

You Can't Say That!

Lucy Wright
William Missouri Downs

This play was workshopped and developed at
The Phoenix Theatre's Festival Of New American Plays

Agent: Patricia McLaughlin
Beacon Artists Agency
West 57th Street - 4th floor
New York, NY 10019
BeaconAgency@hotmail.com

Downs@me.com
Lucy-play-Wright@outlook.com
970 302 9686

CAST OF CHARACTERS (3W - 3M)

CHRIS - *Adjunct professor, haunted by the past, white, 30ish*

DEJA - *MFA writing student, finding her voice, black, 25ish*

MAXINE - *Professor, runs with the wolves, creative casting, 40-50ish*

DOROTHY - *MFA writing student, transwoman, creative casting, 25ish*

BUDDY (*Elder Young*) - *Mormon, gay, a poet at heart, black, 20*

CHRISTIAN (*Elder Smith*) - *Mormon, sexually perplexed, white, 20*

Double casting: The actor playing Maxine also plays Bishop Johnson and Host. Christian also plays The Student, Harry, the Angel. Deja also plays Betty. Buddy also plays Older Buddy and Owen.

SETTING & TIME (Please don't skip this)

NOTE: Above the stage and audience is a maze of microphones hovering just out of reach. At the end of the play, they become stars.

TIME: Sometimes two realities run at once. Scenes should bump into each other without blackouts.

SETTING: A wide open playing area. Locations are only suggested: A professor's office, the front seat of an old Chevy Suburban, a break room with a coffeemaker, an informational webinar, an empty stage. Think Our Town with hardly any scenery and almost no props.

"We're attaching labels to individuals as if those labels capture the sum of who they are. Moreover, we're labeling ourselves to the point of extinguishing our own humanity."

- Irshad Manji

You Can't Say That!

PROLOGUE

(Lights up on the cast, not yet in character. They speak to the audience.)

(CHRIS, 30ish, white, groomed.)

CHRIS

Hi, my character's name is Chris, people identify him as white, male, heterosexual and privileged. This role was written by a playwright who is also white, male, heterosexual and privileged, so it's pretty spot-on.

(DEJA, 25ish, black, youthful.)

DEJA

Hi, my character's name is Deja, people identify her as black, female and invisible. My role was written by a white female playwright who is also invisible. She tried, but it's not perfect. You'll see what I mean.

(MAXINE, 40ish, confident.)

MAXINE

My character's name is Professor Killjar, call me Maxine. People identify her as a free thinking female who is unafraid to speak her mind. My role was written by a white male, who has crippling psychological mother issues. As a result, my role is a shallow stereotype.

(DOROTHY, kind, 25ish trans woman.)

DOROTHY

Hi. Dorothy. A lot of people identify my character as male, even though I'm female. I'm a trans woman. My role was written by a cis woman with a strong imagination who did a crap-load of research but who hasn't been there and done that.

(CHRISTIAN, white, and BUDDY, black, are two well-groomed 20ish Mormons wearing perfectly starched white shirts, black ties and Mormon name tags.)

CHRISTIAN

(Upbeat)

Hi! Our characters names' are Elder Smith.

BUDDY

(Upbeat)

And Elder Young.

CHRISTIAN

If you haven't already guessed//

CHRISTIAN & BUDDY

We're Mormons.

CHRISTIAN

We're young//

BUDDY

Male//

CHRISTIAN

White//

BUDDY

Black.

CHRISTIAN

And positively 100 percent heterosexual. Am I right?

BUDDY

(Not so sure)

...Sure.

CHRISTIAN

(Cheery)

My part was written by a white male non-Mormon who likes to say that some of his best friends are Mormons - we've heard that bullshit before.

BUDDY

(All smiles)

And mine was written by a white female non-Mormon who gave it her best shot. It's a well-meaning attempt, but I'm sure she'll fuck it up somehow. *(To the other actors)*

CHRIS

Please note, most of the actors will be playing more than one part. The authors have screwed them up as well. Actors, places.

DEJA

Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight we present a comedy that makes fun of a serious subject. The idea is that when we laugh we let down our guard. And if we let down our guard, maybe we can finally have a courageous conversation. Isn't that why we go to the theatre? Actors, places.

(The company takes their places to begin the play.)

BUSTING OUT OF UTAH

(The lights change and CHRIS, 30s, a white, clean-cut, soon to be jack Mormon steps up.)

CHRIS

(To the audience)

"Busting out of Utah." Trigger warning: the following scene contains a bunch of backstory in the form of a romanticized flashback. If you're a college writing professor you may label it obvious exposition. You're full of shit. We take you to an old Chevy Suburban on a deserted blacktop in Utah.

(Lights up on the past. ELDER YOUNG (BUDDY) and ELDER SMITH (CHRISTIAN) drive down an isolated two-lane somewhere in Utah - i.e. two chairs.)

(Off to the side, CHRIS watches the scene.)

CHRISTIAN

(Panicky)

We're lost!

BUDDY

We're not lost//

CHRISTIAN

I don't like being lost, Elder Young, it gives me the willies.

BUDDY

We're not lost.

CHRIS

(To the audience)

We were lost.

CHRISTIAN

You kidnapped me.

BUDDY

I saved you.

CHRISTIAN

I was minding my own business//

BUDDY

You climbed out that bathroom window under your own power.

CHRISTIAN

If they find out I'm not on my mission there'll be a hearing, or disciplinary action, or something definitely not good will happen.

BUDDY

Someday you're going to thank me - When we're famous Hollywood writer-slash-actors.

CHRISTIAN

Mormons in Hollywood - that's a laugh. Name one Mormon who's made it in Hollywood!

BUDDY

(Beat)

I'll name two - Donny and Marie.

CHRIS

(To the audience)

The smart-ass driving was my best friend Buddy. The serious one is me. Without authorization, Buddy had abandoned his mission and highjacked me. He was convinced that if we escaped to Hollywood we'd become the next Matt Damon and Denzel Washington.

BUDDY

Someday, just wait you'll see, we're going to producers' offices and pitch'em movie ideas - Starring us.

CHRISTIAN

And when we fail?

BUDDY

We can always teach college. That's what failed writers do - We'll be bitter, but we'll make a living.

CHRISTIAN

I'll never be a college professor, never. That's like hanging a huge sign around your neck reading, "loser."

CHRIS

(To the audience)

It's ten years later, I'm a college professor.

BUDDY

Christian//

CHRISTIAN

We have to address each other by our last names. You're not Buddy, you're Elder Young. I'm not Christian, I'm Elder Smith//

BUDDY

Shit, Chris don't do this//

CHRISTIAN

And we have to watch our language.

BUDDY

What? "Shit?" Shit's not language.

CHRISTIAN

Stop, Heavenly Father might be listening.

(They continue to drive.)

CHRIS

(To the audience)

Growing up Mormon on an isolated farm my father told me to act as if my life were constantly being recorded - As if the stars were microphones.

(He indicates the microphones hanging above the stage and audience.)

CHRIS

And that my life was an HBO movie watched by Heavenly Father - which really confused me, because my parents didn't own a television.

BUDDY

(Teasing, whispering)

Shiiiiiiiiit.

CHRISTIAN

I sincerely doubt whispering helps.

CHRIS

(To the audience)

The only place I could watch a movie was at Buddy's house. He was adopted by a more liberal Mormon family a few miles away.

BUDDY

Come on say it. Shiiiiiiiiiiiiit.

CHRISTIAN

I'm not going to say it.

BUDDY

You know what I think the most beautiful word in the English language is? Gonorrhoea.

CHRISTIAN

What?

BUDDY

Think about it. *(Long and pronounced)* Gonnnnn-or-rhea. If it didn't mean what it means but was the name of some fancy flower or classy perfume I think people would name their kids it. Hi, this is my daughter Gonorrhoea. We call her Gonie for short.

CHRISTIAN

Stop being gross.

BUDDY

How can you become a writer if you don't love language?

CHRISTIAN

I love language just not that language//

BUDDY

Say it. Dare you. Gonorrhoea//

CHRISTIAN

Never//

BUDDY

Double dare you. Gonorrhoea//

CHRISTIAN

You're not going to make me say gonorrhoea// Shit.

(BUDDY laughs with delight.)

CHRIS

(To the audience)

I had to keep my friendship with Buddy secret, my father wouldn't have approved.

BUDDY

Chris, is this what you really want to do with your life. Walk around in some strange town interrupting people's dinners and have doors slammed in your face?

CHRISTIAN

Yes. This is God's purpose for me.

BUDDY

I'm not so sure. More and more I've been taken by this feeling.

CHRISTIAN

What sorta feeling?

BUDDY

Like, I'm not Mormon.

CHRISTIAN

What? Course you are. And if we knock on enough doors, in a hundred years everyone will be.

(BUDDY and CHRISTIAN fade.)

FAILED WRITERS CAN ALWAYS TEACH COLLEGE

(THE ACTOR PLAYING DEJA enters and speaks to the audience.)

THE ACTOR PLAYING DEJA

(To the audience)

"Failed writers can always teach college." Warning: The following scene takes place at a university that shall go nameless. If you are a failed writer who teaches college you may experience mild gastrointestinal discomfort and an uncontrollable desire to spark up.

(DEJA exits.)

(Lights up on CHRIS in his professor's office. MAXINE enters. She's a power woman who draws her wardrobe inspiration from Whoopi Goldberg.)

MAXINE

Chris! Thank you for coming on such short notice. You do know that we are already a week into the semester.

CHRIS

Yes.

MAXINE

Office okay?

CHRIS

Sure.

MAXINE

(Off the newly painted walls)

Pardon the new paint smell - It'll fade in a few weeks. Oh! Found your novel in the dollar cart of the bookstore. *(Bullshitting)* Found it... ah... highly... ah... What word am I looking for? Metaphorical! Remind me, what is it about?

CHRIS

It's a coming of age story about best friends who go to Hollywood//

MAXINE

The next Matt Damon and Denzel Washington. Highly amusing.

