

Stalled

A ten-minute play
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Sarah, F. 40s
Deseree, F. 40s

Time: New Year's Eve, just before midnight
Setting: A nice, classy bathroom stall

“Stalled” was developed in The CRY HAVOC Company for the “Holiday Plays” 2015. There was a staged reading of “Stalled” in “The Future is Female” festival in New York City in March, 2017. The reading was directed by Jessica Bauman and featured Bianca Leigh and Nina Mehta.

A row of bathroom stalls. Flashy skinny red heels, belonging to DESEREE, hang below the stall and a pair of plain black pumps in the stall next to hers shift slightly from side to side. They belong to SARAH. We can't see either woman. Just her feet. The sound of peeing.

SARAH

(yelling) Could you pass me some toilet paper?

DESEREE

Sure.

SARAH

(yelling) There isn't enough in here.

DESEREE

Okay.

Hands reach under the stalls. Toilet paper is exchanged.

SARAH

(yelling) I'm gonna need more than this!

The sounds of sniffing emerge from under one of the doors. An entire roll of toilet paper goes flying over the top of the stall. The sound of the toilet flushing.

DESEREE bursts open the stall like she's going down a runway. She looks like it too in a clingy red dress. She's tall and has Michelle Obama arms. She flips her long hair over her shoulders, heads for the sink, and starts washing her hands.

SARAH opens the stall and just stands there for a moment. Her black dress hangs on her boxy body. She's holding back tears. She steps out and joins Deseree at the sink.

While Sarah washes her hands, Deseree reapplies red lipstick and watches Sarah in the mirror. She recognizes Sarah but says nothing.

SARAH

I like your skinny heels.

DESEREE

Oh, well, thank—

SARAH

I would wear something like that if I didn't have plantar fasciitis or high heel-itis. It's a real thing, high heel-itis. If I put it on the Internet, it'd be a real thing. Anything anyone puts on the Internet is a real thing, right?

Sarah puts her head in her hands. They are still wet and water drips down her face. Deseree hands her a paper towel.

DESEREE

Hey---wow—hi.

Sarah pats her face and blows her nose into the paper towel.

SARAH

Hi—Happy New Year. It's not really a Happy—

She notices Deseree staring at her.

Do I have spinach in my hair? I was eating it earlier and that's—

DESEREE

No—no, you don't. God—wow—uh--

SARAH

Sorry, I'm a little--at midnight my husband's getting married.

DESEREE

Yes, your *husband*?

SARAH

When you say something for twenty-two years, it's hard to stop. It's like if you woke up one day and you were stuck in an elevator with strangers and you couldn't say, "How are you?" or "Nice weather" or "Good morning." It's programmed, saying "my husband." It's just that it's not true any more.

DESEREE

So--why are you *here*--at your ex-husband's wedding?

SARAH

My daughter says her new step mom isn't nice to her—she asked me to come, to sit with her. The invitation for their wedding said, "Ring in the new year; celebrate our new life." So every year from now on when I hear the countdown, I'll be like, "Oh great, it's the anniversary of when I was in the bathroom when my ex-husband got married!"

DESEREE

I can see why—

SARAH

"Celebrate *our* new life." Is that even grammatically correct? Shouldn't it be our new *lives*. Or is it supposed to be like—oh we are now one, bound—forever—like Jesus on the cross. (*looking up*) Sorry Jesus.

DESEREE

Where is your daughter?

SARAH

Somewhere out there. They're getting married in ten minutes, right after the countdown.

DESEREE

I know. I'm sorry about Steve.

SARAH

Are you Robert's mom? From the PTA?

DESEREE

No.

SARAH

Do you work at the hair salon?

DESEREE

No.

SARAH

Neighbor? (Deseree shakes her head no) Doctor? (Deseree shakes her head.) Sorry, I'm terrible at faces.

DESEREE

I'm Deseree. Formerly known as Derek. Kind of like you were formerly known as being married to Steve. And you are terrible at faces, apparently.

SARAH (overlapping)

Shut the front door! Derek? *Seriously?* Derek?

DESEREE

I was Derek, yes.

SARAH

Yeah! Well, hello! Wow! God, I—Derek—I—

DESEREE

I know, it's weird—to run into your old friend at your ex-husband's wedding and now *he's a she*.

SARAH

No—this isn't—weird—this is—normal. Totally normal. I'm really comfortable. Is there any water in here?

Deseree turns on the water in the sink. She tries to hand Sara a cup but Sara's already putting the water in her hand and slurping it.

DESEREE

I was surprised by the invitation. It seems like he invited the whole football team.

SARAH

Wait. So when did you—

DESEREE

It's been a process. A long process.

SARAH

Well, you--look--great, better than me, and I've always been a wom....

DESEREE

You've always been a what?

SARAH

I've always been a—(looking for a neutral pronoun) *person* who liked you.

DESEREE

That's true. You had a crush on me.

SARAH

I did not.

DESEREE

You totally did. Senior year. We sat together in the sound proof courtyard for lunch every day and when Mrs. Nettles walked by, we'd smile and wave and yell, "Hi Mrs. Nipples!" And she'd wave—and we'd laugh. She had huge breasts.

SARA

Yeah, I really don't recall—

DESEREE (overlapping)

Oh, come on--And you ate one tub of French fries and two rolls every single day—

SARAH

I'm much healthier now. Remember, I asked you if there was spinach in my hair because I ate it earlier. See, I eat lots of healthy, health foods. (covering her abdomen) I still have a little extra weight, you know, from my daughter, Eliza.

