



ALMOST, MAINE

By John Cariani

Dramaturgical Packet

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ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



John Cariani is an actor and a playwright. He has appeared on Broadway and Off Broadway, at regional theaters across the country, and in several films and television shows. He's been nominated for a Tony Award and has done movies with Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken, and Ed Asner. Most people seem to know him from "Law & Order," where his character, Forensics Tech Beck, is alive and well in reruns. As a playwright, John is best known for his first play, *Almost, Maine*, which premiered at Portland (Maine) Stage Company in 2004 and opened Off-Broadway in 2006. It has since become one of the most frequently produced plays in the United States and has been translated into nearly twenty languages. His other plays include *cul-de-sac* (Transport Group), *Last Gas* (Portland Stage Company, Geva Theater Center), and *LOVE/SICK* (Portland Stage Company, Hartford

TheaterWorks). Both *Almost, Maine* and *Last Gas* are published by Dramatists Play Service. Originally from Presque Isle, Maine, John is a graduate of Amherst College. He lives in New York City. www.almostmaine.com

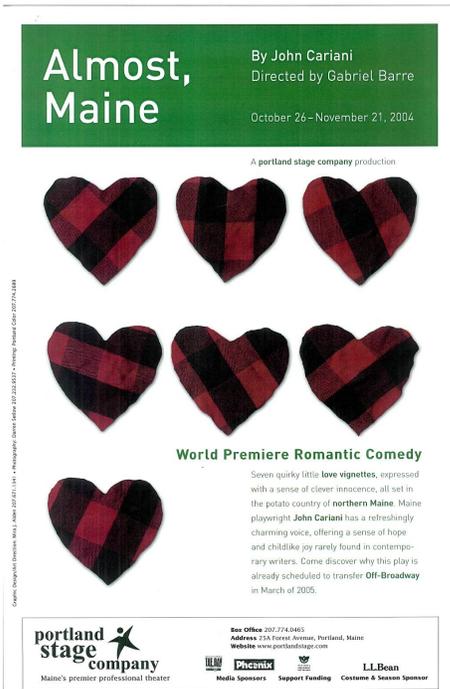
LEGACY OF *ALMOST, MAINE*

Almost, Maine first premiered at Portland Stage in 2004, where it was received very well. As John Cariani says, the play is dedicated to “Northern Maine and the people who live there.”

Almost, Maine then moved on to New York, where it closed after a month due to ticket sales. However, this was not the last that would be seen of this show. *Almost, Maine* may seem to just be a story about love, but it is also a story about perseverance. Those we meet from *Almost*, despite the hardships they face, still find the strength to carry on and figure out what comes next. The play itself also showed this resilience as *Almost, Maine* garnered mass appeal and success with community theaters, high schools, and colleges. According to Playbill’s records, *Almost, Maine* was the most produced play in American high schools for 2017-2018, surpassing William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In general, according to Dramatist Play Service, the licensing

company for the show, “there have been almost 3,000 productions of the play in the United States and Canada since 2008.”

Almost, Maine is also getting a book published in 2020 by Feiwel and Friends!



Almost, Maine
By John Cariani
Directed by Gabriel Barre
October 26 – November 21, 2004

A portland stage company production

World Premiere Romantic Comedy

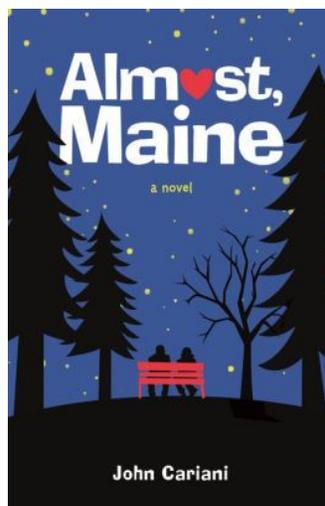
Seven quirky little love vignettes, expressed with a sense of clever innocence, all set in the potato country of northern Maine. Maine playwright John Cariani has a refreshingly charming voice, offering a sense of hope and childlike joy rarely found in contemporary writers. Come discover why this play is already scheduled to transfer Off-Broadway in March of 2005.

