

A Little More Normal

By

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Characters

Lillian	An aspiring writer. She has a story to share, but nobody seems to want to hear it.
Man One	Character one in Lillian's story. A working man who loves his family.
Man Two	Character two in Lillian's story. He keeps the house while Man One is away.
Marcy	One of the children in Lillian's story. The perfect American daughter and Jessie's partner in crime.
Jessie	One of the children in Lillian's story. The perfect American daughter and Marcy's partner in crime.
Distorted Voice	An unrecognizable voice somewhere in between masculine and feminine.
Woman	Man Two's more socially acceptable replacement.
Mother	Lillian's mom. Her first critic, and the origin of her doubt.
Mr. Jenson	Lillian's creative writing teacher. Claims to be accepting, but in reality is just as prejudiced as the people he condemns.
Thomas	Lillian's best friend. Supports her writing and tries his best to defend her.

Connor	A bully in Lillian's class. Homophobic and prejudiced.
Ella	A bully in Lillian's class. Homophobic and prejudiced.
Carrie	Lillian's agent. Believes in her writing, but is tired of publishers telling them no.
Avery	Lillian's grandchild. Curious and open-minded. The return of hope.

Synopsis:

The journey of Lillian, a young, queer, writer, as she experiences the difficulties of writing stories that break the mold. As Lillian faces criticism and disgust throughout her life, we see her lose confidence in the worth of her original ideas. She achieves success, but only by altering her work to be more palatable. However, she eventually finds that perhaps all she needs is the right audience.

Setting

A scene inside of a book featuring a small, cartoonish kitchenette. A child's bedroom. A high school classroom. An office.

Time

The year should not play a prominent role in the production. More important is the emphasis on time passing in Lillian's life. The technology or dialogue used may be altered to fit any time frame.

Act I

Scene 1	The kitchenette.	Morning, the story.
Scene 2	A child's bedroom.	Night, Lillian's childhood.
Scene 3	The kitchenette.	Evening, the story.
Scene 4	A classroom.	Lillian's adolescence.
Scene 5	The kitchenette.	Night, the story.
Scene 6	A courtyard.	Lillian's adolescence.
Scene 7	The kitchenette.	Night, the story.
Scene 8	An office.	Lillian's adulthood.
Scene 9	The kitchenette.	Morning, the story.
Scene 10	An office.	Lillian's late adulthood.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Lights up on a small kitchen. The set is painted to appear cartoonish, like an illustration in a child's picture book. MAN ONE appears, dressed in a suit and tie. He fiddles with the knot of his tie, unable to get it tightened just right.)

MAN TWO

(Offstage)

Off to work already?

(MAN TWO enters holding a briefcase. He walks over to MAN ONE and hands him the briefcase before straightening his tie.)

MAN ONE

Afraid so. Quarterly meeting today, I'll be back late.

MAN TWO

Good, then you can pick the girls up from Scouts on the way home.

MAN ONE

Of course.

MAN TWO

Marcy has an algebra test today, so make sure you ask her about it. Oh, and Jessie has been having trouble with those boys at school again, so-

MAN ONE

So make sure she's alright and maybe stop for ice cream if she seems upset. Yes, I know.

(MAN TWO smiles and reaches up to place a hand on the cheek of MAN ONE)

MAN TWO

Of course you do.

MOTHER

Lillian?

(End of Scene 1)

SCENE 2

(Lights dim on the kitchenette. A small bedroom is illuminated. Lillian (8) sits at a desk, hunched over a small notebook. She looks up as her mother approaches.)

MOTHER

Lillian, sweetie, it's time for bed.

LILLIAN

Just a few more minutes? I'm almost finished.

MOTHER

Finished with what?

(MOTHER walks over to the desk and scans the notebook.)

LILLIAN

It's a story.

(MOTHER continues reading, brow furrowing as she proceeds through the small chunk of text. Eventually, she looks back up at LILLIAN, stern set to her face.)

MOTHER

Did you write this?

