

FIGHT

(Fighting Intolerance Gathering Hidden Truth)

By
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Prologue

Long ago things were different. That was before the Great Equality Experiments. History tells us things were bad for many people, and no one treated each other fairly and equally. There was low tolerance, and people who were different in any way weren't accepted. The Great Equality Experiment was the crazy, last resort idea, that ended the Second Civil War. It was a seven year war fought over homosexual marriage rights. In the end the society fell apart, making the Great Equality Experiment the only option. That was long ago, and now we no longer think of it as an experiment, but a way of life. The people are comfortable and use to this safe lifestyle, so no one wants to go back to the way things were before. At first it was just a city, but slowly it spread to include the whole country, and everyone's happier now. Everyone is homosexual, and it's forbidden to be heterosexual, or act in a heterosexual manner.

The first Great Equality Experiment was a failure. People felt they were still being treated unequally and didn't have a say. The first born child between two babies of opposing gender became the Spirit. The second born was the Soulie. The two babies weren't related, but would grow up as friends. Soulies weren't allowed to date or marry, but would follow their Spirit around and live with them. When the Spirit got married and wanted to have kids, they would have kids with the Soulies. The kids would be raised by the Spirits, and the Soulies were kind of like nannies or babysitters. Naturally the Soulies didn't like that too much, and rebelled. The system lasted less than ten years, and nearly toppled the whole government when it went under. Because of this failure, our government learned what did and didn't work, to create a better society.

Now things are simple and life is good. At birth, you're paired with someone born close to you in time. That person is called your Soulie. But instead of one person being a Spirit and the other a Soulie, its simpler and both are just Soulies. Your Soulie is the person you'll reproduce with. They're announced at a big ceremony on the year of your 8th birthday. Everyone is allowed to live where they want and marry who they want (homosexual). The only time you're allowed to be "heterosexual" in any manner, is during the year of your twenty-fourth birthday, when you'll meet your Soulie to procreate, using artificial insemination. When the baby is born a coin will be flipped to determine custody. If you're single, or unmarried, the baby automatically goes to the married parent. The baby will then be raised by the person and their spouse, who may also have a baby. The parents choose how to be addressed; for example, one parent is Mother, and the other is Mom, or Father and Dad. After that between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, you can have one or two more children with your Soulie. Coins will be flipped to determine custody of additional children as well.

Jenna

I can't remember a memory that doesn't have Will in it. I've known him my whole life, and we've always been really close. Our parents are friends, so we've done a lot of things together. And then we found out we were paired. For a while things were awkward, because to an 8 year old, finding out your best friend is the person you'll have kids with is horrifying. Now, at 17, we're still best friends.

I'm bent over the sink finishing getting ready when Will appears. I look up as he sticks his head in the bathroom.

"Jenna, are you almost ready?"

I nod, "Just a minute."

I finish putting makeup on then follow him out of the room. "What are you guys doing?" I'm curious, since Will made plans without me.

"We haven't decided yet, but we're meeting at The Inn and deciding there."

Will is going on a date with Justin tonight. He and Justin set me up on a double-date with Justin's sister, Sierra. I've never talked to her but she goes to my school, and I know she's pretty.

When we get there Justin and Sierra are already waiting. Justin smiles at us.

"Hi Justin. This is Jenna. Jenna, this is Justin."

I nod politely. I've seen him around school before and we have math together.

"Hey Will. Nice to meet you Jenna. This is Sierra, my sister," turning his attention to Will, "where should we go?"

I look over at Sierra and offer a little smile. She looks me up and down, and I immediately feel self-conscious. Will and Justin have decided what to do and tell us their plan to go see a movie and get ice cream, in case we want to join them. After they leave, Sierra and I are left standing in the parking lot. Sierra still hasn't said anything. I turn back to her, thinking maybe she's just shy, but she's not there. I whirl around to see her disappearing around the corner. Running to catch up, I breathlessly ask what she wants to do tonight. "Want to go get ice cream?" In the low

light I can't tell if she turns to look at me or not. "Ok," I say slightly annoyed at her for leaving me.

I'm wondering if she doesn't like me, or if she's like this to most people. After finding an ice cream shop, we decide, well I decide, to go sit by the river.

"So, what's your favorite band?" I ask lightly, hoping to start a conversation. "Mine's the White Otterpops."

"I don't have one," she walks faster.

Looking at Sierra I can tell things aren't going to work out, but I decide to make the best of the night and have fun anyway. Rolling my eyes, I wonder how Will is doing, and hope he's having more fun than me. The evening doesn't get much better, since Sierra isn't interested in having a conversation. Instead she sits there most of the night texting people. Sighing, I text Will.

