I guess it's what people now call High-functioning Depression.

At home, I asked my mother in an off-handed manner what she would do if any of her children committed suicide. She rolled her eyes and said she would cry, but what else could she do? She would move on, but her child would have condemned themself to an eternity of suffering and brimstone. Then she looked me in the eye and asked if I wanted to kill myself. I smiled and told her, "Why would anyone try that nonsense?" to which she said, "Good, cause you'll just meet worse on the other side."

Another such day, when I contemplated ending it all, was during a family prayer with my mum and siblings. She brought up the topic of homosexuality, specifically in Sodom and Gomorrah. She spoke about how gay people are demonic, their fate in the afterlife, and it scared me to the bone. Why the hell do I even exist? All so I can burn in hell for something that I had no choice in? I opened my silly mouth and asked my mother, "Why would gay people go to Hell? They don't even choose to be gay." Her gaze turned fierce and cold. "What do you mean? Are you gay?" I instantly shook my head, and she calmed down a bit. "Gay people choose to live a sinful life. They choose to move away from women and indulge in men. For leaving the natural order, they deserve to die." She said. I didn't sleep that night, just pondering if it was somehow possible to adapt to eternal fire, my apparent next destination.

I continued Secondary school while navigating grades, people, myself, and my *comphet* clone. It was a relief to be finally out of that place and begin to try and understand myself.

Sometime later, an anonymous message popped up on my phone, saying that he was someone from my high school. I wondered who'd hit me up, and I was pretty sure I had all the numbers of my classmates, at least those that mattered.

I sent a message asking who it was, and I got a reply almost immediately. Why'd he hit me up?

Turned out he's one of the straight crushes I had back then, and he told me that while we were in school, he had no idea how to express his feelings for me. I quickly sat up in bed, shocked! I couldn't believe it, he actually liked me. The first image that popped into my head was Nick Nelson. No idea why, but I was excited for more than just the feelings. For the first time, I had someone to share this burden with, someone to talk about all this with. We hit it off instantly, still talking as friends, but playing the maybe card. We could be lovers or just be who we are, free in our identity, maybe leave this dusted country someday and be happy somewhere. My comfort in this didn't last all that long; usually, nothing ever does.

One night, at his behest, I read *Red, White and Royal Blue*, which provoked this bittersweet joy in me, and a deep longing; sad, jealous, craving to be seen like that, but knowing that I'd never allow myself that, and neither would my family. I adored the way Alex opened up to Henry and how sure they were of themselves, but I knew I didn't get to wish for too much, so I told my friend I loved the book and sealed my emotions tight.

That Sunday morning, I went to church, feeling lost and hurt, and as if the universe wasn't done with its mindfucks, the message of the day was the death and condemnation that awaited the *madness* called the LGBTQ+. All of them and their allies. The spiritual dissonance I felt was shattering, wrenching my soul from body. I couldn't take it anymore, so I walked out of the service and began sobbing uncontrollably outside, wondering what part of God's plan all this was.

My mother had seen me leave the church hastily, so she came outside, asking what was wrong when she saw my red eyes, and told me that I could tell her anything. Her eyes were so soft, so full of worry, I almost believed I could confide all this in her. I promised to tell her everything when we got home, and she nodded as she ushered me back to service so that the pastor could keep hacking at my soul.

Anticipation made my legs restless as I waited to break everything down to my mom, but on the ride home, she talked about her joy in the condemnation of homosexuals, about their vile, satanic behaviour, and just like that, all the comfort I had of an ally parent flew out the window, and I felt like opening the car door to fly out too. At home, my mum kept pestering me, asking what had made me cry in church, but I told her not to worry. She didn't budge, so to assuage her, I gave her a plaster issue to which she laughed and said, "So that's what's making a whole you cry?" I wished so bad that that plaster issue were my real problem.

Sometime later, my Dad took me out to dinner - Just me - and it felt odd. He had an impatient air around him, a crack in his facade of composure for once. The atmosphere felt fragile and confusing; we hadn't spent time like this, just us, in such a long time. I had long given up on finding emotional availability in him, and let him be what he wanted in my life, a provider. Yet, there he was asking me if there was anything I'd like to tell him. The tone of the question was odd, invading, strained. More importantly, it sounded like someone who knew the answer to what he was asking and was just awaiting my confirmation, however, everything else about him was soft, no quiet, like a father who had woken up and realized that he had missed out on his son's life big time, and wanted to make up for it.

He leaned across the table to tell me about how some people in his high school were gay, and he never *hated* them, so I could tell him anything. I recall how hopeful I felt; maybe I could convince him to be an accepting father and have him back me up against a world that hates me. I was so emotionally starved, I told him everything—every last bit. The change in his face from shock to rage, then a scary kind of sadness, wasn't unexpected. Maybe I could still reach him. He then asked why I hadn't told him earlier, shaking with rage, that he could have found a solution, *fixed* me, and they'd have solved all of this before it became a problem.