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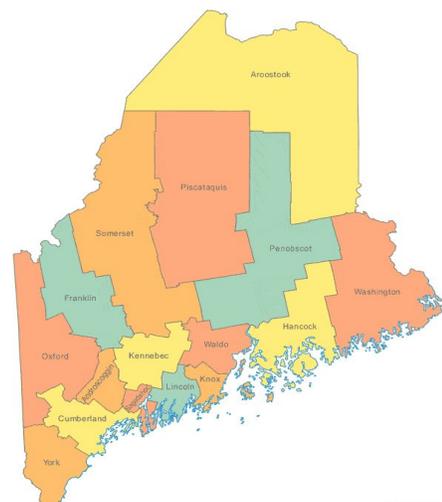
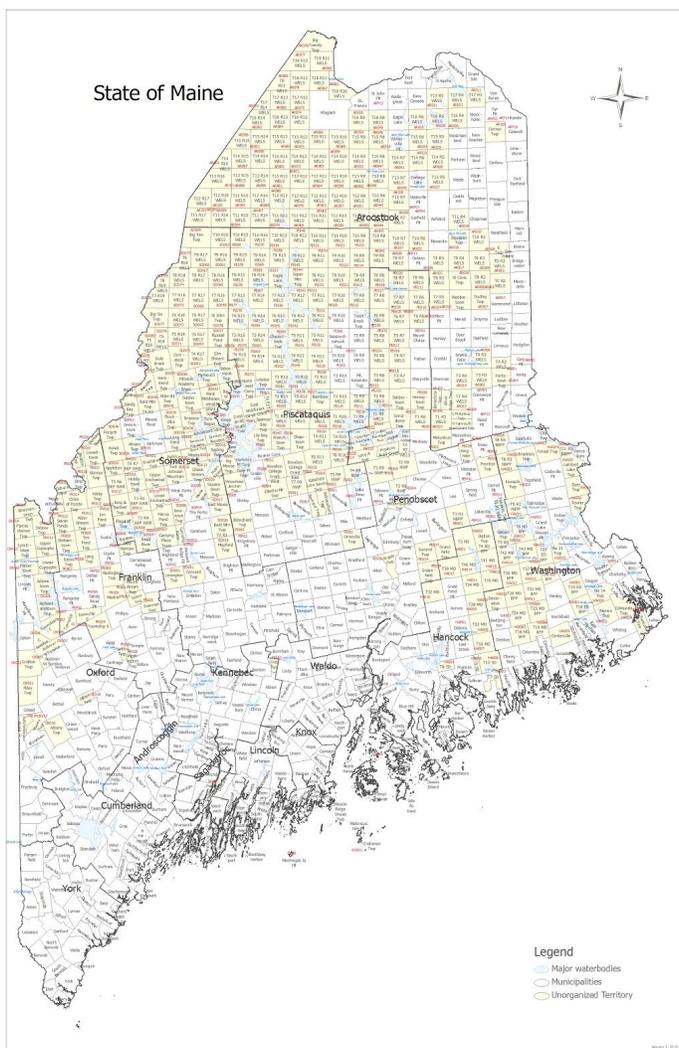
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A (BRIEF) HISTORY OF MAINE

Maine is part of the six New England states (the others being Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire). It is the biggest of all six with a population of 1.338 million people. Here are some quick fun facts!

- Maine became a state on March 15, 1820
- Maine is about 1,752 Miles away from Canada
- Maine is one of nine states that has Unorganized Territories, which make up about 50% of the state.
- Maine has 429 townships
- Aroostook County is the largest county in Maine
- Maine’s largest crop is it’s potato crop, most of which is grown in Aroostook County.

