The Laundry Room: A Creative/Critical Approach to Intertwining Disability with Intersectional Identities

by

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It is worth asking how the presence of disability requires us to revise traditional conceptions of aesthetic production and appreciation.

—Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*

Theatre has proven to be a more powerful venue than advocacy for having ordinary people understand, experience and choose to be inclusive – to welcome diversity into their own lives.

—Judith Snow, “Keynote Conversation”

Stories featuring disabled characters and productions featuring disabled performers—often but not always the same thing—can have a huge impact on today’s audiences, and possibly tomorrow’s theatremakers. Every actor can recall the play they saw, usually at a young age, which resonated with them: The character or the story struck a chord of recognition, and suddenly they felt the need to hop onstage themselves. The untapped pool of talented young people with disabilities, who have too few role models to look up to, need to see those stories, those characters, and those actors onstage.

—Allison Considine, *American Theatre*

Actors from marginalized groups must battle on two fronts, then: to be cast in roles that resemble their own identities and to be cast in roles that do not.

—Carrie Sandahl, “Why Disability Identity Matters”

It is imperative that the disability movement develop methods to influence image-making from the inside and the outside.

—David Hevey, *The Creatures TimeForgot*
**Layering Disability: Intersectional Identities of Queer, Disabled, People of Color in Society and Depicted in Theater**

Many people in society do not interact with disabled people, which is surprising because disability affects one in five Americans (“CDC: 53 Million Adults in the US Live with a Disability”). The history of oppression and discrimination has isolated many disabled people from participating in society and in the arts. People with disabilities are the largest minority group and yet the representations of disabled people onstage are historically and still frequently reductive. I believe that disability is not discussed enough because it is a scary prospect: people do not want to worry about losing mobility or control of their bodies or minds. The consequences are not ones that able-bodied people hope to face. Thus, disabled people are often viewed in both society and media in tokenizing ways. People’s perceptions of them are skewed because they do not want to think about disability and thus do not try to understand people with disabilities.

Disability entered national consciousness during the ’90s with the creation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This significant legislature,¹ paved the way for scholarship and the arts to begin discussing and depicting disability in ways that non-disabled people could relate. Yet, it still seems that only in the past year have disability topics hit headlines and found a newly welcome place in American hearts. For example, disabled actor Madison Ferris, cast as Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* on Broadway, was lauded by both the New York Times and People Magazine. Now that disability is

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¹ The ADA made accommodations a legal component of anti-discrimination for people with disabilities and mandated that employers could not discriminate in the hiring process or the employment activities themselves.
becoming part of mainstream conversation, activism, and art, I wish to examine disability through a sociological and theatrical standpoint simultaneously because they occur at the same time. Often, they are in conversation with each other, reacting to the same societal/systemic issues. We seek to understand the way people with disabilities are sociologically viewed through a theatrical lens and vice versa. I am interested in the various intersections among disability and other identity groups, specifically race and queerness, because I found that intersection to be most lacking in scholarship and/or theater. I will analyze these identity intersections within several plays from the past decade written by disabled playwrights in the anthology Beyond Victims and Villains: Contemporary Plays by Disabled Playwrights edited by Victoria Ann Lewis. Finally, I account for the choices I made in my own play and explain my casting requests.

I believe it important to acknowledge that disability, an impactful identity component of 20% of the people in this country, is not the only identity piece that makes the person who they are. There exists a problematic assumption that all disabled people are white, which is perpetuated through scholarship and the media. In disability theory and theater, people with disabilities are still routinely depicted as white and heteronormative. The clickbait stories of disabled people “overcoming their struggles,” a problematic trope in itself, almost always depicts a white person. Mainstream American theater appears to corroborate this assumption. Even recently, on Broadway, the characters featured that have disabilities are depicted as white and are played by white actors. Three Broadway shows that immediately come to mind are Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime, Of Mice and Men, and Next to Normal. More recently, more radical, yet still problematic, are examples of disabled characters who, because they are embodied by disabled white actors, are figured as white. These are The Glass Menagerie and Deaf West's
Spring Awakening. Though both should be applauded for their inclusive casting, and the welcome outcome of having disabled and Deaf actors their characters provide deeper layers of meaning for their characters by embodying them, in both these productions, all the actors except one were white. In Spring Awakening, Deaf actor Treshelle Edmond is the only African American actor in the onstage cast (Reign 1). I do not name these Broadway show examples—particularly the last two, where an actor with disabilities is cast in a role where the character is disabled—to diminish the value of casting disabled actors. Rather, with these examples, I want to emphasize the ways that our society has conditioned us still only to see certain bodies as the norm, even when these bodies are pushing the boundaries of what normative means. A white heterosexual man’s disabled body is viewed as less threatening than a white queer woman’s disabled body. Moreover, race is rarely brought into the conversation of disability, except when comparing the movements or histories of oppression but not in an intersectional way that acknowledges people may belong to both groups. The notable exception on Broadway is Javior Muñoz, the current star of Hamilton, and an HIV-positive, cancer survivor, gay Puerto-Rican man. (Significantly, Muñoz is cast in a role without have any disabilities, thus defying the type-casting convention of selecting actors who “look like” their characters).

Discussing disability in theater and the world is crucial because though 20% of our world is disabled, 80% could become disabled at any point in time. Disability scholar Lennard J. Davis also points out: “To be African American is not to be white; to be gay is not to be straight. But the category of disability is permeable—anyone can become disabled, and in fact, most people will develop impairments with age (according to a recent report between 40 and 80 percent of people 65 and older are disabled)” (502). Davis uses this reasoning to explain the theory that everyone is a Temporarily Able-
Bodied person, who has the potential to become disabled at any time (502). A radical yet true notion. If we have a more humane understanding of what disability is, how society responds to it, and how it is depicted in mainstream media, we will understand that if we ourselves become disabled, it is not the end of the world—as we are taught to believe. In the disability movement, people continue to join at any time in their lives, and when celebrities join, the movement becomes more fashionable and greater reforms are reached. I experienced this after being diagnosed with celiac disease, when at my diagnosis ten years ago, there was very little edible bread and no desserts, and very little labeling of gluten free. Now that celebrities have celebrated the gluten-free diet, and indeed it has become a fad diet, my food options have proliferated. Yet, I find that in restaurants waiters take my gluten-free food request less seriously.

There are two kinds of audiences I will be discussing. When I refer to the people in society watching disabled people, I will call them “people.” When I refer to the people watching a theatrical production, I will refer to them as “the audience.” Since I am distinguishing between disabled people in real life and the representations of them in theater, to describe the perception of disabled people in society where they do not have a choice in their being viewed as a spectacle in public and when representations of them as characters are placed onstage, I felt it important to distinguish the two types of spectators to which I will refer. Disability scholar Tobin Siebers conveys an accepted theory that the visibility of disability in (nondisabled) society is a “spectacle” (“In/Visible” 144). Accordingly, playwright and disability activist John Belluso (who used a wheelchair) theorizes that disabled people in society are forced to perform as if onstage, when they are just trying to live their lives and not be part of a theatrical production (Breslauer 1). Siebers describes the phenomenon of the disabled body in
society: “When a disabled body enters the room, all eyes turn upon it, as if it has moved to center stage. A rush of emotions animates the room. The disabled person may recoil from the stares, ignore them, or take a deep bow. In any event the appearance of the disabled person in the room is pure theater” (Siebers “In/Visible” 144). Indeed, it becomes radical yet tricky to put the hypervisible body on an actual theatrical stage because the production runs the risk of audience members being distracted by the non-normative appearance of the disabled actor (Siebers “In/Visible” 144). Interestingly, we rarely depict disability onstage, even as we gawk in societal life. Siebers asserts that:

Audiences are most comfortable with artworks that serve the ideology of ability. Disability, however, disrupts the spectacle of ability, for disability represents its complete opposite. We easily believe what cannot be true: men fly, women have superhuman strength, and people are immortal. We are terrified by the truth: we are fragile, we become sick, and we all grow old and die. The first idea gives us pleasure, the second, displeasure. (“In/Visible” 146)

Because we do not like the truth, we often do not confront it in our art. Or, if we do, we find ways to circumnavigate it. Disabled people who need to use a wheelchair can have dreams where they walk, and the able-bodied actors playing those characters further assuage our fears that this is reality. For example, this occurs with the character Artie in the television show Glee, when the able-bodied actor walks in a dream sequence, evoking the perception that Artie’s disability is merely an illusion (“Dream On.” Glee: The Complete First Season. Writ. Brad Falchuk. Dir. Joss Whedon. 20th Century Fox Television, 2010. DVD). Disabled actors onstage challenge the norm of ability onstage, and once distracted, the audience projects inferiority onto the disabled body onstage (Siebers “In/Visible” 144).

To shift people’s perception of disability, we must refocus the lens with which we examine disability. Consequently, I choose to regard disability through the social model. Davis elucidates, the impairments become disabilities when society does not
provide the necessary accommodations that would enable our people to inhabit the world (507). (I say “our people” because I am claiming my place in the disability community.) The social model of disability makes a distinction between impairments and disabilities. People have impairments; they cannot use one or both of their legs, they are dyslexic, they have an autoimmune disease/chronic illness. While these are impairments with which they must live, the impairments are not the actual barriers. The barriers are the disabilities. The common example used in explaining the social model is someone who uses a wheelchair that cannot enter or move through the building because there is no ramp or elevator in the building (Davis 507). It is not the fact that they are in a wheelchair that disables them, it is the lack of accommodations (Davis 507). This refocus the responsibility on society to create accessible spaces for people with impairments so that they are not isolated from public life.

There is a distinction repeatedly made between visible and invisible disabilities, where one is hierarchized over the other. Yet, Siebers maintains that though it appears that there is a distinction between the two disabilities in society: “there are really no such things … in and of themselves. There are only traits that are rendered visible or invisible by certain circumstances. This is the case because disability is a social construction, of course—since a disability may be a disability in one context but not in another—but also because visibility is a social construction” (“In/Visible” 142). For example, I have celiac disease, which means that I cannot eat gluten. Celiac is an autoimmune disease, so some would call it an invisible disability, meaning I can pass in society as non-disabled. However, Siebers’s theory highlights the nuance in “in/visible” disability by illuminating the idea that there are situations where I am very visible for having celiac—any time I eat in public, for instance. I have to order off a separate menu, ask the waiter many
questions, and many times receive separately prepared food or bring my own. While my body does not have visible markings of the disease (since it affects my internal organ, my small intestine), my body is visible in the sense that people stare at me because I am not acting in the normative way in the restaurant.

When writing my play, *The Laundry Room*, I considered my own knowledge of what it means to have a disability, the theories and models of disability, and how society and the audience respond to disabled bodies. Fundamentally, my play serves to address all the components I broadly discuss in this introduction. More specifically, in my play, I aim to approach disability in an attentive yet understated way. Though both characters in my play have disabilities, their disabilities do not define the characters nor do they consume the plot. Their disabilities are part of the conversation, but they drop the subject easily, since they acknowledge there is much more to learn about each other than their disabilities. I also attempt to correct the idea that society is entitled to explanations of every disability because I believe that expecting people with disabilities to explain “what happened” and/or “what’s wrong” is a violation of privacy and places undue attention on one component of their identity—it essentializes them. By forcing the conversation to one aspect of our identity, it removes agency for us to choose when we want to disclose, and how much, and instead forces us to endure invasive questioning.

The main goal of my thesis play and this essay is to further the conversation regarding disability both in society and onstage. In particular, I am interested in exploring the lack of visibility in theater of intersectional people with disabilities.

In researching examples of disabled characters in theater, I realized that there are very few intersectional characters. This confused me because there are many intersectional disabled people in the world. There is a need for the visibility of
intersectional disabled people, which is reflected in how in theater there has mostly only been white heteronormative disabled people represented onstage. For example, in *The Elephant Man* and *The Glass Menagerie* where the protagonists are white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, and fall in heterosexual (if unrequited) love. The contrast between real people existing in the world and how disabled people are portrayed in theater, as characters, is vast. To understand why there is this gap, we must consider how the history of marginalized identities align with that of disability. First, we will investigate how disability scholars use race theory to create a binary between disability and race, to make comparisons between these two separate, detached identities, which exist in people simultaneously. We must examine the application of this binary to understand why it is created and upheld in scholarship and extends into theater.

In viewing disability through the social model, by distinguishing between impairment and disability, the onus of confronting the problem falls on society and not the individual. In this sense, disability functions the same as ableism: “the cause of oppression usually exists in the social or built environment and not in the body” (Siebers 3). Furthermore, in partially-accessible spaces, where they cannot fully exist, people with impairments attract attention, since they may move and speak in non-normative ways to reconcile their bodies in this context. Since “society has a general tendency to repress the embodiment of difference,” as Siebers contends, the people who cannot conform to the space stand out and become hypervisible (“Disability as Masquerade” 3). For example, someone who uses a wheelchair stands out in a space where no one else is using a wheelchair. Alternatively, in spaces that are not at all accessible, they become invisible (not visible) because they are excluded from those spaces.
In theater, Siebers theorizes that visibility of disabled bodies has a detrimental effect on the value-worth the audience attributes to them. He asserts, “Disabled bodies on the stage are thought to be inferior for two reasons, both having to do with their supposed visibility. First, disabled bodies do not pass, that is, disabled bodies supposedly cannot inhibit the character with the same facility as nondisabled bodies” (“In/Visible” 144). Siebers acknowledges the historical detriment of interpreting disability to have “metaphorical significance,” which the audience prioritizes over the plot (“In/Visible” 144). The metaphors take shape in the caricatures of people with disabilities in mainstream culture: stories of disasters, redemption, or villainy, in which the disabled characters are a representation of the story (Siebers “In/Visible” 144). These characters act in a way that advances the overall story, but does not challenge the stereotypical depictions of people with disabilities.

