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My Very Own Story

A play for children

Alan Ayckbourn

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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MY VERY OWN STORY

First performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 10th August, 1991, with the following cast:

The Story-tellers

Percy Parton	Peter Bourke
Peter Patchett	Crispin Letts
Paul Peel	James Simmons
Keyboard Player	John Pattison

The Characters

Percy's Story — *The Donkey*

Rupert	James Simmons
Gorff	Robert Austin
Yerp	Jeffrey Chiswick
Mrs Yerp	Elizabeth Kelly
Frederick	Glyn Grain
Leonora	Rebecca Lacey

Peter's Story — *The Enchanted Suitor*

Frederick	Peter Bourke
Alicia	Anna Keaveney
Cecilia	Isabel Lloyd
Emilia	Elizabeth Rider

Paul's Story — *The Sorceror's Daughter*

Varius	Crispin Letts
Cecilia/Alicia	Isabel Lloyd
Alicia/Cecilia	Anna Keaveney
Emilia	Elizabeth Rider
Denzil	Gary Whitaker
Basil	Robert Austin
Village Boy	Jeffrey Chiswick

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Musical Direction by John Pattison
Designed by Juliet Nichols
Lighting by Jackie Staines

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CHARACTERS

The Story-tellers

Percy Parton
Peter Patchett
Paul Peel
Keyboard Player

Actor

The Characters

Percy's Story — *The Donkey*

Rupert (played by **Paul**)
Gorff, the coachman
Mrs Yerp
Yerp, her husband, Leonora and Frederick's retainer
Leonora
Frederick, Leonora's brother (the "donkey")

Peter's Story — *The Enchanted Suitor*

Frederick as a young man (played by **Percy**)
1st Woman
2nd Woman
Plain Woman
Cecilia, who marries Frederick
Alicia, her mother
Emilia, her sister

Paul's Story —*The Sorceror's Daughter*

Cecilia/Alicia
Alicia/Cecilia
Emilia
Varius, Alicia's husband (played by **Peter**)
Village Boy
Denzil
Basil

The action takes place on an empty stage

Time — the present

Other plays by Alan Ayckbourn published by Samuel French Ltd:

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Absurd Person Singular
Bedroom Farce
Callisto 5
A Chorus of Disapproval
Confusions
A Cut in the Rates
Ernie's Incredible Illucinations
Henceforward ...
How the Other Half Loves
Intimate Exchanges Volume 1
Intimate Exchanges Volume 2
Joking Apart
Just Between Ourselves
Living Together
Man of the Moment
Mixed Doubles (with other authors)
Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays
Mr Whatnot
The Norman Conquests
Relatively Speaking
The Revengers' Comedies
Round and Round the Garden
Season's Greetings
A Small Family Business
Suburban Strains
Table Manners
Taking Steps
Ten Times Table
This is Where We Came In
Time and Time Again
Time of My Life
Tons of Money (revised)
Way Upstream
Wolf at the Door
Woman in Mind

ACT I

A stage

A keyboard player is visible to the audience, at the side or in the orchestra pit. He plays as the audience enters

Percy sticks his head round the edge of the proscenium and signals. The keyboard player plays a fanfare. Percy disappears

Percy enters

Percy Thank you, thank you. You're very kind. Splendid. Marvellous. My name is Percy Parton and may I say straight away how delighted I was to receive your invitation to come along here today to entertain you with this, my very own story. Please remember, ladies and gentlemen, if you will, that what you are about to witness here in a few moments' time is my very own personal, individual, singular and utterly original narrative. Remember where you heard it first — from me, the horse's mouth. (*He laughs*) But seriously, enough of that and, as we often say in the magical world of the theatre, on with the show. May I first of all introduce to you the people who will be assisting me today. Taking care of music and melody, on keyboards Mr Reg Cord.

The keyboard player plays a fanfare and acknowledges the audience

Secondly, those most important people who will be taking part in my very own story — ladies and gentlemen — the actors!

The actors come on, bow briefly and go off again

Now, do bear with me, ladies and gentlemen, I have outside in the taxi — which is still ticking over, incidentally — one or two small props and additional items which we will be using to assist us with our story-telling. I won't be one moment, I promise. Perhaps in the meantime I could ask Mr Cord, if he would, to entertain you with a selection of brief musical moments. Won't be one second. Don't go away. Thank you, Mr Cord.

