



GOING TO THE TOP

BY

MATTHEW BELOPAVLOVICH

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes...* Amidst glittering sequin dresses, hair sprayed up-dos, and thumping disco music, I lose myself in awe of a six-foot seven drag queen lip-syncing for their life. A comfort food of gender-bending-crass-humor -delivering-fresh-talipa served as my palate cleanser to an utterly diabolical world outside. While our times have become more becoming of queer people and culture, it may shock younger generations bans on “homosexual contact” in public were the norm. Within *Going To The Top* by Matthew Belopavlovich, we travel back to the late 70’s where our protagonists, James and Thomas, face

discrimination at a new local hotspot. A quest for identity, acceptance, and freedom ensues. Going To The Top delivers the same comfort feeling I get as a queer man watching drag queens on TV. The feeling of being celebrated for every quirk and quark. Quick and quack. Duck walk the house down boot henny, as they say. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

GOING TO THE TOP

A One-Act with Dance

Cast of Characters

Thomas - college freshman, activist, openly gay, confident

James - high school senior, contemplating coming out, athletic

Mother & Legal Team - supportive mother of James, perceptive,
also plays The Mouse and Attorney

Everyone Else - plays Daniel, Radio Announcer, DJ, TV Reporter,
Security Guard & OCR Editor

Casting Note: Each character played by EVERYONE ELSE may be divided into separate roles for a larger cast size. This also applies to THE MOUSE and ATTORNEY roles.

GOING TO THE TOP was first staged by Matthew Belopavlovich; choreography by Steven Jones; stage management by Julia Bodolay; lighting by Keith Eisenstadt; music by Kyle Waves; presented by William Glenn and Trish Parry for the Tampa International Fringe Festival at the HCC Studio Theater, Florida, July 2022, with the following cast:

Thomas.....Jonathan O'Brien
James.....Bo Bailey
Mother.....Audrey Siegler
Everyone Else.....Ryan Fisher

Special thanks to Julia and Ned who contributed to the editing and revision process.

Setting
Various locations in California

Time
1977-1985

Scenic Note: GOING TO THE TOP was originally presented at the 2022 Tampa International Fringe Festival using four chairs, a folding table, minimal props, and lighting to communicate various locations.

Music Note: Choreography was created for "Dance with Me" with special permission from pop artist Kyle Waves. Royalty-free music was used for all other scenes and transitions. Future productions should select music that fits the time period.

Lights up. Music plays under a radio ad for Music Video City.

Scene 1 - Radio Station

RADIO ANNOUNCER

You'll want to be where the music videos are rolling, the lighting effects are killer, and the music is cranked up high when the weekend arrives! California's newest summer hotspot, Music Video City, is opening this Friday night at the jolliest place on earth. Dance till you drop under the stars with your friends, or maybe a hot date. Music Video City is the dancing, dating, party scene that everyone will be talking about this summer. We're giving away special, discounted Music Video City passports to all grad night partiers. You might even win a new GM car while experiencing this high-energy, high-tech nightclub. You can pick up your exclusive passport in Townsquare. All guests can save five dollars with a coupon now available in Tiger Beat and Seventeen magazines. Get ready for a summer of dancing the night away at Music Video City!

Music fades as the actor playing EVERYONE ELSE swaps out costume pieces and props.

SCENE 2 - Bedroom/OCR Office

OCR EDITOR

Good afternoon, thanks for calling The Orange County Register editorial line.

THOMAS

Hi. My name is Thomas. I was told this was the number to call if I have a story suggestion.

OCR EDITOR

You have the right number.

THOMAS

Yes, ok, are you familiar with Music Video City?

OCR EDITOR

I am. It's The Mouse's new date-night dance club.

THOMAS

That's the one. Are you aware that the jolliest place on earth has kicked out several guests because they were touching while dancing with the same sex?

OCR EDITOR

I haven't heard anything about that happening to anyone.

THOMAS

Well, that's what happened to my roommate, Maggie ... she's a lesbian and one of my friends from San Francisco State.

OCR EDITOR

Alright kid, but what's the story?

THOMAS

If you look at the dance club's policy, it states that only male-female couples are permitted to dance together. It's discrimination.

A beat of silence. There's no response from the editor.

THOMAS

Maggie didn't want to make a big deal out of it, but I think it's outrageous.

OCR EDITOR

But it didn't happen to you.

THOMAS

Not yet, no. But I was calling to tell you that my boyfriend and I are going to Music Video City this weekend.

OCR EDITOR

And?

THOMAS

And ... I was wondering if you would want to send someone to document our queer rebellion.

OCR EDITOR

I doubt that anyone working there will bother you if you're just dancing. It's not like you're going to be kissing in the middle of the dance floor.