Analyzing the hackneyed characters that have disabilities in mainstream theater reveals they are also the most normative. Without the disability, they would blend in onstage easily. These characters routinely appear as white, heterosexual, and socioeconomically wealthy. Helen Keller in A Miracle Worker exemplifies this. Yet, if one-fifth of the people in the world have disabilities, this is not our reality. (Though a frequent complaint is the theater often does not reflect the diversity of reality.) People with disabilities are often not figured as sexual beings, or if they are, they are assumed to be heteronormative, for example, in The Glass Menagerie, The Cripple of Inishmaan, and The History of Bowling. In the latter play, Chuck is surprised his girlfriend Lou previously had a female lover but quickly dismisses it as a “fun” dalliance, not a serious threat to their heterosexual relationship (Ervin 127). Consequently, it was important to me while writing my play to portray my characters based on aspects of their identity more than
that they are disabled—because they are complex beings. Oftentimes the character with disabilities is de-sexualized. The thought is that because they have disabilities they cannot possibly be sexually desirable. Of course, this is not true, but it is a stubbornly persistent belief revealed through depictions of disabled people onstage without romantic and/or sexual partners. Furthermore, very rarely does an audience see onstage a character who is both a person of color and someone with a disability. This intersectional identity is not visible on the average stage.

I find it fascinating that the medium of theater intervenes as a layer representing people and yet routinely depicts the most normative identities. Using theater, I want to make the intersection of queer disability visible in my plays. While queerness is something my characters rarely discuss, it is implicit in their relationship onstage. Race, on the other hand, is not even mentioned at all—except in my casting note: “The actors must identify as not being of the same race/ethnicity.” I saw a problem, which is that many people of color are disabled, and yet, we rarely see this intersection onstage.

Scholar Patricia J. Williams describes the effect of staring in her book, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, and how she is seen by (white) society as a stereotypical black woman and not appreciated as her own person. Siebers refers to Williams’ theory of staring, noting how she “play[s] on the difference between being visible and being recognized” (“Disability as Masquerade” 20, note 6). As a black woman, though Williams is visible in conventionally white society, she herself is not acknowledged: “What was hardest was not just that white people saw me … but that they looked through me, as if I were transparent … white people see all the worlds beyond me but not me” (Williams 222). Siebers links Williams’s hypervisibility to her invisibility: In fact, it is the heightened visibility of her blackness that produces her social invisibility” (“Disability as Masquerade” 20, note 6).
Thus, people of color experience this double invisibility, in both their lives and in the theatrical portrayals of themselves.

As a playwright, I wanted to combat this problem. As a white person, I did not feel comfortable writing a specific ethnicity into the character—because I do not believe there is one representation of what an ethnicity is, and because I think anyone who identifies as any race can feasibly play either character. I also believe that just because an aspect of your identity is visible, does not mean you must explain it, nor do the characters owe the audience an explanation. It is a radical action to normalize disability onstage, and I feel the same way about the race of these characters. Thus, I did not write race into the character’s lines, but I wanted to make sure people of color with disabilities were visible onstage. When the casting note does not mention race, people frequently cast a white actor. I want to increase the visibility of people of color with disabilities. In this way, I think theater can represent the intersection of people’s identities onstage without dialogue that addresses every component of their identity. In my play, race features in a silent but provocative way.

In my research, I looked at many examples of the intersection of race and disability in theater, and how these identity components are aligned in one person and how they are confronting each other when they are separated into two people/groups. As I mentioned earlier, I particularly focused on Lewis’s 2006 anthology Beyond Victims and Villains. Finally, there was a whole collection of plays with characters that had disabilities and intersectional identities. There were people of color with disabilities, there were queer people with disabilities, there were conversations about socioeconomic

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2 I had occasion to explore this in my research paper for Professor Tang’s S 16 “Crossing the Color Line: Racial Passing in American Literature” course and upon revisiting the issues, further developed my ideas about invisibility, visibility (hypervisibility), and intersectionality.
differences between being a person of color and a person with disabilities (as if these identities could be separated and compared). Now that we have noted the need of visibility for intersectional disabled people, before discussing how they are represented in theater, I will discuss examples of some of these intersectional identities and the binaries constructed separating the intersectional aspects of their identities.

The argument scholars Karen and Barbara Fields propose in their book *Racecraft*, that racism created race, can be applied to ableism creating disability. The difference is that race itself is a social construct, as the authors assert, racism created “race” (17). On the other hand, impairments are a physical reality where bodily functioning is lost. Therefore, some may view the race-impairment comparison as problematic because race does not actually physically prevent the bodily processes from functioning in people of color. People who are paraplegics physically cannot dress themselves, whereas being racially marked does not affect physical functioning. While impairment does not literally equal race in this analogy, it still proves useful in identifying the social construction aspect. The “acts of discrimination … then reappear camouflaged as the victim’s alleged difference” (Fields 95) is an applicable analogy in identifying the harm of the social construction of a label for the “difference” (like disability or race) to conceal the prejudicial treatment. In other words, “Disguised as race, racism becomes something Afro-Americans are, rather than something racists do” (Fields 96-7). Because society does not question the mechanism that causes racism (and thus race) to exist, but instead takes these concepts for granted, their marginalization is turned into a fixed part of their identity. Similarly, people see disability as part of someone’s identity. Without people considering how disability itself is problematic (exhibiting ableism), this injustice will remain institutionalized in society. However, Karen and Barbara Fields assert that
through reexamining problematic terms like “race” and “racism” as socially constructed, we can begin to deconstruct the discriminatory societal treatment to prevent it (38).

The answer to why the academic groups, attuned to the discriminatory effects of racism, were willing to discriminate based on disability also may reside, in part, in history. Analogous to the unwillingness to join forces with disability groups, which were presumed as mostly white, the Civil Rights Movement determined to separate from the (white) Women’s Rights Movement. This decision was made to increase the chance to obtain Civil Rights, rather than join forces. Yet, in both cases, with suffragettes and disability activists, the people who belong to both groups (black women or black disabled people) are left out.

Similar to Karen and Barbara Fields, scholar Ann M. Fox highlights the social construction of race, though she extends this construction to disability to further her argument. By pointing out the stigma as belonging to the victimizers, she parallels Barbara and Karen Fields’ argument that racism is something that racists do:

Allied with disability, race is denaturalized and shown to be a construction, and stigma, whether connected to racism or ableism, is situated in the victimizers. Allied with race, disability suggests that such understanding is the first step toward creating a new vision of human interrelationships … through the treatment of difference as an opportunity for mutuality and interdependence. (156)

Fox asserts that examining race and disability simultaneously opens up new possibilities of viewing connections between humans and more equal treatment. To do so, Fox grounds her theories on disability and race in history. According Fox, rooting disability in history illustrates how people with disabilities were isolated from the benefits of Emancipation: “the erasure of the disabled” dates “back to Emancipation, when disabled people, unable to contribute labor in a way defined as meaningful, were left unsupported by the government” and without the means to work toward freedom (170). Thus, Fox
creates an analogy between race and disability recognizing that both are ways society has systematically oppressed people and results in social and economic marginalization. Her analogy unites race and disability into one body: the same government that was giving able-bodied African Americans their freedom abandoned African Americans with disabilities.

I will now identify several case studies in which race and disability are depicted in theater, and comment on the varying success and what I see as the oversights. I tried to find case studies that depicted intersectional disabled characters. I was particularly interested in the intersection of race and disability because I found that most absent in the disability theater I was attending and reading. I was also interested in the intersection of sexuality and disability, of queerness and disability. Also, within disability there are many ways of identifying—some people do not like to claim the word “disabled” but instead say they are sick (have chronic illness).

In her groundbreaking analysis of disability and race in plays by 20th century African American women, Fox focuses on the effect of disability and race simultaneously depicted in characters’ bodies. She maintains that the benefit of this inclusion of both in one body is “[t]hese plays remind us that a fuller integration of race and disability in disability studies is essential if we want to reclaim fully nuanced and representational literary and social histories of disability” (168). Fox argues that if the two are kept separated, this isolation not only is not true to history but also prevents the achievement of portraying an accurate and representative both literary and social history. Fox’s alignment of what these two facets of identity do in a one body creates new possibilities for viewing racism and ableism, specifically, as socially constructed: “Allied with disability, race is denaturalized and shown to be a construction, and stigma, whether
connected to racism or ableism, is situated in the victimizers” (156). Fox’s argument hinges on the same impairment-disability distinction that Davis describes. By grounding the intersection of disability and race in bodies historically, Fox is able to advance her argument to assert that, like race, disability is socially constructed. She empowers the alignment of race and disability because by illuminating the societal fabrication she also destroys the power dynamic created by stigma.

According to Fox, new possibilities emerge from a uniting of race and disability. She declares, when “[a]llied with race, disability suggests that such understanding is the first step toward creating a new vision of human interrelationships: not through a universalizing impulse that erases the particulars of experience or metaphorizes [sic] them into invisibility, but through the treatment of difference as an opportunity for mutuality and interdependence” (156). I read this as a call for embracing intersectionality in identities. By acknowledging that societal forces work in tandem and affect the same person in varying ways, without forgetting either of them, will result in a greater appreciation of how intersectional identities. We will be more aware and not discount crucial people belonging to certain (constructed) groups.

In his Author’s Statement preceding his play *The History of Bowling*, playwright Mike Ervin’s conflation of disability and race draws attention to the type of support that is created by an oppressed community and the benefit of recognition in being a member of that group. Ervin analogizes disability with race to express his desire for a flag or anthem as way to publically self-proclaim and take pride in reclaiming his oppressed identity: “I take pride in being part of disability culture the way some take pride in ethnic culture. If we had a flag, I’d fly it. If we had an anthem, I’d sing it” (113). The benefits to this alignment are located within the analogy of cultural pride. Ervin wants to take an
identity, which has been oppressed by society, and create a community not only celebrating this difference but also have a visible (or audible) display of pride. Scholar-activist-artist Petra Kuppers notes that actors identified as having a non-normative race, age, and/or disability, are rendered “too visible to allow full mobility;” thus, they are not cast (54). Consequently, in both life and theater, the marginalized people who are most visible seem to experience the greatest amount of oppression. It is interesting that Ervin emphasizes the importance of a public vehicle (a flag or anthem) to display membership of the group to reclaim a marginalized, often visible identity. Having a disability culture, then, brings people together who have previously existed in isolation and shame, thus producing two significant advantages (Davis 501). In the end of the play, Chuck, Ervin’s protagonist who uses a wheelchair, proudly wears his bowling cape (a formerly embarrassing costume) in front of his ableist teacher (the antagonist of the play), thus reclaiming a stigmatized object and transforming it into a confrontational physical display of disability pride.

The obvious drawback of Ervin conflating race and disability in his play is making disability white and making ability hostile and black. Chuck contrasts disability and race when recounting the abuse he suffers from religious people on the street:

The street preachers are the worst. I try my best to ignore them, until they start with that, ‘Pray to Jesus and he’ll make you walk!’ One day I passed that one who’s always in front of the drugstore with the bullhorn shouting, ‘Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!’ And he says to me, ‘You better get right with Jesus, or he ain’t never gonna make you walk!’ … Who the hell does he think he is? So I turned to him and I said, ‘You better get right with Jesus, or he ain’t never gonna make you white!’ (Ervin 119)

The specific details “in front of the drugstore with the bullhorn” makes this story universal even while the audience cannot relate to the specifics; we can recall from our own experiences or at least can clearly imagine this moment occurring because of the
details described. This subtle inclusion of imagery helps draw the audience into recognizing Chuck’s experience and ultimately arriving at the conclusion Ervin offers. Through this moment with the preacher, Chuck highlights that his disability should not be viewed as a defect to be cured by God, just as the audience does not view the preacher’s race that way. By placing disability in contrast to race, Ervin illustrates the problematic way society treats disability. However, it is important to recognize the problematic ways Ervin employs the concept of race in his play. While disability benefits from an alignment with race, the latter suffers from this alignment.

It is not the act of aligning disability with race that poses the problem, it is the way Ervin accomplishes this by comparing the two oppressions. Importantly, the African American character is not present onstage; he is merely referenced by Chuck, who, through narrating the story, temporarily embodies (through language) both his African American antagonist and his white self. Drawing attention to the whiteness of the bodies onstage, this is troubling visually and symbolically. In his response, Chuck mimics the street preacher’s manner of speaking: “ain’t never gonna” (119). The slang is drastically different from his own, which is problematic because, through it, Ervin audibly reproduces the stereotype that an African American man speaks with incorrect grammar. Additionally, Chuck’s rejoinder appropriates the man’s jargon to spotlight his incorrect grammar thus insinuating his ignorance. Significantly, the audience perceives the antagonist in this play as a bully because he is able-bodied. However, the bully is also described as African American, and this association recalls the racist stereotype of the African American man as the aggressor. Thus, the disadvantage of disability is hierarchized as more significant than the racial disadvantage because, besides this brief
interlude, most the time is spent watching and hearing white disabled-bodied victims in comparison to the able-bodied African American aggressor.

We see a similar dynamic of a white disabled person placed center stage in opposition to an African American able-bodied person in Susan Nussbaum’s *No One as Nasty*. Significantly, this is one of the only plays I found where the protagonist is queer. Though Janet, the disabled protagonist, considers the other forms of oppression, like classism and homophobia, she displaces them in her hasty return to zoom in on race and disability. Janet is white and quadriplegic, thus adhering to the conventional depiction of people with disabilities in the entertainment industry as white. Yet, rather than rendering Janet’s whiteness invisible, as it is frequently done in theatrical portrayals of characters, who are also reduced to their disabilities, Nussbaum highlights Janet’s whiteness by having her bring up issues of race with Lois, Janet’s African American personal care attendant. In contrast to Ervin, Nussbaum, in her depiction of race and disability, physically places the African American character on stage to speak for herself, and she is also not portrayed as the villain/antagonist. Consequently, Nussbaum visually depicts and challenges the opposition of these two characters, initiating conversations that bring an exchange of views regarding racism and are incorporated in their discussions of disability.

While Janet’s reminders of race conventionally are spoken to African Americans, commenting on and thus reinforcing their darker skin color as existing outside the norm of whiteness, the act of Janet speaking about race also reminds the audience of her whiteness. Indeed, Janet drawing attention to her whiteness illustrates that Nussbaum made this an intentional choice, which serves as a means to begin conversation about their forms of oppression. Perhaps scenes with them both onstage serve to illustrate the
alignment of race and disability not through their dialogue but instead through the placement onstage of two bodies visually symbolizing their forms of oppression. Therefore, a benefit of aligning race and disability is to promote conversation between members of the marginalized groups and hopefully foster equal treatment through a discussion of how their lives are affected by racism and disability (ableism).

