

VERBATIM

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Play runs 15-20 minutes.

VERBATIM

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ANDY, a court reporter, either gender

MARLENE

REESE

(*MARLENE and ANDY entering conference room in MARLENE's office. ANDY has his court reporting machine*)

ANDY: Oh, this will be fine.

MARLENE: You need a chair, right?

ANDY: This is fine. (*Sets up the machine*)

MARLENE: How do those work? Is it like a typewriter?

ANDY: We get asked that all the time. We're fully computerized now. I don't even use paper anymore. See, there's this readout screen so you can see it yourself. It's based on phonetics, really and —

MARLENE: Uh, never mind. I don't really care. Do you need anything else?

ANDY: Um, a seating chart would be useful, and I need the names.

MARLENE: What?

ANDY: The names of everyone who's going to be here, or at least who's going to be speaking. See, we need to have speaker designations so we know who's —

MARLENE: It's just me and Reese.

ANDY: Oh. And his lawyer, you mean.

MARLENE: What? No, just Reese.

ANDY: Well, usually the parties have lawyers at depositions.

MARLENE: This isn't a deposition.

ANDY: No? Meeting, conference?

MARLENE: It's a kind of a meeting.

ANDY: (*Beat*) You're not a lawyer, are you?

MARLENE: Right, I'm not. Look, all you have to do is take down everything we say. That's what I hired you to do.

ANDY: That's what everyone hires me to do, but usually it's —

MARLENE: Whatever, this is your job for today. Reese is my husband. He'll be here when he's supposed to be here, which is (*checking her watch*) in seconds, and then we begin.

ANDY: Okay. Reese is his first name or last name?

MARLENE: First name. My first name is Marlene. You can use first names, can't you?

ANDY: Sure, but usually —

MARLENE: Honey, you really have to open yourself up to the notion that this isn't usually. I'm Marlene, Reese is Reese, you are whoever you are, which we don't care about because you're not going to say anything, and that should reasonably simple.

ANDY: (*Perplexed*) Oh. Okay.

(*REESE enters*)

REESE: Okay, Marlene, let's get right — (*sees Andy*) What's this?

ANDY: Oh, hi, I'm —

MARLENE: This is a court reporter.

REESE: (*Beat*) A court reporter? What's he doing here?

MARLENE: I hired him to be here. He's going to write down everything we say.

REESE: Why?

ANDY: Do I start?

MARLENE: Because every time we try to resolve one of our "disagreements —"

ANDY: Am I supposed to be —

MARLENE: — we get terminally bogged down in, as you said last night —

ANDY: I'll just start writing now.

MARLENE: — a carousel of I didn't say that/yes you did/no I didn't —

ANDY: I can use the practice.

MARLENE: — yes you did —

REESE: I didn't say that.

MARLENE: See, we're starting already. But now, we have a court reporter here who can tell us what we said and what we didn't , and maybe we can push this marriage forward a little.

REESE: You are something else.

MARLENE: Something else other than what?

REESE: Other than "You're too rigid, Reese —"

ANDY: What kind of trees? Rijatrees?

REESE: — learn to let go and float with it a little."

MARLENE: (As a facetious chuckle) Oh-ho-ho.

ANDY: "Rigid, Reese," got it.

MARLENE: This has nothing to do with —

ANDY: Wait, wait, I have to catch up. (*Beat; they watch him writing furiously*) Okay.

MARLENE: This has nothing to do with that. I was talking about puce. I was talking about the guest room, which your mother admittedly is the only one who uses, decorated, to please her, in puce and lavender. And how you refused to even discuss it with me, because once your mother —

REESE: Well, she's the only one who stays there. I mean —

MARLENE: I know she's the only one who stays there, I just said that. (*To ANDY*) Read that back.

ANDY: Oh, yeah, (*reading from his screen*) "Marlene: This has nothing to do with that. I was talking about pus. I was —"

REESE: "Pus?"

ANDY: (*Scrutinizing it*) Puce, puce. Sorry, it came out pus for some reason. "I was talking about the guest room, which your mother admittedly is the only one who uses —"

MARLENE: Ahem.

