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HARD PLACES

by Garrett Zuercher

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting,
Hunter College – The City University of New York

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Date

Christine Scarfuto

Thesis Sponsor

05/10/2022

Date

Robert Cowan

Second Reader

hard places

a play by Garrett Zuercher

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ:

- **TIP** – 35-year-old man. Deaf.
- **JOSE** – 31-year-old man. Hearing. Not a bad signer, but not fluent either.
- **PETER** – Hearing man. Rehab counselor.
- **SANDY, ERIKA, CARLY, KATHERINE, and SUSAN** - ASL interpreters. All played by the same person.
- **MALE NURSE/DOCTOR/SPEAKER**
- **ALEX** – 23-year-old Hispanic man. Hearing.

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prologue

Small cafeteria inside a wing of a hospital devoted to patients recovering from addiction. Pre-COVID times. Random battered tables and chairs are scattered about.

In the very center is Tip, a thirty-something man. He is wearing a hospital gown and looks either weary or bored – it's difficult to tell.

On the table in front of him is a tray of hospital food. It does not look very appetizing.

Slowly but deliberately, Tip is eating. He does not look around or acknowledge anything other than the food on his tray.

At first, there is silence, but then a slow buzz rises, akin to busy chatter. Even though we cannot understand individual voices, it is clear that people are talking excitedly and having fun. Occasionally, someone yells across the room and, occasionally, someone might respond.

The din grows and grows, but nothing else changes. Tip continues to eat.

After a moment or two, a voice begins, confident and quiet, slowly growing in intensity. This mingles with and eventually overpowers the general clamor of the room. We do not know where it comes from.

ALEX'S VOICE

Honestly?
I love who I am.
I really do.
I wouldn't change anything about me.
That's not what I struggle with.
What I struggle with is other people:
L'enfer, c'est les autres.
That's me.
That's my existence.
To other people,
I offer up my body:
Dissect me.
Cut me open and look inside.
See me up close and personal.
Witness my mechanism and how I operate firsthand –
Complete, undiluted, and bloody.
If I could just have that,
If that were even possible,
I honestly do believe I would be a great deal happier.
I have worked

So hard
To get to where I am today
And yet it never feels like
I've done enough.
But what more can I do?
What do you say
To an animal
In a zoo
Beating against the bars of the cage
Or the glass of the windows?
Those outside,
Looking in,
Love to watch
And study me,
But when I try to emulate them,
When I try to be like them,
To live as they do,
To walk among them as one of them,
I'm nothing more than a freak.
A pale imitation.
Is a circus better than a zoo?
Neither is freedom.
They laugh with amusement
And cry with pity
And applaud with pride,
But they don't know.
They call me inspiring
And resilient
While I feel
Like anything but
And the stress of dealing with that
All day,
Every day,
Day after day,
Month after month,
Year after year,
Constantly wears me down.
The rolling tide of humanity
Constantly batters my façade,
The currents of their best intentions
Eroding the little self-esteem
And confidence
I'm able to cling to.
When I try to explain this experience,
They nod and narrow their eyes in thought,
But I can see
Deep down inside:
They just don't get it.
They can't.
And I am tired.
So tired of fighting.

So tired of trying to do my best
When it's never good enough.
So many people
And I can't even walk up to a single one of them and say,
"Hello, how are you?"
"What's your name?"
I just want to be able to go up to a stranger –
Myself alone –
And say hello
And introduce myself
And start a conversation.
I want a connection.
Some connection.
Any connection.
One on one.
Tête-à-tête.
I want to know people.
I want to be known.
I want feelings.
I want passion.
I want to fight,
Mano a mano.
I want others to know the exact words I want to say,
The exact thoughts I am thinking,
Exactly the way they are in my head,
Exactly the way I intend them,
Instead of always becoming remolded
As they pass across the chasm.
Bridges may be connections,
But they don't always connect.
The view from one side
Is always different than the other.
Loose connections of broken understanding.
I don't want to be filtered anymore.
I don't want to be diluted.
I don't want to be translated.
I want to be me,
On the same side of the bridge as everyone else.
What's the point of having the bridge there
If one can never reach the other side?
I don't blame the bridge.
It's useless.
If neither side will move –
Can move –
What's the point of having it in the first place?
Let it fall.
They won't cross,
I can't cross,
So what is there to do?
Let it fall.
Is there anything that can be done?

Let it fall.
I'm tired.
Tired of fighting.
Tired of trying.
And it's so hard not to give up.
Let it fall.
Even just asking for help
Requires extra effort
And I only have so much to give.
Is it even worth it?
At all?

Beat. By now, Tip has finished eating. Slowly, he stands, dumps everything on his tray into a trash bin, places the tray on a table next to the trash bin, and walks off.

Blackout.

act one

The office of Peter, a rehab counselor in the addiction clinic.

Peter is sitting behind his desk.

In front of him, in a battered hospital chair, sits Tip in street clothes. Next to him is his boyfriend, Jose. Seated next to the desk and facing Tip is Sandy, a sign language interpreter who voices everything Tip signs and signs everything Peter and Jose say. She is dressed very casually.

PETER

Just to double-check, what were your medications again?

TIP

(Signing)

Xanax and Lorazepam.

SANDY

(Voicing)

Xanax and...

SANDY

(Signing)

I'm sorry.

TIP (cont.)

(Spelling it again)

Xanax and Lorazepam.

SANDY

(Signing)

The second one?

TIP (cont.)

(Spelling it slower)

Lorazepam.

SANDY

(Voicing)

I'm sorry, I don't know why I can't get this. *(Signing)* Again, please. I'm sorry.

Tip simply looks at Jose in exasperation.

JOSE

Lorazepam.

PETER

Lorazepam, thank you.

SANDY

(Signing and speaking)

I'm sorry. I don't usually work in medical settings. These names are all so difficult!

PETER

That's all right. We're just glad to have someone, so thank you for coming.

SANDY

You're welcome!

PETER

(Back to Tip)

Anyway, thank you for confirming, Tip. That's the same as what I have here. Now, because both Xanax and Lorazepam are both benzos, we won't be able to cut you off cold turkey like we're doing with the alcohol because of the withdrawal and risk of seizures and so on. What we'll do is we'll have our in-house doctor write you a new prescription that will taper you off for about a week or so. Every two days, for six days, we'll reduce the dosage by fifty percent and then we'll be able to cut you off completely. How does that sound?

TIP

Fine.

PETER

Great. Any questions about that before we move on?

TIP

What do I do if I'm feeling... *(he begins to indicate through mixed gesture and signs)*

SANDY

I'm not sure how to voice that. Um, what you see him doing. That kind of feeling.

PETER

I'm not exactly sure...

JOSE

What should he do if he has any adverse reactions to the decrease in his medications?

SANDY

(Speaking)

That! Thank you! You're better than me. *(Jokingly, to Peter)* He's better than me! *(Back to Jose)* You should be his interpreter.

JOSE

(Signing and speaking)

I basically am.

SANDY

(Signing and speaking)

I'm sure. I mean, nobody knows him better than you do, right?

JOSE

(Signing and speaking)

Right. *(Shifting his focus back to Peter)* Anyway...

PETER

Yes, um...since our facility is inside a hospital, there's really no safer place you could be when going through something like this. Full medical staff, the very best this city has to offer, and cutting-edge equipment only a floor or two away. In addition, we have highly trained nurses on the floor day and night constantly monitoring all the patients. We take your temperature and blood pressure four times a day: when you wake up in the morning, in the afternoon, at night before bed, and then in the middle of the night.

TIP

In the middle of the night?

PETER

Yeah, the nurses go from room to room while you're sleeping to take your vitals. Most people stay half asleep. You can just roll over, let them do what they need to do, and then fall back asleep. If any of the numbers come back irregular, then you get checked out further to make sure you're stable. Honestly, we have hundreds of patients in and out of here in a month and very rarely is there ever anything out of the ordinary. It's a precaution, really, more than anything else. Our nurses are highly trained so, if there's anything remotely wrong with you, they'll catch it right away before it escalates into anything serious. There's really no need to worry.

TIP

But I'm not going to have interpreters during the night?

PETER

No. But, honestly, you probably won't even need them at all. Like I said, it's extremely rare that something does happen, especially during the night. I honestly can't even remember the last time.

JOSE

But what if something does happen? Then how will he communicate? Especially because I won't be here with him. He'll be all by himself.

TIP

(Speaking, to Jose)

I'm not a child.

JOSE

I'm just trying to make sure you have the communication access that you need.

TIP

Can I take care of it, though?

JOSE

I want you to focus on yourself and getting better. Let me worry about everything else, okay?

TIP

But...

JOSE

No. This is exactly why you're in here so...let me take care of it. Please. Okay?

TIP

Jose...

JOSE

(Signing only)

No, Tip. No. I cannot keep doing this. I cannot keep going with you to the emergency room. Coming home from work and finding you passed out on the floor. Not knowing whether you're dead or alive. I...I can't, I just can't. I cannot do this anymore, so please just listen to me for once. I know you're stubborn and want to do everything yourself. Believe me, I love that about you, I do. That's a big reason why I was drawn to you in the first place: your independence. But, no. This has to be no. I cannot do this anymore, so you need to just let go. Just this once. Let go, let me take care of this, and focus on getting better. Please? For me. For us. If this relationship is going to survive this, you are going to have to work with me here and help me get you the help you need. Okay?

TIP

(Reluctantly)

Okay.

JOSE

Thank you. I love you.

TIP

I love you too.

JOSE

(Back to Peter)

Now, so what if there's an emergency or something in the middle of the night? What's your contingency plan?

PETER

If anything happens, anything at all, I promise you we will call for an interpreter immediately. We'll have one here as soon as possible. I've already discussed this with all the nurses. They all know about Tip and that he's Deaf. Just in case, though, we're going to put signs on the door of his room and above his bed. They'll have his name, indicate that he's Deaf, and that he uses sign language to communicate.

JOSE

That's great, but what's the point if there's nobody for him to communicate with in the middle of the night?

PETER

Again, it is very highly unlikely / that anything will...

JOSE

I understand that and I hope you're right but, knock on wood, what if something does. I just want to make sure you're prepared for anything that might happen.

PETER

In my experience, nothing has ever happened before that required communication during the night shift. I've been working / here since...

JOSE

/ This is my partner and I am far more familiar with his needs than you are. Trust me, it's best not to leave anything to chance, especially when it comes to communication. He's not a kid you can just throw over your shoulder and carry out when things get crazy. He's an adult and deserves to know what's going on. That's his right.