CHRIS

It was a serious story.

MAXINE

I meant highly amusing in an academically vague sort of way// Chris, I've been teaching for twenty years, and cynical and resigned for five, so I know what I'm talking about.

(MORE)

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Teaching at a university is a lot like postmodern art - don't let it depress you if you don't get it at first, or ever for that matter.

CHRIS

Will do.

MAXINE

As department head, I like to take a moment to talk to our new temporary adjuncts. You know, get to know'em.

CHRIS

Sounds like a//

MAXINE

As an emergency hire, we didn't have a chance to do the normal face-to-face.

CHRIS

I hope you're not disappointed//

MAXINE

It's just that you're not like the other English professors, you're, ah, what are the words I'm looking for? Off the shelf, know what I mean?

CHRIS

No.

MAXINE

In other words, if you were a shirt you'd be dry clean only.

CHRIS

I'm still not sure//

MAXINE

Let me be blunt. A few of the grad students, after the meet-and-greet, came to me in private and expressed concerns that you might... Identify as... The "M" word.

CHRIS

Mensa?

MAXINE

Mormon. Of course this conversation is off the record. However you identify is none of my business. Just know we're into *inclusivity* here. The students are okay, I'm okay, everyone is okay.

CHRIS
Am I okay?

MAXINE
We'll see.

(She's not so sure he's okay.)

MAXINE
Matter of fact I think the adjunct you replaced was once Mormon, but he outgrew it when he went gay.

CHRIS
I heard he died.

MAXINE
Well, not exactly. He... Offed himself. No suicide note, no nothin'. You'd think a writer would leave a note.

CHRIS
This just//

MAXINE
A week ago. Guy moved here from West Hollywood, taught one class and then shot himself an hour after attending the all-day-long-new-faculty-orientation. I know our orientation is inordinately repetitive and redundant but *that* was an over reaction.

CHRIS
What was his name?

MAXINE
Clarence. Clarence Young, but he went by "Buddy."

(We hear the buzzing in CHRIS' head as the floor comes out from under him. For him it's a surreal moment. In his mind he's hovering above looking down.)

MAXINE
(Oblivious)
Just know, if you should ever need a psychiatrist, it's covered under our university insurance. Don't think they adequately explain that at the all-day-long-new-faculty-orientation...

(Maxine notices that CHRIS is off in his own world.)

MAXINE

Chris? Did you hear what I said? Chris?

*(MAXINE fades as we enter CHRIS' romanticized flashback.)**(CHRISTIAN and BUDDY are still driving in Utah. CHRISTIAN is off in his own world.)*

BUDDY

Chris, did you hear what I said? Chris?

CHRISTIAN

What? Sure.

BUDDY

So what's your answer?

CHRISTIAN

What's the question?

BUDDY

Tomorrow, when we get to Hollywood, will you go to a bar with me? Got us some fake IDs.

CHRISTIAN

What? Never!

BUDDY

One bar, one beer.

CHRISTIAN

Absolutely not.

BUDDY

Want to live on the wild side? How about a cup of coffee in a gay bar.

CHRISTIAN

Are you nuts?

BUDDY

Did you know "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day" was written to a man.

CHRISTIAN

I said, no.

BUDDY

Haven't you ever wondered what goes on in there?

CHRISTIAN

(Stubborn)

No. Not once has that crossed my mind! Now repeat after me, doubt your doubt not your faith.

BUDDY

What we need to stop doubting is who we are. We're finally free to be ourselves.

(MAXINE snaps her fingers, CHRIS is pulled back to the present.)

MAXINE

Chris? Did you hear what I said?

CHRIS

What? Sure.

MAXINE

They really got the place cleaned up. You can't even tell where the hole in the wall was.

CHRIS

Ah, Professor Killjar.

MAXINE

Call me Maxine.

CHRIS

Maxine//

MAXINE

Oh that's right, regulations state that all new employees must take a mandatory Diversity and Inclusion Training Webinar.

CHRIS

The professor before me, was he//

MAXINE

Love to talk more, gotta run. Got an Art Committee meeting. We've decided that the only sculptures allowed on campus from now on will be made of orange, steel I-beams. No one understands them, so no one can be insulted. Safety first.

(MAXINE exits.)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TRAINING WEBINAR

(CHRIS opens his laptop and starts the webinar.)

THE ACTOR PLAYING BUDDY

"Diversity and Inclusion Training Webinar." Warning: The following scene contains actors who couldn't find real work so they took shit jobs acting in a training video. Sitting through this video may cause you to question how a university could possibly spend a million dollars on this retrograde Webinar that oversimplifies human relations.

(Inane, cheerful webinar music.)

(During the following, company members act out the training video that CHRIS is watching on his laptop.)

(In another reality, the actor playing DOROTHY enters, now as the HOST of the webinar. She's training-video-fake. She speaks to the audience.)

WEBINAR HOST

(Upbeat and artificial)

Welcome to part one of the webinar "You Can't Say That." Brought to you by Achieve! Remember, there will be a test after each unit and sub-unit, so be sure to take notes. Today's sub-unit is entitled, "The Proper Thing To Say In Every Possible Situation: Words, Impact, Synergy." Here's a situation you might've encountered. Betty is in the company break room when Harry walks up:

(The actor playing Deja plays BETTY. The actor playing Christian plays HARRY. They walk up to a coffee maker hung with Christmas decorations.)

BETTY

(Upbeat, fake and actor-y)

Oh, hi, Harry.

HARRY

(Upbeat, fake and actor-y)

Hello, Betty.

Coffee?

BETTY

Thank you.

HARRY

(They help themselves to coffee.)

How are you today?

BETTY

Great. And you?

HARRY

Couldn't be better. Well, I'd better get back to work.

BETTY

Look at the time - You're right.

HARRY

(Looking at his wrist watch)

Merry Christmas.

BETTY

What?

HARRY

(Insulted)

Merry Christmas.

BETTY

I find that highly insulting. Not everyone is a Christian you know!

HARRY

(Angered)

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

We've all been in that situation. Been there done that. But how should Betty react? Should she, "A."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors unfreeze.)

BETTY

You do know that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior? If you don't believe, you're going straight to Hell!

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

Or "B."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors reset.)

BETTY

(Upbeat)

Oh, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Perhaps I could stop by your cubicle this afternoon. I have several religious pamphlets that can help you find eternal life.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

Or "C."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks - the actors reset.)

BETTY

Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to impose my religious beliefs on you, *during office hours*. Whatever religion you are, I'm inclusive, and would love, *after office hours*, to learn more about it.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

The correct answer is?

(Bored out of his fucking mind CHRIS hits a key on his keyboard.)

WEBINAR HOST

"C." Correct! You're doing great. Let's see what happens when a hostile worker is faced with a correct reaction.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks - the actors unfreeze.)

HARRY

(Upbeat)

Gosh, thanks Betty for understanding. And thank you for being so tolerant. Perhaps someday, *after office hours*, I'll share with you my thoughts about Scientology and Xenu.

BETTY

Looking forward to it. *(Upbeat)* More coffee?

HARRY

(Upbeat)

Sure.

(They laugh like close friends.)

CHRIS

(Fatigued, to himself)

Someone kill me.

(CHRIS closes the laptop and the actors exit.)

I CAN'T BE A FRIEND OF DOROTHY'S

(THE ACTOR PLAYING DOROTHY enters and speaks to the audience.)

THE ACTOR PLAYING DOROTHY

(To the audience)

"I can't be a friend of Dorothy's." Warning: The following scene contains a conservative Mormon meeting a trans woman face-to-face for the first time. If you're a Mormon who has never made eye-contact with a trans woman, you might experience weakness, dizziness and an overwhelming desire to cut funding for the National Endowment for the Arts.

(DOROTHY exits.)

(MAXINE enters the office. She is wearing a "hello my name is" name tag on her lapel that reads, "She, Her, Lesbian")

MAXINE

Your label.

CHRIS

My what?

MAXINE

The student leadership club decided that from now on everyone in the English department is going to wear noun and pronoun labels. User-friendly identities that will help us not mis-type people. Here, I filled yours in for you.

(MAXINE hands CHRIS a name tag.)

CHRIS

(Reading the name tag)

"He, Him, White, Male, Privileged."

MAXINE

I did get your pronoun correct, "he-him"?

CHRIS

Ah, yeah.

MAXINE

Wasn't sure what to put next.

CHRIS

Next?

MAXINE

Gay, straight, T.B.A.?

CHRIS

...Straight.

MAXINE

You sure?

CHRIS

(Not sure)

Totally. No doubt about it.

(MAXINE writes in 'straight' and hands it to CHRIS.)

MAXINE

Just stick it on yourself every morning before you come in.

(NOTE: From now on in the play all the characters wear "hello my name is" type name tags that label their nouns and pronouns.)

(MAXINE starts to leave.)

CHRIS
 Maxine.

MAXINE
 Yeah?

CHRIS
 I... I got a bit of a problem.

MAXINE
(Interrupting)
 Chris, during my travels through academe, I've found that the first semester is always the most arduous. What's up?

CHRIS
 Nothing really. It's just that...

MAXINE
 Let it all hang out.

CHRIS
 Well... I was wondering if I might be assigned a different teaching assistant.

MAXINE
 Dr. Apeloko is in charge of TAs.

CHRIS
 I thought you might override *(Stumbling on the name)* Dr. Apelik, Apelock... Him. He assigned me Dorothy.

MAXINE
 Oh, yes, the new M.F.A.

CHRIS
 I'm sure *she's* an outstanding person, it's just that we didn't seem to ah... ah... click.

MAXINE
 Click?

CHRIS
 She's in my grad creative nonfiction class - Came to see me this morning...

(DOROTHY enters in another reality. She is a kind soul. She's wearing a pronoun sticker, "She-Her.")

(The two realities now run within the same office.)

