

LESBIANS!

Ro McQuaid

4.

Preshow music ends; lights down.

Lights up: there I am! All the props I'll use are scattered onstage. It's not exactly messy but it's goofy. They're kind of funny props even out of their contexts. Throughout the show, I'll use them as anchors to their stories.

RO

My parents got married on August 8, 1998, and their wedding cake was a fruitcake. Of course we all know that a wedding fruitcake means two things: that marriage will not last, and any children from that marriage will be gay.

I'm four years old the first time I ask. I have big green eyes and I go to preschool in a Victorian house painted pastel colors. On my first day, I ask my mom, with big, wet tears streaming down my cheeks, "HOW can you LEAVE ME HERE?" but when my teacher holds me and tells me to lick the tears and taste how they're salty, I learn that school is a place where you can get adults' attention. I start to love it.

My best friends are all boys: Danny at school, Charlie and Will in my neighborhood. Charlie and I are two months and two days apart in age and I never let him forget who's older. (It's me.) Charlie and I love to play princesses together. He might even love it more than me. I like playing pirates or cowboys.

No one ever says anything weird about Charlie. But someone asked me something weird about Danny from preschool. "Is Danny your boyfriend?"

No. Danny's Danny. He's quiet, which leaves lots of space for me to do the talking. He's not my boyfriend. He's my friend, I guess. If I have to label us. We're four!! Mostly, he's an audience for the Ro show.

So I ask Mom. She comes to get me after a long day of preschool, I slide into the passenger seat of her Mazda pickup truck, (this woman is straight by the way. and drives a pickup truck. and dresses me entirely in overalls. and I still had to come out.) I slide into the pickup truck and I ask.

"Mama. What's it called when a girl loves a girl?"

She says, "Friends!"

But that's not what I'm asking. How can she not know what I mean? Am I making it up? Do girls love girls? She'd known me for four and a half years, I'd known her for four and a half years; I thought she'd know what I was asking.

"Mama. What's it called when a girl wants to MARRY a girl?"

"Oh, that's called, um, that's called being gay."

"I'm gay."

"You're four."

But I know I'm right.

That same year, when I was four, I played so hard with the neighbor boys, Charlie and Will, that I got rug burn on my tummy and threw up in one of my dad's shoes. It was the closest receptacle, and I also just didn't care. He came into my bedroom as bright red as my little-kid-fruit-punch-puke, holding his leather boot in both hands and shouting "WHAT THE HELL!!!!" I didn't come out to my dad for another eleven years. My relationships with each of my parents are different. They both love me. They're also both straight. I'm from a small town and it felt like everyone was straight and I was a Martian.

Until my twenties, I only knew three lesbians. Someone at work, the mother of a friend, a tattoo artist standing feet away from me at a King Princess concert. I thought about what they might have been like when they were my age. I asked, I interviewed, I transcribed, because I wanted to write a play about them, make a record of the stories they told me. I wanted to preserve a history that began before me, a history that was better than me. Three happy, normal grown women with jobs and homes and families. I knew they weren't Martians. I knew they were kin. But my own guts felt as distant and blurred as outer space. They still do.

I imagine that 4-year-old Ro-girl would look at 24-year-old Ro-girl the way I look at those three chosen family chunks of my heart. The word "lesbian" was out of her reach; the idea of a "lesbian community" combined two words she had no context for yet. She had such dreams for her life, but some things felt so impossible that she didn't even try to dream them. What answers did my toddler self think I would carry? Would she be disgusted by my leg hair? And would she be amazed that I can poop outside my own home?

6.

Joan Jett: "Bad Reputation"

I dance around the stage for a verse. Music fades. I'm lying on my stomach, drawing with crayons.

RO

I'm six now and boys just aren't as in touch with their emotions as I am. I know: it's a binary way to view things. But I'm living a binary life. You can be a boyfriend or a classmate, but you can't be a boy who's a friend. And besides, it's true: boys have been coached out of their emotions. They're disciplined enough to lack the only thing I know I'll always have: big old feelings.

It's my second year at Catholic elementary school. My mom's coworker's daughter, Camila, is a sophomore at the high school and the coolest person I have ever seen in my life. She does plays at school AND not at school. She can sing AND she can dance AND her dad works at the Aquarium which means she basically has fish for siblings. She tore her leg open dancing too hard in the fall musical. Or that's what I thought she did when I heard about it. I told my mom, Camila tore her leg open!! but Mom laughed and said no, she tore a *ligament*. She gets to keep her leg. Which is good, because she needs both legs to give me piggyback rides or carry me on her shoulders in the swimming pool.

I don't like boys very much. I like Charlie fine, but he's a home friend, and because of those two months and two days between our births, he's in babyish kindergarten anyway and not punk-ass-cool-kid first grade with me. The boys in first grade have flat little butts and raspy voices and they like PE class, which is actually, literally torture. The boys in first grade have skinny, hairy little legs and terrible penmanship. The way they eat is so indelicate, so human. They laugh with chewed-up bread in their gaping mouths and I can't take it.

It's cool that they can pee standing up, though.

Until Will from up the street pees in my mom's garden and she freaks out. Then it's less cool.

9.

Beyonce: "If I Were A Boy"

I'm facing stage left, box of Teddy Grahams in hand.

RO

I'm nine years old and we're voting today. Dad got me and my brother lots of books. I have children's biographies of Barack AND Michelle Obama as well as a book called *The People Pick A President!* which explains the Electoral College. I think it sounds like a load of horseshit because the people don't actually pick the president and it's weird to call something a college when it's not even a school.

Mom and Dad love voting. It feels like they take us a lot. We like it though. We get treats. Today, I'm holding a big box of Teddy Grahams in the line. I love those.

Today is important. I know that because we voted at school. At school, John McCain won. I know he's the bad guy because I don't have HIS biography. But I wish the good guy was a girl. There used to be a girl good guy. I told Mom and Dad they should've voted for Hillary Clinton in the primaries and they told me they loved me no matter who I supported, that they're proud of me for forming an independent opinion, and then they explained why they would be voting for Barack Obama. I try to get it, but I don't. "Progress" is great and all, but girls are better.

There's another thing on the ballot which Dad explained to me and CJ before asking us if we wanted to come to a demonstration with him. At first I think he means a science demonstration of some sort, like when Will's dad, a biology teacher, used to sit down with me, Will, and Charlie and show us animal guts before Will and Charlie both moved away. But Dad doesn't mean science class, he means protest. It's a demonstration against Prop 8.

Proposition 8: marriage can only be between a man and a woman in the state of California. That doesn't seem fair or true to me and CJ, so we make big signs and go to the demonstration.

It occurs to me to ask Mom if we even know anyone gay. How rare are they, gay people? Is there one in our town? Is there one in America? Is CJ gay? (Yes.) Am I? (Yes.)

"Mom. Do we know any gay people?"

"Your Uncle Jordan is gay."

My Uncle Jordan lives in Spain. I don't feel like we know him. I've seen a photo of us together when I was a baby, but I don't remember. He's not one of the people we occasionally get to call on the phone. He's not one of the people we send holiday cards to. He's a guy from the photo album.

"Anyone in America?"

"Hmmm. Dana! Dana's gay."

Dana is Mom and Dad's coworker. He teaches art at the high school where they both teach English. Sometimes I'm allowed to hang out in the art studio with Dad. Dana talks about clay and black-and-white photography and editing the yearbook. He doesn't talk about being gay.

But there's my answer. We know two gay people, Dana and Jordan. I don't know any gay people who are women. I don't even know there's a word for us.