

LESBIHONEST

By
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Act I

Mic check, testing, 1, 2, I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay... *(lights up)*
I mean, hello.

OR

Hello fellow Queers! And the rest of you.

It's been a long journey of coming out to people individually, so now I do it en masse. Thank you for being here. When I first came out, I did a soft launch with my best friend, we'll call her Adriane—'cause that's her name. When I came out to her, I was 23 and very nervous and we were sitting on her bed and I finally gathered the courage to say, "I'm gay." And she lit up and blurted out, "Can I marry you?!" Uhh... and I'm thinking, *I just came out three seconds ago, and now I'm in a very serious relationship. But I can't say no, she's clearly been waiting all of her life for me to say that, she just proposed! So, I guess we're getting married.* She must have sensed my hesitation; seen the cogs a-turnin', because she clarified, "I want to *(miming holding a bible)* marry you *(pointing to an imaginary couple)*."

Officiate! Oh thank fuck, yes you can do that.

A lot of people have known that they were gay their whole lives, but I grew up religious, so I had more of a gay-piphany in the middle of the night. I was in my 20s, I had been watching "Ellen", not her talk-show, her sit com series from the 90s. It was the first time I had ever seen two women in love. Not having sex; I'd seen a lot of that, but two women who were in love. They held hands, went to dinner, and placed their heads gently on one another's shoulders. I woke up out of a dead sleep that night like, *(gasp)* I'm gay! The only other time that happened to me I woke up like, *(gasp)* I need bangs! The only difference was, people really dug the bangs.

The easiest person to come out to was my brother. If a picture could capture our personalities, I'd be a blur, and he'd be a blob. Very relaxed since birth, nowhere in particular to be. I said, "Knock knock", and he said, "Who's there?" and I said, "I'm gay". And he took a long, thoughtful pause and said, "I'm gay, who?". *(pause)* And I said naw, I'm a lesbian. And he said, I thought so but I didn't want to ruin one of your "jokes". Can I be there when you tell mom and dad?

So it's the big day and we're all sitting silently at the dinner table, and it's very tense. I know why I'm so tense, but I don't know why everyone else is. Later, I found out it's because my parents were trying to tell us they were getting a divorce; on the same day I was coming out. We both kept these secrets for 23 years and today was the day! Turns out, they were "married" much in the way that I was "straight". They chose this particular date as sort of a, "You know how your brother's moving out for university this September? Well dad is just, also going to move out".

But, I'm getting ahead of myself. We're sitting there and it's tense. I glance over to my brother like, "It's happening", and I say, "Mom, dad, I've got something to say and I'm only going to say it once, I'm gay".

Something you should know about my mother is, if we're working on an emotional scale from 0-10, I've only ever seen her at a 1 or 2. This news brought her to a 2.5. The difference was in the eyeballs (wide). "Is this because I went right back to work after having you?". No, that's why I have abandonment issues. I'm gay because of Mariska Hargitay. From Law and Order.

She said, "Gay? You can't be gay, I would know if my daughter was gay." Stop saying gay like that, mom. And no you wouldn't because you didn't. And, what do you mean you would have known? Was I supposed to be shitting rainbows as a baby? Take up axe throwing? Tennis? Or maybe I'd get a pixie cut (which, I did), or talk non-stop about a certain *detective* from NBC. I fawned over Mariska Hargitay EVERY WEEK. Did you think I was joking? Did you think I wanted to be a detective? Fuck, I can't blame you, I didn't see it either. I was like, this isn't gay because I'm not gay. Or maybe, you'd catch me in a compromising position at a sleepover, and when you caught us I'd made up a this story about reaching for a CD on the other side of the bed and, oops, falling on top of each other. What did you think then? Maybe that we were just stupid and terribly uncoordinated? Which I suppose at the time was an easier pill to swallow.

"Well what, you just switched to being gay?" No, I just *am* gay. I was previously gay, I am currently gay, and I plan to be gay in the future; and now, I'm letting you in on it. And she says, "Well, I hope you switch back," and leaves the table, and the house.

We look over to my dad, who has not said a word so far; and is staring down with his hands on the table and he mumbles,

"Cinco de Mayo". What? "May 5th, Laura. It's Cinco de Mayo! CINCO. DE. MAYO! All of this on Cinco de Mayo!". You're not wrong, but we're Italian. And I don't think you know what Cinco de Mayo is. And then he gets up, grabs a bottle of Jack Daniels and he leaves the house. I've never seen him drink Jack Daniels in my life. But he knew exactly where it was.