(DOROTHY and MAXINE speak only to CHRIS, never to each other)

(DOROTHY holds two fountain soft drinks with straws.)

DOROTHY
(Optimistic)

Morning Professor.

CHRIS

Hello.

DOROTHY
(Introducing herself)

Dorothy.

CHRIS

Chris.

(They shake, which is difficult with the soft drinks. They touch elbows instead.)

DOROTHY
I heard we have something in common.

CHRIS

Oh?

DOROTHY
Neither of us drink caffeine. So I brought us decaffeinated diet cokes.

CHRIS
That's so kind. Thank you.

DOROTHY
Oh, darn, I kinda forgot which one I was drinking from.

CHRIS
Does it matter?

DOROTHY
Guess not.

CHRIS

No, it doesn't. Have a seat. *(He sucks on the decaffeinated)*
Mmm. That's good.

DOROTHY

Glad you like it.

(During the following, DOROTHY looks for something in her purse.)

CHRIS

(To MAXINE)

I gave my students a first day assignment. They had the weekend to write a short, creative non-fiction piece about a personal experience. I thought it might let me get to know them and their writing.

(CHRIS digs through the papers on his desk.)

CHRIS

Yours was the one about, oh where was it, buying shoes?

DOROTHY

No, mine was about being a trans woman.

CHRIS

Excuse me?

DOROTHY

Being a trans woman.

(Beat, while CHRIS takes that in. He doesn't cover well.)

CHRIS

Oh. That one. Was you. No problem.

(Uncomfortable, CHRIS clears his throat and finds Dorothy's paper.)

CHRIS

You know, ah, Dorothy, one of the oldest tenets of writing is//

DOROTHY

Found it.

(DOROTHY finds what she's been looking for in her purse. A handheld mini recorder.)

DOROTHY

May I record this?

CHRIS

Excuse me?

DOROTHY

I like to record notes.

(During the following, DOROTHY sets up the mini-recorder in front of CHRIS.)

CHRIS

(To Maxine)

I've always been uncomfortable with microphones. Growing up, my father told me that the stars were microphones through which Heavenly Father listens.

MAXINE

The stars are microphones, wow, that's fucked up. *(Catches herself)* Unless that's a Mormon thing in which case I'm totally okay with it//

CHRIS

No, it's not a Mormon thing//

MAXINE

In that case, it's fucked up.

DOROTHY

(Into the mini-recorder)

Monday September 8th, Professor Smith. *(To Chris)* You're on.

CHRIS

(Carefully weighing his words)

Ah, Dorothy, one of the oldest tenets of writing is that you should write about what you know. I wanted you to write a scene from the... ah... parcel of your life.

MAXINE & DOROTHY

Parcel?

CHRIS

Yes, the package. The frame. *(Back to Dorothy)* Many great writers... Yeats, Joyce all wrote about what they knew.

DOROTHY

So did I. This happened to me a few months ago.

CHRIS

But this is a story about a woman who's...

DOROTHY

Waiting for the results of an AIDS test.

CHRIS

Ah... Okay.

(Without thinking, CHRIS pushes his fountain drink away from himself.)

CHRIS

That's when I did it. I didn't mean to, I was just trying to find the best spot for the fountain drink, but she looked at me as if I was some sort of//

MAXINE

Closed-minded-transphobe?

DOROTHY

So, you, what, disliked it?

CHRIS

Noooo, not at all. I'm completely inclusive. Matter of fact 'Rocky Horror Picture Show' is one of my favorite movies.

(MAXINE drops her head in her hands. DOROTHY doesn't know what to make of it.)

MAXINE

You didn't say that.

CHRIS

I didn't know what I was saying. She looked so much like a woman.

DOROTHY

Am I making you uncomfortable?

CHRIS

(Uncomfortable)

What? No. My comfort level is totally normal. Above normal. Look, ah, Dorothy, ah, I think we got off on the wrong foot. Let's rebuild the dike.

MAXINE

Rebuild the dike?

CHRIS

I was rambling. (*Awkward, upbeat*) So, ah, do you need to see a psychiatrist? It's covered by our university insurance.

MAXINE

That's rebuilding the dike?

DOROTHY

(*Ill-at-ease*)

No, but thanks for offering.

CHRIS

Dorothy, let me be honest. I think you have a bright future as a writer. But, I do have a few character notes.

DOROTHY

But you're not a trans woman.

CHRIS

(*An attempt at humor*)

Not last time I checked.

(*CHRIS waits for the laugh, none is given.*)

CHRIS

That was a joke. (*Awkward*) I was trying to...

DOROTHY

Rebuild the dike?

CHRIS

(*To MAXINE*)

That was the moment I lost her. She came in all positive but then checked out. I tried to reach out to him//her.

(*CHRIS makes an attempt at politically correct new speak.*)

CHRIS

(*Meandering*)

Dorothy, I, ah, I want you to know that I value your intrinsic worthiness, and, ah, I know that I am privileged, I own it, and all the historical objectification and oppression that my white male penis has caused.

MAXINE

Your penis persecuted people?

CHRIS

You know what I mean, metaphorically, in an academically vague sort of way.

MAXINE

I have no idea what you're talking about.

DOROTHY

I have no idea what you're talking about.

CHRIS

What I'm trying to say is that I know that I'm white, and male, and that you are transgendered//

DOROTHY

Trans woman//

CHRIS

And we are different. But if we can set that aside for a moment.

DOROTHY

You want me to set aside who I am?

(CHRIS turns to MAXINE.)

CHRIS

As you can see, I don't think that Dorothy and I have what might be called a... a... working relationship?

DOROTHY

I heard that before coming here you were at Brigham Young University?

CHRIS

I'd rather not talk about my personal life.

DOROTHY

(Kindly)

You asked us to write about our personal life, but you don't want to talk about yours?

CHRIS

(With reservations)

...Yes, I attended BYU.

DOROTHY

Okay, ah, first, welcome back to reality.

CHRIS

(To Maxine)

I recognized that as a joke and tried to let out a little laugh to let her know that I was open minded.

(CHRIS attempts a sincere laugh but it comes off totally artificial.)

CHRIS

(To Maxine)

It didn't work.

DOROTHY

Second, what do I do? Start over? Rewrite? Make it a more comfortable read for you?

CHRIS

No. This was just an introductory assignment. I wasn't sure what the next assignment would be, but I think you've helped.

DOROTHY

Oh?

CHRIS

For next week, I'm going to have the class write a creative nonfiction piece about a person who's completely different from themselves - Someone who's absolutely foreign to their//

DOROTHY & MAXINE

"Parcel?"

CHRIS

Yes.

DOROTHY

But you said writers write about what they know.

CHRIS

I did, but it's also important to observe, even investigate others.

DOROTHY

But isn't that, like, invading someone's privacy?

CHRIS

Are you serious about being a writer?

DOROTHY

Yes.

CHRIS

Then you have to invade. Really get up in there, find their dark little secrets.

DOROTHY

I can do that.

CHRIS

Well, thanks for stopping by.

DOROTHY

Is there anything you want me to grade?

CHRIS

Grade?

DOROTHY

Didn't Dr. Apeloko tell you? I've been assigned as your T.A.

CHRIS

(Not covering well)

...And that's not a problem. Welcome. I'm sure we'll work together... well.

DOROTHY

(Kind but not believing him)

I'm sure we will.

(Thinking he's strange, DOROTHY turns off the mini-recorder and exits whistling.)

CHRIS

Then she left whistling "Let's Do The Time Warp Again" from Rocky Horror.

MAXINE

Well, I don't know what to say. In all my years no one has ever rejected a T.A.//

CHRIS

I'm not rejecting. I just thought I could switch to someone who//

MAXINE

Wasn't//

CHRIS

No. I have no problem with that. None whatsoever. I//

MAXINE

Yes, I know, you own your penis.

CHRIS

This is for her, not me - Obviously she's uncomfortable with me.

MAXINE

Have you taken the Diversity and Inclusion webinar yet?

CHRIS

I'm doing it right now - About nine hours in.

MAXINE

(Noncommittal)

Good. Good.

(MAXINE exits.)

CHRIS

(Awkwardly calling after)

And I'm not rejecting her.

WHAT IF MATT DAMON HAD X-RAY VISION

(THE ACTOR PLAYING DEJA enters.)

ACTOR PLAYING DEJA

(To the audience)

"What if Matt Damon had X-ray vision." Warning: The following scene contains a sexually confused Mormon, talk of radiation poisoning and a stupid act of violence. If this is too much for you, we have certified therapy dogs waiting in the lobby.

(The actor exits.)

(The past - Lost in Utah, CHRISTIAN sits beside BUDDY - they are still driving.)

(To the side, CHRIS watches the scene.)

BUDDY

(Thrilled with his story idea)

Here's the first story I'm going to pitch when we get to Hollywood.

CHRISTIAN

Buddy, I'm having second thoughts.

BUDDY

Fade up! Two life long friends in a BMW.

CHRISTIAN

BMW?

BUDDY

Big Mormon Wagon. In other words an old shitty Chevy Suburban.

CHRISTIAN

Language.

BUDDY

Middle of *friggin'* nowhere - Two handsome, like-able guys.

CHRISTIAN

(Bored with these stories)

Yes, I know the next Matt Damon and Denzel Washington//

BUDDY

On their way to new jobs as technicians at a nuclear power plant. But just as they arrive - Alarms! The core is melting! Not thinking of himself, Matt//

CHRISTIAN

That's me.

BUDDY

Runs into the reactor and saves the day, but he gets horrible radiation poisoning. Denzel//

CHRISTIAN

That's you.

BUDDY

Rushes him to the hospital. Dissolve to, three weeks later. Matt comes out of his coma! But he's changed. He's bigger, stronger, but more - he's now gay. And he has x-ray vision.

CHRISTIAN
(Agitated by this)

I think we should go home.

BUDDY

I call this movie "Radiation" exclamation point!

