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April 12, 2022

“Watch Where You’re Going”

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An abstract of
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Abstract
“Watch Where You’re Going”
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Can an industry founded on the principle of supporting marginalized people actually accomplish this task under the modern profit motive mandated by late-stage capitalism? “Watch Where You’re Going,” a new play, posits that the answer to that question is no, but that it is worth the effort anyway. Following several months of interviews with professionals in the assistive technology industry, I put together a play based on the ideas and experiences I had gathered. The play is set over the course of a weekend at an assistive technology conference, where it follows three groups of people: a pair of wealthy executives, a pair of youthful interns, and three expert and attention-seeking panelists. Over the duration of the conference, these individuals come together in a delightfully infuriating meeting of the minds to challenge each other’s worldviews and just maybe find some good networking opportunities.

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Watch Where You're Going

By D.A. Mindell

Characters

ALBERT. The pioneer of a Great Corporate Experiment.

BEVERLY. A Woman In Business. A trailblazer. Mommy? Sorry-

EDWARD. An intern and aspiring engineer. A wheelchair user.

CALLIOPE. An intern and aspiring special education teacher. So well-intentioned that it hurts.

WING. A successful engineer in the assistive technology industry.

EMERSON. A blind scholar of disability studies.

COMET. Emerson's guide dog. A very good dog.

LILA. A d/Deaf advocate and activist. Far from beloved by Industry Professionals.

HUNTER. Lila's interpreter. A fly on the wall, if a fly could use ASL.

Time

One long weekend.

This play is intended to take place in a nebulously post-pandemic America. Masks and other safety measures are encouraged if necessary, and can easily be a part of the play. Masks as a costuming choice are encouraged when safe.

Place

A nice hotel in California.

Notes

Aside from the service dog, Emerson may have whatever other aids make the actor most comfortable (i.e. glasses, cane).

Lines written for Lila are written in what the translation would be from American Sign Language to Spoken English, as the playwright is not fluent in ASL and the grammatical structure is different. The actor is free to translate the lines to ASL in whatever manner conveys the meaning most similarly. None of Lila's lines are verbal.

Act One

Scene I

An empty space, or a resplendent one.

ALBERT

Attendance this year is unprecedented.

BEVERLY

Spectacular.

ALBERT

Unprecedentedly high.

BEVERLY

Spectacularly unprecedented.

ALBERT

I must commend you.

BEVERLY

And I you.

ALBERT

Commendation is well deserved.

BEVERLY

Of course, this is not about us.

ALBERT

Certainly not.

BEVERLY

We are nothing at all.

ALBERT

Worms.

BEVERLY

Vermin.

ALBERT

Dirt to be trodden upon.

BEVERLY

Or wheeled upon.

ALBERT

How crude!

BEVERLY

Oh, one must have a sense of humor in our line of work.

ALBERT

It can take quite the toll sometimes.

BEVERLY

It's a difficult thing.

ALBERT

Tragic at times.

BEVERLY

But so rewarding.

ALBERT

Oh so rewarding.

BEVERLY

It's not easy.

ALBERT

And certainly not lucrative.

BEVERLY

Absolutely unlucrative.

ALBERT

They laughed in our faces when we suggested this move.

Imagine how they treated me!

BEVERLY

Because you're a woman.

ALBERT

The oppression I faced!

BEVERLY

Because of your breasts.

ALBERT

I fought and scraped my way to this point.

BEVERLY

Because of your heavy knockers.

ALBERT

My corporation would not be a player in this industry without my grit.

BEVERLY

Your talent.

ALBERT

My determination.

BEVERLY

Your tenacity.

ALBERT

My joie de vivre.

BEVERLY

Your knockers.

ALBERT

I am a Female Executive.

BEVERLY

A bona-fide bitch.

ALBERT

And the world is better for it!

BEVERLY

For us!

ALBERT

For you.

BEVERLY

And for you.

ALBERT

It's been a burden.

BEVERLY

At times, certainly.

ALBERT

But we have made a real difference in the world.

BEVERLY

With record attendance.

ALBERT

And record sales.

BEVERLY

Congratulations.

ALBERT

And to you.

BEVERLY

Scene II

A hotel office, or maybe a hotel room, or maybe a closet. Wherever the interns are supposed to gather. Lots of files, lots of supplies, little room to be a person. EDWARD is inside, seated, most of him blocked by boxes or a desk or something similar. CALLIOPE enters.

CALLIOPE

You're the other intern, right? I'm not in the wrong place?

EDWARD

No, you made it. Welcome to the dungeon.

CALLIOPE

Is it that bad?

EDWARD

I kid. I interned for this conference last year, when we were up in Boston. Great experience.

CALLIOPE

That's a relief. Seems like a better experience than my last intern job already. At least they give us chairs here.

EDWARD

Ooh, hate to break it to you.

EDWARD wheels himself out far enough to make his wheelchair visible. CALLIOPE looks mortified.

CALLIOPE

I'm so sorry-

EDWARD

It's okay. I'm initiating the joke, you're allowed to laugh.

CALLIOPE

(trying for a joke back)

You're sure? The PC police aren't about to come take me away?

Nah. Security's pretty lax around here.

EDWARD

Good to hear.

CALLIOPE

I didn't catch your name.

EDWARD

Calliope. Wright.

CALLIOPE

Calliope, huh?

EDWARD

My parents were hippies.

CALLIOPE

Couldn't tell.

EDWARD

Ha ha.

CALLIOPE
(dry)

Edward Lewis. Ed's fine, though. Eddie. Whatever works for you.

EDWARD

Which one do you prefer?

CALLIOPE

I don't have a preference.

EDWARD

Noted.

CALLIOPE

EDWARD wheels himself back to where he was working before.

EDWARD

Name tags are in the box over there, and the plastic things with the pins on them are- yep, you found them. Name tags go in the plastic things.

CALLIOPE

There's a lot of name tags.

EDWARD

There's more than last year. The VR demonstration at the exhibit hall got a lot of publicity.

CALLIOPE

What are they using VR for?

EDWARD

Google's using their maps software in combination with some high-res VR stuff to make these vacation experiences for people who couldn't go otherwise - Tours around ruins and jungles and all the places a wheelchair couldn't fit.

CALLIOPE

That's awesome.

EDWARD

Sure.

CALLIOPE

You don't think so?

EDWARD

I think if Google really wanted to put themselves behind an assistive technology project, they could do better. Not to mention, I've been to some of the places they're using VR for. It's not easy, but it's easier to make those places more accessible than to buy every disabled person a VR headset, don't you think?

CALLIOPE

I guess so.

EDWARD

Well, a few wheelchair ramps don't make Google any money.

CALLIOPE

That's cynical, don't you think?

EDWARD

Cynical, huh?

CALLIOPE

I just think that everyone who's here is here because they want to help people, right? The fact that they're making money doesn't negate the fact that they're going to do good things. I wouldn't have a very good time slogging through life if I didn't believe people were essentially good at heart.

EDWARD

You sound like the kind of hippie who would name their kid Calliope.

CALLIOPE

Well, we're all products of our environment, aren't we?

EDWARD

Guess so.

CALLIOPE

So maybe your parents are cynics.

EDWARD

Well, they did bring up a crippled son.

CALLIOPE

Don't talk about yourself like that.

EDWARD

It's okay, I'm crippled, I'm allowed to use that word.

CALLIOPE

Well, I don't like people using words with connotations like that. Even for themselves. We all deserve to think well of ourselves. It's perspective, right?

EDWARD

Sure. Perspective.

CALLIOPE

So, wait, you've actually been to ruins and jungles and stuff?

