HUMAN

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**Cast Of Characters:**

Setting: Unspecific, though with a focused feeling.

Synopsis: A college student recounts a troubling memory and, in the process, faces realizations about the nature of hatred, humanity, and his own inner strength.
Will:

Queer. You think I can’t hear what you say behind my back.
Faggot. Maybe you want me to hear this. I can’t find a good reason why, but maybe you do.
Rump Ranger. Sure, it sounds kind of funny. Honestly it’s a little bit absurd.
Still, that doesn’t change what you mean by it.

If you ask me whether these things offend me, I’d probably say they don’t and laugh along. I don’t want to be a drama queen. But I’d be lying. You may not realize or even mean to, but every joke, every comment, every ignorant name hurts. I see the wary looks.

I try not to let it get to me and tune it all out, but things can change in an instant. Things change when these jokes cease to be just jokes, but actual sentiment. Things change when the hateful words turn into hateful actions. Things change when you’re so scared that you refuse to walk down the street alone at night. When you’re terrified of every person you pass.

Last April, I was walking home from a party. The party was still going, but I was feeling kind of off, so I decided to head home early. Normally, I wouldn’t walk home alone but I had taken this same walk a thousand times before. I figured it would be no big deal.

About halfway back to my apartment there’s this park. Johnson Park. I have to walk through the park in order to get home, or else add another fifteen minutes to my trip, so I walk through the park. Again, I’d done this so often before that I kept going as usual. Well, there was this group of guys in the park. They were clearly drunk. Hell, half of them were pissing right there on the ground. Deep down, I knew that I should have just taken the extra fifteen minutes and steered right clear of them, but I wanted to get home fast, so I didn’t.

One of them turned around and pointed at me. I vaguely recognized his face from one of the classes I’d taken. He turned to me and gave me this…look. Then he asked, “You want this faggot?” I feel so stupid now, but I didn’t know what he meant. I didn’t even really know him. That’s when I noticed that his pants zipper was open. I tried to go quickly past them, pretending I didn’t hear what he’d said, but the others started calling after me. Then they started following me.

(Building) I walked faster, almost running, almost out of the park, almost to someplace more exposed, but then they ran after me. And I was running. And I felt a hand
grab my shoulder and then there were more hands and I was on the ground and all I could feel was arms and legs hitting my body and someone, I think the boy I recognized, holding my face to the ground. I heard a voice I didn’t recognize say, “Give him what he wants.” I felt my pants slipping down, I felt grabbing, heard the sound of a packet being ripped open. Any sound I tried to make was drowned out by their laughter. Then something just (pause) snapped.

Honestly, I don’t remember exactly how I managed to break free; it was all such a blur. I was lucky as is to even get away. But I do remember some things. I remember I didn’t sleep that night. I remember I blamed myself, my stupid impatience, for what happened that night. I remember falling through the threshold of my apartment, the keys shaking violently in my hands, and sobbing right there. I never saw that guy again. Any of them.

For the longest time, I would have nightmares about it all. If I’m being completely truthful, I still do, sometimes. That one night consumed my entire life. I was terrified of seeing one of them around campus and reliving it all over again. I refused to leave my room, let alone the apartment. I stopped going to my classes. I stopped talking to any of my friends. Before long, I was flunking all my classes. Everything just kept building and building, until I found myself seriously considering transferring schools, or just dropping out altogether. Anything to stop that terrible night from repeating over and over every time I shut my eyes. I desperately wanted to run away from it all, and forget about it somehow. But I couldn’t bring myself to do it; something kept holding me back. Maybe it was my rebel streak, but I couldn’t help but feel that, by scaring me off, they had won.

I realize now, by letting them have such an effect on me, I willingly gave them control over my life. By allowing them to have the power that they were trying to take away from me, I was letting them win. I think that’s when I finally realized that no amount of time was going to make me magically forget it all. I had to take back my life. The solution wasn’t to ignore the things that had occurred, but rather to come to terms with what happened and find some way to learn from it. A friend once told me that being a victim is a choice you make. You can dwell on the things that hurt you, or you can do something about it. (Resolute pause) And so I choose to speak up. I know that things like what I went through are not rare, isolated occurrences. Even today, hate crimes occur a lot more than you’d like to think they do. While I know that it’s unrealistic for everyone in the world to suddenly get along and accept each other, there are small changes that we can do.
What happened to me, plain and simply, comes down to a single word: Homophobia. That’s what my attacker was: a hateful, homophobic monster that was afraid of what he didn’t understand and took that out on the first fag he could find. Whether intentional or not, you breed that very same hate when you call me a fairy, or fruitcake, or fag. Even if you’re joking, it only makes it seem like it’s okay for others to say those things and really mean it. All that those words do is bring out the most vile, disgusting parts of humanity. Worse, those words lead to action. A lot. Disagree with how I choose to live my life, that’s fine. I’m not saying anyone has to like it, but respect my humanity. I’m a human being just like you, regardless of whether I choose to kiss another man instead of a woman. No human being should ever have to experience what happened to me that night.

(Head held high) I am a homosexual man and I could not be more proud of it. You can choose to call me a fag! You can choose to live in that world of ignorance and hate, and I can’t stop you. But I don’t have time for that. I will continue to live my life how I want to, and I refuse to live in fear anymore. People like that monster are just going to have to deal with that. It is my life to live.