

They're singing and she's enchanted.

Mouths open, bellowing voices from stomachs rise into the air. She had always wondered how their songs, their word, their Bible could be so impactful. She had thought that no one really was connected to the church. It was more of an obligatory visit on Sundays, where she would bow her head, close her eyes for a minute or two and go along with the rest of her day. It never really moved her. Sure when she was preparing for a test or riding a scary rollercoaster she would hurriedly rush a prayer, but still, she never saw why others wept and raised their hands in an Amen. But now she's swaying. She's swaying with the voices that fill the room. It really is beautiful. To hear their songs. To hear the passion. To feel so connected with everyone and everything.

She stood there in their words. She stood and listened. Listened to their hearts and prayers. It felt somewhat invasive. Like a stranger listening in to someone else's home. But it was intriguing to see such devotion in real life. She was intrigued. Truly intrigued.

They're preaching and she's at the edge of her seat.

She would admit she felt somewhat uncomfortable. It did not feel like she belonged here. Everyone seemed so confident in their faith. Confident that God had saved them. Confident that they have to spread the word of God. Confident that others who did not believe in God needed to be changed. She felt like an imposter as she nodded to their words and hummed along with their songs. But she was intrigued. It was interesting to put a face to the preaching she has seen online. She never thought she'd meet people who full-heartedly and confidently believed in God. She had thought that everyone was like her, people who thought that God was a nice idea but deep down knew that he didn't exist. Yet the people sitting in front of her were *so* sure that He existed and that He loved them.

So she sits there. Staring at the movement of the preacher, how he scrunches his face to prove a point. This was weird. But it's nice at the same time. She liked it. It felt so warm and comfortable. She never thought she would feel like this inside a church. But it really was nice. It all just seemed so lovely and so inviting. She liked it.

They're yelling and she's in disbelief.

The pastor's face is growing redder. His voice was louder. His face scrunches more frequently. He seems angry. So angry. She doesn't know why. He's preaching how unnatural, how defiant, how un-Christian those who aren't heterosexuals are. She can't believe it. He can't believe that queer people would even dare claim their sexual identity. They must only care for themselves. They do not care for God. She is stunned. Shocked into silence. Their passion felt deafening.

Their confidence felt uncomfortable. Their preaching felt humiliating. But more than anything, she was just shocked. Shocked that others actually believed in this. Shocked that such nice people believed such bigotry. Shocked that these walls that felt so inviting were now suffocating her. Shocked that the very people who welcomed her were now nodding their heads as the pastor condemned those like her to hell.

They're smiling and she never felt this angry.

Everyone seems so in unison as they nod their heads and smile in an embrace for each other. Their questions were answered. Their faith renewed. Yet there she sat. Sitting there her body on edge, her face tight in hopes of concealing any emotion, her mouth glued shut. Their happy faces felt like a slap in the face. She couldn't believe this.

"If someone was so confident in their relationship with Christ, why would just the existence of queer people be such a threat to Christianity?"

She had thought about this question over and over in her head. Attempting to make it as neutral, as God-loving, as Christian as she could. She could barely hold herself together when she spoke. Yet she did. Maybe she had a hope that if she just reasoned them out of this thinking, all will be fine. She clung to this small hope when she approached the pastor. But he looked her in the eye and continued to preach how there were always sinners in the world therefore we have to help them survive their struggle.

How silly. How stupid was she? To assume that she could talk them out of their fundamental belief that queer people were sinners. No nuance nor depth to it. Queer people were sinners. They were all sinners. She was a sinner.

It shook her to the core. She felt so sick as she faked a laugh that "yes she understood." She thought that she would throw up. Honestly. She could puke.

She puked up her tears and her words as she tried to explain what had happened to her friends. She didn't want to cry. She hated when she cried. But she couldn't help it. Her eyes puked tears, salty tears. Her tongue dropped word after word as she tried to capture this horrid, terrible feeling. She was unsuccessful in articulating how her mind felt like exploding, how her body felt physically numb, how she was trying to smile and laugh everything away but she couldn't bring the corners of her mouth up, how sick, so sick she felt, how nervous she was surrounded by these churchgoers, how absolutely disgusting she felt as she looked straight into the eyes of the people calling her a sinner, how pathetic she felt as she nervously laughed along with the pastor, how weak she felt, how useless she felt, how there was suddenly a new weight on her shoulders, how

she felt there was something to hide, how ashamed she felt, how tired she felt, how uncomfortable she felt, how angry she was, how devastated she was.

They're gone and she doesn't know what to do.

She sits in their aftermath. It's so exhausting to try justifying yourself, your right to exist, your identity, your whole being.

It's so so tiring.

Please believe her,

*she is just so tired of this.*