(LILLIAN, a bit cowed by her mother's discontent, nods. Frowning, MOTHER tucks the notebook under her arm.)

MOTHER

It's bedtime, Lillian. We'll talk about this in the morning.

LILLIAN

(Shocked, confused)

But-

MOTHER

In the morning!

(MOTHER leaves the room, leaving LILLIAN to put herself to bed. LILLIAN hesitates at the desk before grabbing other papers scattered on its surface, looking around nervously, and then shoving them into a drawer. She then crawls into bed, curled in on herself and sniffing quietly. Lights out. End of Scene 2.)

SCENE 3

(Lights come up on the kitchenette once more. MAN ONE appears, tie undone and hung loosely around his neck. He approaches MAN TWO, who stands with his back towards the audience preparing a meal on the stove.)

MAN ONE

Dinner smells lovely.

MAN TWO

You say that every time.

MAN ONE

It's always true.

(Two girls run in and clamber into their seats at a small dining table, bickering noisily. Their faces are clear and unblemished, and in fact, they appear almost strange in their perfection.)

MARCY

I told you, it was John that ran from the baseball game, not Joseph.

JESSIE

No, because John doesn't play baseball! Joseph does.

MAN ONE

What's this about?

(MARCY and JESSIE rush to speak over each other, neither of them intelligible. MAN ONE holds up his hands in protest.)

MAN ONE

Girls- please, one at a time-

MAN TWO

How about you tell us over dinner?

(Turning away from the stove, MAN TWO holds an enormous pot of stew. For the first time, the audience sees his face- the features on his face appear less distinct, as if somebody had taken an eraser and begun to rub it away. Just as he begins to dish a small ladle of stew into each bowl-)

(A timer rings out.)

MR. JENSON

And, that's time.

(End of Scene 3)

SCENE 4

(Lights dim on the kitchenette and come up on a small, intimate classroom. Four students [ELLA, CONNOR, THOMAS, and LILLIAN (now appearing in her late teens)] sit on couches and armchairs, with a teacher sitting at a table across from them. They all have laptops, and the students are typing furiously.)

MR. JENSON

Stop writing, everyone. Ella, you too.

(ELLA stops typing with a huff.)

Now, let's talk about your scenes. Who here managed to get at least halfway through?

(ELLA, THOMAS, and LILLIAN raise their hands.)

MR. JENSON

Fantastic. Would anyone like to share his or her work with the class?

(Nobody volunteers.)

MR. JENSON (Continued)

You're going to have to eventually. Don't worry about quality, the important part is to get the idea out there, and then we can refine it.

(Still, no hands go up.)

MR. JENSON (Continued)

If nobody volunteers, I'll pick one of you.

(Hesitantly, LILLIAN raises her hand.)

LILLIAN

I can go.

MR. JENSON

Thank you, Lillian. Go ahead and share your document with all of us.

ELLA

(To CONNOR)

Of course she'd volunteer.

(ELLA and CONNOR chuckle and LILLIAN shrinks down in her seat.)

MR. JENSON

No, It's okay. I'm sure your piece is wonderful. Remind us what you're writing about?

LILLIAN

It's sort of about... the concept of domesticity? And how that applies to households that don't fit typical gender norms-

MR. JENSON

Sorry, and what households would that include? Do you mean single parenthood, or did you have something else in mind?

LILLIAN

Well...

(She grows a little quieter, perhaps sheepish.)

LILLIAN (Continued)

It's... it's about two guys.

MR. JENSON

Yes?

LILLIAN

(Quieter still.)

And they're married.

ELLA

(Overlapping)

Ugh, of course!

CONNOR

(Overlapping)

Oh come on. I don't wanna read that!

LILLIAN

What?

ELLA

Yeah, me neither.

THOMAS

Can you guys chill out for one second? What's the big deal?

CONNOR

It's weird and gross, why would you write that crap?

LILLIAN

What's wrong with it?

ELLA

It's disgusting!