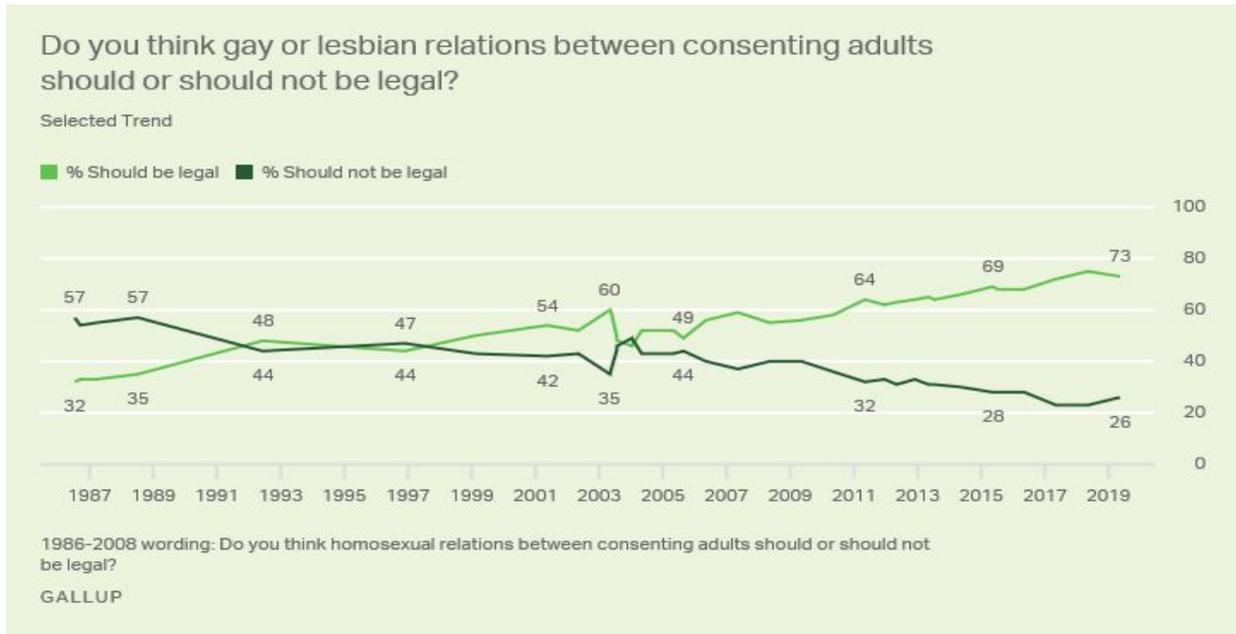


LGBTQ+ RIGHTS AND *ALMOST, MAINE*

Almost, Maine, first produced in 2004, contains a scene between same-sex love interests (“They Fell”). To put into perspective what the social climate of 2004 was regarding same sex relationships, here are some stats:

- Massachusetts was the first state to legalize gay marriage in 2004
- Gay marriage was legalized in Maine in 2012 (8 years after the premiere)
- Gay marriage was legalized in the U.S. in 2015 (11 years after the premiere)
- Don’t Ask Don’t Tell Was still in effect (and would be until September 20, 2011)

According to the chart below, the view on the legalization of gay relationships was evenly mixed, and continued to lean towards the “should” vote in later years:



While these views have shifted over the years, some of the content in *Almost, Maine* is still considered controversial, primarily when it comes to the scene “They Fell”. Often, if a scene gets cut from the play, or the play receives backlash/gets banned altogether in schools or community theatres, it is because of this scene.

HOW GRIEF AFFECTS THE BODY

As seen in Portland Stage's PlayNotes

"It is important to understand how the brain creates and processes emotions. The brain contains a structure called the "limbic system," which is the primary source for behavioral and emotional responses. The major parts of the brain that comprise the limbic system are the hypothalamus, hippocampus, amygdala, and limbic cortex. Each one of these sections is responsible for different functions within the brain, as well as different emotions. Because we are focusing on grief, it is best to take a closer look at the amygdala and hippocampus, which are where sadness and grief primarily occur.

The amygdala, according to *Healthline*, "helps coordinate responses to things in your environment, especially those that trigger an emotional response." The hippocampus "helps preserve and retrieve memories." What sadness specifically looks like in the brain is still being investigated, though Jon Hamilton of NPR also notes that a study at the University of California San Francisco found that, from a study of 21 people, "feeling down was associated with greater communication between brain areas involved in emotion and memory." These areas are, as stated before, the amygdala and hippocampus. The leader of the study, Vikaas Sohal, hypothesized that, "Maybe you're feeling down and so you start remembering times in your life when bad things have happened, or you are starting to remember those experiences and that is what is making you feel down." While this was not definitely proven, it is still a clue as to what the brain may be experiencing when processing sadness.

If this is what sadness looks like in the brain, what does grief look like in the body? As we said before, experiencing stress can cause us to feel a headache. When grief is experienced, it can cause the following symptoms: digestive problems, energy loss, illness due to lowered immune system, nervousness, pain/discomfort, irregular sleeping patterns, fluctuating weight, and temperature-discomfort. (An important distinction between these symptoms being associated with grief versus depression is the length of which they are experienced. If you feel any of these for more than two weeks, consult a medical professional.)

Though our own heart may not literally break, we can experience what is called "broken heart syndrome." The Johns Hopkins Heart and Vascular Institute defines broken heart syndrome as "a condition in which intense emotional or physical stress can cause rapid and severe heart muscle weakness (cardiomyopathy)." This weakening of the muscles can lead to heart failure, low blood pressure, shock, and heart rhythm abnormalities. While these symptoms are also commonly associated with heart attacks, Gregor Dehmer, MD, a professor at Texas A&M College of Medicine says "People with 'broken heart syndrome' typically won't have severe blockages in their coronary arteries like heart attack patients." While broken heart syndrome can result in death, Dehmer assures that it is a very rare occurrence and that it is "A reversible, treatable condition and the majority of people recover fully."

If heartbreak is real, what about shrinking? Can our emotions affect how tall we are? The answer to this is a little more complicated. To start off, it *is* possible to lose your height. We lose height every day from the minute we wake up to the second we go to sleep. According to the *Huffington Post*, “That’s because water in the discs that are in the spine get more and more compressed throughout the day, causing people to be just a smidgen shorter at the end of the day than they were at the beginning of the day.” We can also lose height as we get older due to our bones, which, according to *Mayo Clinic*, “tend to shrink in size and density, weakening them and making them more susceptible to fracture.”