Of course. Like every other time, I remain something to be fixed.

He soon broke down and started sobbing about how he had failed as a parent. It was jarring to see him like this. I wanted to cry with him, for him, for the way my life had gone, for being myself, but I had been crying so much already that in that moment, I had nothing to give. When he calmed down enough to face me, he opened his phone and showed me the unquestionable and undeniable screenshots of my chat with my friend. Betrayal and disbelief at the violation tore my eyes as he told me how my friend's father had seen his son's chats with me and sent them straight to my Dad, who logged onto my chats and secretly awaited his confirmations; that his son likes dudes. He had watched every conversation play out in near real time. It was a kind of nakedness I don't look forward to feeling again.

He promised not to tell my mum, not till we had a plan for my *healing*. His knowing was hard enough, but I had enough emotional detachment from him to brush the shame off. My mum, on the other hand, felt like my best friend most of the time. I didn't want to watch the cracks appear in our iron bond, but I knew it would be a matter of time. So I asked my Dad to let me tell her myself, in my own time, and he agreed. It was the best thing I could have then. I already

felt so bare, like the rawness an ixora experiences when its petals are torn apart for a bit of nectar—a whole life for a few drops.

For the next few days, it was absurd – our relationship – between my Dad and me; he often could not meet my eyes, and there was a hush about my person, like I was now something to be hidden in the deepest closets of family secrets. I gave myself two weeks to tell my mum, a lot sooner than I'd have liked, but it wouldn't have been long before she started asking my Dad why he and I were suddenly spending so much time. She was already joking with me that I had replaced her with him—my new best friend. I laughed when she asked what we were always talking about, and I told her, Guy stuff.

Guy stuff was talking about girls, how to start a business, and things like that, not how to handle your queer son.

I had a week left on my deadline to tell mom. I had already started writing the letter I'd give her, the one I hoped would make her understand, and that maybe she'd look past it all and see only her baby. One night, she came into the living room and sat on the sofa opposite me. Her eyes were red, which scared me. What happened to my mom? I reached out to touch her, and she pulled away. "Why are you a member of the gays?" She spat, sadness and bitterness painting her every word vitriol red. "What?" I asked. Who told her? How? Dad...

"I asked, Why are you gay?" She said again, and I began to stutter. "I...I don't know, but I'm attracted to boys, and girls too." Like that would make it better. She sighed shakily, as she told me how my Dad had told her everything, that she had cried, said her prayers, and that she was trying to make peace with me, that what she was interested in at the moment was finding a way to fix me.

Again with the fix!

My heart was torn at its seams, betrayed by my Dad, wounded by my mother. She asked me to tell her when I knew I was like this, refusing to name it, instead waving the words with her hands. I recounted everything to her, my early years, high school, how I always knew that I was like this, but it had taken a while to understand it. She shook her head, refusing to validate my account, she then told me that it was the Chef that made me like this, that he had misaligned me, and I began to cry all over, reliving the memory; Rough hands, rougher voice and she told me to stop crying, that it had happened years ago, that we needed to focus on the present situation. When she saw my quivering lips and soul-sucked eyes, she then turned soft and said to me that she wasn't mad, she just wished I had told her everything earlier, that they could have solved this from the root problem, and it wouldn't be as big an issue as it now was. I agreed so fast, desperate to feel her love again, scared of being denied, disowned, maybe worse. My world was caving in too fast.

When we had both finished sobbing, she let me go to bed, told me that she and Dad would find a solution, but I should enjoy the night.

Enjoy what exactly?

I ran upstairs, fire throbbing in my legs as I began to bang on my Dad's door. My mother yelled from downstairs that he was asleep.

I DIDN'T FUCKING CARE!

The door clicked open, and he came out in just his boxers, looking around with irritation all over his face; pissed. "What is it now?" He groaned, and I wanted to beat him up, there and then. Instead, the anger evaporated, and I broke down, screaming at him. "Why? You betrayed me! You told her even when I told you I'd tell her myself. You didn't even warn me you were going to tell her. Why? Fucking why?" I continued to sob as he sighed, "I don't have time for this. I can't lie to your mother, and she was asking why we're spending so much time together. I had to tell her." I laughed for a second. It's so odd for us to spend time together that she had to question it.

When I realised my emotions would be fuckall in this spat, I resolved myself to look into his eyes and said, "I hate you." before storming off to my room. My mother came in seconds later, and told me to stop crying, that all of this would be for my own good, that I should think of how good I'd feel when I was healed. I couldn't form any coherent sound to respond to her. I just kept sobbing, squealing, and snorting like a fucking pig. When she started to wring her hands, tears pooling in her own eyes, I wailed. "I just want to be alone. I want to go. I want to go. I'm so tired." To which she retorted, suddenly angry, "So you want to die, shey? If you kill yourself, it'll be even worse for you than it is now," and she stomped out of the room, finally leaving me alone. I sobbed the whole night, asking God to just take me. Put me out of my misery.

