

# LIKE A METAPHOR

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A one-act dramedy by  
Emily Cicchini

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

SCOUT, a girl who uses a wheelchair.

JAZZ, a boy who is always listening to music.

AMY and JAMIE, two girls in Scout's class who are highly concerned with fashion and style.

RICKY, a kid who hangs around with Jazz.

ANGEL, Scout's little sister.

DONNIS, a guy in the grade ahead of Scout, Class President.

They are in grades 6-9, ages 12-15.

## SETTING

Kennedy Central School Cafeteria

Scout's Bedroom

Northtowne Mall

Kennedy Central School Library

Kennedy Central School Music Room

## NOTE

The setting can be done quite simply, with iconic pieces representing place for quick transitions. The cafeteria is merely a long table with chairs or benches; Scout's bedroom, a cot covered with fluffy bedding; The Northtowne Mall can be a few potted plants and store advertisements; The library, a stack of books, or a short shelf full of them. The piano can be either electric or upright. A typical school room or auditorium can provide the backdrop to it all.

The focus of the play is the acting and the character relationships. It's important that Scout's wheelchair is real, fully functional, and up to date. It should be the kind of chair that a person in her situation would really use.

## TIME

The Present.

*(The lunch line in the Kennedy School cafeteria. Sounds of kids talking. A table with a stack of trays and plastic silverware and napkins is on the far stage right side. The wall is covered with posters: One says, "GO BLUEJAYS!" Another says "LADIES' CHOICE DANCE NEXT FRIDAY, TICKETS \$10." Another says "PLEASE CLEAN UP AFTER YOURSELF. YOUR MOTHER DOESN'T WORK HERE." JAMIE, AMY, SCOUT, DONNIS, JAZZ and RICKY all stand in line, in that order, all facing stage right. Actually, Scout sits in line, in a slick wheelchair. There is a backpack hanging from the rear of her chair. There is a moment where they're all just waiting, but we can already see their personalities: what they are thinking about, what they are looking at, how they fidget. Jazz is listening to music through headphones. His body doesn't move at all to the beat, but sometimes, his lips do – silently. Jamie and Amy look around the room, whispering back and forth to each other. Scout follows their lead and inches closer.)*

**JAMIE:** Look! Look at Tonya Quackenbush. What does she think she's wearing?

**AMY:** Is that feathers???

**JAMIE:** Is it pink? Or is it orange?

**AMY:** And her hair...

**JAMIE:** She's like a dead poodle!

*(Amy and Jamie laugh and fall into each other, excluding Scout.)*

**SCOUT:** I can't believe I forgot my lunch.

**JAMIE:** Don't worry about it, we'll help you.

**SCOUT:** It's not that, I just hate school food. What is it today, anyway?

**DONNIS:** Pizza. It's not so bad.

**SCOUT:** *(Turning her wheelchair slightly to look behind her:)* Oh.

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Hi.

**DONNIS:** Just pick off the mysterious meat pellets. I'm Donnis.

**SCOUT:** Yeah, I know.

**JAMIE:** Hi, Donnis.

**AMY:** Yeah, hi.

**DONNIS:** You're Scout, aren't you? When did you get back to school?

**SCOUT:** I guess it's been a couple of weeks...usually my mom packs my lunch...I keep it in my backpack, so I can just reach back and get it...

**DONNIS:** You're really brave.

**SCOUT:** You're really embarrassing.

**DONNIS:** I'm sorry. I'm just glad to see you're doing better.

**SCOUT:** Better than what?

**JAMIE:** Scout, Jeez! Donnis. Don't listen to her. She's doing fabulous. She's almost good as new, right Scout?

**SCOUT:** Yeah, right.

**JAMIE:** So Donnis. You going to the Ladies' Choice Dance?

**DONNIS:** Well, I don't know, Jamie. Nobody's asked me yet.

*(From down the line, Ricky talks.)*

**RICKY:** Are you ladies going to move it? We haven't got all day, you know.

**JAMIE:** Shut up, loser. We'll move when we're good and ready. *(She turns around and gets a tray:)* Come on, Amy.

**AMY:** *(Getting a tray for herself, and one for Scout:)* Here, Scout.

**SCOUT:** Um...

*(Scout takes the tray in her hands, Jamie and Amy move forward and off stage. Scout looks down at her wheels, with her hands full.)*

Uh, Amy?