EDWARD

Family vacations. Costa Rica when I was eight, Machu Picchu when I was seventeen.

CALLIOPE

And you were. The whole-

EDWARD

The whole time.

CALLIOPE

What was it like?

EDWARD

The paths weren't always the best preserved, but I found my way around.

CALLIOPE

No, I mean. What was it like, seeing places like that? My family did vacations, too, but it was always the same thing - camping in the redwood forests, every summer.

EDWARD

Hey, don't shit on the redwoods.

CALLIOPE

Don't worry, if we shit on the redwoods, we buried it after. Leave no trace.

EDWARD

Well. If you really want to know, I have plenty of time to tell you.

EDWARD gestures to the piles of senseless clerical work in front of them.

CALLIOPE

Then I guess we'd better get to work.

Scene III

A conference room, set up for a panel. A long table on a raised stage area, with chairs set out for viewing - or maybe the audience is sitting where the conference audience would be. WING sits at the conference table, on a laptop/tablet/other smart device. EMERSON enters with COMET.

WING

When is a dog not a dog?

EMERSON

When it is a servant.

WING

“A Vision For The Blind.”

EMERSON

University Press, 2016.

WING

Dr. Emerson Walters. I do hope my research has not proven me off-putting. To know one's associate is near the relevance of knowing one's adversary.

EMERSON

And I presume we are not to be adversaries, Mr. Zhao.

WING

Only as the amphiprioninae is to the anemone. I see we share an academic nature, Dr. Walters, at least if our mutual proclivity for research is to be any indication.

EMERSON

Academia has always been my pursuit. One I share with Dr. Khan, and one I was looking forward to making use of in our panel. A true shame we will not be able to reunite at tomorrow's panel, though I suppose our next reunion at Stamford will have to prove sufficient.

WING

A true shame indeed. I have found Dr. Khan's theoretical work so much nearer to the practical than, well, nearly anyone else in the field.

EMERSON

And that is your pursuit, I presume. The practical.

WING

I take no shame in my dealings in the practical, Dr. Walters. The practical is what keeps the wheels spinning, the world turning. There is no pursuit of the theoretical without the practical ensuring the theorizers return home at night.

LILA enters. The lines typed here under "LILA" appear as supertitles, while LILA herself communicates in ASL.

LILA

Smaller than I was expecting.

WING

Pardon me.

EMERSON

Pardoned.

LILA

We're the featured panel. You'd think they'd give us a better room. More seating. Since we're such a draw.

WING

My request is not for you, Dr. Walters, but for a newcomer.

EMERSON

Dr. Emerson Walters, the pleasure is all mine. I am pleased to be making your acquaintance, though I wish it were under less frenetic circumstances. I look forward to getting to know both you and your body of work.

WING

I hate to bear the unfortunate news to the assembly line responsible for tinning that response, but I'm afraid it has fallen on, well. I hope it not too crass to say "deaf ears."

EMERSON

In this hemisphere of the professional world, Mr. Zhao, it's best to keep the assembly line in employ.

LILA

Where's my interpreter?

WING

Allow me to avail myself.

WING's lines, going forward, are signed and spoken. His ASL is, well. Pitiful. His signing appears in the supertitles as well.

WING (*cont.*)

My name is W-I-N-G Z-H-A-O.

LILA

W-I-N-G Z-H-A-O, are you my interpreter?

WING

I am on the panel, the same as you.

LILA

Where the fuck is Susan? This is bullshit.

WING

My apologies, I do need you to sign a bit slower, in order for me to keep pace.

EMERSON

Have you bothered to give this person the courtesy of asking their name?

WING

I assure you, Emerson, it's no matter of courtesy- Your name?

LILA

(first her name sign, then spelled)

Lila Leiberman.

WING

Lila Leiberman.

EMERSON

A pleasure, Lila Leiberman.

LILA

Have either of you seen Susan? When she promised an interpreter for the panel, I didn't think that she meant I wouldn't be able to say a damn word to anyone until then.

EMERSON

Is she speaking?

WING

Lila, would you like for me to interpret for Dr. Walters as well?

LILA

Would I- This is going to be a long weekend, isn't it?

Scene IV

The space.

ALBERT

The anticipation.

BEVERLY

More agonizing every year.

ALBERT

I agree entirely.

BEVERLY

To see everyone again-

ALBERT

Will be delightful.

BEVERLY

Splendid as anything.

ALBERT

The conference hall-

BEVERLY

Always so amusing.

ALBERT

Amusing?

BEVERLY

Indeed.

ALBERT

I'd say the lobby.

BEVERLY

The lobby?

ALBERT

Is more amusing.

BEVERLY

How so?

ALBERT

Always at five o'clock. After the panels are done and the exhibit hall closes. All of the blind folks who make plans, they plan for the lobby at five.

BEVERLY

Lobby at five.

ALBERT

Lobby at five. A hundred blind people bobbing around the lobby, colliding like pinballs.

BEVERLY

Boop boop.

ALBERT

Bing bong.

ALBERT/BEVERLY

(in perfect rhythm, with perfect gesture)

I said a bang bang choo choo train,
Wind me up and I'll do my thang.
No Reese's Pieces, no Buttercups,
You mess with me and I'll mess you up.
I know karate, I know kung fu,
You mess with me and I'll mess with you!

The playground taunt is over as soon and as suddenly as it began.

BEVERLY

It sounds sweet.

ALBERT

Entirely darling.

A blessing, really.

BEVERLY

To give them the tools we give.

ALBERT

We do good work.

BEVERLY

Give good things.

ALBERT

To the pinballs.

BEVERLY

Bing bong.

ALBERT

Laughter.

We are atrocious.

BEVERLY

Truly heinous.

ALBERT

But we do good.

BEVERLY

Indubitably.

ALBERT

Scene V

Some conference room, half-ready for conferencing. CALLIOPE moves chairs into rows. EDWARD supervises.

CALLIOPE

So, is this how it's gonna work? I'm gonna do all the hard labor, you're gonna sit back and do nothing?

EDWARD

I'm management. You're difficult to manage, it's a necessary job.

CALLIOPE

Am I allowed to make a reverse-ableism joke?

EDWARD

(very seriously)

No.

CALLIOPE looks horrified. EDWARD laughs.

CALLIOPE

Asshole.

EDWARD

Don't take yourself so seriously.

CALLIOPE

I'll take myself as seriously as I want to, thank you very much.

EDWARD

So, what brought you to the glamorous world of hauling chairs?

CALLIOPE

Internship credits are mandatory for my degree, and I figured setting out chairs here is better than setting out chairs for something completely unrelated to what I want to do.

EDWARD

What's the degree? What do you want to do?

CALLIOPE

I'm studying communications, but I've been applying to education programs for my masters. I'm trying to study special education, so. Assistive technology hasn't been a bad place to start.

EDWARD

Every special education teacher I ever had, sucked.

CALLIOPE

Well, here's hoping I can be one who doesn't suck.

EDWARD

That would be a good thing to see.

CALLIOPE

What about you? Why this conference?

EDWARD

My fluid mechanics professor mentioned a friend of a friend whose work was being shown at the exhibit hall last year, and I wanted to come see it without paying. It's a cool place. There's a lot of cool tech, and it's doing good things.

CALLIOPE

Fluid mechanics - is that engineering?

EDWARD

It is.

CALLIOPE

Is this what you want to do with it, then? Build the stuff they put in the exhibit hall?

EDWARD

I don't know. I'll build anything I get hired to build.

CALLIOPE

What do you want to make, though?

EDWARD

Money.

CALLIOPE

The cynic is back at it again. What would you want to make if you could make money off of anything?

