

eLLe Kalamazoo ep. 10: This Lane Open

An episodic play in three acts

Shawntai Brown

inspiration from The L Word

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By Shawntai Brown

Inspired by *The L Word*, by Ilene
Chaiken

Cast:



Naya Henderson - A queer black marketing graduate in her late 20s. She has been a student most of her life, and is prone to dreaming but has not finalized a career plan. She has a high turnover rate in her dating life and believes in relationship anarchy. She has a sexual history with Lane. Devon is her closest friend.

Lane - A lesbian Mexican and European-American in her 30s to 40s who works as an assistant coordinator of diversity programming for an elementary-middle school. She is direct, romantic, and sensual. She is friends with Mia, has a long dating history within the queer community, including with Naya, and, currently, with Izabel.

Izabel Martin - A lesbian in her early 30s. She is somewhat new to the queer community. She is in a relationship with Lane, and technically lives with Mia, who also owns the shop where Izabel works as a barista. She is divorced, has an Associate's degree in Arts and Sciences.

Devon Black - A queer lyrical artist of color in her 30s-40s who teaches art and performs spoken word. She is expressive with friends, wistful about her previous relationship with Jess Lynn, and adamant in her professional life.

Carrie Griffin - A lesbian in her 50s-60s who has worked as a school guidance counselor for several decades. She is recently divorced, sister to Lane, and owns the home she shared with her wife of 30 years. She is usually poised and calm, but is falling into a depression that's causing her to be fitful.

Mia Longfellow - A queer coffee shop owner in her late 20s to early 30s. She is usually talkative, expressive, swift, and sullen when stressed. She is pessimistic but cordial with nearly everyone in the community. Her friendship with Izabel is bitterly honest, smothering at times and dependable.

Danniqua "Danni" "Niqua" Thomas - A black woman in her mid to 30s to 40s who works as upper-level management for a small grocery in Kalamazoo.

Narrator/Podcaster - Clear and animated voices head off-stage only.

Synopsis: The lives of queer Kalamazoo women intertwine even more when Izabel and Naya, sworn enemies competing for Lane's attention, begin working at the same grocery

store. Their competition turns outward when their friends start carting their issues of loneliness through the aisles. Devon and Mia are searching for intimate connections while Carrie and Lane are determined to remain solitary.

Setting: eLLe jumps to present day, weeks before the airing of *The L Word: Generation Q* and in the midst of the disappearance of queer spaces for women, womyn and womxn. With little public space left, queer life continues in the grocery aisles, apartments and in the sound waves of a podcast broadcasting in everyone's ears.

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ACT IScene 1.1

Lights come up on Lane's apartment. A craft table holds a project Izabel has been working on. Izabel hides a packed suitcase of her belongings. A knock is heard at the door. Izabel is startled. She scrambles to find a place to hide the bag. As she goes to the door, she begins practicing what she will say again.

IZABEL

Hey, Lane. We should talk.

Lane, I have something to tell you.

Lane, I have been doing some thinking, and . . .

How was your day, Lane? Also, I have something terrible to tell you!

Laney, let's play truth or dare.

That's it! Just ease into it with a little foreplay.

Izabel answers the door.

IZABEL(CONT'D)

You forgot your key again, Laney?

Izabel pauses at the door, fluffing her hair and adjusting her cleavage. She opens the door.

IZABEL(CONT'D)

Truth or dare, Lane?

Naya is at the door. Izabel is perturbed and disappointed.

NAYA

Dare.

IZABEL

Naya? What are you doing here?

NAYA

Your fiance left something in my possession.

Naya fishes Lane's phone out of her back pocket and hands it to Izabel. As Izabel reaches for it, Naya pulls it back out of Izabel's reach and enters the house.

IZABEL

Give me Lane's phone.

NAYA

I'm feeling playful. Dare first, Izabel.

IZABEL

You are giving me Lane's phone and leaving.

NAYA

I dare you to admit that you were at that play party.

IZABEL

That's not a dare. That's asking a truth.

Izabel grabs a bottle of liquor and a glass. She pours herself a drink. Naya reaches for the bottle. Izabel grabs it and places it out of reach before Naya can get her hands on it.

NAYA

It's not a question. It's a dare. I'm challenging you to tell me you were there. I already know the truth. I haven't told her anything. And I won't. But you will.

IZABEL

That's my decision. The wedding plans are off. I've already packed my bags if I need to leave tonight. I was planning to tell her when she came home.

Lane unlocks and enters with her arms full of binders and manila folders. Naya and Izabel stand frozen.

LANE

I'm home! Sorry I'm so late. I stopped by Devon's for a game of Jenga. I'm out another twenty bucks.

Lane looks surprised to see Naya. Wow. I didn't expect to see the two of you here. What's going on? You two are finally getting along?

Naya shakes her head at the idea of her and Izabel getting along. Izabel steps toward Lane.

NAYA

Truth or Dare, Lane?

LANE

Oh, fun. I pick truth.

(Izabel has second thoughts about revealing the truth to Lane.)

IZABEL

First, let me help you with these heavy binders. My hard worker can never resist bringing the entire office home. You must be exhausted. Maybe we should continue this silly child's game another time.

Izabel goes to reach for the binders. Lane hugs them tighter.

LANE

Actually, they are in a very specific order. Budget papers, new hire information, parts of about six different grants I'm working on, yada, yada yada. I'd rather just put them away myself so nothing is mixed up. And I'm quite energized. I can hang for a little bit. So, think of what truth you're going ask me.

Lane exits to put away her things. Izabel's body falls into the sofa as she writhes as if in pain, silently screaming. Naya sips her drink and takes a video of Izabel on her phone. Izabel notices and jumps up.

IZABEL

What are you doing?

NAYA

Helping you collect footage for your followers!

IZABEL

You think this is so funny! Is it so funny I have to break Lane's heart? Geez, I thought she was your friend? Help me not hurt her.

NAYA

I don't do heavy lifting for white women.

IZABEL

This isn't political.

NAYA

Everything is political.

IZABEL

I know we aren't friends, but tell me what to do! I'm in fight or flight right now.

NAYA

You already packed your bags to take flight.

IZABEL

Fine! If you aren't going to help, then leave!

NAYA

No thanks. I think whatever happens next might be quite entertaining. Plus, this is Lane's house. And you know she won't kick me out.

Lane enters, loosening the buttons on her clothing to get more comfortable. Naya notices.

LANE

So, you are playing truth or dare with just the two of you? If I didn't know how much you two hate each other, I'd think you were having an affair.

Izabel swallows hard and goes to refill her drink.

IZABEL

You know how I get when I drink wine. I just befriend everyone!

Naya holds up her flask.

NAYA

She was a terrible host, though. Kind of like that bartender at that one place we were at. Remember, Lane? Good thing I came prepared for self-service.

LANE

As always.

Lane and Naya look at each other, each playing the events of earlier in the evening in their heads. Izabel senses something between Lane and Naya.

IZABEL

I haven't seen you all day.

Izabel takes Lane's head into hers, kissing her deeply. Naya rolls her eyes and pulls out Lane's phone.

NAYA

You left this earlier. That's why I came by.

Lane is alarmed that Naya has her phone and quickly retrieves it.

LANE

It was nothing weird, Izabel, I swear. We just had a few club sodas and complained about work.

IZABEL

It's fine. She's just your friend, right? Naya already told me she came to bring you your phone. And that's the only reason, so now she's going.

NAYA

Right after I finish my drink. We could at least complete the game?

Naya signals to her drink and smiles smugly. Devon shakes her head at Naya.

NAYA(CONT'D)

I believe you chose truth, Lane.

Izabel glares at Naya.

LANE

What do you want to know?

IZABEL

When was the last time you and Naya had sex?

Lane chokes and looks at Naya, shocked by the question.

LANE

And I am done playing Truth or Dare! Suddenly I'm tired.

NAYA

Why? The answer is easy. Two years ago.

LANE

You two are clearly not playing a game.

IZABEL

Now, ask me my truth, Lane.

LANE

I'd rather not.

IZABEL

Lane, I went to Naya's sex party.
(Lane glares at Naya.)

LANE

Naya's sex party?

NAYA

I did not think you were going to frame it that way. It's not my party per-say. I'm just hosting temporarily because the lead organizer is out of town.

LANE

So you two are having an affair?

NAYA

No! I would never try to smash Izabel. You know me, Lane.

LANE

Why were you there?

IZABEL

I never cheated on you, Lane. I swear. I enjoy telling people how to have sex. And then I like watching them carry out my direction.

Lane laughs in shock.

LANE

What?

IZABEL

I like to tell people what positions to be in during sex. You know, arrange them. A hand here. A kiss there.

LANE

You are watching people have sex and you've been worried about me hanging out with Naya?

NAYA

And I think now is a good time for me to go!

LANE

Convenient. Naya, how many times has she gone to your sex party?

NAYA

Again, it's not mine.

LANE

How many times?

IZABEL

Once ... since we've been together.
(Naya is impressed.)

LANE

Since we have been together? So this is a thing? Who are you?

IZABEL

I should have told you.

LANE

Who are you? Who was I about to marry?

IZABEL

I couldn't tell you. I wanted to tell you, but I didn't want you to ask me to stop.

LANE

Stop. You should stop.

IZABEL

I'm not going to.

NAYA

Oh!

LANE

What?

IZABEL

I'm not going to stop. I've stopped for two years while we've been together. I miss it.

LANE

Wow. You miss telling people how to have sex?

IZABEL

It makes me feel respected.

LANE

There's a big dose of misogyny. You need to control someone to feel respected. Just like you controlled the wedding plans and my friendships.

IZABEL

I don't control anyone. The couples do what I say because they trust me. I feel respected that they trust me. We don't trust each other, Lane.

LANE

Do you hear yourself? You should sleep at Mia's tonight.

IZABEL concedes and retrieves her suitcase.

You already packed a bag? Were you planning to leave me?

IZABEL

I'm sorry, Lane.

Lane looks to Naya and senses she is the only one shocked by Izabel's preparedness.

LANE

You knew, too, Naya? Well, aren't you the keeper of everyone's secrets.

NAYA

I never wanted to be apart of this.

LANE

Except that you did, Naya. Leave. You can both just leave.

Naya and Izabel both head to the exit.

Leave your key, Izabel.

Izabel pulls out her keys and drops them and walks out. Naya lingers for a moment, looking at Lane who is looking at the keys, and then looks away trying to collect herself. Naya becomes heavy, and pulls herself to exit. Lane is alone. Lights go out.

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Scene 1.2

Lights come up on stage. All of the characters line up with their backs facing the wall. They turn around with their character speaks.

NARRATOR

Previously on eLLe... Lane takes on a new position at work that leaves her strapped for time.

LANE

I haven't had a social life since I've taken this job. I swear if this keeps up, I won't have any friends besides Izabel.

NARRATOR

Izabel goes full force on planning her wedding.

LANE

Izabel, we don't need to worry about what cake will be at our hypothetical wedding.

IZABEL

Hypothetical? Do you plan to marry me some day or not?