Now, I'll be honest, I handled the news about the divorce just as badly they handled the gay. One week later to the day, we all sat down for another confusingly tense dinner and my mom said, I have something to tell you. We've know this about ourselves for quite some time.// "You had your special news now it's our turn".// "We are g--etting a divorce!". Now normally when people find out their parents are getting divorced will say, "Is it my fault?" "Don't you love each other anymore?" "Don't you love *me* anymore?", because they're children at the time, but I said, "You motherfuckers. What took you so long!".

And she—she didn't say anything right away. She was like (*blinking*) yep, fair. That's on us. My b my b my b. My brother and I were finally getting secure in their marriage after years of assuming they would get divorced any minute. It got too late—they waited too long and we got too comfortable and assumed they were just going to ride this out until they died. We were most upset about being duped! It's like, I always suspected I was adopted, but I keep telling myself like, you're 35 years old so I they obviously would have told you by now. But maybe not. The rest of my family is Italian. I am the only one who looks like I'm from the part of Italy that's actually...uh, Norway. There are only two things that are Italian about me; my last name, and my arm hair. And my pubic hair. So three things.

Since the confession campaign is going so well, I've decided to tell my grandparents. They were getting pretty old so I figured I needed to pick up the pace, but my mom was begging me not to tell them. She was like, you are going to kill your only surviving grandparents with this news. My family is Catholic. I was a child in church choir singing, "Oh Lord, Jesus Christ, you are my favourite". Or some variation of that. And my grandmother, went to seminary school. I don't know if you're familiar with such a place, but it's where priests go to become priests. Now, they don't let women become priests, but they will take your money and let you audit the class. So my grandmother did that, at 85 years old.

I had a falling out with the church that began at around the time I realized there was a world outside that I had really

not been paying attention to. I looked around at us all, standing and sitting, kneeling and responding and I thought to myself, *what the fuck are we all talking about?* I know words, but I don't understand *any* of these words in these configurations.

Then I had this moment where it was like, heaven sounds like a huge pain in the ass. I don't want to go to. I don't want to live on for an *eternity!* I'm only 15 and I'm fucking exhausted. No thank you, I'm good.

After that realization, everything else just seemed ridiculous; like, I don't know if as a kid I thought that from Monday to Saturday the priest was just back there making bread and flattening it with his holy shoe or something, but it turns out, that communion wafer comes in as one giant, tasteless cracker that a huge machine that (*miming a large machine*) **ka-chunk**-s it into circles. How does that man stand up there with a straight face every week? "This is the body of Christ"--**ka-chunk**. "This is the body of Christ, our Lord and God". **ka-chunk** "Not a metaphor, literal Jesus, 100%". The audacity of that heavily robed man. We take this very seriously. Some people don't even want it to touch their hands, they're not worthy, it has to go straight into their mouths. What's even funnier, is that all those leftover bits of Jesus that didn't make the cut, they get wrapped up into a little snack pack. On the bag it says, "Jesus Christ, these are good!".

So, my mother and I are in the elevator at the old-folks home, or, "The Institute" as my grandparents liked to call it, and I look over at my mom who's now at a visible 2.75. I'm getting a strong "Let's not tell grandma" vibe. Don't cause a fuss, don't burden her with your identity. Let her die never having known you at all. That's the right thing to do.

We come inside and we're sitting down. Mama, Papa, and my aunt Geraldine, who also lives in The Institute, are sitting on the couch, three in a row. My mom is sitting in a chair, staring at the floor. The vibe is...suspicious; as we have never visited like this.

So I just get right to it and say, Mama, Papa, Geraldine, "I'm gay". Now, the reaction here, I can only describe as a Greek chorus of confusion. "I'm gay". "What? Huh? Oh my." No follow-up questions. That reaction is Catholic speak for, "We heard you, but that's enough of that". And then they died. Not that day, but they did die.

I was in high school when I first realized something was wrong. I distinctly remember sitting in grade 10 history class, staring off into space one day and then having this sudden and violent realization that I had a crush on my teacher, Miss. Petroni. I was absolutely mortified, and I said to myself with utmost disgust, "You do not think about this ever again, you do not tell anyone, ever. Put it away. Burry it". And I did. For two years it didn't cross my mind again, because I wouldn't allow it. I addressed it in my diary as "the problem" and never elaborated on what it meant, or what I was supposed to do about it other than ignore it completely.