PETER

You're a very good advocate.

JOSE

Thank you. I have to be. Especially because nobody listens to him. Or even knows how to. So I have to make sure they listen to me.

PETER

Have you had a lot of incidents in the past? Personally?

JOSE

I haven't, but he has. We have. Enough. More than enough. So please tell the nurses that if anything comes up – anything, I don't care what time of the day or night it is – you have them call me right away.

PETER

Unfortunately, our policy expressively / forbids any family members or significant others in...

JOSE

(Signing and speaking)

/ I don't care. I don't care. You are taking him off his anxiety medication. I am his... *(To Sandy)*
I'm sorry, can you sign this for me, please?

SANDY

Oh, sure. Yeah.

JOSE

Thank you. It's hard enough to do two different languages simultaneously, but when I'm talking about something like this... *(Back to Peter, now speaking only)* Anyway, I am Tip's partner. I live with him. I know what he's like when he has anxiety attacks. Panic attacks. He's kneeling on the floor, barely able to function. There's no way you're going to be able to communicate with him if something is wrong. If you're going to be playing around with his medications, he needs communication access 24/7. This is a life and death issue. This is his health. So if you're not going to have an interpreter here at all times, the very least you can do is call me if anything comes up – Anything! I mean it! – and there's no interpreter here. I'll get here as fast as I can. I'll take a cab. I'll Uber it. Whatever. And then I'll stay until the interpreter gets here, if one even comes. That is the least – the very least – that you can let me do. Not for me. For him. Okay?

PETER

I'll make a note of that in his file.

JOSE

(Starting to sign again as he speaks, so Sandy stops)

Thank you. Speaking of which, how are the two of us going to be able to communicate while he's in here?

PETER

Please feel free to call me at anytime. If I'm not in, you can just leave a / message and I'll...

JOSE

(Silently, in ASL)

Tip and I.

PETER

Oh! We have pay phones at the end of the hall. They're unlocked and available for use during any free time.

JOSE

Pay phones?

PETER

Yeah. I mean, I know what you're thinking, but he'll have interpreters with him so he can just use them to make phone calls whenever he needs to.

JOSE

I suppose that will have to do. *(To Tip)* Do you have enough change with you?

TIP

(Speaking)

Jose...

JOSE

(Squeezing Tip's hand)

Shh.

PETER

I would like to restate that we are thoroughly committed to making sure Tip has access to everything he needs. Again, there is absolutely no need to worry and I'll be here through the whole process so, if anything comes up, I'll be more than happy to take care of everything. For you, and for him.

JOSE

Thank you.

PETER

You're very welcome. Now, Tip, if you'll please just sign here.

Seemingly lost in his own world, Tip does not react. After Jose nudges him, he snaps back to reality, sees Peter holding up the pen above a piece of paper.

As he leans forward to take the pen and sign, everything around him – save for Sandy and her chair – seems to dissolve, breaking up and disappearing piece by piece. Slowly we transition into an examination room.

When Tip finishes signing the paper, Peter takes it and stands, clumsily signing ‘Thank you’ before exiting.

Standing up, Tip and Jose embrace tenderly. Breaking apart, Jose signs to Tip, ‘Be good.’ Tip signs back, ‘I’ll try.’ Then, after a kiss, Jose leaves as the desk disappears and a male NURSE walks in with a medical clipboard as Erika, holding a large Starbucks coffee cup, replaces Sandy in the chair.

Erika (and all successive interpreters) continue to interpret for Tip the same way, speaking for him when he signs and signing anything spoken around him. They should have distinct and various degrees of style, methods, and professional approaches.

NURSE

Name and birthday, please.

TIP
(Signing)

Tip Papadopoulos. March 26, 1986.

ERIKA
(Voicing)

Tip Pa...pa...

Erika mangles the name and it sounds nothing like it is supposed to.

NURSE

Papadopoulos?

ERIKA

Um, I’m not...I’m not exactly sure how to pronounce it, to be honest.

The Nurse shows Tip the information he has on his clipboard.

NURSE

Is that you?

TIP

Yes.

NURSE

Perfect. Thank you.

The NURSE proceeds to fasten a hospital identification band around Tip’s wrist. Doing so, he notices Erika’s coffee cup.

NURSE

(To Erica)

I’m sorry, we don’t allow beverages outside of the cafeteria without a screw top.

ERIKA

(Speaking, without signing)

It's got a lid on it.

NURSE

I understand that, but if you dropped it or knocked it over, the lid would pop right off. It's very important that we avoid spills around here. It's too easy for the patients to slip and hurt themselves.

ERIKA

I literally just bought this before I came in here. It's still full. It's a \$7 cup of coffee, I'm not throwing it away.

NURSE

(Reluctantly)

Alright, but be very careful, please.

ERIKA

Oh, of course!

NURSE

And if you spill anything, even one drop, make sure you wipe it up.

ERIKA

(Mock saluting)

Yes, sir! Absolutely, sir!

NURSE

Thank you. *(Returning to his clipboard and Tip)* Um...where were we? Oh, right. Any allergies?

As he continues to pepper Tip with questions, he proceeds to take Tip's blood pressure and temperature, recording the results on the clipboard.

TIP

No.

NURSE

Medications?

TIP

(Signing)

Xanax and Lorazepam.

ERIKA

(Voicing)

Xanax and...um, it starts with an L...

ERIKA

(Signing)

I'm sorry, what was the second one again?

NURSE

Lorazepam?

ERIKA

(Speaking)

Yes, I think that's it!

NURSE

Okay, great. That matches up. Have you taken your medication yet today?

TIP

No, they told me not to because of intake.

NURSE

Perfect. Here.

The Nurse hands Tip a small paper cup with pills and a small disposable cup of water.

TIP

Take it?

NURSE

Now. Yes.

Tip does, after which the Nurse takes back the two cups.

NURSE (cont.)

Great. Now open your mouth.

Tip does. The Nurse peers inside, but not too closely.

NURSE (cont.)

Lift up your tongue so I can see underneath.

Tip does, but the Nurse doesn't even bother to look. He throws the cups away and begins to make a few notes on his clipboard as he continues to talk.

During the following spiel, Erika – somewhat abrasively – asks the Nurse to slow down. The exact exchange can be ad libbed by both actors.

NURSE (cont.)

Perfect, thank you. We distribute medications twice a day: before breakfast and after dinner. That's for this morning, since you missed the distribution. Starting tonight, you'll line up with the other patients outside the prescription window next to the Nurses' Station. They'll scan the bar code on the identification band I just gave you, which will unlock your prescriptions in the system. Everything's computerized. We can't give you anything the doctors don't prescribe, so don't ask. You stay at the window, swallow your medication in front of the nurse, just as you did with me, and show them your mouth and under your tongue before you'll be allowed to leave. That's it. Any questions about that?

TIP

No.

NURSE

Okay, great. Can you take off your clothes, please? You can leave your underwear on.

Sandy does not interpret this for Tip but rather speaks up on her own as she stands.

ERIKA

I'm going to leave for this part. You can just come get me when you're done. I'll be in the hallway.

With that, she begins to leave with her coffee.

NURSE

(To Erika, who does not interpret this)

Before you leave, can you tell him what he needs to do?

ERIKA

As long as I'm not here when he takes off his clothes. I just want to give him some privacy, you know?

NURSE

That's fine. *(Turning to Tip as Erika begins to interpret)* What I'm going to ask you to do is to take off all your clothes. If you would prefer, you can leave your underwear on until you put on this hospital gown, but then that must come off too. After you've done that, I'm going to ask you to squat and stay down for fifteen seconds.

TIP

Why?

NURSE

It's formal protocol to make sure you're not trying to smuggle in any substances. Everyone has to do it.

TIP

(Indicating Erika)

You didn't make her do it.

ERIKA

(Voicing)

You didn't make...

ERIKA (cont.)

(To Tip, signing only)

I'm not squatting.

TIP

(Signing, unvoiced by Erika)

I'm just kidding.

NURSE

(Sussing out what is happening, to Erika)

Oh, we're not worried about you. You're fine.

ERIKA

(Genuinely relived)

Ok, good. Thank you. May I leave now?

NURSE

Sure. Thank you.

As Erika finally exits, the Nurse gestures for Tip to take off his clothes, which he does before putting on the hospital gown. The Nurse takes his clothes and throws them into a garbage bag.

Tip, nervous about what is happening to his clothes, gestures to the Nurse that he doesn't want his clothes to be thrown away. The Nurse laughs and gestures something about writing on the bag, but Tip does not understand.

Tip goes to the door to try and get the interpreter, but the Nurse stops him physically and indicates that he cannot do that and must stay in the room.

Tip indicates that he is only trying to communicate, and the Nurse, attempting to placate Tip, indicates that everything is fine and for Tip to return back to the middle of the room. After Tip has done so, the Nurse indicates that Tip should remove his underwear and squat, which Tip unenthusiastically does, not liking how this is proceeding.

When he has finished, the Nurse returns Tip's underwear and, after he has put it back on, opens the door to call Erika back in. As we can see through the doorway, though, she is on her cell phone and holds up a finger to indicate that she needs a minute more. The Nurse holds the door open as he continues to wait. Tip can only stand patiently, holding closed the back of his gown.

ERIKA

(Speaking without signing)

...right. Yeah, and then he...I know, right? And then he...sorry...hold on! Sorry, I need to go back in so I'll call you back...

With that, Erika hangs up hurriedly and, in the process, drops her coffee, which splashes all over the hallway.

ERIKA (cont.)

Oh, shit.

Immediately, she starts for the sink and the paper towel dispenser.

With the preternatural calmness that comes only from extensive experience and training, the nurse stops her as he proceeds to grab a yellow plastic 'Wet Floor/Piso Mojado' sign and place it in the center of the spill, closing the door behind him.

NURSE

It's all right.

ERIKA

I'll clean it up.

NURSE

No, it's all right. I'll take care of it. Don't worry about it.

ERIKA

I just want / to wipe...

NURSE

Thank you, but for safety reasons, we need to have a janitor take care of it. They're trained to do it properly. It's policy.

ERIKA

I'm so sorry!

NURSE

It's all right. Really. Don't worry about it.

He picks up the phone on the wall and speaks into it.

NURSE (cont.)

Coffee spill outside of Examination Room 2.

Beat.

NURSE (cont.)

No, it was the interpreter.

Beat.