REESE: Well, god, with that syntax who can —

MARLENE: Drop it, Reese. The point is I hired this — (*at a loss for the right word*)

ANDY: Court reporter?

MARLENE: — for just such a situation as that. Because, Reese, you don't listen. The last time you listened to me was —

REESE: What are you talking about? I don't listen? I'm here right now because you told me to be here, giving up my lunch hour I might add, which I only know because I listened.

ANDY: That's not what she means.

MARLENE: (*Somewhat simultaneous with ANDY*) That's not what — (*stares at ANDY*) — I mean. And you know it's not what I mean.

REESE: Right, I know it's not what you mean because I know what you mean because you've told me what you mean.

(*Beat; ANDY, struggling to follow, writes deliberately, mouthing and finally saying the words*)

ANDY: "-- me what you mean", got it.

MARLENE: And?

REESE: And I was listening.

MARLENE: Of course you were listening.

REESE: You just said I never listen.

MARLENE: No, I didn't.

REESE: (*Beat*) Read it back.

ANDY: Getting into it now, huh. Let's see, "Marlene: Drop it, Reese. The point is I hired this —" indicating me "—for just such a situation as that. Because, Reese, you don't listen. The last time you listened to me was —" and then you cut her —

MARLENE: I didn't mean that. I meant you don't hear.

REESE: Oh, do I love New Age semantics.

MARLENE: And that's at the heart of what's wrong between us. Communication, or the lack of it. If I express a need to you, I expect you to hear that as a need, as an expression of vulnerability, not as a demand, not as an ultimatum.

REESE: And if I hear your need and am not able to act on it, to you that means I'm not listening?

ANDY: No, that you didn't hear.

MARLENE: Sometimes, sometimes that's what it means. I mean how am I supposed to differentiate between when you don't hear me and when you're just incapable of giving me what I need.

REESE: Who said anything about being incapable?

MARLENE: You just did.

REESE: No way.

MARLENE: Read that back.

REESE: Wait, wait, before you do. And if I didn't say incapable, what does that tell us? Who's not listening, or not hearing now?

MARLENE: Read it back.

ANDY: (*Looking for the place*) He didn't say it. Okay, umm, "Reese: And if I hear your need and am not able to act on it, to you —"

MARLENE: There.

REESE: Not able is not incapable.

MARLENE: What are you talking about, that's what incapable means, not able.

REESE: That's ridiculous. There you go again, words mean what you want them to mean, no —

ANDY: — more and no less. Humpty Dumpty in Through the Looking Glass. I love that part.

MARLENE: We're not going there. Whatever you said, how do I know why you're not responding to me? That's the point, that's the most important point. I have no idea what's going on because you're not responding to me.

REESE: Can we concretize this a little?

ANDY: Whoa, give me a second on that one. (*Figuring out how to write it on his machine*) Con-crete-ize. (*Looking at screen*) It came out concrete eyes.

MARLENE: Concrete ears is more like it. I'll give you an example. I tell you I'm taking a course in basket weaving. And for the next two weeks, you can't wait to tell everyone how I'm learning container craft.

REESE: It's a joke, son. It's funny.

MARLENE: It's belittling. And I told you it was belittling. And you kept doing it.

REESE: You said it was belittling?

MARLENE: Yes.

REESE: I don't remember anything like that.

MARLENE: Here we go again.

REESE: What I remember you saying was that you didn't think it was funny.

MARLENE: Right, that it was belittling.

REESE: You never said belittling.

MARLENE: Exactly, Reese, exactly.

(Beat; REESE and ANDY look confused)

MARLENE: You don't hear me, Reese —

REESE: You said you didn't think it was funny, you never —

MARLENE: — you hear the words —

ANDY: It's really hard when you cut each other off.

MARLENE: Sorry. Go ahead, Reese, finish.

REESE: You said you didn't think it was funny, you never said anything about being belittled, which by the way, talk about belittling, that Labor Day in '96 —

ANDY: '96!? Okay, you can cut him off now.

REESE: Excuse me?

ANDY: I've got another job this afternoon, we can't be going back to '96.