THOMAS

But they've already kicked someone out ... Maggie. And, I don't know, maybe we will kiss. Shouldn't we be allowed to just like any other couple?

OCR EDITOR

Sorry, Thomas. There's just not enough for me to go off of here. What if nothing happens to you and your ... friend? Just try dancing somewhere else, okay? I'd rather not get involved with the mouse mastermind unless we have piles of evidence. I appreciate you calling.

THOMAS

Yeah, sure. Thanks for your time. (hangs up phone)

SCENE 3 - James's Home

The lights shift to JAMES who is getting ready for school while dancing around his room. He occasionally strikes a fierce pose toward the mirror.

MOTHER

(Calling from the kitchen.)

James, you need to be out the door in five minutes, or you'll be late for school.

JAMES

Thanks mom, I just have to grab my backpack.

James applies some deodorant, grabs his backpack, and hurries into the kitchen where his mother greets him with a Pop Tart.

MOTHER

Oh, and James ...

JAMES

(Taking the Pop Tart.)

Yeah mom?

MOTHER

Something from Thomas was buried in the mail yesterday. How is he doing at San Francisco State? I'm so glad you two have kept in touch.

JAMES

Excellent. Thanks mom. (grabbing the letter) Thomas said that he'd be sending me one more letter before moving out of his apartment for the summer.

MOTHER

Well, I want to know all about his new college life after you finish reading. Promise to tell me about it over dinner?

JAMES

Sure mom. And remember, I have soccer practice tonight. Love you.

James starts for the front door as his mother calls after him.

MOTHER

Have a good day.

James exits out of the front door and opens the letter as he walks to the bus stop. He reads the letter as he waits.

JAMES

Dear James. My first year is wrapping up successfully here. I made the Dean's List. My parents will be happy about that. I can't wait to see you and go dancing at Music Video City. It will be our first ever da-

(James stops reading.)

Wait a second ... If I'm going to tell this story, I should probably start from the beginning ... before this letter, San Francisco State University, the kiss, and meeting Thomas. Let's rewind to when I first met my boyfriend Thomas and his best friend Daniel. Hit it DJ.

DANCE #1. The full company performs choreography as a segue into the story.

SCENE 4 - School Classroom

DANIEL

Who do you think would join?

THOMAS

I don't even know. I never thought our school district would even consider LGBT groups.

DANIEL

You're way off man. San Francisco is right up the road. It is literally a gay mecca right now.

James rounds the corner overhearing the conversation. He stops to listen.

THOMAS

Yeah, I guess you're right, except the northeast has got us beat.

DANIEL

What do you mean?

THOMAS

There were some students in Massachusetts starting to organize.

DANIEL

How do you know that?

THOMAS

My cousin Tiffany lives out there and we were talking on the phone a couple weeks ago.

DANIEL

Preppy, suburban Tiff? Anything flies out there, huh?

THOMAS

And don't forget those kids at George Washington High School in the Bronx.

DANIEL

What about them?

THOMAS

Dude, you need to brush up on your queer knowledge.
(Notices James listening in on their conversation at the door.)
Hi there.

DANIEL

What? (Turning to look) Oh hey man.

THOMAS

Off to soccer practice?

JAMES

Um ... yeah ... I am.

THOMAS

Cool.

JAMES

What were you two just talking about?

THOMAS looks at DANIEL who shrugs, giving Thomas half-hearted permission.

THOMAS

There are some students on the east coast forming groups to support gay and lesbian students.

JAMES

Really?

Thomas notices James' gym bag.

THOMAS

You're a freshman, right? JV soccer?

JAMES

Yeah.

A beat of awkward silence.

THOMAS

Want to come in and sit down? I'm Thomas and this is Daniel. We're sophomores.

JAMES

What is this co-curricular?

DANIEL

This. Is. Our soon-to-be, "totally fabulous," gay and lesbian student support group, courtesy of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

THOMAS

And until then, we play sports on boards. (Pointing to the only two people in the room.) We are the mighty chess club.

James laughs.

DANIEL

(Using air quotes.)
Do you "play chess."

Thomas slugs Daniel in the shoulder.

JAMES

(Unsure of how to answer.)
Actually, I better get to practice.

THOMAS

Sure thing dude.

DANIEL

(Calling off to James as he leaves.)
Our chess club door is always open.

James speaks to the audience as lights fade on the previous scene.

JAMES

I wasn't quite ready to join their gay and lesbian group in that moment. There was always something in the back of my mind whenever I took a girl to the middle school dances and for the first time, I was thinking that maybe I should stop ignoring that feeling. Daniel was nosy and Thomas enlisted him to investigate me further. I guess Thomas developed a pretty big crush on me. Of course, my big mouth blabbed about *my* crush at the time. What can I say, he got me talking about soccer ... and I love soccer.