**RICKY:** What's the hold up now???

**DONNIS:** Can I, I mean, may I help you?

**SCOUT:** Sure. Thanks.

*(Donnis starts to push her wheelchair.)*

You know what? I'm not crazy about being pushed. It kind of makes me seasick.

**DONNIS:** How about I take your tray, and we just put everything on mine. Then I'll bring it to your table.

**SCOUT:** That would be great, thanks. Thanks a lot.

*(Scout hands her tray to Donnis, and moves forward in line. Suddenly, Jazz starts singing out loud, totally into the music. Donnis and Scout look over at Jazz like he's crazy.)*

**JAZZ:** Ba-da-da, Ba-da-da, DA DA DA, Ba-da-da, da-da-da, deddle, deddle deet...

*(Ricky taps Jazz's shoulder.)*

**RICKY:** Man. Jazz. Man!

**JAZZ:** *(Pulling off his headphones, a little too wildly:)* Don't touch me!

**RICKY:** Sorry, Jazz. *(Holding his hands up with palms open:)* I had to. Your volume was turned on.

**JAZZ:** What?

**RICKY:** *(Spelling it out for him slowly:)* Your volume. You know. Your real volume.



**JAZZ:** Oh. Right. (*Looking over at Donnis and Scout:*) Sorry. (*To Ricky:*) Thanks, Ricky.

**RICKY:** No problemo, Jazzmo.

**JAZZ:** (*Looking at Scout:*) Are you paralyzed? Forever?

**DONNIS:** What the — how can you ask a question like that?

**SCOUT:** It's okay, Donnis. Yes. Yes I am. Unless they find a cure.

**JAZZ:** Stem cell research.

**SCOUT:** Maybe.

**JAZZ:** You're paraplegic. You can use your arms.

**SCOUT:** Yes, that's right.

**JAZZ:** A quadriplegic can't use their arms.

**SCOUT:** No. But some of them use their mouths. To write. Or paint. Or play music, even.

*(Jazz puts on his headphones again, and seems to go someplace else.)*

**DONNIS:** Come on, Scout. Let's check out that pizza.

**SCOUT:** Still sounds scary to me. But let's go.

*(Scout wheels herself out, followed by Donnis. Jazz moves forward slowly behind. Ricky calls out.)*

**RICKY:** He doesn't mean to be rude! (*Almost to himself:*) It's just the way he is.

*(Jazz and Ricky exit. Jazz music plays while the setting is changed from the cafeteria to Scout's bedroom: Posters of current music and television stars on the walls. A chair with some clothes draped over it. As this is happening, Scout comes forward and talks directly to the audience.)*

**SCOUT:** My name is Scout. It's my real name, not a nickname. I'm named after the main character in the book *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. It was my mother's favorite. I didn't like my name very much when I was growing up, because it just doesn't sound like a girl's name. When I was recovering from the accident, my mother gave me a copy of the book. I have to say, it changed my mind. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the first real "adult" book I ever read, and it's just, well, it's amazing, you know? I don't even want to try to explain it, because, it's better if you read it yourself. It's like trying to explain what it's like to be paralyzed. But the main thing is, it taught me to appreciate metaphors. Metaphors are when you use words to paint a picture that means many things at once...like "apple of my eye," or "raining cats and dogs" or "so hot you could fry an egg." *To Kill a Mockingbird* means a lot of things. It's about racism and discrimination. It's about growing up. Killing a mockingbird is sort of like, doing something wrong to someone who is innocent. See, a metaphor makes the words work harder.

*(There is a knock at the door.)*

**ANGEL:** *(Offstage:)* Scout?

**SCOUT:** That's my sister, Angel. I guess my parents figured out by the time she came along how to really name a girl. *(Calling:)* Come in!