NARRATOR

Naya advises Lane to back out of the proposal.

NAYA

You break off your engagement/fake marriage. I'll roll a joint and we can run off.

NARRATOR

But Lane's job encourages the commitment for optics.

LANE

I've gone from fake engaged to fake married. Somehow it's better for my image, or my job's image.

NARRATOR

Carrie quits her career as a counselor and shuts everyone out after her divorce.

CARRIE

No more making myself available for what everyone else is dealing with, what everyone else needs. You know what I need? I need a break.

NARRATOR

Naya applies for a new position, but realizes she might have to quiet her beliefs around relationship anarchy.

DANNIQUA

Anything with anarchy in it will definitely scare business away.

NAYA

I did a social media cleanse after my very successful interview.

NARRATOR

Devon vows to work on her art after a decade-long love affair and music career with Jess Lynn comes to a close.

DEVON

I never thought I'd be a solo artist again, but I'm actually loving getting to use my own voice. It's nice not having to harmonize with anyone else for a change.

NARRATOR

Mia's landlord locks the doors to her business and long-time lesbian coffee shop, Spice, closes for good to the community.

MIA

It's really over. Spice is over. I don't have a cafe. I don't have a career. I don't have a job. I'm done.

Blackout.

Scene 1.3

Lights come up on the stage. The intro music for the podcast plays.



PODCASTER

Good evening Kalamazoo queers and all those in the podcasting universe. I'm your favorite podcast host, the anonymous nonbinary beauty talking to you live from my studio apartment with the latest in West Michigan happenings. Over the weekend, the glitter bomb of lgbtq space was once again been muted. Amid a steady stream of gay and lesbian bar closings, Kalamazoo recently said goodbye to its queer coffee staple, Spice. The shop was a caffeinated haven for lesbian, pan and bi, cis and trans women, transmen and nonbinary beauties like myself for nearly a decade. This past Friday, Spice closed its doors for good and had to cancel its final party at the last minute, leaving many baby dykes and theybies posting crying emojis on their feeds. Meanwhile, I cuddled with my spouse, whom I met at Spice nearly 6 years ago, and we shed a few real tears together about the loss of safe space echoing across the nation. Mia Longfellow, owner of the coffee joint couldn't be reached for comment and has not been seen in public for days. We love you, Mia, for all the great times you gave us. Losing Spice feels like losing a friend. Listeners, where do you go for community when queer-centered space is gone? Send me a message and I'll play it on the next episode.

Characters begin entering the space as they speak.

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IZABEL

I go to Hayley Kiyoko concerts.

NAYA

I host a play party. Although the last one led to a bit of trouble.

IZABEL

I buy rainbow-colored candy and eat it while watching anything in the gay section of Netflix. Alone.

DEVON

I try to perform at every pride and pre-Pride celebration I can find. And then I listen to Chastity Brown all night.

CARRIE

I could go to an OutFront Event. But I'd rather go home. It's easier to avoid conversation that way.

LANE

I guess I watch old episodes of ER with Kerry Weaver.

DEVON

A few times I've taken a trip with friends to Spiral or Rumors. It's a bit of a drive, but -.

NAYA

I drove home to Detroit to go to Innuendo once. Turns out it was closed. I went to Rosie O'Grady's instead, but it wasn't ladies night. Complete fail.

IZABEL

I go to social media and start enticing anyone with a rainbow flag to follow me.

(Looking into her phone's camera.)

Hey, my Bella's.

DEVON

Drum circle, anyone?

NAYA

I go to any anime convention in cosplay as Mari McCray hoping to meet my Hazel Johnson. If that fails, I put on my Sailor Uranus dress.

MIA

I read Ann Bannon.

DEVON

I read Audre Lorde.

CARRIE

Danielle and I used to go to a lesbian couple's book club. The day Danielle moved out of the house, I thought about how long I could go before I would have to tell people I was single again. At 57. Single in my fifties. I didn't plan for that. Why would I plan for that? I mean, that's the whole point, right? When Danny and I got married 30 years ago, I hadn't planned to be alone ever again. The Lesbian book club had seven couples. That's 13 people, plus myself. Can you imagine 13 people breaking up with you at once? What's the new term? The dating app thing that happens after you meet the person?

DEVON

Ghosting.

CARRIE

Right. They made me a ghost. They took me off the facebook invite. It's like they thought I might haunt the space, or maybe heartbreak is contagious and I might sabotage the other couples.

(Beat.)

I thought about still going. I think about it now. How important is the couple part? I mean, do I need Danielle to talk about a book? Reading is reading, right?

(Beat.)

Really, I want to finish a book without crying. It's not just that Danielle is gone. It's that she's not gone and too gone all at the same time. She left all this stuff. All

(MORE)

CARRI (CONT'D)

of this shit. All of these pieces of her. Clothes and pictures, and people can't tell a story about me without Danielle appearing in it, like the last 30 years of my life wouldn't exist without her in the back of every picture, every memory. Danny was always good at making friends and keeping up with everyone: Calling, sending birthday cards and anniversary gifts with both of our names at the bottom as if I had been just as thoughtful. She kept up with people. And now, they keep up with her. We didn't lose people. It was just me. I was going to have to do this alone. And I realized we never should have gotten a bigger dinning room table. And we didn't really need a guest room. And if I had the money from that renovation, maybe I'd go to one of those retreats for silence like Bette Porter did. So at least the silence could be purposeful. It could be a decision I made. Not this prolonged pause. Not how my house hums when it knows I have nothing else. You have to be pretty lonely for your house to hum to CARRIE(CONT'D)you, right?

(Beat.)

The thing about loneliness, is there's no half-assing it. If you are going to be lonely, you may as well be the driver on the way nowhere. So, I quit my job. And I quit the boards on which I served. And those felt like things I could choose. I could choose to have no one rather be in the circumstance of having no one. It's my choice. I'm asking for the divorce this time. I'm the one leaving.

Lights fade to black.

Act II

Scene 2.1

Lights come up on Devon's apartment, set up for a hair care routine and TV watching. A stack of books sits on the kitchen table behind a small sofa. On the floor sits a pillow and mirror surrounded by jars of incense, oils, lotions and hair milk. Devon enters with her hair in a towel, her phone in one hand and cup of tea in the other. Her phone is playing a podcast. Devon begins doing her hair as she listens to the podcast.

PODCASTER

Good evening Kalamazoo queers. This is your favorite nonbinary beauty coming to you with the latest in West Michigan happenings. Wedding bells are a-ringing for several mitten lovers. Congrats are in order for Dannielle and Kim who recently announced their engagement after just 5 months of dating and heavy public petting.

DEVON

Carrie's Danielle? Shit.

PODCASTER

We wish them well. While Dannielle and Kim are ready to walk down the aisle any day now, I'm wondering if I missed the procession of queer community newbie Izabel Vanderlay, known on social media as TheBiBella. If you follow her, you know she doesn't do anything without the camera phone rolling. At a press conference for Kzoo Preparatory Schools Lane Griffin mentioned a wife. Griffin has been featured in several of the live vlogs of TheBiBella, leaving PODCASTER(CONT'D) followers wondering if their queen Izabel would exclude them from such a picture-worthy celebration.

DEVON

Lane is not going to be happy she made the podcast.

PODCASTER

Finally singer Jess Lynn Michaels, formerly of the Floetry-esq duo Scarlett Hood, announced another national tour. I've already bought my Kalamazoo, Detroit and Chicago tickets! You may remember Jess Lynn's very public breakup with Scarlett Hood member Devon Black who has released a few small projects, but mostly is missing from the music scene.

DEVON

Missing? I could have been left out of this.

PODCASTER

We have Jess Lynn Michaels to thank that at least one in the Scarlett Hood coupling has managed to maintain an artistic flow.

Devon clicks the podcast off and slides her phone across the room.

DEVON

Fuck you! I have fucking artistic flow!

(Beat.)

Breathe, Devon. It's ok. Do not let this ruin your self-care night.

(Talking to smart audio system.)

Home Audio, play self-care playlist.

A song by Floetry begins to play.

Skip Floetry.

A song by another neo-soul artist plays.

Devon exits to an offstage. Naya enters in business attire with a bag of groceries. She begins

unpacking the groceries, which include ingredients for a drink, which she subsequently prepares as she yells to Devon in the other room.

NAYA

Hey, Devon and temporary roomie. I bought groceries using my new employee discount. Did you hear that? I NAYA (CONT'D) got the job.

DEVON

(Yelling from other room.)

That's great!

NAYA

So I got celebration materials. You want a shot or a mixed drink?

DEVON

None for me.

NAYA

You did hear me say celebration, right?

DEVON

No liquor in my self-care routine. It's Mocktail Monday.

NAYA

For you.

Naya adds extra liquor to her drink.

DEVON

We can still celebrate without liquor. There are two celebrations on the table. The first copies of my book just arrived!

NAYA

Shut up! Hell yes, we are celebrating. Is this the book on the counter? This cover alone is amazing! I keep finding evidence that you deserve a shot.

(Beat.)

I so appreciate you letting me stay, Devon. I promise my new apartment will be available for move in within a month.

DEVON

It's fine. As long as you don't get messy. Keep the energy clear in here.

Devon enters with a bundle of sage, which she lights and begins walking around her space, letting the smoke of the sage fill the corners.

NAYA

I didn't even do anything yet.

DEVON

This is not about you, Naya. I'm under spiritual warfare.

NAYA

Did that IRS scam call again?

DEVON

I would have preferred that call over what I just heard. Did you know Jess Lynn is going on tour again?

NAYA

So, I take it you heard the latest Queer Kzoo podcast? I meant to warn you not to listen.

DEVON

She's doing a second tour, announcement via the nonbinary beauty. They feel like Jess Lynn is the only one from Scarlett Hood with artistic flow now. As if Jess Lynn isn't touring with the songs I wrote.

NAYA

Great ass songs you wrote, which would have been nothing without your poetic input. She's nearly talentless in my book.

DEVON

I have artistic flow, too. I don't need a national tour to prove it. I finished my book. I have a new album in the works. I'm doing my thing. I mean, the nonbinary beauty clearly does not do their research.

NAYA

Of course not. Thank god their listener reach stops at Portage.

DEVON

How did I become the bad news in the good news?

(Mocking.)

Jess Lynn Michaels saves the world with music; meanwhile, Devon Black does nothing but oil her scalp.

NAYA

An oiled scalp is important. Speaking of which, I need to find my scarf and wrap my hair. I need to make a decent first impression for my first day at work!

Naya exits to find her scarf. She yells from off stage.

You shouldn't compare yourself to her.

Lane enters carrying beverages and cupcakes.

DEVON

It's not me. It's everyone else. I'm sick of being in the shadow of Jess Lynn.

LANE

You listened to that terrible podcast episode, didn't you? You need to change the narrative. That's what my job does every time there's a racism or sexism issue. Just start talking about something else.

DEVON

According to the podcast you're married.

LANE

Married to my job. See, how I changed the narrative? Sage me! How about we spike these mocktails?

Devon begins swirling the sage around Lane. Naya enters and is shocked to see Lane. She pivots to exit.