SCENE 5 - Boy's Locker Room

DANIEL

Hey James.

JAMES

Oh, hi Daniel.

DANIEL

I heard in the morning announcements that you won the game over the weekend.

JAMES

Yeah, it was a close one.

DANIEL

I played soccer in elementary school. I wasn't that good, but I think the jerseys are cute.

JAMES

They actually call them kits in the UK. I want to travel to Europe and watch a game.

DANIEL

Sounds fun.

JAMES

My parents flew us out to New York to see the Cosmos play last year. It was the best weekend of my life. That's where I got my Franz Beckenbauer jersey. (getting lost in his passion for soccer) Number six, he's awesome! The way he glides down the field – Beckenbauer's a central defender ... his curly brown hair tousled by the wind ... how you can see the power of his leg muscles –

DANIEL

(Cutting James off.)

In those, "barely there," soccer shorts? Like you wear?

JAMES

Huh?

DANIEL

You might as well be wearing boxers.

JAMES

(James chuckles.)

They're made that way to allow freedom of movement when running the field or kicking the ball.

DANIEL

Sounds like you have a crush on this Franz guy.

JAMES

What? No. I mean, he's a great footballer.

DANIEL

(Laughing to himself.)

Who looks good in his kit, right?

JAMES

(Avoiding the question.)

So, why are you in the locker room?

DANIEL

Oh, some of the sophomores are learning a dance to "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing" for the homecoming assembly. Thomas should actually be here soon.

JAMES

Thomas? (flustered) Oh dang, I gotta get to practice.

DANIEL

Hmm, sounds familiar.

JAMES

Have to be on time if I want to be team captain senior year.

DANIEL

Right. Makes sense. Well, thanks to you, I now know more about soccer than I ever did.

JAMES

Yeah ...

James starts to walk away.

You should come to a game some time.

DANIEL

I think Thomas and I can make that happen.

JAMES

Okay, yes, come together. We play again this Thursday ... home game.

James turns and almost bumps into Thomas who is entering the locker room.

THOMAS

Hey.

JAMES

(Playing it cool.)

Uh ... what's going on?

DANIEL

Yo, Thomas! We're going to the soccer game this Thursday ... to see James play.

THOMAS

Great!

JAMES

I'm ... going to practice.

THOMAS

When are you not?

James shoots a look at Thomas.

THOMAS

Only joking. We'll be at the game.

James speaks to the audience as lights fade on the previous scene.

JAMES

What?! (Mentally living the moment again.) Thomas was coming to one of my games! I wish you could have seen my face. It was stuck on full, ear to ear, smile all night. "Love sought, is good; but given unsought, is better." That's from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Fast-forward to our first kiss amidst a brief Shakespearean scene.

SCENE 6 - At School, somewhere secluded

JAMES

I still can't believe you got cast as Romeo.

THOMAS

What? Do you see me more as a Friar?

JAMES

No, umm ... I don't know all the characters. I may have skipped a few scenes.

THOMAS

What?

JAMES

Soccer practice. Sometimes my homework gets benched.

THOMAS

Riiight. Bad to the bone!

JAMES

Am I? So, who would that make me?

THOMAS

You're totally a Tybalt.

JAMES

Oh ... yeah, that's the street fight guy, right?

THOMAS

The street fight guy? You're not wrong ... but you need to do some extra credit.

JAMES

What'd mean?

THOMAS

You didn't read the full script and now must help me rehearse for the play. I'm still struggling with my lines in act one, scene five.

JAMES

Okay, sure.

THOMAS

I'll be Romeo and you're, well ... Juliet.

JAMES

Umm.

THOMAS

Just help me with my lines. Please.

JAMES

I'm not an actor.

THOMAS

You are too! "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

JAMES

Who said that?

THOMAS

Wow ... William Shakespeare wrote it. (humorously annoyed) Let me educate you.

James thinks for a moment.

JAMES

Fine. (rolling eyes) Give me your script.

THOMAS

We're starting at my line, "If I profane." See it?

JAMES

Found it.

Thomas "gets into character" for a second while James just stares.

THOMAS (as Romeo)

If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Thomas grabs James' hands. James is surprised but goes along with a smile from Thomas.

JAMES (as Juliet)

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

THOMAS

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JAMES

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

THOMAS

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

Thomas moves in closer to James, placing his hand to James' cheek. James reaches up to grab his arm, first to remove, but he doesn't.

THOMAS

Sorry James. I'm just doing the blocking Mrs. Elliot gave us.