Will hows ur date? I hope youre having fun! Im not having much fun.

A few seconds later he replies.

Its great, the movie just started. No, Im not leaving so we can go home. Just do this one thing for me Jen.

I smile at his comment. Will knows me too well. Suddenly I have an idea.

Hey, would it be weird if I came and joined u guys for the movie?? I can be there in 10 minutes.

I sit there hopefully, but I don't expect him to let me. After 15 minutes his one-word answer comes back.

No.

The bell rings and I slam my locker shut, ready to go home and collapse. It's been a long day and I'm tired. Melissa comes up to me, followed by her friends. She's one of the more popular girls at our school, and we're kind of friends.

"Hey Jenna! Everyone's going to Sam's to watch a movie tonight, wanna come?"

I'm tempted, since Sam isn't allowed to have friends over very often. "I wish I could, but I can't. Will and I are going to my house after school to work on that stupid social studies project. We're not done the researching yet and it's due at the end of the

week.” *Melissa’s disappointed expression reflects my own disappointment. It sounds like fun.*

“Oh, well maybe you could still make it. We’re starting the movie at 7.” Giving me a last hopeful look, Melissa turns and walks away.

Will

...for the sake of everyone involved. I put my pencil down after reading the sentence again. Proud of my concluding statement, I look around the room. A few kids were still scribbling the ends to their essays, glancing at the clock in the corner every few seconds. My next class is social studies with Jenna. We’re writing a research paper together. As the clock slowly ticks through the last 8 minutes of class, I think about what my Mother said to me this morning before I left for school.

“You know Will, I think you spend way too much time with Jenna. It’s not normal. She’s a wonderful girl, but I don’t think you should see her as much.”

“Mother, we’re just friends! Besides, we’re doing the research paper together, so I need to work on it with her. I’ll be home for dinner.”

“See, that’s exactly what I mean. You’re doing projects together, and going on dates together, I’m just worried you’ll get in trouble.” She handed me my lunch.

“I won’t! I have a boyfriend!” I ran out the door to catch the bus to school.

“Fine, but next time I want Jenna to come here.” She shouted after me. “That way I can keep an eye on you.” I barely heard that part, though I knew I probably wasn’t supposed to have heard it.

After school that day Jenna and I go to her house to do homework. I would never admit it, but we both know she’s smarter than me, and I need help on my homework. We go around to the back door, it’s usually unlocked during the day. Walking inside we run upstairs and leave our backpacks in her room, then wander down to the kitchen. Megan is chopping ingredients for dinner. She looks up when we come in.

“Hi guys! How was school today?” Megan smiles at us. “Would you like a snack?”

“Hi Megan, that would be great! How are you?” I say, smiling back.

“Megan, school was fine. Where’s Dad?” Jenna asks, looking around.

“Your Dad’s out running errands, and your Father is still at work.”

Megan explains.

Megan is Jenna's aunt. She's single and lives with them. Being at Jenna's always makes me feel a little nervous and self-conscious, because of all the security cameras required for Megan to live with them. Although Megan is pregnant, she knows she won't get to keep the baby because she isn't married and her Soulie is.

"So Will, are you going to be staying for dinner?" Megan puts a plate of apples and peanut butter on the counter.

"No, but thanks Megan. I have to go home, Wes is having some friends over." That was half the truth. I was also remembering my Mother's warning.

"Jenna, how do you solve this?" I asked for the millionth time while we were doing homework. Sighing dramatically, Jenna put down her pencil, making a big deal of getting out of her chair and crossing the room.

"Move over. Looks like I might as well just stay here," she playfully elbowed me and collapsed on the bed.

"Jenna," I looked at her, "I have something to tell you." She glanced at me, then sat up and leaned against the wall, listening.

"Before school today, my Mother..." I was embarrassed to tell her, and felt bad. "Jenna, she thinks we spend too much time together. She's worried you'll get me in trouble. I'm not sure if she'll let us hangout as much."

"Will... I guess I'm not surprised. People don't understand we're just friends."

"Ya I guess, but I still feel bad."

"Why do you feel bad? It's not your fault!"

"Because my Mother said it."

"That's ridiculous, don't worry about it. My parents have been saying the same thing to me forever."

Without realizing it Jenna and I have moved closer. Startled, I pull back, knowing the rules strictly forbid unnecessary touching.

