



IMTIAJ ALOM

First Time

The first time I realized I like the boy who sits next to me in math class
In a way I was taught I was not supposed to,
I ran away from said math class with an excuse of peeing.
My mind trying to take me away from a feeling I did not yet understand
My legs moving on their own accord, going to a place it knew was safe.
But not home
I did not run home.
Because sometimes safe is not home, sometimes safe is loneliness.
Because the people whose job it was to take care of me
Were teaching me that people like me were an affront to god.
And that? was before they knew.
And I was so scared of what home would be like if they ever did.
Whatever it would, it wouldn't be safe.
So the 13-year-old me was frantically looking for safety when nothing seemed
safe
And I ran to the only place of solitude I knew.
Behind my century-old school
Next to a river bluer than my tears
Under a banyan tree older than God I was offending
And a stretch of earth greener than my envy of "normal" people.
And there, in my solitude, a boy of 13 laid down and cried
And cried and cried.
Until I had no more strength to cry,
Until the river was overflowing with my tears, the tree carrying my sorrows
And the earth, keeping me grounded.
Or at least I'd like to imagine they did.
Or how did that tiny heart of a 13-year-old hold so much pain?
How could I without any help?



We Exist

We have waited too long from the sidelines,
Holding our breath, afraid to love, afraid to live,
Afraid to offend your sense of moral righteousness,
Afraid of your pointless hatred, your unjustified anger,
Afraid of you.

They say that time heals all
And maybe we were waiting for time
To heal that festering wound of your hatred.
But little did we know that the hate in you
Is a cancer no amount of time can heal
And it has only gotten worse over time
From stage one of bigotry
To stage four of murder.

Too long have we waited while you put
The chains of your intolerance on us,
While you built cages of oppression around us,
While you tried to deny us out of existence.
But we are not a picture painted in pencil
That you can expunge
Wielding that eraser of your hate speech.

Too long have we waited and No More.
No More.
Here we are now and we have always been here.
We are human like you,
Two hands like yours,
Same tongue as yours.
We bleed like you, We cry like you
We laugh like you, We love like you.

Here we are now and we are not going anywhere.
Look in our eyes and tell us we do not deserve to live.
Look at our love and tell us it's not worthy as yours.
Here we are now and we are here to fight for our rights
To fight for the things we deserve,
To fight for equal treatment,
To fight to be able to love freely
And live unafraid.
Here we are now, look and behold.
We exist.



We have always existed
And we will exist much longer than your hatred.



BIOGRAPHY

A white-collar worker by profession and a poet by passion, **Imtiaz Alom** is an expat from Bangladesh. A member of KL Poetry Share and Wordsmiths of Kuching, he has been published by poetryxhunger.com and performed in *Word of Mouth*, *If Walls Could Talk*, *Inqbate*, and *Berani Bersama*.