Percy exits

As Percy goes off, the keyboard player begins to play again, as at the start

After a moment, from a different direction, Peter sticks his head round the edge of the proscenium. He signals to the keyboard player who plays a fanfare. He disappears

Peter enters

Peter Thank you, everyone, so very much. You're most kind. I must apologize for being a tiny bit late. Blame the traffic. Hallo, my name is Peter Patchett and may I say, right at the start, how delighted I was to receive your invitation to come along here today to entertain you with this, my very own story. Never forget, ladies and gentlemen, if you will, that what you are about to witness here in just a second or two will be my own personal, unique, singular and quintessentially original narrative. Avoid cheap imitations, insist only on the original — yours truly! (*He laughs*) But enough mirth for the present and, as we often say in the wondrous world of the theatre, let's get this show on the road. May I first of all, though, introduce you to the people who will be assisting me today. Taking care of music and melody, on keyboards, Mr Bill Notes, ladies and gentlemen.

The keyboard player plays a fanfare and acknowledges the audience. He looks a bit puzzled

Secondly, those people who will be taking part in my very own story — ladies and gentlemen — the players themselves!

The actors come on, looking a little puzzled. They bow briefly and go off again

Now, you're going to have to excuse me just one second, ladies and gentlemen. I have to fetch one or two small properties and technical items from my van outside, I'm afraid. I won't be one moment. I do so apologize. Meanwhile, I will ask Mr Notes if he'd be good enough to entertain you with a few lingering magical musical moments. Won't be one second. Stay right there. Take it away, Mr Notes.

Peter exits

As Peter goes off, the keyboard player begins to play again, as at the start

After a moment, Percy hurries back on with a suitcase of props, which he puts to one side of the stage

Percy Won't keep you long. Carry on, Mr Cord.

Percy hurries off

From a different direction, Paul sticks his head round the edge of the proscenium. He signals to the keyboard player who plays a fanfare. He disappears

Paul enters, rather breathless

Paul Look, I'm terribly late I know and I do sincerely beg your pardon, all of you. I'm afraid we have British Rail to thank for this. My name is Paul Peel and believe me I'm delighted to be here at long last. Thank you for asking me. And for your patience. I won't waste a moment longer of your time. Just quickly to put you in the picture. What you're about to hear is my incomparable, unparalleled, supremely distinctive, highly individual, very own story. Beware of cheap imitations, insist on the original — me. (*He laughs*) But — no time for jokes, let us, as we show business people are wont to say, ring up the curtain. But before we do that, I must first introduce to you the people who will be assisting me today. Taking care of music and melody — on keyboards, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Brian Tune.

The keyboard player plays a fanfare and acknowledges the audience. He looks even more puzzled

And now for those special people who will be playing various roles in my very own story today — ladies and gentlemen — the performers!

The actors come on, as before, although now they seem thoroughly confused and a bit cross. They bow briefly and go off again

Listen, I'm afraid I'm going to have to crave just one more smidgin of your patience. I've got a couple of bags of stuff outside I have to bring in before we can start, I do beg your pardon. So I'm going to ask Mr Tune here if he'd mind playing you a few myriad melodies, just for a quick second. Would you mind most awfully, Mr Tune? Thank you. Won't be a tick.

Paul exits

As Paul goes off, the keyboard player begins to play again, as at the start

After a moment, Peter hurries back with a box of props which he puts at one side of the stage

Peter (*smiling at the audience*) Nearly there. Keep going, Mr Notes.

Peter exits

Percy enters, carrying another case, which he puts to one side with the other one

Percy (*smiling at the audience*) That's the lot. Just going to pay the taxi. Thank you, Mr Cord, keep up the good work.

Percy exits

Paul enters with a bag of props which he puts at the side of the stage

Paul One more. Hang on. Carry on, Mr Tune.

Paul exits

Peter enters with another box of props which he puts with the first

Peter That's it. Sorry to keep you. Just got to lock the van. Bravo, Mr Notes, thank you.

Peter exits

Percy enters

Percy All right now, thank you for waiting. And thank you, Mr Cord, thank you, Reg. A big hand for Reg Cord, ladies and gentlemen.

Percy leads the applause. The keyboard player acknowledges this

Thank you, thank you. Now. Pay close attention, if you will. My very own story. Let us take a second to imagine, ladies and gentlemen, if you will, that we are in a dark, dark wood. Imagine that.

Percy pauses dramatically, eyes closed

Peter enters

Peter (*without noticing Percy*) Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, you've been very patient, thank you again and a special big thank you to Mr Notes for keeping us all entertained. Ladies and gentlemen, on keyboards, Mr Bill Notes. Thank you.

