

Content Advisories

COST OF LIVING

By Martyna Majok

Directed by Priscilla Jackman and Dan Daw

This information contains warnings and spoilers and is subject to change without notice.

About the Show

Former-carer turned Playwright Martyna Majok won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for this play in 2018 and it's easy to see why. This is a beautifully rendered story about our need to care and be cared for, no matter the distance that age, race and disability might place between us.

Drawing on her lived experience, Majok introduces us to four seemingly disconnected characters whose lives are at a crossroads. There's John — a wealthy successful PhD student with cerebral palsy — who hires the secretive Jess to be his new carer. And then there's Eddie, an unemployed truck driver, desperately trying to reconcile with his ex-wife Ani, who has become a wheelchair user after an accident.

Content Advisory

This production contains full frontal male nudity, underwater submersion, sexual references, occasional strong language, herbal and e-cigarettes and the use of haze.

Age Suitability

Recommended for audiences 15+.

Resources for Further Support

Lifeline (13 11 14)

Lifeline has trained crisis supporters available 24/7. They also offer an online Crisis Support Chat 7 days a week between 7pm-4am AEDT (www.lifeline.org.au/crisischat)

Translation services available via 131 450

Detailed Warnings

Full Frontal Male Nudity

The action of a male actor appearing on stage without any clothing

A clothed female character assists a male character to shower and dress. We see the process in its entirety from nakedness to being clothed. This moment is a practical task performed as an act of service and vulnerability.

Underwater Submersion

The action of an actor submerging themselves fully underwater for a period of time.

- The character of ANI, alone in the bath, slips into the tub and becomes submerged. Seemingly she is unable to resurface. The character of EDDIE eventually discovers this and lifts her from the tub.
This is a choreographed moment in which no actors are in danger at any point.

Occasional Strong Language

The use of coarse or derogatory language

- There are frequent use of the words, 'fuck', 'fucking', 'prick' and 'bitch'
- JOHN uses the pejorative word 'retarded' with pointed irony, in the context of being a person with a disability.
- JOHN uses the word 'hooker/s' to talk about his consideration of seeing a sex worker.

Sexual References

- EDDIE bathes ANI as part of his caring role. She reflects on her relationship to her sexuality as a person with a newly acquired disability.
This scene has been choreographed with an intimacy coordinator.

Depiction of smoking

- ANI and EDDIE are depicted smoking.
Real cigarettes are not used in the production.

References to Alcoholism

- EDDIE speaks at length about his struggles with alcohol addiction including waking up in 'vomit, say or piss' and obtaining a DUI charge.

References to Death and Dying

- EDDIE talks about his wife's accident and death at points throughout the play. These are brief references.
- There are several references to death in the play, both figuratively and literally, including the simulated drowning of ANI, a reference to carbon monoxide poisoning and poisoning through food.

Sensitive Commentary around Disability

- The subject matter of the play is concerned with conversations about disability. This includes how disability is perceived by people who do not live with a disability, the varied needs of people living with disability and the relationship between a person with a disability and their carer/s. This occurs throughout the play. This argument is put forward by characters who have a disability and is performed by actors with a disability. The intention of the play is to be empowering for people with a disability and allow the presentation of multi-faceted and complex characters.
- JOHN, a character with Cerebral palsy, has a conversation about his care needs with a woman he seeks to employ to help him with showering and grooming.
- EDDIE, a character who does not have a disability, manipulates the hand of a character who has quadriplegia to punch him. It is presented as a moment of awkwardness and a faux pas on the part of EDDIE.
- There is a mention of alternative therapies found on the internet to 'cure' quadriplegia. This is presented as something that is in no way real or medically sound information.
- ANI describes her accident, her injury and following medical treatment including sepsis and surgery in some detail.
- JOHN, who has Cerebral palsy, describes what his body feels on a daily basis.
- Characters at several points discuss the specific care needs of themselves or other characters with a disability.