In terms of height and its association with your emotions, however, it is not likely that grief can cause height loss, making Daniel’s condition a result of the magic in *Almost*. Though your emotions may not affect your height, your height *can* affect your mental health. This is most likely because of societal views surrounding height in association with power. *Science Direct* states that, “taller people are more likely to have achieved higher educational attainment, hold jobs of higher status, have higher social esteem, earn more, and report higher levels of well-being.””



HOW LOVE AFFECTS THE BODY

Love is comprised of emotions such as happiness, anxiety, desire, attachment, and excitement. When a person finds themselves feeling, well, *feelings*, this is what happens:

3 STAGES OF BEING IN LOVE:

LUST - Lust is when you become consumed by sexual desire of a potential lover.

ATTRACTION - This is when you feel truly love-struck. In this stage it is hard to think of anything else. You can even lose your appetite, need less sleep and spend most of your hours daydreaming about your new love.

ATTACHMENT - Attachment is a lasting commitment and the bond that keeps couples together so they can raise a family and/or become a unit.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR BODY?

Hormones. Lots. Of. Hormones.

When sexually attracted to someone your dominant hormones will be testosterone and oestrogen. Then as these feelings deepen your adrenaline will spike, this can make you blush, sweat and make your heart race.

Your brain will release lots of dopamine. This is a feel good chemical that is released during pleasurable activities, including texting, talking and kissing your loved one.

Serotonin levels become depleted in early stages of feeling love. This is linked to feelings of obsessiveness, meaning we tend to become a little obsessed with the person we set our sights on.

HOW LONG DOES THIS ALL LAST?

After the start of a new relationship, these feelings will begin to calm themselves down at the 12 - 18 month mark.



CONGENITAL ANALGESIA

WHAT IS IT?

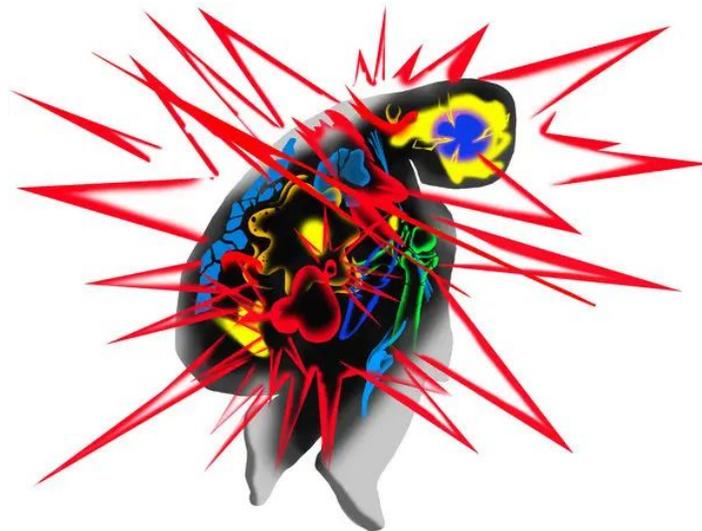
Congenital insensitivity to pain is a condition that inhibits the ability to perceive physical pain. From birth, affected individuals never feel pain in any part of their body when injured. People with this condition can feel the difference between sharp and dull and hot and cold, but cannot sense, for example, that a hot beverage is burning their tongue.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Mutations in the SCN9A gene cause congenital insensitivity to pain. The SCN9A gene provides instructions for making one part (the alpha subunit) of a sodium channel called NaV1.7. Sodium channels transport positively charged sodium atoms (sodium ions) into cells and play a key role in a cell's ability to generate and transmit electrical signals. NaV1.7 sodium channels are found in nerve cells called nociceptors that transmit pain signals to the spinal cord and brain. The NaV1.7 channel is also found in olfactory sensory neurons, which are nerve cells in the nasal cavity that transmit smell-related signals to the brain.

IS THERE A CURE?

There is unfortunately no known cure for this condition.



GLOSSARY

Arctic Cat - Arctic Cat is a popular brand of snowmobile, and competitor of Polaris.

Deficiencies - A failing or shortcoming.

"Got canned" - In this context, when Jimmy says his brother and sister "got canned", he means they were fired from a job.

Latitude - The angular distance of a place north or south of the earth's equator.

Northern Lights - Also known as the "Aurora Borealis", the Northern Lights are the result of collisions between gaseous particles in the Earth's atmosphere with charged particles released from the sun's atmosphere. Variations in color are due to the type of gas particles that are colliding.

Polaris - Pronounced, "pull-AIR-iss." Polaris is a popular brand of snowmobile.

Scandinavia - A region in northern Europe that consists of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

Slate - A fine-grained grey, green, or bluish-purple metamorphic rock easily split into smooth, flat plates.

Villain - The person or thing responsible for specified problems, harm, or damage.

Wallop - To strike or hit very hard.

Winterized - Adapt or prepare (something, especially a house) for use in cold weather.