DEVON

Naya could spike yours.

Lane is uncomfortable when she sees Naya. Naya turns to Lane.

NAYA

Hi, Lane.

LANE

Naya. I didn't know you would be here.

DEVON

That's right. I forgot to tell you. Naya's staying for a few weeks while her next apartment is being vacated. We have a third tonight.

LANE

I don't do thirds. Naya knows that.

DEVON

Lane comes a couple of days a week for games and reruns of The L Word. Jenga? Heads Up? Scrabble, anyone?

LANE

No more games.



DEVON

Fine. Right to The L Word, then. We just started the series over again. You should watch with us, Naya.

LANE

Don't feel obligated.

NAYA

I don't.

DEVON

What's going on between you two?

NAYA

Nothing.

LANE

You knew the entire time.

DEVON

Knew what?

LANE

I would have told you.

NAYA

There are community agreements I can't break.

LANE

I thought as friends we had an agreement.

DEVON

What is happening? What agreement?

LANE

What happened to integrity, Naya? You should reveal information that would cause harm to someone you claim to care for.

NAYA

I do care for you.

LANE

Then what was last night?

DEVON

What was last night?

LANE

She didn't tell you yet, Devon? So I'm not the only one she's been hiding information from. There's not enough sage in this world.

DEVON

Someone fill me in.



NAYA

Lane's mad at me apparently. I'm not the one who lied to my girlfriend. That's what Izabel did, Lane.

DEVON

Izabel lied?

LANE

Izabel has been exploring her sexuality in the company of Naya.

DEVON

Naya, you're fucking Izabel? I said no mess!

NAYA

Everyone knows I don't want to fuck Izabel.

LANE

That didn't stop you from inviting Izabel to you sex party.

DEVON

Really? I should have burned the Pal Santo.

NAYA

I didn't invite her. She didn't know I would be there. Izabel saw me, hid and ran.

LANE

And then you hid those details from me.

NAYA

The playgroup has rules. We don't reveal the guests.

LANE

Friendship has rules.

NAYA

It wasn't my business to tell.

LANE

I should't have been the last in on the secret.

DEVON

I'm the last in on the secret.

NAYA

I was trying to do the right thing.

LANE

You missed the mark, Naya. I think we need to end our friendship.

DEVON

Let's not fight, people. It's Mocktail Monday. Start the week happy and healthy.

NAYA

You're breaking up with me again.

LANE

Again? We were never together. By your standards. Remember, you don't do titles.

Devon grabs a cupcake and stands between Lane and Naya, watching the tennis match of words.

NAYA

We were something until Izabel showed up. What changed?

LANE

She left her husband and committed to me ... It made me feel important. She wanted me and showed it in a way you didn't.

NAYA

I didn't have a cuckolded husband to give up.

LANE

You said you weren't interested in monogamy.

NAYA

I didn't think you were either. You were dating two other people when we met, one of them a married woman. Doesn't sound like pro-monogamy to me.

LANE

And at the end of all of that, Izabel only wanted to be with me. I was enough. That's what she made me believe.

NAYA

And she's only been with you as far as we know.

LANE

You don't think she's having sex with other people?

DEVON

She was at a sex party.

NAYA

She was there for less than five minutes watching other people have sex and telling them how to do it. She's doing the live action equivalent of clicking a category on a porn site.

LANE

Of course you are defending her. You are the maestro of the party.

NAYA

I just filled in for the host.

LANE

You think this all is okay.

NAYA

Except for the fact she didn't clue you in, this is all okay. I don't personally like Izabel, but she isn't some terrible person because she's a voyeur. Everything she did was safe and consensual. We have rules at the party to ensure that. Izabel wanted a safe place to explore who she is. There's nothing wrong with that. We all need a place to be who we are.

LANE

Oh wow! Everyone clap for the progressive sex positivity talk. So well said, Naya. What would we do without your kink wisdom?

NAYA

Is that why you chose her?

LANE

What?

NAYA

Because I was too sexually out there for you?

DEVON

This is turning into a very tension-filled self-care night. Can we just all sit down, watch a few episodes, put on face masks and focus on combating split ends. I want to finish the old series before DEVON(CONT'D)the new L Word Generation Q airs. We can refocus all of this hate onto Jenny Schecter.

LANE

Naya is kind of like Jenny. She has no boundaries. It's hard to take you seriously.

NAYA

No boundaries?

LANE

Well, yes. Your whole relationship anarchy bullshit. You date as many people as you want. Fuck over as many friends as you want. Cause as much havoc around you as you want. You don't have relationship rules.

NAYA

I do have a rule. Honesty.

LANE

One rule you couldn't keep. You aren't committed to anything.

NAYA

Really? Because I stayed committed to being your friend, even when your girlfriend was feeding me side eye for months.

DEVON

How about a game of cards to calm us down? We could play a light three-person game.

LANE

No threesomes.

NAYA

You've been pretending like you're ready to get married.

LANE

So I'm supposed to be like you and date half of Kalamazoo? I'm not in my exploratory 20s anymore. No one's going to have respect for me if I behave like that, Naya.

DEVON

Whoa, Lane.

NAYA

Fuck you, Lane. I had more respect for you before
NAYA(CONT'D)tonight.

LANE

Excuse me?

NAYA

How you see others is how you see yourself, Lane. I'm going to Bell's. Enjoy your L Word marathon, Devon.

Naya exits. Lane looks to the door,
then to Devon.

LANE

I'm right, right? She knew about Izabel and kept that a secret.

DEVON

I get it. I do. But when are you going to be friends again? The hangouts are going to be awkward with you two feuding. Kalamazoo is pretty small. So is my house. Eventually you end up in the same room with every problem you've ignored.

LANE

I barely socialize anymore. I'm sure I'll manage.

DEVON

Well, all I would like to manage are snacks and the remote. My Mocktail Monday is feeling very stressed. My book was released, although it's getting no press, and I just want to celebrate in a queer space. The only queer space I have right now is the LGBTQ section of Netflix and the company of my friends. Are we starting this marathon or not?

LANE

Not. I'm sorry. I'm just not in the mood and I have an early morning.

DEVON

No big deal.

Lane exits. Devon grabs the remote and the drink Naya left.

No one wants to celebrate me but me. That's fine.

Devon flops onto her pillows and raises her glass.

To Devon on completing her book. You are nothing short of amazing, girl.

Devon takes a sip and presses play on the remote. The theme song for The L Word plays as the lights fade.

Scene 2.2

Lights come up on the grocery store. Visible are shelves of food marked by two "Caution: Floor is wet" signs, a checkout counter, and a break room complete with a table and chairs, microwave, and old television on a rolling cart. Carrie is stocking shelves. Danniqua and Naya enter the break room.

DANNIQUA

So this is the break room: Everyone's favorite. Personally, I prefer to eat in my office. I rarely take breaks anyway. But you will for the sake of labor laws, not for the shortage of work. Although it will be a slow start. Mr. Northfield, the marketing director, is on vacation, so you will mostly fill out paperwork and be in orientation these next couple of days. We will be spending a lot of time together, Ms. Henderson.

NAYA

Oh, Naya is fine, Danniqua.

DANNIQUA

Sure. Please call me Danni.

NAYA

Sure, Danni.

DANNIQUA

I will introduce you to everyone in the office in a moment, but first I want you to become familiar with the people on the floor. We are all equals in making the grocery machine work.

(Carrie is annoyed as Danniqua and Naya approach. Danniqua eyes the caution signs and is careful to walk slowly as not to slip.)

Hello! How is your morning?

CARRIE

Better with silence, Danni.

DANNIQUA

You are always so funny. A real Daria.

CARRIE

I don't get that reference.

DANNIQUA

Sorry to walk on your wet floor.

CARRIE

It's not wet.

DANNIQUA

Oh. Then why the signs?

CARRIE

It usually deters people from coming down the aisle while I'm stocking. Usually.

DANNIQUA

Well, I wanted to introduce you two. Naya Henderson, this is one of our most reliable employees, Mrs. Carrie Griffin.

CARRIE

It's not Mrs.

DANNIQUA

My mistake, Ms. Griffin. And this is our newest employee. Naya is our new marketing assistant.

CARRIE

We're acquainted.

DANNIQUA
Really? Small world.

CARRIE
Too small.

NAYA
Good to see you, Carrie.

Carrie forces a smile, trying to hide the information she knows. She continues stocking the shelf.

DANNIQUA
Mrs. Griffin

CARRIE
Ms.

DANNIQUA
What is wrong with me? I just keep messing that up. I'm sorry. Ms. Griffin was recently promoted to floor manager and lead cashier.

CARRIE
Apparently, I'm over qualified to stock shelves.

DANNIQUA
And yet you are still stocking them.

CARRIE
We are understaffed. Peter quit this morning.

DANNIQUA
He didn't put in a two-week notice.

CARRIE
Imagine that.

DANNIQUA
Not to worry. I'm in the process of interviewing several candidates. Maybe you should join me for the interviews.

CARRIE
No thanks.

DANNIQUA
You must be great at reading people.
(To Naya.)

I did a little Google search and found out Mrs. Griffin has a Master's in counseling psychology. She left that off of her resume.

CARRIE
Slipped my mind. Much like yours on my preferred salutation.

DANNIQUA

Bad habit. I'm so sorry. I'm so used to assuming women your age are m-.

NAYA

(To herself.)

Nothing good ever comes after "women your age."

CARRIE

Married? Am I too old to be alone? Well, I'm not married!

DANNIQUA

Of course...

CARRIE

Of course?

DANNIQUA

Look at the time. I have a meeting a couple of minutes. We better wrap this up, Naya. Perhaps since you know Naya, you can introduce her to everyone else at lunch.

CARRIE

I'd prefer not to.

(Danniqua laughs nervously.)

NAYA

It's fine. I'm pretty extroverted. I can introduce myself.

DANNIQUA

Great spirit, Naya. Let's keep moving.

(To Carrie.)

Perhaps you will think about joining for the interviews. Enjoy your day - Ms. Griffin.

CARRIE

I was enjoying it.

(Danniqua laughs.)

DANNIQUA

Again. So funny.

(To Naya.)

This way.

Naya and Danniqua exit. Izabel rolls her cart in. Mia is sitting in the basket snuggling a bottle of wine and a loaf of bread. Izabel sees Carrie and starts to roll the cart in the opposite direction.

CARRIE

I've already seen you, Izabel. No sense in hiding.

(Izabel winces and continues toward Carrie)

IZABEL

Hiding? Why would I be hiding?

CARRIE

You've avoided me every time you've come here this week. Trouble in paradise?

IZABEL

How do you know? I thought you didn't talk to Lane much.

CARRIE

Oh, my sister didn't have to tell me about your little fiasco. I heard a group of lesbians whispering about it the other day.

IZABEL

People are whispering about me? I don't know if I'm offended people are gossiping about me or proud of my popularity.

MIA

You shouldn't want popularity, Izabel.

IZABEL

Says the person everyone knows.

MIA

Yea. As a failed business owner.

IZABEL

That's not what people are saying about you, Mia.

