

DRAW FOUR

by

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Commissioned by and developed with Green Carnation Theatre Company.

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CHARACTER

Dee is a late-20's person, should identify either as a woman, or non-binary. Can be from anywhere, but would be great if from the Midlands. She acts her stories, and has fun to do the voices, but gets distracted, and flustered and lost in visualising the memories.

DEE: I'm 11 and I'm at my grandma's. We're playing the card game - UNO. We're sat in her kitchen, at this heavy table. She's put a plastic Lino covering over it. We're eating Tic-Tacs from a bowl. Decanted individually from a box by my tiny gran.

The Lino covering is mustard and printed with fish. It's rancid, and confusing because on the walls are farm animals, with their names labelled underneath. Sheep. Pig. Chicken. And then even more confusingly, underneath the cow, it just says 'milk'. It's weird, I don't know why she's defined by what comes out of her. And all the others get their own grown-up names.

Anyway, it's my gran, my mum, my brother, my uncle and me, and we're playing UNO, and my uncle and I are playing to lose. We're completely ruining it for the others who are doing quite well at winning. We don't care. We have about 14 cards each. We're stubborn. If we're not gunna win, let's at least commit to losing. Be the best at being the worst.

So I'm sat at this table, picking up cards left, right and bloody centre, and my grandma, stands up to pop a green 2 in the centre of the table. She says, 'you know Carl died?' And then she sits down.

Carl was this 50 year old guy who lived in the village. He always wore a zip-up hoodie. Baggy old maroon. He smelt really good, like citrus, and he had a really fit daughter. Beth. Beth also smelt like citrus. Beth with the Morrissey tattoo. Beth, who at the time I thought was super cool and I really wanted to be like. Obviously, skip forward 6 years and I'm absolutely fingering women left,

right, and centre. But hey, I was 11. I didn't know I was as queer as a Catholic. If I had to define as anything at that age, I probably could only confidently muster 'All Saints Fan', and that was about it. Also, Morrissey is a racist now. We all realise things about ourselves later on. Oh Beth, I hope she got that tattoo removed...

Anyway, so my grandma says "Carl died", and my uncle sighs - he used to do bits of gardening for him when he was little. And my mum just says "AIDS?" And she lays a green 6.

I didn't know what AIDS was, but the sound of the word felt insidious. Wrong. It sounded nasty. The way she said it. AIDS. Like a ratty little dog nipping at your ankle... Judgemental. AIDS. I felt like my spine had been replaced by a stack of worms. I shuffled on my seat, confused. How can you just guess how someone's died?

My brother flushes, laying down a change colour. Red. He breathes out and says, "Why do you think it's that?"

He was 17 and he was wearing this tight short-sleeved PIXIES t-shirt over a stripped long-sleeved top. We used to joke that underneath that was another short-sleeved top, and underneath that was another long-sleeve top, and we could play pass the parcel with his torso.

My mum explains, "Well, you know, it's tragic, but probably it was AIDS because he was gay, and there's nothing wrong with that, but it's likely that is was AIDS..." She speaks as if she was reading the weather report. "It'll be stormy in Stornaway, and breezy in Bristol, and Carl probably died of AIDS because he was gay."

My brother - and I remember this because he had the tiniest wrists in the world - pinches the ends of his sleeves, one at a time, pulling them entirely straight.

My uncle and I exchange a look, both respectively picking up cards for our mounting collection. I laugh, but I don't know why. It's awkward.

My mum becomes a kind-of children's entertainer. "A few years ago - you're too young to understand - so many poor young men... It was awful. It was terrible. I was really quite sad actually. They called it a plague, darling."

My brother picks up the pace in his breath. "You can't just assume Carl died of AIDS because he was gay." He said quick, through soft lips.

"Listen, it's just very likely that Carl died of AIDS, that's all." Says my mum, waving her flat palms in the air.

My brother stands up and his cheeks are flushing red, and his breathing's changed. I can see he's trying so hard to be calm. He swallows. "You don't get it - you're making it seem inevitable to get AIDS if you're gay. You're making it seem like being gay is a death sentence."

My grandma quickly lays a change colour, and turns it to yellow.

My mother barks. "I think we should just not talk about this. I don't want to fight with you." She lays a miss-a-go.

My brother, leans back, and pushes out his tiny chest. "You're assuming Carl died of AIDS because he's gay, just admit that!" He misses a go.

My mum smiles, and delicately stands up to join him. To be on his level - on his eye line. Classic mediation technique. It's like when you go on the floor to match a toddler. Except my brother's much taller than my mum. She says "I guess we're just not understanding each other, and we can agree to disagree." Like ending an email.

"You don't want to understand!" My brother sits. To me he's now like 30 years older. And my mum sees this. And she sees him look at her in a way he's never done before. He licks his top lip.

My mother switches - "I just said he died of AIDS!"

My brother - "Exactly, you just said! You just *said* he died of AIDS."

My uncle lays a pick up four, so I pick up. I cheat. I pick up 5.

My mum screams, and slams her hand on the heavy mustard Lino'd table. "DOES IT MATTER OR NOT IF HE DIED OF AIDS?!"

(pauses)

The room is funeral quiet. I feel like I want to go out into the garden, swallow a mouth full of soil and silently die. My uncle bites his thumb nail. I gently reach for another card, pretending I'd only preciously picked up 3.

Then, very softly, my grandma stands up. She slips a yellow 7 onto the stack. "It was a heart attack. Uno."

(A pause. Dee leaves the memory. She is now a bit lighter and matter of a fact.)

A few years ago, I went to give blood with my flatmate Nate. The nurse said he wasn't allowed to because he had 'had sex with a man'. I got stabbed with the needle, gave blood and felt dizzy. He went home and felt dirty. He wasn't allowed to give blood, and *(mocking mum)* Carl definitely died of AIDS.

And then there's ever time we play Cards Against Humanity. You know the game where you have to pair the 'funny' cards up, to basically shock people into laughing. There's like 'Who really did 9/11?' And then you can lay a card that says 'Madeleine McCann'. 'Madeleine McCann did 9/11'. *(Mock laughs.)* It's a game of our times. It's horrible, but we've all played it.

Well, there's a card that says 'AIDS.'

I see - I do - I see why people think its funny, I get it. When you read 'Madeleine McCann' it's a shock and it's dark, and you laugh, because none of us are Madeline McCann - that we're aware of.

But when someone lays a card that says AIDS, (*long pause*) and you have an older brother who you loved who died of AIDS, and you have a mother who will never forgive herself for the one conversation she had with him about it when he was 17, it's...

My flatmate Nate, the one who couldn't give blood, told me he's got a partner who's HIV positive. And he told me you can also get this pill now that you can take to stop transmission. It protects you. And Nate was so open about it to me, he said 'My partner's got HIV, and we're both protected.' Like he was telling me he was going to the shop to pick up milk. He felt protected. This little blue pill. Like a Tic-Tac.