Language of One
by Drew Emery and Lewis Merkin

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The Ensemble

There is an ENSEMBLE of nine actors; four men, five women.

To make the play fully bi-lingual, voicing and signing characters will double for each other in a technique we call "shadowing." Below, characters on the left are shadows of characters on the right and vice-versa. Otherwise, ALL DIALOGUE is both signed and voiced. When we use brackets [like this] to indicate when something is signed only or we indicate "voiced only", we mean that the character whose dialogue it is either signs or voices only — but their shadow still provides the appropriate interpretation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albert Rose</td>
<td>deaf, gay, Jewish. He is an architect in his 30s. Does not double in any role. Signs only.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Hart</td>
<td>hearing, gay, 30ish. He is a budding young veterinarian. Learns to sign in the course of the play. (Actor must sign well.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judith Rose</td>
<td>Albert’s mother, deaf and Jewish. A strong-willed woman in her 50s. Signs only.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simon Rose</td>
<td>Albert’s father and Ida’s son, deaf, Jewish and in his 50’s. Signs only.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ida Rose</td>
<td>Albert’s grandmother, hearing and in her 70s, a Latvian Jew. Also plays Writer. Does not sign but has her own gestural vocabulary which she resorts to when absolutely necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albert’s Shadow</td>
<td>hearing woman, preferably 30s. Does not double in any role. Voices and signs well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter’s Shadow</td>
<td>hard-of-hearing woman with good voice (if possible, otherwise hearing). About 30. Also plays Worker/Teacher Signs and voices well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leigh/Interpreter/Operator/Waiter/Speaker</td>
<td>a hearing woman, 30-50ish. Signs a little.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jerry/Irwin/Tutor/Rally Interpreter/Maitre’d</td>
<td>a hearing man, 35-45. Signs only a little.</td>
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*Some of the secondary roles may be reassigned within the ENSEMBLE as signing skills and casting allow. Some productions may feel the need to add additional ENSEMBLE members for the doubled roles but we recommend an economy of size.

Production History

An earlier version of this play, Language of Love, was originally commissioned by Alice B. Theatre of Seattle, under Artistic Director Susan Finque, and received a workshop production in April, 1993 with Howie Seago directing.

The play was further developed by New York Deaf Theatre. Language of One received an Equity Showcase production at the Vineyard Theatre in August, 1995 with Drew Emery directing.
Staging This Play

As a deaf and hearing collaboration, this play was written explicitly to be produced bilingually and bi-culturally — on every level. This is not a deaf play that happens to be accessible to hearing people or a hearing play that is ASL-interpreted for deaf audiences. Above all else, this is a play about deaf and hearing, and where these worlds collide.

Needless to say, we do NOT give permission for hearing actors to play deaf roles or vice-versa. It is important that the signing, voicing and interpreting instructions throughout the text be followed to the letter. Once the production is on its feet, our reasoning for these decisions should be readily apparent.

One role of the Ensemble is to explicitly show deaf and hearing people coming together to tell one person’s story. However, if the Ensemble’s telling of Albert’s story appears effortless, then the central action of the play will be deprived of its conflict. So we recommend that even if you assemble a cast that is entirely gay, or a cast of expert signers, the Ensemble should still be played as if they are a group of people from varied backgrounds who, in language and in culture, have a hard time understanding each other.

It should also be noted that Albert’s Shadow and Peter’s Shadow are more than mere interpreters for their characters. They also act as alter egos, inner voices which have a life of their own. Sometimes the Shadows know more than their characters; sometimes they are privy to their character’s deepest thoughts; sometimes they are egos blithely unaware of what the ids are up to. If nothing else, the two Shadows clearly exist in a theatrical reality that the other characters are unaware of.

The physical staging of this play needn’t conform to any form of realism. Modular blocks, chairs and tables can be arranged and rearranged by the ENSEMBLE as needed. There is little need for stage dressing and the use of props can be minimal. All other objects and environments should be represented through mime and slide projections. As a starting point, we have included several suggested uses of the slides.

For practical reasons, the upstage area of the playing space should contain a series of different platforms that are high enough to allow actors to shadow other actors (sign or voice) from behind. Extra care should be taken to make sure that lighting, costuming and blocking doesn’t interfere with the visibility and readability of the signing.