NURSE (cont.)

Yes.

Beat.

NURSE (cont.)

Alright. Thank you very much.

The Nurse hangs up the phone.

ERIKA

I'm so sorry again!

NURSE

Seriously, don't worry about it. *(Turning back to Tip and picking up his clipboard)* Anyway, you're good. All clean. Now, you're required to / wear that hospital gown for...

TIP

/ What are you doing with my clothes?

NURSE

What do you mean?

TIP

You put my clothes in that garbage bag.

NURSE

Oh, that's what we do for everyone. That's how we separate them. We'll tie it shut and label it with your name and identification number and return it to you upon discharge.

TIP

I thought you were going to throw them away!

NURSE

Oh, no, no, no! We wouldn't do that!

TIP

Okay. Thank you! Sorry.

NURSE

It's alright. Anyway, like I was saying, you're required to wear that hospital gown for the first week. After the seventh day, if you prefer, you can switch out to your street clothes. It helps the nurses identify who the newer people are, the higher-risk people, so that they can be more closely monitored.

Beat. Tip nods but does not say anything.

NURSE (cont.)

All right, then. If you don't have any more questions...?

Tip shakes his head.

NURSE (cont.)

Great, so I think we're good for now so you can just head down to the cafeteria for lunch. Do you know where it is?

TIP

Yeah, I saw it on the tour.

NURSE

Great. Just go on in there and they'll take care of you, and I'll see you around on the floor.

ERIKA

(Signing and speaking)

And that means I'm done.

TIP

(Signing, unvoiced by Erika)

You're not staying for lunch?

ERIKA

(Signing and speaking)

No, I'm only booked up until your lunch.

TIP

(Signing, unvoiced by Erika)

Is someone else coming?

ERIKA

(Signing and speaking)

I have no idea. *(To the Nurse)* Do you know if someone else is coming?

NURSE

Another interpreter?

ERIKA

Yeah.

NURSE

I know nothing about that. You'd have to check with the Nurses' Station.

ERIKA

(Signing only)

You'll just have to wait and see if the agency sends someone else. I wouldn't worry, though. You'll be fine. *(Turning to the Nurse and speaking, holding up her phone)* Could you sign this for me, please?

NURSE

What is it?

ERIKA

Oh, the agency requires proof that I was here for my client today. For billing. Anyone can sign, really.

NURSE

I don't think I have the authority to do that. You'll have to ask one of the nurses at the station.

ERIKA

Sure, okay. Where is it?

NURSE

Down the hall and to the left. Right where you came in.

ERIKA

Oh, yes. I know what you're talking about. Thank you. *(Turns back to Tip, signing)* Well, good luck with everything and it was great to meet you!

TIP

You too.

ERIKA

Maybe I'll be back, who knows? Depends how long you're in here, I guess. Enjoy your lunch!

TIP

Thank you.

Tip stands still in the center of the stage as everything around him, once again, seems to dissolve, breaking up and disappearing piece by piece. Both Erika and the Nurse disappear with the rest of the set as the surroundings slowly transition back into the same hospital cafeteria that we saw during the prologue. The familiar buzz of busy chatter rises.

Disoriented and confused, Tip wanders back and forth across the stage, clearly trying to figure out what he is supposed to be doing. It appears that different people keep pointing him in different directions.

Gradually, progressively, as he wanders, he manages to accumulate a tray of food and finally reaches a table down center. Just as he sits, though, the Nurse enters, indicates the time, takes his tray, and points offstage. Taking the tray, the Nurse walks off again as Tip stands, not having eaten a bite.

Slowly, Tip walks off as the cafeteria dissolves into a hospital room. There are two identical beds against the wall, one on each side, two identical dressers, two metal lockers next to the door, one desk, and a doorway to a small bathroom. It looks exactly like the love child of a college dorm and a prison cell.

Above one of the beds is a glaring neon-colored paper sign indicating in large, crude letters that the patient is Deaf and one must use ASL to communicate. On the bed itself are several full plastic bags and a pile of sheets, as well as a pillow.

The other bed is neatly made with a few personal objects scattered on top of the dresser next to it, such as a book, a toothbrush, toothpaste, and a bottle of water.

Seated at the desk, scrolling on her phone, is KATHERINE.

The Nurse enters, followed by Tip.

NURSE

(To Katherine)

Are you the interpreter?

KATHERINE

(As she puts her phone away)

I am, yes.

NURSE

Great. *(Indicating Tip)* Could you...?

KATHERINE

Absolutely.

Katherine stands and proceeds to interpret.

NURSE

Okay, so...Tip. This / is your room. Your things are on the bed...

KATHERINE

(Signing only, to Tip)

Okay, so... *(Aside)* Do you have a name sign?

TIP

(In ASL)

No, just spell: Tip.

When the Nurse sees Tip signing, he trails off.

KATHERINE

(Signing, to Tip)

Okay, great. Thanks! *(Speaking, to the Nurse)* You can keep going.

NURSE

Oh, sorry, I thought he...

KATHERINE

(Simcom)

No, I was just asking what his name was.

NURSE

It's Tip.

KATHERINE

No, I know. His sign name, I mean.

NURSE

(Slightly confused)

Oh...okay. Um...sure. Anyway, so that's his bed, and...

KATHERINE

(Simcom)

You can speak directly to him.

NURSE

(Starting to become a bit flustered)

Okay, sorry. Um...so, Tip. That's your bed and we've put your things there on top of it. They're in bags because we had to go through them first and make sure there was nothing that's against the rules. There's also some sheets, towels, and a pillow for you. You can go ahead and put your things in the dresser if you would like. You have a roommate, but I'm not sure where he is right now. His name is, um...Adam, I think.

KATHERINE

(Simcom)

Alex.

NURSE

Alex! Yes, that's right. *(To Katherine)* How did you know that?

KATHERINE

(Simcom)

I was chatting with him earlier while I was waiting. He had a meeting with his counselor, but he'll be back soon. *(Back to Tip)* He's really excited about learning some signs from you. He already knows the alphabet from when he was in grade school.

NURSE

That's awesome. Maybe I'll learn too, and then we won't need the interpreters anymore.

He thinks it's funny, but the other two don't.

NURSE (cont.)

Right. Anyway, it looks like you have a few minutes before your first meeting, so go ahead and get settled. Let the Nurse's Station know if there's anything you need.

TIP

Okay.

NURSE

Great. Good luck, and I'll see you around.

The Nurse leaves. There is an awkward silence.

TIP

How long have you been here?

KATHERINE

(Signing only)

I got here about an hour ago. The Nurses' Station said you were at lunch and told me to wait here.

Beat. Tip registers this for a moment before turning to peer in his bags. Katherine watches for a moment, then sits and starts scrolling on her phone again.

Gradually, Tip becomes self-conscious about her presence. They sign back and forth without speaking.

TIP

Would you mind waiting outside, please?

KATHERINE

Oh, sure! I'll just go grab some coffee and then I'll be in the hallway if you need me.

TIP

Perfect, thanks. What's your name?

KATHERINE

Katherine.

TIP

Katherine. Nice to meet you.

KATHERINE

You too!

Beat.

KATHERINE (cont.)

Alright, I'll just go get my coffee and be back in a few.

TIP

Thank you.

Katherine starts to exit, but Tip suddenly remembers something and chases her, catching her just at the door.

TIP (cont.)

Do you mind making sure your coffee has a lid, please?

KATHERINE

Oh. Sure?

TIP

Thanks. One of the other interpreters had a really bad spill and I just don't want it to happen again.

KATHERINE

No! Really?

TIP

Yeah. It went all over the hallway.

KATHERINE

Oh, my God. What a headache! I would have been so embarrassed. I'll make sure mine has a lid. Thanks for the heads up!

TIP

Sure.

Katherine finally exits as Tip turns back to unpack. The very first thing he does is rip down the neon sign above the bed, crumple it up, and toss it into the trash.

Next, he dumps the contents of the bags out on bed, the majority of which are clothes, toiletries, and a few books and magazines.

The clothes, he sorts into his dresser. The books, he stacks on top and, against it, leans a snapshot of Jose.

As he is doing this, a DOCTOR appears in the doorway with a medical clipboard.

DOCTOR

Hey... (*Looking down at the clipboard*) ...Tip, right? How are you doing today?

His back turned, Tip does not see the doctor and does not respond, continuing to arrange his things.

Beat.

DOCTOR (cont.)

That's alright, you can keep working. I'm Doctor Hale and I'll be your doctor. I just wanted to stop by real quick and introduce myself and let you know that I'm here if you have any questions or anything else you'd like to talk about?

Beat.

DOCTOR (cont.)

No? Okay, then. No worries, that's cool. Maybe we can chat later? I'll try and stop by again in a bit. Have a good one.

The doctor exits.

Tip continues and, after a few moments, ALEX enters - a short, young Hispanic man with a sweet disposition.

ALEX

(Testing)

Hi?

Seeing that Tip did not hear him, Alex goes up to his dresser and opens the bottom drawer, which is empty.

Finally seeing Alex, Tip stops what he is doing.

TIP

(Speaking)

Hi.

ALEX

Hey. (*Adding rudimentary gestures*) You're deaf?

TIP

Yeah. Um. Hold on.

Tip goes to the door and looks out, apparently looking for KATHERINE and finding nobody.

Returning to the room, Tip gestures as if to say, 'Never mind.'

ALEX

Um...I don't have that much stuff, so I don't need this bottom drawer. You can have it, if you need more room.

TIP

I'm sorry?

The best he can, Alex attempts to gesture what he just said and, after some effort, manages to convey it to Tip.

TIP

Oh, thank you!

ALEX

Sure. *(Then, noticing Tip's toiletries)* Oh, you have a locker over here.

Alex points to the toiletries and then leads Tip to the two lockers, opening one of them, which is empty.

Alex attempts to gesture a towel and indicates that Tip can hang his in the locker as well. Alex is quickly growing comfortable with this style of communication, almost as if it comes naturally to him.

As Tip starts to put his toiletries and towels into his locker, Alex goes and sits on his bed just as Katherine returns with her coffee, which – incidentally – does have a lid.

ALEX (cont.)

Hey, Katherine!

KATHERINE

Hey, Alex.

ALEX

I am honestly so jealous. I would kill for some coffee right now.

KATHERINE

Do you want me to get you some? I'd be happy to!

ALEX

I would love that, but we can't have coffee in here.

KATHERINE

Are you serious?