EDWARD

I don't know. I don't really take the time to think about it.

CALLIOPE

You should.

EDWARD

Yeah, well. A lot of people should be able to do a lot of things, but that's not always the case. If you saw me in public, would your first thought be that I can handle dangerous welding machinery?

CALLIOPE

Well, not my first thought.

EDWARD

See my point?

CALLIOPE

I don't think about welding machinery that much.

EDWARD

But you know what I mean.

CALLIOPE

That doesn't mean you shouldn't be given the chance to try.

EDWARD

If everyone in the world were as optimistic as you, maybe I would get a few more chances. But coming here, working this internship, this is about as much of an indulgence as I get.

CALLIOPE

An unpaid internship is an indulgence?

EDWARD

It's not in engineering. It's tech, but I'm not working with the tech. Compared to the kinds of applications I'll be up against when I'm trying to get into grad school, it's fluffy.

CALLIOPE

Fluffy?

EDWARD

You know, filler. No substance. It's nice, like volunteering at a soup kitchen, but it doesn't prove anything. It doesn't prove to them that I can use my hands, that I can build things that work. And maybe, maybe some other applicant will get in with that fluff on their application, but not me. They need me to prove it. And so far, I haven't had any opportunities to do that. It's fine. It's what it is. But it means I need to work harder. And it means I can't be picky.

CALLIOPE

You're still allowed to want things. You can have dreams.

EDWARD

They're not going to come to anything.

CALLIOPE

Then what's the harm in having them?

EDWARD

You're going to be one of those teachers with the inspirational kitten posters hanging up everywhere, aren't you?

CALLIOPE

Those were always my favorite teachers.

EDWARD

I thought those posters were the most irritating things ever. There were tons of them in every one of my special ed classrooms. I always finished my quizzes and stuff early, and they were the only things to look at. "Hang in there," "Reach for the stars," "You can do it if you just believe in yourself" or whatever. It wasn't like any of us believed it, and the teachers sure as hell didn't. So it was like the posters just existed to make fun of us.

Discomfort. CALLIOPE moves chairs.

CALLIOPE

How many chairs are we supposed to have in each row?

EDWARD

They didn't give us instructions. Just chairs.

CALLIOPE

So what do we do?

EDWARD

There are seventy chairs, we can do five rows of eight on one side of the aisle and five rows for six on the other.

CALLIOPE

Why not five rows of seven on each side?

EDWARD

If one side is shorter, there's room for wheelchairs without offsetting the balance of the room.

CALLIOPE

Good thinking.

EDWARD

I told you, I finished all my tests early. Fifth grade math has nothing on me.

CALLIOPE

Any company will be lucky to have those skills on their team.

EDWARD

So kind.

CALLIOPE

What's supposed to be happening in here, anyway? What are we setting up for?

EDWARD

This is where they're having the keynote address.

CALLIOPE

Remind me who's giving the address?

EDWARD

Beverly Whyte. She started the assistive technology department at, like. Three different companies? Back in the eighties.

CALLIOPE

I've heard about her! She was a revolutionary in the industry.

EDWARD

Something like that.

CALLIOPE

Do you think we'll get to see her address?

EDWARD

I think so. Tom said we'd have a chance to see exhibits we're interested in, and we'll probably be in the room anyway, to get her coffee or whatever.

CALLIOPE

Ah, the coffee run. A right of passage.

EDWARD

I was hoping to be the one to do that illustrious task.

CALLIOPE

We could do it together. Teamwork.

EDWARD

I think that can work.

CALLIOPE

In the meantime, though, we could grab a coffee downstairs when we're finished for the afternoon? I heard the place in the lobby actually wasn't too shitty.

EDWARD

I'm in. I'll need some caffeine after all this exhausting work I'm definitely doing.

CALLIOPE
(joking)

Don't make me redact my invitation.

CALLIOPE continues moving chairs. EDWARD moves over to a half-assembled sound system and plugs in his phone. He starts playing music. CALLIOPE looks up, EDWARD shrugs, and CALLIOPE returns to her work with a little dance in her step. EDWARD smiles.

Scene VI

The panel room. EMERSON (with COMET) and LILA sitting at the table. WING enters, pocketing his cell phone as if he has just ended a phone call.

Unless otherwise specified, WING will sign and speak simultaneously when voicing his own thoughts, and his voicing of what Lila signs will be denoted "like this." He signs what EMERSON says for LILA to see. None of his signing is particularly good. Anything written under "Lila" will appear in supertitles, as well as WING's signing.

WING

Susan has done us the kindness, in all her scuttling about to keep the day's activities in motion, to arrange for an interpreter to join us shortly. They should be on their way.

LILA

It's not a kindness.

WING

"Not a-" kindness, was that?

LILA

It's not a kindness to arrange for a necessity, it's negligence. Especially now. Why didn't she have an interpreter on staff already? It's a disability conference.

WING

"There should have been an interpreter already."

EMERSON

Waiting for an accommodation shouldn't be unfamiliar to you. It isn't for me, and it isn't for anyone else at this conference.

LILA

Which is bullshit.

WING

"Which is-" I do apologize, I am not familiar with that sign.

LILA

What is it you do, exactly?

WING

“What do you do?” Me?

LILA

You. For work.

WING

I am an engineer, Ms. Leiberman. A prodigious one, I would hazard to say.

EMERSON

Mr. Zhao has patented some of the most efficient and refined models on the market of assistive technology.

LILA

I saw a profile on you, once, you know. You made an augmentative communication device once, right?

WING

What?

LILA

A-U-G-M-E-N-T-A-T-I-V-E C-O-M-M-

WING

“Augmentative communication,” yes. A tricky bit of work, I will admit, but a favorite design of mine. Was it Shakespeare, who said that to put one’s words into someone else’s hands was to- Oh, the line escapes me.

EMERSON

A scholar of Shakespeare once the grease monkey has dried his hands, then?

LILA

A tale too tall, to tell what others say.
A grand mistake to make in such a tale,
To say you swear you know, for sure. To claim
That you’re the worthy keeper of the grail.
Who is unworthy? Incapable? Or
Is just too dumb - speech or capacity -
To make their claim, to say that they are sure?

Where did you get this brash audacity?
Now, have you ever listened with your eyes?
And have you ever spoken with your hands?
How does one man determine, certify,
That his are the only worthy demands?
So take your words. I spit on them. Why not
Just ask them first, if they wanted to talk.

A pause. COMET scratches their ear.

WING

I am not the architect, Ms. Lieberman. I simply use the space.

LILA

Use it better.

HUNTER enters. They speak and sign at the same time.

HUNTER

Excuse me, hi. My name is Hunter Kranzin, I'm an intern with the conference. Susan sent me over to help with the panel? I'm in my final year of my degree in ASL interpretation.

LILA

Oh, fuck me.

Lights down.

Scene VII

A table in a little hotel restaurant space. CALLIOPE and EDWARD have coffees.

EDWARD

So, the panel finally got out, right? Half an hour late or something like that, because the guy didn't know how to shut the hell up. We were starving by that point. So we decided to go to the Cheesecake Factory across the street.

CALLIOPE

You and- Bill, right?

EDWARD

Bill, yeah. Good guy. He's blind, and he looks blind, too.

CALLIOPE

Oh my go-

EDWARD

It's relevant, I promise.

CALLIOPE

Okay, I'm trusting you. Go for it.

EDWARD

He looks blind. Dark glasses, white cane, service dog, the whole nine yards. It's obvious he's blind.

CALLIOPE

What's his dog's name?

EDWARD

Donut.

CALLIOPE

Aww, Donut!