CHRISTIAN

I'm serious, Mormons can't make it in Hollywood.

BUDDY

Did you know that in Hollywood everyone is like gay or bisexual, or Jewish or really, really confused. They don't know who they love. What about you, ever been in love? And we both know that girl you met at the singles ward doesn't count.

CHRISTIAN
(Fuming)

Buddy, if we don't turn around I'll... I'll...

BUDDY

What?

CHRISTIAN

I'll report you to the Zone Leader!

BUDDY
(Laughing)

Chris, there's gotta be more to life than mindlessly following the orders of a Zone Leader. What're you gonna do when you finish your mission? Marry that girl?

CHRISTIAN

Her name is Alison.

BUDDY

I'm sure you'll be a great daddy to little "Gonie." Which won't give you any time to write. You'll become nothing more than a middle aged Mormon with a mortgage.

CHRISTIAN
(Pissed off)

Stop the car.

BUDDY

Why?

CHRISTIAN

Just Stop!

(BUDDY pulls over. They sit there for a moment. CHRISTIAN fumes.)

BUDDY

You okay? *(No answer)* Chris? I'm sorry if I//

CHRISTIAN

Shut up! Can you do that?! Just shut your face!

BUDDY

(Beat, kindly)

Look, I... I know what your father did to you when you were twelve years old.

CHRISTIAN

I don't know what you're talking about.

BUDDY

The gay conversion camp thing.

(Pissed, CHRIS gets out. BUDDY follows.)

BUDDY

(Genuine)

Chris, I admit it, I deliberately got us lost, but I need to tell someone, someone I can trust, someone who won't tell Bishop Johnson. So... Let me just say... I love you. Always have. I just need to know if you share my feelings. Or am I making a fool of myself?

(Beat. CHRISTIAN's agitation grows.)

BUDDY

Chris?

CHRISTIAN

Fuck off!

(Chris shoves Buddy into the dirt, then stands over him. He's one confused fucked up young Mormon, so what else can he do but quote the church website)

CHRISTIAN

The church's official policy is that if you're gay you are to live a celibate life or marry someone of the opposite gender and suppress it!

BUDDY

Yeah, but that's totally fucked up.

CHRISTIAN

Yes it is!

(Chris mounts Buddy and passionately kisses him. Stops, stands.)

CHRISTIAN

I'm going to marry Alison!

(CHRISTIAN exits.)

(BUDDY runs after.)

CAN I BOUNCE MY ABSURDIST PLAY OFF YOU?

(The actor playing MAXINE enters.)

ACTOR PLAYING MAXINE

"Can I bounce my absurdist play off you?" Warning: The following scene contains a young writer presenting the first draft of her first absurdist play. If you're a fan of Samuel Beckett you may experience existential uncertainty. If you are not a fan of Beckett you'll most likely just get bored.

(The actor exits.)

(Standing in the office door is DEJA a black college student. She's a vehement young writer searching for her voice.)

DEJA

Professor?

(Beat, CHRIS is off in his own world, still thinking about the previous scene.)

DEJA
Professor?

CHRIS
Huh?

DEJA
You were thinking pretty hard there.

CHRIS
What? No. Ah, can I help... you?

DEJA
Deja. I'm in your creative nonfiction class.

CHRIS
Right, the girl who sits in the black/back.

DEJA
Woman.

CHRIS
Mental error - That's what I meant.

(She steps in and looks around.)

DEJA
Wow, they really fixed the place up - hole in the wall and everything. *(She shudders)*. You going to the moment of silence?

CHRIS
For?

DEJA
Buddy, the guy you replaced? I was his TA for like two seconds before he shot himself.

CHRIS
Oh, ah, don't know if I'll have time.

DEJA
I'm not going. I think moments of silence are bullshit. It makes you feel like you've done something when you've done absolutely nothing.

CHRIS
And what can I do for you?

DEJA

Can I bounce my "write about someone unlike yourself" assignment off you before I turn it in.

CHRIS

Sure.

DEJA

I wrote it in the form of a play.

CHRIS

It was supposed to be a short story//

DEJA

Wrote it in one sitting. You know, flow of consciousness.

(DEJA takes out two play scripts and hands one to CHRIS.)

DEJA

(With the passion of a young artist)

It's about men and women, black/white, and our total inability to communicate. It's a manifesto. No one writes manifestos anymore, we write mission statements. Working title, "The Myth of Sisyphus, Part Two." Okay, here goes. *(Reading)* "Darkness. A spotlight fades up on a white man." That's you. "In a separate spotlight we find a black woman." That's me. "Both are buried to their necks in sand."

(DEJA is author-ish-ly into it, CHRIS noncommittal.)

DEJA

Okay, go.

WHITE MAN

(Playacting the script)

Ah... "I'm sorry."

BLACK WOMAN

(Playacting the script)

"Sorry or just apologetic?"

WHITE MAN

"I'm ashamed but not remorseful."

BLACK WOMAN

"Conscious-stricken?"

WHITE MAN

"Guilt-ridden."

BLACK WOMAN

"Mixed with metaphysical isolation?"

WHITE MAN

"Isolation is too strong a word. I feel an otherness mixed with a bit of hope that someday you will forgive me."

BLACK WOMAN

"I want to forgive you, but am not sure I will ever be able to exonerate you."

WHITE MAN

"So we can go forward?"

BLACK WOMAN

"We can get beyond this but we cannot move forward."

WHITE MAN

"I'm glad we talked."

BLACK WOMAN

"We've talked but not conversed."

WHITE MAN

"We've had a meeting of the minds."

BLACK WOMAN

"Can minds ever really meet?"

WHITE MAN

"Two people can understand each other."

BLACK WOMAN

"Understand or just comprehend?"

WHITE MAN

"Appreciate."

BLACK WOMAN

"No one can fully appreciate me."

WHITE MAN

"I want to appreciate and perceive you."

BLACK WOMAN

"I perceive you but don't grasp what you're saying."

(CHRIS stops the reading.)

CHRIS

Deja.

DEJA

Huh?

CHRIS

Sorry to interrupt. *(Flipping through the long script)* How much more?

DEJA

About twenty pages, then things really get going.

CHRIS

Does anything happen before page twenty?

DEJA

Meaning?

CHRIS

Is there a hint of story?

DEJA

You mean like Aristotle's rules of writing?

CHRIS

That's a start.

DEJA

I don't follow Aristotle. That's for white men.

CHRIS

If it's all right, Deja, I should get to the moment of silence. I'll read this tonight.

DEJA

Am I making it clear that communication between black women and white men is impossible?

CHRIS

You've communicated that remarkably well.

DEJA

So, be honest, you hated it?

(During the following absurd conversation neither CHRIS or DEJA are aware of the absurdity.)

CHRIS

Not at all. I don't like it, but I don't dislike it.

DEJA

So you're displeased but not to the point of hostility?

CHRIS

Hostility is too strong a word. I feel perplexed but want to understand.

DEJA

Understand or comprehend?

CHRIS

I want to appreciate your intrinsic worthiness.

DEJA

I don't want to be appreciated, I want to be recognized.

CHRIS

Your writing brought an interconnection between us.

DEJA

So you missed the point of the play.

CHRIS

I didn't miss it, I lost sight of it.

DEJA

I'll go rewrite.

CHRIS

No, don't rewrite it's perfect.

DEJA

Flawless perfect or it-needs-work perfect?

CHRIS

You get an "A".

DEJA
 You think I wrote this to get a letter grade? My goals are so much more.

CHRIS
 Glad to hear it.

DEJA
 Glad or just pleased?

CHRIS
 Happy.

DEJA
 Do you mean delighted?

CHRIS
 Mirthful. I'm mirthful.

DEJA
 Mirthful?

CHRIS
 Yes, mirthful. Okay, I gotta get to the moment of silence.

DEJA
 Any grading?

CHRIS
 Excuse me?

DEJA
 Didn't Maxine tell you? I'm your new T.A.

CHRIS
(Beat, with reservation)
 ...Good. That's really... good.

(DEJA exits. CHRIS puts his head down.)

THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

(In a new light, MAXINE enters and speaks to the students and faculty - the audience - gathered in the study room for the moment of silence.)

MAXINE

"We will now have a moment of silence to celebrate the life of Buddy Young. Please lower your heads. Unless of course your particular religion does not allow you to do so, or if you have a physical impairment that prevents you. Also, lowering your head does not mean that you're performing an act of submission - Unless you want to perform an act of submission. You may say a prayer if you wish, but you are not required to do so, nor does my broaching the subject in any way suggest that the Department of English endorses or opposes prayer. Also know that a moment of silence does not imply an assumption of belief. This is a nonsectarian act that can be interpreted as sectarian if you so desire. If you do choose to say a prayer please whisper as this is a moment of silence, but know that by asking you to whisper I am not attempting to censor you. If you wish to hold hands or hug the person beside you, do so only after you've asked permission and after you have received a positive confirmation that is witnessed by at least one person. Do not assume that just because someone gave you consent previously to hug them, that their consent is universal. We shall now begin a moment of silence."

(After three seconds...)

MAXINE

Thank you for coming.

(MAXINE exits.)

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR (PART I)

(The ACTOR PLAYING DEJA enters and speaks to the audience.)

ACTOR PLAYING DEJA

Be careful what you wish for - Part 1." Flashback, ten years ago. You're now part of a reception after a Mormon wedding. Warning, during this scene you are not allowed to consume alcohol, coffee, tobacco or porn.

(In a single light, CHRISTIAN, nervous and too young to be married, stands before the wedding crowd. He's wearing an ill-fitting tux and stupid bow tie his mother picked out. He's never talked in front of this many people.)

CHRISTIAN

(Tense, deer in headlights)

Hi. Ah, we're so happy you came and I'm sorry that my non-LDS friends were not allowed to enter the temple for the sealing ceremony. But Buddy and I would like to thank you all for coming--

(CHRISTIAN is distracted by someone whispering to him from the crowd.)