DESEREE

How old is she?

SARAH

Three—teen.

DESEREE

Three—teen? Thirteen?

SARAH

You say potato and I—I like potatoes. I love potatoes. (a moment) You were perfect at everything. You let me cheat in Biology. Isn't it funny—how you were good at Biology given--Sorry, ugh, sorry. Sorry. Sorry!

DESEREE

Sarah, It's okay. I really wasn't perfect but now I'm okay.

SARAH

Yeah?

DESEREE

Yeah.

SARAH

You were the best parallel parker, too.

DESEREE

Thanks.

SARAH

I thought I was going to have a heart attack the first time Eliza—

DESEREE

You let your thirteen-year-old drive?

SARAH

Okay. She's sixteen. Sixteen plus one. Seventeen. She's seventeen okay. Stop pressuring me.

DESEREE

I wasn't--

SARAH

I *wish* she was thirteen. Or three. Or any age going backwards instead of forwards. At three, she'd scream about not having another cookie or another cartoon and I wanted to run out of the room. I wanted to run out of the house. Now it's Snapchat and late night parties and only living with me part-time until she's in college, when she won't live with me at all, and now I'd do anything to go back to cookies and cartoons. Because there were more years ahead than behind. Because even though it was really hard, I was a part of a team.

DESEREE

If a man, woman, kid and a fence were the only definition of a family, hardly anyone would be in one. I mean, outside of this town. And this town sucks.

SARAH

I still live here.

DESEREE

Right, right. What I meant was that your daughter--she'll always be your daughter. You'll always be her mom. She'll be bringing home laundry and boyfriends and--

SARAH

She likes girls. That's what she told me last year over s'mores.

DESEREE

Wow—how did you respond?

SARAH

I brought out a bottle of champagne and she pretended that she hadn't had champagne before. And I toasted her and pretended that I was okay with her liking girls. It took me a little bit of time to be okay with it, I still—(looking at Deseree)--I thought it was more important to pretend than to make her feel like there was anything wrong with her.

DESEREE

I wish my family had pretended. My dad told his friends I died and mom didn't say anything.

They stand for a moment and say nothing.

SARAH

Why didn't you call me?

DESEREE

It was Steve's wedding and I didn't think you'd be here.

SARAH (overlapping)

I meant why didn't you call me *ever*? You said I had a crush on you, which is fair I guess because everyone did—but I thought you were my friend. And then, one day, I never heard from you ever again.

DESEREE

I needed to do that. To take my time—

SARAH

People shouldn't quit on each other.

DESEREE

I'm sorry, Sarah. I really am. I just had to focus on building a new life that had nothing to do with this one. I've only been back on occasion. It took a long time for things to be better with my mom. After my dad died last year, I felt like I could finally breathe. She sent me half a dozen different shades of red lipstick, a red dress and a note that said, "Girl, you look good. But you should wear more red."

SARAH

You do look good in red.

DESEREE

Thanks.

SARAH

But why now? Why here?

DESEREE

I--I didn't want to make this wedding about me; I don't want to make this about me. It's just—I got this invitation and--I called Steve and he was actually pretty nice—he said, “Come anyway.”

SARAH

Yeah, that Steve, he's a nice guy . . . Have you seen him?

DESEREE

For the last half hour, I've been stalling in the car, watching people I haven't seen in years walking by. I finally got up my nerve, looked at my reflection in the mirror, and heard my Mama's voice: “Girl, you look good.” But then I went to pick up my place card and it said “Derek.” And it hit me. Steve probably told some people. Over the years, I've run into some people. Who knows? Who doesn't? Is everyone going to be gawking at me or whispering behind my back like I'm some kind of specimen? Are people going to be more interested to talk *about* Derek vs. Deseree instead of just talking to me? So I turned around and was going to walk right back out the door but instead I walked into this bathroom. The one with the lady in a skirt.

A moment.

SARAH

Did you ever have any children?

DESEREE

No. But I do have a new family. The most amazing people you could ever imagine. Do you have any pictures of your daughter?

SARAH

Of course.

Sarah pulls out her phone and shows Deseree Eliza's picture.

DESEREE

Wow—she looks like you.

SARAH

She's pretty, right?

DESEREE

Pretty, poised, smart, looks like she has a good sense of humor, just like her mom. I'd like to meet her. Someday.

SARAH

Someday?

Deseree points to the time on Sarah's phone.

If you don't leave soon, you'll miss the wedding. Pretend if you have to, put on a face if you have to, but don't leave her alone.

SARAH

I deleted every picture of me and Steve on Facebook. I unfriended him on the day he posted, "She said Yes." And then I updated my status and said, "I'm really happy for Steve" and 37 people liked it.

DESEREE

You can do this.

SARAH

I don't want people to gawk at me, either.

DESEREE

Go—go Sarah.

SARAH

What about you?

DESEREE

I didn't promise anyone anything.

Sarah looks at her.

Really—You have to leave now.

Sarah walks to the door. She turns back to Deseree.

SARAH

I could really use a date.

DESEREE

Happy New Year, Sarah.

SARAH

Happy New Year, Deseree.

Sarah opens the door. She waits for Deseree. Deseree doesn't move. Deseree looks in the mirror. She pulls out her lipstick, takes a look at herself and then, Deseree follows.

An empty bathroom stall.

A moment and then--

*The sounds of the
countdown "10-9-8"—*

Blackout.

End of Play.

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