In grade 12, I decided to try coming out to 3 of my closest friends as bisexual. Which was a mistake. My two closest guy friends were ecstatic, with these stupid, shit-eating grins on their faces. They assumed I would soon be doing porn and making out with women in front of them. They thought, what bisexual meant was, "A slut so horny, so revved up, that she's made her way through ALL THE MEN, and has now moved on to women. Sex sex sex sex sex." Am I giving off that vibe right now? Dispite the fact that I was a virgin and we were all very aware of that, that they thought. And that reaction, is why I didn't come out for another 6 years.

I really only felt comfortable with myself after watching that episode of Ellen, where her and her girlfriend sat on the couch, held hands, and cuddled while watching a VHS tape of the Civil War. I thought, if this is what gay is, I am so gay! I am obsessed with the Civil War. Thank you, Ellen, for being the PG lesbian I needed you to be.

If you tell enough people you're gay, eventually, you're bound to get yourself a date. I can only describe my first attraction to a girl as--well, you know that U-Haul joke? What do lesbians bring on a second date? I get it now. It was all-consuming. It's like driving a car with two gas pedals. Men are the breaks in relationships. Two women in love is a converted sprinter van careening out of control through a vineyard, on the third date. I was googly for her. All I wanted to do was touch her hand from across the table and watch her eyelashes flutter in the dim restaurant lighting.

Everything was going so well for our first date, and we went to go see a classic first date movie, "Inglorious Bastards". I had not seen the trailer and Cassie told me it was a comedy. Anyone who's seen it knows she's playing fast and loose with the word "comedy". About ten minutes in, she leans over and whispers, "It gets funnier". And it did. And everything was cute and fine, and we even held each other's pinky fingers on the arm rest. I'd never been so excited to be at .5 base.

So then the movie's over and we both get up to go to the bathroom. I would have read a pamphlet about lesbian bathroom etiquette had I anticipated that this would be a problem, but it wasn't until I was standing at the threshold of the bathroom that the questions came flooding in. Are we still on the date in here? Or on some sort of T.O.? Do I sit closer to her the more I like her? Or do I give her her space? So I eeny meeny miny moe'd it to pick a stall, and unscrewed my water bottle and poured water down the toilet to pretend like I was peeing because I was too embarrassed for her to hear me actually pee--don't ask me why, that's just how the neurosis came out that day--and then enthusiastically washed my hands for her and got the eff outta dodge. I haven't been to the bathroom on a date since 2007.

So were cuddling in our apartment the next day. And with a dude I would have just done this (*reaching over to put a hand in the middle of his chest*), but I go to do it and realize, uh, that's second base, (*attempting to put the hand lower*) that's rounding third (*hand wandering upwards*) and that's her face, (*swiftly moving arm behind head*) so we're back to square one.

Cassie and I broke up about a week later, because she joined the navy without telling me. I know you think there's more to this story, but there isn't. One day, it was just like, "Hey babe, wanna grab lunch?" And she was like, "Sorry, can't, live on a boat now". Fuckin' Lesbians.

After her, I went on a date with a girl named Victoria, I think. Her opener was, "I want you to know that my last girlfriend died of Lupus, but I'm totally over it". First of all, what is Lupus and no you're not. We talked the entire time about this dead girl. I know some very specific details about that funeral, like how she was buried in sweat pants and a ponytail with a Harry Potter wand in her hand. And while that's very sad, and kind of creative, we're on a first date. That is second date talk. Not only are we on the most depressing date possible, but we're wearing the same thing. So I ask her, hey, where did you get your black, three-quarter length sleeve

blazer? And she said, "Banana Republic, where did you get yours?" and I said, the lost and found. We did not go on a second date.

By the way, I'm meeting these girls on sites called, like, gays.com. On like, the dark web. At this time, dating apps didn't exist, except for E-Harmony but their "sophisticated algorithm" couldn't figure out the complex and nuanced pillars of attraction of us same-sex aliens, so they just, didn't do it. And I definitely didn't know any gay people in real life, so trying to find another gay on the wilderness of the internet, was actually tumultuous. This is why gay communities exist; because you can't function as a singular gay wandering around, trying to find another gay with no context, especially, when you look like this!

People tell me all the time, "Oh, well you don't look gay". OOOOH MY BAD, I guess. I'm not sure what you were expecting, but I would have to make some pretty serious flannel modifications to my daily life for people to start pulling over their kids like, "Hey, that's that lesbian I've been telling you about".

I've had to come up with a solution for us invisilez and it goes like this (*placing "L" on forehead*). Now, I've recently learned that in the heterosexual world, this means something completely different. But I'm going with it. It goes like this:

You lock eyes.