CHRISTIAN

(To someone in the crowd)

...What? ...Who? ...What did I say? ...Oh! I meant Alison. Alison and I would like to thank you. I've always wanted to marry my best friend, and Buddy// I mean, Alison and I, although we've known each other for just a short time, I'm sure we'll become best friends. But... Ah...

(He stops. Tries to regain his composure.)

CHRISTIAN

(Trying to find his words)

Look, I don't see Buddy any more. I mean, literally. He doesn't exist. He was excommunicated. And rightfully so. When he writes, I burn his letters. I am totally devoted to ah... ah... Alison! And our marriage which will last for all eternity. *(That's hard for him to stomach)* Ah... Tell you what, let's skip the speeches and Buddy and I will cut the cake. *(He realizes what he said)* Shit!

(Black out.)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TRAINING WEBINAR II

(Lights up on CHRIS sitting at his laptop taking a webinar.)

ACTOR PLAYING BUDDY

Diversity and Inclusion Training Webinar, unit fifty-eight. Warning: The following scene contains satire. Clinical trials of satire have been known to cause problems for people who are humor-challenged.

(The actor exits.)

(Inane, cheerful webinar music.)

(Just as before, during the following, company members act out the training video that CHRIS watches on his laptop.)

(The actor playing DOROTHY plays the HOST of the webinar. She's training-video-fake.)

WEBINAR HOST

(Upbeat, artificial, to audience)

Hi and welcome to part fifty-eight of the webinar "You Can't Say That." Brought to you by Achieve! Today's sub-unit is entitled, "What You Text Matters: Intent, Impact, Synergy." One day Betty and Harry are in the company break room when...

(The actor playing Deja plays BETTY. The actor playing Christian plays HARRY. They walk up to a coffee maker.)

BETTY

(Upbeat and actor-y)

Hi, Harry.

HARRY

(Upbeat and actor-y)

Hello, Betty.

BETTY

Coffee?

HARRY

Thank you.

(They help themselves to coffee.)

HARRY

Did you get my text?

BETTY

(Displeased)

Oh, that was you.

HARRY

That popular comedian I mentioned in my text is pretty funny.

BETTY

I didn't find him funny at all.

HARRY

What's wrong with you? That's funny.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

How should Betty react? Should she, "A."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors unfreeze.)

BETTY

I guess you're right. I do want to maintain workplace cohesion so I guess I'll just put up with it.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

Or "B."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors reset.)

BETTY

I'm calling the police! You pervert!

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

Or "C."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks - the actors reset.)

BETTY

Harry, we need to empower people by recognizing bullying, abuse and harassment while creating a culture of respect and employee well-being. This is the second time you've sent me an inappropriate text, so I have no choice but to report you to H.R.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

The correct answer is?

*(Bored out of his fucking mind
CHRIS hits a key on his keyboard.)*

CHRIS
(To himself)

Please kill me.

WEBINAR HOST
"C." That's correct. You're doing great. Let's see what happens when a hostile worker is faced with a correct reaction.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks - the actors unfreeze.)

HARRY
(Regretful)
Wow, you're right, Betty, I haven't learned my lesson. I guess I'll have to face the consequences of my actions.

(CHRIS closes the laptop. The Webinar actors fall out of character and exit.)

(Dejected, CHRIS sits alone for a moment. He takes a carefully folded letter out of his pocket, opens it.)

(In another reality, BUDDY enters and reads from same letter.)

OLDER BUSTER
Dear Chris, I know this is a corny way to begin a letter, but I wish you were here. Hollywood continues to be a mess. A big fat ugly beautiful mess. It's still pay-check-to-pay-check, but my agent got me a meeting with some new HBO show called "Game of Thrones." Sounds like a horrible idea - can't imagine it'll go anywhere. But I'll take the meeting. Guess who knocked on my door the other day. Two Mormon boys. We had a nice chat - I think I converted them. Just kidding. But they sure did make me miss my home, and family. And you. Please take the time to answer this letter. Or any of my letters. It would mean to world if you did. Love, Buddy. PS - Heard about your divorce. What can I say? Shiiiiiiiiit - I was right. PPS - Gonorrhea is no longer my favorite word. My new favorite word is *(drawn out)* Streptocooooocusssss.

(CHRIS carefully folds the letter and returns it to his pocket.)

**HOW STRAIGHT, WHITE, PRIVILEGED, MALE ACADEMICS
TALK TO EACH OTHER IN PRIVATE**

(MAXINE enters.)

(The actors set up three music stands and stools for the reading of a play.)

MAXINE

(To the audience)

Ladies and gentlemen, students and faculty, welcome to the department of English's second annual original student written new play festival. Our first reading tonight is written by Deja. Some of you read her first play, a tangy piece called "The Myth of Sisyphus, Part Two." Now she's back with a new play, so let's give her our full attention. *(To Deja)* Any trigger warnings.

(DEJA steps up.)

DEJA

(To the audience)

Yes, this play will disturb you. If it doesn't it should.

MAXINE

(To the audience)

You've been warned.

(MAXINE exits.)

DEJA

(To the audience)

I'll be playing the role of Dr. Whitehead, a white, privileged, male professor with tenure.

(DEJA puts on a name tag that reads, "WHITE MALE.")

(The actor playing BUDDY now plays the role of OWEN, a college student.)

DEJA

My friend Owen here, a theatre major, will play the role of Dr. Lynch, a white, privileged, male professor without tenure.

(OWEN puts on a name tag that also reads, "WHITE MALE.")

DOROTHY

And I'll be reading the stage directions. Are we ready?

DEJA

Ready.

(OWEN gives a thumbs up.)

DOROTHY

(Reading from the script)

"How Straight, White, Privileged, Male Academics Talk To Each Other In Private" a new play by my friend Deja. The lights find Professor Whitehead, the white male head of the English department. Enter Dr. Lynch, a new white male adjunct professor.

(During the following play within the a play, DEJA and OWEN do white accents, super WASPY.)

DEJA

(Reading from the script)

"Come in. Close the door."

OWEN

(Reading from the script)

"Yes. *(Frustrated)* I can't believe this happened in my first week of teaching. Am I going to lose my job?"

DEJA

"Not if you play your cards right."

OWEN

"What's going to happen?"

DEJA

"There'll be a hearing, witnesses called, and then three to six months from now the Dean's Oversight Committee will issue an executive report that will be filed and forgotten, just like the university's new five-year plan."

OWEN

"Still, I'm worried."

DEJA

"Chris, it's time we have the talk."

OWEN

"The talk?"

DEJA

"The secret rules, the golden plates, the Holy Grail. What they don't cover in the University's Diversity and Inclusion Training Webinar. How a straight, white, male, can survive the messy realities of political correctness at a modern university."

OWEN

"I've heard these rules existed and were handed down from one generation of straight white male professors to another but I thought it was just an urban legend."

DEJA

"No, they're real. And now, because you're white, you will be a member of the club."

OWEN

"I'm honored."

DEJA

"Rule one: Always remember, it isn't your fault. We white males didn't create this situation. We are victims. Say it."

OWEN

"I am a victim."

DEJA

"No, say it like you mean it."

OWEN

"I am a victim! Wow that feels good."

DEJA

"Good. Rule Two: always assume that ninety-five percent of your students and fellow professors are one of *them*."

OWEN

"Them?"

DEJA

"Knee jerk liberals that're always scouting new ways to be offended, and Vagina Monologue feminists who are utterly humorless."

OWEN

"Should I be taking notes?"

DEJA

"Absolutely not. We cannot take a chance that this will fall into non-white-non-straight hands.

(MORE)

DEJA (CONT'D)

Rule three: vocabulary adjustment. If you change the words people use, you'll tear down the walls between us - tear down the walls and you find yourself in an accepting open minded society - it doesn't work of course - but it's a nice thought."

DOROTHY

(Reading the stage directions)

"Dr. Whitehead reaches into his satchel and takes out flashcards."

(DEJA reaches into a satchel and takes out flashcards.)

DEJA

"Let's test your skills."

OWEN

"You want me to..."

DEJA

"Yes. Say the word in the correct form."

DOROTHY

(Reading the stage directions)

"The flashcard reads, 'Waitress.'"

(The flashcard reads, "Waitress.")

OWEN

'Waitress.' A politically incorrect term that has been replaced by 'server' or 'waiter.'

DOROTHY

(Reading the stage directions)

"Dr. Whitehead isn't sure, he checks the back of the card for the answer."

(DEJA checks the back of the card.)

DEJA

"You are correct."

DOROTHY

"He flips to the next card, it reads, 'Foreign food.'"

(DEJA flips to the next card, it reads, "Foreign food.")

OWEN

"'Foreign food' has been replaced with 'ethnic cuisine.'"

DOROTHY

"Once again, Dr. Whitehead must check the answer on the back of the card.

(DEJA checks the answer.)

DEJA

(Impressed)

You're batting a thousand.

DOROTHY

"Dr. Whitehead hands over all the cards."

(DEJA hands over the flashcards.)

DEJA

"Take these, study them, and always remember appearance is more important than the real thing."

OWEN

"Am I now open minded?"

DEJA

"Almost. Rule Four: Similes and metaphors. I'll give you a sentence and you rewrite it using the correct simile. Ready? "Drunk with power he crashed into the room like a female driver." Go ahead."

OWEN

(Guessing)

"Ah... Drunk with power he crashed into the room like a madman."

DEJA

"No, that'd be flagged by people with mental health issues."

OWEN

(More guessing)

"Drunk with power he crashed into the room like a... a... bowling ball?"

DEJA

"No, bowlers have feelings too."

OWEN

(*Trying again*)

"Drunk with power he crashed into the room. Period?"

DEJA

"That's right! Avoid all similes and metaphors! And if you write about a character who is drinking coffee, never, ever describe the shade of the coffee."

OWEN

"Got it."