By aligning race and disability, Nussbaum presents the hierarchical view that blackness is “inferior” through her character Janet, but the playwright also presents a contrasting equitable view through Lois. Janet and Lois attempt to align race and disability to draw divergent conclusions. Lois does so to facilitate Janet’s understanding of racial oppression whereas Janet only uses race as the means to bring the focus of the conversation back to her and her disability. Lois was raised in a segregated community and treated as a second-class citizen by white people; in the school cafeteria, she ate at the “black table”—notably, Janet’s term, which Lois accepts (364). Janet remembers also having tables “like that” at her school, but reinserts her disability in the conversation, through self-pitying and victimizing remarks, illustrating herself as the worst off: “I probably would’ve just had a bowl on the floor under somebody else’s table” (364). In response, Lois offers, “You could’ve sat at the colored table,” a proposal that surprises Janet yet one she quickly rebuffs, literally cutting off further elaboration and bringing the conversation quickly back to disability: “Really? No, it woulda been—no, but did you have any crips at your school?” (364). Lois tries to collapse the segregation that Janet creates between African Americans and people with disabilities, suggesting that the two marginalized groups could coexist and support each other, but Janet dismisses this. Instead, Janet uses Lois’s divulgement of her experiences with racism to make her own case more pitiful. Lois resists Janet’s conflation of race and disability because she
opposes Janet’s trend to ignore the abuse Lois experiences, especially from Janet’s own mouth.

Thus, while appearing to engage in a dialogue about race, Janet only uses race to return to discussing disability. By rejecting Lois’s idea—possibly because she mistakenly believes the colored table would not have allowed her to sit there or because she victimizes herself and therefore rejects the possibility of her life improving even in hindsight—Janet significantly separates herself and disability from an equitable alignment with race. The two oppressions cannot exist at the same table in her mind, even as it exists her reality: she is sitting next to Lois in a movie theater while having this conversation (362). Janet recalls a savage encounter Lois had in the street when a white woman spat on her; Janet asks Lois if she hates all white people but, without giving Lois time to respond, Janet immediately declares that when she herself is in the street (or the hospital), she wants to kill all the able-bodied people (363). Janet cannot have a conversation with Lois about race or racism without inserting her own oppression. Consequently, the audience shifts our focus to how Lois responses to Janet’s self-absorption impact the excuses Janet makes:

LOIS: Have you heard what I’m saying to you? Or are you just gonna keep coming up with reasons and excuses?
(Pause.)
JANET 2: Are you saying I’m a racist?
LOIS: This is not about racism! Although if it makes you happy, yes! Yes, you are a racist, but so is everybody a racist! You’re no more than most.
JANET 2: It’s in there though. Racism’s in there. It’s everywhere. I don’t know what the right thing is to say. I’m sorry. I’ll try to pay closer attention to your needs. I’ll try not to step on your neck.
LOIS: Mm-hmm.
JANET 2: I feel really bad.
LOIS: Whose fault is that?
JANET 2: Look. Look.
LOIS: Look. Look at what?
JANET 2: I have tried to be your friend as well as … your employer. I don’t—There’s no manual for this—I try to—
LOIS: Bullshit.
JANET 2: Then why don’t you quit? I mean, I really wonder that. I don’t want you to, but I don’t know why you stick around if it’s such a bad deal. And it is a bad deal, right? It’s like marriage with none of the benefits. Half the time I’m apologizing to you for...stuff— I don’t even know why it’s happening, and I feel bad...that you’re so...angry. I’m sorry. It’s like I get so—so—so—but it’s not, you, it’s that I— ... Because I feel—I’m this person with problems and I don’t want to hurt you anymore. I don’t know. (Nussbaum 383-4)

Janet repeating her claims about the existence and effect of racism is a defense mechanism to deflect blame from her to society. Different from earlier in the play, when Janet accuses Lois of calling her a racist, this time Lois acknowledges to Janet that the societal system is set up as racist. However, Lois refuses to let that be a justification for Janet’s cruel actions toward her. Nevertheless, Janet cannot let go of the racism accusation because, for her, highlighting the institutional problem absolves her of responsibility for treating Lois considerately. Janet apologizes in vague terms: “I’ll try to pay closer attention to your needs,” “I feel really bad,” etc. Again, different from their earlier scenes, here Lois chooses to respond verbally instead of with her usual silences, to directly challenge Janet’s excuses. When Lois relentlessly pushes her to confront her issues, Janet repeats “Look” in an attempt to resume power, and when that fails Janet begins to ramble. Janet’s subsequent chaotic speeches finally begin alluding to the root of her conflict with Lois.

By announcing the presence of racism in their relationship, Janet hides her insecurity about her friendship with Lois. Janet’s insecurity seems located not as much in Lois being African American or Janet being racist but rather stemming from Lois being Janet’s employee: there is a significant class difference. Yet, Janet tries to disguise the class difference by calling it racial difference (racism) because perhaps she feels less complicit in racism than classism. Another way Janet avoids taking responsibility is through ellipses and dashes: “I’m apologizing to you for...stuff— I don’t even know why
Janet employs punctuation to fill in the blanks of her speech. Janet’s silences allow her to make excuses and leave holes in her apologies so she does not have to state her misdeeds. By not vocalizing her mistakes, Janet can more easily ignore them.

In contrast to Janet—indeed, in response to Janet’s negligent gaps in her apologies—Lois’s ultimate silence (at the end of their interaction) creates a more powerful statement. Lois disrupts Janet’s self-victimization strategy because Lois holds her accountable to her disparaging behavior. In the absence of sound or a verbal response from Lois, Janet is forced to hear the insensitive and selfish thoughts she had just uttered. In response to this forced and unwelcome revelation, Janet flusters and makes excuses, either racist or classist. Up until this point, Janet has explicitly avoided talking about class. Only here, when Lois directly confronts her and Janet feels out of control, she finally voices classist undertones of her rude behavior. Though Janet does exercise her white privilege without realizing it, she also repeatedly brings up the issue of race. Invoking race to explain their relationship perhaps is prompted by Janet’s white guilt but also is her avoiding a discussion of class. By confronting disability and race, class (not racial) issues emerge as the main source Janet’s anxiety with Lois.

Lois’s argument, that Janet is constructing this racial power disparity, suggests the social construction of race. The gulf, Lois argues, is not there in reality, but rather Janet establishes one by commenting on it: “You act like you invented slavery. Why don’t you just concentrate on being a human being? Maybe everything’s not about race” (370). Lois tells Janet to stop focusing on slavery and race and instead concentrate on more immediate tasks, like “being a human being.” Lois suggests in this line that Janet’s fixation on racism is not actually helping Lois live in a racist world. In fact, Janet would
be most helpful if she treated Lois better, rather than habitually recalling the racism inherent in society but still not treating Lois kindly. Lois’s line is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the social construction of race through slavery (racism).

Through their conversations, the audience grasps that Lois sees race as socially constructed, whereas Janet ignores Lois’s argument to return to disability. Crucially, Janet is not African American, thus she is not experiencing the struggle with racism, but she still manages to insert herself in the struggle: “Wait I don’t put it there, it’s there. It’s been there for hundreds of years, and it’s here now in my life, in my head. I’m trying to deal with it” (370). Through Janet’s response, Nussbaum implicitly highlights the possibility that like racial inferiority, disability is also socially constructed. Lois’s line, “Maybe not everything is about race” is powerful coming from a woman of color, who has experienced bigotry because of racism. The African American woman maintains that race should not be central. Is Lois trying to minimize the forms of prejudice she experienced or does she want to reduce Janet’s obsession with race when it does not appear to be applicable? Perhaps Lois sees their differences as rooted in classism rather than racism or ableism, which is closest to what occurs at the end of the play. Bringing up race with Lois and inserting her disability into those conversations, Janet aligns the two in a way Lois finds problematic. By putting this into words, Janet literally creates this conflict with her language.

A bit earlier, on page 366, Lois uses Christopher Reeve to discuss the possibility that anyone can become disabled, alluding to the TAB (Temporarily Abled-Body theory), yet, it is notable that neither character explicitly states that Lois or African Americans in general could become disabled too. The suggestion that the disability movement has exponentially increasingly members is as close as the play approaches to the possibility of
both race and disability converging in one identity. It is as if the two intersections of oppression cannot exist within one body onstage because this world is already struggling to reconcile the two oppressions existing in separate bodies. Subsequently, a crucial drawback of this race-disability binary is it excludes people who belong to both groups. Would African Americans with disabilities fly both flags? Would they have to choose? We do not know how Ervin or Nussbaum imagines these people would fit into this reclaimed community because the non-binary people remain unacknowledged in his artist statement and their plays. In fact, both Ervin and Nussbaum do not mention, let alone create, the possibility of the two identities converging into one body in their plays.

On the other hand, scholar and theater artist Leslie Rebecca Bloom attempts this intersection of race, disability, and other forms of marginalization in the characters of her theater project (a play and a reflection), “Identify This…: A Readers Theater of Women’s Voices.” The play places the experiences of different women side-by-side in monologues on various themes, separated by acts. All the characters are intersectional: comprised of different ethnicities, queerness, but only one has a disability (Sara). While the objective of this theater piece is to illustrate the women’s intersectional identities and highlight as problematic that society often reduces them to just one of their identities, the piece fails to accomplish its objective. The failure manifests in the conclusion, when the characters only use one word describing the sole oppression to advocate against; therefore, all the intersectional characters are pushed into a narrow mold and have to choose one stereotype. For example, the word is “ability” for Sara, the character who is deaf; the word is not abuse or poverty/classism (221). This literal erasure—by omission—of the other conflicts in her life reduces her to her disability.
The character that came closest to aligning their intersectionality was Jackie, a character who vocalized the pressure to choose a form of oppression to fight against. The audience is introduced to Jackie as a black woman, who explains the tug-of-war struggle between being African American and gay: “I’ve felt like I have always been asked to choose between the two. I couldn’t be openly homosexual and play a big part in the black student association on campus” (220-1). Yet, even at the end of the play Jackie, who realized they were genderqueer and now goes by Charlie, was reduced to their word: “gender” (221). This word identification illustrates they did essentially choose one oppression: gender. It was interesting to note in the second part Bloom’s project, the reflections, that Charlie was recently diagnosed with hyperactivity disorder. In the play, Sara was the only character who self-identified as having a disability. Bloom’s choice to include Charlie’s reflections on her hyperactivity disorder could have been an amazing intersectional aspect to include, and further the visibility of disability in theater, but unfortunately it was another of the intersectional identities left out of her character.

This is the struggle of theater: to fully represent characters in all their complexities. Things will naturally get left out, but it is important to fully explore all dimensions of a character’s identity. In Bloom’s project, the characters’ monologues function more as mouthpieces for diversity but the connection with the audience is not there because all we hear them discuss is their marginalized identities. The back-to-back monologues attempt to begin conversations about race and disability but instead the lengthy first-person narration format, rather than an actual dialogue, restricts these conversations. Bloom explains the choice of alternating women’s monologues was explained: “By juxtaposing such narratives, we hoped to make complex individual identities and matrixes of differences visible and emotionally evocative” (224). However,
arguably, the play failed to do this in the end by reducing the characters to their one distinguishing identity marker of marginalization, even after they just described the multiple modes of oppression operating within their lives.

We see another but vastly more successful attempt at aligning race and disability in Lynn Manning’s radical depiction of his blind African American protagonist, Donny. In his play, *Shoot!*, Manning challenges the assumption that one form of identity can be separated from the other when they exist in a single body. Similar to Chuck, Donny also experiences an attitude of neglect from people in society. However, unlike Chuck, Donny cannot distinguish whether people’s attitudes toward him are different because he is African American or disabled. Perhaps they treat him differently because he is both. Yet, Donny attributes his emasculation from being ignored by beggars to his disability only:

> You know what really pissed me off about the dude, though, was he acted like I wasn’t even there at first—like I was a big zero. I get that kind of shit all the time; can’t stand it. It’s like they be sayin’ a blind man, no matter how big or buffed he is, don’t count for shit when it comes to throwin’ down. (He sneers) It’s like you ain’t a man in that way anymore. (Manning 57)

It is notable that although Chuck and Donny have very different disabilities—paraplegia and blindness, respectively—they suffer the same silence by beggars. Chuck is white and Donny is African American, but they are both (mis)treated the same, which implies that their disabilities upstage their race. Chuck is approached by street preachers but not by beggars (118). Similarly, the beggar does not approach Donny but solicits his brother for money. Donny complains about the emasculating aspect of this, as does Chuck. There is something about disability that seems to render the subjects invisible in a way that race does not appear to when street beggars are soliciting for money. However, immediately after raising this assumption, Manning challenges it.
In *Shoot!*, race and disability also become aligned in a new way: in the form of racial epithet from a high white boy directed at Donny’s disability. This appalling insult “blind nigger” unites the two marginalized identities into one prejudiced statement (56). This is one of the only occurrences a character in this play or any of the plays discussed in this essay acknowledges the two identities existing at once in the same body. Yet, this is a negative recognition. The harmful stereotypes label Donny as the two oppressed aspects of his identity. Interestingly, they are two visible features. Thus, another way disability and race are aligned is that they are both frequently viewed by society as visible difference, though of course countless exceptions exist. Significantly, Donny chooses one: he proposes that he is mistreated because of his disability. However, the audience (and Donny) cannot accurately determine which aspect of his identity triggered the insulting conduct toward him because we cannot separate the two (being blind and African American), as they are both visible.

Though Donny continues to highlight disability as the root of society’s abuse to him, race surfaces even while Donny resists its influence. In contrast to Ervin’s scene where Chuck narrates, Donny and his brother Charles narrate the whole incident, and the white aggressor is never present onstage. Thus, the invisible character is calling, through the mouth of the visible, Donny, this hurtful term. Donny repeats the term (with quotation marks) back to the aggressor, as if to reclaim the designation as his identity, but soon after uses his own reclaimed terminology (without quotation marks) “blind niggah” (56). This small act of reclamation combined with the lack of presence onstage of the racist, ableist white aggressor, allows Donny to verbally acknowledge his identity as including these aspects but not limited to them. However, later, Donny argues that he was treated as invisible because of his disability. Crucially, he does not
acknowledge the racial slur at all in his diatribe. Janet similarly deflects from the other forms of marginalization in favor of focusing on disability when her lover, Johanna, discusses homophobia; Janet is convinced that when they are in public people are staring at them because she is a quadriplegic, but Johanna insists that because they are in public and visibly in a non-(hetero)normative relationship, it is their unconcealed homosexuality attracting the attention (374). Yet, Janet’s insecurity about her disability prevents her from acknowledging other forms of difference and giving them the same weight. For Janet, disability upstages all other forms of marginalization. Similar to Janet, Donny considers his disability to ultimately overshadow all other aspects of his identity. Yet, he acknowledges the race of all his assailants.