About a week later, Jenna and I are at my house, and she's helping me with homework again. We've been playing games with Wes, my 10 year old little brother. Jenna gets along really well with him, and he loves her.

"Will! Jenna! Dinner will be ready in ten minutes! Make sure you wash your hands before coming to the table." I can see my Mom yelling up from the bottom of the stairs, with a dishtowel in her hand.

"Okay Mom!"

A few minutes later Jenna closes her textbook and we go downstairs. Everyone is just seated at the table and about to start eating. The phone rings. Wes goes to answer it. After a few minutes he hands the phone our

Mother, who's standing behind him. After listening for a while, her expression turns grave and troubled.

Her face turns white and she says, "Yes, yes of course. I'm so sorry!" Holding the phone to her chest, she turns back to the table and looks at Jenna. "Jenna," her voice wavers, and I know something's wrong, "it's for you. Megan's on the line. She needs to talk to you. Here, you can take it in the other room if you like."

Puzzled, Jenna stands and accepts the outstretched phone, moving into the kitchen. "Hi Megan. Is something wrong?"

I watch Jenna, concerned. After a few seconds, she turns her back to us, breaking down in tears. She sinks to the floor and draws her knees to her chest, still crying. After some time Jenna returns. No one needs to ask her if things are okay.

"There's been an accident. I have to go home. Megan is coming to pick me up. Thank you for dinner, sorry to ruin the evening." Jenna tries to smile apologetically then runs upstairs to grab her stuff.

No one says a word as we sit at the table. Jenna leaves, leaving behind a melancholy silence. Nobody eats much that night. A few hours later I get the story from my parents. That night on his way home from work, Jenna's Father was in an accident. His vehicle was hit from the side by a larger truck and he was killed instantly. He had just called home to tell them he was on his way and would be home in a few minutes. We decided I should go see Jenna tomorrow after school, and maybe I could make her feel better.

Jenna

I won't see anyone. Not even Will. I can't believe he's gone. I think of all the memories of when I was a little girl. All the times I rode around on his shoulders while we laughed and played. Now I'll never see him again, never hold his hand when I'm scared, never read stories with him at bedtime. My thoughts are interrupted when the door creaks open. I know it's Will without looking up.

"Leave me alone."

"Jenna, look, do you um want to talk?" He pauses, hesitatingly, then crosses the room. "Hey."

Out of the corner of my eyes I see him sink to the floor next to me, and feel him brush against me. I sobbed quietly next to him. After a few seconds, Will slowly puts

his arm around me and rubs my back. With tears running down my face, I lift my head to look at him. He knows the rules. Will notices and smiles back at me. My heart stops, and for just a moment, I can almost forget the horrors of the past 24 hours. I bury my head into his chest, sobbing. For a moment he just holds me.

“It’s okay, you still have me. You’ll always have me.” I can barely hear him as he whispers in my ear. I know it’s against the rules and we could both get in trouble, but in that instant, I wish we could stay like that forever.

By now the whole school knows. People keep calling and texting and driving by our house. Everyone thinks they can help in some way, that they’ll be the one who cheers us up. But it doesn’t work like that. We all lost someone very important to us, and a phone call can’t change that. Megan lost her brother. Dad lost his husband. I lost my Father. The funeral is this weekend, on Sunday. My grandparents are flying in for it. As I think about what this means, I realize with a sinking heart that Megan will have to move out. With her brother gone, she’ll no longer be allowed to live with us because “something could happen” between her and Dad. She’ll have two months after the funeral. I wonder what she’ll do and where she’ll live.

On the day of the funeral, Will came over to help me get ready, and make sure I was okay. The house was dead quiet. My family barely exchanged greetings with Will when he arrived. I was sitting on the bed staring off into space, imagining dead times and forgotten memories, when he came into the room. He sat beside me on my bed. We just sat there for a few moments, deep in thought. It was 9 o’clock. The funeral was at 10, so I knew I should be getting ready. Without thinking, I had reached down and grabbed Will’s hand. I knew it had startled him, but before I got a chance to pull back, he squeezed my hand reassuringly. Stunned, I just sat there for a few minutes, surprised Will doesn’t remove his hand... The moment ends when my Dad calls from downstairs. I have to hurry up, or we’ll be late. I can hear the tension in his voice, and it brings tears to my eyes, hearing him this... broken, fragile.

The funeral was rough. Will stood by my side the whole time, and I couldn't have done it without him. It seemed the whole town was there. Grandma and Megan sobbed the whole time. I mostly just felt numb. I don't remember much.