EDWARD

Yeah, it's cute. Anyway, we're going to the Cheesecake Factory across the street, right?

CALLIOPE

Right.

EDWARD

So I press the button at the intersection, and the light changes, and I tell Bill that he can cross - only for this truck to come barrelling out of nowhere, around the corner. I shouted, other people shouted, and Bill stopped short before the thing could hit him.

CALLIOPE

Jesus.

EDWARD

And the guy driving the truck, he leaned out the window. Big white beard, American flag bandana, those doucheey sunglasses-

CALLIOPE

Oakleys?

EDWARD

Oakleys! That was it. He leans out the window, and he goes - I shit you not - "Watch where you're going!"

CALLIOPE

No way.

EDWARD

"Watch where you're going." Can you believe it? He just drove away after that, too. Bill turned around, towards us, just looking dumbstruck, because what are you supposed to say to that? He's the picture right next to the dictionary definition of a blind person, and that guy told him to-

CALLIOPE

(trying not to laugh)

"Watch where you're going."

EDWARD

You're allowed to laugh, you know. It's funny.

CALLIOPE

I know I'm allowed to laugh.

EDWARD

I don't think you do.

CALLIOPE

Say something funny, then, and I'll laugh.

EDWARD

Okay, ow. Come on, it was a good story.

CALLIOPE

I'm not arguing with you on that.

EDWARD

Cripples have the best stories.

CALLIOPE

Am I supposed to laugh at that, too?

EDWARD

Just a fact of life. We also throw the best parties.

CALLIOPE

That so?

EDWARD

Absolutely.

CALLIOPE

See, I don't know about that part. Dirty hippie parties go pretty hard. Whenever my extended family gets together, it's chaos. Bonfires, drum circles, tarot readings, the whole nine yards. And you can always score the best edibles.

EDWARD

Two words for you: medical marijuana.

CALLIOPE

Gluten-free hash brownies that taste like fudge and get you higher than anything you've ever tried.

EDWARD

Okay, point taken, but the pot isn't the only thing that makes the party. A couple guys from this screen reading company, they've apparently been throwing the same party at this conference for the last decade, up in their hotel room. I went last year. They unscrewed the door from its hinges so people could get easier or just hang out in the hallway, and they filled the bathtub with ice and bottles of liquor. Hotel admin was livid. I think it was still going on when the exhibit hall opened the next morning.

CALLIOPE

So were people just showing up to the exhibit hall the next day, what? Still drunk?

EDWARD

One sales rep threw up on his prototype.

CALLIOPE

Oh, gross!

EDWARD

It was disgusting. Great party, though.

CALLOPE

Sounds like it.

EDWARD

I heard that the same guys are throwing another party tonight.

CALLIOPE

Are you going?

EDWARD

I have to, right? You can't miss out on a party like this.

CALLIOPE

Well, if I can't miss out on it...

EDWARD

You're gonna come?

CALLIOPE

Guess I am, if your hype is to be believed. So I'll see you there.

EDWARD

Or.

CALLIOPE

Or?

EDWARD

Or we could go together?

CALLIOPE

Together?

EDWARD

Together.

CALLIOPE

Together, or. Together-together.

EDWARD

I'm sorry, was I not- I'm so sorry, I thought I was picking up on something.

CALLIOPE

You weren't picking up on anything. There's nothing to pick up on.

EDWARD

I'm sorry.

CALLIOPE

This is really inappropriate. We're working together. It's inappropriate for you to hit on a coworker.

EDWARD

I didn't think I was hitting on you.

CALLIOPE

You were.

EDWARD

I asked you, once, if you wanted to go together to a party we were both going to anyway, and you're the one who wanted to get coffee in the first place- Look. I'm sorry. I obviously misread things. I thought we were hitting it off.

CALLIOPE

Well, we weren't.

EDWARD

Okay.

CALLIOPE

We should get back to work.

EDWARD

Great. Let's get back to work.

CALLIOPE rises, moves to throw away her coffee cup, changes her mind and turns back around.

CALLIOPE

I'm just not interested. Okay?

EDWARD

Okay.

CALLIOPE

I'm allowed to not be interested.

EDWARD

I know you're allowed to-

CALLIOPE

It's not appropriate.

EDWARD

You've said that already.

CALLIOPE

Okay.

CALLIOPE exits. EDWARD hangs back, shakes his head. He exits.

Scene VIII

The empty, resplendent space.

Drinks tonight?	ALBERT
Oh, certainly.	BEVERLY
We've earned them.	ALBERT
At the hotel bar?	BEVERLY
Or out on the town.	ALBERT
How special!	BEVERLY
Well, the bar will be crowded.	ALBERT
Terribly crowded.	BEVERLY
A night out will be well deserved.	ALBERT
We deserve it.	BEVERLY
For our hard work.	ALBERT
Our toil.	BEVERLY

I've nearly broken a sweat.

ALBERT

Oh dear! In that suit!

BEVERLY

In this suit!

ALBERT

The poor silk.

BEVERLY

The poor, poor fibers.

ALBERT

So! Drinks at the hotel bar.

BEVERLY

Or out on the town.

ALBERT

So good to get away.

BEVERLY

We've earned it.

ALBERT

A night away from the guests.

BEVERLY

Clientele.

ALBERT

Rabble.

BEVERLY

Oh, you are *bad*.

ALBERT

Are we bad? BEVERLY

Oh, positively. ALBERT

No, Al. Are we bad people? BEVERLY
(different)

We can't be bad people. ALBERT

Why not? What's stopping us? BEVERLY

We do good things. Can people who do good things be bad people? ALBERT

Why not? I can do or be whatever I damn well please. BEVERLY

Scene IX

The panel room. HUNTER has taken over the duties of interpretation. Their interpreting will be implied, not written out with the dialogue. All ASL will appear in the supertitles.

EMERSON

Ms. Lieberman, why exactly are you here?

LILA

Excuse me?

EMERSON

There is, if I do recall correctly, a member of the press who will be in attendance tomorrow, on behalf of a rather well renowned journal of the social sciences. This is an event of some significance, to garner that sort of attention. I was familiar with Dr. Khan, but I am sorry to say that I have no recollection whatsoever of a Lila Leiberman.

LILA

I run a nonprofit that specializes in supplying interpreters to free clinics. ASL, but other languages, too. I do a lot of healthcare activism, protesting. I was at that Capitol Hill protest where the cops showed up to drag people out of their wheelchairs. That might be the work you'd be familiar with.

EMERSON

I was under the impression that this was not to be a political panel.

LILA

Do you consider your work political?

EMERSON

Is it political to have water flowing through the pipes beneath your home? Is it political to have electricity pulse through the power lines that line the streets in steadfast formation? Accessibility is no more political than water, or power, or any other sustenance.

LILA

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but those things are pretty political already.

EMERSON

They oughtn't be.

LILA

Fuck your “oughts,” they are.

A pause, as LILA’s last line goes uninterpreted.

HUNTER

She disagrees.

A Look from LILA, but she continues.

LILA

It’s all political. Every last bit of it. Including how they decide to address it. Look at our panel. What’s it called again?

WING

“Equity, diversity, and inclusion in the assistive technology industry: doing necessary work with proper accommodations.”

LILA

See? More bullshit. None of this is going to garner any real reform. My wife conducts her research through UCLA, and her inbox is always getting flooded with emails for panels, or town halls, or pizza parties, with everybody pissing themselves over how they can make their spaces more inclusive.

EMERSON

The salon has been the venue of progress since the Parisians.

LILA

And the people on the streets were the ones actually chopping off heads. Nothing ever happens after those meetings. Nothing changes. But they all get to pat themselves on the back for being oh-so progressive.

