

# Balcony ●●● Scene

By

*Jessica Durdock Moreno*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Saving one of my faves for last as a sweet finish to this section. Balcony Scene, a Romeo and Juliet for the ages by Jessica Durdock Moreno is a love story between two neurodiverse teenagers that's primed to spark some honest conversations. The ticking time-bomb in this storyline is that BENJI is about to turn 18 tomorrow, meaning that his 15 year-old girlfriend, CASSIE will no longer be the age of consent. Jessica Durdock Morena has chosen not to highlight the neurodiversity of her characters (in her note to the actors she says, "Play the action; not the neurotype!") but their differences underscore the range of individual responsibility that play into any romantic relationship. CASSIE may be younger than BENJI but what if she's just as mature or even more so? BENJI is about to become a legal adult, but should the difference of a day mean that their relationship is over? Balcony Scene takes on a tough topic and makes it approachable through believable and appealing characters along with natural dialogue that doesn't flinch away from tough questions - that might not have easy answers:*

BENJI:

Each and every single time. I didn't force you. Or...coerce...you. Did I?

CASSIE:

No! ...Wait. ...Did I coerce you?

BENJI:

No. Nope. No. You didn't. I wanted it. Every time. Probably more than every time.

CASSIE:

Same.

BENJI:

...What now?

CASSIE:

I think I might have wanted it more than you.

BENJI:

Not possible.

CASSIE:  
You sure?

BENJI:  
No...?

*(Spacing is playwright's own.) JEC*

## BALCONY SCENE

### CHARACTERS

CASSIE - Age 15, Autistic.

BENJI - Age 17, Autistic.

### TIME

Present day, around midnight.

### SETTING

A house in the woods in a small town in Northwestern Connecticut.

### A NOTE TO PERFORMERS

Play the action; not the neurotype!

### CONTENT/TRIGGER WARNING

Discussion of rape, statutory rape, and underage sex.

*(A full moon. In the distance, the crunch of footsteps on the driveway gravel draws closer.  
BENJI, 17, quietly trots down the driveway towards an old red farmhouse. He looks up to the*

*second story window. He picks up a piece of gravel. He throws it at the window. He picks up another piece and throws it.)*

BENJI:

*(Loud whisper.)* Cassie! ... Cassie! ... CASSIE!

*(BENJI hunches over to catch his breath. A light turns on in the bedroom window. The window pushes open. CASSIE, 15, pokes her head out. She spots BENJI.)*

CASSIE:

*(Loud whisper.)* Benji?

BENJI:

Yes!

CASSIE:

What are you doing?

BENJI:

I don't know!

CASSIE:

You're gonna get me in trouble!

BENJI:

Sorry!

CASSIE:

You have to go! *(BENJI just stands there.)* Now!

BENJI:

Shit!

CASSIE:

What?!

BENJI:

I have to tell you something.--

CASSIE:

...Where's your car?

BENJI:

Not here.

CASSIE:

How did you get here?

BENJI:

I ran.

CASSIE:

You ran here?

BENJI:

Yeah.

CASSIE:

What time is it?

BENJI:

Before midnight?

CASSIE:

Run back! You're gonna wake my mom!

BENJI:

I have to tell you something.

CASSIE:

Tell me tomorrow!

BENJI:

I can't.

CASSIE:

Why not?

BENJI:

It's big. I think it's gonna be big.

CASSIE:

So text me!

BENJI:

How are you? Shit. No, that's not it. Hang on. I know! ...How are you?

CASSIE:

That's what you ran here for?

BENJI:

Yes. No. Kind of?

CASSIE:

Benji!

BENJI:  
Did I hurt you?

CASSIE:  
What?

BENJI:  
Did I hurt you. When we slept together. Did I hurt you?

CASSIE:  
...No?

BENJI:  
Okay. Good. I mean, that's what I thought. But I just wanted to check.

CASSIE:  
...Okay?

BENJI:  
Bye. *(He starts to leave, then...)* Did you want to?

CASSIE:  
What?

BENJI:  
Sleep with me?

CASSIE:  
Yes.

BENJI:  
Are you sure?

CASSIE:  
Yes...?

BENJI:  
Each and every time?

CASSIE:  
Yes!

BENJI:  
Each and every single time. I didn't force you. Or...coerce...you. Did I?

CASSIE:

No! ...Wait. ...Did I coerce you?

BENJI:

No. Nope. No. You didn't. I wanted it. Every time. Probably more than every time.

CASSIE:

Same.

BENJI:

...What now?

CASSIE:

I think I might have wanted it more than you.

BENJI:

Not possible.

CASSIE:

You sure?

BENJI:

No...?

CASSIE:

Wait. So did I hurt you?

BENJI:

No!

CASSIE:

Am I a rapist?

BENJI:

No!

CASSIE:

I know I initiated a few times pretty aggressively...

BENJI:

No! No! That was fantastic! If anything, I'm the rapist...

CASSIE:

What?