Finally, the original production of this play was staged to great effect with the Ensemble onstage at all times. Whenever characters were not in action, they sat in full view of the audience as observers, thus maintaining their participation in the storytelling. They could make minor costume changes, hand each other props, and instantly jump into the action of the play singly or as a unit. This device, if handled with great care and simplicity, needn’t be intrusive, and in fact, keeps all the theatrical tools focused and available.
ACT ONE

Scene 1

THE SETTING consists of simple shapes—wood, stone, concrete—arranged seemingly without thought, building blocks all for an urban landscape. Upstage there must be room for projected images to be clearly visible to the entire audience.

RAIN. Music begins softly as the lights rise on ALBERT in a dream state sitting alone center stage. On a small square board, he immerses himself in play, arranging variously shaped toy blocks of wood to form a cohesive whole.

SIMON enters, looks to the heavens, and realizing that it's raining, opens an umbrella. He approaches ALBERT and gestures for him to take shelter. ALBERT gestures to his work-in-progress and ignores his father.

JUDITH enters next, opens her umbrella, and joins SIMON. Together they circle ALBERT in a dance. One by one, the remaining ENSEMBLE enter, opening umbrellas and joining the circular dance around ALBERT. He continues with his task, ignoring the movement around him.

The music suddenly ends with a bell and an abrupt light change as ALBERT'S SHADOW enters sans umbrella. The ENSEMBLE grouping parts in wonder and the SHADOW comes face to face with ALBERT for the first time. They circle each other in a ritual motion and become one. In unison, they each stamp one foot loudly on the ground. The ENSEMBLE turns as one to face the audience.

[During the following sequence, each character chooses the character which will voice or sign for them throughout the remainder of the play.]
ALBERT regards the building blocks again.

ALBERT
Something is missing. I have spent the past 35 years collecting the pieces. To build something, a life for myself. And here it is, all of it. But how does it fit together? What connects the parts to the whole? What does it look like when I'm finished? A house? What do I call it? What's the word?

JERRY
It's never complete. It's a game, a never-ending game. There are rules, there are winners and there are losers.

JUDITH
No. Life is a puzzle. God's plan is very, very clever. Just when you think you've put the pieces together, along comes a great wind.

PETER
I don't know. Sometimes it's a dream, sometimes a nightmare. Sometimes it's Oz and sometimes it's Kansas. You know?

PETER'S SHADOW
It's a carnival ride with it's ups and downs.

LEIGH
No. It's a test. You study, you pass or you fail. And when you fail, you have to come back and take it again.

SIMON
She's half right. It's a lesson. It's school. You learn and learn and learn and then you die and then you are tested!

LEIGH
That's what I said.

SIMON
No it's not. You only get one chance.

LEIGH
How do you know?

SIMON
I'm older than you. I know.

IDA
(voiced only) You're all wrong. I'm the oldest. I've been there. I remember when Elizabeth Taylor was a little girl —
SLIDE: "You’re all wrong. I’m the oldest. I’ve been there. I remember when Elizabeth Taylor was a little girl —"

She looks about and realizes that no one is signing for her.

IDA
Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Why aren’t you signing for me?!

SLIDE: "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Why aren’t you signing for me?!"

The ENSEMBLE stonewalls her.

IDA
(using guilt) Come on, who’s going to sign for this sweet old woman?

SLIDE: "Come on, who’s going to sign for this sweet old woman?"

IDA
Hey! That’s not fair!!

SLIDE: "Hey! That’s not fair!!"

THE SHADOWS
(in IDA’s face) [Life isn’t fair.]

IDA
What did she say? What did she—

SLIDE: "What did she say? What did she—"

IDA sees the projection and jumps back, frightened.

IDA
Aaah!

SLIDE: "Aaah!"

IDA
Albert!!

SLIDE: "Albert!!"
ALBERT’S SHADOW comes to attention, assuming the Shadow position behind ALBERT. During the following, she voices his lines as an aside to the audience, leaving out IDA.

ALBERT
(coming forward) This is my grandmother Ida. Her whole family is deaf and she’s never learned to sign.

IDA
Now what are you saying? I thought there would be interpretation!

SLIDE: “Now what are you saying? I thought there would be interpretation!”

She eyes the projection booth and draws a finger sharply across her throat. The SLIDE fades. She then fishes through her oversize handbag and pulls out a plastic pad and pen — a Magic Slate. She speaks as she writes.