References to violence

- There are several references to wanting to inflict violence on others. There is no depiction of violence on stage in the play.

References to sexual violence

- JESS refers to not serving certain patrons during her bar job to protect women from sexual assault.
- JESS, a young woman, is nervous when entering the house of JOHN, an older man and informs him she has mace.

Spoiler Sheet

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Below is the Scene Breakdown Spoiler Sheet for *Cost of Living*.

Please note some changes to technical elements of the production may be subject to change.

IF YOU DO NOT WANT THE PLOT OF THE SHOW TO BE SPOILED – DO NOT READ AHEAD.

Overview

The story of *Cost of Living* by Martyna Majok, directed by Priscilla Jackman and Dan Daw is performed by four actors. Two actors are living with disabilities that mirror the disabilities of the characters they play.

JOHN has Cerebral palsy. Dan Daw who plays JOHN has Cerebral palsy.

ANI has an acquired disability that requires her to use a wheelchair. The character of ANI is capable of using one hand. Kate Hood, who plays ANI, has an acquired disability and uses a wheelchair for mobility.

This play is scripted.

There are nine scenes. They are not chronological in order.

The play takes place in New Jersey.

The Prologue, Scenes Seven, Eight and Nine occur on the same Friday night in December, a week before Christmas. The rest spans the months of September through December of that year.

The set is stylistically sparse with sliding walls that are moved into different configurations to represent the different spaces within the play. There is a bathtub that moves downstage during Scene Eight.

The costumes are realistic, and each character wears several different outfits

The performance is supported by theatrical lighting and sound – including an extended period of low light.

Scene by Scene

Prologue

Friday Night, December, a week before Christmas

One by one each character is revealed to the audience in a tableau.

ANI

JESS

JOHN

and lastly EDDIE.

He is in a bar, specifically St. Mazie's bar in post Bloomberg Williamsburg, Brooklyn. It is what could be called a 'hipster bar'.

- EDDIE speaks directly to the audience, providing insight into his life, struggles, and current state of mind. He is determined to move forward despite his past mistakes. He reveals that his wife of over 20 years, ANI, has died two weeks earlier and he misses her a great deal.

Scene One

Early September. It is raining outside. The setting is an accessible apartment in Princeton, well-kept and costly.

- The scene opens with JESS standing alone. She is nervous. Eventually JOHN enters to interview JESS. This is the first time they have met.
- JOHN asks JESS about her prior carer experience and her suitability for the job.
- The interaction is awkward, with JOHN being direct and JESS being somewhat taken aback by his bluntness.
- JOHN explains the specifics of his care routine, including his need for physical assistance and his expectations.
- JESS hesitates but ultimately accepts the job, seeing it as a necessary means to support herself.

Scene Two

Early September. It is raining outside. The setting is a different accessible apartment in Jersey City, NJ. The apartment is largely empty, in transition and clearly not fully lived-in.

- EDDIE shows up at ANI's apartment, unannounced, attempting to reconnect and offer his help.
- ANI is initially hostile, bringing up EDDIE's past betrayals and failures.

- EDDIE pleads with ANI to let him help her, emphasizing his desire to make amends and prove his worth.
- ANI remains sceptical, struggling with her own pride and the pain of their shared history.
- ANI shows a moment of vulnerability, hinting at her deep-seated fears and struggles with her disability and the two connect.
- EDDIE reveals he has an ulterior motive. He would like to collect some things that were accidentally packed when ANI left their shared home.
- ANI is furious.
- EDDIE decides he does not need any of his 'stuff' and leaves as his new girlfriend is waiting outside.
- EDDIE leaves and the scene ends with ANI, alone in her apartment.

Scene Three

September. Early Morning. JOHN's Apartment, JESS' first day at work.