*(ANGEL comes in with her suitcase.)*

**ANGEL:** I can't decide what to bring with me.

**SCOUT:** Bring what you normally bring.

**ANGEL:** But this time we're going to the country. There's supposed to be horseback riding and swimming...

**SCOUT:** Isn't it a little cold for swimming?

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**ANGEL:** It's an indoor pool. It's Veronica's family. She's rich, you know.

**SCOUT:** So I've heard. But not rich enough to put a ramp on their house.

**ANGEL:** It's not about the money, Scout. They said the neighborhood won't approve the plans.

**SCOUT:** That's discrimination.

**ANGEL:** Dad's going to talk to them about it.

**SCOUT:** Yeah, right. Next year. Right after they widen their bathroom doors.

**ANGEL:** I'm sorry you don't get to go stay with Dad, Scout. It's not fair.

**SCOUT:** It wasn't fair that he left Mom, either.

**ANGEL:** He's happier now. And Veronica's not that bad.

**SCOUT:** Whatever, Angel. What do you want, anyway?

**ANGEL:** I was wondering...can I borrow your bathing suit? The blue bikini?

**SCOUT:** But I was planning on wearing it to physical therapy! *(Pause.)* I'm kidding! It's over on the chair. I can't wear a bikini anymore, with all the scars...

**ANGEL:** Are these your brown suede cropped pants? Oh, wouldn't I look so fine riding Victoria's English pony in these...

**SCOUT:** Take them.

**ANGEL:** No. They're your favorite...

**SCOUT:** They're too hard to get on anymore. I wish I could have ridden a horse like that.

**ANGEL:** But you can, right? There isn't a law against it...

**SCOUT:** Even if they did help me get up on the horse, I'll never be able to...what do they call it? Post. You know. Move up and down with your legs, as you ride, like in the movies, like *National Velvet*... It just wouldn't be right, you know?

**ANGEL:** I'm sorry I brought it up.

**SCOUT:** No, are you kidding me? It's amazing that you get to ride her horses. Go, have a good time, okay? Take the pants. Take anything you want.

**ANGEL:** Thanks, Scout. I'll take good care of them, I promise.

*(Angel leaves.)*

**SCOUT:** Dad left about a month before the accident. In some ways, I was relieved, not to hear them fighting all the time. He got remarried before I even left the hospital, to some woman he'd just met. I guess she's a lawyer. I didn't even meet her until after I was released. The arrangement is that Angel goes to stay with them every other weekend. Every other Wednesday, they come and take me out to dinner. I have to make suggestions, because a couple of times they've taken me to places that are completely inaccessible...some fancy place up some flight of stairs with no elevator. It's like, Dad doesn't want to admit his daughter is a cripple. Cripple is one of those bad words you shouldn't say in public. I would get angry if someone called me that to my face. But when I say it myself, it kind of helps me own it.

*(Music again, something they would play over a loudspeaker in a store. Scout rolls off stage. The setting changes to Northtowne Mall. Signs that say popular store names and "SALE" and "20% OFF" and "NEW SHIPMENT" and "ONE DAY ONLY." Amy and Jamie come on, with shopping bags in their hand. Scout follows. Amy and Jamie sit on a bench.)*

**JAMIE:** I am so glad I found that matching top. I was afraid I was going to have to throw that skirt away.

**AMY:** It looks great on you, Jamie.

**SCOUT:** Let me see it!

*(Jamie pulls it out of the bag and gives it to Scout.)*

**JAMIE:** It's such a shame you couldn't come in the dressing room. It looks much different on.

**SCOUT:** Oh, it's nice!

*(Jamie grabs it back and puts it back in her bag.)*

**JAMIE:** So. I still can't decide who to ask to the Ladies' Choice Dance. Luis or Michael.

**AMY:** Luis is better looking.

**JAMIE:** Yeah, but Michael has a better body.

**SCOUT:** I was thinking...maybe I'll ask Donnis to the dance.

**JAMIE:** What! Are you crazy?

**AMY:** Why would you want to go to a dance, anyway?

**JAMIE:** Amy, don't be stupid. Scout can go to the dance if she wants. People don't have to dance to go to a dance.

**SCOUT:** Who says I can't dan—

**JAMIE:** The point is...Donnis is way out of your league, Scout. He's older than us. He's popular, too. He's even class president!