Peter leads the applause. The keyboard player acknowledges this. Percy stares in amazement

Thank you so much, you're very generous. Now, gather round everyone please for this, my very own story. It started one bright September morning when I was ——

Percy Hey! I say. Oy!
Peter What?
Percy I say — do you mind?
Peter Sorry. Do you mind?
Percy I'm saying, do you mind?
Peter Look, do you mind?
Percy No, no, I'm asking, do you mind ——?
Peter That's what I'm asking you, do you mind ——?
Percy No, I'm the one who's doing the asking. Do you mind?
Peter Well, yes, I do mind. I certainly do mind, if you don't mind.
Percy Me? I mind. Indeed I do mind. Never mind asking me if I mind, I'm asking you, do you mind?
Peter How many more times, yes I do. I mind very much.
Percy Well, so do I. So mind out of the way.
Peter Mind it, now, mind it.
Percy No, you mind it, mate, you're the one to mind it. I've a good mind to give you a piece of my mind in a minute, mind.
Peter I don't mind. See if I mind. You're out of your mind, anyway. I've half a mind to ——
Percy A mind to what? A mind to what?
Peter Never mind. (*Muttering*) Mindless git.
Percy (*threateningly*) Now, mind your language!
Peter Mind your own business!

They stand facing each other antagonistically

Paul enters with his second bag. He fails to notice the other two

Paul Thank you so much, ladies and gentlemen, and I do promise you that will be our last delay, the very last one. And under the circumstances I think a specially big hand for our noble keyboard player, Mr Tune, is in order. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Brian Tune ...

Paul leads the applause. The keyboard player acknowledges this. Peter and Percy stand stupefied

Thank you so very much. Now, without further delay, off we go — my very own story, chapter one. Imagine if you will, one wet afternoon in June. I was just returning from ——

Percy
Peter } (*together*) Oy! I'm sorry ...

Paul (*puzzled*) Sorry?
Percy No, I'm sorry ...
Paul You're sorry? Sorry, I'm the one that should be sorry, surely ——
Peter There's no point in being sorry now, is there?

A slight pause as they stare at each other

Percy (*muttering*) Well, this is a sorry state of affairs.
Paul Sorry?
Percy Sorry, I was just ...

They look at each other. Another pause

Peter I think we ought to sort this out, don't you?
Percy We should.
Paul It's perfectly simple. I've every right to be here and you two haven't. That's the long and the short of it.
Percy Is it now?
Paul Yes.
Peter Really?
Paul It most certainly is.
Percy Please excuse us one minute, ladies and gentlemen.
Peter One moment ——
Paul Just one second. Music please, Mr Tune ——
Percy Mr Cord ——
Peter Mr Notes ——

The keyboard player, rather bewildered, starts to play feverishly

Percy (*rather quickly*) Quiet!
Peter *Quiet*!
Paul QUIET!!!

They keyboard player stops playing

Percy Listen, this can be sorted out very quickly. There's obviously been a double — triple booking here. Quite easily sorted out. No need for aggravation, I'm sure. After all, we're all members of the wonderful brotherhood of show business — (*he produces a contract from his pocket*) here we are, legal proof ... if proof is needed — (*reading*) "This agreement between on the one hand the theatre company hereinafter known as the employer and the undersigned hereinafter referred to as the entertainer" — (*skipping a bit*) diddly-diddly-doo ... "I, Percy Parton, do hereby agree ——"
Peter (*reading from an identical contract he has produced*) "... I, Peter Patchett, do hereby agree ——"
Paul (*doing likewise*) "... I, Paul Peel, do hereby agree ——"
Percy "— to abide ——"
Peter "— to abide ——"
Paul "— to abide ——"
Percy "— by ——"
Peter "— by ——"
Paul "— by ——"

They stare at each other

Percy (*grabbing Peter's contract*) Let me see that ——
Peter (*grabbing Paul's contract*) Let me see that ——
Paul (*grabbing Percy's contract*) Let me see that ——

They study the respective documents, muttering through the small print

Percy (*grabbing Paul's contract from Peter*) Let me see that ——
Peter (*grabbing Percy's contract from Paul*) Let me see that ——
Paul (*grabbing Peter's contract from Percy*) Let me see that ——

They study the respective documents, muttering as before

Percy That seems —— (*He hands Paul's contract back to Peter*)
Peter — to be —— (*He hands Percy's contract back to Paul*)

Paul — in order —— (*He hands Peter's contract back to Percy*)
All — yes.

They glance at the contracts, realize they have the wrong ones and exchange yet again

(*Together*) Yes.
Peter This needs thinking about.
Percy Yes.
Paul Yes.
Peter Mr Note ...
Percy Mr Cord ...
Paul Mr Tune ...