(*series of hand gestures on forehead throughout*)

Lesbian. You? No? Okay.

I'm a lesbian. What? A lesbian. Nevermind.

Lesbian. You? Yes? Come `ere.

But it only works if we all agreed do it, otherwise you'll have parents pulling over their children like, "That's that loser I've been telling you about--unless she's wearing a lot of flannel, then it means something totally different". Actually, there's an easier trick. It's just this, (*rolling up short-sleeve t-shirt*) If you have sleeves, roll `em up. You could also do up all the front buttons on your shirt, even the ones you've never seen before, on the flap there, do those up. Or, wear a ring on your thumb. Get gels on 8 of your fingers.

I've always heard that having manicured short nails is really important if you're a lesbian, but I've never been with anyone who wanted to be fingered, except one girl one time with

one finger and she didn't want it to move. Is this good? Is this what you want?

Speaking of the devil, the next girl I dated was Holly. She emailed me a video of herself, it had like, 5 pixels, to prove she was real, after meeting on the early years of Plenty of Fish. At this time, my mom was still so uncomfortable with the idea of me dating a woman that we weren't allowed to stay at her house, so we had to go over to my dad's across the street for our little gaycation. By this time, my dad had taken a keen interest in my homosexuality and was gifting me clippings of gay people doing things in the news. "Look Laura, the dykes are on bikes now. Tomorrow at noon. Will you be attending? No, not this year.

Holly was the first girl I dated who was closeted, but she wouldn't be the last. She refused to hold my hand in public. In fact, she would flick me off of her if I got too close, or if she thought people were staring. And we absolutely weren't allowed to even say the word "gay" in front of her parents lest they figure it out.

She and I had been dating long distance for about 3 weeks when I said, "Hey, want to come to Europe with me for a month?" And she was like, "Oh, I don't know..." and I was like "No, seriously! It'll be fun! We'll get to know each other!". It was not fun. We broke up in three countries.

When we were still together, one night she said to me, "I love you". And I was like, What? You do!? Ooooooh! And she was like, "No-no, lub, with a "b". It's like before love. It's lub". Oh. That's so sweet.

I've been in 3 Pride parades, none of them on purpose. The first one was in my university town of Antigonish, Nova Scotia. There are about 2,000 people in the town and about 10 in the parade. It was so sparse I didn't realize I was in it; I thought I was just walking down the street in a line until someone threw garbage at us from their porch. Some people waved, that was nice. The second was in Rome. We didn't know it was Pride week and Holly and I came upon the parade. As it passed, we realized people were just joining in at the end so we went along with them. We got to hold hands, and be out, and no one was staring at us. And we had this moment as we walked past the Colosseum, like, "Wow, how far we've come". At the end of the road, we were met by about two dozen, heavily armed policemen. They circled

around us and made everyone take off every ounce of gay before leaving the parade; lest we offend the Pope. They put out garbage cans and made us take off the gay; the flags, the wigs, the shoes—you, the shoes. And Holly and I cried on a curb for 10 minutes. Then I was in Toronto Pride parade 2012, which was a totally different vibe. I had just decided I was going to get back into performing after taking a 4-year hiatus to do my university degree. I was nervous and scared and they put me in a Caribana bikini. Well kid, I hope you're ready 'cause now you're naked and in a parade.

I'm not even gay. I just like that word more than all the other words. Seems friendliest. I'm technically pansexual. And to answer your next question, no not an attraction to cooking-wear; which would be tiresome. Why doesn't she write? He's so cold.

When I came out to my mom as pan (this is my second time coming out to her), she said, "...What's that?". So I started to explain; there's this gender binary, and some people are here, and others are over here, some are in the middle and others are way over-- and I looked at my mom's face and realized that she's like 7 conversations away from being able to understand the words I'm saying. Binary means numbers 0 and 1 to her. She's an accountant, she does a lot of math. I have no idea how to get her from where she is, to where I am, but I can't burst into the conversation starting with how her reaction supports the goals of patriarchy to keep me down! Because she doesn't know what that is. She knows the effects of it, being a woman in business, but it's like explaining quantum physics to an 8th grader. You can't launch in with, "There are things we can't see. Not ghosts. Maybe ghosts". You have to start with, "There are things". So I just planted the best seed I could and said, I know it seems like a bizarre word but it just means I'm attracted to adult, human beings... with a lot of money. No, that's not part of it, that's just me. And she said, "Oh, so it could be a guy?" Or a girl. "But maybe a guy!" Or girl or "Or?!" ...Maybe...Technically.. "Well that's delightful news!" I thought, did that go well?