Again, Donny highlights his disability in a new interaction with impudent teenagers, but it remains unclear that the boys also target him because he is African American. Donny notices them first by the way they are speaking, which is the same way he used to at their age, and identifies them as “two brothahs, three Chicanos. I think, There’s some progress, anyway” (58). Presumably, Donny is talking about the integration in the friend group of black and Mexican teens. Their eventual teasing, questioning if Donny is really blind, does not faze him. It is only when one of them waves his fingers in front of Donny’s face, getting in his personal space, which triggers response to this form of emasculation. Yet, Donny’s initial reaction is to imitate a parody of a blind man, attempting to diffuse the situation through surprise and humor. Unfortunately, their interaction escalates to the teenager spitting in Donny’s face, a shameful image (spit on the face alludes to the image of male ejaculation on the face). Donny tries to strike the offender with his cane, but misses—another sign of emasculation—his blindness prevents him from making violent contact with the boy, and all the teenagers laugh.
Their laughter serves to further emasculate him because of his failed attempt at a violent, thus stereotypically masculine, act. Donny acts with the empowerment of a black man but the disempowerment of a blind man.

While I appreciate the value of putting race and disability in conversation with each other, as Nussbaum’s play does, there is something lost when the two identities are separated. The conversations become stilted, revolving around their difference. When the identities are aligned but that is the only thing discussed, as in Bloom’s piece, the impact similarly loses its punch. In Manning’s play, when race and disability are in conjunction with each other but not always emphasized, the effect is powerful. They spend a lot of time talking about these aspects of their identities in a way that the two aspects become their defining features. In my play, I explore what happens when I add more identity components in addition to race and disability for the characters, like queer sexuality, without essentializing it in the way Bloom’s piece does or appropriating a manner of speaking, like in Ervin’s play. In *The Laundry Room*, I have a diverse cast, but race is not a subject discussed in the play—it is an unspoken yet visible part of the characters’ identity. This kind of subversive casting decision in normative white roles can provoke discussion about race without explicitly using the text/lies in the play to do so. For example, casting black actors in *Next to Normal*, would not change the words in the script but instead would transform the implication of the speaker, by shifting the expectation of who can and is talking about mental health issues (White 1).

A successful alignment of race and disability in a play’s character(s) not only raises beneficial questions about the workings of racism and ableism but also facilitates a deconstruction of other problematic aspects of society not just limited to racism and ableism. Fox’s analysis of the African American physically disabled characters, Dan and
Lucy, in Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s play *Mine Eyes Have Seen* highlights the productive impact this alignment can have: “Dan is not confined to a disability role of maimed passivity and mystical predictions, nor is Lucy’s role one of sentiment and pathos … Disability thus complements and enhances the playwright’s deconstruction of race and patriotism while demonstrating the intertwined nature of race and disability” (162). By depicting onstage characters that are African American and disabled, the playwright already is engaging in a powerful act of radicalization. When these characters are participating in the conversation about other economic or political ideologies, the alignment of race and disability work to subvert established modes of thinking.

Portraying bodies like Donny’s onstage and giving them a voice that is not only talking about the struggles they face but also engaging in dialogue with others (and about themselves) is an effective way to stop society ignoring marginalized people who are African American and disabled. This also opens an alternative to examine other societal issues through the lens of the alignment of race and disability. For example, the first scene in Shoot! allows the audience to perceive the ease with which Donny bought a gun. While buying a gun does not explicitly relate to race or disability, the fact that it occurs in this play, with Donny as the purchaser, advances conversations about gun control and the drawbacks of lenient policies. It also makes the audience question if we are unsettled solely because Donny is blind or if the fact that he is African American also contributes to the discomfort. Thus, as frequently occurs in theater, the events and people existing onstage, reflecting a version of our reality, prompts us to reexamine our own lives with enlightened eyes. Nussbaum bemoans the fact that she didn’t do enough regarding depicting race in her play. However, I don’t think you have to write a “black” character. You can write a character and anybody can play that. It becomes about giving
everybody, especially the marginalized ones in our society, the opportunity to play that role. This is where casting comes in.

In my play, I want to give opportunities to actors who are not traditionally cast. I loved that Janet was queer and that aspect of her identity was unabashedly present without apology or explanation. Accordingly, I decided to subvert the boy-meets-girl character convention to make *The Laundry Room* a queer love story between two women, Jimi and Charlie. These women would not struggle with their sexuality. Their queerness would not be a conflict in the play; instead, I begin the play with their queerness already established. I also learned from *No One As Nasty* and *The History of Bowling* the power of humor, and thus decided to write a comedy. Additionally, I wanted to make sure my characters were multi-dimensional. This means they talk about more than their problems—the various ways they are marginalized in society are not what makes them human. Rather, I wanted to represent college students, because that is who they are, and so they discuss roofies, their favorite songs, play kissing games, and do their laundry. I wanted to create characters that were relatable even in their difference. That is what I think good theater achieves, the ability for unlike people to understand and connect with people they have never encountered or did not previously understand.

In my casting note, I ask that the actors identify as having a disability. John Belluso, a famous disabled playwright, championed casting disabled actors in his plays. Sandahl elaborates on the importance of casting disabled actors:

Disabled actors’ demands to play disabled characters are based on economics, aesthetics, and politics. In terms of economics, disabled actors rarely make a living in their profession because so few roles are available to them; they are neither type-cast nor cast against type. Even professionally trained disabled actors have difficulty getting cast at all. They are routinely passed over for traditionally non-disabled roles because it is assumed that their impairments will confuse the audience if the impairment is not explained by the text. (236)
My choice not to specify Jimi’s mobility impairment in the character description and not have Jimi herself explain “what happened” to her leg in the dialogue confronts this fear of audience confusion regarding an unexplained impairment. What happens if the impairment is not explained? The play goes on. It ends. The audience members survive their curiosity.

It is important to me that my play can be adapted to as many societies and people as possible because disability and the implications of it exists everywhere. I want an actor that uses a wheelchair to feel comfortable playing Jimi, just as I want an actor that walks with a limp to do so. In my play, I intentionally left open the question not only of the race of both women, but also Jimi’s physical disability. Sandahl illuminates why even if the actors do not share the same disabilities as the characters, we should still cast them: “The concept of disability as a social identity and not just a physical condition explains casting choices in which a disabled actor is cast in a role in which his or her impairment significantly differs from the character’s. This form of casting is, paradoxically, both within and against type” (237). There are so few opportunities for actors with disabilities in general, that I do not want to be exclusive in my casting of them. At the same time, I do require the actors identify as different races/ethnicities, as I mentioned earlier. This is because as I’ve seen through my research, it is very rare that actors of color with disabilities are depicted onstage. Not only does this give the director more freedom to choose the ethnicity of the cast and play with the audience’s perception of race in interesting ways, but also it is a pragmatic concern. It is important to me that people of color are visible onstage having disabilities, and I do want my play to be produced. Thus, I want to be flexible in my casting request. Since I did not write any
ethnicity in the characters, I do not see why anyone of any race could not play either character.

Looking beyond my play, at adaptations or new plays, I believe that casting disabled actors in conventionally able-bodied character roles is a radical action. It is challenging the norms of theater and the audience’s perception of disability. An opportunity to re-script the expectation of what disabled actors can accomplish and, through the layer of disability, adds meaning to the play. I think that especially when someone is marginalized in society for an aspect of her identity, the best thing theater can do is change the character to adapt to the actor. This is another reason why I chose not to specify the race of my characters. The actors do not have to change who they are to play the character. How the characters appear onstage depends on who the actors are. The audience sees the actors as they are, and hopefully the relatable qualities of the characters facilitate the audience’s connection with them and their unconventional bodies.

In a lot of ways, I wrote an idealized relationship. Though there are moments of tension, there is very little conflict. The women are supportive of each other and are not embarrassed to share and receive without judgement, intimate and deeply personal, often embarrassing, parts of their lives. While reading my play, I hope my audience members ask themselves if the relationship between the two women, Jimi and Charlie, could exist in our world.
THE LAUNDRY ROOM
by Rachel Sobelsohn

NOTES

Lines in (parentheses) can either be omitted, spoken to the other character, or as an aside to herself.

Ellipses signify a brief pause in dialogue.

Casting: I ask that all characters be cast as female-identifying or non-binary actors. The actors can be cis- or trans-women, or non-binary people, but cannot be cis-men.

To make this play representative of the world, I ask that actors with disabilities are cast. Disability affects all identities. A few examples are: race, gender, and sexuality. Although this is a two-person cast, I ask you to be aware of these intersectional identities in your casting choices. The actors must not identify as being of the same race/ethnicity.

CHARACTERS

CHARLIE: woman in college, quiet to the world but once spoken to, not afraid to talk and share her knowledge
JIMI: woman in college, the loud one, likes people to think she doesn’t give any fucks. Jimi has a physical mobility impairment.

SETTING

A fully accessible laundry room. It is a one-room building, on the campus of a small liberal arts New England college. There is a swipe machine to pay, a sink with soap, and two couches.

SCENE ONE

[The laundry room. A Thursday night.
Party noises coming from next door.
CHARLIE enters, taking a breath from the party next door.
CHARLIE checks to make sure she’s alone and then lies on the floor.
CHARLIE smells the clean laundry room smell.
JIMI enters and sees CHARLIE on the floor.
CHARLIE jumps at JIMI's line.

JIMI. Sam?

CHARLIE. Ah! You scared me!

JIMI. Oh wow sorry. You look just like my ex.

CHARLIE. Eugh. Seriously? That is honestly one of the worst pickup lines I've ever heard. In the whole entire existence of pickup lines. It is the worst.

[CHARLIE takes JIMI's cup and drinks from it as JIMI says her line.]

JIMI. It wasn't a pickup line! But if it was, it worked.

CHARLIE. What? No. How?

JIMI. You're drinking my drink.

CHARLIE. I'm dehydrated, okay?

JIMI. If you're dehydrated, shouldn't you be drinking water?

CHARLIE. What are you, my Bubbe?

JIMI. What does that mean?

CHARLIE. Grandma.

JIMI. In what language?

CHARLIE. Yiddish. In case you couldn't tell, I'm Jewish. Sooo, what's in this?

JIMI. You don't wanna know.

CHARLIE. Actually I do. I mean, what if you put in roofies?

JIMI. Do I look like the type of person who would roofie you?
CHARLIE. Hey, you look like the kind of person who could do anything.

JIMI. Ouch! Just so you know, I didn’t. Roofie you. Know how?

CHARLIE. The suspense is killing me. Literally.

[JIMI takes the drink from CHARLIE and takes a long sip.]

JIMI. I’d have to be really dumb to put roofies in my own drink.

CHARLIE. Okay well you could have built up a tremendous tolerance to roofies like that knave did in Princess Bride. Or—

JIMI. Wait. First of all, knave? Who says knave?

CHARLIE. What do you want me to say? He is one!

JIMI. Oh my god. Are you a Medieval Studies major? Are you the one Medieval Studies major at this school?

CHARLIE. What? Oh yeah. That’s me.

JIMI. I can’t believe I’ve finally met you! Do you know how long I’ve been waiting for this moment? For like ever. Well, basically since I knew you existed. I’m fascinated. What about the Medieval time period is so exciting?

CHARLIE. I don’t know.

JIMI. I don’t believe you.

CHARLIE. I don’t know what you expected but it’s not that exciting. I took a Medieval Studies class my first semester and loved it.

JIMI. What was it called?

CHARLIE. Knights of the Roundtable.

JIMI. Amazing.
CHARLIE. I guess? Anyway, I just kept taking more classes because I liked learning about the Medieval period.

JIMI. I was kind of hoping for a revelation like, Sir Lancelot came to me in a dream and said, “Remember me”—sorry—“Remember eth me, young one?”

CHARLIE. No no no. It can’t be “young one.” You can say, “m’lady.”

JIMI. “M’lady, thou shall be remembered for thy efforts.”

CHARLIE. Nice try. You’re getting warmer.

JIMI. You’ll have to speak Medieval English to me one day… What does Medieval English actually sound like?

CHARLIE. It’s an ugly language. It’s very guttural.

JIMI. I wanna hear it.

CHARLIE. Um, we don’t speak it.

JIMI. We?

CHARLIE. Medieval scholars.

JIMI. Oh my GOD. There’s a whole community?

CHARLIE. Yeah, if you want, I could read you a Medieval poem.

JIMI. A poem? Like romantic poetry?

CHARLIE. …Uh, just kidding! Honestly some of it is pretty raunchy. You never would have expected but they had dildos and sex pamphlets and were really experimental. But of course, it was for the sake of fertility. Because back then, they thought a woman couldn’t get pregnant unless she orgasmed.

JIMI. Ah, the good old days… Wait tell me more about the “knave” in Princess Bride… We’re not done with him yet.
CHARLIE. Right. I was saying you could have built up a tolerance to poison like the knave Will did.

JIMI. Oh my god, his name is not Will.

CHARLIE. Shit. What is it?

JIMI. It’s Westley!

CHARLIE. Oh no! I’m so bad with names. Well anyway Westley put poison in both the cups, but he survived.

JIMI. You think I built up tolerance to roofies just so one night I could roofie someone else… With my own drink?

CHARLIE. Yeah and you could be using reverse psychology on me right now, just like Westley did, pretending the idea that you would poison yourself is “inconceivable,” but you know it’s not.

JIMI. Okay even if I did roofie you—which I didn’t—the damage is already done.

CHARLIE. Exactly! I still can’t trust you.

CHARLIE takes JIMI’s drink and sips it.

CHARLIE. Is this Jungle Juice? It’s really good.

JIMI. …What were you doing at that party?