JAMES

No, it's okay. My line is next. Umm ...
Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

THOMAS

Then move not...

James and Thomas stare into each other's eyes. It is a beat of intensity.

THOMAS

While my prayer's effect I take.

Thomas gently moves James' hand from cheek into his palm. Thomas kisses his hand and James cracks a big, blushing smile.

JAMES

(Breaking from the moment.)
So ... how do you feel about your lines now.

THOMAS

Yeah, um, better.

JAMES

Okay. I should get to soccer practice.

THOMAS

Right. I'm already a little late to rehearsal anyway.

JAMES

See you tomorrow.

James starts to leave.

THOMAS

Thanks for helping me rehearse my lines.

JAMES

Sure. Alright, bye.

SCENE 7 - School Parking Lot

JAMES

The truth was ... I was falling for Thomas. I couldn't stop thinking about that kiss on my hand. I didn't even wash my hand for the rest of that day. I wanted to be Thomas's boyfriend and

had to tell him. Of course, I couldn't do it publicly. I wasn't ready to come out. There had been so much in the news recently about parents disowning their children or kicking them out of the house after they came out. I couldn't risk anyone on the soccer team or my parents finding out. But it needed to be romantic and sophisticated ... something that Thomas would appreciate. Letters always seemed romantic in the movies, so that's what I went with. The only problem was that I didn't know what to say. I kept it short.

Thomas walks up to his jeep and notices something on the hood of his vehicle.

THOMAS

(reading letter)

Thomas. I like you. Do you like me? Wear something green tomorrow if yes, and white if no. I'm hoping for green. J.

JAMES

... The colors of my favorite soccer team, the Cosmos. Well, he wore green. A neon green jacket, with hints of blue and pink to keep it subtle. He knew that I wasn't ready to tell the world. Thomas liked me and my heart was bouncing off the walls.

SCENE 8 - James's House

THOMAS

Before we go inside ... you're cool with this, right? I mean, we can always hang at my house or keep it strictly an at-school thing. I understand what you're feeling.

JAMES

No, no ... it's fine, really. My parents know we're friends and they like you - like me having you as a friend. You're not like all the other jocks I spend time with.

THOMAS

How so?

JAMES

Well, you're courteous to my parents for one ... you say "please" and "thank you" rather than just gobbling up all the snacks and leaving a mess. Y'know, that kind of stuff.

THOMAS

As long as you're comfortable.

JAMES

(Pantomiming using a lever and button.)
Totally. And if anything comes up that I'm not ready to discuss,
I'll expertly maneuver around it like I do with my ship when I'm
killin' it at Star Fire.

THOMAS

(Laughing at James being adorable.)
Right. Let's go, space warrior.

They enter James' house and his mother approaches from an
adjoining room.

MOM

Hi boys.

JAMES

Hey mom.

THOMAS

Hello Mrs. Boyd.

MOM

Nice to see you again Thomas. It's been awhile.

JAMES

(Shooting his mom a glance.)
Mom! We hang all the time.

MOM

Yes, but not at our house.

JAMES

(Trying to avoid further conversation.)
Okay, we'll be in my room.

MOM

Sounds good.

The boys start to exit toward James' room.

MOM

(Stopping them with another thought.)

And Thomas?

THOMAS

Yeah?

MOM

Would you like to stay for dinner? Nobody eats leftovers in this house.

JAMES

Mom, I think that Thomas —

THOMAS

(Cutting James off before he can say no.)
Would love to. Yes, I would like to stay for dinner.

MOM

(Smiling at his response.)
You can use the phone in our kitchen to call your parents and ask.

Thomas exits with Mrs. Boyd. James remains onstage to continue his timeline narration.

JAMES

A couple years felt like seconds, and before we knew it, Thomas was a senior.

SCENE 9 - Thomas's Jeep

THOMAS

(Getting ready to exit the vehicle.)
We're here.

JAMES

(Placing a hand on Thomas's arm.)
Thomas?

THOMAS

Yeah? You look worried James. What's going on?

JAMES

I'm just ...

THOMAS

You can tell me anything.

JAMES

It's going to be hard not having you around next year.

THOMAS

I know.

JAMES

I mean ... you've changed my life. These past few years have been so great, and this feels like an ending. I'm afraid.

THOMAS

There's nothing to be worried about. I'm yours.

JAMES

What if you go off to college in San Francisco and meet other guys that are, I don't know ... more comfortable than me, sexier than me ... more like you.

THOMAS

(Trying to break the tension.)
So, you think I'm sexy?

JAMES

Thomas, I'm serious. I don't know if I'll ever be ready to come out. It's scary.

THOMAS

I'm not asking you to do that.