They ponder. The keyboard player starts to play again. He has barely started when:

Percy Just a moment!

They keyboard player stops

Peter (*startled*) What?
Paul (*similarly*) What is it?
Percy Listen, we are faced with a problem, right?
Peter Correct.
Paul True.
Percy Now, I may be wrong but it seems to me we have far too many story-tellers here.
Peter Two ——
Paul — too many.
Percy So. (*To Peter*) Either you leave ——
Paul Hear! Hear!
Peter Absolutely not ——
Percy (*to Paul*) Or you leave ——
Peter Brilliant.
Paul Out of the question ——
Percy Or I leave ——
Peter }
Paul } (*together*) Good idea.
Percy — which we won't even bother to discuss.

Slight pause

Peter So we're all staying.
Percy Exactly.
Paul Precisely.
Peter Well, we can't tell three stories, can we?
Percy Take all night.
Paul Right.
Peter In that case, we'd better all tell the same story.
Percy Well, you're certainly not going to tell my very own story.
Paul Nobody tells my very own story but me.
Peter Well, I was thinking we might tell my very own story, actually.
Percy Your very own story?
Paul Certainly not. It's yours.
Peter Just an idea.

Slight pause

An Actor enters

Actor Excuse me ...
Percy Yes?
Peter Yes?
Paul What is it?
Actor Will we be starting soon ——?
Percy In a minute ——
Actor — only the lads are getting a bit restless ——
Peter — two seconds ——
Actor —— only we've been bowing a lot, you see, but not a lot of acting ...
Paul Literally, half a second ...
Actor Sorry to trouble you.
Percy Not at all.

The Actor exits

Paul I think ——
Percy Yes?
Peter Yes?
Paul I think the only way around this, is to decide it by chance.
Percy We could draw for it.
Peter Lots?
Percy Well, once or twice. Just till we decide.
Paul I've got it. The yes or no game. We all keep talking but none of us can

say yes or no. If we say yes or no, we're out of the game. Last one in wins. What about that, then?

Percy
Peter } (*together*) No.

They keyboard player makes a gong sound. He makes this sound for each subsequent "yes" and "no" during the game

Paul Right, you're both out. I win.
Percy We weren't ready.
Peter Not ready.
Percy Anyway, it's a stupid game you can never win it.
Paul Yes, you can.

Gong

Percy Right, that's you out.
Paul I wasn't playing.
Percy (*to Peter*) You heard him, he said it, didn't he?
Peter Yes.

Gong

Percy Right that's you out too, I win.
Peter I wasn't ready.
Paul He didn't say anything, did he?
Percy Yes, he did.

Gong

Paul Right, that's you out ——
Percy Just a minute, just a minute ——
Peter All right. Start again. This is the real start. OK? The real start of the game. Both ready?
Percy (*carefully*) I am ready.
Paul I am quite ready.

Silence

Peter Somebody say something.
Percy Why?
Peter Because we can't decide the game unless somebody says something, can we?

Pause

Paul Very nice weather, isn't it?
Percy When?
Paul Lately.
Peter Where?
Paul Up — there — in the sky.

Pause

Peter (*suddenly; to Paul*) Sorry, did you say something?
Paul No.

Gong

Peter Out!
Paul That wasn't fair.
Percy Out!
Peter Just me and you.
Percy Just us.

Silence

Peter (*suddenly, as before*) Sorry. Did you say something?
Percy Who me?
Peter Yes.

Gong

Percy Out!
Peter That was cheating.
Paul Out!
Percy I win. Now, my very own story ——
Peter What do we do, then?
Paul What happens to us?
Percy I don't know. Goodbye, then.
Peter Goodbye?
Percy Off you go.
Paul Go?
Percy So long.

Peter But we ——
Percy Cheerio.
Paul We ——
Percy Ta-ta.

Paul and Peter exit reluctantly

Paul returns

Paul What about all our — (*he indicates the bags of props, etc.*)
Percy Later. You can collect them later.

Paul exits

Ladies and gentlemen, at long last My Very Own Story. It is a tragic Victorian tale entitled, *The Donkey.*

Music. The Lights change

Imagine it is night time in a dark wood, a few days before a Christmas many long forgotten years ago. It is bitterly cold, a sharp, slicing, biting wind; thick snow lies on the ground. Snow so deep that it is now almost impossible to make out the rough cart track that winds between the trunks of the huge tall trees. Very few people venture this way in weather such as this and rarely, if ever, at night. Yet it was along this very path on that day before Christmas Eve that I, Rupert Fellowes, found myself travelling alone. I was intending to spend the holidays with my brother and his family. They had recently moved away from our home and we had consequently lost touch. I was now anxious to see both him and his wife, and most especially my angelic little nephews and nieces for whom I had bought a whole trunk-load of gifts and presents. I confess though that when I set out, I had no idea what a remote and God-forsaken district they had chosen for their new home. Difficult to reach even in midsummer, the recent snow-storms had made their village all but inaccessible. Indeed, few local coachmen would agree to venture out at all and I had nearly given up hope of finding a driver. Then one particular fellow named Gorff approached me and offered his services. Had I not been so anxious for transportation, I might have realized that his willingness to convey me concealed an evil and ulterior design.