ALEX

Only decaf. Which is bullshit because they have a Coke machine. We can have caffeinated soda, but we can't have caffeinated coffee.

KATHERINE

Why?

ALEX

I have no idea! Oh, do you mind interpreting for me?

KATHERINE

That's what I'm here for.

Katherine places her coffee on the desk and begins to interpret for Alex and Tip.

ALEX

Hey, Tip.

TIP

Hey.

ALEX

(Offering his hand)

So, I'm Alex. It's really nice to meet you.

TIP

(Shaking hands with Alex)

You too.

ALEX

So, I know we're gonna be roommates, so I just wanna say that this is your room as much as it is mine, even though I've been here for a while already. So please – um – just make yourself comfortable and let me know if you need anything or need more space. I'm happy to move any of my stuff. Did you get what I said earlier about...

ALEX gestures the drawer again and KATHERINE does not understand what he is referring to.

KATHERINE

(Clarifying)

The what?

ALEX & TIP

(Simultaneously)

The drawer.

KATHERINE

(Simcom)

Are you two sure you need me?

ALEX & TIP

Yes.

ALEX

(Continuing)

Although it would be great if I could, maybe, pick up a few signs. I learned the alphabet when I was in grade school, but I'm really rusty. If you don't mind, maybe we could practice later? It would be nice if we could chat if the interpreter's ever not here. Because we're roommates, you know? I can help you if you need. I'd be happy to do that.

TIP

That's really sweet. Thank you. And, yeah, of course we can practice!

ALEX

Thank you! I'm so excited. I've never had anyone to practice with before. Also, I have to tell you – the most important thing to know in here – the coffee in the cafeteria is decaf. Even if they say it's not.

TIP

All of it?

ALEX

Yeah.

TIP

Even in the morning?

ALEX

Yeah.

TIP

Why?

ALEX

That's the rule, I guess.

TIP

That's bullshit. How am I going to survive in here without coffee? Real coffee, I mean?

ALEX

There's a hack, though.

TIP

What is it?

ALEX

They have tea bags. Caffeinated black tea. Take a couple and put them in your coffee.

TIP

They have caffeinated tea but not caffeinated coffee?

ALEX

Yeah.

TIP

That makes no sense.

ALEX

I know.

TIP

How does it taste?

ALEX

Terrible. Like, it's disgusting. Weak, stale decaf coffee mixed with black English Breakfast tea. But...it's better than nothing and at least you get a good buzz going. This is rehab. You take what you can get. Oh, we're not allowed to have cards either. Playing cards. But we can have UNO cards, so...

Alex pulls a deck of cards from his top dresser drawer and shows it to Tip. They are UNO cards, but with black markings on them.

ALEX (cont.)

Just ignore the colors. Some of the numbers are face, but most of them are written on with magic marker, along with the suit. That's what you should pay attention to.

TIP

Why don't they allow real playing cards?

ALEX

Gambling. It's an addiction, you know? And this is rehab.

TIP

For substance abuse.

ALEX

Yeah, but we're all still addicts. It's our tendency, you know? One thing leads to another. If we can't get the high we're looking for, we'll find different ways.

TIP

Why are these okay, but regular playing cards are not?

ALEX

I guess the rules don't say that we can't make our own. We play every night during snack hour after the AA meeting. Hey, speaking of which, what's your drug of choice?

TIP

I'm sorry?

ALEX

That's what we say in here: 'Drug of choice.' What's your addiction?

TIP

Oh. Alcohol and benzos.

ALEX

Cool. I'm alcohol too. We usually play Crazy 8's, but also Hearts. You want to join us?

TIP

I'm not sure if I have an interpreter that late at night. I didn't have one for lunch today.

ALEX

Oh, that's fine. Just stick with me. I'll help you. We've got a fun group going right now and we'd love to have you!

TIP

That's really sweet of you.

ALEX

Of course. (*Indicating the picture of Jose*) Who's that in the picture?

TIP

That's my partner.

ALEX

You have a partner? That's awesome! What's his name?

TIP

Jose.

ALEX

Jose? He's brown?

TIP

Yeah.

ALEX

Same as me. He looks white, though.

TIP

Yeah, he gets that all the time. His mom's white, but his Dad's Puerto Rican.

ALEX

Is he deaf too?

TIP

No, he's hearing.

ALEX

Does he sign?

TIP

Kind of. Yeah.

ALEX

Did you teach him?

TIP

Yeah.

ALEX

That's so cool. How long have you been together?

TIP

Four years.

ALEX
Do you live together?

TIP
Yeah.

ALEX
Did he know you had a problem?

TIP
Yeah, but not this bad.

ALEX
So you were sneaking around behind his back?

TIP
Yeah, he's a bartender, so he works nights.

ALEX
Oh, my god. That's so perfect. So you could totally get drunk while he was at work.

TIP
Right. The hard part was remembering to hide all the bottles. That's how I messed up a lot. He caught me a few times, because I passed out before I was able to clean everything up.

ALEX
You have to get rid of the bottles first. Before you start drinking.

TIP
Right. Exactly. Before you get too drunk and forget.

ALEX
What'd you use instead?

TIP
Soda bottles.

ALEX
Nice. I had this huge plastic travel mug. From 7/11. For the Slurpees, you know? Held almost a whole liter.

TIP
That's brilliant. I didn't even think of that.

ALEX
It was the best thing. How were your hangovers?

TIP
Terrible.

ALEX

That's how it starts, right?

TIP

Yeah. You drink to make the pain go away and then, before you know it...

ALEX

You're drunk again.

TIP

Over and over and over.

ALEX

How did he not find out, though?

TIP

He doesn't get home from work until like five or six in the morning, so he usually sleeps in until noon or later. I drink just enough to get me over the hangover and through the day until he leaves again.

ALEX

Yeah, that's such a nice place to be. Hair of the dog. No hangover but not quite drunk yet and knowing you'll soon be able to drink more.

TIP

His days off were the worst.

ALEX

Oh, my god. What did you do?

TIP

I'd just go for walks.

ALEX

"Walks."

TIP

Exactly.

ALEX

Very long walks.

TIP

Those were dangerous, though.

ALEX

Tell me about it. You couldn't sit down.

TIP

Just when you can't walk anymore, you go home and take a nap.

ALEX
A “nap.”

TIP
Seriously. Are we the same person?

ALEX
No, we’re just alcoholics. Takes one to know one.

TIP
Birds of a feather.

ALEX
Hair of the dog. We’re all just animals, when you get down to it.

From the hallway comes the sound of someone walking up and down the corridor ringing a bell.

ALEX (cont.)
Hey, so it’s time for the next meeting. They ring a bell ten minutes before to let everyone know to start heading down. If you want, if I’m ever not here, I can totally come check on you. I know you can’t hear it.

TIP
Thank you, I really appreciate that.

ALEX
Of course. My pleasure. Do you want me to show you where the meeting room is?

TIP
Sure, that’d be great!

ALEX
No problem. C’mon!

The hospital room dissolves and rearranges to become a meeting room with chairs arranged in a circle. Tip sits in one and Alex takes the one next to him. After Tip indicates that he’d like for her to sit opposite him in the circle, Katherine does so.

After a moment, Peter enters and sits in the circle as well. He begins to speak as Katherine begins to interpret.

PETER
Good afternoon, and welcome to the all-male discussion group. For those of you who are here for the first time, the reason we do this is to create a safe space for those of us who identify as male to be able to express any feelings or thoughts we may have that we would not be comfortable sharing in front of anyone who identifies as female. As I’m sure you’ve already noticed, we do have an interpreter here in the group for Tip, who is Deaf, so I’d like to address that quickly. I’ve already spoken with Katherine, the interpreter, and she has reassured me that she is fine with anything anyone has to say and wants to make sure you all know that you can feel comfortable

saying anything you would normally say here in this group. Anyone have any thoughts about that?

Beat. Silence.

PETER (cont.)

No? Okay, then. I'm going to ask Tip if he has any thoughts he'd like to add. Tip?

TIP

(Signing, voiced by Katherine)

Oh, um...I actually didn't know about this. But I guess I'm...I'm fine for now. Thanks.

PETER

Great. Thank you, Tip. It's great to have you here with us and I'm sure we all look forward to getting to know you. Meanwhile, how is everyone else doing today?

Beat. Silence.

PETER (cont.)

Anyone?

Beat.

Suddenly, the room begins to swirl as the scene dissolves back into Peter's office.

Peter, alone in the room and sitting behind his desk, is enmeshed in paperwork.

There is a knock at the door.

PETER

Who is it?

After a beat, the voice of CARLY, another interpreter, is heard.

CARLY

It's Tip.

PETER

Oh. Um...okay. Come in.

Tip and Carly enter his office.

PETER (cont.)

What's up?

TIP

(Interpreted by Carly)

I'm sorry to bother you. Do / you have a couple minutes?

PETER

/ No bother.

TIP

Thank you.

Tip sits in the same chair as earlier and Peter places another chair where Sandy sat earlier, in which Carly sits.

PETER

Aren't you supposed to be in a meeting now?

TIP

Yeah, umm...

PETER

Everything okay?

TIP

I'm a little frustrated.

PETER

What's up?

TIP

You told me I would be able to use the pay phones during our down time, like lunch or whatever.

PETER

Right.

TIP

But I can't use the phones without an interpreter.

PETER

Right, of course.

TIP

And I don't have interpreters during down time. Only when I actually have meetings and stuff.

PETER

Oh, right. I see. Well, you can always skip out of a meeting or two if you need to make a phone call.

TIP

I thought about that but the phones are locked during meeting times. To keep the other patients from skipping meetings to make phone calls, so any time I have an interpreter / the phones are...

PETER

/ the phones are locked. Right. *(He sighs)* You're absolutely right and I'm sorry about this. Let me talk to the nurses and see what we can figure out for you. Don't worry. I'll take care of it.

TIP

I would just like to check in with Jose. My partner. Let him know how I'm doing. You know?

PETER

Absolutely. I'll make sure you can do that. Is there anything else?

TIP

Yeah, um...

PETER

Yes? I'm sorry, I don't mean to rush you, but I have about five minutes before I need to leave for my next meeting.

TIP

Because this is...um...because this is a medical setting, I would really be a lot more comfortable with male interpreters.

PETER

What are you saying? You don't like the interpreters?

TIP

No, they're fine. They're great. It's just that, I mean, I'm walking around in a hospital gown and...normally I wouldn't care. Normally I wouldn't mind women. I know most interpreters are women, but...um...and it's probably hard to find enough male interpreters, I understand that, but...um...it would be, it would be great if you could just maybe please let the agency know that I would prefer male interpreters. As much as possible. Please?