I didn't have to come out to my Italian side of the family. My cousin leaned over at dinner once and said, "Just so you know, we all know, and nobody cares". Again, did that go well? I never did follow up with anyone so I still don't know how to interpret that cryptic message. I guess I don't care. If it's not acceptance, at least it was easy.

I'm glad, for visibility, that they added the P in the acronym. So now we've got, LGBTTPQPR...E-S-P-E-C-T...2. Is that right? Look at all those categories, it's like 17 letters dedicated to just not being straight. It's straight people vs the world! And still, with all these "other" categories, these hetero-alternatives, we live in a world where we're straight until proven gay.

And *why* do we need to have all these words and definitions? Because straight society demands that non-straight, non-cis people explain themselves! Explain your weird-ass self to us! And then come up with a name for it, "*lesbian*" so it sounds a bit like a disease, or a poorly performing race horse breed, and you feel a little bit bad about yourself every time you say it. Straight people are like, "Hey, wh-what's that thing you're doing there? What's the word for that?"

Straight girls can get away with being a little heteroflexible and everyone thinks it's hot and no one beats her up outside of the bar. But a straight guy has sex with another guy *one* time and now he's GAY. We skip straight past bi as a possibility because in women it's invalid because what they're doing is for the attention of men, obviously, and in men it's invalid because bisexuality is a gateway drug to homotown. Every identity has a unique kind of phobia used against us. I've been accused of promoting the gay agenda; which is actually just a giant day planner that at the top of every day just says, "Be gay", and on Sunday it says "Brunch".

So next I dated a guy and my parents were like, "Let's meet him!". It was like I had undone my coming out. We were back to straight; the heterostasis. A collective sigh of relief from the family for having made it safely out of the gay phase. For whom has this really been a phase? Who went in there and came out like, wh-ahaha-oops! That was not for me.

This new boyfriend had a very pretty face and was a bit of a hypochondriac. He was three years younger than me and I felt like his mom. Like his lesbian mom. At one point, he called me on the phone and said, "Hey, um, what if we spent less time together?" I said, what if we spent no time together? That was one of my healthiest relationships.

After having some experience dating both women and men, I can safely say that, in general, the problem is, that men are stupid and women are insane. Men get in trouble in relationships because they don't know things they're definitely supposed to

know; names, anniversaries, fatal allergies. Too dumb to commit it to memory, and too lazy to set an alarm. A man will forget your birthday, but a woman will diagnose you with a mental disorder on the 4th date and tell you it's ok, I'll take care of you. What's your SIN number again? But people still ask me, who's better? Guys or girls? And, I cannot tell you. No that's a lie, it's boobs.

Almost every girl I've dated has been seriously sexually assaulted. That's not a joke. A lot of people's first response is, oh, that's why they're gay. No. Lesbians aren't damaged straight girls. In fact their assault has nothing to do with being gay and everything to do with being a woman who said no.

So knowing that, and looking back to what I just said, maybe women are *insane* because people keep fucking with us and we've had to build all these crazy, make-shift barriers around ourselves to stay safe. *Maybe* as a gender, we've been driven to insanity because to trust him with our hearts means to trust him with our lives. I don't know a single man who couldn't kick my ass. Without even trying. My brother, who hasn't worked out a day in his life, can do ten pull-ups. He discovered it one day while bored on the subway. I've been training to do a pull-up for 5 years and I can do half of one. I will admit the training has been inconsistent, but my point still stands.

This guy I know, barely, from a show I did once, I think, every six months or so, sends me messages professing his love to me in the middle of the night. I've ignored them all. On May 3rd at 2:34am, he writes, "I love you". At 2:51am he writes, "Supportively, not romantically". Oh, haha, I thought you meant - Well isn't my face read. No, no, no need to clarify further, of course, of course that's what you meant. That's a totally normal thing to say at that hour. Messaging me at 2:30 in the morning; what kind of disrespect is that? You don't love me, you love the idea of me you've derived from my Facebook profile picture. I bet she likes butt stuff. I can tell. (*scoff*) "I love you". What's my middle name!?

There was this other guy, he was the owner of a gymnastics gym in Montreal. I was training there for the first time and he came up to me and said, "Wow, you're really good. Would you consider doing some partner acro with me? I've been looking for someone to work with. So I said sure, let me finish up what I'm doing here and I'll be over in a bit. A woman about my age approached me and said, "You know, he kind of does this with all the new girls. It's his way to get to know you and ask you out.