BENJI:

NoGodFuckNo! I'm not the rapist! I'm not a rapist! Unless you tell me I'm a rapist! Am I a rapist?

CASSIE:  
You didn't rape me.

BENJI:  
Thank God.

CASSIE:  
I wanted it.

BENJI:  
...Really?

CASSIE:  
Yeah.

BENJI:  
From me?

CASSIE:  
Yup.

BENJI:  
That's...really hot.

CASSIE:  
Sure was.

BENJI:  
Wow. Good. Great. Good. That's good. That's very good. Very healthy.

CASSIE:  
Is that why you ran here? To check and see if you raped me?

BENJI:  
No. Yes. No. Yes.

CASSIE:  
'Cause you didn't.

BENJI:  
Okay. Good. And for the record, you didn't rape me.

CASSIE:  
Okay. Good. We're not rapists.

BENJI:

Phew.

CASSIE:

But apparently starting tomorrow, you're gonna be a rapist if you keep sleeping with me.

BENJI:

Fuck. I know. I'm in this...weird...rape limbo.

CASSIE:

Does oral count?

BENJI:

Good question.

CASSIE:

I don't wanna stop fucking you.

BENJI:

Jesus, Cassie.

CASSIE:

That's what we're doing.

BENJI:

It is?

CASSIE:

Isn't it?

BENJI:

I don't know. It just sounds so...rough. I love you. ...Shit. ...I just said that. I guess I can go now, bye. *(He starts to leave.)*

CASSIE:

Wait.

BENJI:

*(He stops.)* What?

CASSIE:

What do I do with that?

BENJI:

I don't think you're supposed to do anything. Unless... You want to...do something? Or...say something? Back? To me? Nevermind. *(He starts to leave again...then...)* No, wait. This is

what I came for. Fuck. Okay. Fuck. I love you. And you can take it or leave it. I don't care. But I love you, and I didn't feel like texting you or waiting till tomorrow to tell you... Because. Cassie, I am completely in love with you. And I am losing my mind. And all I can think about is you. And I love you, and I can't stop thinking about you, and that's my story, and I'm sticking to it, and... I just wanted to tell you that. Out of respect. Because you have a right to know. And I respect you. So. Good. Okay. Bye. I'm not a rapist, you're not a rapist, I love you, bye. *(He starts to leave.)* Aren't you gonna stop me?

CASSIE:

?

BENJI:

Can you please say something?

CASSIE:

Uh.

BENJI:

Are you gonna dump me? Are you dumping me? Was that too much? Too fast? Is it over? WHAT ARE THESE WORDS COMING OUT OF MY MOUTH. I love you, Cassie. And I'm not gonna say it again. But I'm glad I said it. Because I mean it. And you're killing me here. And I don't care. Because I love you. And you're so beautiful. And I can't stop thinking about you. And I am NOT losing my mind. It's the opposite. It's the complete opposite of losing my mind. I'm like...IN my mind. And I see you, and I'm just like. Holy shit. This girl wants to sleep with me? This girl right here? By choice? And it makes absolutely no sense in my head. And I have no idea what any of it means. But we sleep together. You. And me. Which is insane. But when we sleep together, you are so...beautiful. And I look at you, and I'm just like: my God, you are the most beautiful girl in the world. And I'm so in love with you, and I have no idea what that means, but I just ran four miles in the middle of the night and I feel like I could run a hundred more. In fact, when I'm done...with...whatever this is I'm doing here, humiliating myself, I'm gonna run a hundred miles because I literally have no idea what to do with...with...my heart. My heart is... I'm so in love with you, Cassie. And being with you is just... I almost can't take it. And tomorrow when I turn eighteen, I'm gonna die. So that's it. Bye. Wait, one more thing. The thing is: now I am never gonna have to wonder what it's like to be an old man and look back on the entire expanse of time and space that constitutes the meaning of...my entirely meaningless life--'cause we're all just, like, stardust here, right? (What?)-- FUCK! Look: I'm not gonna regret telling you in this singular moment in time...that I love you. I'm not gonna do that. Because life is short and you only live once and I love you so I'm telling you that I love you and I mean it, and it has meaning, this means something, so I'm saying it because that's the kind of man I am. So, let's just move to Sweden where this is legal. Okay? Bye. *(He starts to leave again...then...)* And just one more thing. I know we're probably not going to get married, and there's a very good chance that when I graduate and go off to college we'll break up--not because I want to--because at this moment I swear we are gonna be together for the rest of our lives--I don't even want to touch you right now. I just want to look at you for the rest of my life. Like freeze you forever right up there. Put you in a vault and lock you up. No! I am not trying to lock you up. Jesus. One minute I think I'm a rapist, the next minute I'm verging on kidnapper--is that what love is? I have lost my mind. THE POINT IS: I'm not naive

and I know you probably need to sleep with, like, ten or a hundred other people before you decide who you're gonna settle down with, so if you think of me in like, ten or a hundred years, just, gimme a call and let's see where we're at, and if it works out and you wanna get married. WHAT THE FUCK AM I SAYING. Fuck. All that aside, all that matters right now is you, and me telling you I love you. Because that's all we got. This moment right here. That's all I got. ...Bye. *(He starts to leave again.)*

CASSIE:

I can see why you didn't wanna text that.