PETER

Well, I...

TIP

I would really be a lot more comfortable. I'm sorry.

PETER

No, I understand. Completely. I do. I will do what I can.

TIP

Thank you.

PETER

Of course! Now, while I can promise that I'll do my best to help you, one thing you do need to understand is that I really don't have much control over this. The hospital here has an office specifically for access services and everything must go through them. I can make requests, but they make all the final decisions. But, yes, I will let them know and advocate for you as much as I can.

TIP

I really appreciate it.

PETER

Of course. Not a problem at all. Is that it?

TIP

Yes.

PETER

Great. Now, if you'll excuse me, please. I really can't be late for this meeting.

Peter gets up and opens the door, through which Carly and Tip exit as Peter - still clumsily - signs 'Thank you.'

Everything around them dissolves and becomes a meeting room. Tip sits on a chair among many facing a podium. A droning but stern voice can be heard, presumably coming from someone standing behind the podium. Next to the podium is seated Carly, who interprets the voice.

Sometime during the speech, Carly - noticeably kinder than Erika - asks the Speaker to slow down. The exact exchange can be ad libbed by both actors.

SPEAKER

...also known as narcotics, drugs in the opioid family include morphine and oxycodone, often shortened to oxy. These medications block pain signals in the body from reaching the brain, which is their primary function. Safe when prescribed by a doctor for a short period of time, they can and do easily become misused, which leads to severe abuse and addiction. That's why many medical professionals use them only as a last resort when pain relief is unable to be achieved through other safer methods and medications...

A door upstage opens and Peter peeks around it. The speaker's voice trails off.

PETER

Sorry! Can I just steal Tip for a second, please?

Tip stands and exits, followed by Carly. They disappear behind the door, which rotates, taking us out into the hallway with the three of them, the meeting room disappearing to the side.

PETER

(Interpreted by Carly)

Sorry to take you out like that. So, I spoke with the Access Services office and they don't really think they'll be able to get interpreters for you during your down time. *(Off Tip's reaction)* I know, I know. It totally sucks, I completely agree with you. But I do have some good news: I spoke with the nurses and we think we found a solution to your phone problem. If it's okay with you, I can call Jose and have him drop off your laptop or a tablet or something. Now, please understand that personal devices are forbidden here. We lock them all up during intake, as you know. Normally, the only communication we allow with the outside world is through the pay phones. However, taking into account your special situation and the lack of access to the pay phones, we will allow you half an hour every night during pharmacy hours. All other times, the device must be locked up with the medications but, when the nurses open the pharmacy, you can get your medications first, get your laptop or whatever, and go in the storage closet - just so you can have some privacy - and Facetime Jose or whoever you want. How does that sound?

TIP

That's great. Thank you so much!

PETER

You are very welcome. I don't want to take you out of your meeting too long, but I just wanted to let you know before I take off for the day.

TIP

When will I be able to start?

PETER

I'm actually going to try and call Jose right now. If he doesn't answer, I'll leave him a message. As soon as he can drop off something for you to use, you should be good to go. I'll keep you posted.

TIP

Thank you so much again.

PETER

My pleasure. Have a great day!

TIP

You too!

Tip, a new spring in his step and followed by Carly, walks back through the door back into the meeting room, which has dissolved into a different layout.

It is now much later in the day. What was previously sunshine is now night.

Carly has dissolved into Sandy. She, along with Peter, Alex, and Tip, stand in the center, making up four random segments of what seems to be a circle of people holding hands.

At the same time, Peter and Alex begin to recite.

Realizing that she can't interpret while holding hands, Sandy breaks the circle and begins to sign for Tip.

PETER & ALEX

God,
Grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

PETER

Good meeting, everyone! Snacks in the cafeteria and I'll see you all after breakfast tomorrow.

As Peter exits, Alex approaches Sandy.

ALEX

Hey, Sandy. Are you coming with us to the cafeteria?

SANDY

I'm here until ten, so I have a few minutes yet.

ALEX

Great. Thank you. I just want to make sure Tip knows what to do.

SANDY

Oh, sure. Do you want to talk to him?

ALEX

Yeah, can I please?

SANDY

Sure!

By this time, Tip has approached the two of them and stands waiting.

ALEX

(Interpreted by Sandy)

Hey, so...now we have snacks in the cafeteria. I'm gonna run back to our room real quick just to grab the cards and then I'll meet you there and we can play?

TIP

That sounds great!

ALEX

Awesome! Sandy told me she's gonna be here for a couple more minutes, so I'll be able to explain the game and introduce you to everyone real quick before she leaves.

TIP

Great.

ALEX

Awesome! I'll meet you there in five?

TIP

Yep!

ALEX

I'm so excited!

TIP

Me too!

ALEX

Maybe we could even practice a bit too? My letters, you know?

TIP

Yeah!

ALEX

Awesome! I'll see you there!

Alex dashes out. Tip begins to walk out, but Sandy stops him. They sign only.

SANDY

I have something for you.

Sandy goes over to her bag and pulls out a laptop, handing it to Tip.

TIP

How do you have my laptop?

SANDY

As I was coming in, I ran into your boyfriend.

TIP

He was here?

SANDY

Yeah. He swung by quickly to drop it off before work. We bumped into each other in the hallway coming up and he asked me to give it to you, since you're not allowed to see him anyway. He asked me to give you a hug for him. *(She awkwardly gives him a hug)* He sends his love and misses you, and he hopes you're doing well. He's excited to talk to you soon.

TIP

Thank you. They didn't take it?

SANDY

What do you mean?

TIP

The laptop. Don't you get searched when you come in?

SANDY

No, I just tell security that I'm here to interpret and they just wave me in.

TIP

They don't check you at all?

SANDY

No. Are they supposed to?

TIP

So, basically, you could smuggle anything in here to me if I asked you to?

SANDY

I guess I could.

TIP

Actually, do you mind giving the laptop to security? If I give it to the nurses, they'll wonder where I got it and I don't want to get you in trouble. I also don't want them to think I'm trying to break the rules.

SANDY

Oh, that's a good point. I didn't even think of that. I'm sorry. Yeah, I'll give it to them. I don't want to get you in trouble either. Seriously, though, please know that I'm cool. If you need me to bring anything in for you on the DL, just let me know. As long as it's not illegal. No drugs or anything like that. Just between the two of us. I'm more than happy to do that.

TIP

Thank you.

SANDY

Of course. I'm sure it can get pretty rough in here, so I don't mind helping any way I can. Do you want to head to the cafeteria?

TIP

Yeah, and can you drop off the laptop with security on the way?

They exit as the room dissolves into the cafeteria. The din of friendly chatter rises, but now it feels far less oppressive.

Tip and Alex sit across from each other at one of the dining tables. Sandy sits off to the side facing Tip and continues to interpret.

ALEX

...then when I couldn't find anything, I'd just end up drinking rubbing alcohol or sucking all the liquid out of disinfectant wipes. You know, the kind you get after eating, like, BBQ? The ones in the little paper packages that you tear open and use to clean your hands? The ones that take forever to unfold, especially when your hands are all sticky and covered with sauce. I could never understand why they couldn't make them easier to open.

TIP

Did they even do anything?

ALEX

I honestly don't remember. You're kind of so fucked up that you'll do whatever it takes to try and keep that buzz going, and it says there's alcohol in it, so...I don't know. I mean, I got really sick afterwards, but – honestly – we always do anyways, right?

TIP

Yeah.

ALEX

With all the crap we put into our bodies, who knows?

TIP

When you're that fucked up, it doesn't really matter anymore.

ALEX

Exactly! You're running around, looking in every drawer and cupboard for anything that might have the slightest bit of alcohol in it. I drank a whole bottle of bitters once. Bad idea. Oh, and cooking wine? So so so salty! Ugh.

TIP

It's a miracle we're not dead yet.

Beat.

ALEX

If I can be honest with you, I've always had this sort of fantasy about death, ever since I was little. Young, you know? It's hard to explain and it always seems to freak people out. It seems like it would be such a release, to get to that sort of place. Not suicide, but the actual nothingness of nothing nothingness and how that nothingness seems like such a beautiful peace.

Beat.

TIP

What makes you happy?

ALEX

I, um...I don't know, I mean...I...it's not...it's not that things don't make me happy, you know? Like, on the surface, I'm happy, you know...kinda...but um...underneath, there's all this darkness. This weight that just constantly holds me down, you know? And keeps me from being able to, you know, like, rise up and actually enjoy that happiness. No matter what happens, it's always there. You know? Holding me down. And I can't...oh, shit. It's ten oh five! I didn't realize I was talking so much! (*To Sandy*) I'm so sorry! I know you're done at ten.

SANDY

(Simcom)

Actually, it's okay. I can stay a bit longer.

ALEX

I'm so sorry. Are you sure you don't mind?

SANDY

(Simcom)

Not at all.

ALEX

Thank you so much!

SANDY

Of course. By the way, I already told Tip, but I want to tell you too: if there's anything you need, just let me know. They don't search me, so I can basically bring in anything I want.

ALEX

A Texas Mickey?

SANDY

A what?

ALEX

Kidding! I'm just kidding!

SANDY

Nothing against the rules. I told him the same thing.

ALEX

I know. Seriously, I was kidding. But, honestly, basically everything's against the rules in this place. Except for you, I guess. Anyway, let me finish explaining the game really quick before the others finish eating. So, instead of suits, we match the colors. If the top card is red, you can play either any red card or the same number of any color...

As they continue to talk, everything breaks apart and starts to swirl as the set dissolves. The lights fade.

End of Act One.

act two

Peter's office.

Erika interprets for Tip.

PETER

I haven't been able to confirm anything yet, I'm sorry. I explained to them why you prefer a male / interpreter, but they don't seem...

TIP

That's fine! That's why I'm here: I like Sandy and it would be great if I could have her as much as possible.

PETER

Oh. Okay. Are you sure?

TIP

Yeah.

PETER

And this is Sandy?

ERIKA

(Speaking to Peter)

Erika.

PETER

Oh, sorry. I can't keep them all straight.

TIP

I can't either myself, sometimes. Anyway, if you could just let the office know that I'd prefer Sandy, I'd really appreciate it.

PETER

No problem. I'll do that.

TIP

What about the down time? Like lunch and after the AA meetings?

