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OUTINGS & THE ACT

by Thomas Hescott and Matthew Baldwin

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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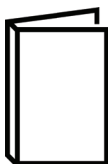
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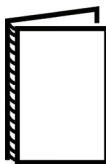


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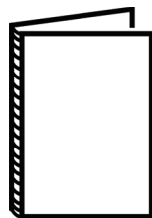
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MATTHEW BALDWIN

Matthew Baldwin is a writer and actor.

In 2013 Matthew and his colleague Thomas Hescott developed *The Act*, for Ovalhouse. Matthew was nominated for an Off West End Award for Best Actor and jointly nominated with Thomas in the category of Most Promising Playwright. In 2014 *The Act* transferred to Trafalgar Studios in the West End with Matthew reprising his role.

Also in 2014 Matthew and Thomas wrote *Outings* for James Seabright Productions, which enjoyed a successful run at the Gilded Balloon for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and subsequently a national tour and into the West End.

In 2017 he was named on the BBC's New Talent Hotlist.

Also in 2017 Matthew has written *I Miss the War*, part of the eight part series *Queers*, for BBC Four, starring Ian Gelder and directed by Mark Gatiss. This work was also performed at the Old Vic.



THOMAS HESCOTT

Thomas is a writer and a director.

In 2017 he was named on the BBC's New Talent Hotlist.

Television credits (as director) include *EastEnders*.

He directed *The Dark Room* – a short film featuring David Mitchell, Miles Jupp and Matthew Baldwin. The film premiered at the 2016 London Short Film Festival.

Theatre credits include *The Act* for Ovalhouse (as co-writer and director). The production was nominated for two Off West End Theatre Awards, including Most Promising Playwright, and transferred to the West End. He also directed the recent West End production of *Tory Boyz* by James Graham.

Other credits as director include: *Wolves at the Window* (Arcola and Off-Broadway), *The British Ambassadors Belly Dancer* (Arcola and Arts Theatre, West End) and *Anatol* (Arcola), *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* (Southwark Playhouse), *Reunion* (Bridewell) and *Our Thing* (Gate).

AUTHORS' NOTE

As part of Ovalhouse Theatre's fiftieth anniversary celebrations they commissioned five plays to celebrate five decades of counterculture. *The Act* explored gay counterculture of the 1960s – the decade that led to the partial decriminalisation of male homosexual acts.

We'd both been very aware of generations of men who had been thrust into an underground world, not through choice but through necessity – some men embracing that world, and some finding it an uncomfortable fit. We were both aware of the rights that we often took for granted that had been hard won by those who came before. But we were also acutely aware of the prejudices, misogyny and class politics that were ever present within that world. *The Act* tries to capture that world in all its glory and with all its flaws. The protagonist, Matthews, is someone for whom the audience should feel empathy, but he's also a snob, and deeply flawed – the trick is to enjoy playing him and all his flaws. He isn't a saint.

The Act is a one-man play. The audience enjoys the seamless jumps from character to character – the acting athletics is part of the fun of the piece. Staging should be kept simple. In the original production we used sound to move us from location to location and to underscore the scenes. We embraced the old-fashioned radio plays of the day, using an old microphone for the narration.

When *The Act* transferred to Trafalgar Studios in the West End we were sought out by producer James Seabright to work with him on *Outings*. In 2014 there didn't seem to be a week that went by without some celebrity coming out. James and his general manager, Oli Seadon, had spotted this trend, and were aware of how coming out had changed over the decades. They commissioned us to create a play that told real life coming-out stories from around the world.

Outings was always intended to be performed by well-known actors, comedians and celebrities. All the stories, whilst not being strictly verbatim, are real life stories – some people submitted their stories to us via a website, some we met and

interviewed, a few were people we knew already. We felt a great responsibility to represent their story as truthfully and as accurately as possible. If they're funny – it's because the person who told us the story found it funny (we all use humor with the darkest of experiences). If we're laughing in the performance, and we should be laughing, it is with the protagonist, not at them.

One of the hardest aspects of staging *Outings* is to understand that the action is about someone telling us a story – it is not about recreating that story. The “present tense” is speaker and listener in the same room. *Outings* doesn't work if you try and stage the stories fully – there are moments when other characters speak – they act as brief flashbacks – but the action of the play is someone telling someone else a story.