IDA
What did you tell them?

She hands the pad to ALBERT. He writes. [In the following, as she reads his half aloud, he signs for the audience.]

ALBERT/IDA
“I said that you’re my grandmother Ida.” That’s true. “And that your whole family is deaf and you’ve never learned to sign.” (speaking loudly and clearly to ALBERT) That’s because I hear perfectly fine.

ALBERT
(anticipating her) [“I hear perfectly fine.”] See what I’ve had to put up with for 35 years? She glares at him suspiciously and takes the Magic Slate.

IDA
I wanted to say something about life. (gesturing, writing) I wanted to say something about life.

ALBERT
(reading over her shoulder) [“I wanted to say something about life.”]
He gestures for her to go ahead.

**IDA/ALBERT**

(IDA writing, ALBERT reading and then signing) Everyone goes on a journey. They’re looking for something. And they don’t know what they’re looking for. They go away and then they come back.

ALBERT looks at her, puzzled.

**IDA**


(writing) Odysseus.

**ALBERT**

(nodding) [Odysseus.]

**IDA**

(writing,) It’s like the salmon, Albert.

[It’s like the salmon.]

**ALBERT**

(writing) You are a salmon.

**IDA**

(frowning) [She says I’m a salmon. Thank you so much.]

**ALBERT**

(writing) You were born here in Seattle.

**IDA**

(reading) [I was born here.]

**ALBERT**

(writing) You swam away out to sea.

[And then you swam back home.]

**ALBERT**

[And then you swam back home.]
IDA
(writing) Why?

ALBERT
[Why?]

She awaits his answer. He shrugs.

IDA
(writing) What are you looking for?

ALBERT
[What am I looking for? I don’t know.]

IDA
You don’t know? Aha! (writing) That’s life!

ALBERT
[That’s life.]

Triumphant, IDA returns to her place in the ENSEMBLE. The SHADOWS resume their interpretation.

ALBERT
That was life? I am a salmon!?

SLIDE: A fish.

ALBERT
I have never understood that woman.

Scene 2

ALBERT
My name is Albert Rose. And it is true that I was born here and that I swam away. I went to school and got a job. And it’s true that I swam home just this year. But I am not a salmon and if I am looking for something, I have absolutely no idea what that might be.

A bus horn and light blink.

ALBERT
Who has time to think about that?

The ENSEMBLE begins to rush around again. ALBERT taps his watch repeatedly, and then,
in horror, rushes to the central area. His SHADOW removes the building blocks from view.

SLIDE: Downtown rush hour.

A bus. The ENSEMBLE quickly become passengers and a driver. ALBERT races after the bus, waving his arms. It screeches to a halt. He climbs on and finds a spot in the back. PETER reads a newspaper. He glances over his newspaper at ALBERT, interested. They eye one another, then avert their gazes. PETER looks back. ALBERT sneaks a peek. PETER smiles. ALBERT smiles. The WOMAN sitting next to PETER gets up and leaves the bus. PETER moves his bag and gestures for ALBERT to take a seat. ALBERT pauses, and then turns away. PETER quickly scribbles something on a flyer. The bus stops and as ALBERT squeezes down the aisle, PETER thrusts the flyer into ALBERT’S hand. Shocked, ALBERT looks back as PETER winks and the bus leaves, the ENSEMBLE disbursing.

SLIDE out.

ALBERT reads the flyer.

ALBERT

"Dolphin-Safe Tuna Rally. Five p.m."

His SHADOW takes the flyer and reads the other side.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

"720-3459"

ALBERT grabs the flyer back.

ALBERT

What? A complete stranger passing me notes!

ALBERT’S SHADOW

He has a real sexy smile.
ALBERT
I could’ve looked away. I could’ve pretended I didn’t notice. But I smiled back. Why did I smile back?

ALBERT’S SHADOW
Why didn’t you say “hello?”

ALBERT
Because he’d probably flee in terror anyway.

ALBERT’S SHADOW
But it was the only real smile on that bus! Everyone else had this depressed Seattle rain face on and out of the blue comes this gorgeous sun-filled smile.

ALBERT
Yeah. Yeah. So he’s cute. And maybe he’s nice. And I suppose it’s even possible that he has a brain. Too bad he’s hearing.

ALBERT’S SHADOW
You sound like your mother! What’s wrong with a cup of coffee and a little hand-holding? You don’t have to say anything. Just look at each other and communicate with your eyes.