EMERSON

Have you ever actually made the effort to attend these supposed frivolities? Do you make any effort to participate beyond assuming the role of the cynical observer?

LILA

Place your bets on how many of those events are interpreted. They don’t want me there, and frankly, I don’t want to be there.

WING

And what of your supposed activism?

LILA

Discussions aren't activism. They're tea parties. The things we're trying to change aren't going to be done in polite little salons.

EMERSON

No, I suppose they're accomplished by getting dragged out of wheelchairs on Capitol Hill.

LILA

They certainly don't get accomplished in hotel conference rooms.

EMERSON

The dramatic is lovely for a night at the theater. But no one is attending the theater anymore. If you wish to be heard, you need to begin speaking the language of those you want to influence, and that language happens to be respectability.

LILA

And why can't they speak my language?

No one can answer. An uncomfortable silence.

Scene X

A cramped hotel room, with a party raging. There can be fun colored lights, but absolutely NO strobing or rapid flashing. If we can get extras in this scene, that's a plus. If the extras are of varying ability/disability, that's a bigger plus.

The room is full, the music is throbbing. COMET the dog is out of vest, and zooms around in delight, getting pets from the people it passes.

LILA grabs a beer, likely from a bathtub. She cracks it open, takes a long swig. It's not good beer, but it's good to have a beer. She can feel the music thump in the floorboards. She signs greetings to someone she recognizes.

HUNTER enters, motions for her attention. This conversation is in ASL. Translation appears in supertitles.

HUNTER

Hi.

LILA

Hey.

HUNTER

It's a. Cool party.

LILA

Pretty fucking sick.

HUNTER

Hey, I'm sorry about-

LILA

Hey, no. You're fine. You're a kid, it's not on you. Your sign is pretty good, too.

HUNTER

I'm a CODA, but what my parents taught me is so dialectical-

LILA

Yeah, no, get your degree. Professional interpretation is different from having a conversation.

HUNTER

I've noticed.

LILA

Are you enjoying it? Interpreting?

HUNTER

Sure. Of course. I've been doing this pretty much my entire life anyway, so it feels pretty natural. It's frustrating for my parents, not having interpreters in places they should be. And I agree. So. It's the thing I'm doing.

LILA

But do you want to be an interpreter?

HUNTER

Of course I do.

LILA

Not anything else?

HUNTER

It's... I've been doing it forever. It's important. It's necessary.

LILA

Look. I do a lot of activism, because it's something I'm passionate about. And it's related to disability, because I think it's important, and I think it's necessary. And we can talk about whether being d/Deaf is a disability or not, because plenty of people have different opinions. But I don't just do d/Deaf activism. I've had to advocate for myself my entire life, and you can consider that activism, but when it came to deciding what I want to do with my life, that wasn't the thing I settled on because it just wasn't what I wanted to do. I'm gay, so is my wife, and we've had to deal with plenty of shit for that. I'm Jewish, I've dealt with shit for that. And I fight for myself and my wife, and that's activism, but I'm not a Jewish activist, or a gay activist, I'm an activist for medical justice. Because it's what I want to do. It's what sets my heart on fire. What sets your heart on fire?

A beat. HUNTER simply does not know what sets their heart on fire.

HUNTER

Where did you get that beer?

LILA

From the bathroom. Do you want one?

HUNTER

Desperately.

LILA leads HUNTER off to get a beer, as CALLIOPE enters from the same direction. LILA and CALLIOPE collide, a bit of beer spilling.

LILA

Shit, sorry. Didn't see you there.

CALLIOPE, of course, doesn't sign. Doesn't understand.

CALLIOPE

(louder than she needs to be)

Hi. Sorry. My fault. Enjoy the party.

LILA and HUNTER exchange a Look, exit.

CALLIOPE takes in the room, takes in the ways in which people move around, the kinds of people in the space. COMET comes up to her, asking for pets or treats or a "good dog." She kneels down and pets the dog. As she gets up, she's momentarily eye to eye with EDWARD, who's entered while she wasn't paying attention.

EDWARD

Hey.

CALLIOPE

Hi.

EDWARD

I'm glad you came.

CALLIOPE

It's a good party. Seems like, anyway. I just got here.

EDWARD

Do you want a drink? The punch from last year could knock you on your ass after one cup, but it tasted good.

CALLIOPE

You- Can drink?

EDWARD

Yeah, I can drink.

CALLIOPE

Cool.

EDWARD

Do you want a drink?

CALLIOPE

I don't want you to get me a drink.

EDWARD

Okay.

CALLIOPE

We're. At the same party. We're coworkers. At the same party. Coworkers at the same party. That's it. That's fine. That's a good thing to be.

EDWARD

Why?

CALLIOPE

Why, what?

EDWARD

Why was the idea of going out with me so horrific?

CALLIOPE

I didn't-

EDWARD

Look, the last thing I'd want to do is make you uncomfortable. I get it, women have a hard goddamn time, and I'm not trying to contribute to that. But I thought I was pretty professional about the whole thing. And I wasn't coming out of nowhere. We were getting along really well. You're smart, and funny, and really damn optimistic, and I liked that. I thought we had chemistry. If I was misreading things, then I was misreading things. But I don't think I was. I think I asked you out, and that scared you, or disgusted you, because I use a wheelchair. I don't think you meant for it to scare you, or disgust you. I think you mean well, pretty much all the damn time, but in your gut, that's what you felt. And you've grown up being told to trust your gut.

CALLIOPE

That's not what happened.

EDWARD

Are you sure about that?

CALLIOPE

Why do you care this much? If it's so fine that I said no, why can't you let it go? Why can't you let me go?

EDWARD

You're not what I'm holding onto.

CALLIOPE

What is it, then?

EDWARD

Would you ever date a disabled person?

CALLIOPE

Of course I would.

EDWARD

"Of course" you would. Why "of course?"

CALLIOPE

I mean, I'm not an asshole.

EDWARD

It's not about being an asshole.

CALLIOPE

What's it about, then?

EDWARD

It's about the fact that you want to be a special ed teacher. You want to work with disabled kids. Make them feel good about themselves. But when it comes down to it, you're uncomfortable with disabled people. We're not real people to you, not the same way someone abled is. You're going to get your degree in special education, and you're going to put your job on your dating app profiles, and you'll tell the guys you go out with about how it's really the children teaching you - except they're not really children, are they? They're like puppies. We're puppies.

CALLIOPE

You don't know anything about me. You don't know anything about the reasons why I want to do what I want to do. This is unfair, and- and rude! Holy shit, this is so rude. You can't just say those kinds of things to someone.

EDWARD

It's hard to hear these kinds of things about yourself, right?

CALLIOPE

Yeah, it's hard, because you're being a dick.

EDWARD

If you can't stand to hear yourself called out for the kind internalized ableism you're working with, you really don't want to hear about the things people have been telling me my whole life. It's vicious. You know it has to be vicious. But you're not ready for the viciousness.

CALLIOPE

You're being vicious.

EDWARD

It doesn't feel good when you don't get to opt out, does it?

CALLIOPE

I'm going to go get a drink.

EDWARD

You do that.

CALLIOPE exits. COMET noses towards EDWARD, snoot resting on the chair very cutely. EDWARD double checks for a vest on the dog, then rewards COMET with affection.

HUNTER enters with a drink, gives COMET a scratch. HUNTER does not sign during this conversation, outside of interactions with LILA.

HUNTER

Tame opening line.

EDWARD

Positive reception in a disgruntled tone.

HUNTER

Testing out a joke.

EDWARD

Polite laughter.

HUNTER

I'm Hunter.