CARRIE

Yes it is. I overhear a lot of conversations.

IZABEL

Carrie!

MIA

It's fine. I'm embracing it. I'm moving out of my denial stage of grief.

IZABEL

Any yet, you are still cuddling the wine bottle.

MIA

I'm not denying myself cheap Rose.

IZABEL

Mia, I thought we agreed on better coping methods.

MIA

This is your third time here this week. Check your own coping habits. I heard you eating chips at 3 am. You cope with salt.

IZABEL

I balance it with my 5am cardio. I'm going to sweat through my sadness. Not slurp it down out of a plastic cup. Carrie, can you tell Mia drinking your pain away is unhealthy behavior!

CARRIE

I'd have to invoice you for advice. And considering you are both unemployed, you can't afford my services.

IZABEL

Mia is your friend. Shouldn't you do this pro bono?

CARRIE

Mia is Lane's friend.

MIA

Lane is no one's friend.

IZABEL

Lane is no one's anything. She's not my anything.

Izabel begins sobbing.

CARRIE

No crying in this aisle. I'm not actually trying to mop.

Mia hands Izabel the bread.

MIA

Sop your tears. It might salt the bread as well.

Izabel cries harder.

This could last a while. Yesterday, she cried for two and half hours nonstop. Could you ring us up, Carrie?

CARRIE

I would love to help you both leave.

Carrie walks over to the checkout counter and rings up the bread and wine.

Would you like to pay with cash or credit?

MIA

Coin.

Mia pulls out rolled quarters and dimes from a sock. Carrie laughs.

It's the exact amount. I pre-planned our purchases.

IZABEL

Don't laugh at us, Carrie. I feel bad enough.

CARRIE

The store is hiring.

IZABEL

They never called me back. Do you think it's because in my resume I said I prefer not to damage my nails by lifting heavy objects? I just wanted to be upfront.

CARRIE

And unemployed.

MIA

I don't interview well. That's why I opened my own shop.

CARRIE

You're going to feel silly when the bills roll in and you realize you spent your last bit of money on carbs and very bad wine.

MIA

I have a rare Beanie Baby I can sell on eBay in an emergency. We'll be fine, Carrie.

CARRIE

Your financial stability rest on a plush toy. I'm not worried at all. Thanks for shopping at Douglas Grocery.

(Beat.)

Mia, have you spoken to my sister at all?

MIA

Lane? No. She hasn't reached out to me. So, I'm team Izabel.

IZABEL

Thanks, Mia.

CARRIE

I'm not into choosing sides. ... If you see my sister -

MIA

I'm not looking forward to seeing her. She wasn't there for my shop closing. She hasn't even sent a text to check on me. If I see Lane, it will be the same as not seeing her at all. Take care of yourself, Carrie.

Izabel rolls Mia out of the store.
Lights dim. Carrie exits.

Scene 2.3

Lights come on Devon. She's holding a notebook and writing occasionally as she listens to the podcast.

PODCASTER

Another day in the life of a queer in Kalamazoo. This is the nonbinary beauty bringing you an update. Tickets are selling out to Jess Lynn Michaels Kalamazoo tour kickoff. The songstress is offering a free show to fans, but space is limited. You know I will be in the front row with my nostalgic Scarlett Hood T-shirt signed by Jess Lynn and Devon Black when they were still hot and heavy for each other. Speaking of signing, I received an anonymous message from a listener with a link to Devon Black's book signing. Seems the former bandmate is lighting a fire in the literary community. A companion song project is supposedly circulating in the artistic universe. I haven't read the book yet, but I'm hoping it's full of jaded love poems giving us clues into the breakup.

Devon clicks off the podcast.

DEVON

That's all you want are break-up poems? When I lose community, I lose myself. A part of you gets taken by the relationship. I lost my identity in Scarlett Hood. I became too much a synonym to Jess Lynn. And now that we're not together, people treat me like her antonym. Always comparing us, associating us. Jess Lynn is touring, but Devon isn't. Devon is single, but Jess Lynn is swimming in vag. Jess Lynn looks happy, and Devon hasn't posted in a while. I'm not Jess and Dev. I'm alone. Happily alone. To be alone is to have space, is to make space for oneself. Is to
DEVON(CONT'D)quiet the world enough to un-silence your truest self. All of those ways I have made myself squeeze into this too small world, into a too small love. My alone isn't an absence of a relationship or a woman or a whatever. It isn't absence. I'm full. Alone is the time I get to unzip and let my fat spill out of my pants shamelessly; let my thighs breath. Alone is to live up all my expectations. That's how I completed this book, after all. Alone is an act of love. Of self care. Of freedom.

Danniqua walks across the stage.
Devon follows her with her eyes.
She closes her book.

(Beat.)

Who the fuck am I kidding? Fuck all of this deep thinking. I'm horny as fuck. Who's writing about that? Who's talking about how being horny as fuck in a town with no gay bar can turn aloneness to lonely? I have a dam in need of breaking.

Devon opens her bag and pulls out a vibrator. She wraps her hand around it and turns it on. The vibrations can be felt and heard through her grip. She closes her eyes and allows the current to flow through her body.

Thank god for the rechargeable vibrator. There's nothing wrong with being single. It's just better when alone is a decision, not a circumstance. When I lose community, I make sure my battery is fully charged.

Scene 2.4

Lights come up the grocery store. Mia is in the grocery cart asleep and dreaming. Lane, Danniqua, Devon and Carrie enter and stand in line in front of the cart. They occasionally look at their phones or watches, obviously irritated. Mia wakes up and believes she is in Spice. She begins serving cups of coffee out of her buggy.

MIA

So sorry to keep you waiting. What can I get for you? One macchiato for Devon. The Wifi password? gaygal69, all lowercase, one word. Can I help who's next?

The customers begin moving up to the buggy, saying nothing to her and simply returning to the end of the line after Mia shoves a coffee cup into their hand. Mia continues talking incessantly about the coffee products.

Have you tried our light roast? It got a great rating on Yelp. Would you like a sample? Password is ladylove2013, all lowercase, one word. Latte's are \$3.69. No, that muffin is not gluten-free. What's the Wifi password? kalamazoolez2014, all lowercase, one word.

Izabel enters with a collar around her neck. She's wearing a Wonder Woman headband and is walking sultrily around the shop. Mia notices her, but doesn't leave the counter. Naya approaches Izabel and attaches a leash to her collar. She begins walking Izabel around the stage.

One Americano for Naya. What can I get for you? The Wifi password? drinkupdamnit, all lowercase, one word. Red Eye for Lane. No, it's not free. Wifi password? pridestop2015, all lowercase, one word. It's not working? I'll restart the router. Small dark roast 70 percent off.

Lane starts to walk towards Izabel, but Naya keeps leading her away by the leash. Mia sees this and is

uncomfortable, but continues with customers.

Would you like a refill? It's two dollars. What do you want me to do? They raised the rent. Wifi is for customers only. Have you tried our farmer's market fresh apples? Yes, they are gluten-free. Are they vegan? It's an apple. What's the Wifi password? 5 lowercase e7 upper case M123 lowercase s. I'll print it on the receipt if you buy something. You have to purchase to access the Wifi. Nofreebies, all lowercase, one word. If you don't want to buy anything, get out!

Everyone begins to exit.

No. No. Wait. Don't leave. I want you to stay. I need you.

Izabel exits last, being leashed out by Naya. She turns to Mia before exiting.

IZABEL

You look good without pants, Mia!

Mia looks down embarrassed. And then, Mia realizes she is alone and in the grocery store. She climbs out of the buggy, touching herself to regain reality. Izabel enters dressed completely different from her dream attire. She is holding an arm full of books and talking into her phone as she is live on social media

Hello, my Bellas. You all look as beautiful as my sunrise picture today. Just because I look good doesn't mean I am feeling good inside. I know many of you have heard about my split from my fiance. And I so appreciate all of you funny memes to cheer me up. You all are so special to me. Send me your tips on how you deal with a breakup. Meanwhile, here's a tip from me.

Izabel pulls out a lipstick and applies it.

When you need to achieve the perfect pout after a breakup, use long-lasting plum red lipstick by VeganLipLove. Use my promocode TheBiBella for 30 percent off! Bye, bye for now, my bellas.

Izabel blows them a kiss and waves goodbye. She stops recording and collapses onto the buggy.

MIA

Your collar is gone.

IZABEL

My collar?

MIA

You just had one on.

IZABEL

Seriously, Mia, you should drink less. You're imagining things.

MIA

Am I? Then why am I at the grocery store without pants?

IZABEL

You are wearing shorts. They're short shorts.

Mia lifts her shirt to reveal shorts. She's relieved.

I never noticed what great legs you have. You should show them off more often.

MIA

I was dreaming I was back at Spice. And Naya was leading you on a leash.

IZABEL

What! I was offered a job as cashier here. Your dream could be an omen. Maybe I shouldn't take it.

MIA

Take it!

IZABEL

Mia, Naya is out to ruin my life. What if it's a trap?

MIA

Eviction is a trap. Our rent is due in two weeks and they aren't going to accept empty wine bottles and breadcrumbs as payment.

IZABEL

Do you think the landlord would take a sexy floor dance as payment?

MIA

Izabel? If he does, I'm moving immediately.

IZABEL

What? I'm just checking our options. I was learning a floor dance to do for Lane on our honeymoon that's never going to happen now. I can monetize my skills.

MIA

No one is going give you discounts for gyrating.

IZABEL

I feel confident I can disprove that last statement. My gyrating is superb, and I do have a job. My influencer account makes \$200 a month, plus lots of free lipstick samples.

MIA

Our rent is \$800. That's \$600 short. Take the job, Izabel.

IZABEL

Fine. But when are you going to start working again? I'm starting to feel like your sugar mama, Mia.

MIA

I just need time to find something. Besides, when I hired you at Spice, that came out of my Salary. I paid you more than I made and you lived with me every time you and Lane broke up.

IZABEL

Lane.

Izabel's lip start quivering.

MIA

Don't cry again. Let's just go home before Carrie get upset about her floor again.

Izabel and Carrie exit. Meanwhile in the break room, Naya is watching an old VHS on customer service, likely shot in the late 90s, on the old box television. A box of belongings including framed pictures and knickknacks sits on the table. She is slouched in the chair next to the table. Carrie enters and heats her food in the microwave. Some time passes before the two speak.

NAYA

You would think they would update these orientation videos at least every ten years.

CARRIE

But then they would have to update the television as well. I kind of like it.

NAYA

How do you like it here?

CARRIE

It's a place to be. How are you liking things?

NAYA

It's every graduate's dream. I have a Master's and I'm still an assistant. Yay.

CARRIE

Woe is you. You actually have a benefits package. Enjoy the health insurance.

NAYA

Says the woman who voluntarily left her career as a counselor to work part time at an hourly wage. Let me have my grief.

(Beat.)

Why did you quit counseling?

CARRIE

I was sick of talking to people. I'll eat in my car.

Carrie collects her lunch and exits. Devon enters the break room from the store.

DEVON

Hey, Naya.