Will

A few days after Jenna's Father died, I was at home doing homework. I'd just gotten home from school when I heard a knock at the door. My Mom goes to answer. It was a functionary. He's dressed in standard uniform. White shirt and black pants, a silver belt, with the lavender jacket. On the chest of his shirt is the national emblem: a lavender lambda outlined with these four words. Balance. Equality. Tolerance. Unity. This was our motto.

"Hello Functionary, what can we do for you?"

My Mother's come into the room, and she pauses to see what's going on.

"Do come in."

"Excuse me ma'am, sorry to intrude. Is your son home?"

The functionary steps inside. He fidgets uncomfortably, and looks sincerely apologetic. My heart stops as I start to panic. For a second I think of running, but Mother is watching me. Functionaries visiting your house are bad news.

"Which one?" My Mom looks around.

"Your older son, Will." He also looks around. With sweaty hands, I approached him.

"Hello Will. I'm Functionary Crother. I need to talk to you."

He hesitated uncertainly, and my parents picked up on his cues, leaving the room. We came downstairs as they were leaving, and he reluctantly followed them back out. I sat down on the coach and looked expectantly at Functionary Crother, sitting on my hands to keep them from shaking.

"Do you know why I'm here?" I shake my head no. "We have evidence that last week when your *friend* Jenna's parent died, you went over to her house to console her. We understand she was upset, and that you were only trying to help, but the rules are the rules. You rubbed her back and let her sob into your shoulder. Because of the circumstances, and this being your first offense, we'll let this be your warning. Don't let it happen again son." I noticed how he put emphasis on the word friend, and realize that maybe my Mother was right. Jenna and I are just friends, but it might not appear that way to everyone else. I look up at him as he moves to stand up.

"I'm not sure you understand why it's so important not to touch girls," he turns back to look at me. "It's important because even hugging is a sign of affection. It could lead to more, like falling in love." He walks towards the door to leave, as my parents come back into the room.

"Mr. Crother, Sir, what's the problem?" My Mother hurries to open the door for him.

"My apologies ma'am. Your son consoled his friend after her loss last week, and he was touching her. But don't worry," he added at her stricken expression, "Its just a warning. Sorry to intrude on your afternoon. Good day."

With that he ducked out the door, and was lost to the bright spring sunshine, disappearing into the street. After closing the door, my parents turned to look at me, disappointment and worry evident in their expressions.

"What was that all about Will?"

"Jenna was upset, and I just put my arm around her and rubbed her back to make her feel better. It won't happen again."

"You're right, it won't happen again." With that they turned and left me standing by the door, shocked at the past hour.

I think of calling Jenna, but think better of it. I should let my parents calm down a little before I even mention her. I know they're just worried about me, and I can understand that, although I don't like it. They need to understand I'm a teenager and need some freedom. With a shudder I think of what would happen if we were caught touching again. I'm not entirely sure what happens, but I do know no one taken away for being heterosexual has returned, at least not remotely the same person. With a start, I find myself having thought of Jenna, and what would happen to her, worrying about how she'd cope with it. Instinctively I knew that was wrong, and went upstairs, shaking my head.

That night Wes came into my room, singing the Kissing song.

"Will and Jenna sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G."

Glaring at him I kicked him and he left, grinning. It was a stupid little kid song and it didn't mean anything, but it still bugged me. I never used to care when Wes would sing it with his friends, because I always knew it was a joke, and everyone knew it. Now I'm not so sure.

Jenna

I went back to school today. It was awkward, and people either kept their distance, unsure of how to act, or drowned me in sympathy. So I just didn't talk to anyone but Will, and my best friend Olivia. Olivia and I have been friends ever since we were little girls, but we've never dated. When her Granny died last year, it was a hard time for her and I helped her get through it, so I'm glad she's repaying the favor.

Will's parents are going out on a date tonight, so he invited me over. He told me what happened with the functionary, and we both thought it was best that we don't hang out so much, at least not when they know about it. So I sneak over to his house.

I can't help smiling as I slip into his room. I know it's wrong, but there's something exhilarating and exciting about breaking the only rules I've ever known. He's lying on his bed with his laptop.

"Shhhh!" He whispers as I jump onto the bed next to him.

We're squeezed next to each other as we watch a movie, eating popcorn. It was one of those cheesy love movies, where a girl falls in love with her best friend, and things get awkward, but in the end the friend decides she loves her best friend too. We've both seen it before, but that's not the point. After the movie's over, we sit with our backs leaning against the wall.