**SCOUT:** Yeah, you're probably right.

**JAMIE:** Oh look at that dress in the window. Let's go in there...

**SCOUT:** That's a cheap store...

**JAMIE:** I've found good things in there...

**AMY:** Sure, so have I.

**SCOUT:** Well, maybe it's not so cheap...but...just look, the way they've got it arranged...

**JAMIE:** It looks kinda cute to me...

**AMY:** Yeah, very metro, very downtown...

**SCOUT:** It's all crowded in there. I don't think I'll even fit between the racks...

**JAMIE:** That's okay. You can just wait out here for us.

**SCOUT:** Oh, you want me to wait for you?

**JAMIE:** Sure, you don't mind, do you?

**SCOUT:** No. Why would I mind?

**AMY:** Will you watch our bags?

**SCOUT:** I— um — Sure.

*(Amy and Jamie dump off their bags next to Scout and exit. Scout turns to the audience;)*

Amy and Jamie are my best friends. I've known them since third grade, when we moved here from Lincoln. We used to have sleep-overs every weekend and make up these weird things to eat with sugar and cinnamon and crackers and butter all hot and melted into candy. But we haven't slept over since the accident. When it first happened, they were right there, by my side, every day. I mean, they cried, they brought me all kinds of flowers and magazines and things, and they were really, really great. But since I've been back at school, I don't know. Something's changed. It's like, I'm just annoying to them. I can't stand to feel that way. See, the deal is, I am different, too. I just don't really care about the same things that I used to. Clothes. Music. The next hottest thing doesn't matter anymore. I'm looking for something...something more, classic, now, more timeless, more real. Authentic. Maybe...maybe that's, you know what they say, the silver

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lining. The silver lining to losing the use of your legs. Everything just gets, a little, slower, you know? It's given me time to stop and smell the roses.

*(Jazz enters, followed by Ricky. He starts to go up to Scout.)*

**JAZZ:** Look. It's that girl. From school.

**RICKY:** Hold it. What are you doing, brother?

**JAZZ:** I'm going to ask her where the music store is.

**RICKY:** Come on, I told you, man, I can find the music store. It's not like I've never been to the Northtowne Mall before...

**JAZZ:** It's been seventeen minutes and twenty-eight seconds. I don't think you know where the music store is.

**RICKY:** Man! What do you think I am, stupid? I can find the dang music store...this place is just so big...

**JAZZ:** Excuse me.

**SCOUT:** Oh, hi.

**JAZZ:** Do you know where the music store is?

**SCOUT:** Um, I think it's over that way.

**JAZZ:** South by southwest.

**SCOUT:** I guess so. See, the blue sign?

**JAZZ:** Past the pothos ivy and split leaf philodendrons.

**SCOUT:** You mean the potted plants?

**JAZZ:** Yes.

**SCOUT:** You know a lot, don't you?

**JAZZ:** About some things. Not so much about others.

**RICKY:** Jazz is a genius. He's amazing. You should hear him play piano...

**JAZZ:** No! She's a stranger!

**RICKY:** Calm down, calm down. He only lets certain people hear him play. People he already knows.

**SCOUT:** Well, Jazz, my name is Scout.

**JAZZ:** Scout. Like in the book by Harper Lee. *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**SCOUT:** Yes. Exactly!

**JAZZ:** I don't like that book.

**SCOUT:** You've read it?

**JAZZ:** Too many metaphors.

*(Amy and Jamie enter.)*

**JAMIE:** Scout! Come on. We've got to get going...

**AMY:** Yeah, my mom is picking us up, and you know how long it takes to get your chair folded up and in the trunk...

**RICKY:** We've got to get going, too.

**JAZZ:** Bye, Scout.

**SCOUT:** Bye.

*(Jazz and Ricky exit.)*

**JAMIE:** Were you talking to those "special needs" kids?

**AMY:** That Jazz guy is psycho or something. He sits in the front of my math class just doing problem after problem after problem, sometimes he runs out of paper and keeps writing on the desk and the teacher has to stop him...