Hey. Shawntai Brown

DEVON

You didn't happen to send a link to my book to the nonbinary beauty, did you?

NAYA

I can't recall.

DEVON

You are amazing, friend. Are we still on for lunch?

NAYA

Yea. I just have to finish this very poorly acted portrayal of the sexual harassment policies a la 1996. It needs a Time's Up revision.

DEVON

I'm sure. I'm going to grab a few things while you're finishing up.

NAYA

Great.

Devon is seen shopping and disappearing behind the shelf with a handheld basket. Danniqua enters the break room.

DANNIQUA

How is on-boarding for my newest employee?

NAYA

Informative. Rivating.

DANNIQUA

I know they are a bit outdated, but it is still mandatory per our handbook.

NAYA

It's fine. The nostalgia of the VHS makes it somewhat entertaining, Danniqua.

DANNIQUA

I told you, I prefer Danni while here. You are probably one of the few people here who wouldn't mispronounce my name left and right. My parents must have wanted me to be resilient when they named me. A simple name like Kristina just would not do.

NAYA

I like the name Danniqua. Let me guess, your dad's name is Dan.

DANNIQUA

And my mom's name is Monique. All of their narcissism packed right into me. Mostly my mother's. She picked the name.

Danniqua notices Naya's box of belongings.

DANNIQUA (CONT'D)

What's this?

NAYA

A few personal items for my desk to keep me grounded.

Danniqua thumbs through Naya's box. Naya's eyes are marked by feelings of intrusiveness, but she holds her tongue.

DANNIQUA

I see you are ready to move in. Are you u-hauling with the company already?

NAYA

Um.

DANNIQUA

That was a joke. You know, because you are a les-... Nevermind. I'm pleased you are making yourself at home right away. It's good to seem comfortable. Shows confidence.

Danniqua fishes through the box and pulls out a framed photo.

Who is this you are all smiley with? Life partner? We offer benefits to all spouses and domestic partners.

NAYA

That's great. But, I don't have life partners.

DANNIQUA

Right. Your relationship anarchy thing. Good job scrubbing your social media clean, by the way.

NAYA

The person in the picture is a friend. Lane, but we aren't really friends anymore. I don't even know why I packed that.

DANNIQUA

Friends come and go.

NAYA

Not for me. I tend to keep people close.

DANNIQUA

Lucky you. I don't have time for many friendships anyway? I work, go home to my daughter and -

NAYA

You have a daughter.

DANNIQUA

Yes. Angela. She is 7. She finally goes to school for full days, which means I have time to work.

NAYA

And the baby daddy?

DANNIQUA

Her father, you mean? We are not together. Jordan lives in Arkansas. He has her for the summers and holidays.

(Beat.)

Anyway, if you are taking your lunch soon, consider doing it in my office and I can go over Mr. Northfield's notes with you about the next marketing campaign.

NAYA

Oh. I was planning to go to Crow's Nest for lunch. Actually, I was going to meet up with a friend.

DANNIQUA

Sure. I am sorry. I did not mean to intrude. Have DANNIQUA(CONT'D)lunch with your friend. I will probably just grab something from the deli. We can meet when you get back.

Devon is holding groceries and sticks her head in the door.

DEVON

Ready, Naya?

DANNIQUA

Devon? Devon Black!

DEVON

Niqua?

NAYA

Niqua?

DANNIQUA

You are the only person I still let call me Niqua. Oh my God, Devon, it is you.

DEVON

I haven't seen you in years.

Danniqua gets up and rushes to the middle of the room. She hesitates, but Devon walks forward and embraces her.

DEVON (CONT'D)

You look great.

DANNIQUA

Stop!

DEVON

You do.

NAYA

I'm sorry. You two know each other?

DEVON

Womyn's Fest.

DANNIQUA

2006.

DEVON

I was performing with Scarlett Hood.

DANNIQUA

And I was a grad student on vacation with one of my Omega Chi sister, Regan. She was recently divorced and heard from her spiritual guru that fest was a place to heal. I was skeptical, but she dragged me along with her.

DEVON

We met in the Womyn of Color tent.

DANNIQUA

Regan complained that she wasn't allowed in the tent.

DEVON

White fragility?

DANNIQUA

Definitely. But I left Regan and went into the tent anyway.

DEVON

And we danced all night.

NAYA

Danced?

DEVON

Mmmhmm. Niqua has moves.

DANNIQUA

Barely.

DEVON

I was trying my hardest to keep up.

DANNIQUA

Please. I took modern jazz for five years, and you were far more impressive.

DEVON

This is a surprise. You are the person who hired Naya. Danni is Niqua Thomas. I thought you would be married by now. Weren't you engaged?

DANNIQUA

Yes. To Jordan. But I broke up with him right after I returned from Fest.

DEVON

I'm sorry to hear that.

DANNIQUA

I'm not. Jordan was too stiff for me, and never in the right places.

Danniqua smiles shyly, barely believing she just told the joke.

DEVON

Bye bye, Jordan. You should come to lunch with us.

NAYA

Um.

DANNIQUA

I don't want to intrude. I know you are planning to do your friend thing.

NAYA

Exactly.

DEVON

Oh, we can do that anytime. Naya and I live together.

DANNIQUA

Oh, so you two are?

NAYA

No.

DEVON

There is a shortage of black women to date in Kalamazoo, but I would not date Naya.

NAYA

Wow. I'm awesome.

DEVON

Mmmhmm. For someone who isn't me.

DANNIQUA

Not all the black women are taken.

DEVON

Come with us, Niqua. You can tell me how you went from drum circles to power suits.

(Naya is pained by this.)

DANNIQUA

I would rather hear what you have been up to. Did you ever finish your book?

DEVON

You remembered that?

DANNIQUA

You talked about it so passionately, how could I forget? Plus your lyrics. I bought your Scarlett Hood album.

DEVON

For Jess Lynn's voice.

DANNIQUA

For your poetry. Your words were beautiful. I still have the CD.

DEVON

I did finish my book.

NAYA

And she's working on a companion album for it.

DEVON

Just some instrumental work and spoken word.

DANNIQUA

That is so exciting! You have to tell me more, Devon.

DEVON

Maybe I can tell you about it over lunch.

DANNIQUA

Ok. So I guess we are all going to lunch then. If that's ok with you, Naya.

DEVON

Oh, no. She good. You're coming to lunch. I insist.

DANNIQUA

Well, I do like women who insist.
(Naya is full of sarcasm.)

NAYA

Great. This is so great.

Shawntai Brown
Scene 2.5

Lights come up on the grocery store
Izabel is standing behind the
checkout counter and scanning the
same pack of gum over and over.
Danniqua enters with a few items in
her basket. Izabel doesn't notice.

DANNIQUA

Is your lane open, Izabel?

IZABEL

No. She's definitely not open to being open.

DANNIQUA

What was that?

Izabel is startled back to
consciousness.

IZABEL

I'm sorry. Ms. Thomas!

DANNIQUA

Please, call me Danni. You look a little spiritless. Job not as exciting as you'd hoped?

IZABEL

I'm just waiting on my trainer to arrive. Thank you for hiring me. I am so grateful for the position.

DANNIQUA

Welcome aboard. Get it? Board, because you look a little bored. I can't resist a corny joke sometimes.

Izabel realizes she had better laugh at the joke.

IZABEL

Good one. I'm not bored. Not at all. I'm very excited to start training. I'm just bagging today. The cashier isn't here yet, so my lane isn't open. My Lane.

Izabel starts crying. Danniqua looks around uneasy and unsure of what to do.

DANNIQUA

Um. Are you ok?

IZABEL

I'm sorry. I'm just having some personal issues. It's just this word play has me emotional. Welcome aboard and bored. My lane and my Lane. I'm just a mess.

Danniqua scans a travel tissue pack and then hands Izabel a tissue.

IZABEL(CONT'D)

Thank you.

Izabel blows her nose and starts laughing. Her laugh turns hysterical.

DANNIQUA

Are you ok?

IZABEL

Yes. I'm sorry. I just realized this is my Jenny moment. I have Jenny Schecter moments. Jenny marries a man. I was married to a man. Jenny has a romance with a woman that upends her marriage. I did that, too.

DANNIQUA

Oh.

IZABEL

Now I work at a grocery store. Jenny starts working for a grocery store in season one.

Season one of what?

DANNIQUA

Naya approaches with packaged breakfast items.

IZABEL

The L Word.

DANNIQUA

Oh, that Jenny! I only watched the last two seasons.

NAYA

The last two? Wow. I'm sorry. You missed everything good.

IZABEL

You're here?

NAYA

I work here.

IZABEL

But I work here.

DANNIQUA

Naya, so nice of you to join us. As you can see, that good word you put in was taken seriously. Izabel is our newest cashier. Well, soon to be. She's bagging today. Thank you for recommending her.

IZABEL

You recommended me, Naya?

NAYA

I said you'd be an ok choice.

DANNIQUA

When I called to offer Naya her new position as marketing assistant, she said she had a friend who knew her way around a register.

IZABEL

Friend.

NAYA

Acquaintance. I think I said acquaintance.

DANNIQUA

She said you were popular with customers at your previous job, Spice. I hope you bring that same enthusiasm here.

IZABEL

I plan to.

NAYA

Wait, so you watched The L Word. Are you ...

DANNIQUA

Am I what?

IZABEL

You know ...

DANNIQUA

A huge fan of Jennifer Beals? Yes! Flashdance is my favorite movie.

IZABEL

I love romance movies.

Izabel begins crying again, and scans another pack of tissues to blow into.

DANNIQUA

Mostly, I love movies about assertive, independent women such as myself.

NAYA

And do you love assertive, independent women?

DANNIQUA

Of course. That's why I hired you, Naya. Well, I have morning duties. See you in the office for our 9am check-in to go over your paperwork, Naya. And enjoy your first shift, Izabel.

IZABEL

(Sniffling.)

Thank you, again.

Danniqua exits. Naya watches as she leaves. She nudges Izabel.

NAY

Gay or not gay?

IZABEL

What?

NAYA

Come on! You know this game. We all play it. Is Danniqua gay or not gay?

IZABEL

Can't play. Must hide.

Carrie runs in throwing on her apron as she approaches the counter. Izabel puts a bag over her head and ducks behind the counter to hide.

NAYA

Carrie. Good morning, coworker.

CARRIE

Is it? I'm supposed to be training someone new on this register, but seems they didn't show.

Carrie goes to sign in on the register when Izabel pops up.

IZABEL

It's me, Carrie. You're training me on this register.

CARRIE

Shit! What are you doing here?

IZABEL

Retail experience.

NAYA

Ahem.

IZABEL

And an amazing reference.

NAYA

Thank you.

CARRIE

You made this happen?

NAYA

I helped it along.

CARRIE

Is this part of a master plan to get Lane? I always liked you better for her.

IZABEL

I exist and I can hear you.

NAYA

This isn't about Lane. I'm over Lane.

CARRIE

Too bad. You may have a shot.

Naya looks hopeful.

(MORE)



CARRI (CONT'D)

Seems she and Lane are on the outs. I heard there was an infidelity.