MARLENE: Exactly, Reese, we can't. We're here now. As I was interrupting, you hear the words, but you've never taken the trouble to learn who I am and what those words mean when I say them.

REESE: Oh, no, Marlene. I know what the words mean when you say them. What I don't know is what they mean a year later. If you felt belittled, you should have said you felt belittled, or small, or — or —

ANDY: Diminished.

REESE: Diminished or —

ANDY: Dis'd.

REESE: But instead, you tell me that I'm not funny. When we were first courting, you couldn't tell me enough how funny you thought I was.

MARLENE: You were. You are, you have a great sense of humor, and you know it. But in your obsession with being the funniest guy in the room, you reveal a very hostile inside. And you don't listen, you don't hear. You're just sitting there, waiting for me to shut up so you can say whatever you've got ready to say next.

REESE: So what are we talking about, my hostility or my not listening?

MARLENE: See, there you go again.

REESE: What!? I just asked a question.

MARLENE: Bullshit, Reese. That was just another attack.

REESE: You tell me I don't listen and when I try to find out what you just said you tell me I'm attacking you.

ANDY: How was basket weaving? I always wanted to try that.

MARLENE: What? Oh, I quit after two sessions.

REESE: Like everything else.

MARLENE: (Animated, pointing her finger at him) Huh? Huh? Belittling? That's what it's all about, Reese, the belittling.

REESE: How many things is it all about? Lack of communicating, not responding, belittling.

MARLENE: What are you talking about?

REESE: The lack of communication was the heart of what's wrong between us, the not responding was the most important part, and now belittling is what it's all about.

MARLENE: Oh, that you heard. The stuff about you, that you hear; the stuff about me, that's what I'm talking about.

ANDY: Why did you quit?

MARLENE: (Right at REESE) Because I was sick and tired of hearing him tell everyone I was into container craft.

REESE: You know, a container craft —

MARLENE: I know what it is, Reese. Stop it, just stop it.

ANDY: Oh, like those big ships.

REESE: Right.

ANDY: Oh, that's funny (*gets a look from MARLENE*) sort of.

MARLENE: Do you have an off button?

REESE: Okay, Marlene, now you need to listen to me.

MARLENE: I always listen to you.

ANDY: (*Pointedly*) But do you hear him? (*Beat, absorbs both their stares*) Sorry, go on.

REESE: You need to really focus on this. I listen to you, I hear you, I feel you —

MARLENE: Oh, please, Reese. You're beginning to sound like a Who song.

ANDY: Hoozong?

REESE: You're not focusing. There are even times when I hear you and purposely don't respond.

MARLENE: Why?

REESE: I'm getting there. This is why you need to focus. I admit I have a problem with neediness.

MARLENE: Who said —

REESE: Focus. I occasionally feel that what you're asking me, in your abstract way, is like inviting me to step into a bottomless pit of need.

ANDY: (*Shivering*) Oooo.

REESE: And so I hear you but I don't hear you, if you understand me.

MARLENE: No, I don't. Why would you think that responding to me asking you to be a little more sensitive would open up some abyss?

REESE: I didn't say I thought that.

MARLENE: You just — read that back.

ANDY: "Reese: I occasionally feel that —"

REESE: Feel. Feel, not think, feel. It's a visceral reaction to the way you express yourself.

MARLENE: Oh, please.

REESE: Which is sometimes passive-aggressive and manipulative —

MARLENE: You must be mistaking me for some puce and lavender dowager.

ANDY: (*Reading his screen*) Whoa, you should see how that came out.

REESE: Maybe that's where it comes from, Marlene, I don't know. But that's who I am and that's who I was when you married me.

MARLENE: That was six years ago, Reese. Times changes, people should change too.

ANDY: Never marry someone expecting they're going to change, that's my first rule of dating.

MARLENE: Your first rule of dating is about marriage? You go on a lot of dates?

ANDY: Um, not really.

REESE: But it's a good rule.

ANDY: Thanks.

REESE: You married me as I am, and you have made absolutely no effort to adjust to who I am.

MARLENE: Adjust? Is that like change?

ANDY: Whoa, abandon ship, that was a direct hit.

REESE: Well, I guess that's why we're here. One of us has to make an adjustment.