**SCOUT:** They asked for directions to the music store. That's all.



**JAMIE:** Scout. You've got to be careful. You're not like them. You don't want people thinking that you're special ed or something...

**SCOUT:** I can't believe you just said that.

**JAMIE:** I'm sorry, but I'm just worried about your reputation.

**SCOUT:** I think you're more worried about your own.

**AMY:** Scout. How can you say that? Doesn't our friendship mean anything to you?

**SCOUT:** Of course it does. Of course. I'm sorry. We better get going. We don't want to keep your mother waiting.

*(Scout, Amy, and Jamie exit. The MUSIC changes to classic Jazz. Maybe John Coltraine or Miles Davis. The signs change again: QUIET. NO TALKING. FICTION/NON-FICTION, with arrows pointing in different directions. A table comes on with an old record player and big old clunky headphones. Jazz is listening to music, and looking at an album cover, that reads, LEGENDS IN JAZZ. Scout wheels in with some books on her lap. She sees Jazz, thinks about it for a moment, and then goes over to him. She starts to reach out and touch him...but then decides against it. She pulls out a book, and puts it right in front of his eyes, between the album cover and his face. He looks at the book, and she pulls the book over back on her lap. His eyes follow it, and then go up to her face.)*

**JAZZ:** Oh, hello...

*(He takes off the headphones quickly. The MUSIC stops.)*

**SCOUT:** Am I bothering you?

**JAZZ:** No...I was just listening...to some great music. You can't even get this anywhere. I've tried.

**SCOUT:** You really like jazz music, don't you?

**JAZZ:** It's the only thing that helps me relax. Why are you talking to me?

**SCOUT:** I don't know. I like music too.

**JAZZ:** I've never talked to a girl before. I mean, other than my mother.

**SCOUT:** That's okay. I won't bite.

**JAZZ:** You mean, like a dog?

**SCOUT:** Yes.

**JAZZ:** Bite like a dog. That's a simile. I like similes.

**SCOUT:** What do you mean?

**JAZZ:** Similes are where you say something is LIKE something. Or sometimes you can use AS. Sly as a fox. Like father, like son. That makes sense to me. It's true. Some fathers are like some sons. But metaphors...that's when people say something IS something else. That's confusing. That's just a lie.

**SCOUT:** I remember. You said you didn't like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, because it had too many metaphors.

**JAZZ:** People say...for instance...love is blind. Love is an emotion, it doesn't have eyes, so it can't see in the first place. So how can it be blind? When people use metaphors, I have to go through all that translation to make it real, and it gives me a pain in my brain.

**SCOUT:** You think differently, you're saying.

**JAZZ:** The doctors call it autism. My mother calls it Asperger's syndrome. She says she likes the way it sounds better. I call it neurologically diverse.

**SCOUT:** Gosh. Wow. Shouldn't you be sitting in a corner rocking back or forth or something?

**JAZZ:** Only when I'm having a really bad day. *(Beat.)* That was a joke. I don't rock. I do stack and count things, like the number of tiles on the ceiling. There's 247 in this room. 1,523 in the cafeteria.

**SCOUT:** Wow. Funny. You know, you were the first person at school to use the word paralyzed around me. And to ask me if it was permanent.

**JAZZ:** I'm sorry.

**SCOUT:** No, don't be! I like that I can finally be honest with someone. Everyone around me puts on this nicey-nicey attitude, it's really annoying.

**JAZZ:** Like that Donnis guy?

**SCOUT:** I wasn't really talking about him...

**JAZZ:** Are you going to ask him to the dance?

**SCOUT:** I guess that's none of your business.

**JAZZ:** I don't even want to go to the dance. See, there is this jazz quartet playing that same night, at this club called The Oasis...

**SCOUT:** The Oasis? Isn't that a bar or something?

**JAZZ:** It's an "all-ages" show. But my parents won't let me go. They won't let me go anywhere alone. Sometimes...sometimes I get confused.

**SCOUT:** Oh. That's too bad. What about that friend of yours?

**JAZZ:** He can't. He's got something at his church he has to do. This is the only time they've ever come here. They're from Chicago. That's the only night they're playing.