DEJA

"Rule five: Pedagogy. When you're in front of your class be sure to, once a week, throw in a little footnote on the contributions of them."

OWEN

"Them?"

DEJA

"Gays, lesbians, and anyone else on the alphabetical list. Rule six: Political correctness insurance. You take out insurance by doing little things that make you appear to be open-minded."

OWEN

"But I *am* open-minded, right?"

DEJA

"Of course you are, all white male English professors are. But nowadays you gotta prove it. So let's say one of your students is selling cookies for some student group in the union - you be sure to stop by, chat'em up, buy something, you know, make an appearance. By the way, cookie?"

DOROTHY

"Dr. Whitehead offers him a cookie."

OWEN

"Thanks."

DOROTHY

"They eat cookies."

(*They eat cookies.*)

DEJA

"They're doing the cutest thing today. To protest the wage gap between men and women they're charging men a dollar and women only eighty-seven cents."

OWEN

"That is so cute."

DEJA

"Isn't it. Rule seven: Comedy."

OWEN

"I like a good joke."

DEJA

"No you don't. Comedy is dead."

OWEN

"What about witticisms?"

DEJA

"Never ever be witty. Did you hear what happened to Dr. Adhock over in Criminal Justice?"

OWEN

"No."

DEJA

"Full professor, top in his field, published twenty books. This freshman//"

OWEN

(Correcting him)

"First year student."

DEJA

"Thank you. This first year female student kept sending him long, rambling, three-page, emails."

OWEN

"Oh I hate that."

DEJA

"He kindly requested that she edit. She sent more. He recommended that she get to the point. Even more long emails. Finally, trying to get through to her he wrote back a witticism, quote "An e-mail should be like a skirt, long enough to cover the essentials, but short enough to be interesting" Unquote. That's witty, right?"

OWEN

"Sure is."

DEJA

"That's Oscar Wilde witty. Not only was he fired, they disappeared him."

OWEN

"Disappeared?"

DEJA

"They removed his entire academic record and expunged his books from every college library. His books are now harder to find than an episode of The Cosby Show."

OWEN

"So never make jokes."

DEJA

"Or puns, or wisecracks."

OWEN

"What about irony?"

DEJA

"Irony, dead! Repeat after me, irony, dead!"

OWEN

"Irony, dead."

DEJA

"No, say it like you mean it."

OWEN

"Irony, totally dead!"

DEJA

"You are now officially open minded."

OWEN

"Gee thanks, this has been enlightening."

DEJA

"Remember there are no safe spaces for straight, white, male academics and that makes us...?"

OWEN

"Victims!"

DEJA

"You are now ready to face the politically correct world!"

OWEN

(Looking at his watch)

"I should get to my next class."

DEJA

"Which is?"

OWEN

"Shakespeare."

DEJA

"And how are you going to teach it?"

OWEN

(Sure of himself)

"I'm going to, for no apparent reason, right in the middle of a lecture on Macbeth, mention that Shakespeare was most likely a bisexual."

DEJA

"And..."

OWEN

"And then I'm going to go on a long tangent about how Taming of the Shrew is a sexist play filled with female oppression."

DEJA

"And what else are you going to do?"

OWEN

(Proud)

"Keep my job!"

DEJA

"You go girl!"

OWEN

"Thank you, it's been a privilege."

DEJA

"No, the *privilege* has been all mine."

(They shake.)

DOROTHY

"The lights fade. End of play."

(MAXINE enters.)

MAXINE

(To the audience)

Can we have a round of applause for our actors and playwright.

(Applause.)

MAXINE

Do to the unfortunate incident that occurred last year during the audience feedback session after Bob's play about why women should not breastfeed in public, the faculty has decided to cancel all audience talkbacks. Thank you for coming.

(They exit.)

THE SMALL PENIS RULE

(The ACTOR playing Dorothy enters.)

ACTOR PLAYING DOROTHY

"The Small Penis Rule." Warning: The following scene contains talk of a man with a small penis. If you have a small penis this could be disturbing. To protect yourself, we ask all men with small penises to cover your ears now.

(The ACTOR PLAYING DOROTHY exits.)

(MAXINE invades CHRIS's office with a small bag of cookies.)

MAXINE

Bad news, some student in your dramatic lit class named Frank has filed a complaint against you, although I wasn't supposed to say his name so forget I said it.

CHRIS

A complaint? About?

MAXINE

Don't know. We'll find out when Frank comes forward. Wait, I said his name again, forget I said Frank.

CHRIS
(To himself)

Shit.

MAXINE
 Don't panic yet. Well, maybe start panicking a little.

(MAXINE starts to leave.)

CHRIS
 Maxine, there's another problem.

MAXINE
 Another? Chris, all professors suffer from incompetence, but you're having the worst first semester since our distinguished Chaucer Scholar was fired for masturbating in the stacks.

CHRIS
 Deja came by with information this morning that I found rather troubling.

(DEJA enters in another reality.)

(Both realities now run within the same office. DEJA and Maxine never speak to each other.)

DEJA
 I burned it!

CHRIS
 What?

DEJA
 My play. I burned it. I immolated it on the quad. Drew quite a crowd.

CHRIS
 Why?

DEJA
 Cause I heard you say in the hall that it was shit.

CHRIS
 I never said 'shit.' I said it needed development.

DEJA
 Development or fixing?

CHRIS
Editing.

DEJA
I don't like editing, I'll shorten things but I won't edit//

CHRIS
(To Maxine)
It was pretty much a typical meeting, when...

DEJA
Did you like Dorothy's new piece?

CHRIS
Haven't read it yet.

DEJA
It's extraordinary.

(Note: DEJA knows exactly what she is doing.)

DEJA
It's a short story about this un-woke writer. Years before he became a professor he was on his mission, oh, forgot, he's Mormon too, when suddenly half way through he quits, runs home, marries this woman he hardly knows.

CHRIS
(Troubled)
Ah, Deja//

DEJA
But she divorces him because he can't get it up for her.

(DEJA's phone bings.)

DEJA
Hold on, it's Dorothy, one sec.

(She texts.)

CHRIS
As you can understand, I'm a little concerned. Deja's play//

MAXINE
"How straight, white, privileged, male...yada yada//

CHRIS

Was obviously aimed at me. And now Dorothy is writing a piece about a professor here at the University who just happens to teach the exact classes I teach.

MAXINE

You did ask them to write about someone unlike themselves.

CHRIS

Yes, but I didn't think//

MAXINE

Does the character in Dorothy's story have a tiny penis?

CHRIS

Excuse me?

MAXINE

A little willy.

CHRIS

(Confused)

I don't follow.

MAXINE

You've certainly heard of the Small Penis Rule?

CHRIS

Can't say that...

MAXINE

When you write an unflattering characterization based on a real person always make sure you give the character some unflattering attribute, that way the real life person won't come forward and charge slander - It's known as the Small Penis Rule.

(DEJA finishes texting.)

DEJA

Oh oh! Dorothy has this really cool scene where the homophobic professor's mormon wife talks about how their marriage failed cause he has a microscopic dick.

CHRIS

Deja//

DEJA

I find stories about Mormons fascinating. Did you know they didn't allow blacks into the Priesthood until 1978. What happened? Did God suddenly get woke? Did he have a revelation over his morning coffee! Wow black is good!

(She looks at her phone.)

DEJA

Hold on. Text.

(During the following she texts.)

MAXINE

In my humble opinion it would be best not to react. Better yet, don't even read Dorothy's short story, just give it an "A" and move on. That's what most writing professors do anyway.

CHRIS

But//

(MAXINE starts out.)

MAXINE

Now, if you don't mind the Dean's having a terminology meeting. We are discussing whether we should call the faculty "people" or "personnel." The administration is in favor of "personnel." It makes them easier to fire if you know what I mean.

(MAXINE exits. Dejected, CHRIS lowers his head. Beat.)

DEJA

You okay?

CHRIS

I've a headache.

DEJA

You want me to leave?

CHRIS

Leave is too strong a word, could you come back later.

DEJA

Okay.

(DEJA starts to leave.)

CHRIS
(Blurting)

I got a 99.5!

DEJA

Excuse me?

CHRIS
On part one of the University's Diversity and Inclusion Training Webinar. I got a 99.5. And I'm doing better on part two.

(DEJA doesn't quite know what to make of this.)

CHRIS
I just had to tell someone.

DEJA
(Beat, confused)

Good for you.

(DEJA exits.)

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR (PART II)

(The ACTOR PLAYING MAXINE enters and talks to the audience.)

ACTOR PLAYING MAXINE

Be careful what you wish for - Part 2." Warning: The following scene flashes back to when Buddy was a Hollywood screenwriter. After years of struggle he was hired and then fired as a writer on the show 'Game of Thrones'. He's now pitching a movie idea to a bored producer. If you've ever been a writer in Hollywood this scene might cause dry mouth, panic attacks and impotence. The lobby has been designated a safe space.

(The actor exits.)

(We enter the recent past, BUDDY, now in his thirties, is wiser, bespectacled. The Hollywood hustle has taken its toll.)

*He stands before an unseen
Hollywood producer.)*

OLDER BUDDY

(Tired, but good at pitching)

Fade up! A like-able priest, a Denzel Washington type. But he's having doubts. One night, he slips out of his ecclesiastical garb and sneaks out of the rectory. He finds this happenin' bar and after much soul searching goes inside.

(The producer's phone rings.)

OLDER BUDDY

There... ah... he meets this nice woman, a Beyonce type. Later, he walks her home, she invites him up.

(The producer's phone rings.)

OLDER BUDDY

Ah... Early the next morning the priest sneaks back into the rectory where he finds the evil Bishop, Matt Damon, is introducing a new nun and get this - It's her! It's Beyonce! And she's pregnant! And the child is the anti-Christ!

(The producer's phone rings.)

OLDER BUDDY

(Blurting)

Don't answer the fucking phone!