Izabel looks confused.

NAYA

Heard. Meaning Lane still isn't talking to you? Even her sister lives on rumors?

Izabel smiles at Naya defending her. Carrie is tight-lipped and walks away.

CARRIE

I think I need to check on inventory.

NAYA

Don't worry about her training you. Just Youtube it, girl.

IZABEL

Why did you help me? You're being nice. I've never been nice to you.

NAYA

True. But as of late, you have been honest with me. I heard you're only honest with people you trust and respect. Listen, I'm happy you have a job now. I don't hate you. Let's leave it at that.

IZABEL

Sure. Yea. Thank you for the recommendation.

Naya nods. She scans her own items.

NAYA

Press the button with my name so I can add it to my store account, please.

Izabel presses the button.

IZABEL

Oh, that's how you do that.

Naya smiles, takes her items and walks away. Izabel picks up a Soap Digest magazine and begins reading it.

This is my life.

Mia enters.

MIA

How's the new job, Izabel?

IZABEL

I will need more chips for tonight.

Mia nods and begins shopping.

CARRIE

(Voice heard dryly over intercom.)

Attention Douglas Grocery Plus shoppers. Jam and Jelly are on sale, buy two get one for free. And, in honor of pride month, Funfetti cake mix is 50 percent off. Thank you for shopping with us.

Carrie enters with a mop bucket and two folding caution signs. She sets the signs at the perimeter of the aisle. She takes out papers filled with inventory numbers and then folds the paper around a book and begins reading to herself. Mia notices and admires Carrie's fortress of peace. Mia talks to Carrie from a distance.

MIA

Can I enter?

CARRIE

With caution.

MIA

How do you do it?

CARRIE

Do what?

MIA

Move on?

CARRIE

Well, you just pick the middle-priced brand and keep it rolling.

MIA

I mean, leaving your job. Losing your marriage. How did you just decide to move on?

CARRIE

Decide? I didn't. Danielle moved on. My clients still had all of their problems. I guess I decided I would like to sit still for a moment.

Carrie goes back to reading her book.

MIA

Are you ok, Carrie?

Carrie looks up shocked.

CARRIE

You're really asking... I'm fine... I'm managing. I'm angry. It's quiet at home.

MIA

Too quiet. Izabel's not in the apartment today. It feels small there. Or too big. I'm not sure which one.

CARRIE

My house talks to me.

MIA

About what?

CARRIE

I don't know. It just makes a lot more noise than it used to. So, I try not to be there.

(Beat.)

I hope you're not here for advice. I'm retired, remember. Now I only answer questions about where you can find something in this store.

MIA

Where can I find discounted happiness?

CARRIE

Aisle 5. Ginseng's 30 percent off. I read something about it boosting endorphin release.

MIA

We could be friends, Carrie. I know I was closer with Lane the past few years, but we don't need your sister to hang out.

CARRIE

You don't have time to hang out with me.

MIA

I have no job. My schedule is extremely flexible... And I like you, Carrie.

CARRIE

How do you feel about bisexual vampires and family fueds.

MIA

Intrigued?

CARRIE

Want to crash a party with me?

MIA

Sure.

Carrie tosses Mia the book. Mia catches it.

MIA(CONT'D)

Fledgling by Octavia Butler. This was on this lesbian reading list I never made my way through.

CARRIE

Book club meets tomorrow at 8. I'm not invited. We're going anyway, and we are going to be late just to spite them.

MIA

Sounds like a plan. Pick you up at 8.

Mia smiles and leaves a little more energetic. Carrie, far more satisfied now, begins mopping the floor with a little pep. She hums to herself. Lights fade to black.

ACT III

Scene 3.1

Lights come up on the grocery store. Carrie is at the register with Izabel. They are both reading and snacking on chips. Carrie is reading Ruby Fruit Jungle. Izabel is reading a tabloid.

IZABEL

I know you and Mia went out without me. You could have invited me.

CARRIE

It wan't your kind of party. Also, we weren't invited. You should have heard the fall of books when we walked in the room together.

Lane enters. Izabel ducks behind the counter.

CARRIE(CONT'D)

Hiding again?

IZABEL

I'm not ready for this. I haven't seen Lane since the night we broke up.

CARRIE

At least you've seen my sister.

Lane grabs one item off the shelf and approaches the counter.

LANE

Carrie! What a surprise.

CARRIE

It shouldn't be. I work here.

LANE

No you don't. How could you - Are you pressed for money with Danielle gone? Do you really need a second job?

CARRIE

I quit counseling. That will be \$5.27. And no you can't use my employee discount.

LANE

Why wouldn't you tell me? You could have called me.

CARRIE

I did call you, Lane. I've called you several times. You never got back to me.

LANE

Text me. You could have texted me. Then at least I would know it's urgent.

CARRIE

I don't want your urgent care, Lane. I've been a big sister to you all these years. All of these years. And the one time you know I need you to look after me, you're too busy to return a call. I mean I'm divorced. Do you know what that means? Of course not. You couldn't even manage to get married.

LANE

Great! Very mature, Carrie.

Izabel begins audibly crying.

LANE (CONT'D)

What's that noise?

CARRIE

Your mistakes. Can you get her a bag, Izabel?

Izabel rises from behind the counter.

IZABEL

Paper or plastic?

LANE

What the hell? You work here, too? With Naya? I'm in the Twilight Zone. You and Naya can't stand to be away from each other.

CARRIE

And once again the conversation is on Lane's problems.

Carrie stuffs Lane's items into a bag and hands them to her.

Thank you for shopping at Douglas Grocery. This lane is now closed.

Carrie leaves the register. She calls Izabel after her. They both exit. Lane exits angrily. Meanwhile, Devon and Naya are in the break room both eating carryout.

NAYA

Thank you for bringing me lunch, friend.

DEVON

It's a nice break from the studio.

NAYA

How's the music project coming.

DEVON

It's fine. I just feel a little backed up creatively.

NAYA

You need to get laid.

DEVON

I need to get laid.

NAYA

You create better music when you are on a healthy sex diet.

DEVON

It's true.

NAYA

So then your date with Carly didn't pan out?

DEVON

Carly stood me up! Again. I told her my address to pick me up, and she said she didn't drive through neighborhoods on the north side.

NAYA

Fuck Carly.

DEVON

Fuck the whole app-based dating. I just want to date someone I meet in the real world. I miss dating before the internet.

NAYA

Do you even remember dating before the internet?

DEVON

No! I got a Black Planet page as soon as I turned twelve. Where is the gay Black Planet?

NAYA

Atlanta.

DEVON

I should move. I think I need a change. And there are a lot of black women in Atlanta.

(Beat.)

Would you rather date a white woman or a black woman?

NAYA

I would rather date a human.

DEVON

So you, Naya Henderson, are color blind? The woman who will shout about racial injustice at the top of her lungs is color blind.

NAYA

No. I'm tetra-chromatic. I try to see every color. I see so much beauty that distinguishes us all, why would I deny myself any of it. I just don't date racists.

DEVON

It's deeper than that. Be real. Black or White?

NAYA

No.

DEVON

Come on!

NAYA

It's stupid.

DEVON

I'll give you my last spring roll.

NAYA

Fuck! I love spring rolls. Fine, if I have lots of options and I'm choosing, I choose Black.

Naya Reaches for the spring roll.
Devon pulls it out of reach.

DEVON

Why choose that adventure?

NAYA

Because it's an adventure I'm better prepared for. I know what it's like to grow up as a black woman. I know what the world thinks about me, how the world treats me, how it feels to be black in a classroom or at a board meeting.

(Naya snatches the spring roll.)

Somehow being with black woman makes me feel less black and more human. I mean, I 'm still black, it just -

DEVON

Isn't amplified. I keep going back to this line I read: "I feel the most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white backdrop."

NAYA

Or against the body of a lily white woman.

DEVON

I would have dated Zora Neal Hurston in a heartbeat. She gets me like no lover ever has. I've never dated another black woman.

NAYA

That can't be true.

DEVON

It is true. I grew up in a town without many black people. Definitely no black queer women. I think I need to love someone like me; someone who the world has treated like me. I just need that experience, right?

NAYA

Agreed.

Danniqua enters.

Actually, I disagree.

DANNIQUA

Devon, you're back!

(Devon smiles. Danniqua smiles back and turns to Naya.)

Naya, we have a meeting in 30. And policy prevents non-employees from congregating in the break room.

NAYA

I must have missed that on the orientation video.

DEVON

I can leave.

DANNIQUA

No. Stay. Just a note in case someone else notices. You're always welcome here, Devon. It's good to see you again.

DEVON

You, too, Niqua.

Danniqua smiles and exits.

I should ask her out, shouldn't I?

NAYA

Please do not date my boss.

DEVON

She's so cute.

NAYA

She's not fun. She's a rule follower.

DEVON

She was fun when I met her. And she's black. And she has really nice shoulders.

NAYA

Gross.

DEVON

How the fuck and I supposed to have my San Junipero romance if I can't even find the right woman?

NAYA

Can your Black Mirror romance not star my superior, please?

DEVON

Oh no. I'm casting her.

NAYA

You know she has a kid, right? Are ready for mommy duties.

DEVON

I'm ready for a date. I'm pretty sure adoption papers are next level vetting that happens after we have dinner a few times.

NAYA

You are going to make this awkward for me, aren't you.

DEVON

Absolutely.

Scene 3.2

Lights come up on the stage. The podcast is heard.

PODCASTER

Once again, you are tuning in to your favorite nonbinary beauty. I am the host of Queer Kalamazoo the podcast. I have sad new, beauties. This the final episode of the season, and perhaps of all time. That's right, gaylords, my reign may be coming to a close. I applied to be on The Cooler, and guess who received a callback today? Yours truly. If all goes well, I will be packing up and flying to the Bay area. That also means, I won't have my ear to these Kzoo streets. Honestly, with Spice closed, it's far harder to collect content. My best stories came from overhearing conversations in the coffee shop. But, fear not my queer cuties. I have more listener messages. My mailbox has been overwhelmed. So, don't tune out yet.

IZABEL

When I lost my community... Actually, I never had one. I didn't have the college coming out experience. I went abroad after high school, and I met Paul, and we got married. I loved him. He said I didn't have to work, and honestly, I didn't want to. I preferred having my days to craft and travel. Judge me if you want, but most of you don't want to work either. But, without working it was hard to meet people. All of the friends I had made lived across the ocean. I did like social media. It was a way to connect. I started a YouTube channel about shopping. What else? There was a couple, two women who followed me, and really liked me. Tammy and Rita who both lived in Kalamazoo. One day, they invited me for dessert to talk fashion. Who says no to pie and beautiful women? I thought maybe I could finally make friends. They kept inviting me, and on the third visit, Tammy and Rita answered the door in lingerie. I couldn't stop smiling. I had had crushes, lots of them, but here IZABEL(CONT'D)was a woman, two women inviting me into their bedroom. I was too afraid to do anything. Too worried about Paul and what this would all mean. So, they asked me if I just wanted to watch. I did. I watched, just enjoying how their bodies curved into each other like wind on silk. I couldn't stop watching. And then I had suggestions. Notes, if you will, on what they should wear or how they should kiss. Or bite. Or bend. And they took my suggestions. I can't explain what that's like to have people as invested in your vision as you are. It more than awakened me; it made everything else seem muted. We saw each other for 3 months; me watching and suggesting; them enjoying the audience and direction. Then, Tammy and Rita broke up with each other, which meant they broke up with me. I remember blaming Paul, but it wasn't his fault. He had nothing to do with it. I couldn't see him the same anymore, though. He just came off flat. When I met Lane, I thought, I had solved it. I was finally with a woman. That's what that desire had been about, right? Then why is something's still missing?