PETER

Yeah, I'm really sorry, but I don't think that's going to be possible, unfortunately. I talked with the office and told them everything you said. I explained that it's the only time you're really able to connect with the other patients but they don't see it as a justifiable expense like the meetings are. Maybe if you have a couple minutes in between meetings, then maybe you could try and squeeze it in then?

TIP

That's not really fair.

PETER

I know, and I tried to explain that to them. If they say no, my hands are tied and there's not really anything more I can do. I'm really sorry, but I promise I will let them know what you said about Sandy and keep on them about that.

TIP

Okay. Thank you.

PETER

By the way, I noticed that your roommate Alex has been picking up some sign. Have you been teaching him?

TIP

A little bit, yeah.

PETER

That's awesome! Maybe you've thought of it already, I don't know – it just occurred to me – but maybe he can help you out during those down times? Interpret for you a bit? I know it's not the same, but...better than nothing, maybe?

TIP

Maybe. Thanks again.

PETER

No problem. Have a great day!

TIP

Thanks. You too.

The office dissolves into what appears to be a storage closet for office and general cleaning supplies. There is a cluttered office desk in one corner, seated at which is Tip. In front of him is his laptop through which he is video chatting with Jose.

In another part of the stage is Jose with a laptop of his own, through which he is chatting with Tip.

Jose signs without voice. Tip speaks.

JOSE

So how are you feeling?

TIP

Fuzzy, you know. Like...really out of it. It's hard to focus.

JOSE

The withdrawal?

Yeah. TIP

From the benzos. JOSE

Yeah. TIP

Are you completely off them now? JOSE

Yeah. I had my last dose two days ago. TIP

That's great! Congratulations! JOSE

Thank you. TIP

I'm so proud of you! This is huge! JOSE

Thank you. I just wish I felt better. TIP

Of course. I'm sure it'll take a while. Your body's still adjusting. JOSE

Yeah. TIP

How's your anxiety? JOSE

It's okay. TIP

That's good! JOSE

I just wish I could communicate better. TIP

I know. How are the interpreters, though? JOSE

They're fine. TIP

Are they giving you what you need? JOSE

For the most part. TIP

What do you mean? JOSE

Yeah, they are. TIP

Tell me what you need! I'll get it for you. JOSE

I'm fine. TIP

I'll call them. JOSE

Stop it. I'm fine! Stop parenting me! Please. TIP

Beat.

It really is good to see you. I miss you so much. JOSE

I miss you too. How's everything at home? TIP

Fine. It's so quiet around here. It's really weird. JOSE

How's Monster? TIP

She's fine. Around here somewhere. I'm sure she'll pop up to see who I'm talking to. JOSE

She better hurry up. We only have about twelve minutes left. TIP

I can look for her if you want. / She's probably... JOSE

No, it's fine. I'd rather see you as much as I can. TIP

JOSE

Yeah, I'd rather see you too.

TIP

She probably doesn't even realize. I'll walk in the door and she'll be like, 'Oh...you were gone?'

JOSE

Would you expect anything less from a cat?

TIP

Yeah. Doesn't even miss me or anything.

JOSE

Well, I miss you, so...

TIP

And you're more important anyway.

JOSE

I should hope so.

TIP

I mean, I'm going to rehab and everything to get sober for you.

JOSE

Tip...

TIP

I'm kidding! I'm kidding!

JOSE

That's not funny.

TIP

I know. I'm sorry.

JOSE

You're not doing this for me. You're doing this for you. You need to remember that.

TIP

I know. I just wish I could be at home with you right now. Eating Mexican food on the couch and watching the Food Network.

JOSE

Soon.

TIP

Yeah.

JOSE

And things will be so much better.

TIP

Yeah.

Beat.

TIP (cont.)

So, what's new. What have you been up to?

JOSE

Nothing much, really. There's not a lot going on. Just working and hanging out with Sarah. Thinking about you. Wondering what you're up to.

TIP

Well, now you can see me. And I can tell you.

JOSE

Did Sandy tell you that I ran into her?

TIP

Yeah.

JOSE

What?

TIP

Thanks for the hug. And the message.

JOSE

What is it?

TIP

Nothing.

JOSE

Just tell me. What did I do?

TIP

If you drop anything else off, can you please give it to security?

JOSE

Did I get you in trouble?

TIP

No, no! It was fine. I asked Sandy to give it to security herself. I just didn't want the nurses to think that I was...um...that I was doing anything wrong. I mean, they're already bending the rules by letting me talk to you like this. I don't want them to think I'm abusing my privileges, you know?

JOSE

Oh, my God. You're right. Absolutely. I'm so sorry. I didn't / mean to...

TIP
It's fine!

JOSE
I just saw Sandy and it was just like an impulse thing. I thought she could give you a hug for me.

TIP
It's fine, really. Don't worry about it, please.

JOSE
I'm really sorry.

TIP
It's fine! I'm not mad. It was actually really sweet.

JOSE
I won't do it again.

TIP
Okay, thank you.

JOSE
Is there anything else you need?

TIP
Actually, yeah. Could you do me a big favor, please?

JOSE
Of course! What is it?

TIP
You know the sign language book on the bookshelf in the living room?

JOSE
The red one?

TIP
Yeah, that one!

JOSE
What about it?

TIP
Would you mind dropping it off for me?

JOSE
Oh, sure! I'll do it before work tomorrow. What's it for?

TIP
It's for Alex. My roommate. He really wants to learn how to sign.

JOSE

That's really sweet of him.

TIP

Yeah. I've been teaching him a bit, but I thought maybe the book could help too.

JOSE

Tell him to be careful with it! It's mine.

TIP

I know. I will.

JOSE

And I want it back.

TIP

Of course. I know. I'm not going to let him keep it.

JOSE

Okay. Good. Is he nice?

TIP

Yeah, he's really sweet. He's been helping me a lot.

JOSE

Oh, that's great! With what?

TIP

Sometimes, when I don't have interpreters, he helps me out. Like at meals and stuff like that.

JOSE

You don't have interpreters for meals?

TIP

No.

JOSE

That's ridiculous. I'm going to call them tomorrow.

TIP

No, Jose. It's fine. Really.

JOSE

You shouldn't have to rely on other patients to help you communicate.

TIP

It's fine. And he doesn't mind. Really. Besides, it's been helping us to connect. Alex and I.

JOSE

Are you sure?

Yeah. TIP

Just make sure that, if it's an emergency / or anything medical... JOSE

Yes, I know. TIP

...you have them get an interpreter. Or call me. JOSE

I know. TIP

I'm serious. JOSE

I know. TIP

And I know you. That's why I have to say this. JOSE

I know. TIP

I love you. JOSE

I love you too. TIP

I'll drop off the book tomorrow. Do you need anything else? JOSE

No, I think I'm good. TIP

All right. JOSE

No Monster? TIP

No Monster. JOSE

Maybe tomorrow. TIP

JOSE

Maybe tomorrow.

Both Tip and Jose close their laptops and do not move, staring into the space in front of them. For a moment, there is silence and stillness. Jose stands and exits. Tip stays for a beat more.

Around him, the scene dissolves to the cafeteria. It is breakfast and Tip is eating alone. Around him is the usual din of chatter.

Alex, carrying a tray, comes and sits opposite of Tip. They sign to each other, Tip slowly and deliberately, supplementing his phrases with iconic gestures that help clarity. Alex is clumsy but determined. It is clear that he is learning sign but is still in the extreme beginning stages of fluency. His commitment and enthusiasm dramatically make up for any lapses, though.

NOTE: the words in bold are fingerspelled due to Alex not knowing how to sign them. Occasionally, after spelling them, Tip will show Alex how to sign those specific words.

TIP

How did you sleep?

ALEX

Meh. I was thinking a lot.

TIP

When you woke me up, I was wondering why you were already wide awake.

ALEX

Yeah. I had already been up for **hours**.

TIP

What's up? What is it?

ALEX

Same old...how do you sign **shit**?

TIP shows him.

ALEX (cont.)

Shit. Same old shit. I **hate**...my **life**...

TIP

No, don't say that.

ALEX

I'm sorry. It's just the...thought of going back after I get out of here. I'm just **dreading** it. **Work**. **Family**. They just...**stress** me. And...too much...**temptation**...out there. Too much...too much.

TIP

Have you talked to them about this? The people here?

ALEX

They don't understand. **Nobody**...understands.

Beat. Tip does not know what to say.

ALEX (cont.)

I **wish** you had been here at the beginning. It got so much better with you. When you got here. Thank you.

TIP

No, you've been helping me so much! I'm the one who should be thanking you.

ALEX

After I go, are you going to be okay?

TIP

I'll be fine.

ALEX

Who's gonna help you?

TIP

I'll be fine!

ALEX

I wish I could stay longer.

TIP

You want to stay in rehab longer?

ALEX

Yeah.

TIP

You're crazy.

ALEX

I think so, yeah.

TIP

When do you leave?

ALEX

Two more days.

TIP

Oh, wow.

ALEX

Yeah. That's why...I can't sleep. I'm **worried** about you.

TIP

Don't. Please. Focus on yourself. Eat something.

ALEX

I'm not **hungry**.

TIP

It'll help you.

Beat.

ALEX

It's been really nice. Helping you. I like it. It makes me feel...**important**.

TIP

You are important. To me.

ALEX

It's nice to be important to **someone**.

TIP

And we can still hang out when I get out of here. **Sober brothers**.

ALEX

I like that. How do you sign that?

TIP shows him. He is visibly moved.

ALEX (cont.)

When do you get out of here?

TIP

I have two weeks left.

ALEX

That's a long time.

TIP

I know. Hey!

ALEX

What?

TIP

Remember how I told you that I chat with Jose at night? With my laptop?

ALEX

Yeah.

TIP

I only get half an hour with him, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind if I chatted with you for a bit too. Like, I could do twenty minutes with him and ten minutes with you. We can check in with each other.

ALEX

I don't want to take away from your time with him.

TIP

You're important to me too.

ALEX

Thank you. I would love that.

TIP

Of course.

ALEX

Who's going to teach me sign, though? When I get out of here. How am I going to keep practicing?

TIP

Take the book with you.

ALEX

But it's Jose's!

TIP

It's fine! Just give it back to me after I get out.

ALEX

Are you sure?

TIP

Yeah!

ALEX

He won't be **mad**?

TIP

Mad? No. Not at all. He'll be happy because you're helping me. It's the least we can do.

ALEX

Thank you so much. I'm excited now.