Will

I don't pay much attention to the movie. I'm too busy thinking about Jenna being here, and what it means. I think of Justin, who I'm really starting to like. But I can't get Jenna out of the mental scenario either. I think of all the times I was taught to be who I am, and follow the rules, and be a good little boy who likes boys, not girls. I think of all the rules I've already broken. The Truth: I might like Jenna as more than a friend, and I'm scared. I don't want to disappear. And Jenna, her family is already going through a hard time, this would rip them apart forever. It's then that I notice the movie is over, and Jenna is staring at me. I look at her, and find it hard to breathe, hard to think. I forget about Wes, forget my parents will be home soon. All I can think about is Jenna.

Jenna

For a second I think about what it would mean if Will and I were....together. But the thought is shattered by thoughts of my wounded family. What it would do to them, if I let this happen. I flinch as I think of watching Rachel Adams dragged out of school, screaming and struggling, having been caught throwing herself on the football quarterback. That was the last time I saw either of them. Their families moved, never heard of again. Will recoils slightly when I flinch. I smile back at him warmly, and the scarring memory is washed away, like the waves on the beach on a perfect day. My Secret: I've only been kissed once, in 7th grade, and it was a dare. Only two people know, me and Olivia, who shared it with me. I like Will, and I realize now that I have for some time.

Will

I know what's coming, as I see her lean towards me. For a moment I panic, as I realize I'm leaning back. I've never kissed a girl; don't know any boys who have. If touching is forbidden, kissing is an immediate Removal. Removal from society, removal from everything I've ever known. But I still lean towards Jenna. Because right now, I want this.

Jenna

I smile a little, as I see how much he wants this. Kissing Will is just like I've always imagined kissing would be like. For me, time stops. I can tell Will's had a lot of practice kissing. His lips are soft against mine. The room feels hot, and I can think of is the kiss. I want to stay here forever, with Will. I know the chances of being caught are high, but I don't care. Briefly I think of running away, finding what is outside the society, living in a world that lets me be me. Right now that sounds like the best thing in the world, being with Will. My heart is pounding in my chest. This is the most dangerous and exhilarating thing I've ever done.

Will

Kissing Jenna is nothing like kissing a boyfriend. A boyfriend's safe, and you feel satisfaction, following the rules. But this is the opposite of that. It's adrenaline and fear and happiness, and... impossible to explain. She's slow, but her lips are so warm, and taste like the cherry lipgloss she was wearing. It was the best kiss I've ever had. I can't explain it, but you'd know what I meant if you were there, which, unfortunately, Wes was. I hadn't even noticed when the door opened, and I curse myself for not stopping the events that would follow. Wes didn't need to say anything for me to realize he was standing in the doorway. Wes has never been quiet when opening doors, and he never shut ups, until now. I whipped around, to see him standing there, with an open mouth, shaking. I knew he was afraid, but so was I.

"Wes!"

I jump off the bed as he runs. I hear a car in the driveway, and know it's too late. Jenna is standing beside me.

Will

I know they're coming. They'll be here soon. I stare out the window, and watch them approach the house. Jenna is gone, and I'll be gone soon too. My parents and Wes stand beside me. I'm sorry to have let them down, to have shamed them. I never wanted it to end like this. They're coming for me now, like they did for Jenna. I don't know what's going to happen, but it's not good. As I think over the evening, I'm surprised to find I don't regret a thing, except for losing her. Before I knew it, she was gone, out the back door and running. She'll never give in, never stop fighting. I admire her courage, her strength. I think of Jenna, and I resolve to be like her, and fight like her, to fight for her. It's then, in my final moments, that I realize the truth of our society. I see it for what it really is, lies that cling to us everywhere we go. Our society is based around equality, but I see nothing equal in the way we live. This was supposed to solve the problems of the previous society, a society where homosexuals were oppressed, but instead our society just turned into a mirror image that's no better. We have Equality, but not Tolerance. Now I can see the difference, and understand where our society went wrong.

Jenna

I wake to white. White walls. White ceiling. White floor. White clothes. White memories. I'm sitting in a room after a surgery. I feel angry, I feel violated. Something is missing, something personal. Someone. I remember running home, hugging my family, being taken away. Now I finally know what happens when you're taken away, and I realize the unfairness. This society is not equal or tolerant; I'm not accepted and I don't belong. I can't be with him. I don't remember him, but I know he's real. My someone, my memory. He's been stolen, but the game has begun. I know he's out there, somewhere. I can feel it, and it gives me hope. He's out there, and I'll find him. I won't stop until I find him, wherever he is. I will find him, and together we'll fight for equality, for tolerance, and for our freedom.