Izabel exits and Danniqua enters.

DANNIQUA

When I lost my community, I found another one. I wanted to pledge Divine Nine; a historically black sorority. Live out my A Different World college dreams. My mom wanted me to be an AKA. I hadn't made up my mind. I started dating this guy freshman year, Patrick. We met in the cafeteria. He was best friends with a few Kappas, so I knew the route he was planning to go. We had been talking for about a year. Texting, meeting between classes, going to icebreakers and homecoming together. Having sleepovers. Patrick and Niqua. Everyone thought we were so cute. They called us PatNiqua. Anyway, one night, we were hanging out at my dorm. We were drinking and I was feeling a little loose, but not too gone. He dared me to kiss my suite-mate, Amanda. She was cute. Brown skin with glasses and one of those Tia and Tamera moles. I had thought about kissing her before, but I didn't think she would be into it. Randomly kissing girls wasn't popular in the black community. But, when Patrick suggested it, Amanda wasn't opposed. It was just us. What could it hurt? So I kissed her. I kissed her a second time, and that was it. I could not go any further. I really liked it, but I was embarrassed by Patrick being there and I didn't want him to think less of me. We DANNIQUA(CONT'D)all laughed, and Amanda went to bed. Patrick and I went to Wendy's. Everything seemed fine. But the next day Patrick told his Kappa friends that he, Amanda and I had a threesome. It spread like wild fire. That was the end of my chances at black sororities, at having close female friends, at dating. Guys always assumed I was there to fulfill a fantasy. Straight women didn't trust me around their men. I tried to date one of the few out black lesbians on campus, but she called me HoeNiqua: the flip flopper. I cried. My nickname evolved from PatNiqua to HoeNiqua. I stopped going out or eating with the black students in the cafeteria. I just focused on class and kept my head down. Then a girl in my business class said she was rushing Omega Chi. She thought I should join. The sorority had been accused of racism, so they had a new focus on diversity. They didn't want bad press and were nice to me no matter what. Omega Chi was a white, blank canvas for me. All they knew was I was Danni, a smart black girl from East Michigan with a killer GPA and lots of volunteer experience. No cared about the threesome rumors. No one even cared who Patrick was. I heard he dropped line anyway. Never even became a Kappa. Danni won, I thought. And then, I met Devon. And she reminded me of that woman I lost. Of Niqua.

Scene 3.3

Lights come up on Devon's apartment. Lane and Devon are lounging on the sofa. Devon is typing on her laptop and dressed for a date. Lane is snacking and

flipping through a file folder of papers, still working. Devon clicks on her computer and then throws up her arms in celebration. She lifts her computer and begins walking around the room reading an email.

DEVON

"Dear Devon Black, We recently received a copy of your poetic sound project and book, Devon and The Black Hood. We would love to feature you at our Black Women Rock fundraising event next month. Please find the attached contract and invoicing instructions!" I officially have been booked for my first solo show since Scarlett Hood! And I'm going to be paid!

LANE

Congratulations, Devon. How are we going to celebrate?

Devon pulls a bowl out of her pocket and lights it.

DEVON

With peace and a little more of The L Word.

Shawntai Brown
Devon offers it to Lane. Lane waves it away. Devon finds her remote and clicks on the show.

LANE

You are obsessed with the show.

DEVON

I can't resist the lesbian vignettes at the beginning. They warm my heart.

LANE

What episode are we on?

DEVON

Season 3, episode 10.

LANE

Skip. That's the Dana episode.

DEVON

Gladly. I am not watching her die again. Not without grief support.

LANE

Where's Naya?

DEVON

Hiding from you. She decided to stay in the guest room rather than play nice.

LANE

That's probably best.

DEVON

You both annoy me right now.

LANE

She's the one who - nevermind. Weren't you supposed to have your date?

DEVON

She cancelled. Doesn't she know how much time I put in on my hair for her? We could go out. Let's hit up Harvey's.

LANE

Report due at 7am. I can't multi-task while being out. Get on your dating app thing and find someone else.

DEVON

The apps can feel like ordering off a menu and then hoping the meal taste as good as it looks. I was better at this in person. There's something about meeting someone off chance and clicking with them. You know what I mean. How did you and Izabel meet?

LANE

We met at Spice. She asked to share a table with me so she could plug in her phone. My table had an outlet. Once she sat down and plugged in her phone, she started talking. At first, I was annoyed. I couldn't get any work done. Then, I didn't want her to stop talking.

(Beat.)

You know, I'm far more productive alone. And you have been, too. What happened to being solo, Devon and the Black Hood?

DEVON

I am a solo artist. Not a solo person. I can't believe I'm saying this, but I miss Metro. I miss our gay bar.

LANE

You always said you hated the music and the drinks.

DEVON

And parking lot, the bathroom, the location of the pool table. I did. I hated all of that. But I didn't know how good I had it. And then when The Mix closed. Ugh. And now Spice. I just want to be able to go make out with a woman in public on a Friday night without it being a spectacle.

LANE

I'm sure Izabel can get you an invite to a queer space. She could even choreograph a hook up for you.

DEVON

Naya already tried to invite me to the play parties.

LANE

Of course she did.

Devon snatches Lane's folder of files away.

Maybe you should hook me up, Lane.

Lane snatches the folder back and goes back into reading and writing notes.

LANE (CONT'D)

With who? No one is even talking to me. Did you know Carrie was mad at me?

DEVON

Yup. Mia's not talking to you either since you haven't been around.

LANE

I haven't been around because Mia's always mad about something. They both are. And did you know Carrie is working at the grocery store?

DEVON

Yes. Why are you just finding out your sister works there? I thought you two were close?

LANE

We are. We were. You know, Carrie is the secretive one. She just expects me to guess what's going on with her. I've been busy with work.

DEVON

You make time for the people you care about.

LANE

You can't make time. It's finite. There are 24 hour in a day; 1,440 minutes. That's it. I work, and there's the endless avalanche of emails, and fundraising events, and 7am reports, banking, grocery shopping and sleep at least some nights. I don't have time to hang out.

DEVON

Lies. We've been watching the L Word together for months. You've had time to hang out with me.

LANE

Well, you aren't sad all the time.

(Beat.)

That sounded bad. That's not what I meant.

DEVON

Maybe that is what you meant.

LANE

Do you ever feel like nearly everyone around you is a slightly depressed alcoholic?

DEVON

Well, I'm in the writing community. So, yes.

LANE

Mia has been sad for years, and then Carrie became so negative after her divorce.

DEVON

Can you blame her? Can you blame either one of them? Mia lost her business. And Carrie's wife left her and is already engaged to some new woman.

LANE

It's not that it's not understandable. It's that I have so little time after work. I just want to spend my free time being happy. Does that make me terrible?

DEVON

Probably... Not entirely. But it will make you lonely.

LANE

I'm fine.

DEVON

Alone?

LANE

Not alone. Just not partnered. I want to be free.

Naya enters holding the Ruby Fruit Jungle book.

NAYA

Free. Imagine that. Sounds like anarchy.

Lane turns to Naya and is uncomfortable.

Oh, don't mind me. I'm just grabbing something to drink and then going back to my hole.

Devon takes another hit from the bowl and dances as she speaks.

DEVON

Guess who got her first solo gig, Naya! Black Women Rock!

NAYA

You rock!

DEVON

I'm celebrating very low key. Lane won't smoke with me.

NAYA

I thought I smelled joy in the air. I want to. I haven't smoked in months so I could get this new job.

DEVON

And you have the new job.

NAYA.

I do. You are so right. Let's celebrate.

Devon passes the bowl to Naya. Naya takes a giant inhale. A knock is heard. Devon answers the door. Danniqua enters.

DEVON

Niqua?!

NAYA

Shit!

Naya begins to run with the bowl in her hand.

DANNIQUA

Hi, Naya.

Naya stops and turns to Danniqua.

NAYA

This is my first time smoking ever.

DANNIQUA

It's fine. We are not at work. I'm not your supervisor here.

NAYA

Well in that case.

Naya takes another hit.

DEVON

I thought you were tied up tonight.

DANNIQUA

I was. I had my daughter. I'm so sorry I had to DANNIQUA(CONT'D)cancel earlier, Devon. I couldn't get a sitter. Everyone says they want to babysit when you first get pregnant, but that's not what they actually mean. But, my neighbor called me about 30 minutes ago and let me know she could watch Angela. I can see you made other plans. I'm obviously interrupting.

Devon smiles dopily.

DEVON

No. Niqua, this is our friend, Lane.

NAYA

Devon's friend, Lane. She's not speaking to me right now.

LANE

Nice to meet you.

Lane rises to grab water, but more as an excuse to give Devon and Danniqua time alone. She avoids eye contact with Naya. Danniqua and Devon are alone near the door together.

Shawntai Brown

DANNIQUA

Devon, I would really like to take you out if you are still up for it. I even vacuumed the stale Cheerios out of my car to make a good impression.

DEVON

I've been impressed since I met you.

Danniqua and Devon stare into each other deeply. Naya and Lane watch from afar, both of them leaning in to watch what will happen.

DANNIQUA

Do you need more time to get ready?

DEVON

Do I look ok? Are my eyes red?

DANNIQUA

You look great.

DEVON

How long do you have your sitter for?

DANNIQUA

Just three hours.

DEVON

Well, let's make the most of it.

Devon grabs Danniqua by the hand. Danniqua takes this as a chance and kisses Devon. Naya and Lane look on, grinning and slapping at each other excitedly. Danniqua pulls away slightly and smiles. Devon leads Danniqua to the door.

Catch you later, Lane and Naya.

DANNIQUA

Nice to meet you, Lane. See you at the office, Naya.

Devon and Danniqua exit. Lane's guard is down. She looks at Naya who is looking at the door still.

NAYA

Please let this date go well so I can keep my job.

Naya picks up her book and exits back to her room. Lane sits back on the sofa and starts back at her report. After a moment, she looks toward's the guest room where Naya is. She contemplates for a moment and then picks up her phone and dials a number.

LANE

Hey. I didn't think you would answer.

Naya re-enters with her phone pressed to her ear.

NAYA

I only got up because realized there was still weed in here. Why are you calling me? What do you want, Lane?

Lane and Naya hang up and begin speaking directly to one another. Naya lights and inhales and then offers it to Lane. Lane accepts.

LANE

Are you just hiding in the guest room whenever I come over?