TIP

Good. Me too.

Alex takes a bite of his food, realizes he does have an appetite, and eats a bit more.

Sandy enters. She simcoms.

Hey, guys! SANDY

Hey! ALEX

Hi. TIP

I got here a bit early and wanted to check in with you guys and see if you needed anything. SANDY

No, we're fine. TIP

Yeah, we're good. ALEX

Great! I'll see you guys at the meeting then. Ooh, coffee! Is it any good here? SANDY

(*Simultaneously*) TIP & ALEX
No.

It's decaf. You have to put black tea in it. TIP

What kind of bullshit is that? SANDY

Right? ALEX

Maybe I'll run downstairs real quick and get some halfway decent coffee from the cafe. With a lid. I'll be right back! SANDY

As she turns to go, Sandy speaks to Alex without signing, her lips blocked from Tip's view.

It's in your room. Top drawer. SANDY (cont.)

Alex flashes her a quick thumbs-up as she exits, which arouses Tip's curiosity.

What? TIP

What? ALEX

What was that? TIP

What was what? ALEX

What did she say? TIP

Nothing. ALEX

Come on. TIP

ALEX
I was just saying okay. *(He does the thumbs up again)* See: okay. Coffee. With a lid. Okay.
That's it. Oh, my God. I can't wait until I can have real coffee again.

TIP
(Still unconvinced, but dropping it)
Tell me about it.

ALEX
I miss it so much. Do you think Sandy would let us have a sip?

The Doctor enters. Alex interprets for Tip.

DOCTOR
Hey, Alex. You excited to be leaving soon?

ALEX
Yeah.

DOCTOR
Don't forget to stop in and see me before you check out so I can transfer your prescription over to
your pharmacy.

ALEX
Okay.

DOCTOR
Great. Hey, Tip. How are you feeling?

TIP
I'm fine.

ALEX

He's fine.

DOCTOR

Great. And we're still on for 2 o'clock, right?

TIP

Actually, the interpreter's coming at 3 now. They just let me know. They said they would tell you.

ALEX

His interpreter's coming at 3. They said they would let you know.

DOCTOR

Oh. No, they didn't. Okay, um...actually, let me just go check into that real quick and then I'll get back to you. I'll do that right now. And, Alex, don't forget.

Sometime during the Doctor's previous line, Alex is forced to ask them to slow down so he can interpret. This should be awkward, but well-meaning. The exact exchange can be ad libbed by both actors.

ALEX

I won't.

The Doctor exits.

TIP

I really don't know what I'm going to do without you.

Beat. Silence.

Slowly, we dissolve out of the cafeteria and into the meeting room. Same set up as Act One: an implied circle of chairs. Alex and Tip sit next to each other with Sandy opposite. Peter is somewhere else in the circle.

PETER

So, Alex, you're leaving us soon.

ALEX

Yeah.

PETER

How are you feeling about that?

ALEX

It's...I don't know...exciting?

PETER

Would you mind expanding on that?

ALEX

Well, I mean, it's going to be really nice not being here anymore.

PETER

It's certainly going to be very different on the outside. You're not going back to the same world you came from. Hopefully a stronger person than the one who walked into here a few weeks ago.

ALEX

Right.

PETER

It's very good that you're going into it with an open mind. Being positive about it. Just make sure you're prepared to forgive yourself if things don't go the way you want them to.

ALEX

Yeah.

PETER

What tools have you come up to help you through this transition?

Alex throws in a few signs here and there and Tip watches him directly instead of Sandy.

ALEX

Um...well, I mean...Tip and I are going to...um...check in with each other every night...um...until he gets out of here, then...um...we're planning on meeting up for...you know...coffee or whatever. He promised he's going to...um...keep teaching me sign language.

PETER

That sounds great! It's so important to have a support system in place, especially with someone who knows what you're going through. So important to have that kind of open communication with each other.

ALEX

Yeah.

PETER

Great! And, Tip: I want to check in with you. I know you and Alex have made a strong connection while you've been in here, so how are you feeling now that Alex is leaving?

TIP

(Interpreted by Sandy)

Well, I mean, I'm sad, but I'll be fine. It's not like I won't be able to talk with him or see him anymore. He won't be here, physically, but at least we can still talk, you know. So that's something to look forward to. We can still try and be there for each other, even though we're not actually together. Sober brothers, you know.

Sandy does not catch this term, 'Sober brothers,' and asks Tip to repeat. Before he can, though, Alex speaks it for him – and her – instead.

PETER

Sober brothers. I love that. Is that a term you guys came up with?

TIP

Yeah.

PETER

That's awesome! Not everyone is able to make such a strong connection with someone else while they're in here, so that's definitely something special to hold on to. So tell us: what plans have you two made? Other than learning sign language?

TIP

Well, I mean, we're going to have coffee, obviously. Real coffee. Good coffee. With caffeine. Without a lid.

ALEX

Oh, my god, yes.

PETER

It's really all about the simple things, isn't it?

TIP

Yeah.

PETER

That's so great. What else?

TIP

Well, we also talked about going to see movies. There's a theater downtown that has captioned films...

Sandy misses the word 'captioned,' so Alex jumps in and fixes it.

ALEX

Captioned films.

SANDY

Sorry: Captioned films, thank you.

Sandy continues to interpret.

TIP

...so that's another thing we can do...

As Tip continues to talk, the meeting room breaks apart and dissolves into the storage closet.

Tip is now sitting in front of his laptop.

On his own part of the stage, Jose enters and sits with his own laptop.

As before, Tip speaks while Jose signs.

TIP

I don't want to talk about it.

JOSE

It was nice of you to say he could hold on to the book for now.

TIP

I was so worried that you were going to be upset with me.

JOSE

I know how much Alex means to you. That means a lot to me too.

TIP

Thank you.

Beat.

JOSE

Go talk to him. I know you want to.

TIP

Are you sure?

JOSE

I'll see you tomorrow. And tell Alex I look forward to meeting him.

TIP

I will.

Jose stands and exits with his laptop as Tip hangs up. Immediately, he dials Alex.

The video stream rings.

And rings.

And rings.

And rings...

...as, around the waiting Tip, the set slowly begins to dissolve and he dissolves right along with it.

Amidst the swirling mess, Peter's office appears. But everything seems disjointed. Something is off with this world.

Peter sits behind his desk. Jose sits in a chair in front of him, an empty chair next to him. Tip stands next to Katherine looking at them both. At first, he speaks for himself.

What's going on?
TIP

Please have a seat.
PETER

(To Jose)
Why are you here?
TIP

Sit down.
JOSE
(Patting the chair next to him)

Tip sits next to Jose. Katherine begins to interpret.

Alex?
TIP

Yes.
PETER

Fuck! I knew he was going to do this. I knew it!
TIP

I'm so sorry.
JOSE

FUCK!
TIP

It's okay. Let it out.
JOSE

PETER places a package on the desk wrapped in brown bathroom paper towel.

What's that?
TIP

Before he left, Alex asked me to give this to you, but only when you were checking out. He wanted it to be a surprise, but...I think you should have it now.
PETER

Can I open it?
TIP

Yes.
PETER

Inside is the sign language book and two envelopes, one large and one small.

Tip opens the larger envelope. Inside is a card, which he begins to read. Around him, everything starts to dissolve and swirl. Tip is now the unmoving eye of a hurricane.

From somewhere unseen comes Alex's voice speaking what he has written. His tone should evoke the opening monologue.

ALEX'S VOICE

Hey, Tip:

I know we said we would meet on the outside, so I'm really sorry for disappointing you. By now, you probably already know.

Please don't feel bad. There was nothing you, or anyone else, could have done. You were my friend, and that's more than anyone has done for me in a long, long time. A little bit of unexpected joy in the darkness of my life. Don't worry: I'm happy now, so please be happy for me.

In the midst of the hurricane, bits and pieces fall into place around Tip. He is now back in his hospital room, continuing to read the card. The room is dark. It is the middle of the night and he is alone.

As he reads, Tip's tremors become more and more severe.

ALEX'S VOICE (cont.)

Meanwhile, I couldn't leave without giving you something, so here's a gift card. I know they're kind of tacky, but I wanted your first good coffee after you get out of here to be on me. It's not much, but in some small way, I guess I'm still keeping my promise to you. I'm so sorry for lying when I asked Sandy to drop it off, but I just didn't want to ruin the surprise. You know us addicts: we're good at hiding things. I hope you'll forgive me. For that, and for everything else. Be good for me, please. And have an amazing life.

Forever your sober brother.

Love,
Alex.

Tip collapses and begins to cry, his tremors uncontrollable. He gets up and paces around the floor, trying to calm himself.

Around him, his room breaks apart and is swallowed back into the hurricane. Even though he is tightly contained within the eye of the storm, Tip has become a frenetic hurricane of his own – an agitated mass trapped within.

The Nurse rushes in and tries to speak to Tip.

NURSE

Tip! Tip! Are you okay? What's going on? Tip?

His hands shaking, Tip pushes the Nurse away, who circles around Tip, mirroring the hurricane.

NURSE (cont.)

Look at me. Listen to me. Just breathe. Just breathe! Breathe!

Tip continues to push the Nurse away, so – realizing it's useless – the Nurse finally runs out, presumably to get help.

Around Tip, the swirling becomes more and more frantic as he finally collapses to the floor. As he lays unmoving, the hurricane lifts us out of the hospital and crashes us squarely into Tip and Jose's home. It is now a month after Tip got out of rehab.

Slowly, Tip struggles to his feet. He is either still drunk or very hungover. He staggers over to the front door and attempts to open it as Jose enters just in time to stop him.

JOSE

Where are you going?

Tip does not respond, so Jose pulls him away from the door.

JOSE (cont.)

Tip. Where are you going?

TIP

Fuck you.

JOSE

Go lay down.

TIP

Fuck you.

Tip pushes Jose to the side and heads for the door again.

JOSE

Don't push me.

TIP

Then get the fuck out of the way!

JOSE

Go lay down!

TIP

Just let me go.

JOSE

No.

TIP

I need more alcohol!

JOSE
You need to go lay down.

TIP
Fuck you!

Tip attempts to shove Jose out of the way, but stumbles and ends up flat on the floor himself. He begins to cry.

Exasperated, Jose can only look down at Tip.

TIP (cont.)
I need more alcohol. I just need more alcohol. Please.

JOSE
What you need is some sleep.

TIP
Why did you take my bottle? I wouldn't have to get more if you would just give it back to me.