The original production had a rotating cast of performers, and is designed for four actors. We have kept the actor breakdown as it was originally, but there is nothing to stop a director using more actors, should they wish. When *Outings* was produced as a charity gala in the West End every story was read by a different celebrity – either way works.

Thomas Hescott and Matthew Baldwin
July 2017

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Outings was produced by James Seabright Productions and opened at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2014. It subsequently toured the UK, and in 2017 came into the West End.

Outings was performed by a rotating cast including:

Tom Allen	Julie Hesmondhalgh
Stephen K Amos	Sharon Horgan
Adèle Anderson	Luke Kempner
Simon Callow	Shappi Khorsandi
Scott Capurro	Caroline Lennon
Jo Caulfield	Nichola McAuliffe
Revd Richard Coles	Hardeep Singh Kohli
Rob Crouch	Margaret Thatcher – Queen
Jim Davidson	of Soho
Rob Deering	Zoe Lyons
Andrew Doyle	Shazia Mirza
Mark Farrelly	Adam Riches
Jade Godley	Mark Thomas
Kerry Godliman	Camille Ucan
Russell Grant	
Andrew Hayden-Smith	

Written by Thomas Hescott and Matthew Baldwin

Directed by David Grindley

Designed by Janet Bird

Lighting by Jason Taylor

Sound by Tom Lishman

The Act originally ran at Ovalhouse from 8th to 26th October 2013:

Company

Director and Writer – Thomas Hescott

Actor and Writer – Matthew Baldwin

Assistant Director – Jamie Jackson

Lighting Designer – Ed Locke

Illustrator – Gavin Dobson

Musician – Tim Saward

The Act subsequently transferred to Trafalgar Studios from 25th February to 29th March 2014.

Company

Director and Writer – Thomas Hescott

Actor and Writer – Matthew Baldwin

Assistant Director – Jamie Jackson

Lighting Designer – Ed Locke

Sound Designer – Rob Donnelly-Jackson

Illustrator – Gavin Dobson

Musician – Tim Saward

General Manager – Peter Huntley

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Rebecca Atkinson-Lord and Rachel Briscoe for commissioning *The Act*, and for their support and notes as the play developed, and to everyone at Ovalhouse for their support with the production.

Thank you to Peter Lloyd for so much insight into the characters and the world of the play.

Thank you to Peter Huntley for spotting an opportunity and transferring the play into Trafalgar Studios.

Thank you to James Seabright for commissioning us to write *Outings*, thanks to our four core cast members – Camille, Andrew, Rob and Zoe – and our director David Grindley.

We are indebted to everyone who told us their coming-out stories – some of whom we have never met – thank you for trusting us to tell your stories.

Finally thank you to Dan Usztan – the best agent we could have.

For Dean and for Haydn

OUTINGS

CHARACTERS

Outings was originally written to be performed by four actors – two male and two female. This script has kept the character breakdown as it was originally performed; however there is no reason a director working with a larger company has to keep to this character breakdown. It is entirely possible for each story to be assigned to a different actor (as we did for the West End gala).

Where it seems useful, we have given the age and accent for the character. If casting each story separately, we would advise casting as close to type (in terms of age and nationality) as you can. Of course, with four actors this becomes less relevant.

ACTOR A: Male

How Would You Come Out

A Closet Story

A Nurse's Story

A Story About ME (20s)

Four Short Stories

A Story About Treatment (nurse)

A Story About Bruises (20s)

Things Gay People Are Asked

A Jehova's Witness's Story (20s)

A Trans Story

A Football Fan's Story (20s, Leicester)

A Story About A Yoghurt Spoon

A Drama Queen's Story (20s)

ACTOR B: Female

How Would You Come Out

Two Short Stories

A Nurse's Story (mother)

A Story About Running Away (young girl)

A Daughter's Story (20s)

Four Short Stories
Things Gay People Are Asked
A Trans Story (20s, pre-transition)
A Teacher's Story (primary-school girl)
An Immigrant's Story
A Story About A Note
A Christian Story (20s)

ACTOR C: Male

How Would You Come Out
Two Short Stories (Yorkshire)
A Story About ME (older brother of narrator)
A Daughter's Story (father of a girl in her 20s)
Four Short Stories
A Story About Treatment (60s, Liverpool)
A Mother's Story (son of narrator, American)
A Trans Story (father of narrator)
A Teacher's Story (Scottish)
A Story About A Funeral
An NGO's Story (Nepali taxi driver)
An Airman's Story
A Christian Story (preacher)