He's a bit of a perv. Harmless I guess, but just so you know". Great. Ok well let's see how long this lasts. About 30 minutes in he's asked me out on a date. I said, "noooo", and, to my surprise, we continued doing partner acro. We finished up one of our moves (*deep squat*), I felt a fart coming on. Not a bum fart, a vagina fart. And there ain't nothin' you can do about a vagina fart. The acrobatics came to its final pose (*deep squat*) and I let out a long, airy quief, with a sustained vibrato, directly into his mouth.

Let me tell you, this man was NOT DETERED! He didn't even register it. Nope! Doesn't fit into the fantasy, didn't happen. As if telling them I'm a lesbian would matter. These people are invited in by lesbianism. Somehow the only thing that could not possibly be about them, still somehow is about them. They're jealousy has gone full circle to the point that they've convinced themselves that this is that they want. YES! LESBIANS! Thank you for lesbianing for me. You must think I'm so hot for you to be doing that, over there, without me. Wow, I'm good. The most dangerous place to be is in the forefront of some deranged man's mind.

That's not to say that women can't be dangerous. I dated a nurse a few years back, and that bitch bit me; in the thigh, and on my stomach. She left a mark that a crime scene investigator would have been able to match to her dental records. Whenever I tell people that story they're like, "Ooooh she bites eh? That's hot". No, asshole, that's assault. Even violence in lesbian relationships is sexy somehow. I didn't even consider going to the police because I was not in the Goddamn mood to deal with whatever little "questions" they were going to have.

And she knew that. She took advantage of the fact that this could have all been misconstrued as "kooky lesbian behaviour", and there would be no follow-up questions. Her only mistake was that she was wasted and showed way too many of her cards way too early and I got out. But if she were in her right mind, and I know she's done this before, she would have played the long game and I'd be three kids in, living in Sao Paulo before I realized she was insane.

Maybe I should have known something as up when I met her friend earlier that day. I was telling a story and said, I was being followed by this guy, and he interrupted, "You mean you *thought* you were being followed". Like I must have been confused. Like its more possible to him that I don't know how to recognize being followed, than that a *man* would *follow* a woman.

No, I very clearly know the difference between a guy going about his day, and a guy going about *my* day.

Then, and for a while after that I dated no one. For 5 years I was a lone wolf and I loved it. I loved it more than any relationship I'd ever had. After a few years of no sex I thought to myself, am I ace? Is this what asexuality is? Wow, I'm really making my way through the letters. At one point I thought, I'd have sex with myself. Yeah! But that's not asexuality, that's just narcissism. I looked it up. I'd date myself. But I am a huge pain in the ass.

But I get what it means to be ace; I could go the rest of my life never having sex again, and that would be perfectly fine with me. I don't need it. I don't really go looking for it, and I'm completely indifferent to having it. It's good when I do, and fine when I don't. Would I miss boobs? Perhaps. Would I miss the peen? No, I merely tolerate the peen.

So what do I call myself now? Pan, ace, gay, lesbian? I don't know, because every time I choose one, someone from that group goes, "NOOOOOO. You're breakin' the rules. That's not what you are!" Every time a bell rings, we add another letter. I'm fucking exhausted to so now I just identify as the plus sign at the end.

If it were up to me; and it is, we wouldn't come out at all. I'd just show up to Christmas dinner and say, this is who I'm dating now, you figure out what it's called. What am I doing participating in this bullshit with my sweat and tears? Let's get rid of this hetero-imposed "rite of passage" altogether. There is nothing more heteronormative than the expectation of Queer people to come out.

And the formality of coming out is what keeps straight people in line. They can't branch out. Any move on their part requires a new designation of "no longer one of us". One false move and you're gonna need a parade!

We've been reduced to our stats: I'm a pan, demi-sexual, gender-indifferent, homo-romantic cis person-- Ma'am, this is a Pizza Hut.

Even well-meaning straight people fall into this trap about centering it around themselves. They sit with you, sympathetically while you come out, and sob, and confess all of your crushes, starting at age of 6...for some reason. They sit

there as if they're entitled to an explanation but, they do feel bad that you have to do it.

The Queer community even embraces it now with Coming Out Day. Now, I'm divided. One half of me is like, yes, reclaim it. This is our day. Because for many people, and in many countries, "coming out" is very much still going to be a thing for another century or so, so we need to support and celebrate the people who are still stuck in that paradigm, and who are brave enough to break through. But let's also maybe workshop the idea of fuck coming out, don't let them put you *in* in the first place. Skip it. Just don't do it. Walk in holding her hand and they can Google what it means.