CHARLIE. What does that mean?

JIMI. It’s just, it doesn’t really seem like your kind of place.

CHARLIE. Now who’s judging whose appearance?

JIMI. The first thing you said when you met me was that I look like the type of person who could do anything.
CHARLIE. God! Okay, I meant it like: “you’re attractive. You could get away with murder.” It was a compliment!

JIMI. Well, can’t say I’ve heard that one before.

CHARLIE. Yeah, I’m pretty original with my praise.

JIMI. I’d say that was more of a backhanded compliment. You told me I’m hot—and also that I look like someone who would murder people.

CHARLIE. And get away with it! That’s the crucial part. You’re just emphasizing the wrong part of the compliment.

JIMI. The wrong part of the compliment?

CHARLIE. Gahh that’s not what I meant. You twisted my words.

JIMI. I just repeated what you said.

CHARLIE. Well now I sound even more like a pretentious asshole.

JIMI. That’s my specialty. Along with paprika-spiced chicken breasts. You should try them sometime.

CHARLIE. Are you inviting me to taste your cooking?

JIMI. Actually I was inviting you to taste my breasts.

CHARLIE. Wow. That was. Right to that. Right there. Oh-kaaay. You got me! …What are you doing?

JIMI. It’s called yoga. For your breasts. It makes them tender.

CHARLIE. I am not eating your breasts. Paprika or not. Paprika is a great name for a spice though. It sounds like a spice. You know, like how gaahhr-lick tastes like garlic. Or uhhhhnn-yun tastes like onion.

JIMI. Those only sound like that because you associate the taste with the word. Basic psychology.
CHARLIE. Are you a psychology major?

JIMI. Yes.

CHARLIE. Is that why you’re acting like you’re smarter than me?

JIMI. Nope. It’s because I am.

CHARLIE. I heard that. I’m not deaf.

JIMI. I find that expression offensive. I have trouble hearing.

CHARLIE. Wait what?

JIMI. I have Eustachian Tube Dysfunction.

CHARLIE. Oh my god. You’re so full of shit.

JIMI. What the fuck? E.T.D. is a real condition.

CHARLIE. No, I know. I mean, of course it is. I have it too.

JIMI. No fucking way. How long?

CHARLIE. Since I was like, I don’t know, five?

JIMI. Oh, I was just diagnosed last year. Do you also hear the crackling?

CHARLIE. Crackling? Nooo. For me, it’s like everything is underwater. Far away.

JIMI. That’s beautiful.

CHARLIE. I don’t know if I would call it that. It’s pretty awkward when I mishear things. You know what they’ve nicknamed it? Glue ear. Isn’t that disgusting?

JIMI. Ew! It’s not glue ear.
CHARLIE. I mean, it kind of is. I get why they’d call it that. It’s stuck—the eardrum. Sucked back.

JIMI. But not glue.

CHARLIE. Just hearing that term applied to my ear makes me nauseous.

JIMI. What’s your best throw-up story? You look like the kind of girl that has great throw-up stories.

CHARLIE. Seriously?

JIMI. Yeah, they’re just really funny to me.

CHARLIE. And I’m the weird one. I can’t believe you—

JIMI. Hold that thought. I gotta pee.

CHARLIE. Don’t leave.

JIMI. (I must. I can’t use the bathroom here.) Please accept my forgiveness, m’lady. The bladder beckons me to the land of El Baño. But when I return, I’ll make it up to you. Promise.

CHARLIE. Okay.

[JIMI goes to pee.
CHARLIE tries to hang in the laundry room, real casual.
CHARLIE leans on various surfaces, talking to herself, “Stop sweating,” practicing saying, “Hey!”
CHARLIE takes a dryer sheet and wipes her armpits.
CHARLIE checks to see if her breath stinks. A relief, it doesn’t.]

CHARLIE. You’re back!

JIMI. Were you just checking your breath?

CHARLIE. What? No. Ahhh what’s my surprise?
JIMI. I brought you another drink.

CHARLIE. You’re definitely going to roofie me now.

[CHARLIE takes the cup and holds it up like a toast to JIMI.]

JIMI. I don’t need to.

CHARLIE. What are you implying?

JIMI. Well, you did call me “hot murderer.”

CHARLIE. Ha! I did do that.

JIMI. You think I’m hot.

CHARLIE. Um yeah? I’ve never done this before.

JIMI. And how’s it working out?

CHARLIE. Better than expected. To be honest? I’m surprised you came back.

JIMI. We’ve only just met, and I want to tell you all my secrets. But don’t worry, I won’t. I don’t want to chase you away.

CHARLIE. Yeah because if you chased me, you’d definitely win, and I’d be psychomurdered for sure. So let’s agree on no chasing. Deal?

JIMI. Yeah. I can’t run anyway. (Bum leg.)

CHARLIE. I’m not sure what to say. Do you want to talk about it? I’m happy to talk about it but I also understand if you don’t want to because sometimes I don’t want to talk about it and I hate when people make me because there’s nothing they can say to make it better. It just is. And now I’m just still talking and probably should shut up. Right. Now.

JIMI. I’m… Impressed.
CHARLIE. I don’t know. That’s just how I wish people would act when I tell them I have Crohn’s and depression. (Surprise!)

JIMI. Wow yeah. I guess unless you have a disability you don’t really have this awareness.

CHARLIE. I don’t have a disability.

JIMI. You don’t? (You do.)

CHARLIE. I have Crohn’s and depression, not a disability.

JIMI. What is Crohn’s?

CHARLIE. It’s a chronic illness.

JIMI. Well, some people consider chronic illness a disability. Depression too.

CHARLIE. No, I am ill. Not disabled.

JIMI. What is it about that word that you’re afraid of?

CHARLIE. I don’t want to take attention away from people who actually need special treatment.

JIMI. Accommodations are not special treatment.

CHARLIE. Sorry you expected me to understand, just because I have Crohn’s and depression… Can we talk about something else?

JIMI. Yeah…

CHARLIE. So what’s in the mysterious drink?

JIMI. You couldn’t tell? It’s peppermint tea.

CHARLIE. I knew it! It tasted too good to be shitty jungle juice. Or whatever. So you’re trying to sober me up, huh? Jokes on you ‘cause I didn’t drink anything earlier.
JIMI. What brought you to Keg Co-Op then?

CHARLIE. You already asked that! I can fit right in with the cooperative of drunken collegiates. Honestly though, it really should be named Projectile Vomming Ritual. I guess I’m not really the Thursday night party-type.

JIMI. No! So why tonight?

CHARLIE. Do you wanna know the real reason or the bullshit reason?

JIMI. Shit first. Truth later. That’s my motto.

CHARLIE. You’re so gross it’s almost charming. Okay I’m about to completely embarrass myself. (Why am I doing this?) To make myself excited about coming to the party, I listened to my Pump Up Playlist.

JIMI. Let’s go! What’s on the playlist?

CHARLIE. The Pokémon Theme song.

JIMI. Wait how does that go?

CHARLIE. You never watched Pokémon?

JIMI. No, I just wanted to hear you sing it. Please tell me there’s another song in this playlist. Can you even top Pokémon though?

CHARLIE. Um. Miracles Happen. From The Princess Diaries. That’s kind of my anthem for everything right now. Midterms, class presentations, getting out of bed in the morning—and, of course, at the gym.


CHARLIE. You’re right. But here I am. Meeting new and exciting people.

JIMI. Aww you think I’m exciting. Perhaps, even… a miracle?

CHARLIE. You’re pushing it with “a miracle.” I’m still making up my mind about “exciting.”
JIMI. Challenge accepted! Follow me.

CHARLIE. Where are we going?

JIMI. There’s only one place to go. Close your eyes. I’m taking your hand.

[JIMI leads CHARLIE, weaving around the laundry room.]

CHARLIE. The suspense is killing me.

JIMI. Alright, open your eyes. How do you feel about the laundry room?

CHARLIE. Wow! How different and exciting!

JIMI. You hate it. Cool. We can go somewhere else.

CHARLIE. No, I mean… It’s been on my bucket list, without me even knowing it.

JIMI. Haven’t heard that one before. I like it. I’m Jimi, by the way.

CHARLIE. Charlie. Nice to meet you.

JIMI. A handshake? How formal.

CHARLIE. Chivalry is my middle name, Jackie.

JIMI. Jackie?

CHARLIE. Oh shit… Sorry.

JIMI. It’s okay, Chuck.

CHARLIE. Ugh please don’t. That’s the worst nickname.

JIMI. New rule. Each time you get my name wrong, I call you Chuck.

CHARLIE. Noooo… Uh, Jamie?
JIMI. Yes, Chuck?

CHARLIE. (Shit. This is so embarrassing.) Will you just tell me your name again?

JIMI. You can’t give up now! Your last guess was so close.

CHARLIE. Okay okay. I know it starts with a J.

JIMI. Yup.

CHARLIE. Jordan!

JIMI. Noooo.

CHARLIE. Please, I beg of you. It would be so easy for you to save me from my misery.

JIMI. But Chuck, I’m really enjoying this.

CHARLIE. I can’t believe this is happening. Can I wake up now?

JIMI. Okay, Sleeping Beauty. Nightmare’s over.

CHARLIE. Thank you!

JIMI. My name’s Jimi.


[JIMI laughs.]

JIMI. J-I-M-I. Like Hendrix. My mom was a huge fan, and when I was born on his birthday, she couldn’t resist.

CHARLIE. Aww, a namesake! I love that. Um, Jimi?

JIMI. You get a point!
CHARLIE. A point?

JIMI. Every time you do something impressive, you get a point. Five points gets you a gold star.

CHARLIE. What does a gold star mean?

JIMI. You can use it to check something off your bucket list.

CHARLIE. Can you lose points in this game?

JIMI. Nah. Everyone can be a winner.

CHARLIE. Great, well. I just want to let you know… That… I don’t want to. Have sex. Tonight!

JIMI. Okay. We don’t have to.

CHARLIE. Thanks.

JIMI. Are you ready to make the familiar unfamiliar?

[JIMI turns off the lights.]

CHARLIE. I can’t believe we’re doing this. (This is so bad ass.)

JIMI. What was that?

CHARLIE. Oh, umm.

[Sounds of drunk people walking by laundry room. CHARLIE grabs JIMI and pulls her down.]

CHARLIE. There are people outside! Do you think they can see us?

JIMI. No.
CHARLIE. Are you sure?

JIMI. Nope. Don’t care.

CHARLIE. Ha. Well, I guess it’s lighter outside than it is inside. So we should be okay.

[JIMI leans in to kiss CHARLIE.
CHARLIE kisses JIMI back.
JIMI kisses CHARLIE’s neck.]

CHARLIE. That was my second time kissing anyone I hope it’s wasn’t bad! (Oh my god I did not just say that out loud.) I can learn! (Shut up. Just shut up!)

JIMI. You’re adorable.

CHARLIE. Please tell me what to do?

JIMI. You don’t need to do anything right now.

[JIMI moves CHARLIE’s hair away and kisses CHARLIE’s neck.
CHARLIE begins to relax.]

CHARLIE. Okay. (I can do this.) This is nice.

[JIMI keeps kissing CHARLIE.
JIMI is about to kiss CHARLIE’s lips.]

CHARLIE. Wait. Can we try sitting on the washing machine? I heard that’s really… fun.

JIMI. “As you wish.”

[They move to the laundry machine.
CHARLIE hops up on one machine.
CHARLIE offers her hand to help JIMI up.
JIMI shakes her head no.
CHARLIE gets comfortable on top of the machine.
JIMI stays standing.]
CHARLIE. Are you gonna come up, too?

JIMI. Nah, I’ll stay standing. It’s more comfortable like this.

[JIMI leans in and kisses CHARLIE. CHARLIE kisses her back and shifts positions. CHARLIE puts her hand on the machine top next to her.]

CHARLIE. Oh no.

JIMI. What?

CHARLIE. It’s wet.

JIMI. EW. So gross.

CHARLIE. It’s probably detergent.

JIMI. Yikes. I hope it’s detergent.

CHARLIE. It’s gotta be.

JIMI. Do you want to wash your hands?

CHARLIE. Eh. Health is a social construct created to oppress people.

JIMI. No, but can you actually wash your hands?

CHARLIE. Okay, but just saying. Here we are, in a laundry room. Fighting the patriarchy by making dirty a conventionally clean place… In other words, making the familiar unfamiliar.

JIMI. Hell yea! You get another point.

CHARLIE. Let’s try this couch.

JIMI. Oh god. There’s another wet stain here. Hold on, I gotta take care of this.
[JIMI washes her hands.
JIMI brings several layers of paper towels to place over the stained part
of the couch.]

CHARLIE. I don’t want to know. Eww this one’s wet too!

JIMI. Why’ld you touch it?

CHARLIE. To see if it was a recent stain. (Duh.)

JIMI. Um, can you wash your hands again? I just… I don’t know what it is this time.
Like spilling detergent on a washing machine is reasonable. It’s a little more shady to do
it on a couch. Right?

CHARLIE. I mean, we tried to hook up on both. So…

JIMI. The laundry room works in mysterious ways. Have you lost your appetite?

CHARLIE. The thing is, even though this place is pretty gross, you’re not gross.

JIMI. How can I say no to that?

[JIMI leans in and kisses CHARLIE.
CHARLIE kisses back with full enthusiasm.
Clothes come off.]

CHARLIE. Do you want me to take your pants off? Or do you?

JIMI. I’ve got it.

[They take their time.
CHARLIE, still kissing, touches JIMI on her knee.
CHARLIE pauses on that spot—it’s not smooth skin.
JIMI pulls away from the kiss, starts laughing uncontrollably.]

CHARLIE. How’d you get this scar?

JIMI. I can’t tell you. It’s too embarrassing.
CHARLIE. Tell me! I told you that Miracles Happen is my pump up song. That is so embarrassing!

JIMI. I don’t know. I’d say that’s pretty hard-core.

CHARLIE. Tell me or I'll have to kill you.

JIMI. That’s the worst logic. If I’m dead, you’ll never know…

[CHARLIE silently glares at JIMI.]