MR. JENSON

Okay everyone, let's calm down. Lillian, can I speak with you privately for a moment?

LILLIAN

Why? What's so bad about my scene?

ELLA

Don't play dumb, you know what we're talking about.

THOMAS

Just say it then, if it's so obvious.

CONNOR

I didn't do anything, snowflake.

THOMAS

Sounds like you're the snowflake if you can't handle a piece of schoolwork.

MR. JENSON

Class, please. Quiet. Down. Lillian, just step outside with me for a moment.

(MR. JENSON leaves the room. LILLIAN stands, and THOMAS stands too.)

THOMAS

(Low, to LILLIAN)

Are you okay? Want me to come with you?

LILLIAN

No, it's fine. I can handle this.

THOMAS

Okay. Be safe.

(LILLIAN nods, then follows MR. JENSON. Lights follow them outside into the hallway. LILLIAN stands with her arms crossed, defiant.)

LILLIAN

Is everything okay?

MR.JENSON

(Shifting as he speaks)

Lillian, you understand that at this school we provide a comfortable environment for all students, yes?

LILLIAN

(Knows his angle already.)

Yes.

MR.JENSON

And you understand that some students aren't comfortable with the... content you choose to write about.

LILLIAN

(Growing irritated:)

Just say what you mean, Mr. Jenson.

MR.JENSON

Miss Bates, please. Just... try and leave those ideas for outside of the classroom.

LILLIAN

You haven't even read my scene. None of you have. How can someone be uncomfortable with something they haven't even read?

MR.JENSON

Well, you see- it's the premise.

LILLIAN

It's a romance, just like anything else we've read. What's so wrong about that?

MR.JENSON

I know what you're trying to get me to admit, but Lillian, it's not like that-

LILLIAN

Not like what?

(MR.JENSON stays silent.)

LILLIAN (Continued)

Go on. Say it.

MR.JENSON

You know that I support all of my students. My class is a safe space for everybody.

(LILLIAN scoffs.)

LILLIAN

You mean, it's a safe space for everybody who's just like you.

(Beat.)

I've been in your class for months now, and I don't think you've read a single one of my assignments.

MR.JENSON

Lillian, I may not... understand everything about your generation, but you have to give me some grace. We're living in different times-

LILLIAN

(With growing anger)

Why aren't you reading what I write? How come every single one of the documents I've sent has been left unopened? If I asked you about the characters I wrote last week, would you even be able to tell me their names?

(The hall falls silent after Lillian's outburst. MR.JENSON stares at her with a mixture of shock and what could be shame, if only for having been caught. After a moment:)

MR.JENSON

I think you need to take a walk before we can continue this discussion.

LILLIAN

(Absolutely livid.)

Fine.

(She turns to walk away, the words thrown over her shoulder laced with pure vitriol and sarcasm.)

LILLIAN (Continued)

Enjoy the rest of your class. I really wish I could've been there.

(Lights down. End of Scene 4)

SCENE 5

(Lights up on the kitchenette.
MAN ONE walks in, rubbing his
eyes.)

MAN ONE

Took about thirty bedtime stories, but the girls are finally
asleep.

(He waits for a response. None comes.)

MAN ONE

Darling?

DISTORTED VOICE

Yes, dear?

(MAN ONE hears the strange voice and
pauses, seeming to realize something. He
stands and looks around the kitchenette,
peering offstage, into the audience, etc.
He doesn't find what he's looking for.)

MAN ONE

Where are you?

DISTORTED VOICE

I'll be right there, dear. Just finishing up dinner.

(MAN ONE stares at the empty space in
front of the stove. Seemingly on its own,
a spoon stirs the large pot. MAN ONE walks
over, and places his hand on the shoulder
of someone invisible. Lights out. End of
scene 5.)

SCENE 6

(The courtyard of a high school. LILLIAN sits in tears on a small stone bench, knees pulled to her chest and wiping her eyes furiously. THOMAS enters, clearly looking for her. He spots her and immediately walks over and wraps his arms around her. He lets her cry for a moment, then:)

THOMAS

Is it Mr. Jenson? He's stupid, Lillian, don't listen to anything he says-

LILLIAN

It's not just him.