MARLENE: And naturally that has to be the manipulative bitch.

ANDY: His mother? (*Beat*) Oh, you.

REESE: I didn't call you a manipulative bitch.

MARLENE: True, I added the bitch because I was really focused.

REESE: And I didn't say you were manipulative.

MARLENE: (*Begins to say "read that back," but Andy is way ahead of her*)

ANDY: "Reese: It's a visceral reaction to the way you express yourself."

"Marlene: Oh, please.

"Reese: Which is sometimes passive-aggressive and manipulative —"

MARLENE: Sorry, I left out the passive-aggressive. How passive aggressive of me.

REESE: What you left out was that I said you sometimes express yourself that way. I didn't say you were.

MARLENE: Like there's a difference.

REESE: (*To Andy*) Is there a difference?

MARLENE: Don't ask him.

REESE: And what's the difference if there's a difference?

MARLENE: And that's another thing you always do.

REESE: What?

MARLENE: You shoehorn some friend of yours into being a referee.

REESE: When did I ever do that?

MARLENE: What about when you called Mark up about the time-share in Costa Rica?

REESE: Oh, good grief.

MARLENE: What do you mean good grief? Talk about piling on.

REESE: That is so —

MARLENE: Admit it, you called him up —

REESE: Of course I called him up. That's his business.

MARLENE: No, Reese. Our marriage is not his business. But you insisted on —

REESE: I don't know what you're complaining about. He ended up agreeing with you.

ANDY: That's not the point.

MARLENE: Right, Reese. It's not.

REESE: Look, okay, I admit that I did rope Mark into that —

MARLENE: Thank you.

REESE: — for which, by the way, he never forgave me.

MARLENE: I didn't know that.

REESE: But that's one time, one time.

MARLENE: Right.

REESE: One time, one — read it back.

ANDY: "Marlene: And that's another thing you *always* do." (*His pronunciation of "always" is heavily stressed*).

MARLENE: I didn't say it like that.

REESE: You said it, you said "always," and it was one time. And as for shoehorning, every time my mother tries to interject herself, I always tell her to butt out.

MARLENE: You don't tell her to butt out.

REESE: Words to that effect.

MARLENE: "Thanks, ma, your experience in these things is always helpful" is a far cry from butt out.

REESE: Not the way she hears it.

(*The following gets angrier and angrier*)

MARLENE: There it is, Reese. There it is. You're worried about what she hears, but not what I hear.

REESE: Wait, what are you doing?

MARLENE: What?

REESE: This was about what I hear not what you hear.

MARLENE: It's the concept.

REESE: I get the concept. I'm considering making it the subject of my thesis.

MARLENE: Do you really think sarcasm is going to help our communication?

REESE: (*Indicating ANDY*) Do you really think memorializing it for posterity is?

MARLENE: It's a lot better than listening to you deny all those provocative things you say.

REESE: And that's the point of this?

MARLENE: No, Reese, the point is feeling loved.

REESE: Oh, so now I don't love you.

MARLENE: I didn't say that.

REESE: I didn't say you said it.

REESE and MARLENE: (*After a beat of looking daggers at each other and breathing heavily, both look to ANDY simultaneously*) Read that back!

ANDY: (*Finds the spot to read*) "Marlene: I don't know how to let go of my anger without becoming very vulnerable. I need the man I married to help me find a way.

Reese: I'll try, but I worry that I'm not strong enough to do it.

Marlene: There are a lot of battered people in the world. We're just two more.

Reese: Then I guess we're lucky we found each other."

(*There is a very confused beat*)

MARLENE: That's what we said?

ANDY: That's what I heard.

(*MARLENE and REESE look at each other, and smile*)

REESE: (*Looking at his watch*) Jeez, look at the time, I gotta run.

MARLENE: (*Checking her watch*) Oh, god, me too. I have a client coming in.

REESE: The Korean outfit?

MARLENE: Yeah.

ANDY: Should I still be writing?

REESE: They're gonna love you.

MARLENE: They are?

REESE: They are. You're very lovable. (*They kiss*)

ANDY: I definitely should still be writing.

— end of play —