JAMES

Now you aren't. You're going to the gay mecca. Who knows what you'll feel once you get there. It's just been us - you, me, Daniel ... in our own little world, but it's about to be a whole new experience for you.

THOMAS

James. Take a breath babe. You don't need to rush anything or be like the gay men strutting down Castro Street. I like the always curious, soccer playing, Star Fire pro James. Yes, I'm looking forward to having more freedoms than here and meeting other like-minded people. But I want to share those moments with you. And that's why we're here.

JAMES

Right. Okay, I'll try to relax. Where is here exactly? You still haven't told me where you're taking me after dinner.

THOMAS

And I'm having second thoughts. Maybe I should have. I just wanted you to see what else is going on and meet other people in our community that want change.

JAMES

Okay.

THOMAS

There's a youth social event organized by The Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center tonight and I wanted us to go, meet other young people who feel the same way we do. Everyone here is an ally. Nothing will get back to your parents. I promise.

JAMES

I trust you.

THOMAS

Good. And we can leave whenever you want or if it's boring – and just drive. Okay?

JAMES

Yeah, that sounds like a plan.

Thomas starts to get out of the vehicle again.

JAMES

Wait, Thomas ...

THOMAS

Yeah?

JAMES

I wish we could go to your senior prom together.

THOMAS

That would be awesome. I promise to take you dancing someday.

JAMES

Yeah, school dance rules are a total bummer.

THOMAS

But we can meet-up on Sunday and I'll tell you all about it ...
might even dance for you (nudges James).

JAMES

(James chuckles.)
I'd like that. (They look at each other.) Oh, dang. I almost
forgot ... I got you something to wear when you move away,
something to keep you comfortable and inspired.

James hands Thomas an unwrapped department store gift box.
Thomas opens the gift box; it is a baggy Champion-brand
sweatshirt. Thomas gives a questioning look to James.

JAMES

"C" for the Curious Crusader, that free LGBT magazine you dream
of creating.

THOMAS

I love it James!

They share an awkward car hug.

JAMES

Hey, I heard that The Mouse is opening up an outdoor dance club.
Maybe we could all go when you come home for one of your breaks?

THOMAS

You tell me the date and time, and I'll pick you up. Now let's
go inside before the good snacks are gone.

James speaks to the audience as lights fade on the previous
scene.

JAMES

You're all caught up! Even though Thomas was moving away to San
Francisco for college, I knew we'd be alright. And just as he
promised in the letter, Thomas was taking me to Music Video
City. Tonight!

SCENE 10 - James's House (living room)

MOM

So, when is Thomas picking you up?

JAMES

I think he said around 7:00 ... 7:30.

MOM

Ok ... and how late are you planning on staying out? I think I read that club stays open till something like 2:00 o'clock in the morning in some magazine ad. That's three hours past curfew.

JAMES

But mom, I haven't seen Thomas in months! Can I please stay out a little bit later tonight?

MOM

Sure. But remember, you do have the whole summer to keep going back. It's not just open tonight.

JAMES

(Letting it slip)
Yeah, but tonight is special.

MOM

Special? (a beat) Is anyone else going with you and Thomas tonight? Any other friends like his friend Daniel, or Maggie?

JAMES

No it's just (almost says yes) — I mean, yeah, maybe they'll stop by ...

MOM

(Saving him from a stumbling explanation.)
Alright, alright fine. Leave the park by midnight, be home by one. (giving stern mom face) That's non-negotiable.

JAMES

Thanks mom! I owe you.

MOM

(Trying to dig/make conversation.)
I'll remember that. So ... is Thomas still driving that Jeep he had in high school?

JAMES

I'm not sure. Maybe his ecologically savvy friends at San Francisco State convinced him to get a new car.

MOM

Or a bike. (laughing at her joke) Y'know, things that you couldn't say and do at your school are probably freely discussed at his university.

JAMES

(Thinking about whether or not to share.)
Actually, Thomas mentioned he was joining a couple different activist groups and getting involved with some protest marches at school.

MOM

(Genuinely curious, also digging.)
Which ones? Do you know what he's supporting? Who is he trying to help?

JAMES

Question overload mom! I think he's gonna be here soon and I need to finish doing my hair.

MOM

(being a mom)
Your hair? It looks fine ... and you have your new shirt on ...

JAMES

I just ... you know. (Clarifying.) It's a cool dance club and I just wanna make sure I fit in with everybody.

MOM

James, of course you will fit in. You're awesome and I just hope you know that I love you no matter what.

JAMES

(Confused about the inclusion of weird, sappy comments.)
Mom! What are you even talking about?

James turns to head toward his room.

MOM

You know you can tell me anything, right?