EDWARD

Edward.

HUNTER

I don't particularly want to think about the conversation I just had.

EDWARD

Thank fuck. I'm being pleasant now, even though I'm so far in my own head I'm leaking out of my ears. The productive thing to do would be to get the hell out of here, but I'm not going to do the productive thing, because I shouldn't have to be productive. I'm allowed to get messy, just the same as anyone else.

HUNTER

I'm asking you if you want a drink, but I'm actually asking you to hook up tonight.

EDWARD

And I'm saying yes to the drink, which really means I'm saying yes to hooking up with you, and I'm probably even willing to look past the inevitable awkward questions about whether my dick works.

HUNTER takes EDWARD towards where the drinks are coming from.

COMET rushes to EMERSON, who enters using her cane. EMERSON gives COMET a treat.

EMERSON

Oh, you like parties, don't you? Don't you, my sweet friend?

BEVERLY collides with EMERSON as she enters, ALBERT coming in behind her.

BEVERLY

Oh, dear! My apologies, my sincerest apologies.

EMERSON

It's fine.

BEVERLY

You're alright?

EMERSON

I'm good. Just watch where you're going.

BEVERLY

Oh, absolutely. I- Haha, yes. I shall.

ALBERT

Is your animal permitted to roam around like this?

EMERSON

Comet's out of vest. We're having a night off.

ALBERT

Noted.

BEVERLY

Enjoy it.

EMERSON

I will. Comet, heel.

EMERSON exits with COMET. BEVERLY loses some of her saccharinity.

BEVERLY

This is absolutely insane. Almost certainly a fire hazard.

ALBERT

I don't know, it does seem a bit delightful, in its own quaint way. It's good that they are able to have their fun.

BEVERLY

I don't know how these people thought this would be a good idea. They could trample each other.

ALBERT

Well. I suppose it won't be a concern much longer.

BEVERLY

Excuse me - you.

BEVERLY puts out a hand to stop WING as he passes. He is clearly a bit plastered.

WING

If you want me to be anything less than incredibly intoxicated for this interaction, you're in the wrong place.

BEVERLY

You need to shut down this party.

WING

Why?

ALBERT

Bureaucratic pedantry.

WING

Equally bureaucratic justification.

ALBERT

Continuation of bureaucratic pedantry.

WING

Refusal to budge.

BEVERLY

Thinly veiled discomfort.

WING

Deflection to someone else. Drinks are in the bathtub if you want one.

WING goes to walk off, just as EDWARD and HUNTER are coming back in. EDWARD has a drink, though maybe HUNTER is carrying it for him.

EDWARD

You're Wing Zhao.

WING

I- am, yeah.

EDWARD

This is- I'm using your chair. This is one of your chairs.

WING

That's great, man.

EDWARD

My name is Edward. I'm in school, I'm an engineer. CalTech, actually, like you. I've read your dissertation. It's incredible. It's great to meet you.

WING

That's great - Marty, hey! - Listen, come by the panel in Hall C tomorrow. We can talk after - CalTech, engineering, all that.

EDWARD

Really? That's- Thank you.

WING heads off, EDWARD watching him go. HUNTER hands him his drink.

HUNTER

Good party?

EDWARD

Good fucking party.

The music picks up. A phantasmagoria of partying picks up from here. The lights are brighter, the bass is thumpier, the dancing is hornier. It's almost uncomfortable. It should be a little uncomfortable. At least, it's uncomfortable for the audience. Disabled people aren't supposed to be sexy, or horny, or people, really, but they're just as turned up as anyone else should be able to be.

A drink is spilled on BEVERLY. She turns, wants to cuss someone out. She can't find them, or they can't hear her.

The music changes. Another song. Time is passing, the night is pulsating on. EDWARD and HUNTER are, honestly? Hitting it off.

LILA dances. The bass is in her bones. Even if her feet leave the floor, it's thick enough to feel in the air around her. She's maybe more on beat than anyone else.

EMERSON and WING and, hell, maybe MARTY, dance. It's a beautiful fucking night. WING can see LILA, LILA can see him. They're getting closer, and someone lets EMERSON know, and they're all dancing. They're not all okay, totally, but they're dancing.

The music changes. Another song. Early in the morning. A few more drinks in. HUNTER is practically in EDWARD's lap. Everyone is kind of in everyone's laps.

CALLIOPE has been dancing this whole time. She isn't quite where we can see her. She's not the most important person in this room.

HUNTER kisses EDWARD. EDWARD kisses HUNTER back. CALLIOPE sees. CALLIOPE stops dancing.

The music shuts down. The lights shut down. The party has been shut down.

End of Act One.

Act Two

Scene I

A stage, or a podium, or wherever BEVERLY is set up to deliver her keynote address. She did not drink much the night before, but she might as well have. She is hungover. Perhaps she has a slideshow prepared. Maybe even a laser pointer.

BEVERLY

Thank you all dearly for your presence here today. Thank you to Susan for putting together an incredible event. I have been attending this conference in particular for decades, and I have to say, it keeps getting better and better.

Now, the first time I attended an industry event for this industry of ours - this wonderful, industrious industry - there wasn't an assistive technology department at my company. There wasn't even a glimmer of an idea for one. There was technology, sure. There was nothing remotely like any of this. And I was a woman, at the bottom rung of a massive corporation. What I needed was a miracle, in order to get anywhere. A miracle. Miracle miracle miracle.

I hadn't ever thought about assistive technology until I saw a flyer in the lobby of my corporation for a conference. Well, it wasn't my corporation, it was the corporation I worked for. Not anymore, but I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm ahead.

I came to this tiny event, limited to the smallest conference room at a Holiday Inn Express. I hadn't even known there were conference rooms in a Holiday Inn Express, but they had given the smallest one to this conference. And it was packed with people, all kinds of people. People in chairs and people with dogs and people who shouted when they laughed because they didn't know any better. People with lines on their faces, neanderthalic people with neanderthalic lines on their faces. Forehead ridge and flat nose and honking laughter, and I was there. I could drag them out of the neolithic era and into the chromium sunlight of a desktop computer. They didn't even sell desktop computers when I started.

It was a risk. It was the biggest goddamn risk of my life, walking into that boardroom. I wore a pencil skirt and a Princess Di blazer, and I could tell they wanted to laugh me right out. These men. These men with their cigar smoke breath that boomed out of them with every snort of the nostril. But they didn't laugh. Do you know why? Because my Idea Was Good. I had a good idea. An untapped market, untapped potential, untapped vein of oil that I was about to pierce right into. Holy fuck was I about to pierce it.

I'm here today because I took that risk. My corporation - and it is my corporation now - has the biggest assistive technology department of any corporation on the planet. We fund this

conference. We fund development. We fund the chromium futures of the neanderthals that once lurked in dark caves, smacking sticks together to try and make fire out of drum music. We did it. I did it! Through adversity. Through hardship. Through Princess Di blazers. I made something of myself, for other people, and if that isn't the goddamn best thing anyone could ever do, I don't know what is.

It has to be, right?

Because if it's not.

Because if it's not?

Well.

Scene II

The back of the panel hall. CALLIOPE is standing, waiting. EDWARD enters, tray of coffees in his lap.

Doing okay?

EDWARD

Huh? Yeah. Fine.

CALLIOPE

One of these is yours. Chai latte.

EDWARD

Thanks.

CALLIOPE

CALLIOPE searches for her coffee, flushed and aware of her proximity to EDWARD's lap until she pulls away with her latte.

Figured you might want one. Just about everyone here is hungover today.

EDWARD

I didn't really have all that much to drink.

CALLIOPE

You have more restraint than most, then.