ALBERT
That’s great for a week. But then what? The last thing I need is to play more hearing games.

Scene 3
ALBERT wanders out into the middle of the general area with his SHADOW.

ALBERT
Maybe it is a game. I don’t know. Game. Puzzle. Dream. Test . . . . Salmon. You can always count on Grandma Rose for advice.

The deaf family appears behind him in silhouette.

ALBERT
At my Bar Mitzvah, my father’s mother pulled me aside and told me that the key to life was . . . .

ALBERT/IDA
Finding your place.
ALBERT

And . . . .

ALBERT/IDA

You can’t find your place until you’ve found your people.

ALBERT

I guess that’s the kind of advice you expect from a woman who was born in Latvia and lived in six different countries before settling in America.

ALBERT/IDA

Find your place.

Shaking her finger and nodding her head,
IDA retreats behind to “do the dishes.”
JUDITH enters.

ALBERT

Of course, in some sad, New World way, my parents managed to translate the mysterious words “find your place” into something much less magical.

JUDITH

Settle down and get married.

ALBERT

Settle down and get married? I guess we’ve come to the point where we lower our expectations with each generation. But in my parents’ generation, being deaf meant you shouldn’t even have expectations. To them, settling down and getting married seemed like an ambitious life-on-the-edge proposition. I think they’re still amazed they got away with it.

SLIDE: A set of small row houses.

SIMON

You’re only half a person until you marry.

JUDITH

Less, Simon. What was I until I married?

SIMON

You were a beautiful girl. I was nobody.

JUDITH

You’re still nobody. But at least you’re not alone.

SLIDE out.
(to audience) Settle down and get married!? When I was seven years old, I couldn’t think of anything more boring. (to JUDITH) What if I don’t want to marry?

JUDITH
Of course you want to, Albert. When you’re older, you’ll see. You’ll need someone.

ALBERT
Why?

JUDITH
Because your father and I won’t always be here to take care of you.

ALBERT
Why?

JUDITH
Because someday we will be with your grandfather in Heaven.

ALBERT
But I can take care of myself!

JUDITH
(becoming impatient) What makes you think you can work and cook and clean for yourself? Do the shopping? The laundry? Wash the dishes?

He turns and stares at his grandmother. She stops washing and stares back at him as if to say, “Who are you staring at?”

ALBERT
She had a point. I certainly didn’t want to wash dishes. And for the first time I wondered what it would be like not to have my Grandma Rose around to take care of us. She made all our doctor appointments, met with our teachers. Argued with our landlord. Everything. I started to become concerned. What would happen if Grandma Rose should die? Who would answer the phone?

The phone rings. IDA rushes to it.

IDA
Mister Petersen. Finally. We need to talk about my son’s plumbing . . .

IDA turns her back to us and continues speaking silently. ALBERT watches her gesticulating wildly and stares in awe.
ALBERT
I never knew what Grandma talked about on the phone but she always made it seem like it must be terribly important. As if she were saying, “See what I can do? Aren’t you glad you have me?” I was too young to understand what that meant, but I began to realize that there were two worlds—ours and theirs—and our world had a different set of rules.

SLIDE: A typical 1950s family.

ALBERT, now a child, brings forth his building blocks.

JUDITH
We do want you to succeed. Be a teacher.

ALBERT
What’s wrong with an art class?

SIMON
It won’t hurt him to take one class.

JUDITH
But what will you do with it?

ALBERT
I want to be an architect.

JUDITH
An architect! Where is there room for a deaf architect!? JUDITH stares SIMON down.

ALBERT’S SHADOW
What she really meant to say is “Your father tried it and he failed.”

ALBERT
When my grandfather died, my father took over his upholstery business. The family had put everything into that business and my father lost it. No one would come to a deaf upholsterer.

SIMON
He likes to draw and he’s good.

JUDITH
You were good too. What does that have to do with success? You gave up your job as a printer so you could try and be your father. But your father was hearing. He could afford to succeed!
SIMON

And Albert can’t succeed?

JUDITH

In the deaf community! Albert will have his hands full looking after himself. Raising a family. He won’t have his mother to look after him.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Of course she really meant “He won’t have to live with his mother-in-law!”

ALBERT

When the business went bad, Dad lost everything. My parents moved in with Grandma Rose when I was two and they’ve been living there ever since.