The whole time I wasn't dating anyone, I went into some sort of gay remission. For years everyone assumed I was straight because I was single. So I was brainstorming, ok, what can I do, I need some sort of proof; some sort of external validation of Queerness. And I really didn't want to have to resort to wearing rainbow suspenders or shaving one side of my head, even though it would look really cool, but I needed to find a way to be culturally gay, and the answer, was softball.

In a league that should be called "Lez Play Ball" but for some reason, isn't, is where I met my girlfriend, Margaret. The main difference between women-only and co-ed leagues is the amount of apologies. Every throw—Sorry! Oh, sorry that was bad. Missed that one, sorry! No, don't be sorry, I'm sorry, I can't catch, you did a good job. Men don't apologize, they just throw the damn thing and shift the responsibility of catching it to someone else. Not my fault, he did my part. That and the compliments from 3rd base coach. I like those shorts.

Margaret hasn't been "out" insofar as it's been none of anyone's business. But now that we're together, she's decided to share. Coming out in the 2020's is a trip. No one cares. Just, congratulations! And *pff* handful of glitter appears and we all go back to work. Every single person she's come out to has all said the exact same thing, "I am so happy for you". And she's like, WHAT?. I've been keeping this to myself for 30 years and this is your response? No. I feel like I'm being gaslit a little bit. Like, I was told this was a big deal, is it not?

Recently, the Ontario Arts Council removed LGBT+ people from their priority list for funding, presumably because we are no longer oppressed enough to qualify. I found out while I was

writing a grant, as I usually do, "As a queer wom—" oh, it's gone. Are we over it? Are we done? Because I am not over it. I am not done lamenting on my difficult childhood. I am not done cashing in on this oppression to be pushed to the front of the line! Give me money for my struggles! I got about five minutes to revel in how brave I was for overcoming adversity and now I'm redundant. Unbelievable.

I might also be gender Queer. I know. I've been subtly going by "she/they" for a while, mostly in my Instagram bio and email signatures, but I'm doing it. No one has yet to call me "they", probably because they think I'm faking it, or that I don't really mean it and I'm doing it to be inclusive, but I'm dying to see how it fits. I'm also thinking about going by "he/him". That's a power I haven't tapped into. *He* made the suggestion, *his* car is on fire, *he* picked the kids up from daycare. But then I thought, it would upset me if no one called me "her" ever again. There's something I very much like about being perceived as a woman and I wouldn't want to give it up. *She* is funny as fuck.

I recently learned about the term, omnisexual. And I'm that, too. I just read the definitions of these things and I'm like, "Yeah, I could do that". But why do I feel the need to do this? Half of me is like, shut UP, and the other half of me is like, (*typing*) "As an omnisexual..." I have to know. I have to know what I am. Straight people already know. They are incredibly confident about their identities. I admire that.

When I was young, and growing up, seeing gayness in the wild was so rare that when I did see it, I'd make a point of making eye contact and smiling so they would know that I really wanted them to feel good about themselves. And now that I'm walking around holding Margaret's hand, I'm recognizing those smiles in others. Mostly from people my age, with kids. They give me this pleasant side eye, alternating looks with their kids like, look, this is gay. This could be you, if you want. Look how totally ok with it I am. This is fine! And the kid's like, "Yeah, I know mom. Jackson has 2 dads and 3 niblings".

I met this kid the other week, in middle school, just decked out in flags. Flags I've never even seen before. So I said, "Happy Pride!". And she said, "Thanks! Are you proud, too?" Just recently, I am. And she said, "What's your sexual orientation?" And I thought, I have never discussed this with a

child before so, um, Queer, we'll go with "Queer". How about you? And she said, (*boldly, flapping back her rainbow cape*) "I'm a LESBIAN!". And I don't know how that conversation ended because I was crying. They get to just grow up like that. They don't have to do any of this shit. Little fucks. No, I couldn't be happier.

Last summer, I was hiking in Newfoundland, and I ran into two couples on the trail, in their 50's or so. We got chatting about our lives and I was saying, my girlfriend Margaret is a designer, my girlfriend Margaret is meeting me at the end of the trail in St. John's... my girlfriend Margaret, girlfriend Margaret. And about 10km into a 17km hike, one of them stopped walking and turned around and said, "Wait, when you're saying girlfriend do you mean girlfriend or girlfriend? Girlfriend. "OOOOH. This whole time you were saying girlfriend, I thought you meant girlfriend. Well, there's nothing wrong with that".