When the dust had settled a little, move past the following drama: my mother crying, constantly blaming me for not telling her sooner, and my father being unable to meet my eyes, plus walking on eggshells around my siblings, who I wasn't sure if they knew yet how my world was crashing in on me. I started conversion therapy. Cue Diazepam, Christian lectures, books that only helped to cement my self-hate and the other thingamajiggas. By this point, I was numb. Numb to myself, numb to the external. I was done with people, family, me.

Every time I came home and my family asked if it was working, hopeful for their son to be restored to the image they had of him, the one alive in their minds, I would mumble yes. They were so sure that they were fixing me, yet I alone knew just how I was dying internally—a slow, wicked, and painful death. I had rationed food, fasting to dislodge the devil, took the pills meant to sedate

my demons, whatever. I attended all the healing services and still didn't feel that mystical call to straightness.

One day, fed up with all the bullshit, I told my accountability in a rather haughty manner how I let a guy knock me up. I didn't even like the guy; I just wanted to feel something, anything. He began to rage about how I wasn't even trying, and that's why I wasn't changing. LOL - not trying?

The reason that conversion camp failed, amongst other science-backed reasons, is that I simply feel too much. I feel too much to have anyone push my propensity for love to the deepest caves of ignorance, where the sun doesn't shine. Against my better judgement, I had gone along with every treatment, crying, praying, reading, denouncing, doing everything I could possibly fucking do to be *normal!* When I looked in a mirror, I would submit myself to all forms of verbal retorts, letting myself know how ugly and wretched I was, so that when I came across someone like me, I knew to call them what they were. Ugly and wretched.

In an attempt to have God in my life, I spent a week locked up in church. People would come and go, service would happen, but I'd stay behind with no food: just me, my journal, and a Bible. I stayed silent every day, hoping to feel the spirit of God, for him to tell me that I'd be okay and that I'm loved. Nothing. Whenever I felt a stream of breeze flow through the windows and caress my cheeks, I would imagine it was God speaking to me, and I would embrace it, crying and praying fervently for him to heal me, to make me a new person, that I was willing to be his most excellent servant.

I know how defeated I felt on the last day; Hungry, parched, unchanged, and all I wanted to do was scream at the injustice of the world, to scream the building down. When I felt that bitter, I'd remind myself to calm down, that it could be worse. God could have given me cancer, made me a starving child in the ruins of Gaza. Instead, he gave me a simple test. To resist my desires, like my father would say:

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

I wasn't resisting desire. I was resisting self, and I was dying.

PART FIVE

DEATH

CUE: Shrike By Hozier

SOFT REQUIEM FOR A DEPARTED SOUL

My accountability partner told my parents about my sexual renegade, and their reaction changed the way I view sex till date. They said to me in sorry-angry voices that gay people are responsible for the HIV/AIDS epidemic and that they're the largest transmitters of the disease to date, warning me that if I continued this *lifestyle*, God would strike me with it or worse. I'm well educated on sex and STDs, I know how to prevent them, and I know that people with them deserve love regardless. Everybody deserves love, plus I'd even gotten tested a few times. The thing is, I'm so used to not believing that I deserve love or that I can find it, that I thought that if God gave me HIV, it would be the last straw in my journey to self-love and to be seen as lovable by others. Queer, neurodivergent, and HIV+ didn't seem like a good look for me.

My parents continued to pathologize my sexuality by blaming it on the chef, and I believed them. I needed to. I believed that with the way I was brought up, there was no logical way that I would be romantically attracted to my own gender, but that's the funny thing about love, huh. It's beyond logic.

My family agreed that conversion therapy was too aggressive. Mentally, I had already fallen apart, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to find joy in things; food, games, friends. Nothing.

My parents got me a “Life Coach”, another accountability partner, and a Christian man with experience in raising boys the right way, who would help me walk the path to straightness. On the first day, he let my mom(Dad didn’t want to be there) know that at the stage I was, the chances of me becoming straight, were very slim, but the best that I could do would be to find an understanding girl, who would love me, but understand that I can’t love her back like that, but we’d have kids and a *normal* life. I wondered why I’d ever do that to a girl. Trap her in a loveless marriage and deny me and her the chance to experience the fullness of our humanity.

Still, I went along with his program out of desperation. The coach was so friendly with me; he acted like he understood my situation, to the point where I believed that my salvation had finally come. I thought that he’d be the one to *realign* me. He told me that all he could do was help and act as a guide; ultimately, the only way to convert would be to immerse myself fully in my *healing* and be transparent with him about my journey.