THOMAS

What, Ella and Connor? They're not any better- I mean, you've seen the way they treat-

LILLIAN

But it's not just them, either.

(LILLIAN pulls away from THOMAS, who drops his arms.)

LILLIAN (Continued)

It's not just them. What about my mom? What about *your* mom? What about all the- the young writer competitions, and the scholarships, and the grants, and-

(LILLIAN cuts herself off, her face falling into her arms. THOMAS tentatively reaches out and places a hand on her back, rubbing gentle circles.)

LILLIAN (Continued)

I'm just so tired of it.

THOMAS

I know.

(They sit together, both lost in their own thoughts. Eventually:)

THOMAS (Continued)

You'll find someone.

(LILLIAN looks up, confused. THOMAS turns to face her fully, folding one of her hands in his own. This is not a romantic gesture- rather a show of comfort, of solidarity.)

THOMAS (Continued)

Your writing is incredible. Anyone who can't see that isn't worth your time. You'll find someone who appreciates it just as much as I do, someone who can do more for you than I can. I know you will.

(He believes this with a fiery passion. But he hasn't been the one trying. LILLIAN very clearly does not feel his same enthusiasm, but far be it from her to crush his optimism. After a pause:)

LILLIAN

I hope you're right.

(Lights out. End of scene 6.)

SCENE 7

(The kitchenette reappears, but this time MAN ONE sits alone at the table. It is late, and he picks at food on his plate while flicking through a pile of paperwork. The spotlight sharpens in focus until only he is illuminated. Hands appear on his shoulders, rubbing out the tension.)

DISTORTED VOICE

Rough day?

MAN ONE

...yeah. Long.

(MAN ONE reaches up to envelop one of the hands with his own but comes to the same realization the audience does: the hands on his shoulders are feminine. Lights down on the kitchenette.)

SCENE 8

(Lights up. LILLIAN, now in her late thirties, sits at a desk in a small office space, in a strikingly similar position to MAN ONE. She's typing away at a laptop, several empty coffee cups nearby. There's a knocking on the door as CARRIE, her agent, enters.)

CARRIE

Lillian, sweetie, hi.

(Lillian looks up, pasting a smile on her face.)

LILLIAN

(Weary)

Hey, Carrie. Everything alright?

CARRIE

Oh, yes, of course.

(Pause.)

Well, it's just this most recent draft-

LILLIAN

I told you, I'm getting it done. My deadline isn't for a few more weeks-

CARRIE

Yes, yes, I know. That's not the issue.

LILLIAN

Then why are you here?

(CARRIE pauses, moving forward and placing a file of papers on the desk: LILLIAN's draft. She leans in, speaking in hushed tones.)

CARRIE

You know I love your work. I think you're brilliant, really.

LILLIAN

Get to the point, Carrie.

CARRIE

Nobody will look at it. I'm busting my ass in front of committees, talked to forty-something officials since lunch, and nothing.

(This isn't the first time she's proposed this.)

It... might be time to make some changes.

LILLIAN

(This isn't the first time she's refused this.)

I'm not changing it. There has to be somebody-

CARRIE

There is somebody. I've talked to them. We're running out of options. Your kids need to eat, and so do mine.

(This time is different- she's serious, now. They're out of time.)

LILLIAN

(Defeated:)

Fine. What are you thinking?

CARRIE

Everyone I talked to had similar revisions.

(CARRIE passes over another folder. As LILLIAN looks through:)

CARRIE (Continued)

They like you, Lillian. They like your work. But publishers won't take a risk on something so... volatile. If you just removed some of the political messaging-

LILLIAN

Political messaging?

CARRIE

-They're worried readers won't find it palatable.

LILLIAN

Political messaging.

(LILLIAN exhales heavily, rubbing her eyes. CARRIE sees her opportunity.)

