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Future Tense: Iowa Looks Ahead

Equal (More or Less)?

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Equal – More or Less

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Today, I am more equal than yesterday.

Today the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) is unconstitutional. The fight isn't over, not yet, but it brings this country one step closer to real equality. Today I am just a little bit closer to being able to marry the woman of my dreams anywhere in the country of which I am a citizen. I am just a little bit closer to the same rights as the rest of the country. Today I am almost equal.

Today I can get married in this state. Not in many states, but in this one. I can file joint state taxes with my partner. I can visit her in the hospital were she sick, hurt or dying. We can adopt a child. We can take in foster children. We can share benefits packages. Today my partner and I are treated in the eyes of the state laws as if we were equal to a heterosexual couple. Today, we are almost equal.

Today I am in grad school and I don't have health insurance. When I need to get my yearly checkup, I can go to Planned Parenthood or the Emma Goldman Clinic. There they will check me for the cancer that runs in my family. They'll make sure I am healthy. Today if I need birth control for any reason, whether for pregnancy prevention or other medical reasons I can get a prescription. If I was raped, I could go there and not endure victim-blaming. If I were pregnant I could discuss it with a doctor and make the decision that is best for me. Today these decisions are between me and my doctor, not the insurance companies and the government.

Today if my boss wanted to fire me just for being gay, the law would back me up. This state wouldn't allow personal ideology to determine managerial decisions. Today I still encounter people who are offended by my rainbow tie, who do a double take at my short, spiky hair and flannel shirt fashion choices. Today I still know people who truly believe I'm going straight to hell. But they can't refuse to employ me, serve me food, or give me legal advice because I love women instead of men.

Today I live in a world where the President of the United States thinks I should be able to get married. A President who thinks that a family is defined by love - not by a particular assortment of genitalia. Who thinks that anyone who is willing to serve their country shouldn't have to lie about whom they love. Who is taking a stand against the cruel bullying that leads people to tragically take their own lives. Today the President of my country considers me equal.

I'm not equal to you yet. Not quite, but almost.

That's today.

What will tomorrow bring?

In one tomorrow, the Supreme Court has completely repealed DOMA, and I am legally able to marry the woman of my dreams in every city and every state. We can file federal taxes together, and travel across state lines with our children without worry. I can continue to be openly gay at work without fear of being fired. I can extend my job benefits to my wife and children. I can chaperone field trips and sit with my child at the hospital without bringing legal proof of my right to do so.

I can continue going to Planned Parenthood or the Emma Goldman Clinic for my woman's health decisions. Or I can go to a family doctor and know that my medical needs will be covered under the insurance we have through my wife. If I find myself pregnant I can decide what to do with a doctor, knowing my government supports my right to control my own life and body.

In this future I look around and I see that things have gotten better. There are visible, positive examples of same-sex couples and untraditional families. It is no longer acceptable to bully kids who are gay, or don't gender conform. The rate of LGBTQ youth suicides has gone down, slowly but surely. As a society we are a few steps closer to embracing our differences and accepting each other. We aren't there yet, but we are moving forward.

Tomorrow I could be more equal than I am today.

But there is another tomorrow that looms on the horizon like a storm cloud slowly approaching. In this future, one day I wake up and I'm no longer married to the woman I love. Our decision to be together means nothing. The life we've built together means nothing. The daughter my wife gave birth to is suddenly not mine. Though I raised her and changed her diapers and held her when she cried, I suddenly have no rights. I can't pick her up from school or visit her in the hospital. If something were to happen to my wife, her family could come in and take everything away. Everything my wife and I built together – including our child. I'd have no right to any of it because we are suddenly no longer married. We no longer matter to the law.

In this other future Planned Parenthood is closed and teen pregnancy rates skyrocket. Now that I don't have health insurance, I won't be able to afford to go to the doctor for yearly check ups. I'm now at risk for letting a cancer diagnosis go untreated until it is too late because I can't afford preventative care. I also can't afford the birth control pills that keep medical problems at bay. If I am raped and become pregnant I won't have the option of terminating the pregnancy, even if it kills me. *Even if it actually kills me.* I won't have any rights over my own body. In this other future the government thinks it knows more about what's best for me than I do.

In this other future the inches we've gained toward equality for women have slipped away. My daughter is bombarded with images and messages, insisting she should stay home and have some kids, that if she doesn't she is worthless as a woman; that as a woman she is worth less

than a man. I will try to teach her that she is equal, but how can I succeed when the world tells us both to sit down and shut up and let the men go about their jobs?

Tomorrow I could be much less equal than I am today.

Tomorrow it could all go backwards.

Today I am more equal than I was four years ago. Today I am more equal than I was one year ago. Today I am more equal than I was yesterday.

What will I be tomorrow?