It often felt so humiliating, to tell him about my latest attraction of the week, whether it was a beautiful woman that I’d seen on the road who I thought would be a nice lay, still, at the end, I wouldn’t be able to connect with her romantically, or the guy I’d see at the mall, and I would envision a whole life with him: married, a dog, and successful careers. Finally happy.

He kept reiterating that I had to resist the latter thoughts, and told me in a moment of *vulnerability*, how growing up, he had struggled with porn addiction, yet, with God and sheer will, he overcame it, and so could I. I wondered how possibly porn addiction and same-sex attraction correlated; two ultimately different things, one a mental battle and the other, a part of you—your identity. Regardless, I continued our program.

On one of our meetings, he handed me the Romans, Genesis, and Leviticus trifecta on the church’s stance on homosexuality. He then asked me if I knew that I have a problem. I told him yes, and he smiled, saying that the first step to deliverance was to understand that you have a problem. We often had lunch together, on his tab, and he’d try to help me understand the root of my trauma, like I wasn’t looking at one source. Most of the time, I let my mind wander elsewhere as he’d talk, daydreaming about a world where I could be normal, just human.

Somedays, he said things that resonated with me, and I’d believe his counsel was working, that in a bit of time, I’d be alright again. I even practiced

the testimony I'd give in church whenever I was alone, hopeful for that sweet day. When I got home, I'd ebulliently tell my parents that my deliverance was underway and that soon I'd be in God's good graces. Their faces would beam, and it'd be such a nice thing. The home hadn't smiled in a long time, and that's all I wanted then: a happy family.

One day, I woke up groggy, with swollen lymph nodes, and saw in the mirror that my tongue had turned a very patchy white. I immediately broke down, sobbing and scared that God's judgement had finally arrived. I didn't tell anybody anything, except my mother, whom I asked to follow me to take an HIV test. She asked why, that usual suspicion in her tone, and I told her that it was nothing, I just wanted to make sure, but she didn't sound convinced, and I knew that she knew something was up. My heart rate spiked as we drove to the clinic, tears rolling in silence down my face.

When the doctor took my blood, I could feel my heart lodged in my throat, clogging my airways with every beat and raising my blood pressure. I wasn't scared of the disease; rather, I was mortified by the idea that God would punish me like this, and of the idea that I'd be condemned to a life of further stigma.

Those 30 minutes were some of the longest of my life. I was so nervous that I couldn't even stand to be around the clinic, so we drove home. My mother told the clinic to send the results to her, not me. When the results were finally ready, my mom called me downstairs to hear the verdict.

“Positive.”

My breath caught in my lungs, the world went still as the sound of my heartbeat came into focus, bringing the fears of the past few weeks crashing on my head like toppling debris.

“No!”

My mom threw her head back, cackling, and then told me that she was joking, as she showed me the real result: Negative.

Disbelief clouded my head. What kind of sick joke was that?

She then turned serious and said, “You now know the implications of sleeping around.”

I laughed with her, legs shaking, too shocked to respond the way I'd have liked to.

When I got back to my room, I fisted the sheets, mouth full of my pillow as I tried to muffle my guttural screams. My sobs were quickly succeeded by my breathless gasps, there was so much crying these days. Was that how it was always going to be?

The weeks didn't get better; other than the now covert form of conversion therapy I was undergoing, I was still getting sicker. Rapid weight loss, loss of appetite, rashes, swollen lymph nodes, and all the other symptoms I knew came with HIV were making themselves evident. At some point, my mom muttered to herself after visiting the doctor for like the second time with no conclusive results, that maybe we should retake the HIV test to make sure everything was good. I felt so lost, so disoriented. What was going on? Why me?

When I had enough courage, I asked my mum to follow me to get tested again, but she said there was no reason to, and I was scared to get tested without a support system. If the results came in positive, my parents would berate me, telling me that it was the consequence of my sexuality. I took antibiotics, lots of them, on the doctor's orders to treat my strange sickness, but I was just getting worse. I hated the look of worry and pity my mum gave me whenever she saw me; it was the same look I gave myself in the mirror: sadness, despair, pity, contempt. I looked like a shadow, so much weight shed in so little time, a husk of the person I was.

Anytime someone would comment on my weight loss, it'd throw my whole day off, leaving me scared, irritable, and miserable, always on the verge of tears. When the headaches threatened to burst my brain, I cried to God to make my exit peaceful. Death would be a sweet kind of mercy. I was convinced that he was punishing me, and I deserved every bit of it. That's what I told myself: that all my suffering was a consequence of my sexuality and all the actions that I had taken as a result of it. Eventually, we found out that I had caught a severe case of Malaria. The worst that I had ever been affected by it.