ACTOR D: Female

How Would You Come Out
Two Short Stories (mother of narrator, Yorkshire)
A Story About Running Away
Four Short Stories
A Wife's Story
A Story About Treatment (narrator's mother)
A Mother's Story (American)
Things Gay People Are Asked
A Trans Story (mother of narrator)
An NGO's Story
A Story About A Yoghurt Spoon (mum of narrator)
An Immigrant's Story (Zimbabwe)
A Drama Queen's Story (mother of narrator)

There are no specific lighting and sound cues. The original production had no props – with guests reading the stories.

SCENES

ACT ONE

HOW WOULD YOU COME OUT?
A CLOSET STORY
TWO SHORT STORIES
A NURSE'S STORY
A STORY ABOUT RUNNING AWAY
A STORY ABOUT ME
A DAUGHTER'S STORY
FOUR SHORT STORIES
A WIFE'S STORY
A STORY ABOUT TREATMENT
A STORY ABOUT BRUISES
A MOTHER'S STORY

ACT TWO

THINGS GAY PEOPLE ARE ASKED
A JEHOVA'S WITNESS'S STORY
A TRANS STORY
A TEACHER'S STORY
A FOOTBALL FAN'S STORY
A STORY ABOUT A FUNERAL
AN NGO'S STORY
A STORY ABOUT A YOGHURT SPOON
AN IMMIGRANT'S STORY
AN AIRMAN'S STORY
A STORY ABOUT A NOTE
A DRAMA QUEEN'S STORY
A CHRISTIAN STORY

ACT ONE

How Would You Come Out?

ACTOR D How do people come out? Have you come out? How would you do it?

ACTOR A We set ourselves a task last year. To gather as many coming out stories as we could. From as many countries as we could, from as many generations as we could.

ACTOR C We asked people on the web, we found websites devoted to coming-out stories, we asked people on Twitter, we travelled around recording our conversations wherever we went.

ACTOR B We collected over one hundred stories. Some happy, some sad, some silly. People would often say...

ACTOR A Me? Oh my story is totally boring.

ACTOR D Before they told us something beautiful, personal and unique.

ACTOR A Wherever we went we asked the same questions. Old or young, wherever we were, the questions were the same, even if the answers weren't. We'd ask...

ACTOR C When did you know?

ACTOR D I guess I was seven.

ACTOR A I was eleven.

ACTOR C Nine.

ACTOR B Thirty-four.

ACTOR C There were some boys on the school bus. They were older than me. At night I imagined them getting it on with

girls. I gradually realized I was more into them than the girls they were with.

ACTOR A I joined the Cub Scouts to be around the other boys. I was seven.

ACTOR C Four years old. Nothing taught me.

ACTOR D My church equated gayness with selfish hedonism. I didn't feel like that so I didn't realize I was gay. At first.

ACTOR C I'd just discovered euroboy.com. That's where I found out there was a word for how I felt – that it was called gay.

ACTOR B I saw Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman and that was it for me.

ACTOR A I saw John Craven on *Newsround* and that was it for me.

ACTOR C I was about eleven or twelve I guess. I would get crushes on certain male friends. It would get extremely awkward.

ACTOR A The moment that I remember most was when I was twelve, and this boy and I were insulting each other and he said, "Well at least I'm not gay like you." And I thought, "You're right, I am."

ACTOR D I watched this girl from my class when I was thirteen dancing at my friend's bat mitzvah. I had a crush on her for the rest of the year.

ACTOR C I was doing homework on Henry VIII. I read that he was "a very handsome man in his youth", a "hunk". Curious, I googled "hunk" and what I found I liked. Very much.

ACTOR A I didn't realize two boys could be together. I thought that if I wanted to be with a boy, I'd have to become a girl. So at age four or five I was convinced I'd grow up, become a girl, and fall in love with a boy.

ACTOR B 1996. I was eight at a wedding reception. There was this girl in her teens and when I saw her, I felt the strongest,

most intense butterflies, for the first time. I couldn't stop looking at her. She had big, blue, mysterious eyes, flowing chocolate-coloured hair, and just the most alluring smile I had ever seen. I didn't talk to her, I never found out who she was and I never asked. Never saw her again.

