

LUNCHBOXES

by

Matt Gurr

Commissioned by and developed with Green Carnation Theatre Company.

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CHARACTERS

JAMIE, 40-50, male

OVERVIEW

This monologue is written in three parts.

Part 2 takes place one week after Part 1.

Part 3 takes place one week after Part 2.

1. TUNA MAYO

JAMIE sits a kitchen table with lunch items in front of him: bread, butter, a multipack of crisps, that sort of thing. There's a child's lunchbox next to him. JAMIE carefully butters the bread. When he's done, he stabs the knife into the butter and looks up.

JAMIE: She's particular, is our Alice. Only five, but already knows exactly what she wants. Wakes up, knows what outfit she wants on. Bedtime, knows what book she wants read to her. And when it comes to sandwiches? Cucumber, ketchup, white bread. Crusts off.

Like I said, *particular*. She gets that from her dad. Not me. My husband.

Well. She's not getting cucumber and ketchup tomorrow, that's for certain. Sure, she might have a hissy fit but it's her first ever day of school, needs to have a proper lunch to keep her going. So tuna it is. Lots of iron and fatty acids. Keep her going.

JAMIE grabs a tin of tuna and forks it out.

God, look at me eh? Sunday used to be the day of hangovers and comedowns. And if you'd've told me then I'd be sitting here now making up a lunchbox for my daughter's first day of school...well...would've pissed myself laughing.

I never thought about having a family. Oh, when I was younger, maybe. But, doesn't everyone grow up thinking they'll get old and marry and have kids? Back when I thought I'd be able to ignore the whole gay thing and find a nice girl. Y'know, the normal path. But then, coming out it...it was almost like being gay was the same as finding out I was infertile. I just let go of the idea of having children. Turned away from that path. There was too much other stuff to worry about.

And then I met *him*. The particular one. And the rest - as they say - is history.

Not been easy though. A whole train of shit. The adoption, the visits, the interviews. He was amazing through it all. Obviously. Even when it felt like we'd explained the most intricate details of our lives to strangers for the umpteenth time - he kept me going. I

know they need to know all that. Still tough.

But that first time she came home for good - *forever* - all of that stuff melted away. In its place was this most gut-wrenching, head-to-toe perfect love. Our Alice.

And now she's five. Fucking five. Heading off to school with her Peppa Pig lunchbox. She can't wait.

JAMIE lays down the second slice of bread to complete the sandwich.

I hope it's different for her. School. I'm sure it will be. For me, it was...well. I'll show my age here but I started secondary in 1988. *Nineteen eighty eight.*

Same year Section 28 got introduced. Remember that? I won't go into all the gory details but let's just say school went just about as well as you could imagine for a gay kid growing up during *that*. All the clichés - you name it, I got it. Mean rumours. Stolen lunch money. Jabs in the ribs. F-words on the playground.

Teachers didn't give a flying fuck. They couldn't say anything even if they wanted to.

And my parents? No fucks given from them, either.

If I'd had a bad day, I'd stop by the corner shop on my way home and get as many penny sweets as my pocket money could afford. Then I'd run back, go straight to my room and gorge myself on sugar listening to records. Madonna, Culture Club...whatever I was into at the time.

Wouldn't speak to either of them. Mum. Dad. Wouldn't even look them in the eyes. And they wouldn't check I was OK either. They were as straight as straight could be. *Not* the kind of parents spending Sundays preparing my packed lunches. Just ignored me. Still do.

JAMIE pulls a pad of paper and pen towards him.

But I am not such a parent. I promised myself, I wouldn't be like that. Alice would have a different life.

JAMIE starts to write, he speaks the words as he does so.

DEAR ALICE.

GOOD LUCK ON YOUR FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL.

ALL OUR LOVE, ALWAYS.

DAD & DAD xxx

JAMIE folds the note up, holds it for a moment, smiles and puts it in the lunchbox.

2. HAM

JAMIE sits at the same table. The kitchen feels darker. There's food around him but he sits still, staring into the distance.

JAMIE: I was looking at the news on my phone while I waited for Alice at the school gate yesterday.

There was this awful...*thing*...that happened in Croatia. Out in the sticks in some tiny town they had this carnival. An annual tradition, it said. Everyone who lives there gets in fancy dress - clowns, hippies, Elvis - that kind of thing. And the parade always ends with them burning an effigy, right.

Some new law's been proposed there that will let gay people adopt children. And this town, well, they don't like that. So this year they decided to burn an effigy of a gay couple and their child.

I watched the video. One of the men had dark hair like me. The other had light hair, like my husband. I watched them pour a full can of petrol of them. Watched them go up in flames. They were just papier mâché so went up in seconds. The child was the last bit to catch light.