JIMI. It was my first year of high school, which meant you had to give up morality for the sake of making friends. I’m kidding. My new friend was so excited about the first Twilight movie. Even though I wasn’t at all, I wanted to be her friend. We decided to go, we were super late, so we ran… Well, she ran. We were on this strange sidewalk with pebbles cemented in, and it was raining. I must have tripped because the pebbles were wet and slippery. And I fell and gashed my knee open. So I took it as a sign: Never watch Twilight!

CHARLIE. That’s what you got out of it? Seriously though? Twilight is sooo good. Okay, we have to watch it.

JIMI. No! Did you not just listen to what I said? I’m mortal enemies with Twilight. We will never watch Twilight.

CHARLIE. Never is a long time. Isn’t it a little soon to give me that ultimatum?

JIMI. I’m hedging my bets you want to see me more than you want to watch Twilight.

CHARLIE. A gambler?

JIMI. Only in the language of loooooving.

CHARLIE. Ew.

JIMI. I’m pretty hot, if you haven’t noticed.
**CHARLIE.** You’re lucky you can’t lose points. Because that would have just cost you a point.

**JIMI.** I’m confident. What can I say?

**CHARLIE.** I’d say cocky.

**JIMI.** Do you ugly cry?

**CHARLIE.** Woah, where did that come from? One second we’re talking about how hot you are, the next you’re asking me if I ugly cry?

**JIMI.** I don’t think you’re ugly.

**CHARLIE.** Well, I wouldn’t know. I’ve never watched myself cry. How’d you get this scar?

**JIMI.** How much do you want to know?

**CHARLIE.** Only what you want to tell me.

**JIMI.** (I want to. But…) Another time?

**CHARLIE.** Okay… Do you like the rain? Some people love being outside in the rain and some love being indoors, listening to it. Which are you?

**JIMI.** That’s so much pressure… Does it matter? (Will that change anything?)

**CHARLIE.** It’s not like I asked you if you’re a dog person or a cat person.

**JIMI.** I bet that’s your follow-up question!

**CHARLIE.** Nah, the people who ask those questions are always dog people. I’m a cat person.

**JIMI.** Noooooo.

**CHARLIE.** Gahhh I’m sorry! Cats are just so soft and clean and they don’t drool they just cuddle.
JIMI. No dogs are the best cuddlers—

CHARLIE. Okay, before we get into a cat-dog battle, I have a different question for you: Would you rather step in dog poop every day for a week or have your roommate pee on all of your stuff?

JIMI. Where do you come up with this?

CHARLIE. The roommate thing did. Second semester of college, right before she moved out. And yesterday I stepped in dog poop. Yeah, I guess you could say this question was inspired by life events.

JIMI. I can’t even… I’m phoning in a friend.

CHARLIE. Is this your extremely subtle way to get my number?

JIMI. Gotta admit it’s my smoothest move yet.

CHARLIE. Not saying much. You just said, “In the language of looooving.”

JIMI. Come on, phoning in a friend? Give it to me!

CHARLIE. Fine. That earned you one point.

JIMI. Yessss. So will I see you again? Or will you disappear into the dark and I’ll lie here pining for you until I rot and become another stain on this couch?

CHARLIE. Beautiful.

JIMI. I tried.

CHARLIE. A natural poet.

JIMI. Actually, I’m a musician. But you can call me “poet” if you want.

CHARLIE. What do you play?

JIMI. Trumpet—it’s a really underrated instrument.
CHARLIE. No, I know. I’m really into the trumpet.

JIMI. Is this a recent development? Like, since you found out I play trumpet?

CHARLIE. No, you presumptuous cad.

JIMI. Please tell me “cad” is a Medieval insult.

CHARLIE. (Am I that predictable?) Yeah. It means bastard. But it’s really a slur against men. For when they behave dishonorably towards a woman.

JIMI. Please accept my sincerest apologies for acting like a dishonorable knave. I hope never again to stoop so low. Do you think today’s version of cad is “fuck boy”?

CHARLIE. Honestly yeah. Anyway, I was into trumpet before I met you. But you could play me something this weekend, if you want?

JIMI. I can’t.

CHARLIE. Never mind!

JIMI. No I want to, but I’m going on a farm retreat this weekend.

CHARLIE. A farm retreat?

JIMI. There’s so much you still don’t know about me.

CHARLIE. I love it so much. I really didn’t see you as a farmer. Farmer Jimi. Digging in the dirt.

JIMI. Oh shut up. My favorite is weeding. None of the farmers like weeding as much as I do.

CHARLIE. “None of the farmers.” There’s a whole community!

JIMI. Haven’t you heard about Long Lane Farm? It’s a student-run farm collective.

CHARLIE. Nooo. So what’s it about weeding that really... turns your soil?
JIMI. Oof. But actually? I like how you can see your progress in the work. The visual outcome. Immediate gratification. And who doesn't like helping the little plants to breathe and grow big and tall, without the aggressive weeds taking up space and stealing the nutrients?

CHARLIE. That’s quite heroic of you. If you’re not saving the plants next Thursday night, we could hang out.

JIMI. First of all, I help them, not save them. And second, I’d like that.

CHARLIE. Would you also like me to pencil you into my calendar?

JIMI. Please tell me you’re joking.

CHARLIE. I am joking. I have a fantastic memory. So I don’t need to write things down.

JIMI. A fantastic memory? It took you forever to remember my name!

CHARLIE. For scheduling, not names. Names I suck at. But I remember my responsibilities. I don’t know. I can’t explain it. Maybe you’ll learn about it in one of your psychology classes and tell me why.

JIMI. You never told me the truth.

CHARLIE. What?

JIMI. Of why you went to the party. You just told me how you pumped yourself up. Why did you come?

CHARLIE. Oh. Right. It was a dare.

JIMI. Who dared you?

CHARLIE. My sister. She goes to USC and parties a ton. She thought I would have fun.

JIMI. Well, did you?
CHARLIE. Yeah. And I’m so pissed she was right.

[JIMI kisses CHARLIE.]

CHARLIE. Do you have any siblings?

[JIMI keeps kissing CHARLIE.]

SCENE TWO

[The laundry room. The following Wednesday. JIMI is putting her dirty laundry into a washing machine. CHARLIE enters.]

JIMI. Charlie?

CHARLIE. (Oh my god. It’s you.)

JIMI. Haven’t seen you all week.

CHARLIE. I wasn’t feeling well. But I’m feeling good today!

JIMI. That’s great! Are you gonna come in?

CHARLIE. Yeah. (Of course.) I didn’t know if there were enough machines.

JIMI. There are plenty. I’m just using one, and it’s almost done.

CHARLIE. Cool.

[Long silence. CHARLIE lugs her laundry into the laundry room. JIMI is transferring her wet clothes into a dryer. JIMI does so one article of clothing at a time. The clothing must not touch the floor when JIMI pulls it out. CHARLIE has let her laundry build for a long time. It is very heavy. CHARLIE takes a break in the middle of the laundry room.]
JIMI doesn’t know if she should help CHARLIE. CHARLIE finally makes it to a washing machine. CHARLIE begins the slow process of sorting her dirty laundry. More silence.]

JIMI. Do you think anyone’s ever hooked up on this couch?

CHARLIE. Uhh. Yeah?

JIMI. Charlie! Did you hook up on that couch?

CHARLIE. I don’t kiss and tell.

[CHARLIE and JIMI smile.
JIMI is still putting her clothes into the dryer.]

CHARLIE. Oh no!

JIMI. What’s wrong?

CHARLIE. I forgot my towels!

JIMI. That sucks. Also, gross.

CHARLIE. Gross? That’s the least bad thing to forget to wash.

JIMI. Why?

CHARLIE. Because you’re always clean when you use your towel.

JIMI. Do you know how many dead skin cells you lose every day?

CHARLIE. But they’re clean skin cells. What’s taking you so long with the laundry?

JIMI. I don’t want any of my clothes to touch the ground.

CHARLIE. But it’s the laundry room.
JIMI. The ground is dirty! See? Look at this! Actually don’t look. You don’t want to. So. Tonight is Wednesday. You going to Bar Night?

CHARLIE. Nah, I don’t think so. I went once last year and I didn’t know many people.

JIMI. You should come! It’s fun. And you’ll know me.

CHARLIE. I probably won’t go. But I could meet you here tonight, if you want? Unless you want to wait until tomorrow, like we planned. Jimi, are you mopping the ground right now?

JIMI. It’s so dirty!

CHARLIE. You’re a farmer! You’re supposed to love the dirt.

JIMI. I do. When it’s outside.

CHARLIE. You’re too much.

JIMI. You should rethink coming to Bar Night. It’s gonna be sick!

CHARLIE. Why do people say “sick” like that?

JIMI. You’ve never heard that expression?

CHARLIE. I have, I just don’t get it. Why would something good be “sick”?

JIMI. I don’t know. Sick isn’t bad.

CHARLIE. Yeah it is. The definition is... Oh it’s not as exciting as I thought. But still proves my point. “Not in good health; ill.”

JIMI. You did not just look that up!

CHARLIE. What?

JIMI. In a dictionary?!

CHARLIE. So? I like to support my claims with evidence.
JIMI. But that wasn’t… Oh my god. You didn’t look it up on your phone.

CHARLIE. I’ve become anti-smart phone. Wow, you really haven’t noticed? All of my texts are green on your iPhone and you didn’t notice!

JIMI. I thought you just had bad reception. Wait I’m still not over the fact that YOU ACTUALLY PULLED OUT A REAL PAPERBACK MINI DICTIONARY. FROM YOUR POCKET. The last time I saw one of those was in middle school when no one had smartphones. But you have a phone, and you also still carry a dictionary. You’re such a nerd!

CHARLIE. I am a responsible conversationalist. If that makes me a nerd, so be it.

JIMI. Next you’re going to tell me you don’t use your phone for directions. But instead draw your own map. On a napkin.

CHARLIE. If more people in our society took a minute to fact check their claims, we’d be in a much better place.

JIMI. Please just don’t mention Trump.

CHARLIE. No. There’s been enough talk of Donald (it sounds less powerful than Trump) to last a lifetime.

JIMI. My friend worked for Hillary’s media campaign this summer and had to sit in on like 20 meetings about messaging and how they were never supposed to use the words “Mr. Trump” or even “Trump” in a video or statement, it should always be “Donald” or ideally “The Donald.”

CHARLIE. Wow I love that. The Donald. I hope that it stays “The Donald” and not “President The Donald.” Um, I also don’t have the energy to continue this conversation right now.

JIMI. Okay. But you’re voting, right?

CHARLIE. Of course. I’m sorry I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I just feel like all I ever do is predict the bad things that are going to happen if “The Donald” is actually elected. It’s sick.
JIMI. So sick *is* negative. Except in the expression I used. Unless I'm reclaiming “sick”?

CHARLIE. I doubt it. Because it’s *context-dependent*.

JIMI. Five points for Gryffindor!

CHARLIE. This is awkward. I’m totally Ravenclaw.

JIMI. Well, I’m Slytherin.

[CHARLIE slithers up to JIMI and starts speaking in parseltongue.]

JIMI. Speaking of, did you *really* hook up on that couch?

CHARLIE. No. It was the other one.

JIMI. Lol.

CHARLIE. Did you just say, “L. O. L.” out loud?

JIMI. We pronounce it “lol” now. This is 2016. Sooner than you think, people are going to be studying our emoji text conversations.

CHARLIE. I am terrified for the world.

JIMI. For real though. The situation isn’t good.

CHARLIE. I know… So I’m sick.

JIMI. I got it, okay? Sick has a negative meaning. Can we stop talking about that word?

CHARLIE. No, I’m trying to tell you… I’m actually sick. You know, how I have Crohn’s?

JIMI. I still don’t really get what it is.

CHARLIE. It’s GI-related. GI is gastro-intestinal.
JIMI. What happens?

CHARLIE. I have inflammation in my colon. I’ve had it since I was 11. My medicine costs so fucking much.

JIMI. How much?

CHARLIE. $15,000. A month. My family can’t afford those medical bills without our insurance. I finally found medication that allows me to live my life without getting so tired all the time. And the medication stops the other, less “cute” symptoms of Crohn’s. Which is a huge deal. You can be excited about that.

JIMI. That’s great!

CHARLIE. I think so too. But when Trump—sorry—“The Donald” talks about how he’s gonna cut Obamacare, it really scares me.

JIMI. What were your other symptoms? Besides being tired?

CHARLIE. You wanna know all the gory details?

JIMI. I’m the girl that loves a good vomit story, remember? Bring it on.

CHARLIE. I wasn’t absorbing any nutrients from my food, which was why I was so tired. And I was in a lot of pain. I was going to the bathroom like eight times per day.

JIMI. Wait you were pooping eight times every day?

CHARLIE. Okay I know you’re not a squeamish person when it comes to bodily excretions. But are you sure you want all the details?

JIMI. Yup. All of them.

CHARLIE. Okay, but I warned you. So technically it was watery diarrhea. There are seven types of categorizing poops, but to simplify, I’ll just go into the main differences, but obviously, there’s more variation between these. There’s softly formed stool, loose stool, diarrhea, and on at the other end of the spectrum is the constipated stool, which is like rabbit pellets. But I didn’t have that. How you doing so far?
JIMI. Yum.

CHARLIE. Great. And obviously don’t ask everyone with Crohn’s about their poop.

JIMI. Are you worried I’ll give you a bad rep in the Crohn’s community? You really think I’m gonna go up to someone and say, “So great to meet you, Clarissa! You look like the softly-formed stool kind of girl.”

CHARLIE. Okay okay. I shouldn’t have said that.

JIMI. “Oh hey Brad! Where do you fall on the spectrum of rabbit pellets to diarrhea?”

CHARLIE. You’re having way too much fun with this.

JIMI. Speaking of diarrhea, you never told me why watery diarrhea was bad.

CHARLIE. If it’s watery, it means you’re not retaining water. So I was super dehydrated. Which is really dangerous. But other people with Crohn’s have different symptoms. Some people have to poop twenty times per day. You’ll appreciate this one: some people are nauseous and vomit all the time.

JIMI. Hold on. Just because I like vomit stories does not mean I have a morbid desire to hear the vomit stories of people with Crohn’s. I like vomit stories when it’s like, someone getting carsick. Or if they’re too drunk. “Harmless” vomit stories.

CHARLIE. Valid, sorry for assuming. The other symptoms are lots of fevers, or you can have a combination of any of them.