JOSE
It's for your own good.

TIP
What did you do with it?

JOSE
I dumped it out.

TIP
Why did you do that?

JOSE
So you wouldn't drink it.

TIP
I need it.

JOSE
No.

TIP
Give it to me!

JOSE
It's gone! I poured it down the drain!

TIP
So let me go buy more.

No. JOSE

You don't know what I'm going through! TIP

You don't need more alcohol. JOSE

Yes, I do! TIP

Go lay down. JOSE

Alex would let me drink. He would understand. TIP

No, not this again. We've talked about this. I am not Alex. JOSE

No shit. TIP

What's that supposed to mean? JOSE

Figure it out. TIP

Don't talk to me that way. JOSE

Then let me go buy some fucking alcohol. TIP

No. JOSE

Fuck you then. Fuck you. Seriously, fuck you. TIP

I am trying to help you! JOSE

Why? TIP

Because I love you! JOSE

TIP

Bullshit. If you really loved me, then you would let me go buy some more alcohol!

JOSE

I'm trying to keep you from ending up dead. Like Alex. Is that what you want?

TIP

Don't you fucking bring him up.

JOSE

You brought him up first!

TIP

I don't care. He was my friend. Not yours. Mine! You have no right / to...

JOSE

I have no right?

TIP

No! This is not about you.

JOSE

Yes, it is.

TIP

How?

JOSE

I am a person in this relationship. And you know what? Maybe you're right. Lately it feels like there's three of us here and I'm getting pushed to the side. There's no room for me anymore.

TIP

(Not understanding)

What?

JOSE

Never mind.

TIP

No. Tell me. What are you talking about?

JOSE

Ever since you got out of rehab, it's Alex this and Alex that. What about me? I know he killed himself and that's understandably very difficult to deal with, I'm not saying it's not, but I'm your fucking partner. We've been together for four fucking years. You knew him for two weeks, but it feels like he's suddenly far more important to you than I've ever been.

TIP

You're just jealous.

Jealous of what?
JOSE

Alex.
TIP

I'm not jealous of a dead person.
JOSE

You're jealous of what he meant to me. What he means to me. You want to be the only person in my life. You want to be the only person I can connect with. The only one I can communicate with. That's why you're jealous.
TIP

That's not...
JOSE

You'd rather I be all alone. No friends. Nobody to talk to. That's what you want.
TIP

That's not what / I'm...
JOSE

You are so fucking selfish!
TIP

Oh, I'm selfish? Look at this shit you put me through. You're lucky I'm still here. Fucking lucky. Do you think I enjoy this? Do you think this is fun for me?
JOSE

It's not fun for me either.
TIP

So why the fuck do you keep doing it? Why do you keep doing everything you can to destroy the little we have left?
JOSE

You don't get it.
TIP

Get what?
JOSE

What it's like.
TIP

Oh, my god. We go through this every fucking time and I keep telling you: not everything is about being Deaf.
JOSE

That's not what I'm talking about. TIP

What the hell are you talking about, then? JOSE

You don't get it! TIP

Oh, my god. JOSE

Don't roll your eyes at me. TIP

What? JOSE

I saw you! TIP

No, I didn't...you know I can't understand you when you're like this. Say it again. What did you say? JOSE

You rolled your eyes at me. TIP

No, I didn't... JOSE

I saw you! TIP

I didn't roll my eyes. JOSE

Yes, you did! I saw you! You're right here and I saw you! TIP

Tip... JOSE

You don't get it. TIP

Get what? JOSE

You don't know how hard it is. How fucking hard it is. I hate it. I hate it. I hate it. TIP

He begins to cry even harder. Jose can only watch in exasperation.

TIP (cont.)

I hate it. And I hate you. Fuck you. Fuck you. I need Alex. I need Alex. I need him. I need him. I need him. I need him. I need him.

JOSE

Fine, then. Go back to rehab and find another Alex and then you two can live happily ever after. Without me.

TIP

Fuck you.

JOSE

What did Alex have that I don't?

TIP

You just don't get it!

JOSE

For the last time, what don't I get?

TIP

Everything. Every-fucking-thing. I hate it. I hate it so much. I hate it so goddamned fucking much. Nobody gets it. Nobody gets it. Nobody understands. Nobody understands what it's like. Nobody understands. Not even you. Nobody understands. Nobody understands.

Tip descends into wracking, drunken sobs.

The hurricane begins to swirl again, violently blowing Jose away and closing in on Tip before swallowing him whole.

epilogue

A month later. Still pre-COVID times.

Peter is sitting behind his desk. In front of him sits Tip, looking disheveled and worse for the wear. His clothes are ragged and he has a large bruise on his face along with a cracked and bloody lip. His eyes are bloodshot. He looks like he, indeed, has lived through a hurricane and barely made it out alive.

Peter stares at Tip, who only stares at the floor.

After a moment, Peter types on his computer, then turns the monitor towards Tip, who does not look up at it.

Beat.

Peter taps the table in an attempt to get Tip's attention. Nothing.

Beat.

Peter tries to wave, either his hand or a folder. Still nothing.

Beat.

Suddenly, there is a sharp, urgent rap at the door.

PETER

Who is it?

From behind the door comes the muffled voice of SUSAN.

SUSAN

It's the interpreter. I'm here for Tip.

PETER

Come in.

SUSAN rushes in and quickly drops her coat and bag on an empty chair.

SUSAN

I'm sorry I'm late. I tried to get here as fast as I could, but it took me forever to get through security.

Tip looks up at her.

SUSAN (cont.)

(In ASL, without voice, to Tip)

Security. Sorry!

TIP

(Signing)

I asked for Sandy.

SUSAN

(Signing)

I don't...I'm sorry, I don't know who that is.

TIP

(Indicating Peter)

Tell him what I said.

SUSAN

Oh...sorry. *(Speaking, to Peter, pointing a finger at TIP)* I asked for... *(To Tip, in ASL)* Who?

TIP

Sandy.

SUSAN

(In ASL)

Again.

TIP

(Slower)

Sandy.

SUSAN

Oh, Sandy.

From here on, Susan interprets everything the Peter says for Tip (and everything Tip signs for Peter).

PETER

Yes, um, Sandy unfortunately is no longer allowed on hospital premises.

TIP

Jose left. He said he can't be with me until I get sober and stay sober. I need help.

PETER

Alright, well...Tip. Why don't we check you in, and then we can talk about...

TIP

I want interpreters for meals and social time.

PETER

We've been through this. I don't have the authority...

TIP

I want to be able to communicate with the other patients in the halls between meetings. I want the able to socialize. Make friends. I want male interpreters.

PETER

Well, unfortunately, as you know, that's not always possible.

TIP

I don't care. Try harder. When we're breaking out into our weekly gender groups to talk about male things and male problems and our deepest masculine feelings and the interpreter is the only woman in the room, do you think any of us are comfortable opening up, most of all me? We're all side-eyeing the lady to make sure we haven't gone too far because we don't want to make *her* uncomfortable, which – in turn – makes us all feel uncomfortable. And then all the other patients are uncomfortable with *me* because I'm the reason this woman is there in the first place, so I'm even more uncomfortable. I just end up sitting alone in my room the whole time while everyone else is playing games in the library or chatting in the cafeteria. Do you really think that makes me want to stop drinking?

PETER

I hear you, Tip. I do. However, this is an addiction clinic. Our job is to keep you sober, not happy.

TIP

Fuck happiness. I gave up on that a long time ago. What I'm asking for is simple, effortless human communication. Connection. The one thing every other patient gets in here without even having to ask or beg for it.

PETER

The law says we must provide reasonable accommodation, so we do. However, you don't get to set the terms. The hospital does. The people above me do. Sometimes you have to realize that you have no control. The important thing is to focus on yourself and make the best of what you do have. Who knows? Maybe you'll meet someone new who can help you? Someone like...actually, you know what? Why don't we...

TIP

Someone like Alex, you mean?

PETER

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...

TIP

No, this is good. Let's talk about this. This is important. You want me to find another patient in here and groom them to work for me? To interpret for the times when the hospital doesn't want to pay for me to have the ability to know what the fuck is going on around me? Then they go and kill themselves like Alex did and I'm left wondering if maybe, somehow, in some small way, it was my fault? These people are addicts too! They have their own shit to deal with already without having to worry about mine on top of it. We all have our own shit to deal with, which is why it's your job to take care of everything else. I'm a fucking Deaf alcoholic in a goddamned rehab that's designed for hearing people, just like everything else in this goddamned fucking world. If you give me what I need as a Deaf person and stop treating me as just some generic addict, then maybe I'd stop showing up at your door! Maybe I'd finally, for once, be able to stay sober.

PETER

I'm not trying to be a villain here, Tip. I genuinely do want to see you become sober and will do everything I can to make that happen. I just have to follow the rules, you understand?

TIP

Why?

PETER

Why what?

TIP

Why do you have to follow the rules? So you can keep *them* happy, the people up there who make the fucking rules? Why is *their* happiness more important than *my* sobriety? Because they're the ones that sign your fucking paycheck? They don't know me. They don't know what I need. You do. So, if you really do want to see me get sober, then break the fucking rules and give me what I keep telling you over and over and over again that I need and we can show them why they're fucking wrong. Otherwise, why should I believe you anymore?

Beat.

PETER

Why do you want to become sober?

TIP

I told you: Jose left / and said he...

PETER

No, no. I'm not talking about Jose or what Jose said. I'm not talking about anyone else. Fuck everyone else. Fuck Jose. Fuck the people upstairs. I'm talking about you, Tip. Why do *you* want to become sober?

Beat.

TIP

I don't know.

PETER

Well, that's where we need to start, then. Until you figure that out, I can't help you. Nobody can. No matter how perfect your communication access is, no matter how many male interpreters we find for you, you're not going to become sober. This is a journey you are on and, unfortunately, you're on it alone, just like everyone else in here, Deaf or hearing. Until you can give me a concrete answer to why you want to be sober, I can't help you.

Beat.

TIP

I just want to get rid of this fucking hangover.

Beat.

Silence.

From somewhere comes Alex's voice, an echo from the beginning.

Tip and Peter do not respond.

ALEX'S VOICE

Dissect me.
Cut me open and look inside.
See me up close and personal.
Witness my mechanism and how I operate firsthand –
Complete, undiluted, and bloody.
If I could just have that,
If that were even possible,
I honestly do believe I would be a great deal happier.

Blackout.

End of play.