A Closet Story

ACTOR A I've known I was gay since I was eleven but have always found it hard to talk about. It's not really because I'm gay, it's because I have never been happy with the way I look.

When I was at school I was bullied and it wasn't until my final year that I actually started to stick up for myself, but by then I had no self-confidence at all and I weighed eighteen stone. I'm still battling with my weight now and I am convinced that because I am a larger guy no one will love me.

When I was thirteen I had my first gay experience; it was with my only friend in middle school. I went to his house one Saturday and we got bored so I asked if he wanted to play poker. My friend said yes but we didn't know what we could bet so I suggested our clothes. It was the most exciting time of my life, especially because his parents were downstairs. After we both lost our clothes he suggested we experiment a little.

Over the next few years we did more and he came out to his parents, but I never. I was scared of their reaction. Also, I felt like I was disappointing them.

I've always kept people at a distance. I have come out to friends before and have been told that I will burn in hell. I always seem to worry too much what other people think and expect of me. Although I love my family, I don't want to upset them. I feel that looking the way I do, when I do tell them and if they don't accept me, then I'll be on my own with nobody in my life and nowhere to live.

I have two brothers, who each have four kids, but I still want kids of my own. I love my nieces and nephews and don't want my brothers to stop me seeing them. Why is this so hard?

It's like there are two versions of me; the one I let people see and the one I *want* them to see.

Does that make sense?

I know that this is meant to be about coming out and being OK with yourself, but how can you do that if, when you look in the mirror, you don't like what you see?

Two Short Stories

ACTOR C I was seeing a guy when I was seventeen. He was twenty-seven and a trollop! My naivety plus his promiscuity made it very difficult. We'd tried to patch things up with a soggy weekend in a tent near Scarborough.

When I got back I was having a bit of a weep in my bedroom. My mother came into my room and asked what was wrong, I didn't tell her so she told me.

ACTOR D You're involved with that Ian aren't you?

ACTOR C I burst into tears, but managed a small "yes", to which *she* replied—

ACTOR D I just can't bear to wash your pants anymore!

ACTOR B It was the summer before I went to university, and I felt like I really needed to tell my dad before I left. He's a doctor, and he always had conversations with me about contraception and birth control. We were on a bike ride and the pressure for me to come out was building.

ACTOR C (DAD) So make sure you use a condom, y'know, you don't want to be getting pregnant at university.

ACTOR B That won't be a problem, 'cause I'm gay.

It just slipped out! I hadn't planned on saying anything that day! I nearly fell off my bloody bike in the shock of it.

There was a moment of awkward silence.

ACTOR C Well.

That could change.

ACTOR B And that was it! He just changed the subject!

A Nurse's Story

ACTOR A So at school one day our homework was to get our parents to write down what they expected from us when we got older, what and who they wanted us to be, which was to be sealed and not opened until the teacher read them out in class. My mum loved being involved with stuff, and so jumped at the chance of writing down exactly what she expected from me. Did she want me to be a scientist? A doctor? A builder? A banker? Hell, a binman? The moment came to find out...

ACTOR B (MUM) I have no expectations other than to follow his dreams, his heart, his desires. Whether gay or straight, no matter what career he chooses, who he chooses to be or who he chooses to be with, I will be proud of him as I already am.

ACTOR A I could feel the eyes of the other kids boring holes deep into me wondering... Is he gay then?

Growing up, I never felt the need to come out to anyone. I never once felt that who I was was any different to who my mum or my dad were. I never once thought "I'm hiding a huge secret here, this will be a shock, I'm different to my siblings". So I didn't feel the need to come out. Well, not until the moment my mum first mentioned it.

I'm a nurse (of course I am) I was busily trying to eat in a quick lunch break, with my workmates, and the phone goes. I answer it hands free because I was trying to eat, and trying to sort paperwork at the same time, so I put my mum on speakerphone. The conversation was about me not having been home for a few nights and was everything ok, was I safe, etc.

ACTOR B So when do we get to meet this guy, I'm assuming he is your boyfriend because of how much time you spend there now? If you bring him over, it gives me a reason to get my hair done and cook a nice meal!

ACTOR A Bam. There it was. The first mention between us of me being gay, and my official outing to the world, without any help from myself.

Mum ...can I call you later?