JAMES

Ok mom. Stop being weird. I'm gonna finish getting ready.

MOM

(Copying his tone at first.)
Ok James. I hope you have a great night! And you better ride Runaway Thunder Train. You know I haven't been on it yet and I want to hear all the details.

JAMES

(With a loving tone.)

Sure mom. We'll definitely ride Runaway Thunder Train.

SCENE 11 - Music Video City

MUSIC VIDEO CITY DJ

Alright, alright! I see some totally rad dance moves out there. Let's keep the party going with another chart-topping music video.

DANCE #2. MUSIC VIDEO CITY DANCE (45-60 seconds of choreography)

JAMES

They have been playing all of my favorite songs tonight.

THOMAS

(Cracking a big smile.)

I'm glad you're having fun.

JAMES

Why wouldn't I be?

THOMAS

I don't know. I guess I was just nervous about ... it's just that you're not out. (adding on) And I wasn't sure how you felt about other people seeing us dance together.

JAMES

I feel like this is the only place I can be me. Your imagination can run wild here ... their movies are full of characters who are considered different.

THOMAS

Different? (slightly offended) We're just like everyone else.

JAMES

You know what I mean - how the world sees them. How they have to rely on their friends and believe in themselves.

THOMAS

Yeah ... I just hate that word *different*. But you're right. I'm sure there are a bunch of gay boys dancing around their basements with an imaginary prince charming.

A Security Guard enters and speaks over the music.

SECURITY GUARD

Excuse me young men, but I need you to leave the dance floor so that we can have a word.

THOMAS

Dang, I knew this was going to happen.

JAMES

Knew what was going to happen?

THOMAS

You can tell us right here. We're paying guests just like everyone else.

SECURITY GUARD

Look, I don't want any trouble. I'm just enforcing the rules.

THOMAS

Yeah, I know all about your discriminatory rules. You kicked my friend Maggie and her girlfriend out recently.

JAMES

Thomas, what are you talking about?

THOMAS

They're trying to remove us from the club. And I'll tell you later.

JAMES

What?

SECURITY GUARD

If you don't cooperate, you'll be suspended from the property completely. I'm just asking you to leave the dance floor.

THOMAS

(The conversation is getting heated.)
So, we can secretly hold hands on a ride but not at this night club for dates?

JAMES

Sir, we were barely touching, and we can stop. Just let us stay and dance.

THOMAS

No James, you're my boyfriend and we're on a date. We should be able to dance together.

SECURITY GUARD

You're making this difficult. Why don't you just find two nice girls to dance with for the rest of tonight?

THOMAS

I think you're making it difficult. We were just dancing.

SECURITY GUARD

This is a family park gentlemen. Nobody wants queers around their kids.

THOMAS

So that's what this is all about? No gays allowed?

SECURITY GUARD

You two were engaging in homosexual fast dancing and touch. It's against our policy for Music Video City.

JAMES

Seriously? We were just having some fun.

SECURITY GUARD

(Irritated)

Guys, if you won't exit the dance floor peacefully, I'll have to call over some other guards and it will be a bigger scene than it already is. Just exit the dance floor, okay?

THOMAS

Yeah, we're going. So much for the jolliest place on earth.

Thomas tugs at James and they leave the dance floor. James speaks to the audience as lights fade on the previous scene.

JAMES

Thomas isn't wrong. We should have been allowed to dance just like any other couple and, even though I hadn't heard it spoken in front of others yet, we were boyfriends. In school there was no mention of the Stonewall Riots or the first Gay Liberation March, but Thomas knows all about gay and lesbian activists and

movements. He's still charged up from that encounter with the security guard.

James steps out of narration and into the next scene.

SCENE 12 - Thomas's Bedroom

THOMAS

Sorry that I outed you in the park tonight. That was totally uncalled for.

JAMES

I'm actually feeling pretty okay about it. We were dancing together. I'm sure some people guessed.

THOMAS

Yeah, but it wasn't my place to do that.

JAMES

It's not like it was in front of my soccer teammates or parents.

THOMAS

Right.

JAMES

Hey Thomas, what did you mean earlier when you said, "I knew this was going to happen?"

THOMAS

Oh, um. Shoot. Okay, my friend Maggie, from San Francisco State?

JAMES

Yeah, you've talked about her a lot.

THOMAS

Well, she had went to Music Video City with her girlfriend and they were kicked out just like us.

JAMES

So, you knew it was possible.

THOMAS

Yes, but I may have also called a newspaper to see if they could cover us being removed from the dance floor.

JAMES

What? But how could you know it would also happen to us?

THOMAS

I didn't ... just had a feeling.

