

Another Bottle by Jonathan Llewellyn

“Fuck!”

“What is it? What’s happened?”

“My stupid, kid brother, that’s what! He’s just come out to mum and dad! The bastard!”

Drew slammed the phone down on the table.

“Oh!,” said Tim, “I didn’t see that coming.”

“Neither did I. That’s really fucked my plans now!”

“Did it not go well?”

Drew had been planning on coming out to his parents on his next visit in two weeks. He’d been putting it off for a while. For a long while. Since he and Tim had got together really. Who was he kidding? He was 33 and had been living with Tim for 10 years. Dating for 12. Before that even. He’d been putting it off since he was 17! And now his kid brother, Sam, had ruined it. Married at 19, a parent at 20, divorced at 22 and suddenly a raving homosexual at 23! WTF?!

Drew had been terrified of telling his parents. He’d drafted numerous letters, emails, speeches. He’d watched countless coming out videos on YouTube for ideas. He’d even planned on baking a rainbow cake except he couldn’t follow a recipe to save his life.

Tim had been encouraging with each phone call or visit to the family. Each Christmas or birthday get together Tim had been there ready to support Drew if he finally decided to say something and it all went badly. Tim got so used to being on standby it was a default mode now. He acted supportive but secretly he’d given up all hope of Drew actually saying the words.

Drew’s sister knew. Not that she told Drew. She’d secretly confided in Tim that she knew but made him swear not to say anything so as not to rob Drew of his moment. Bi herself, she didn’t care but was sensitive to the needs of Drew the Drama Queen who would crack it if he was outed even in a supportive “we already know and we love you all the same” way.

Drew mumbled something and left the room. Half stormed out, half walked out like he was getting something from another room. He turned on his heels, walked back to Tim and blurted:

“Talk about queer as - he’s together with his best mate. They’ve both come out. Talk about a cliched, fucking Jerry Springer episode!”

And with that he was gone again, talking with his hands, mumbling as he went.

Tim boiled the kettle, made himself a tea. In anticipation of what was to come next, he poured Drew a glass of a half-drunk bottle of red that was ok for cooking but not really so great for consuming. Tim sat quietly at the table stirring the spoon when Drew returned and drank from the glass as if it was the thing he’d been looking for all along. A mouthful of mediocre red and the diatribe download commenced. Tim patiently listened nodding and agreeing at the correct moments. He knew how to do this. Drew finished the glass and Tim poured another.

After about thirty minutes, a “ding-ding” came from Tim’s phone this time. It was Drew’s sister:

“Is he ok?”

“He will be.”

“Thanks. Dinner next Saturday?”

“Sure.”

“What have I been drinking?!” Drew had finally calmed down enough to realise how rancid the red was.

Drew’s phone rang. His mother. No doubt to talk about spotlight stealing Sam! He answered pretending to be calm and collected. Tim sat by, eternally supportive, listening to the conversation between mother and son. Speakerphone wasn’t on. It wasn’t needed for Drew’s mum. Her voice could be heard across a busy marketplace.

However, Drew’s mothers voice was different, filled with energy and excitement, not tone and tears as he had expected. Tim listened and heard words like “wonderful”, “joyous” and “thrilled”. This conversation was not going the way that either of the couple had expected.

And then it happened. The unexpected. The can-I-believe-what-I-just-heard moment.

“Oh yes, of course we support him. What with your sister telling us about herself when she was 19, and now your brother

coming out too. The only thing that surprised your father and I was that it wasn't you telling us first, Drew. We thought you would have come out to us years ago? We would have always been very supportive. Your father's late brother was queer."

And then the absolute clincher:

"And we've always known about you and Tim."

Tim quietly turned to the cupboard and looked for another bottle.