I watched them *burn* us. Turned into ash and smoke.

And here was me thinking things had moved on since I was a kid, eh?

JAMIE reaches for two slices of bread and starts to butter them.

Alice's first week at school has been tough. After I watched that video she came running out, got in the back of the car and just didn't say a word.

She's was doing a "me," I guess. Speaking to nobody. Not looking at anybody. I know it's only been a week but she started with so much...hope. It just breaks my

heart to see her like that.

JAMIE puts the butter knife down.

It started, she told me, on the first day. Her class got given this task to draw pictures of their family...y'know, so all the kids can get to know each other. One of the others pointed out she'd drawn two men. Me with my dark hair. Him with his light hair. Her in the middle.

This kid told the others how her picture looked different to every one else's. *Apparently* the class hadn't seen a family with two dads before and some rumours starting flying around. Told her it was weird.

JAMIE lifts up a pack of ham.

And *apparently*, none of the others eat tuna mayo sandwiches. That's weird too. Who knew? "Ham only," she said. So, ham it is.

I must admit, it has been strange being back in a school. Brought back some memories. I swear, as soon as I step through those school gates I feel my spine freeze and the hair on my arms stands up. That's PTSD shit right there.

And what can I say about the parents? Honestly, I've never seen so many Range Rovers in my life. The yummy mummy lot. They're alright, really. Just different to what I'm used to.

Y'know what one of them said to me yesterday? "Mum's day off is it? Nice to see dad helping out!"

She was mortified when I told her. Properly embarrassed.

Guess we're not the normal school gate set-up though, are we?

JAMIE opens the pack of ham and lays it on a slice of buttered bread.

But what the fuck is normal, anyway? We always told Alice that she just needs to be herself. And that's all that matters. Don't worry what anyone thinks of you.

I'm starting to wonder if that's true, if I'm honest.

JAMIE reaches for his pen and paper and starts to write.

DEAR ALICE...

JAMIE stops and thinks. He screws the paper up and tosses it onto the floor.

3. CUCUMBER AND KETCHUP

JAMIE sits at the same table. There is a tall pile of bread slices next to him and he furiously butters them, placing the buttered slices in another pile to his left. There's a huge bottle of ketchup and a pile of cucumbers in front of him. While he does this, he holds a phone in the crook of his neck.

JAMIE: So the Saturday after next, you said?
Great. Yes. Alice'll be there, course she will!
Can I bring anything?
OK, well, if you're sure.
Fine, fine, fine. See you tomorrow, love.

JAMIE hangs up the phone.

Christ, what a difference a week makes, huh?

So. After the debacle with the drawing, Alice and the kids all had to do a little talk for the class. About their families and their homes and their favourite things. Parents were invited too, like a show and tell, y'know?

Alice was so nervous. Begged us to talk to the teacher and get her out of it.

I nearly caved, but *he* persisted. Sat her down and patiently told her, this is what life is like. Sometimes she'll have to do stuff she doesn't want to do. She listens to him.

So there I am, sat on one of those tiny kids chairs in her classroom waiting for her to give her speech. I was nervous for her too obviously. Every bit of me was sweating.

She was...*amazing*.

She told her class how my husband works in London

and gets on the big train everyday. How I work at the swimming pool where they all go and have lessons. I think they think I'm a mermaid. I just do the admin.

She told them about her before family. How she had to leave and how she came to us.

She told them about our weekend walks in the park with the dog and how we go and get chips by the seaside on birthdays and how on Sundays we sit and eat cucumber and ketchup sandwiches watching the telly.

She told them how much she loves her dad and dad. Our little family.

JAMIE grabs a cucumber and starts slicing it.

I was a wreck, as you can imagine. One of the mums gave me a whole pack of Kleenex to get through it.

Now everyone in her class thinks it's dead cool she has two dads. Y'know how you used to do pretend weddings in the playground? You'd make little rings out of daisies and get married by the bike sheds or whatever? Well, now it's not just boys marrying girls, boys are marrying boys, girls are marrying girls...

I'm serious. Progress, huh?

JAMIE grabs the bottle of ketchup and starts squeezing big dollops on the bread.

And *now*...all her class wants to eat ketchup and cucumber sandwiches like her as well. It's the in thing. Ham. Is. Out.

JAMIE gestures at the tall pile of bread.

So we're taking in a big picnic for all her friends. The things we parents do.

JAMIE grabs his pen and paper and starts to write. Again, he reads the word aloud:

DEAR ALICE.

EVERYDAY YOU MAKE US PROUD.

ALL OUR LOVE, ALWAYS.

DAD & DAD xxx

JAMIE folds up the paper, looks at it for a moment, then places it in ALICE's lunchbox.

END.