EDWARD

Unlike you?

CALLIOPE

Wow, bitchy.

EDWARD
(teasing)

You barely know me, you don't get to do the quippy gay best friend bit just because you kissed a boy at a party, especially after telling me off like you did.

CALLIOPE

EDWARD

Hunter's not a boy- Were you watching me?

CALLIOPE

I saw you, there's a difference.

EDWARD

Not a vast one.

CALLIOPE

I don't get you.

EDWARD

Elaborate.

CALLIOPE

Nevermind.

A moment. Calliope picks at her coffee cup.

EDWARD

You barely know me. You realize that, right?

CALLIOPE

Excuse me?

EDWARD

We've been working together for a literal day. And we've had some good conversations, but in that time all you've done is make assumptions about me.

CALLIOPE

I haven't been making assumptions about you.

EDWARD

You absolutely have.

CALLIOPE

You know, there was a time when it was considered rude to assume someone's queer.

EDWARD

What a sentiment from your hippie commune, but that's not what I meant.

CALLIOPE

What did you mean, then?

EDWARD

I meant that since the moment we met, you've done nothing but make assumptions.

CALLIOPE

No, I haven't-

EDWARD

Yes, you have. Assumption after assumption after fucking assumption. Why couldn't I be queer? Why couldn't I kiss someone else after you made it very clear you weren't interested? You looked at me, and you saw a disabled person, and you assumed that I'd roll around for the rest of my life pining after the pretty abled girl who turned me down. Why? Because you don't think a disabled person can be considered attractive. You thought I saw you as my one chance at love, and when you turned me down, I'd spend the rest of my life pining after you, and you'd walk around the rest of your life making a martyr of yourself because you just had to break my poor disabled heart. Well, guess what? I have sex. I have a lot of sex. You don't need to know with who, or how, because it's none of your business. You made it none of your business.

CALLIOPE

And you've never made assumptions about me?

EDWARD

What are you talking about?

CALLIOPE

You don't think you're assuming things about me? I'm a pretty girl who turned you down, so I have to either think you were being a pig, or you're a baby-puppy-whatever. I can't have my own reasons for wanting to teach special ed. I can't be making an informed decision when I decide to be idealistic, I have to be ignorant. I can't possibly know what suffering looks like. I'm not ignorant. I know what suffering looks like, and you would know this shit if you'd ever fucking asked me, but you didn't.

EDWARD

I-

CALLIOPE

Did you?

EDWARD can't answer. WING walks past, on his phone, stops when he sees the intern with coffee.

WING

Oh, awesome. Are these for us?

EDWARD nods. WING takes his coffee from the tray.

EDWARD

Mr. Zhao, I don't know if you remember me, but I saw you at the party yesterday-

WING

Right, yeah. Ted?

EDWARD

Ed. Well, Edward. You said we could talk about-

WING

After the panel, Ed. Absolutely. We'll talk.

WING exits.

EDWARD

I should get the other panelists their coffees.

CALLIOPE

I can do it.

EDWARD

Because I can't?

CALLIOPE

Can't I just want to?

EDWARD

You can want whatever you want.

EDWARD exits. CALLIOPE, alone.

Scene III

The panel. Everyone is sitting at the table, facing the audience. HUNTER will be interpreting for LILA in this scene. Lights fading in and out reflect gaps in time.

HUNTER

(spoken and in ASL)

And now, a dramatist's (or a bored audience member's) interpretation of the panel: Equity, diversity, and inclusion in the assistive technology industry: doing necessary work with proper accommodations.

EMERSON

My name is Emerson, and I'm important.

WING

My name is Wing, and I'm also important.

LILA

My name is Lila, I'm probably important but I also think that anyone who calls themselves important is full of shit, and I won't hesitate to say so.

Lights fade out.

Lights fade in.

EMERSON

Sure, I would say gender discrimination exists in the assistive technology industry.

WING

Racial discrimination.

EMERSON

Something insightful.

WING

Right here, I have a really good monologue about the model minority myth and how being Asian is challenging in the engineering field. It's really quite insightful. Also a little rehearsed. Very rehearsed. Palatable for white audiences. The kind of monologue the playwright could enter in competitions, and definitely the kind of thing he has the authority to write.

LILA

Sardonic non-sequitur.

EMERSON

Frustrated counterargument.

Lights fade out.

Lights fade in.

LILA

The problem is capitalism.

WING

So what's the solution?

LILA

The problem is capitalism.

WING

But there has to be a solution. That's what we're here to do, find a solution.

LILA

We're not here to find a solution, we're here to complain about it.

EMERSON

Delightful.

LILA

Delightful, delightful. Everything's fucking delightful and then you die.

WING

Why are you here? If this pisses you off so much, then why did you say yes to presenting for all us imbeciles?

LILA

Because Susan and I were fuck buddies in college and I owed her a favor.

EMERSON

Classy.

LILA

This whole thing is prostitution, isn't it? We come here and pimp ourselves out so this room of people can get off on their own progressiveness, and then they go home.

EMERSON

Do you want to go home?

LILA

Nothing would delight me more.

Lights fade out.

Lights fade in.

EMERSON

Dry citation of theory.

WING

Equally dry counter argument.

LILA

Witticism.

Lights fade out.

Lights fade in.

COMET

I snacked upon a trembling bumblebee.
Its stinger stung my maw and so I swelled.
My handler rushed to aid and comfort me;
No thing feels quite so good as being held.
I am a stoic servant of the blind.
I see beyond her inky, darkened depths.
The world is mine to seek and search and find,
Provided I am with her step by step.

One day, my harness I will yet retire,
And I will live a simple peasant's life-
Til age and sweet decay warm by my fire,
And I depart to be Lord Hades' wife.
A pup shall my place take, and learn to lead-
Sometimes to be held, never to greed.

Lights fade out.

Lights fade in. An orgy on the conference table.

EMERSON/WING/LILA
(in the throes of ecstasy - a climax)

And! In! Conclusion!

Lights fade out.

Scene IV

After the panel. Almost everyone has cleared out. EDWARD approaches the table, where WING is gathering up his things.

EDWARD

Excuse me?

WING

Right! Eddie.

EDWARD

Edward.

WING

Sure. What can I do for you?

EDWARD

I just wanted to say- it's- I mean, it's an honor to meet you. Your tech pretty much set the standard for motorized wheelchairs.

WING

Am I right to remember you're in engineering school?

EDWARD

That's right, yes. CalTech.

WING

Go Beavers.

EDWARD

"Nature's engineers."

WING

Good for you. Best years of my life.

EDWARD

I don't know what I want to say, really- What are you supposed to say, when you meet someone you admire this much? Nothing feels right, you know?

WING

Heh. Yeah. I get that. Have to say, I never expected to be that person.

EDWARD

Really?

WING

I'm an engineer, kid.

EDWARD

Fair enough.

WING

So, what can I do for you? What do you want to know?

EDWARD

How did you get started in the industry? Was it something you always wanted to do? Did you have some worldview-altering experience that set you towards mobility devices?

WING

Are you kidding? I took an internship at the first lab that had a paid spot open.

EDWARD

Right. Of course.

WING

Best piece of advice I can give you, by the way? Do the same thing. Take a job that pays, keep it as long as it keeps paying. You especially.

WING exits. A crushing moment. CALLIOPE enters.

CALLIOPE

That, um. That was kind of brutal.

EDWARD

You always want to be proven wrong. When it comes to your cynicism. You always secretly want to be proven wrong, and it hurts when it doesn't happen, no matter how hard you set yourself up to expect it.

I'm sorry.

CALLIOPE

Don't.

EDWARD

Don't be sorry?