JIMI. Wow. That sucks.

CHARLIE. Yeah. Before I found this medication, I didn’t think I would find anything that would work. I was so close to needing surgery and having to get a colostomy bag.

JIMI. What’s that?

CHARLIE. Oh it, uh, you know, holds the poop.

JIMI. Where?
CHARLIE. Outside. Um. So basically if you need surgery on the small or large intestine, they reroute the passage of poop to go into a bag that gets placed on your stomach.

JIMI. I bet they make sexy colostomy bags. I bet there’s a whole market for it.

CHARLIE. There actually is. You know me, I do my research. Not only is there lingerie that covers the colostomy bags, you can even make the actual bag sexy.

JIMI. I knew it!

CHARLIE. I found some that are bejeweled.

[CHARLIE and JIMI don’t break eye contact.]

JIMI. Hey. If you have to get a colostomy, I’ll find you the most bedazzled colostomy bag. Deal?

CHARLIE. I don’t know. Rhinestones are kind of tacky.

JIMI. Well, I’ve never hooked up with someone with a colostomy bag before. So at the very least, I could check that off my bucket list.

CHARLIE. Are you fetishizing me?

JIMI. No no I’m not trying to! I just want you to still feel sexy.

CHARLIE. Sexiness is about the person, not the pants.

JIMI. Yeah, of course. Sexiness and disability are not mutually exclusive.

CHARLIE. Disability?

JIMI. Crohn’s is a disability. Why don’t you just join the club already?

CHARLIE. What are you talking about.
**JIMI.** Chronic illness is a disability. If all people claimed their disabilities and came together—

**CHARLIE.** I just don’t want to use the word disability. Why can’t you leave me alone?

**JIMI.** Shit. Okay, I will!

[CHARLIE avoids JIMI’s eyes.
JIMI moves to leave.
CHARLIE sees her about to leave.]

**CHARLIE.** Wait, seriously?

**JIMI.** I forgot my laundry card. I’ll be right back.

[CHARLIE stays.
CHARLIE cleans the lint from all the drying machines lint trays.
CHARLIE notices JIMI’s dryer isn’t on.
CHARLIE swipes for JIMI’s dryer.
JIMI comes back.]

**JIMI.** I don’t understand. It’s all ready to go.

**CHARLIE.** Yeah, I swiped for you.

**JIMI.** Charlie, you shouldn’t have.

**CHARLIE.** You’re welcome.

**JIMI.** Sorry, thanks. Let me swipe you?

**CHARLIE.** Don’t worry about it.

**JIMI.** I want to.

**CHARLIE.** It’s fine!

**JIMI.** I don’t want you to think I’m taking advantage of you.
CHARLIE. You’re not. When have I ever…?

JIMI. You haven’t.

CHARLIE. Wow, I just swiped your laundry. It’s not a big deal.

JIMI. Yeah, I’m sorry. Right now it’s just laundry. But like if we ever got… dinner. I couldn’t always get you back.

CHARLIE. I get that… So, you saying you wanna get dinner with me?

JIMI. Yeah, I guess I am. Just not expensive, okay? …It’s funny to be here. Right? We’re both here, just doing our laundry. Not hooking up. Unless…

CHARLIE. Jimi, it’s still light out!

JIMI. Not for long… Okay okay, we can just make out. No one’s gonna get scandalized about a little kissing.

CHARLIE. Yeah, kissing should be fine.

[JIMI and CHARLIE makeout. Post-makeout, JIMI takes out her phone.

CHARLIE glances at her phone.]

JIMI. It’s official. This is our spot now.

CHARLIE. We’ve hooked up here twice, and you’re already calling it “our spot.”

JIMI. Believe it.

CHARLIE. What are you looking at?

JIMI. Just on Facebook. The university “Compliments Page.” You know, where students anonymously compliment each other?

CHARLIE. You’re the worst. Just because I deactivated my facebook—
JIMI. And got a *dumb* phone!

CHARLIE. Doesn’t mean I don’t know what the “Compliments Page” is. Have you ever written anyone a Compliment?

JIMI. The complimenters’ identities are supposed to stay secret!

CHARLIE. Come on, you can tell me!

JIMI. Keeping your compliment secret is literally the point of the page!

CHARLIE. Oh my god. Was it a compliment about me?

JIMI. Um, I mean. Have you gotten a compliment before?

CHARLIE. Only once. About being a Medieval Studies major… That was *you*?

JIMI. What? No…

CHARLIE. You can’t lie to save your life.

JIMI. Okay. Yes. After I wrote it I realized how awkward it sounded. (“Keep learning and loving.” Stupid stupid.)

CHARLIE. It was nice. People just kept coming up to me asking if it was true.

JIMI. Why would someone lie on the Compliments Page? Have you ever lied to me?

CHARLIE. In *all* the time that I’ve known you?

JIMI. *Time* is a social construct.

CHARLIE. You really should have been a Sociology major.

JIMI. My sister was a Sociology major.

[Long pause.]
**CHARLIE.** How old was she?

**JIMI.** She was 19. It’s weird being older than her now…

**CHARLIE.** There’s something I’m trying to remember, and you’re good at names. You know that whole Movement Palutta, uh… Martian Prairie Dream Girl?—No… What is it?

**JIMI.** *Manic Pixie* Dream Girl?

**CHARLIE.** I was close!

**JIMI.** Martian Prairie? I think not.

**CHARLIE.** Well, anyway you know that phenomenon?

**JIMI.** Yeah, and I’m pretty pissed about it.

**CHARLIE.** Why?

**JIMI.** Because it doesn’t allow women to express themselves as anything other than awkward and adorable.

**CHARLIE.** I feel like that’s me though. “Adorkable.”

**JIMI.** Eugh, no way. You’re awkward and adorable, but also chill and smart and funny!

**CHARLIE.** But *Manic Pixie* Dream Girls are funny too.

**JIMI.** They’re like, “oh no, I can’t do anything right! But I can smile and it’ll all work out for me,” if *that’s* what you mean by cutesy and funny. You’re actually funny.

**CHARLIE.** Aw.

**JIMI.** Let’s play a game.

**CHARLIE.** What kind of game?

**JIMI.** A kissing game.
CHARLIE. I like games.

JIMI. You’re so…

CHARLIE. What were you gonna say?

JIMI. Nah.

CHARLIE. Say it!

JIMI. Cute. You’re really fucking cute. (But not Manic Pixie Dream Girl cute. You’re better than that bullshit.)

CHARLIE. Let’s play! Let’s play! How do we play?

JIMI. So the game is, you kiss me five different ways. And I tell you which way I like best.

CHARLIE. Wait, what? Do you think I’m a bad kisser?

JIMI. (Shit I should I have thought of a better way to say this before saying it out loud.) Nooo. The game is like role playing. Like you’re kissing as a different person each time.

CHARLIE. Oh o-kay…

JIMI. Want me to go first?
Here’s One.

CHARLIE. Oooohhh I like this game.

JIMI. Two.

CHARLIE. Mmmm.

JIMI. Three. Four.

CHARLIE. I want more of three.
JIMI. Five.

CHARLIE. Oh! I'll take five, please.

JIMI. Your turn.

CHARLIE. One. Am I doing this right?

JIMI. Yup. Now do two.

CHARLIE. Two. I don’t think—

JIMI. You’re doing great.

CHARLIE. Three. Four. Five.

JIMI. Let’s go five!

[CHARLIE takes off some of JIMI’s clothes.
They move to the couch.
The door opens, someone screams “Oh my God! Ew!”
The door slams shut.]

JIMI. That was hilarious! Her face. Your face.

CHARLIE. I’m glad you got to enjoy this because I’m never gonna forget it. Oh god. That was probably the worst thing someone could have said.

JIMI. “Ew”? That wasn’t about us. Well, that was just her surprise in catching us. But not “ew” us.

CHARLIE. We should go…

JIMI. Why are you whispering? There’s no one here anymore.

CHARLIE. I don’t know. I just feel so exposed.

JIMI. She won’t remember your face. She was just as embarrassed as you.
CHARLIE. Were you even embarrassed?

JIMI. No. We’ll probably never see her again.

CHARLIE. I still feel bad.

JIMI. Okay. Ask me a question.

CHARLIE. I don’t know what to ask you.

JIMI. Anything you’ve been wondering?

CHARLIE. Have you dated anyone here?

JIMI. Nope. I mean, I’ve hooked up with people.

CHARLIE. What about before college?

JIMI. Yeah.

CHARLIE. Are you gonna tell me about it?

JIMI. What do you wanna know?

CHARLIE. Is that even a question? *Everything.*

JIMI. Okay. I grew up in Alabama.

CHARLIE. Wow.

JIMI. Wow?

CHARLIE. I’m hooking up with a Southerner.

JIMI. “Are you fetishizing me?”

CHARLIE. Finish your story!
JIMI. Alright, so I grew up in the South. Queer before I knew what that meant. At sleepovers, I was surrounded by girls. And we would practice kissing, with each other—before I learned in my town that girls were “supposed to” kiss boys. And we got really good. But none of us told anyone. What’s your story?

CHARLIE. I don’t know if this counts, but something happened when I studied abroad in Ecuador. Actually, I kind of had the dream study-abroad experience. I did all the things I was afraid of. Nude art classes—

JIMI. Wait, I’m sorry for interrupting. You did nude art?

CHARLIE. Yeah. I have an embarrassing story about that.

JIMI. I’m still stuck on the fact that you call it nude art.

CHARLIE. I don’t know. It’s stupid but I just like calling it nude art. It sounds more badass than “life drawing,” right? You know it does.

JIMI. What’s the embarrassing story?

CHARLIE. At the first class, there was a very confident male model. I literally spent the first ten minutes just getting used to it. I was sooo uncomfortable, but everyone else was fine! Because they’re artists. By the second hour, I had finally adjusted. Until this model almost gave me a heart attack.

JIMI. Aw newbie artist Charlie gets flustered.

CHARLIE. Yeah well he was adventurous with his poses. He literally said he wanted to make sure we all got a full-frontal position. So I’m busy working on my drawing, and when I look up he had changed positions and is standing three feet in front of me. Hold on, I have to do the pose. I can’t even describe it.

[CHARLIE gets up and stands in front of JIMI. CHARLIE holds an embarrassing pose. A pose option could be: CHARLIE raises one of her knees, bent. CHARLIE’s foot is high up on her leg, but still facing forward. CHARLIE extends her arms like wings. They burst out laughing.]
JIMI. Oh my god.

CHARLIE. Right? I look up into… that. I immediately looked back down at my paper. Bright red. It was just, it was a lot to absorb when you’re not expecting it.

JIMI. This is incredible. Do you still have the drawing?

CHARLIE. Yeah I put it next to my mirror in my room. It’s a reminder not to take myself too seriously.

JIMI. Was this the person you dated?

CHARLIE. Oh no! I never saw him again, and I’m not into guys. So I had never gone with the group to the bar afterwards because I always had class the next morning, and I hadn’t done my reading for it yet.

JIMI. Of course you always do your reading. I bet you’ve never skipped a class either.

CHARLIE. Nope. And it was a 9am. But a month in—you’d be proud—I was like, “Fuck it, I’m going out tonight.” And I just did my reading when I came home. It was great.

JIMI. So proud. You’ve graduated to the “work hard, play hard” level.

CHARLIE. So that night, I ended up talking to one of the girls in the class. Until the bar closed. Midnight. She walked me back to my host family’s house. And that was it.

JIMI. Did you even kiss?

CHARLIE. …No.

JIMI. Oh wow. That is. Something.

CHARLIE. Don’t be mean.

JIMI. What? I’m not judging you.
CHARLIE. I’ve never dated anyone. Should I not be telling you this?

JIMI. You can tell me whatever you want. I respect that you haven’t dated anyone.

CHARLIE. Thanks. Sometimes I feel like I’m missing out.

JIMI. If it doesn’t feel good then it’s not worth it.

CHARLIE. But what happens if I can’t tell what feels good?

SCENE THREE

[The laundry room. A few weeks later. JIMI enters. CHARLIE takes off her headphones.]

JIMI. What were you listening to?

CHARLIE. What?

JIMI. What music were you listening to?

CHARLIE. Oh. Nothing.

JIMI. I promise I won’t judge your music taste. Even if it’s like, Hilary Duff.

CHARLIE. No, I actually wasn’t listening to anything.

JIMI. Come on.

CHARLIE. It’s true! Okay so sometimes I just put on my headphones. I plug it in. But I forget to turn on the music. The fact of wearing headphones is enough to help me focus.

JIMI. Who are you?

CHARLIE. I’m probably the only one that does this.

JIMI. Yeah.
CHARLIE. Right. Well then I guess that makes me a nonconformist.

JIMI. You’re a real Janis Ian aren’t you.

CHARLIE. I wish. I totally had a crush on her the first time I watched Mean Girls.

JIMI. Same. I’m dressing up as her for Halloween next year. Would you like to be my Damien? Oh my god.

CHARLIE. What? Is everything okay?

JIMI. Is that an eggplant hat?

CHARLIE. So what if it is? (Who’s asking?)

JIMI. A fan.

CHARLIE. Yes, it is.

JIMI. Where did you find something like that?

CHARLIE. In the back of my closet. It was in the bin of clothes that my grandma bought for me. This is the only thing I actually still like. I’ve had it since I was 12.

JIMI. You really pull it off. Eggplant is a lovely shade for your complexion.

CHARLIE. Why thank you. No one’s ever told me that eggplant is my color.

JIMI. Eggplant is an awful name for such a beautiful shade of purple though. It doesn’t make sense. Eggs are not purple.

CHARLIE. The color eggplant is based on the inside yellowish color. Not the purple.

JIMI. That is the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard about a vegetable.

CHARLIE. It’s a fruit, actually.

JIMI. No way.
CHARLIE. Yeah. Because it has seeds. The definition of fruit is having seeds.

JIMI. Prove it!

CHARLIE. You want me to look it up?

JIMI. No no not the dictionary again! Okay I believe you. But cucumbers have seeds. But they’re not fruit, right?

CHARLIE. Yes, cucumbers are technically considered fruits. So are avocados.

JIMI. Nooo. All my life I thought I was eating vegetables. Have I ever even eaten vegetables? It’s all fruit now. My world is ending.