BENJI:

*(He stops.)* What? Oh. Yeah. Good. Okay.

CASSIE:

That would have been a lot to text.

BENJI:

I know.

CASSIE:

Thanks.

BENJI:

??? ...Oh my God...Thanks? That's it? I AM SO FUCKED. No. It's fine. WHAT THE FUCK. I can't breathe. It's fine. Bye.

CASSIE:

No, wait!

BENJI:

!!Okay!!

CASSIE:

Did you see the moon?

BENJI:

The wha? What? The moon?

CASSIE:

It's big.

BENJI:

...It's a full moon(?).

CASSIE:

I remember when I was little. I used to look out of this window. And I would close my eyes. And I would reach my hand out. And I would...just...try to touch the moon. I would imagine

that I could reach it. And I would tell myself that I had magical powers, and that I was the only person in the world who could reach out and touch the moon. And I would reach it. And in my head I would tell myself: "I am touching the moon." But I couldn't, like, actually think up what it would feel like. I couldn't imagine what it would feel like. Like, what does it feel like...to be able to hold the moon in your hand? Do you know what I mean?

BENJI:

Not at all.

CASSIE:

I don't know why I just told you that story.

BENJI:

It's a great story.

CASSIE:

I love you, too.

BENJI:

--

CASSIE:

Don't tell anybody that story I just told you.

BENJI:

--

(!?)

CASSIE:

Promise?

BENJI:

Promise. ... Sometimes I imagine that the world is ending, and like, the sky is falling and shit, and there are fires everywhere. And there's just...chaos all around. Like smoke and bombs and carnage and volcanoes going off and war and destruction...and I imagine that I rescue you from it. I imagine carrying you in my arms, and you're unconscious--but you're okay--just...knocked out or...overcome...or...whatever, anyway you're fine...just your eyes are closed... And I rescue you. And I'm the only person in the world who can do it. And as I carry you away from all the danger, you open your eyes...and you see me. ... PLEASE don't tell anyone THAT story.

CASSIE:

Promise.

BENJI:

I will deny it if you do.

CASSIE:  
I won't!

BENJI:  
Okay.

CASSIE:  
Okay. We have secrets. ... What time is it?

BENJI:  
*(Checking his phone.)* Twelve ten.

CASSIE:  
Happy birthday.

BENJI:  
I'm so in love with you, Cassie.

CASSIE:  
We have secrets...

*(End of play.)*

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *One of the most brutal bits of feedback I received on my playwriting was in grad school when a fellow student—much, much closer in age than me to the characters I was penning—told me: “that’s not how young people speak.” A seemingly innocuous and useless comment that should have rolled off my back, these words simultaneously triggered an occasionally dormant-but-chronic sense of personal invalidation...and also a sparkling epiphany that how I have formed thoughts, wielded grammar and syntax, and experienced emotion has always—and will always—annoy(ed) and discomfort(ed) folx who choose (consciously or subconsciously) to oppress Autistic people for not thinking, communicating, or feeling the way a neurotypical-defaulted world coerces them to. The dialogue this fellow student attempted to nullify was ripped from my own diaries, memories, and embodied experience, and the feedback they offered represented the systemic and systematic taming and erasure of Autistic people for simply existing as they are.*

*I am an early career playwright. Time will tell if I leave behind a body of mediocre or excellent work. When it's my turn to die, I'd rather have left behind a bunch of panned plays authentically created by me on my terms than some (perhaps) better plays that pander to neurotypical tastes. I do not consent to being the agent of my own eugenic project.*

*I have not returned to work on the play that received that useless feedback. Still hurts too much. Instead, I have moved onto other plays in which my fully expressed characters are free to think, communicate, and feel however they tell me to. “Balcony Scene” is an example of this endeavour. Inspired by those other two star-crossed lovers—but defying the epitomized and worshipped language of Shakespeare—these two madly in love Autistic kids speak how they speak as they navigate a world filled with rules and laws that don't suit their logic. (And yes, it's*

*complicated, especially concerning statutory rape and ages of consent—because Autistic kids are allowed to access and engage with all of life’s complexities, just like everyone else.)*

*And a bit of feedback, should that fellow student ever stumble across this play: it’s not that “that’s not how young people speak,” it’s just that that’s not how YOU speak. And it’s exactly how the playwright speaks.*

“The month of April has a bunch of national, international, and UN recognized Autism awareness and acceptance days and celebrations. While I have mixed feelings about some of them, your including an Autistic playwright telling an Autistic story centering Autistic characters in your April issue is incredibly comforting and exciting and important to me.”

## **AUTHOR BIO:**

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- The Theatre Times

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