ACTOR B (*MUM starts to break down, to cry*) Well, just let me know when you can bring him round and then I'll get my hair done. 'Cause you know it's not an issue, don't you? It's completely nothing to even think about with us, right?

ACTOR A Mum, I'm taking you off speakerphone. Why are you crying? You said it was OK?

ACTOR B I feel I must be a bad mother because you couldn't have told me earlier! I've known all your life, and I've tried to show it doesn't matter...to me, to us, but you couldn't tell me! I must have handled it wrong!

ACTOR A No, Mum, don't you see? It's because you handled it right that I had nothing to tell you. I feel no different to anyone else because of you. You couldn't have taught me better.

A Story About Running Away

ACTOR D It's my wedding day. I'm crying. Crying because I know I don't love my new husband.

At night, when I am in bed with my husband, Doug, I lie there next to him and think of Jo.

Jo was a girl I'd met at university. My parents had helped me move down to London and into the halls of residence. While my parents were still saying their goodbyes, a girl popped her head into the room and said hello.

From that moment, my whole life seemed to shift on its axis.

Jo and I became firm friends and within the first few days she told me she was gay. I was nineteen and I had never knowingly met a gay woman. Initially I was intrigued and found myself seeking her out at every opportunity. The more I saw her, the more I wanted to see her. She was like a drug to me. When Jo walked into a room, it lit up. Gradually I started to question how I felt about her.

It began to dawn on me that my feelings were far from platonic. At last I confessed how I was feeling. I think I shocked Jo at the time, as she saw me as her straight friend. Jo had a girlfriend back at home, although the relationship was pretty rocky. I started my personal campaign to win her over and eventually it paid off. The first time I slept with Jo, it was the scariest and yet the most mind-blowing experience. It switched something on inside me and that was it, I was totally hooked.

We went out with each other for three years. At this time I went through a bit of an identity crisis. I thought that if I was gay then I needed to look a certain way, so I cut all my hair off and tried to butch up. That was when I began to develop an incredible fear that my parents would find out.

When things ended with Jo, I went headlong into a mission to recreate myself. I ditched all my old friends and found new friends – ones who didn't know about my relationship. And that's when I met my husband.

Of course things end with Doug, we have three children but we can't make the marriage work. We get divorced.

I'm in a local gay bar having a drink with some friends when in walks the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. She is with a couple of friends. I can't work out if she is with either of them. We start talking and hit it off right away. The relationship quickly progresses. Within three weeks I know I am totally head over heels in love with her. I've never felt this way about anyone before, not even Jo. I decide the time has come to tell the children. They're seven, five and three. They just seem to accept that Mummy is in love with a woman.

My eldest turned rounds and says—

ACTOR B (DAUGHTER) Oh my God, my mummy is gay, how cool is that.

ACTOR D Telling my parents is a whole different experience. My mum cries down the phone and my dad refuses to speak to me. My mum keeps on going on about how I am a liar and asking how I can do this to her. My dad makes it clear he never wants to meet Sarah, my girlfriend. He tells me he doesn't want to meet her because he doesn't want to like her.

That was back in 2001. And over time my father softened, and they ended up getting on really well. Before he died he said that he saw her as his daughter-in-law. That meant so much.

My only regret is that it took me so long to realise that I couldn't run away from who I am. Coincidentally our eldest daughter has recently come out as gay at the age of nineteen. Thankfully her coming out story was a lot more straightforward. It went something like this—

ACTOR B Mum, I've got something to tell you... I think I'm gay and I've met this great girl.

ACTOR D Oh that's wonderful sweetheart, I'm really happy for you.

A Story About Me

ACTOR A And as I was lying on the operating table I thought, “if I die now no one will really know who I am.”

I’ve had excess skin tissue removed from my chest, stomach, ribcage, back, buttocks and my legs.

And I’ve had to have pockets of fat removed and my belly button and my nipples removed.

I’ve had about 20 per cent of my skin cut off.

You see when I was eleven I developed ME, which I had for seven years that stopped...anything...social life, friends anything. I recovered when I was eighteen, but I had ballooned massively. I was fat. So I then had to go on a diet and lose nine stone. But that left me very badly disfigured by all the excess skin tissue.

So I’ve spent the last ten years having reconstructive surgery.