After finishing my malaria treatment, I felt a lot better, but I wasn't convinced. I had my Dad follow me to get tested after crying to him over a phone call that I didn't want to die. The results were negative, but the effects of living it did not go away. Every day, even till now, I find myself looking in a mirror, searching my body for symptoms that don't exist, waiting for God to drop the bomb on me.

One day, my Dad came to sit me down and have a talk, with a look of concern in his eyes. "You know, some time ago, I had a dream that you had HIV," and my whole body tensed up at the mention. "I know now that it was God warning me, and I'm happy he revealed your issue to us, because it could have gotten a lot worse. This whole health scare thing you had is him warning you to stay away from homosexual tendencies, or next time it'll be worse. He might even kill you. You understand?" I nodded, defeated, tired, worn out. For such a merciful God, death might've been a mercy at that point. Far from all this terrorism.

Sometime later, my Dad came home happy about something that happened at work. I remember my Mum being so joyous about it. Later, she came to me and told me that ever since God had revealed my issue to them, my Dad had been doing better business-wise, that God was using my deliverance from same-sex attraction to uplift the family. At the time, I felt so proud, but guilty as well. My desires had been holding the family down, and their liberation now coincided with mine. It was my responsibility to ensure that I saw the journey through.

One of those evenings, my mum came up to me and told me how happy she was for my growth, for God delivering me from homosexuality. LOL. She let me know that I shouldn't take my deliverance for granted, that not many people got it, and that if I decided to return to my demonics, she would wash her hands off me and leave me to my evil. She didn't say it outright, but it was apparent. She would likely disown me.

So with a rejuvenated energy, I continued sessions with the coach, filled with spirit I was sure could only come from God. I trusted he'd make everything right, until my friend hit me up again—the one I had a crush on. I told myself, as a child of God, it was my responsibility to shun away everything that makes me want to go back and sin. Like my mother had told me as an example, of a woman who God had delivered from the strip club and how one day she went back just to see where she had come from. The spirit of the club filled her again, and her salvation was lost. I cut off my friend and told myself that it would be worth it in the kingdom of God, but no matter how many times I screeched Hallelujah, something was still unquestionably wrong with me.

The loss of my friend deepened the chasm in my soul, I had alienated the one person who had any idea what I was going through, in the name of salvation and everybody expected me to smile like the world was right. During the hymn services in church when everybody would sing of their mansion in heaven, my face would be so sully my mother would bump me and tell me to stop acting like I was the only person in the world with problems. Did this madness have any end in sight?

I had no idea how to reconcile my faith in God with how I felt. So I took to my coping mechanism and slept with a few guys and girls here and there, hating myself all over, but no more than I've hated myself throughout my life. It was time to accept the truth; I'm sexually attracted to men and women, but I could never feel the romantic attachment I could feel with a man, with a woman.

What did that make me? I'm wasn't sure yet.

PART SIX

DECONSTRUCTION

CUE: Lights Are On By Tom Rosenthal

A SONG FOR THE SPACE OF LIMBO

My mind often wanders to the days when I was forced to memorize and recite a Bible verse or get beaten or punished, and the way I abhorred the task. Maybe if I had given them a bit more enthusiasm, my life would have gone in a much better direction. No matter. We've done it all now.

Social media isn't a nice place. So many days, I find a new post hating on someone like me, convinced they're following up on a demonic agenda or the polished Christian who acts like God's legislator, demonizing someone like me under the guise of Jesus' love.

You know what they say, "Ain't no hate, like Christian love."

Real life is even worse. There's always a story on same-sex relations in Nigeria, and it's never a good one. Someone got arrested, harassed, beaten to death, burned on tires, and it hurts every single time, because that could be me. I could be getting beaten, harassed, or killed. I can't count how many times I've screamed in a shower, angry that my existence is up for debate, broken by the loss of my self-esteem.

Soon, I gave up on God, and all those memory verses I had stored up over the years seemed to evaporate with it. Why worship someone who doesn't even have someone like me in his plans for salvation? My Coach would tell me that God loves me, that he just wishes for me to stop chasing the flesh and acting on my gay desires.

What exactly does it mean to act on gay desires?

How does a straight person act on their desires?

Why is same sex attraction reduced to just the sexual aspects? To lust?

So, do I get to miss out on a fundamental part of human life? Connection in all its forms?

A straight man acts on their desires every day, in the way that they look at a girl laughing and feel love and passion. It's in the way they exchange letters and chats between themselves, in asking each other out, dating, courting, in their knowledge that they'll be married or in a relationship, and accepted as the norm. They'll be safe in their connection. What is it to act on gay desires?

Deconstructing is hard. Especially in a highly religious African home. Bad enough I like guys, even worse to say that I'm not quite sure Christianity calls to me anymore. If it ever did. It's a lonely process. One, because I couldn't tell anyone, not without catastrophic events, or some massive blowout, and two, my

family thought that I was making some miraculous comeback to faith. How could I tell them that I was scared of opening my bible, without feeling like I was choking on a double-edged sword.