At this point the "coach" enters. It is driven by Gorff, an evil looking coachman. In the back is Paul, muffled up and unrecognizable in coat,

scarf and hat. He is shaken about as Gorff struggles with his "horses"

Gorff (*cursing*) Gwaaan ... Gooworrn ... gwaaarn, yer bleezers ... yup ... yurr ... gworrn ...

Percy This Gorff was certainly an evil-looking enough fellow but I prided myself on never judging others on first appearances. The journey was, though, one of the most thoroughly uncomfortable I had ever undergone. Gorff's coach could well have benefited from care and attention, his horses from food and better treatment, and his passengers from a little consideration.

Gorff Whooyer ... whooa ... wheeerr ... whoooorrrr!

Gorff reins back the horses and the coach stops

Percy Unexpectedly, the coach pulled up with a shuddering suddenness. I must confess the abrupt lack of motion was a considerable physical relief. I wondered what the cause of our stopping might be. I leant out of the window and called to the man.

Paul I say — I say, what's happening? Why have we stopped, coachman?

Percy The man Gorff, by way of reply, climbed down off the box seat, muttering incomprehensibly.

Gorff climbs down, muttering

Gorff Mun git down wearn stuckinasnow ...

Paul What's that you say?

Gorff Stuckinasnow ... (*He gesticulates to demonstrate*) Stuckin! Stuckin!

Paul Stuckin? Oh, stuck in ...

Gorff Ar. Stuckinasnow ...

Paul Ah! Stuck in the snow. Oh yes, quite. I see. Are we? Oh dear ...

Gorff Git darn. Mun git darn.

Paul Mun git darn?

Gorff Ye mun git darn.

Paul Mun git darn?

Gorff *Ye* mun git darn.

Paul You mean *me* mun git darn? Ah. Mun git darn?

Percy I confessed to a certain difficulty understanding the fellow.

Gorff (*insistently*) Git darn.

Paul Git darn? Git darn? What on earth can he mean? Oh, you mean get down. You want me to git darn ...?

Gorff Git darn on the grarn.

Paul On the grarn. Right. (*He climbs out*)

Percy It was bitterly cold out of the coach.
Paul Brrr!
Gorff Mun pushem. (*Demonstrating*) Pushem, see?
Paul Pushem, yes. You want me to pushem, do you?
Gorff Ar. (*He moves off and starts to climb up again*)
Paul Righty-ho. What are you going to do?
Gorff Pullem. Oi mun pullem.
Paul Oh, I see. You're going to pullem. I'll pushem, you pullem. Fair enough.
Gorff Uroit!
Paul Say when. I'm ready. (*He braces himself against the back of the coach*)
Gorff Uroit!
Paul Er — right.
Gorff (*whipping up the horses*) Giddy — or — arrr! Hup!

He moves off rapidly. Paul falls over in the snow

Gorff exits

Paul Grooo!
Percy And to my horror, before I could prevent him, the fellow had whipped up the horses and in a trice had galloped into the night, leaving me face down in the snow.
Paul Hoy!
Percy I clambered to my feet and shouted after the fellow, cursing him roundly in no uncertain terms ——
Paul (*calling after Gorff*) Rogue! Villain! Scoundrel!
Percy —but to no avail. My voice was all but lost in the increasing blizzard. I looked around me for signs of assistance but I was completely alone and helplessly lost. The knave had taken everything I owned. My hip flask, my travelling rug, all my luggage and, worse still, all the Christmas presents intended for my angelic little nephews and nieces.
Paul Blackguard! (*He shivers*)
Percy I knew if I failed to find shelter soon I would swiftly perish from the cold; but in what direction to walk, I had little idea. I was, I confess, hopelessly lost now, as the last evidence of the cart track disappeared under ever deepening snow. I walked for what seemed miles and miles; but for all I know, in circles.
Paul Help! Help!
Percy The cold wind sliced like a dagger through my clothes, my limbs grew wearier, my voice weaker ...
Paul (*feebly*) Help!

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