**SCOUT:** Maybe your parents will take you.

**JAZZ:** My father is not like his son.

*(The school bell rings.)*

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**SCOUT:** Well, I better get going. You know, one thing I've learned about this condition is it takes me a little longer to get from place to place. I have to allow extra time for everything. I'll see you around, okay?

**JAZZ:** Yes. You'll see me. I'll see you.

*(Sound of talking returns. The signs from the cafeteria return, with one new one: ONLY 20 MORE TICKETS LEFT FOR THE LADIES CHOICE DANCE! BUY SOON OR LOSE! A table and chairs come in. Lunch is on the table. Jamie and Amy pick at their food. Scout eats from her lunchbag.)*

**AMY:** I'm thinking about getting my hair straightened. What do you think?

**SCOUT:** I like your hair how it is, Amy...

**JAMIE:** Do it. And you should think about color, too. Maybe blond, or red!

**SCOUT:** Jamie, you've been through so many colors now, that how do you expect anybody to ever recognize you?

**JAMIE:** Who are you to give me any advice about hairstyle, Scout? If I remember correctly, you were shaved bald not so long ago.

**AMY:** Ooooooh!

**SCOUT:** I'm just kidding, Jamie. I love your hair, really. And you know that bald head wasn't really my choice.

*(Donnis comes by.)*

**DONNIS:** What's up?

**JAMIE:** Hi Donnis! Luis and I are going to the dance...

**AMY:** And I'm going with Justin...

**JAMIE:** Wanna sit with us?

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**DONNIS:** Well, I would, but I still don't know who I'm going with. Let me go get some eats and maybe you can figure it out for me. I'll be right back.

*(Donnis leaves.)*

**SCOUT:** I'm going to ask him.

**JAMIE:** Don't do it.

**SCOUT:** I think he wants me to ask him. He's always dropping hints.

**AMY:** Listen to Jamie. She just wants the best for you...

**SCOUT:** Maybe I'm not the same as I was outside, but I'm just the same inside. If I could still walk you would be thrilled about me asking Donnis to go to the dance. Are you ashamed of me, or something?

**JAMIE:** It's not us. It's him. Don't you see? Donnis is just coming on to you because it's good for his image. He wants everyone to see him being nice to the girl in the wheelchair, so he can gain more sympathy and win more votes.

**SCOUT:** What?

**JAMIE:** Hello, it's election time.

**SCOUT:** You're awful, Jamie. I don't believe it. I'm going to ask him anyway.

**JAMIE:** Well, I can't be here to watch you make a fool out of yourself. We love you, Scout, but we don't want to see you get hurt. Come on, Amy.

*(Jamie and Amy leave together.)*

**SCOUT:** Nothing could hurt more than the way they were treating me. I knew right then they weren't my friends anymore.

*(Donnis comes back with his tray.)*

**DONNIS:** What's up with them?

**SCOUT:** Um, they had to go to class. Um...Donnis? I was wondering. Do you...want to go...to the dance...with me?

**DONNIS:** I thought you'd never ask.

**SCOUT:** REALLY? That's great. That's—amazing. That's—unbelievable!

*(Donnis looks around, to see who might be watching them.)*

What are you looking at?

**DONNIS:** Nothing, nothing. *(He finally looks back at her, and holds her hand.)* I'm just glad to see you happy. You deserve it.

*(Donnis and Scout exit. The set changes back to Scout's bedroom. MUSIC plays, something popular that Scout might listen to. She is recording a diary entry.)*

**SCOUT:** Mom was driving when it happened. We were coming back from dropping Angel off at dance class. I just went along for the ride, for no reason. It was a perfectly normal day. We were crossing the intersection at Washington, and this truck came out of nowhere. Ran the red light. Slammed right into the passenger side. I never even saw it coming. I hardly even felt a thing. Until I woke up three days later. Then, it was pain like you can't describe: pain is an excellent teacher. Mom was standing over me: she was fine, thank goodness, hardly hurt at all, just a scratch on her forehead. She said, "He was drunk. What were they thinking, letting a drunk man drive their truck..." I think both she and Angel somehow feel responsible, in their own ways. Even though I tell them over and over..."it was just an accident! How could we have known?"

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