Truth hurts, some random user on TikTok said when I asked if God hated Queer people.

It felt odd to wake up in the mornings and not pray, to not ask God for forgiveness for being who I am, and not to wonder if I missed a prayer so that I would know how to cross the road with extreme caution. It felt daunting when I felt scared, depressed, or even slightly sick, and didn't know whether to call out to God or something else.

Sometimes I would say, Thank you, God, when I had a little win, and then catch myself. If God exists, would he accept my thanksgiving when my heart is wrestling with the idea of him? Somedays I tried to come back to God, and feel like I was immersing myself fully in him, but my heart(and mind) always came up empty. That's the thing about deconstruction. Once you start, you can't go back, you have to see it the whole way, so that's what I did(It's what I'm doing).

To begin my deconstruction, I'd have to start with the tipping point of my faith - my sexuality.

When I look at the concept of a sin, I usually see something that causes physical and spiritual harm to the person and their external surroundings. Like lying breaks trust, alcoholics damage their body and can be dangerous to the people around them, and Queer people? Well, we simply want to love in all its aspects. Doesn't sound all that damaging or against Christ's teachings of love above all.

I began to download books and join theology discussions on the subject of LGBTQ+ people in the church, study biological and psychological journals on same-sex attraction, trying to find ground to begin to wage my war.

Psychologically, it's not a mental illness, contrary to what many people think. Good enough, I could work with that, although I do wish a little that I could call in sick for liking a dude. Biologically, Queer people and heteronormative people are normal, each just differing from each other in one way or the other, like left-handed and right-handed, which begs the question. Why the hate?

Humans are programmed to fear that which is different, to fear that which they don't understand, and I'm a mystery, I suppose. As I continued to read up, it was heartbreaking to see the devastating effects the Ronald Reagan administration had on Queer people in the Americas, hurtful to see the depths

of human wickedness. Nobody deserves this kind of hate, rejection, or demonization. Nobody.

The issue of the LGBTQ+ identity in Abrahamic faiths was a much messier area to tackle, especially since it was one of the primary sources of my shake in religious belief. Many can't agree on what the Bible says, so what is the church if the church can't even agree on its topics? The thing is the religious is political, as much as the political can be religious. It's easy to weaponise scripture to marginalize a group of people. It gave leeway to burn witches, uphold slavery, and enforce colonization.

The movie 1946 is a movie of spiritual liberation, especially for many christian queer people, it touches on how the word *Homosexual* wasn't introduced to the Bible till 1946 based off of a germanic mistranslation and how it's been used since then to demonize millions of Queer people for almost a century and condemn them to a lifetime of neglect, isolation and hatred. The movie gave me a little hope; it meant that it was possible that my suffering wasn't for God or from him, but human degradation. A sport as old as humanity itself.

I started to read deeper: The clobber verses, theology journals, pre-colonial notions of gender and sexuality, including the Greco-Roman concept of gender and sexuality, the time Jesus grew up in. The idea of sexuality in the Greco-Roman world was nowhere near the understanding we have of it today. They didn't see same-sex attraction as a thing of love, rather a thing of abuse, dominance, social hierarchy, and sexual excess, which Paul condemns. The concept of Same-sex love as we have it today fits nowhere near that ancient notion, and yet Jesus never condemned a single Queer person.

Now, it's obviously easy to take the unclobber and to accept that sexuality is older than religion, move on with my life, and be happy. However, it felt too easy, like a cop out. If it were that easy, there shouldn't be that much disagreement in the church. If my identity were a sin, I needed to make sure, so I could understand if I could walk this faith, or if my calling were elsewhere.

I continued to read books for and against same-sex attractions. The books against tended to always take the Bible verses on the surface level, like several other scriptures. Books like Unclobber, God and the gay Christian, gave me so much perspective. How could God hate love? Why would he make me like this if he were against it? Every prayer I had asked of him to change me went unanswered; my suicide attempt had failed. It couldn't all be to put up a show and marry a nice girl so that I can make other people comfortable. I also don't feel a calling to celibacy. The journey has to be so much deeper, more significant, than repressing myself to fit in.

The Bible is not a literal text. According to Christianity, it is infallible, sure, maybe, but the interpretation of Man can be flawed. The Bible has context, culture, history, politics, and the inevitable lisp of human tongue, the way we can mean the same thing and say it a million different ways, across different translations. I'd like to think that part of the problem is we see the people in the Bible as figures, not people. People capable of sarcasm, humour, anger, and yes, even mistakes.