*(BUDDY realizes what he's done,
it's over. He's desperate to find
the right words. Perhaps he's not
really saying this, perhaps this is
all in his mind.)*

OLDER BUDDY

(Desperate)

I... I'm sorry... I can't do this. *(Beat, frustrated)* When you're young you have this vague sense that tomorrow we'll get things right. But how can we when we live in a world where there's dragon-infested Medieval gonzo porn where art should be. Algorithms where the human heart should be. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

*(He looks at the producer hoping
he'll understand. He doesn't.)*

OLDER BUDDY

You don't, do you. *(Troubled)* Two days after I was hired as a writer on 'Game of Thrones' I overheard two executives talking, they said they were thrilled to have me because with me they had met their "black quota." *(Beat)* I soon found it was true. All season long everyone looked right through me - As if I were invisible.

(For a moment he is defeated. Then his rare anger grows.)

OLDER BUDDY

Just so you know. I'm the writer who left the Starbucks coffee cup on the set of 'Game of Thrones.' I did it on purpose. Know why? To prove I exist! Life isn't a television show - The tiki torches are real!

(He stops, pulls back into himself.)

OLDER BUDDY

I quit. I'm going to become a professor, that's what failed writers do.

(The producers phone rings.)

OLDER BUSTER

Now you can answer your fucking phone!

(BUDDY walks out.)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TRAINING WEBINAR III

(CHRIS sits at his desk taking the Webinar.)

(The actor playing DOROTHY plays the WEBINAR HOST. She's training-video-fake.)

WEBINAR HOST

(Upbeat, artificial, to audience)

Hi and welcome to part eighty-five of the webinar "You Can't Say That." Brought to you by *Achieve!* Today's sub-unit is entitled, "Jokes are no laughing matter: Intent, Impact, Synergy." One day Betty and Harry are in the company break room when:

(BETTY and HARRY act out the Webinar. They walk up to the coffeemaker.)

(HARRY has his arm in a sling.)

HARRY
(Upbeat and actor-y)

Hi Betty, how are you today?

BETTY
(Upbeat and actor-y)

Oh dear, what happened to your arm?

HARRY

Skiing accident.

BETTY

Painful?

HARRY

It is.

BETTY

Let me help you by making coffee.

HARRY

Thank you.

BETTY

Cream?

HARRY

You bet.

BETTY

How much?

HARRY
(Showing a inch.)

About yea much.

BETTY
(Busy with the coffee)

How much?

HARRY

Make it the color of Bruno Mars.

(BETTY stops making coffee.)

BETTY

(Uncomfortable)

...You know, Harry, Black people don't like jokes like that.

HARRY

No, really? Why?

BETTY

We find them offensive.

HARRY

Thanks for letting me know. You know I learn a lot from our little friendly conversations.

BETTY

Little friendly conversations are important.

HARRY

Wow, I love to learning new things.

BETTY

Glad to hear it. Now, how much cream would you like?

HARRY

(Utterly humorless)

One ounce.

(Suddenly everything is okay, they smile and laugh like close friends.)

WEBINAR HOST

(Upbeat, artificial, to audience)

Congratulations you have finished the webinar "You Can't Say That." Brought to you by *Achieve! Let's celebrate!*

(Bad rap music.)

HARRY

(Rapping)

WHAT YOU GOTTA KNOW IS THAT WE'RE ALL EQUAL

BETTY

(Rapping)

ANYTHING LESS IS TOTALLY FEEBLE

HARRY
TIMES ARE A CHANGIN' WE AIN'T MEDIEVAL

BETTY
THERE'S NEVER BEEN A CAUSE TO BE DECEITFUL

BETTY AND HARRY
CAUSE IF YOU ARE, KNOW THAT IT'S ILLEGAL!

(CHRIS closes his laptop. The Webinar actors fall out of character and exit.)

WHY YOU SHOULD BOYCOTT WOODY ALLEN MOVIES

(The ACTOR PLAYING BUDDY enters and speaks to the audience.)

ACTOR PLAYING BUDDY
(To the audience)

"Why you should boycott Woody Allen movies." Warning: The following scene contains strobe lights, loud noises and if this theatre can afford it, theatrical haze. It may be offensive to people who like the play 'Angels in America,' and neurotic movie directors who rip off Fellini.

(THE ACTOR PLAYING BUDDY exits.)

(MAXINE enters the office.)

MAXINE
You got a letter, it was forwarded from your previous address.

(MAXINE hands it over and exits. CHRIS stares at it for moment, its from Buddy. But before he can open it...)

(DOROTHY and DEJA enter the office.)

DOROTHY
You wanted to see us?

CHRIS
Ah, yes, Thanks for stopping by.

(CHRIS quickly pockets the letter.)

DEJA

What's up?

CHRIS

Ah... I was wondering if we might have a... a *(off the webinar)* 'little friendly conversation.'

DEJA

(suspicious)

Okay.

DOROTHY

Sure.

(There's an uncomfortable beat.)

CHRIS

(Trying to find the right words)

Ah... I asked you to stop by because... ah, I... I had a rather unpleasant thing happen to me this morning...

DOROTHY

Oh, I'm sorry.

CHRIS

I was talking with another English professor in the hall. A nothing special conversation, just chatting, when I mentioned that I like the novelistic structure of Woody Allen's films. The professor bristled and loudly condemned me for condoning a, quote, "neurotic sexual predator who rips off Fellini movies."

DOROTHY

(Confused)

Is that why you asked us to stop by, to talk Woody Allen?

CHRIS

Yes. No. I just wanted to say that even a Fellini mimic who is a neurotic sexual predator can, on occasion, make a good movie...

DEJA

Okay, if that's all, I'm due back on the planet Earth.

CHRIS

Do you know what it's like to walk into a room and have everyone immediately judge you.

DOROTHY

Yeah.

DEJA

Been there and done that.

CHRIS

I make an innocent comment about Woody Allen and they judge me as a privileged, white, unwoke male. No further information is needed.

DOROTHY

Would you like to share more?

CHRIS

No. Yes.

DOROTHY

You like Woody Allen and...

(CHRIS delays.)

DOROTHY

And...

CHRIS

(Beat, this isn't easy)

And...

DEJA

And?

CHRIS

And... I was once gay.

DEJA

...Excuse me?

CHRIS

It's not what you think.

DEJA

What else is there?

CHRIS

I was twelve years old, when I was called in by Bishop Johnson.

(In another reality, the disciplinarian BISHOP JOHNSON enters. He's played by the actor playing MAXINE who is dressed like a man.)

(BISHOP JOHNSON talks to a little boy but his focus is to the audience.)

BISHOP JOHNSON

Hello Christian, I have something special to tell you.

CHRIS

I was just a farm boy who knew nothing about real life.

(BISHOP JOHNSON holds up a stuffed toy dog and cat.)

BISHOP JOHNSON

It's normal for dogs to be attracted to dogs and cats to cats. But it's abnormal for dogs to be attracted to cats *in that way*.

CHRIS

I had no idea what "that" meant in *that* sentence.

BISHOP JOHNSON

But sometimes a boy has an *overbearing mother* and an *emotionally distant father* and this can result in an illness called (*Ominous*) homo-sex-uality.

CHRIS

That was the first time I'd heard the word.

BISHOP JOHNSON

And we all know sodomy is wicked.

CHRIS

The reason for the talk was that someone left a copy of the play "Angels in America" in the Chapel. Bishop Johnson was convinced it was me. I knew it was Buddy.

DEJA

Buddy?

DOROTHY

Do you mean... Dead Buddy?

CHRIS

Yes. We were... friends.

(DOROTHY and DEJA are amazed.)

BISHOP JOHNSON

Sodomy is a threat to our national security. You don't want to be a threat to our national security do you? Do You!?

*(Shakes the pets heads, 'no'.
Intimidated.)*

CHRIS

All I knew was that my mother was overbearing and my father spent most of his time in the barn. So one night at dinner, I told my mother, father and twelve older siblings, I knew what was wrong with me - I was a threat to national security, I... was a sodomite.

DOROTHY

You're joking.

CHRIS

A sheltered homeschooled farm kid could hardly have anticipated what happened next. Besides the beatings in the barn, there was lots fasting and praying. Then I was sent to Bishop Johnson for a psychological test.

BISHOP JOHNSON

(Clinical)

Which do you like more, your mother or father?

CHRIS

I always preferred my mother. My father was always in the goddamn barn.

BISHOP JOHNSON

Do you feel like an outsider?

CHRIS

Course - that's why I became a writer.

BISHOP JOHNSON

Have you ever read the play "Angels in America"?

CHRIS

No, but I was determined to. I was convinced that this forbidden text would let me in on the secret of who I was. I managed, through Buddy to get a copy, which I read under the sheets after lights out.

DOROTHY

What did you think?

CHRIS

I thought it could use a little editing.

(Spooky lights fall on BISHOP JOHNSON.)

BISHOP JOHNSON

(Booming)

What have you done?! What Have You Done?!

CHRIS

As I finished the play Bishop Johnson's voice echoed in my head. Then the ground began to shake, there was smoke and fire.

BISHOP JOHNSON

(Eerily)

You! Little boy, are a threat to national security!

(Smoke, strobe lights and bone-chilling banging.)

CHRIS

(Terrified)

And then an angel came to me!

(Gonzo Porn music! An ANGEL breaks through the wall, is lowered from above, or in some way - à la 'Angels in America' - makes an interesting entrance.)

(Shaking in fear, BISHOP JOHNSON cowers and runs.)

THE ANGEL MORONI

(Ominous)

"Greetings prophet, the great work begins! The messenger has arrived!"

DOROTHY

Isn't that a line from 'Angels in America?'

(CHRIS becomes his twelve year old self.)

CHRIS AS CHILD
(Terrified)

Who are you?

THE ANGEL MORONI

I am the Angel Moroni!

DEJA

You gotta be fucking kidding.

CHRIS

I'm not, he was there, for real!

DOROTHY

You were dreaming?