I was fifteen when I realized – I’d felt very shut off for a long time, and then we got the Internet. That’s when I realized I was gay. I’d been stuck in my bedroom for years and I was like, “At last, finally I can see a bit of the world.” And I ended up seeing some of the wrong things, if you know what I mean? I was feeling very isolated. It was another thing that made me feel different to everyone else.

My first piece of reconstructive surgery was when I was twenty. I didn’t really realize the seriousness of the operation and I went to a local private clinic, and ended up having a very serious post-op complication. A bleed. And I woke up from the surgery to be told I was bleeding very badly and we need to take you back down to theatre.

The last thing I said to the anaesthetist was, “Please don’t let me die.”

As I came out of it, as I came round, still alive, I thought to myself, “I could be dead.”

But lying there, I also thought – if I had died there on the operating table, no one would have really known me, no

one would have known who I was. But it wasn't that which shocked me. It was the thought that that would have been better, the easier option. It shocked me that I thought that badly about myself.

I knew I had more surgery coming up (this time with the NHS!) and I couldn't risk that happening again, I couldn't risk dying with people not knowing who I was.

The first person I told was my biggest, scariest brother. He's much older than me, a builder, a real lad's lad, and I idolized him growing up. I was sitting on his sofa and it just came out.

I think I'm gay.

ACTOR C (BROTHER) You *think* you're gay?

ACTOR A No – I *know* I'm gay.

ACTOR C Well that's fine by me.

ACTOR A And I just sat there for a little while – it wasn't the reaction I'd expected. And I thought – OK well this is alright then.

ACTOR C Just don't come round here in a dress, alright?

ACTOR A It was all remarkably easy after all that.

A Daughter's Story

ACTOR B I can't quite remember when it finally happened. But I know it was 2001, and I'm pretty confident it was July, or maybe August. We were driving in the car.

Dad had been acting a little strange all day, and now it became clear why.

In a lull in conversation, he took a deep breath and began a prepared spiel.

ACTOR C I did this with your brother when he turned eighteen and now you are eighteen, and so I have put it off as much as I can.

ACTOR B He paused, staring straight ahead, focused on the traffic.

ACTOR C I have always promised myself that when you turned eighteen, I would give you the chance to ask me any question you liked and I would give you a completely honest answer.

ACTOR B Dad loved to have important conversations in the car. We'd had the sex talk in the car. We'd talked about sick family members, broken friendships, possible career changes involving relocating, my first boyfriend.

The car was for the big talks.

It was also where, as a small child, I would pretend to be asleep late at night when there was more than one adult in the car, just in case they ever said anything interesting.

They usually did.

And so I knew then, with one hundred percent certainty, where this conversation was going. My dad, who had split from my mother when I was very young, who always had male friends, who had always, as far as I could see, always been gay, my dad was now going to come out to me. I wasn't quite sure how we were going to get there, but I knew where we were headed.

ACTOR C Well? Don't you have any questions?

ACTOR B Dad was very tense. No, no, I don't think so.

ACTOR C Nothing?

ACTOR B The silence stretched between us. So I decided to bluff him out.

Well, there is *one* thing.

ACTOR C Yes?

ACTOR B He was eager, anxious.

When we were little and you would give us food and you wouldn't tell us what was in it...

ACTOR C Yes?

ACTOR B What was in it?

ACTOR C Seriously? You want to know what was in your dinner?
I just don't think that's relevant.

ACTOR B Too bad, you said *anything*. Answer the question.

We drove along for a bit, Dad thinking where to go.

ACTOR C You really want to use your question on this?

ACTOR B Yes.

ACTOR C Right. Well, there was kidney, and there was the bits of the chicken you don't like, and once... there was duck.

ACTOR B I was appalled.

DUCK! You fed me duck?!

ACTOR C Yes. You had no idea.

ACTOR B I can't believe you would do that.

ACTOR C Sorry.

ACTOR B I don't know when I developed the attachment, but for as long as I can remember ducks have been my favourite animals. I think maybe it had something to do with *Jemima Puddleduck*.

For my entire life I have avoided eating them, I just couldn't do it. But there it was. The man had fed me Jemima Puddleduck, and told me she was chicken.

I bristled a little and was momentarily distracted from the real problem at hand.

There was silence in the car again as we inched past the car yards that signalled our neighbourhood is not far off.

ACTOR C So that's your only question?

ACTOR B Yes, I think so.

But I think there's something that you want to tell me, and I know what it is, and I truly believe it's not my place to ask you, it's your place to tell me – when you're ready.