Sexuality is older than history, older than religion. It is as much a part of the human race as skin colour variation. Just like I have a geographic tongue, the person seated to my left doesn't, like right-handed or left-handed. We can't explain them fully, but they've always existed and will continue to exist.

It's not a cop out.

It's not a trend.

It's not an agenda.

It just is.

Being Human.

Nowadays, there's always someone in my ear telling me to deny my flesh, and I tell them back, homosexuality is not an example of sexual immorality, I watch the disgust crawl over their face, making it clear. Homophobia is not some religious justification; it's humans hating something they can't understand. I can't conceptualize that a love between two people, especially one that chooses to honour God in its actions, is sinful. Then again, if it is, we'll all meet at the pearly gates and answer *individually* for our transgressions. I'd rather go to hell happy than do it twice, which is what so many have made life here feel like.

Miss me with that Hate the sin, love the sinner BS. L'enfer c'est autres.

PART SEVEN

BECOMING

CUE: I Wanna Live Forever By Alexander 23

A SONG FOR THE KNOWLEDGE OF MISPLACED GRIEF

I'm trying to find Christianity again, but oftentimes I feel like I'm leaning more towards agnosticism/Deism. These days, the reasons lie outside just sexuality, and that's okay. I still pray, whatever that counts for, and I like to think that if he has this big plan for me, if God saw me through this all, he'll call me and I'll hear it. If not, *the world kept spinning*.

I feel plenty spiritual, though. I'm becoming more in touch with myself and more aware of life. I'm tired of mourning the person I am and the person I could've been. All I've done is hurt myself, hatred more than words could ever put together. I don't find condemnation in being queer anymore, in loving whoever I decide to love, but I know many won't see it that way, and they won't change their views for a long time, if not ever. I'll lose friends, I'll lose family, especially those I thought were closest to me, but the possibility of finding new people, chosen family, who'll love me without placing conditions, is far greater, and I look forward to it.

Perhaps this letter will resonate with someone, a requiem for someone mourning themselves too, or it'll just be another material for hate. Anyway, conversion therapy did not work; wouldn't recommend it either. It had nothing to do with not praying enough, nor will I be changing myself to fit somebody's box again. as for the Christians who will and who are mourning me, the me that they want Jesus to save. Your religion has bigger problems than who I choose to love under God, and I've given this a lot of thought, mind you. God loves me as I am, and if you're adamant that my life is contrary to his will, I've said it before, I'd rather go to hell happy than do it twice. People have made life hell enough.

Something I've come to realise on the deconstruction part is the willful ignorance of many in religion. They distance themselves from their perceived temptations or spiritually weak situations and then condemn them from a distance. They know nothing of atheism, nothing of sexuality or gender, nothing of other cultures, and yet always have the loudest say in the matter. Perhaps it is something that needs to be looked into. After all, even the Bible says to test every spirit.

It doesn't always seem like it, but I'm grateful for my sexuality. It has made me more empathetic and compassionate towards people, especially those who don't fit the status quo. They've proven to me to be far more Christian in their lives than most will ever be.

If there were something I wish people could understand, it would be that:

- Sexuality is not a choice or some agenda
- If sexuality were a choice, there'd be a lot more lesbians, just cause men...

- Nobody wakes up someday and decides to put themselves through years of hate, misunderstanding, *therapy*, and whatnot so that they can shove a cock up their butt(pardon my language).
- If someone's sexuality makes you so uncomfortable you can't be their friend/family again, you're a bad friend/mother/father/son, whatever - Or you were never really theirs.
- If you're hiding behind God to hate on people, you're no better than the person you're judging.
- I no longer believe homosexuality is a sin.
- I wouldn't wish for anyone to be this way because it comes with a lot of untold hardships. Like I said, nobody deserves to be hated on.
- Being gay does not automatically mean we're attracted to everybody in our gender, the first guy we see. There's taste.
- Gay people are not the cause of STDs. Stop fucking traumatizing your kids.
- If you read all this and your bigoted opinion remains the same, I wish you the best.

Shalom, Shabbat, alhamdulillah, amen, whatever floats your boat.

To the person this will touch, you're not a case, not an issue, not a sin, not an abomination. You're human, just like the rest of us.

The story continues for me, and I hope there's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Do with that, what you will.