CHARLIE. It’s okay, Jimbo. You were gonna have to learn sometime. Glad you learned with me here to support you.

JIMI. How is it possible. All these veggies. My entire life. Are fruits. What is even real anymore.

CHARLIE. Come on. It’s not as bad as you think it is.

JIMI. It’s so bad… Charlie? Can I ask why you were crying earlier?

CHARLIE. Does your dad ever bless you?

JIMI. I’m not religious, but I feel like my mom has blessed me at some point.

CHARLIE. Do you remember when she blessed you, if she cried?

JIMI. Yeah. I mean, no, I don’t remember.

CHARLIE. My dad does. Every year on Yom Kippur. It’s a Jewish holiday where you repent your sins. He skypes me because I’m in college and he can’t come bless me in person. Even over skype, he still cries.

JIMI. I think that’s sweet.
CHARLIE. The only other time I’ve seen him was when his best friend died. From a sudden heart attack.

JIMI. Damn.

CHARLIE. He told me through skype. So I just have this vivid picture of him and Mom sitting next to each other on the couch. And he was crying. It’s funny. I don’t know who was holding the phone. Because my dad usually does.

JIMI. Really? I didn’t notice.

CHARLIE. Well, you’ve only seen them once.

JIMI. Yeah, but I’m usually pretty observant. Like did you realize how much my parents look like the mom and dad emojis.

CHARLIE. What?

JIMI. Look. Right? It’s uncanny. My stepdad’s the mustache man and my mom looks exactly like the mom face. You know what she said when I told her? “You’re reducing us to emojis?”

CHARLIE. It just seems weird that he would hold the phone while he was crying. So maybe my mom held it. I should ask her. But she probably won’t remember.

JIMI. Why do you need to know who was holding the phone?

CHARLIE. I don’t know. I don’t know why it matters. It doesn’t. You’re right.

JIMI. Are you okay?

CHARLIE. Do you listen to the words when you’re being blessed? I thought I’ve always listened to the words, but… Maybe I haven’t as much as I thought. It’s distracting to see my dad cry while he’s blessing me. Wanna hear my thought process? Okay, Dad’s gonna cry. Dad’s about to cry. Dad’s starting to cry, wow, okay he’s crying now but also praying.

[JIMI laughs.
CHARLIE joins in.]
CHARLIE. No but this time I listened to the words. The prayer he said asks for us to fear God. Like, he actually prayed for us to have the fear of God instilled in us… I don’t believe in God.

JIMI. I don’t know what I believe. I think I believe there’s something out there. But I don’t know what it is.

CHARLIE. Okay but I don’t believe in God. So here I am, listening to my dad crying while blessing me. Clearly it’s very meaningful. But the words are asking for—impossibilities—stuff I don’t want to happen. My parents are accepting, but still say they want me to marry a nice Jewish boy. And give them grandkids. I hate that these traditional values are still so ingrained, even now, in “modern” times.

JIMI. Just because it’s tradition doesn’t mean that’s what you have to do. The Bible is full of fucked up traditions. Abraham sacrificing Isaac? I hate the part where God is like, Abraham kill your son to prove your love for me. And Abraham is like, okay! And when Abraham is about to kill Isaac, God is like, psych! You don’t have to kill your boy anymore.

CHARLIE. Exactly! What kind of God would do that? That’s so psychologically abusive.

JIMI. We take these stories and make them super meaningful, but ignore all the reprehensible parts.

CHARLIE. And what about Lot, who basically just gives his daughters up to be raped—so the strangers don’t have to be raped.

JIMI. This is just another example of men trying to control and take reproductive rights of women. Classic that it would have such an origin in the Bible.

CHARLIE. It’s funny. I went to Hebrew School for seven years and maybe we learned these stories but we definitely didn’t talk about how problematic they are.

JIMI. You think they would have taught you that horror story in Hebrew school? “Okay kiddos, today we’re gonna learn about all the fucked up things that actually happen in the Bible. A dad offered up his daughters to be raped because selflessness starts at home. And what’s more selfless than offering up—not yourself, no that’s too easy—your most prized possession: your daughters.”
CHARLIE. Ugh, you’re right. And have you ever thought about lepers? The outcasts of their time. I’ve been thinking about why we think about disability as *dis*-ability. Why so many people with disabilities are completely marginalized. Maybe it goes back to the idea of lepers being untouchable…

JIMI. Wait. Why are you smiling at me like that? What’s going on?

CHARLIE. Ah I don’t know. I gotta go. Homework.

JIMI. Charlie!

CHARLIE. It’s nothing.

JIMI. *What?!* I bet it’s *huge*.

CHARLIE. I can’t. You’re gonna freak out.

JIMI. I’m already freaking out! I’ll keep freaking out until you tell me!

CHARLIE. Okay, calm down!

JIMI. I’m calm. So calm.

CHARLIE. I don’t know. It’s just… (No. It feels too early to say anything.)

JIMI. *Charlie!*

CHARLIE. Okay, fine! I’m hooking up with someone.

JIMI. Oh.

CHARLIE. And she’s great!

JIMI. Yeah?

CHARLIE. Yeah. I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone as cool as her.

JIMI. Cool.
CHARLIE. And she introduced me to her parents last week.

JIMI. She did?

CHARLIE. Yeah, but just as her friend.

JIMI. I’m sorry! We talked about that.

CHARLIE. When we first met, I talked about *The Princess Bride*. For a really long time.

JIMI. And what happened?

CHARLIE. And I forgot the name of the main dude. The hot pirate guy. Shit. I forgot it again.

JIMI. You forgot *Westley’s* name?! AGAIN?! Who are you?

CHARLIE. And… it gets worse.

JIMI. How can it get worse than that?

CHARLIE. I also forgot her name.

JIMI. Oh my GOD. And she *still* hooked up with you?

CHARLIE. Yes, and she must really like me. Because she’s still here.

JIMI. Stuck here. There’s a difference.

CHARLIE. You like me, you really like me. You really really like me.

JIMI. Oh my god. You get a gold star! That’s a reference to Sally Field’s Oscar speech, right?

CHARLIE. No, but I wish it was. Who is Sally?

JIMI. You are a Martian. But you’re my Martian… (Prairie Dream Girl.)
CHARLIE. I'll embrace my out-of-worldliness. And circle you like a planet orbiting its sun.

[CHARLIE does an outer-space dance around JIMI.]

JIMI. You're incorrigible.

CHARLIE. Nice word.

JIMI. Thanks! My newest phone app is Word-of-The-Day. Every day they teach you a new word.

CHARLIE. Jimi's using her smartphone for good. I'm impressed.

JIMI. And Dazzled? Affected? Roused? Excited?

[JIMI moves to kiss CHARLIE.
For each word, CHARLIE gets a kiss.]

CHARLIE. How did we get here?

JIMI. Synonyms.

[CHARLIE jumps on top of JIMI, kissing her.
CHARLIE leads JIMI to the washing machine.]

CHARLIE. Jimi, do you want to sit up here and have a go? Try it out?

JIMI. No, it actually hurts my knee to bend it.

CHARLIE. You alright?

JIMI. Is it okay if we take a break?

CHARLIE. Of course. Hey Jimi?

JIMI. Yeah?
CHARLIE. Um. I don’t know how to say this. Okay. Can I talk to you about something?

JIMI. What's up?

CHARLIE. I was talking to my dad, and he was asking weird questions again.

JIMI. About my leg?

CHARLIE. Yeah, and I told him it was none of his business. But he won’t let it go.

JIMI. Classic doctors.

CHARLIE. I just don’t want him to bug you about it when he meets you.

JIMI. If I’m not worried, you shouldn’t worry. Alright?

CHARLIE. Yeah. Also, this is so stupid, but.

JIMI. Say it!

CHARLIE. I wish you wouldn't always tell people I'm a Medieval Studies major.

JIMI. But that's something so great about you! I'm proud of that.

CHARLIE. Well I’m not. I didn't do anything special to be a Medieval Studies major. I took a bunch of Medieval classes and then one day I realized I had enough to minor and if I took a few extra classes when I came back from abroad, I could major. So all I really did was take classes. Like everyone else who completes a major. Not a big deal.

JIMI. But the subject is sooo cool. Why don't you want everyone to know?

CHARLIE. I just don't want that to be the only thing I talk to new people about. No one really knows what Medieval Studies is so I end up spending so much time explaining it.

JIMI. …You’re incredible.
CHARLIE. Because I’m a Medieval Studies major?

JIMI. Are you that dense?

SCENE FOUR

[The laundry room. A month later.
Friday after the Election.
CHARLIE inside sitting with back to the door.
JIMI standing in front of the door.
CHARLIE won’t move away from the door, and JIMI can’t get in.
JIMI just stands in front of the door.]

JIMI. Hey, Charlie? What are you doing?

CHARLIE. I’m just chilling… What about you?

JIMI. Oh, you know. Just checking in. See how you’re doing.

CHARLIE. I’m fine, thanks. How are you?

JIMI. You just asked me that. Charlie, can I come in?

CHARLIE. Okay.

JIMI. You gotta move away from the door, Charlie… Charlie? Charlie! Chuck?

CHARLIE. Call me that again, and I’ll never open this door.

JIMI. Charlie!

CHARLIE. Yeah?

JIMI. What’s going on?

CHARLIE. The election.

JIMI. I know.
CHARLIE. They recounted the votes. The stinging won’t stop. Oh god, Jimi. It’s bad. It’s so bad.


CHARLIE. I can’t believe it.

JIMI. Okay. It might not be as bad as we think. We don’t know what’s actually going to happen yet.

CHARLIE. Jimi have you seen the news? The outbreak of hate crimes? It’s bad. It’s really bad. And he’s making all sorts of threats about fulfilling his campaign promises. So many people are scared for their lives and their families.

JIMI. I just can’t believe our professors expect us to act like nothing’s changed. I have an essay due in an hour. How can I focus? …This essay is the least of my worries.

CHARLIE. What can I do? Jimi, please. Tell me.

JIMI. Charlie, I honestly don’t know. I called my parents and they don’t know what to do either.

CHARLIE. But—there has to be something for me to do. What can I do now? I’m just stuck. I’m just right here. I can’t do anything. I don’t want to leave my bed.

JIMI. Charlie move, I’m coming in.

CHARLIE. I know you’re dealing with the same shit too. I’m gonna go for a walk. No, I’m going to make tea. No. No no no I don’t know. HOW ARE YOU SO CALM?

JIMI. I don’t know.

CHARLIE. I’m so fucking scared. I was at a protest yesterday, and this girl came up to me. She told me that I don’t deserve health care. She was so blunt, I thought I misunderstood what she said. But she meant it.

JIMI. That’s disgusting.
CHARLIE. She’s a student here.

JIMI. I want to beat her up.

CHARLIE. That’s not helpful.

JIMI. That’s how I feel. Ugh, it’s just. We just don’t know what’s going to happen. We need more information. We have to wait. But we’ll wait together. Alright?

CHARLIE. Yeah. We’ll wait together.

JIMI. You know what makes me feel a bit better? We’re—us. Existing right now, here. That’s people with disabilities existing—thriving—even in the face of “The Donald’s” evil.

CHARLIE. That’s really sweet. The us—we.

JIMI. We are a direct challenge to “The Donald” and his mockery. We have a voice here, and we can use it.

CHARLIE. Yeah, I know. Jimbo, you gotta finish your essay. It’s due in an hour.

JIMI. Less.

CHARLIE. Are you gonna do it?

JIMI. What’s the point?

CHARLIE. You’re right. Let’s make sand drawings.

JIMI. What? Sand drawings?

CHARLIE. It’s an online activity you can do to relax. My therapist showed it to me.

JIMI. Okay. Can I come in? I have my computer.

[CHARLIE opens the door.
JIMI enters.]
JIMI. Hi.

CHARLIE. Hi. So what’s your essay on?

JIMI. The apocalypse that happened this week.

CHARLIE. The election?! Wow. That’s kind of cruel to make you write about it so soon.

JIMI. No, I chose to write about it. I’m so pissed. Our professors pretend nothing happens outside their classrooms. But serious shit is happening right now. And you know what’s really fucked up? In another five years, we’ll be studying this catastrophe with them. But while it’s happening—they’re ignoring it. Do you think that’s because no one has written an academic book analyzing it yet?

CHARLIE. Hey, it does suck. It sucks so much. But if you don’t write this essay, you could still be here five years later, reading that book.

JIMI. Noooo.

CHARLIE. You’re so close!

JIMI. Fuck.

CHARLIE. Okay okay. Let’s make a sand drawing. And then you’ll write your essay. So the website is thisissand.com—Look, you just hold down your mouse and sand falls. And you can change the color. See? Why don’t you try?

JIMI. You just press down the clicker? And then sand falls. And you fill up the screen with different sand colors.

[JIMI makes a mountain of blue sand. CHARLIE and JIMI watch the mountain grow until it fills the screen.]

JIMI. Symbolism sucks sometimes.

CHARLIE. Your casual use of alliteration is… exquisite. (I love you.)

JIMI. “Exquisite” from the girl who wears an eggplant hat!
CHARLIE. That’s me. (What a line to hear back when you say I love you.)

JI MI. You wear an eggplant hat. Not because it's quirky or hipster. But because you found it in the back of your closet from when you were twelve.

CHARLIE. Hey, stop hating. I love my eggplant hat.

JI MI. I love it too! That’s what I’m trying to say. You’re one in a million. No, you’re one in… You’re one in 1.6 million.

CHARLIE. Aww, you’ve done research on Crohn’s. I’m equal parts disturbed and endeared. Thank you. Alright, now finish your essay.

JI MI. Let’s do this!

CHARLIE. I’ll make a sand drawing too.

[JI MI types furiously on her computer. CHARLIE makes two blue mountains. The mountains cradle each other. JI MI dances in her seat to the music for a few seconds. JI MI’s dancing is awkward. CHARLIE sees JI MI dancing and laughs. JI MI pulls off her headphones.]

JI MI. What?

CHARLIE. You finish your essay?

JI MI. Almost done! Wanna dance with me when it’s over?

CHARLIE. Like nobody’s watching.

[JI MI smiles and puts her headphones back on. CHARLIE practices dance moves behind her.]

END OF PLAY
WORKS CITED