NAYA

Not hiding. Giving you space. You told me you didn't want to be friends?

LANE

Will you sit, please?

Naya sits down, careful not to get too close to Lane.

Did you want Izabel and I to break up?

NAYA

I've wondered where things would have gone. It felt like Izabel was the reason we never got a chance. But, I actually realize we just aren't in the same place, Lane. I don't believe in monogamy or have shame around the ways I like to fuck, and I don't want it.

LANE

I made you feel ashamed?

NAYA

You couldn't if you tried. But I felt like you were trying. Which I don't get. I thought my free spirit was what you liked about me to begin with.

LANE

I love that about you. It's like the rules don't apply to you.

NAYA

The rules?

LANE

The life rules. The society rules. I miss you, Naya. I've missed you for a long time. I just didn't want to cheat on Izabel.

Lane stands eye to eye with Naya and tucks a piece of Naya's hair behind her ear.

NAYA

And you didn't. So let's leave it at that. I actually just want to finish this book. Alone. Have a good night, Lane.

Naya exits. Lane is once again alone. Lights fade to black.

Scene 3.4

Lights come up on a play party. The space is mostly empty. A bowl of condoms and dental dams sits on a table. A layout of toys, including ropes, handcuffs, collars, and wearable animal ears and masks, sit on another table. Naya is setting out lube and sanitizer. Izabel enters dressed in whatever outfit the actor would feel comfortable

wearing to a sex party. Naya laughs to herself.

IZABEL

I look ridiculous?

NAYA

No. I'm laughing that you are the first to arrive. You're not hiding this time.

IZABEL

Well, thanks to you, there's nothing to hide anymore.

NAYA

Well, there are lots of toys to choose from, director.

IZABEL

Oh, I love props.

Izabel touches the items on the table, picking some up and playing with them or trying them on.

Have you used most of these before?

NAYA

Some.

IZABEL

Any recommendations?

NAYA

I'm a personal fan of the nipple clamps.

Izabel holds them up to her chest and winces at the idea of them. Izabel tries to put on handcuffs and a collar. Izabel motions Naya over to the table.

IZABEL

Mind showing me how to put some of this on?

As Naya and Izabel speak, Naya puts various knots of rope, blindfolds or handcuffs on Izabel.

IZABEL(CONT'D)

The nonbinary beauty called me. They follow my vlog and want to know if I want to take over the podcast.

NAYA

Good for you.

IZABEL

It could be good for us. I want you to host a weekly segment. You can talk about whatever you want.

NAYA

No. I don't want a segment on the Izabel show.

IZABEL

Then host the whole thing with me. You are funny.

NAYA

You want me to be comic relief.

IZABEL

You are also knowledgeable.

NAYA

You want me to educate you.

IZABEL

You write amazing content.

NAYA

This is true. But I don't want to write for you. I much prefer our dynamic this way.

By this time, Izabel is completely bound and unable to free herself.

IZABEL

It would be paid. And I know you have lots of student loans.

(Naya considers this.)

I have secured a sponsor. I've been an influencer with them for years. VeganLipLove is willing to pay us per download.

NAYA

I'll think about it.

IZABEL

Your voice should be amplified. I know you want to say yes. Do you want me to beg?

NAYA

What do you think I want, director?

Izabel lowers herself to her knees and looks up at Naya. Naya inhales deeply, hiding a smile.

I am not calling our listeners Bellas.

Izabel smiles widely.

IZABEL

I'm open to negotiations.

(Beat.)

Ears, please. I want to look like a snapchat filter.

Naya picks a set of ears and places them on Izabel's head. Naya grabs the leash off the table.

NAYA

Should I finish off the look?

Izabel nods affirmatively. Naya attaches the leash to the collar and gives a gentle tug.

How does that feel?

IZABEL

Feels like a dream come true.

Lights fade to black.

Scene 3.5

Lights come up on Devon's apartment. Naya is setting up recording equipment while Devon is preparing a drink tray with Danniqua's help. The two are very touchy. Mia and Carrie are relaxed on the sofa leaning into each other and snacking on popcorn while reading from the same book.

DEVON

It's time to screen the reboot of The L Word! The show starts in a few minutes, generation Q.

DANNIQUA

You throw a great get-together, Devon.

DEVON

Well, Mia made this community happen for so long, she shouldn't be the only one putting in the work to
DEVON(CONT'D)bring us together.

NAYA

Speaking of together, where the fuck is Izabel? It's our first podcast and she's...

Izabel knocks and enters in a leotard complete with animal ears and a tail.

in costume.



IZABEL

Sorry to be running behind. It took me a while to get my tail on straight. I can't get over how cute it is. I thought it would be perfect for our first show.

NAYA

You do know this is just a voice recording, right?

IZABEL

I thought the visual might inspire you. Also, I feel like a walking thirst trap. It's really helping me get over the last hump of this breakup with Lane. Will she be here?

DEVON

I don't know if Lane will show or not. Can I just say that I'm so proud of you two for getting along. Two years of despising one another, and now you run a business together.

NAYA

The potential for money is a strong motivator.

IZABEL

It wasn't the money that got her on board with the podcast. I let her tie me up.

NAYA

That's not why; although, helping you into knots is fun. I'm doing this because we aren't competing anymore. It used to be fun to throw you off balance, but -

IZABEL

It's more fun to chase a dream together.

NAYA

And, your thirst trap game is real.

DEVON

Please, say less.

Naya fiddles with Izabel's tail.
Devon walks away uncomfortably. She whispers to Carrie and Mia.

CARRIE

Are they ...?

MIA

I don't know. Izabel hasn't been home much.

DEVON

I'd rather not think about it. How's the book?

CARRIE

Fishing for compliments? Wasn't your amazing review in the Times enough?

Danniqua hugs Devon from behind.

DANNIQUA

Your book is amazing, Devon.

MIA

Agreed.

CARRIE

I'm reading at a viewing party. Enough said.

Devon, Carrie and Mia turn to see Izabel and Naya taking a picture together. Naya is now biting Izabel's tail and looking at the camera. After, Izabel starts typing on her phone to upload the picture to her social media.

IZABEL

Sharing! These are such good promotional photos. Our listeners are going to love it!

CARRIE

I can't unsee that.

A knock is heard.

DEVON

It's open.

Lane enters holding a stack of papers.

CARRIE

Your invite list is not fully appreciated.

DEVON

I expect you to play nice, Carrie.

CARRIE

Lower your expectation.

MIA

Pay Lane no mind. Turn the page, Carrie.

Carrie turns the page of the book.

LANE

Sorry to be late, Devon. My meeting ran over.

DANNIQUA

Good to see you, Lane.

DEVON

I'm glad you decided to come.

Danniqua and Devon hug Lane.

LANE

You two are probably the only people happy to see me here.

DEVON

Your exes are in their own production of Cats. I don't think they care.

LANE

I'm not even going to begin to understand how they are friends.

DEVON

I heard a little common ground eased the tension. Maybe take note, Lane.

Naya and Izabel continue posing for pictures together. Lane breathes deeply as she watches them. She then looks to Carrie and Mia. She approaches apprehensively.

LANE

You two look cozy.

CARRIE

Amazing you could make it, Lane. I thought you only CARRIE(CONT'D)showed for things that had a printed agenda?

LANE

That's fair. I know I've been somewhat busy.

CARRIE

Busy? Is that what you've been?

MIA

Funny. You're not too busy to come to Devon's.

CARRIE

Maybe busy isn't the right word, Lane. Try absent.

LANE

I've been absent? What have you both been? You haven't been - ugh. Nevermind.

CARRIE

Oh, just come out with it, Lane.

LANE

You haven't been yourselves. I needed a break. I feel like I don't know who you are when you're depressed.

MIA

You ditched me for being depressed?

LANE

No... Maybe. Yes. Let me start over. ... I don't know how to be; how to help. I miss you. I miss my thoughtful and snarky but caring sister. I miss my best friend who can make any space feel like a community.

MIA

I miss me, too. Don't you know that? I don't want to be this way. And not having my friend just makes it worse.

CARRIE

Well, I like this new me. I like not having to care for anyone else for a change. I like the silence.

LANE

So why are you upset that I've stayed away?

CARRIE

I want peace, not solitude.

LANE

What am I supposed to do? Just sit around and not talk to you?

CARRIE

Exactly. Try just being around. I lost my wife, Lane. Don't make me feel like I lost my entire family.

LANE

You didn't. You didn't lose me. This is my family, and I need you, too.

Carrie hands Lane the book and shifts to make room. Carrie invites Lane to sit, but Mia refuses to scoot.

LANE(CONT'D)

I am sorry for being absent. And I know it's not enough.

MIA

It's not. ... But maybe having more popcorn will make me forgiving.

Mia shakes her empty bucket of popcorn. Lane softens and takes the bucket. She refills it and rejoins

Carrie and Mia on the sofa. The three cuddle into each other and read the same book. Devon and Danniqua approach with a tray of drinks.

DANNIQUA

Hey, reading rainbows. Time to toast and get this party started. Who wants what? We have Bourbon or blackberry iced tea.

Naya and Izabel both take a shot and then grab another shot of bourbon each to hold.

IZABEL

Who knew you were so fun, Naya.

NAYA

I knew.

LANE

Tea for me, Danniqua. Thank you.

CARRIE

I'm cutting back as well. Tea.

MIA

Make that three.

DEVON

I thought you didn't do threesomes, Lane.

LANE

Depends on the company, I guess.

Danniqua and Devon each grab a drink.

DEVON

Is the podcast ready to go?

Naya and Izabel put on their headphones and set up at their microphones.

NAYA

Going live in 5, 4...

Naya counts down on her fingers and presses the button to cue the intro music. After a moment, Izabel speaks into the microphone.

IZABEL

Hello, Kalamazoo and beyond. That's right, there is a new voice in your ears.

NAYA

Two new voices.

IZABEL

The Nonbinary beauty has moved to the Bay, but there are more beauties in the area.

NAYA

So I am Henderson's Castle with research and commentary on nontraditional relationships.

IZABEL

And I am TheBiBella with advice for all the kinky and not-so-kinky cuties.

NAYA

And we are broadcasting live at The L World: Generation Q screening party, hosted by Devon Black.

IZABEL

We will be taking your commentary and questions live as we watch.

NAYA

But first, a queer Kalamazoo update. Local writer and musician Devon Black has just announced the release of her latest musical solo project, Devon and The Black Hood. Black Women Rock has this artist on the roster, and we can all witness her at Kalamazoo Pride this summer.

IZABEL

We are super excited for her. So if you have something to toast with, raise it now.

NAYA

To Devon Black for bringing us all together again.

IZABEL

To new ventures, business and otherwise.

LANE

To sisters and friends.

MIA

To the spirit of The L Word, and The Planet, and Spice.

DEVON

To self love and love amongst women.

DANNIQUA

To belonging.

To community. NAYA

To community. EVERYONE

Let the show begin! IZABEL

Lights fade as everyone toasts and music and laughter fills the space. Perhaps they begin singing the theme song to The L Word together as the lights go out.

-END-

Shawntai Brown