SIMON

One of these days —

JUDITH

No. You promised me a year but we’ve been here for twelve!

SIMON

Should I be working harder?!

ALBERT

She didn’t answer him. When she didn’t want to talk about something, my mother would simply stop.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

But my father knew what she was thinking. “You don’t have the guts to dream anymore.”

ALBERT

He couldn’t blame her. He never blamed her. He kept his feelings to himself. That’s how he loved her.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

But I couldn’t do that.

SLIDE out.

JUDITH and SIMON fade away.

ALBERT

I went to architecture school and proved them wrong. Afterwards, of course, Grandma Rose felt it was her duty to come to the ‘rescue’ and before I knew it, I was working for her cousin, Irwin.
SLIDE: An office.

IRWIN and an INTERPRETER enter carrying a drawing. The ENSEMBLE forms an "office pool," standing in formation, staring at ALBERT.

IRWIN/INTERPRETER
(looking at drawing) This is pretty good, Al.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
(mocking him) For a deaf person.

ALBERT
Communication wasn't the problem. Attitude was the problem.

ALBERT looks to the office pool. They smile and wave condescendingly.

ALBERT
Grandma Rose was right about one thing. I was swimming upstream. When I did good work, someone else in the office would say . . .

A WORKER steps in ALBERT'S path.

WORKER/ALBERT'S SHADOW
The boss always cuts him a break. It's because he's deaf.

ALBERT
But when I made a mistake Irwin was the first to say—

IRWIN/INTERPRETER
Don't worry about it. I understand you just need a little extra time.

ALBERT
Stop being so "understanding!"

ALBERT
You're not being understanding—don't you realize you're holding me back?

IRWIN/INTERPRETER
Who's holding you back? You should thank me. I gave you this job so you could get ahead.

ALBERT
Thanks. I'll manage.
SLIDE out.

They dissolve into the background again as SIMON, JUDITH and IDA step forward.

SLIDE: Edvard Munch’s “The Scream.”

JUDITH/SIMON
What!!? You’re leaving the firm!? Are you crazy? Why? Aren’t you happy? What happened?

ALBERT
I’m limiting myself there.

SIMON
Limiting yourself!

JUDITH
You should be so lucky!

ALBERT
I’ll get my own clients.

JUDITH
Your own clients?

ALBERT
Yes. My own practice.

JUDITH
(to SIMON) Oh, now he’s hearing!

SIMON
Irwin’s been good to you.

ALBERT
I don’t need to be coddled anymore.

IDA
What? What happened?

IDA scratches a message on her Magic Slate and hands it to SIMON.

SIMON
Why didn’t you tell us earlier?
Emery/Merkin

ALBERT

I wasn’t ready.

IDA scratches a message to JUDITH.

JUDITH

You can’t face your parents but you’re ready to start your own business?

ALBERT

Don’t you think I’m old enough to make my own mistakes?

IDA

Job? What about his job?

Frustrated, JUDITH scratches a message to IDA.

SIMON

Albert, you should think about how you’re going to support a family.

IDA shrieks out loud.

IDA

You quit?!

IDA smacks SIMON in the head. He stands puzzled as JUDITH and IDA retreat, arguing back and forth over the Magic Slate.

SLIDE out.

ALBERT

So here I am. A deaf architect striking out on his own. Maybe it is a little terrifying. But I have to have chutzpah to compensate for 35 years of nail-biting! I have only to go home and look my father in the eye to see the panicked person hiding beneath my drive. When he dies on his tombstone they’ll write . . .

SIMON becomes a gravestone.

SIMON / ALBERT’S SHADOW

Don’t expect too much.

ALBERT

I remember he used to always say, Albert . . .
SIMON / ALBERT'S SHADOW
You always expect so much from people. How can you be happy always being disappointed?

ALBERT
But how can you live without taking chances?

SHADOW encircles ALBERT in her arms.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
Who's holding you back, Albert?

With a burst of determination, ALBERT breaks free.

Scene 4

SLIDE: Foliage.

Two ENSEMBLE members open pairs of umbrellas and become trees. ALBERT and his SHADOW stroll by, ALBERT carrying his portfolio.

A pool of ethereal LIGHT encircles PETER and his SHADOW as they approach each other from opposite sides of the stage. They meet face to face, turn in place together, and become one for the first time. The LIGHT fades.

