

The First Summer

Contemporary Literature Portfolio

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The First Summer is an excerpt of Matthew Griffin's debut novel "Hide", which can also stand as a short story, written in 2016. The setting is North Carolina, USA, around the year 1946. It paints a picture of the simple moments between Frank Clifton and Wendell Wilson, a couple who have to hide (hence, the title of the novel) from other people because of homophobia. It clearly shows the difference between the treatment that straight couples and same-sex couples get from society.

The story opened with a scene of Frank and Wendell at the beach, playing in the sand and splashing in water. At the beach, they can be themselves because there are not many people there; at least none who knows them.

For queer people, simple acts of intimacy and love (such as literal sleeping in a bed together or even casual physical affection) can carry heightened tension and fear. Queer couples have to suppress their desire to show their physical affection to their loved ones, and only be able to do so in private. Meanwhile, straight couples can hold hands and kiss in public without fear at all.

The story continues to show the level of cautiousness that Frank and Wendell have to perform in order to not be found out by unaccepting and judgmental people.

*We're not together in any of the photographs. It was reckless enough just to walk out in the open and the sun like that without going and asking some stranger, who might not turn out to be one after all when you got close enough, to take our picture. But we've still got all of them, in a cedar box at the top of the closet, with his medals from the war and his mama's wedding rings, and as tenuously as they link us, **they're the only real evidence that any of it ever happened**, that we were ever even in the same vicinity. The rest we got rid of, if it ever existed at all. We never wrote each other love letters, anything someone might find, and he never came to my shop at the same time two days in a row, or by the same path through the downtown streets and alleys. Once I went to throw some carcasses in the trash can out back—the big noticeable ones I had to haul off myself, but the smaller ones, squirrels and possums and owls, I tossed in the trash can and nobody was the wiser—only to find him crawling on hand and knee down the alley to stay below the line of sight of some poor tenement family eating their gruel in the window above. **"So nobody can establish a pattern,"** he said, real gruff and clipped, looking up at me from the ground.*

They can't keep any photographs of them. Walking out in the open feels reckless and dangerous. They even have to go through the trouble of meeting in secret. Straight couples will never have to do this (at least, it wouldn't be because of their sexual orientation).

He was the most worried about his mama. She was always trying to send him courting some girl she'd just met, and talking about how empty that old house felt, and how she sure would like to have some grandchildren someday to fill it back up.

But I didn't blame him. For protecting her, for protecting himself. He'd lost enough already, felt enough pain. I didn't want him to know how it felt to fumble for an excuse, to stammer and redden and try to explain without explaining the compromised position in which he'd been found; I didn't want him to see the change in his mother's eyes as the stain of understanding spread through them, seeping back through every memory and forward into every hope, so that no matter which way she looked, every sight of him was tinged with filth and soaked in sorrow.

One of them also has to hide their relationship from his mother, due to fear of disappointing her and the risk of losing her love. This is not a strange thing in the LGBT+ community, to hide a big part of who they are from their loved ones out of fear of not being accepted. Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe also deals with this exact issue, when Dante is afraid to come out to his parents because he doesn't want to disappoint them.

The First Summer is an honest and emotional story. It's not exactly political, but still conveys the yearning of LGBT+ people around the world to get true equality.