

Stalled

A ten-minute play
By: Sharon E. Cooper

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CHARACTERS:

*Sarah, late 40s

*Deseree, late 40s

*Deseree is a transgender woman. If you need to adjust the characters' ages in either direction in order to cast a transgender actor to play Deseree, please do so. Sarah and Deseree can be any racial or ethnic background.

TIME:

New Year's Eve, just before midnight, the present

SETTING:

A nice hotel bathroom in a small town. This play can easily accommodate various budgets. For example, chairs could represent the stalls and a table could represent the bathroom counter.

"Stalled" was developed with the The CRY HAVOC Workshop and further developed in the Stillwater Writer's Group. A staged reading of "Stalled" was in "The Future is Female" festival in New York City in 2017. It was directed by Jessica Bauman and featured Bianca Leigh and Nina Mehta.

"Stalled" had its world premiere at the Samuel French Off-off Broadway Play Festival at the Vineyard Theatre in August, 2018, New York City. The play was directed by Jessica Bauman and featured Ali Lawrence and Bianca Leigh. Wardrobe designer: Flavia Colucci. Photographer: Mikaela Martin

The playwright would like to thank all involved in the development of the piece, especially Jessica Bauman and Bianca Leigh, as well as Delia M. Kropp, who provided tremendous resource to the playwright.

For the rights to produce the play, please contact Sharon E. Cooper:
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A row of bathroom stalls. Flashy 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 their feet.

The sound of a toilet flushing.

SARAH

Could you pass me some toilet paper?

DESEREE

Sure.

SARAH

There isn't enough in here.

Hana reaches under the stalls. Toilet paper is exchanged. The sounds of sniffing from under one of the doors.

SARAH

I'm gonna need more than this!

DESEREE

Okay!

Sarah reaches under the stall. Deseree throws an entire roll of toilet paper over the top of the stall. Sarah catches it.

Deseree steps out of the stall in a fashionable red dress. She heads for the sink and starts washing her hands.

Sarah opens the stall; her sailor dress (or some equivalent that says she's trying and failing at looking cool) hangs on her boxy body. Her zipper is stuck in the back. She's holding back tears as she steps out and tries, unsuccessfully, to zip up her dress, getting caught up in her sweater.

Deseree reapplies red lipstick and watches Sarah in the mirror. Deseree recognizes Sarah as Sarah washes her hands.

DESEREE

So—*Hi!*—Happy New Year.

SARAH

Yeah, Happy New Year. I like your skinny heels.

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

DESEREE

Oh--thanks.

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?

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—uh—

SARAH

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

DESEREE

Your *husband*.

During the following, Sarah returns to trying to fix her zipper. The zipper is winning.

SARAH

When you say something for sixteen years, it's hard to stop. It's like if you woke up one day and you were in an elevator with strangers and you couldn't say, "Nice weather" or "Bad weather" or basically anything about weather. It's programmed, saying "my husband." It's just that it's not true anymore. Could you help me with this?

Sarah indicates the zipper. Deseree tries to help.

DESEREE

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

SARAH

My daughter wanted me to come. She wanted all of us to be together, a big, happy--The invitation 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—

Deseree continues to work on the zipper.

SARAH (continuous)

"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

Your zipper is stuck.

SARAH

(snappy) Yes, thank you, I know. *(softer)* Sorry. Maybe it's a sign I shouldn't go.

DESEREE

Where's 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 takes a good look at Deseree.

SARAH

Are you Robert's mom? From the PTA?

DESEREE

No.

SARAH

Do you work over at the bakery on--

DESEREE

No.

SARAH

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

DESEREE

Do you have a pencil?

SARAH

You work in a pencil—place?

DESEREE

For your zipper.

SARAH

Ooohhhh.

Sarah digs in her bag and hands her a pencil. She hands it to Deseree, turns around and--

SARAH

I really don't understand how a pencil—I mean, what are you going to do—erase my--

DESEREE (overlapping completely)

Let's--see. Let me--just--this might -- voila!

SARAH

What?! You are a miracle worker.

DESEREE

Maybe it's a sign you should go—*(looking at Sarah's splotchy face)* but you could use a little—

Deseree reaches in her bag and takes out some blush. She places it on Sarah.

DESEREE

My Mama says a little blush and the right lipstick could make a rainbow out of a rainy day. There . . . that's nice. . . . Do you have any lipstick?

SARAH

Sorry, who are you again?