JAMES

A hope? (Letting out a deep sigh.) It was supposed to be a date, not an activist thing.

THOMAS

I know, and I'm sorry ... kind of.

JAMES

What kind of apology is that?

THOMAS

Don't you want to be able to hold hands, dance together, share a meal, kiss – not just in our rooms but in public? Live our lives as partners just like every other couple?

JAMES

Of course, that would be amazing ... once I find the courage to come out to everyone.

THOMAS

And I don't want to pressure you babe, but there is an opportunity here?

JAMES

To what?

THOMAS

"Come out, come out, wherever you are." Harvey Milk is calling you right now. We have to battle this in court. We have to fight for the right to dance together so that one day couples like us might even be able to get married.

James is in a state of shock at the thought of marriage. He stares at Thomas.

JAMES

You're so brave Thomas but I don't think that I can do that.

THOMAS

It happened to us, not me. We'd need to fight this together, as boyfriends, to win. And your mom can help us. She can help us approach the ACLU.

JAMES

The ACLU?

THOMAS

Yes, the American Civil Liberties Union. What happened to us tonight was discrimination.

JAMES

Yeah, this whole thing makes me feel awful.

THOMAS

Yes, it does. And your mom's law firm can help us request legal assistance from the ACLU. I mean, I know they are fighting for gay and lesbian rights, and I think they'd be interested in this as a potential case.

JAMES

Which means I would need to tell my mom about us, right?

THOMAS

Yes. I know it's asking so much James. And I understand if you're not ready. It's just that I know we could do something important in this moment ... together.

James takes a long pause to think.

JAMES

Okay.

THOMAS

Okay?

JAMES

Yes. I'll talk to my mom.

THOMAS

Really? Because I want you to be sure about this.

JAMES

And Thomas?

THOMAS

Yeah?

JAMES

I love you.

Thomas stares into James' eyes and then gives him a giant hug.

THOMAS

I love you too. I'm so proud of you James.

James breaks away between scenes to address the audience.

JAMES

And so, as the soundtrack of Sunday morning cartoons provided some levity for the tension I am about to create, I cautiously sit down to talk to my mother.

SCENE 13 - James's House (kitchen)

MOM

Hey James. So how was last night?

JAMES

We had fun, but -

MOM

Uh oh, a but, what happened? Sit down, have some coffee, and spill.

JAMES

We got kicked out.

MOM

(Almost spitting out her coffee.)
You what? Did you get into a fight? Steal something?

JAMES

Mom! Did you forget who your son was?

MOM

Well ... I don't know.

JAMES

You know I wouldn't do those things.

MOM

Okay, so what happened?

JAMES

(Choking up, contemplating his next words.)
We were dancing.

MOM

I would hope so. Did you meet some other people to hang with?

JAMES

We were dancing ... together.

MOM

(Not thinking about her tone.)
Oh.

JAMES

Sorry - this is a mistake - never mind.

James gets up to leave.

MOM

Wait, James. It's okay. Tell me what happened.

He hesitantly sits back down.

JAMES

We were dancing together ... we held hands ... and after a couple songs, this security guard came up to us and asked us to find girls to dance with or leave the dance floor.

MOM

What did you do?

JAMES

And then Thomas got pretty upset and started arguing with the security guard. Everybody around us was staring. He - we caused a pretty big scene I guess. But then we left. Nothing else happened. He wasn't arrested or anything.

MOM

I'm sorry, hunny. That does sound like an awful end to your night.

JAMES

Yeah, it definitely wasn't how I thought the night would go. Wait, you're not mad that I was dancing with Thomas?

MOM

Well, there have been some moments with you and Thomas when I suspected that you were more than just friends. And, that's okay. I don't understand it fully if I'm being honest. But what I do know, is that you seem so happy with Thomas ... and all that matters to us is that you're happy.

JAMES

Wait, us?

MOM

Your father and I have talked about what we've sensed was true. We didn't know if you'd ever bring it up. Things are tough out there for gay people James and we're just a little concerned.

JAMES

Well, actually ... that's the other thing I wanted to talk to you about.

MOM

(Lightly laughing.)

Wow, I'm thinking we should have had more of these coffee chats when you were growing up. What else is on your mind?

JAMES

We were wondering if you would help us organize our thoughts and speak with the ACLU. Thomas believes that we could go to court on the grounds of sexual discrimination. We should have been able to stay and dance. We want the same rights as anyone else.

MOM

(Proud of her son standing up for himself.)

James, nothing would make me happier right now than to help you fight The Mouse.

JAMES

Really mom?

MOM

Yes, I'm in. Why don't you invite Thomas over for dinner and we'll talk about next steps.