- JESS is trying to shave JOHN's face with a sharp razor. She is nervous and he keeps interrupting her to ask personal questions.
- JOHN tries to establish a personal connection with JESS by asking her questions about her life and interests.
- JOHN, who has Cerebral palsy, describes what his body feels on a daily basis.
- JESS is guarded, trying to keep the relationship strictly professional.
- JOHN becomes annoyed and suggests she is not the right person for the job.
- JESS needs the job and shares a personal story about how she got her name.
- JOHN is seemingly dismissive of her story.
- JESS returns to her professional role, but a connection has started to form between them.

Scene Four

October. Evening. ANI's Apartment.

- ANI's carer has not turned up.
- As her emergency contact EDDIE has turned up her apartment.
- EDDIE and ANI have a significant confrontation, addressing their deepest grievances and unresolved issues.
- EDDIE offers to come and care for ANI, it will save money, he knows her better than anyone and he seems genuinely keen to spend time with her.
- After some resistance, ANI agrees to allow EDDIE to come for the next two weeks.
- ANI remembers her birthday is coming up.

- During this scene both characters reflect on their past, revealing more about their history and the pain they have endured.

Scene Five

December. Early Morning. JOHN's Apartment.

- JESS showers JOHN.
- JOHN disrobes, bathes and is helped into clean clothes by JESS. **There is a brief period for full frontal nudity.**
- Some time has passed since JESS started the job. Their relationship has deepened, and they are at ease with each other.
- JESS speak candidly about her other jobs at 'bars that stay open late' and how she makes sure the girls who work at these places are not in danger. JESS declares 'No Rapes On My Watch'.
- JOHN speaks of loneliness and JESS teases him for never going out.
- At the end of the scene JOHN asks if JESS will come over that evening.
- JESS has never been to JOHN's house in the evening and misinterprets his intention. She cancels her work plans so that she can come over and spend time with JOHN, thinking that his request is romantic rather than professional.

Scene Six

October. ANI's Apartment.

- ANI is bathed by EDDIE.
- EDDIE assists ANI, showing a significant step towards reconciliation. They reflect on their past as lovers and ANI discusses how sensuality is different for her after acquiring her disability.
- ANI and EDDIE share a cigarette.
- When EDDIE briefly leaves the room to find an ashtray ANI slips underwater and is unable to resurface.
- **ANI is submerged for approximately fifteen seconds before EDDIE returns and pulls her out of the bath. Both are shocked and fearful of ANI's near death experience.**

Scene Seven

Friday Evening. JOHN's Apartment

- JESS enters carrying a bottle of wine, appearing to have added additional effort to her appearance for JOHN. She sprays herself with perfume, including her thighs, before entering the apartment.
- JOHN compliments JESS' appearance. They chat flirtatiously but it becomes clear the flirting is one sided as JESS has misinterpreted why she has been invited.

- JOHN needs JESS to assist him preparing for a date. JESS is deeply hurt. JOHN does not seem to notice this.
- JESS then asks if she can stay in his apartment while he is on his date because it is warm. JOHN tells JESS 'No' because he thinks she might steal things, noting that he suspects she has previously stolen a bar of soap.
- JESS exits the apartment abruptly.

Scene Eight

Immediately after. Outside JOHN's Apartment. It is snowing.

- JESS has fled the apartment and is cold and crying. She calls her mother who does not answer her call.
- JESS leaves a message in her first language, which is not English. It is clear she misses her mother, communicating with despair and loneliness.

Scene Nine or Epilogue

Later the same night, EDDIE's Apartment. Outside it is snowing.

- On his way back from the bar (from the Prologue) EDDIE finds JESS parked nearby sleeping in her car with no heating on a bitterly cold night.
- EDDIE is searching for a blanket to lend to JESS. The blanket used to belong to ANI.
- JESS remains in the doorway while he searches. She is suspicious. EDDIE offers her food and eventually suggests she stays in the house with him.
- JESS is deeply suspicious and leaves, but returns a few moments later.
- The play ends with EDDIE and JESS, together, but ultimately separately, dealing with change, loss and forgiveness. Although we do not see ANI and JOHN, it is implied that these intersecting relationships reflect the enduring power of human connection.