CARRIE

You could be one of the greats, Lillian. These companies are itching to get you published under their name.

(CARRIE digs through her bag, pulls out a contract.)

CARRIE (Continued)

It's everything you've dreamed of. Just a few revisions, and they'll be ready to sign. And then, once you're published, once your name is out there- then, you try again.

(LILLIAN looks at the contract. There's a battle in her eyes, something she's tried so hard to hold onto. She lets go. Wordlessly, she picks up a pen and signs. Lights down. End of Scene 6.)

SCENE 9

(Lights up on a small kitchen. The set is painted so as to appear cartoonish, like an illustration in a child's picture book. MAN ONE appears, dressed in a suit and tie. He fiddles with the knot of his tie, unable to get it tightened just right.)

WOMAN

(Offstage)

Off to work already?

(WOMAN enters holding a briefcase. She walks over to MAN ONE and hands him the briefcase before straightening his tie. In every interaction with WOMAN, MAN ONE seems uncertain, unsure. There's an emptiness to his words that wasn't there before: they're bland, disingenuous.)

MAN ONE

(After a moment of hesitation.)

..Afraid so. Quarterly meeting today, I'll be back late.

WOMAN

Good, then you can pick the girls up from Scouts on the way home.

MAN ONE

Of course.

WOMAN

Marcy has an algebra test today, so make sure you ask her about it. Oh, and Jessie has been having trouble with those boys at school again, so-

MAN ONE

So make sure she's alright and maybe stop for ice cream if she seems upset. Yes, I know.

(WOMAN smiles, reaches up to place a hand on the cheek of MAN ONE)

WOMAN

Of course you do.

(MAN ONE stares at her, none of the warmth we'd felt earlier in his eyes. Does WOMAN notice? Does she care? Regardless, she doesn't stop smiling, even as his face falls into something that could only be described as grief. Lights down. End of Scene 7.)

SCENE 10

(E. LILLIAN, in her office once more, but much older- perhaps in her 50s. The once drab environment is now littered with numerous awards and manuscripts- she has become a successful writer in the years that have gone by. She settles into the desk chair, reaching into one of the drawers and withdrawing the set of crumpled papers from her very first draft, all those years ago. She looks at them, her face mirroring that of MAN ONE, when suddenly-)

AVERY

Grandma?

(LILLIAN sets the papers down as Avery walks into the room, carrying a pile of books.)

AVERY

Mom said you needed these up here?

LILLIAN

Yes, thank you. You can set them down over there, I'll put them on the shelf in the morning.

(Avery sets the books down, picking the top one off the stack.)

AVERY

Your new one? What's it about?

LILLIAN

I'm not quite sure. Life, I suppose.

AVERY

You don't know what your own book is about?

LILLIAN

(Glancing back at the draft.)

I'm sure I did at one point. It seems I've forgotten, over the years.

AVERY

That's sad.

LILLIAN

It is.

(Beat. Then-)

AVERY

You know what I'd write about?

LILLIAN

What?

(A single lamp blinks on in the kitchenette.)

AVERY

You and Nana.

LILLIAN

(Amused:)

Now, why on Earth would you do that?

AVERY

Mom and Dad's story is alright, I guess. But you and Nana had to go through so much. You dealt with so much, just to get your happy ending. Who wouldn't want to write that story?

LILLIAN

Of course. But who would want to read it?

AVERY

I would.

(The lamp grows brighter, and now MAN ONE is illuminated, standing in the kitchen. He struggles with his tie.)

(LILLIAN, for the first time, sees the kitchenette.)

LILLIAN

(Facing the kitchenette, but to Avery)

Really?

AVERY

..yeah. Of course.

(The light grows brighter still. Slowly, hesitatingly, MAN TWO walks into the kitchenette. He helps MAN ONE with his tie. Something long broken heals at last.)

(LILLIAN watches this, then turns back to Avery. She picks up the draft.)

LILLIAN

Would you like to?

(Blackout.)