CHRIS

I know that now, but I was twelve years old.

(CHRIS is drawn into the dream.)

THE ANGEL MORONI
(Ominous, echoing)

Christian, sexual purity is God's plan! And you haven't been pure!

CHRIS AS CHILD

I'm only twelve, I don't know what sex is!

THE ANGEL MORONI

Violation of our Father's laws gets in the way of eternal progress!

CHRIS AS CHILD

I want to make progress!

THE ANGEL MORONI

The stars are microphones whereby Heavenly Father listens to you. Day and Night, you are being watched!

CHRIS AS CHILD

Even under my sheets at night?

THE ANGEL MORONI

Especially under your sheets!

CHRIS AS CHILD

I'm a bad person!

THE ANGEL MORONI

Did you read "Angels in America?"

CHRIS AS CHILD

I'm sorry!

THE ANGEL MORONI

So did I.

CHRIS AS CHILD

Really? What did you think?

THE ANGEL MORONI

I thought it could use a little editing. (*Thunderous!*) Was Jesus a sexual pervert?

CHRIS AS CHILD

I keep telling you I don't know what that is!

THE ANGEL MORONI

See that you don't! Now I have to go. If you should have any questions, the Church provides helpful resources at... Mormon-and-gay-dot-LDS-dot-orgggggggggg!

(The ANGEL disappears. The music and special effects end as the lights return.)

(CHRIS is pulled back to the present, but he's traumatized by the memory. DEJA and DOROTHY are shocked.)

CHRIS

(Desperate, finding his words)

I... I am not one user-friendly label. I'm... I'm not just some privileged white guy... I'm dealing with a fucked up childhood, and stars that are microphones, and I'm blocking tons of regret, and I'm haunted by the past, and burdened by the fact that my father never loved me, and I'm sexually... perplexed! (*Beat*) I'd put that on my name tag but it wouldn't fit.

(Touched, DOROTHY starts to reach out to comfort him, but before she can...)

(In another reality, the actor playing MAXINE enters as the WEBINAR HOST.)

She clicks her clicker. CHRIS, DEJA and DOROTHY freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

(To the audience)

We've all been in that situation. Been there done that. Now, audience, how should they react? Should she, "A."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors unfreeze.)

DOROTHY

(Amazed)

That's the most fucked up thing I've ever heard. You need to see a team of psychiatrists. And while you're at it throw in a shitload of shock therapy.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

Or "B."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks - the actors reset.)

DEJA

(Angry)

That doesn't excuse you, you homophobic, trans-phobic, sexually confused racist in denial! You need to take responsibility for all the historical objectification and oppression that your white male penis has caused.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

Or "C."

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors reset.)

DOROTHY

(Kindly)

Chris, we're more than our labels, we're the sum total of a whole bunch of back story that's stacked atop more back story.

DEJA

And we need to stop pretending it doesn't exist and deal with it.

DOROTHY

We've become static and brittle people who've forgot how to talk to people unlike us.

DEJA

We need to step out of our gated realities and really see each other.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors freeze.)

WEBINAR HOST

The correct answer is?

(The WEBINAR HOST prompts the audience to answer until they answer "C.")

WEBINAR HOST

(Upbeat)

"C." That's correct. Let's see what happens when a white, homophobic, trans-phobic, sexually confused Mormon whose father never loved him is faced with a correct reaction.

(The WEBINAR HOST clicks a clicker - the actors unfreeze.)

CHRIS

(Catching his breath)

Thank you for understanding.

DOROTHY

Do you need a hug?

CHRIS

I do.

DOROTHY

Before I can hug you the rules state that I need a definite 'yes' or 'no.'

CHRIS

Yes.

DOROTHY

And a witness. Would you be our witness?

DEJA

Yes.

DOROTHY

(To Chris)

Do you give me permission to hug you?

CHRIS

Yes.

*(DOROTHY looks to DEJA for
confirmation.)*

DEJA

I witness that you have received a positive response.

DOROTHY

Thank you.

*(DOROTHY hugs CHRIS. A sincere
moment.)*

DOROTHY

Chris, I just want you to know... I see you.

CHRIS

(Sincerely)

And I see you.

(CHRIS looks to DEJA.)

DEJA

Don't ask, I got no choice but to see you.

(They laugh.)

*(They walk over to the webinar
coffeemaker. During the following
they laugh and enjoy each other's
company.)*

DEJA

Coffee?

DOROTHY

Decaf?

CHRIS

No, I'll take caffeinated.

DEJA

You sure?

CHRIS

Positive.

WEBINAR HOST

(To the audience)

Thus they had a caffeine powered courageous conversation that lasted well into the night. Chris continued to say some pretty stupid things but over the next few months Deja and Dorothy mentored him and soon, Chris began to wake up. The end.

SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A SUMMER'S DAY

(The actors playing DEJA and DOROTHY stop the play.)

ACTOR PLAYING DEJA

Wait wait!

MAXINE

What's wrong?

ACTOR PLAYING DOROTHY

There's still one more scene. *(To the audience)* Epilogue. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day."

ACTOR PLAY DEJA

We will now flashback to a few weeks ago, the first day of class. Warning: *(Beat)* You know what, fuck it. Let's just see what happens.

ACTOR PLAYING DOROTHY

We find Buddy, now a professor, in his office. Actors, places.

(OLDER BUDDY enters the office, he is now a professor. MAXINE joins him.)

(The other actors exit.)

MAXINE

(Eating a cookie)

Teaching at a university is a lot like postmodern art - don't let it depress you if you don't get it at first. Or ever for that matter. Cookie?

(She offers him a cookie.)

OLDER BUDDY

Oh, sure.

(They eat cookies.)

MAXINE

Some student group is selling'em on the steps of the Union to raise money for some cause, I don't remember what for. They're only charging a buck. Oh that's right, regulations state that all new employees must take a mandatory Diversity and Inclusion Training Webinar. So get on that right away.

(MAXINE exits.)

(OLDER BUDDY is alone in his office for a sec.)

(A WHITE STUDENT enters. He is played by the same actor who played young Christian. He wears a 'Thin Blue Line' cap.)

WHITE STUDENT

Got a minute?

OLDER BUDDY

Sure.

WHITE STUDENT

Name's Frank.

OLDER BUDDY

What can I do for you, Frank?

(BUDDY offers a handshake, the STUDENT ignores it.)

WHITE STUDENT

Professor, I represent a consortium of concerned students who feel that we have to take action, so we're holding a bake sale.

OLDER BUDDY

Happy to help, how much?

WHITE STUDENT

For you, fifty cents.

(The STUDENT holds out a cookie.)

OLDER BUDDY

That looks like the same cookie Maxine had.

WHITE STUDENT

One and the same.

OLDER BUDDY

But she said they cost a dollar.

WHITE STUDENT

That's right. We're charging white men a dollar and a half, women a dollar, and blacks, gays, or any other of you minorities, fifty cents.

OLDER BUDDY

...Why?

WHITE STUDENT

We thought if we're going to hold a bake sale to protest affirmative action we'd have affirmative action going on right at the bake sale.

OLDER BUDDY

(Perplexed)

Ah... Frank, was it?

WHITE STUDENT

Yeah.

OLDER BUDDY

What student organization are you with?

WHITE STUDENT

It's a new student group that wants to take our universities back. We're tired of watching you professors promote the propaganda of the pro-homosexual left. Now professor, before we sic our Twitter mobs on you, we'd like to give you another chance.

OLDER BUDDY

To?

WHITE STUDENT

Improve your teaching. For example, just now, during the first class, right in the middle of the lecture, for no apparent reason, you mentioned that Shakespeare was most likely a bisexual.

OLDER BUDDY

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day" was written to a man.

WHITE STUDENT

Yeah but, if you're going to bring up the fact that a particular play-writer is a sexual pervert, then shouldn't you also mention that another play-writer is a dedicated family man who loves his wife, children, God and country?

OLDER BUDDY

...But I don't know any playwrights who...

WHITE STUDENT

(Forceful)

Your job, professor, is to provide us clear career pathways and job-specific skills not to muddy our heads. Do we understand each other? Some affirmative action hire telling me that Shakespeare was queer doesn't help me find a job.

(The WHITE STUDENT leans in for the final blow.)

WHITE STUDENT

(Quiet, dead serious)

We got some tiki torches to help convince you.

(OLDER BUDDY'S blood runs cold. The STUDENT flashes a winning smile.)

WHITE STUDENT

By the way, I was a great fan of 'Game of Thrones.' Sorry it went off the air. *(Then serious)* I like dragons, you know what I mean, lots of dragons.

(The STUDENT drops a cookie on the desk.)

WHITE STUDENT

Tell you what, for you, no charge.

(The STUDENT exits. OLDER BUDDY stands there stunned. Beat.)

(CHRIS enters the office in the present. He quickly takes out Buddy's letter and reads.)

(BUDDY watches him in another reality.)

BUDDY

Dear Chris, this'll be my last letter. I know you're asking, why? I guess I just got tired. Tired of fighting the same battles. Tired of being invisible. We're all anxiously praying to some unknown unknown that all this drama and pain and desire will someday be reduced to a simple theme that we can consume like a good book where a powerful revelation is revealed on the final page. The problem is, we are the authors, and there is no final page, unless we write it. And we can't write if we're not willing to have courageous conversations. Don't stop loving, your friend, Buddy.

(CHRIS is devastated. Then, he is taken by goosebumps. He becomes aware of a ghostly presence. The two realities become one. CHRIS slowly comes to see BUDDY.)

CHRIS

...Buddy?

OLDER BUDDY

Chris.

(CHRIS and BUDDY join each other's realities. Beat.)

BUDDY

I see you.

CHRIS

And ...I see you.

(Separated in time, they stand inches apart.)

(The microphones hanging above the stage and audience become stars twinkling in the clear night sky.)

(The lights fade.)

THE END

Please Note:
This play needs a courageous conversation talkback.