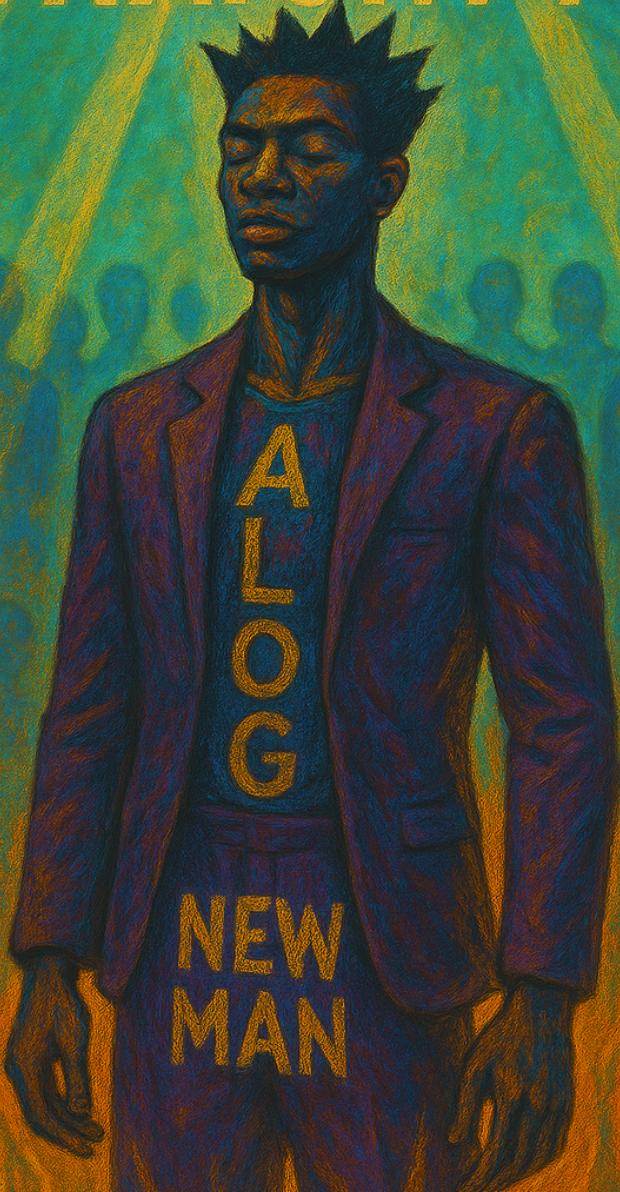
PART EIGHT

THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

CUE: OVERTURE II By Sleeping At Last

A SONG FOR THE RECOVERY OF SOUL

EULOGY FOR A STRAIGHT MAN



Healing isn't always grand.

It comes in many forms, often simple ones.

Like convincing myself I deserve love.

Unlearning and relearning faith.

Finding someone I trust enough to come out to—someone to hold a tiny part of me until I decide to show the world the real me.

And even then, I'll hold my breath, waiting for their acceptance...

But I'm learning to tell myself that regardless of their response, I am me:

Intelligent, funny, loving, sometimes selfish, a little delusional, a little broken, healing—

But human.

Always human.

I want to unlearn the behaviors I built to hide.

For all I know, my voice might not even be this deep.

(Okay, it is—but still.)

I won't be the magical end-all solution to homophobia.

But in my corner of the world, I hope my healing is enough.

For me.

For someone.

For the skeptical parent who thinks their child is doing all this to spite them.

For the religious who forget that God's love transcends all.

For the different kids:

Immigrant.

Disabled.

Queer.

Neurodivergent.

Short, tall, unconventionally attractive—whatever that means.

You are loved.

And someone, somewhere, will move heaven and earth to make space for you in their world.

Some days, healing is messy.

I relapse.

I let the fears win.

But it's in a smile, a laugh, the words of human travail,

That I believe again.

In myself.

In humanity.

In something greater than I am.

Love is love.

And man—I'm basically a unicorn.

Neurodivergent. Queer. Black. African. Human.

Find a rarer combo.

Cue: “Beautiful World” by The Chevin as lights fade out...

THIS IS NOT A COMING OUT STORY

I mean, technically it is, but it's more of a witness - A testament.

A eulogy for harmful ideas. A haunting. A name etched into grief, not glitter.

The piece doesn't beg for your acceptance, it's written in spite of it.

It's not a campaign. It's not an apology. It's what remains when all the softness has been

scraped away.

Instead, it commands you to see what it's like, to live the experience, and to look at what

you've done.

To sit in it. To squirm.

Not to *imagine*, but to feel the breath leave your lungs.

It's for the ignorant who think this is a choice to confront the weight of their dismissal.

The way a joke becomes a bruise.

The way silence can become a verdict.

The way scathing words kill.

It's for the ally to look and see that there's still so much work to be done.

That a pat on the back isn't enough.

That your friend, your colleague, your family member is still bleeding.

It's for the people like me—to know they're not alone.

To hear someone say: *I made it this far. You can too.*

And it's for the friends and families who gave up on people like us—to know what that

did.

What was lost.

What could have lived.

What is.

It hurts.

And we can do better.

We have to.

The World is big enough for everybody.

Let's stop making it feel so small.

Also, if you loved the playlist, there are more songs on it.

You can now play it in shuffle, straight, however you'd like it.

LATE DEDICATION

To all those who left the faith. You're the ones that wanted it the most.