CALLIOPE

I don't want your pity.

EDWARD

It's not pity.

CALLIOPE

What is it, then?

EDWARD

My dad has Parkinsons. His dad did, too. I don't know if my great-grandfather did, but probably. It wasn't all that bad, in the beginning, but it got a lot worse last year. He can't walk anymore, he can barely talk... There's a fifty percent chance I get it, too. I could get genetic testing done, to find out, but I haven't yet.

CALLIOPE

Why haven't you?

EDWARD

Would you?

CALLIOPE

I don't know.

EDWARD

I guess if I knew it was coming, I'd have more time to get myself ready. But I don't think I could ever really be ready for it. It's terrifying, watching it happen to him. He used to be a swimmer, you know. A really good one. He almost qualified for the Olympic trials, when he was in college. There's a lake down the road from us, and he used to swim across it for a Sunday morning

CALLIOPE

workout. Now he can't even wade. I know what it looks like, on him. That helplessness. I know what it looks like on other people. I can help them. I'm good at that. But the idea of being that person, who needs that help? That's terrifying.

EDWARD

It's not as scary as it seems.

CALLIOPE

Isn't it? Because from where I'm standing, it seems pretty brutal.

EDWARD

When you look at me, do you see a tragedy?

CALLIOPE

How can I not?

EDWARD

You could see a person.

CALLIOPE

It's not like I'm not trying. I know that I'm uncomfortable, and I know that I can't be a special ed teacher if I'm not comfortable being around disabled people.

EDWARD

Maybe you don't need to be comfortable. Maybe you just need to stop making your discomfort everyone else's problem.

CALLIOPE

Jesus.

EDWARD

Didn't think your hippie parents were the type for Christianity.

CALLIOPE laughs, almost.

CALLIOPE

What about you?

EDWARD

What about me?

CALLIOPE

I'm not trying to, you know. Do whatever it is you'll probably accuse me of. But maybe there's something you're still uncomfortable with, too.

EDWARD

Like what?

CALLIOPE

Like whatever's made it impossible for us to have an actual conversation all weekend without you accusing me of something. Not like I didn't deserve it sometimes, but also? Sometimes I didn't.

EDWARD

I know.

CALLIOPE

So?

EDWARD

So. I don't know, actually. Maybe I'm so used to my disability being the only thing people see about me that I haven't actually done any work on myself as, you know. A person. Maybe if I'm only fighting on that one front, they won't take the fight deeper, and I won't have to deal with the fact that I don't really know who I am outside of the thing the world's convinced me is the only part that matters.

CALLIOPE

It's not the only part that matters.

EDWARD

I know that. I know that, and that's what makes me feel like a dumbass. But if I never let anyone probe deeper, I won't have to look down there, either.

A beat.

CALLIOPE

Are we okay?

EDWARD

Do we need to be?

Scene V

A table in the hotel restaurant space. The dialogue of this scene is entirely ASL.

HUNTER

(referring to their coffee)

Thank you.

LILA

Of course.

HUNTER

I don't know if you could tell, but my hands were shaking for that entire panel.

LILA

I could tell.

HUNTER

That's great. That's embarrassing.

LILA

Don't be embarrassed. You did well. You've got a good career ahead of you if you want it.

HUNTER

That means a lot. Thank you.

LILA

You want it, right? I know we had this talk last night, too.

HUNTER

I don't know. Do I need to want it?

LILA

What do you mean?

HUNTER

It's just something I can do. There are plenty of things I can do, but this is one that's got a few jobs in it, and I get to meet good people. That's enough, right? It doesn't have to set my heart on fire, it just has to pay the bills.

LILA

Are you sure?

HUNTER

You said you got into medical advocacy because it sets your heart on fire. And that's awesome! It's awesome to do something you're passionate about. But I don't need to be on fire about the things I do, right? I just need to be warm.

LILA

Well, if that's where you're landing, then good for you. Most people take years to figure out where to land.

HUNTER

Can I ask you something?

LILA

Go for it.

HUNTER

Why did you come here?

LILA

I wanted to buy you a coffee.

HUNTER

Why did you come to the conference? To speak on the panel? I know you knew Susan, but- Why? You didn't have to. It was at the last minute. And you've obviously hated every moment of it.

LILA

I wouldn't say every moment.

HUNTER

Come on.

LILA

Look, I'm a cynic. I've always been a cynic. I'm okay with that. I've made my peace. My wife is the optimist in the relationship, which is strange, because she's a virologist. She spends all of her time studying these tiny things that could wipe out the whole planet, and she's so damn happy. She's away this weekend, visiting her family back in New Mexico. I miss her more than anything.

And doing a favor, coming to this conference? It's what she would do.

HUNTER

She sets your heart on fire.

LILA

Like a furnace. Or an engine.

HUNTER

That's sweet.

LILA

That's life.

HUNTER

Thank you.

LILA

For what?

HUNTER

I don't know. Coffee. Experience. The usual intern things.

LILA

I'm going to email Susan when I get home. As soon as you're certified, she's getting you on the goddamn payroll.

HUNTER

That would be amazing.

LILA

Yeah, well. At least one thing's going to be changed by sitting around and talking. But - a little advice?

HUNTER

Please.

LILA

Next time your client swears at someone, you translate it. Exactly.

HUNTER

That - I have a feeling that that's going to cause a few problems. If my clients are anything like you.

LILA

So fucking what? Don't d/Deaf people get to cause problems just as much as anyone else?

HUNTER

You know? You have a point.

LILA

I know I do.

HUNTER raises their coffee cup for a "cheers." LILA "cheerses" them. They drink.

Scene VI

The empty/resplendent space.

ALBERT

An excellent year.

BEVERLY

Hm?

ALBERT

Excellent. The year. The attendance. The profit margins.

BEVERLY

Excellent.

ALBERT

Are you alright?

BEVERLY

Am I a cunt?

ALBERT

Excuse me?

BEVERLY

Am I. A cunt?

ALBERT

Are you allowed to say that word?

BEVERLY

Depends on if I am one or not.

ALBERT

Well, in this industry. In any Industry. You'd have to be.

BEVERLY

Be what?

ALBERT

A cunt.

BEVERLY

You don't get to say it.

ALBERT

My apologies.

BEVERLY

See, that's just it. We putter about having these god-awful Conversations about what words we can and cannot say, and we pat ourselves on the back for not saying them, but then we go and do all sorts of things and never have those kinds of conversations about the things we do. Does anyone even want us here?

EMERSON

No.

ALBERT and BEVERLY startle. The space is very Suddenly a hotel lobby. Everything has always been public, brash, insensitive. They never noticed.

ALBERT

Pardon me?

EMERSON

I've been coming to these conferences for a long time. Ever since the first one, in a Holiday Inn express, of all places. I didn't even know they had conference rooms at a Holiday Inn Express. But it didn't matter what room we were in, because everyone in that room cared. They cared so much about everything and everyone else in that room. They were there because this was the work that made their souls sing. They were there because their lives depended on it. The first year we moved out of that Holiday Inn Express, people were overjoyed. But by the end of that conference, they realized what was happening. It wasn't for them anymore. There weren't any more souls singing. The music was gone, because you can't monetize soul-song.

ALBERT

We've tried, actually, but the legal process is a headache.

EMERSON

Do either of you have a single disabled person working in your departments?

Silence.

BEVERLY

What should we do?

EMERSON

I don't know. Watch my TED talk, to start. But the conference is over now. Go home. Try again next year. Comet, heel.

COMET leads EMERSON offstage.

ALBERT

(trying)

Bing bong.

BEVERLY

We're going to Hell.

End of play.