ACTOR C How do I know I'm telling you the right thing?

ACTOR B Just say it, Dad.

And then he did. He told me all of it, and he made the pieces fit. The parts of our life that had made less sense to me as a small child. The moving, the housemates, the adults we were taught to love and treat as family, and who treated us that way.

He was annoyed, I think, that I had known the truth for some time, and had not said a word. But I never thought I had the right to question him, because he'd obviously made a choice not to tell me, and so I had respected that.

Besides, it never meant anything to me. It made no discernible difference. I can't remember feeling differently about him after I'd figured it out. Years ago.

He was just Dad. He gave me love and safety and security. He taught me perseverance and how to argue and when to argue. He loved me, and trusted me, and I knew from the get-go it was unconditional. I guess I'd always just felt that love was a two-way street. I owed it to him too.

He looked at me, mischief in his eyes. Took a deep breath.

ACTOR C Your brother had no idea.

ACTOR B I was amazed. My brother is the smartest person I know. How could he have not known? Dad never hid anything; the men he loved he loved with his whole heart and he shared them with us. We used to get into bed with Dad and his partner when we were little; we would make Dad Father's Day breakfasts with his partner. We holidayed together, as a family. They slept together, held hands, kissed, touched each other in that way lovers do. Not with jazz hands, but discreetly. Dad never pretended to us that he was *not* in love with those men.

Another pause.

Why didn't you just tell me?

ACTOR C I didn't know... I didn't want to ruin anything. I didn't want to disappoint you... I was worried you wouldn't love me anymore.

ACTOR B His shoulders, big, strong Dad shoulders, were heaving.
Dad. Do you love me?

ACTOR C Yes.

ACTOR B Do you love my brother?

ACTOR C Yes, of course.

ACTOR B Well, what the fuck do I care who else you love?

In that moment I was angry. Not at him, not at all. I was angry at the world, at his life, at the way that he had been made to feel all these years. That this man, who I know would do anything for me, would give his life for mine, would not even flinch at it, would feel such shame at who he is. That he would entertain for even a second that his children might feel that shame too.

It is an ugly realization, that your parents are fallible. It is a whole other thing to find out that they might worry your love for them is too.

Four Short Stories

ACTOR D It was the eve of the millennium. I didn't have the courage to face my sister face to face, so I called her to say I'm gay. I didn't want to enter a new century without my family knowing.

ACTOR C I hadn't planned to do it. I'd thought about it, I could see it happen. It's the National School's Public Speaking Competition and I'm speaking in front of the whole school and I just said it. It just came out, "I'm gay."

ACTOR B When I came out to my dad he was relieved, he thought I was going to ask him for money.

ACTOR A It did help that when I told my father I was bisexual he said he was too.

A Wife's Story

ACTOR D Forget closets. The place where gay men hide with the women they married is in the cupboard under the stairs. This is the dark space where we keep those things we want unseen by the rest of the world. Her friends and family don't see what's in there, in fact, it's probably best if they don't. Explaining to them what is in the cupboard is just too hard: she doesn't have the right words to say it, and they don't have the experience to hear it. They can't understand this. The woman has a home, and because she loves her home, she wants to keep it just the way it is. She accidentally married a gay man and so she lives in her cupboard under the stairs.

Home is her comfort and salve, the retreat when the rest of the world is too cold, too unfriendly, too busy, too quiet. It's where she knows where the tin foil is, and that the upstairs bedroom door slams when the back door is open, and where the carpet is loose on the fifth rise, and where the single, simple act of putting a key in a lock is a single, simple act of breathing in.

It's where the people she loves live all the time, or sometimes. The pillows smell of their hair, their shoes sit by the front door refusing to run themselves upstairs, their pictures smile in their frames, their finger prints smear the bathroom mirror and an odd sock waits patiently in the washing basket for its partner to be found under the bed.

She's gone into hiding in the cupboard under her stairs to keep her home safe, and she shuts the door. He tells her what the marriage means: the two people who love each other most in the world stay married, but the gay one gets to have sex with anyone they want, and the wife chooses to go along with it. Clearly for him the benefits are considerable: he gets to have his cake; he gets to eat his cake. But in the dark, she can't be sure what her benefits are.

The woman does a lot of thinking in the cupboard under the stairs. She has known for many years that the tiny words

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