I know. It was kind of charming even though it was a bit offensive. I appreciate that he thinks he's ahead of his time. And even though it feels a little bit condescending, he really meant it. He really wanted me to know it was ok to be gay. He assumed, quite accurately, actually, that at some point in my life, I was sure that it was not, and he was making a point of making eye contact and smiling.

But it is frustrating when I'm saying girlfriend and people assume I mean friend who's a girl. Do I sound like I talk like that all the time? Like a waspy middle aged woman? (*rich voice*) *Girlfriend*. Charles, did I tell you? My girlfriend and I played tennis at the chalet, and then we finger-banged all Thursday evening. *Girlfriend. Girlfriend*. Am I not saying it right? Is there a gayer way to say that?

Later in the trip I was hitch-hiking with a woman and naturally, the topic of my husband came up. She told me that actually, her entire family had watched me hike past their house the night before, and they all made a little joke about me marrying her son. She asked, "Do you have a husband? Or a boyfriend? And I said no. And I started to tell her about Margaret and in the last second, I called her my friend. Why do I do this? What am I so afraid of? That she'll pull over the car in the middle of the highway and make me get out? I think about the threat of opting into discrimination all the time, and I'm so afraid of the consequences. Not even necessarily the danger, though, I'm afraid they won't *like* me anymore. How pathetic. I just go ahead and hide behind my straight girl façade whenever I

want and come out when it conveniences me? Before the guilt of having just done that even sinks in, I'm immediately punished by the feeling of having shoved myself back in the closet. You want to feel safe? Liked? Then you can stay in here as long as you want.

Maybe I'm the one with the prejudice. I'm talking to a small-town woman so she must be homophobic? Is this some sort of heterophobia? Am I the bad guy in this story?

There's one person in my life who I have yet to come out to. Maria. As you may recall, after having me, my mother went back to work. She welcomed Maria into our home to take care of me. Maria is a first-generation Portuguese woman in her 70's who calls me Luringa when I'm being bad. (exasperated) Ahhh! Luringa! Whhhhy? Don't feel bad for her, she has a summer home in the Azores. Maria speaks English in a way that only my brother and I can understand. After knowing her for 35 years, she has taken care of me my entire life, we have never had a conversation lasting longer than 5 minutes. Her love for me is felt, not heard. It is understood by me on such a profound level and I cannot afford to lose it. I have no idea what her beliefs are. I could not even guess what kind of reaction she might have if I brought Margaret over to meet her. But I can't risk it. I can't even begin to process how devastating a loss that would be for me. Even if she doesn't react badly; even if it's just a slight withdrawal of her love, I'll feel it, and I'll know it was my fault. I'll know I could have kept it if I kept my mouth shut.

So even after that big talk about going in holding her hand and let those fuckers figure it out, there are some circumstances that just stop me dead in my tracks and remind me that I am vulnerable. Am I willing to risk losing some of her love, to love someone else? To love myself? I don't know.

Everyone preaches about self-love. It's instructional, "love yourself!" But they don't know what to do with it when you say, yeah, I do. Like, a lot actually. Because, to the untrained eye, self-love looks a lot like arrogance; especially if you're a woman. These very thoughtful people are like, "love yourself, love yourself, love yourself, not that much. Love yourself, but be humble. Well, which is it?

More people have criticized me for my self-love than for my self-hate. People definitely liked me more when I liked myself less, but it turns out, that's not my problem. Don't get me

wrong, I don't think I'm better than anyone else. I don't have to like myself the best to love myself the most.

Now that enough time has passed, my parents buy me rainbow socks and flannel for Christmas. My family comes to my queer shows, make an effort to learn about pronouns and attempt to understand gender. When talking about relationships my mom says, "Can't wait to meet him...or her" and with every passing year, the pause gets shorter. Once a year my dad sends me a text, "Happy Cinco de Mayo". Last year, my mom sent one, too but she's a classic boomer so it said, "Happy Cinco de Mayo, dot dot dot". So it still has a bit of an edge. When we have dinner mom asks, "Is this going in your stand-up comedy?" and I keep saying no, but now that I think about it, yes. She knew I was lying, and that is why she's not here.

As it turns out, I don't need a girl on my arm, or rainbow socks or a giant neon sign that says, "LESBIAN" to validate who I am. I'm enough. I was denied my identity for so long I felt like I needed proof of it to really exist; maybe not even to prove it to others, but to myself. I come out to me every single day, and I'm getting louder and louder. The microphone helps.

(lights out)

(lights up, curtain call)

Thank you for coming out.

(lights out)