JAMES

(Surprised)

Thank you mom, thank you. I'll call him now.

SCENE 14 - News Studio/On Location

All characters appear in lighting specials as they speak. The actor playing mother switches costume pieces to signify the two legal team members.

TV REPORTER

After nearly four years, a decision has been reached in the Drake and ACLU v. The Mouse case. The jolliest place on earth has been forced to eliminate a ban on same-sex dancing, a policy that has been in place since the 1950s. With the ACLU's help, Thomas Drake sued the amusement park for sexual discrimination after he and his boyfriend were kicked out of Music Video City for dancing together. Over \$20,000 in emotional damage is to be paid to the families of Thomas Drake and his boyfriend James.

JAMES

We will be donating a portion of the funds to a local LGBT center.

THOMAS

And we plan to use the remaining funds to start a free magazine that promotes equal rights and exposes discrimination.

TV REPORTER

The boys' attorney held his ground, reminding the courtroom that -

ATTORNEY

The Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

TV REPORTER

A spokesperson for The Mouse claims that the same-sex dancing policy was -

THE MOUSE

Put in place to avoid men without dates turning the date-night attraction into a pick-up joint.

TV REPORTER

But that night, witnesses heard a security guard accuse the young men of "homosexual fast dancing" before escorting them off the dance floor. It's a partial win though as less than an hour ago, The Mouse's attorney stated -

THE MOUSE

The amusement park would abide by the order regarding Thomas and James, but it doesn't apply to others.

TV REPORTER

Only time will tell if the jolliest place on earth is also a welcoming place for all. I'm Drew Scott for KTLA-Channel 5. Back to you Jessica.

SCENE 15 - James's Car

Thomas and James are sitting in a car.

JAMES

Does this remind you of anything?

THOMAS

Will you break up with me if I say no?

JAMES

Sitting in a car, you're about to graduate ... I have one more year of college.

THOMAS

I guess you're right. The night I took you to that meeting at The Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center.

JAMES

Bingo. Except you've traded in that Champion sweatshirt I gave you for a gorgeous tux.

THOMAS

You clean up pretty well yourself.

JAMES

And this time you're doing the talking. The Curious Crusader is going to help people, kids like me in high school ... and spread pride across this nation.

THOMAS

Yeah, wow ... I still can't believe this magazine is a reality.

JAMES

That editor didn't listen to you years ago but now you have the opportunity to cover important stories happening to people in our community.

THOMAS

We. We have the opportunity.

JAMES

Right. I'll do my best when answering the phone, boss.

THOMAS

Shut up. (Chuckles then grins at James.)

JAMES

What?

THOMAS

It's just ... you're finally joining my "chess club."

They hug. It's filled with many emotions.

JAMES

Let's go inside. We have a first issue to celebrate!

Music begins to build as they stand up and go inside. Lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *The first couple scenes of Going To The Top were written in a cabin facing the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains in Georgia. I was scrolling through videos on YouTube during winter break and came across a Defunctland episode about Disneyland's Videopolis. Intrigued by the channel's overview of this theme park dance club, I went down a rabbit hole of articles and any other resources I could find. I had been looking for script inspiration having recently completed a playwriting course with my MA in Theatre program at the time. Love, Simon and similar books were gaining traction while television shows including Love, Victor and Heartstopper were appearing on our streaming networks. It was the perfect time to write a positive queer love story for the stage inspired by the true events surrounding lgbt people and Videopolis. I used my personal coming out journey and high school experiences to influence the fictional elements of Going To The Top. I entered the one-act concept into the*

Tampa International Fringe Festival lottery and was selected for the 2022 festival. This gave me the motivation to finish the script and the feedback we received from audience members and reviewers influenced the current revision.

AUTHOR BIO: Matthews Belopavlovich (Playwright) holds a BFA in acting from UW-Milwaukee, MA in theatre from Regent University, and graduate certificate in ASD advocacy from Lesley University. His original work has been featured at the Tampa International Fringe Festival and New York Clown Theatre Festival. Professional performance credits include work with Orlando Rep, Walt Disney World, TampaRep, and Skylight Music Theatre. As a stage director, Matthew has collaborated with Show Palace Dinner Theatre, Prairie Fire Children's Theatre, and Oxford Exchange. Belopavlovich spent a decade teaching and directing students at the Straz Center's Patel Conservatory, where he received the 2018 Teacher of the Year award and co-created the theatre education internship and sensory-friendly production programs. He was able to live out his childhood dream of performing as a clown with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for two years. His clown and theatre workshops have been presented at various conferences around the country including EdTA and SETC. Belopavlovich currently serves as the Middle School Drama Teacher at Shorecrest Preparatory School in St. Petersburg, Florida.