

Dandelions

Once in a green grassy school yard
He gave his friend a dandelion
And whispered, "You're pretty like this flower."
Because he wanted to see him smile.

And none of the other kids noticed
And the teachers chatted about how cute
That he was so sensitive
And they were such good friends
And when his parents heard
Their eyebrows raised
And they said nothing
But were sure to take him to church that Sunday.
That was the year he learned about God
And was told that God loved everyone the same

And the songs they sang were about charity
And he felt like Jesus was inside him
When he played house with the girls on the playground
and kickball with the boys
And believed God would always keep him safe.

Once on a commercial holiday
He gave a boy a daisy
With the note, "I picked this special for you."
Because that's what people did

And it made the boy blush hot pink
While the other kids laughed and laughed
And the teacher told him it wasn't fair
To give a Valentine to just one person
And sent a note home
Where his parents,
Their eyebrows raised,
Said nothing
But sent him to a special camp that summer.
That was the year he was baptized into the church
And told that some kinds of love are sinful

And his pastor led prayer every evening
And shouted praise at the heavens
Because he wanted to be sure he had God's attention
And he tried to feel the Holy Ghost
And to cry out in rapture with the group
And willed himself to forget the pain in his father's eyes
When he asked why the other kids called him a sissy.

Once at a senior dance recital
A girl gave him a bouquet
and a long tongue-kiss
And a card that said she loved him

Because he had been inside her one time
And it made him feel like a filthy liar

While the crowd stood and cheered
And the teacher told him how proud she was
That he had come so far and worked so hard
And sent home a performance tape
For his parents to watch,
Eyebrows raised,
And say how nice it was that he finally had a girlfriend
That was the year he learned about the boy in Wyoming who was beaten bloody
And tied to a fence and set on fire
And left to die
And told his classmates he thought fags deserved AIDS
Because he didn't want to seem like one of *them*

And prayed every night for God to take away the thoughts
And told himself he enjoyed touching girls
With shaky, sweaty hands
And he went to a Bible study every week
And pretended to understand what his pastor meant
That the gays had some agenda other than to be left alone
And spent hours reading the paragraphs over
And over
Because he wanted to believe God would not make him this way
Without some sort of explanation or cure

Once on a college campus
He gave a man a rose
And a promise to always be faithful
Because that's what people in love do

And they wanted to put it on paper
And tell all their friends
And their families
And be able to hold hands in public
That was the year his parents told him to not come home for Christmas
And said they could love the sinner
Without welcoming the sin into their home

And they sounded just like his pastor
And his mother cried
And asked how he could do this to them
And he walked all the way back to the airport
Because he couldn't afford a taxi
And his parents wouldn't even look him in the eye
And he realized he couldn't remember the words anymore
To the Sunday school songs about charity
And wouldn't believe them even if he could

Once in a hospital waiting room
He gave flowers to a nurse
With a "Get Well Soon" Hallmark card
And asked her to take it to her patient
Because only family members are allowed visits in the ICU

That was the year he learned "sexual orientation is not a protected class"
And that "crimes motivated by hate are not necessarily hate crimes"
(If you are a damned faggot)
And that the police would only take an assault report

Because technically they had to
And they would fill out all the proper paperwork
And nothing would ever be done about it

And he tried to see his boyfriend through the tiny window
And he prayed for the first time in years
And tried to explain to God
That he didn't blame him for the ways people hurt each other
And just wanted his lover to live

That's why when he put flowers on the grave
He brought a Bible
And read the parts about charity out loud
Because he needed to believe there was still some good

And he saw on the stone it said "Loving husband"
And wished it had been true
Because then he could at least have collected insurance
And a few days off work to grieve
And a final kiss goodbye.
And so he lay down in the grass by the dandelions
And gave his body to them for just a moment
Because he knew that soon he would have to get up

And keep going on alone.