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

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

DESEREE

I was Derek, yes.

SARAH

Yeah! Well, hello! Wow! God, I—Dere--Deser—I—

DESEREE

I know, it's weird—running 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 points at the sink. Sara slurps water into her mouth.

DESEREE

I was surprised by the invitation. It seems like he invited the whole debate 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 – (*looking at Deseree*)

DESEREE

You've always been a what?

SARAH

I've always been a--*person* who liked you.

DESEREE

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

SARAH

I did not.

DESEREE

You totally did.

SARAH

Everyone had a crush on you.

DESEREE

Senior year. We sat together in the sound proof courtyard for lunch every day and when Mrs. Nickels walked by, we'd smile and wave and yell, "Hi Mrs. Nipples!" And she'd wave—and we'd laugh.

SARAH

She did have huge breasts.

DESEREE

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. (*touching some part of her body*) 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. Okay, fine, I still *love potatoes*. But *you*--you were perfect at everything: student council president, you let me cheat in AP Bio; you were the best parallel parker. The first time I let Eliza drive, I thought I was going to have a heart attack.

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

(calmly) 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 reaches out and touches Sarah's shoulder. A moment.

DESEREE

If a man, a woman, and a kid 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. What I meant was that your daughter--she'll always be your daughter. You'll always be her mom. Soon, she'll be bringing home laundry and boyfriends and--

SARAH

She likes girls.

DESEREE

Oohhh....

SARAH (continuous)

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

DESEREE

How did that go?

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 my 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*? I don't know—I would have—I think I could have—I thought we were friends. And then, one day, I never heard from you ever again.

DESEREE

I had to take that time.

SARAH

(about Deseree but also about Steve) People shouldn't quit on each other.

DESEREE

I—I needed to build—something—somewhere else—that had nothing to do with this shithole. No offense.

SARAH

No—none taken--

DESEREE (overlapping)

To make my life that you thought was so perfect actually be okay. For me. I haven't been back much. It took a long—long time for things to be better with my mom. After my dad died a few years ago, I felt like I could finally breathe. During the funeral, I stood next to my Mama, and the pastor kept saying he was a great family man. Later at home, Mama pulled me in her room and I thought we were going to have a “talk” and she handed me a little bag with half a dozen shades of red lipstick and said, “Girl, you look good. But you should wear more red” and I was like—“It's a funeral.” And we laughed.

SARAH

You do look good in red.

DESEREE

Yes, I do.

SARAH

So why did you decide to come here, now for--

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. Does everyone know? 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 children?

DESEREE

No. But I do have a family. The most amazing people.

SARAH

Do you have any pictures?

Deseree pulls out her phone.

DESEREE

Of course. *(pointing)* This is Eleanore. She's a real estate agent like me. A real pisser. She outsells me every damn month and makes me laugh every day. Greg and Delilah are my neighbors. They walk my dog when I'm late. This is my dog, Ruffles. She barks a lot. Get it—Ruff-les. Every time I come home, it's like I've just come back from war; she's so happy. Oh, and this is my boyfriend, Allan. He's always traveling for work but he's the nicest damn man I've ever met. To make up for being gone so much, he watches my favorite reality TV shows with me—I mean, really, who can watch the news these days? *(on her phone)* Look! See, I told you—this *(laughing)* this is a picture of us watching TV!

Deseree notices Sarah, who is both happy for and jealous of Deseree.

SARAH

It looks like you have a great family there.

DESEREE

Show me a picture of your daughter.

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

DESEREE

Oh--she looks like you. 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.

DESEREE

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 go sit with your daughter.

SARAH

So, wait, you're not coming?

DESEREE

You should go.

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

DESEREE

You need—do you have any lipstick in there?

*Deseree leans over and looks in Sarah's
large bag. She finds a lipstick and hands it
to Sarah. As Sarah applies the lipstick,
Deseree pulls Sarah's hair back into a clip.*

DESEREE

No reason to hide that face . . . There, now you're ready.

SARAH

What about you?

DESEREE

I didn't promise anyone anything.

Sarah looks at Deseree and then herself in the mirror. She looks back at Deseree and then walks towards the door.

DESEREE

Happy New Year, Sarah.

Sarah stops and turns to Deseree.

SARAH

Happy New Year, Deseree.

Sarah leaves.

Deseree looks in the mirror. She pulls out her red lipstick, applies it—and then, Deseree leaves, too.

An empty bathroom.

Blackout. End of Play.