PETER sits on a bench with his TUTOR.

ALBERT
Shit, that's him!

ALBERT'S SHADOW
Mr. Smile.

ALBERT
Mr. Tuna.

ALBERT'S SHADOW starts towards PETER but ALBERT pulls her back.

ALBERT
Just act natural.
ALBERT and his SHADOW sit on one of the benches and casually take out their lunches. PETER notices ALBERT and freezes.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
He sees me. He definitely sees me. But is he interested?

PETER
(speaking clearly) See that guy cruising me? I gave him my number a while back but he didn’t call. What is he, blind?

TUTOR
[Maybe he’s a closet case.]

ALBERT'S SHADOW sees him sign and taps ALBERT on the shoulder.

PETER
(learning the sign) “Closet?” A closet case? (realizing) Please God, no! Not another closet case! These Downtown professionals always cruise you but they want you to do everything. Nuh-uh. Just sit back. (signing) He’ll make a move.

TUTOR
[Let’s get back to your lesson.]

PETER
(signing slowly) Fine. Back to my lesson.

Did you see that? He signs.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

ALBERT
Not very good.

PETER
Ooh, he liked that. Must’ve impressed him. (signing) Here, keep going with the lesson.

TUTOR
[Sorry. My hour’s up.]

ALBERT’S SHADOW
You could teach him. We could meet for lunch every day, get to know one another.

ALBERT
No. No matter how cute, hearing guys never seem to listen.
[Good luck.]

The TUTOR leaves, stealing a last glance at ALBERT. ALBERT gets up to leave, pausing when he sees PETER watching. He smiles crisply, and then starts to walk away. His SHADOW moves his portfolio aside so that he forgets it by the bench.

(Peter and Shadow signing) Closet case.

PETE'S SHADOW spies the portfolio left behind. SHE rushes to the bench, picks up the portfolio and hands it to PETER.

(reading) Albert Rose. (yelling after) Albert!

PETER runs after ALBERT and taps him on the shoulder.

(voiced only) Excuse me.

ALBERT is startled.

This must be yours.

Embarrassed, ALBERT takes the portfolio.

Missed you at the rally.

ALBERT

Sorry. Deaf.

PETER

(delighted) Oh. You're deaf.

PETER'S SHADOW smacks him in the head.

(singing) Nice to meet you.
ALBERT

Nice to meet you.

An awkward pause. PETER signs for himself, though not very well. He pulls a flyer from his pocket and shows ALBERT.

PETER

(signing) Interpreter. (pointing at flyer) At the rally.

I'm a vegetarian.

ALBERT

What? You're a virgin?

PETER

(signing) Sorry, I'm just learning to sign so I'm not very good yet.

If you keep at it you'll get better.

ALBERT

What? (signing) What did you say?

Keep it up! Keep trying.

PETER

Keep trying. (signing) Yes. Yes, I'm taking night classes. It's a lot of fun. It's a beautiful language.

ALBERT and his SHADOW look at one another and shake their heads in dismay.

ALBERT

Right. See you around.

ALBERT starts to leave.

PETER

Wait. Wait. My name is (spelling) P-e-t-e-r H-a-r-t. (name sign) Peter.
As he spells, his arm swings wildly up and down. His SHADOW stirs it with her hand.

I wanted to meet you because . . . (signing slowly) . . . because . . . you have beautiful eyes.

Why are you afraid of him?

(taken aback) Thank you.

He has a beautiful smile.

You have—

He hesitates.

Tell me.

Tell him.

(ALBERT)

(signing slowly for PETER'S benefit) [You have a beautiful smile.]

PETER

(reading ALBERT'S sign) And you have a beautiful smile. (smiling) Thank you.

It was nice meeting you.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

It was wonderful.

PETER

Nice meeting you.

He waves after ALBERT as ALBERT leaves.

TTY?
ALBERT'S SHADOW

[Yes.]

PETER'S SHADOW

Call me.

PETER'S SHADOW hurries after PETER.
SLIDE out.

**Scene 5**

ALBERT'S SHADOW

Wow!

ALBERT

"It's lots of fun. A beautiful language."

ALBERT'S SHADOW

He's a sweetheart.

ALBERT

I don't want to be somebody's hobby. I'll have to hold his hand through everything.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

Oh, come on! Just one date. You don't have to marry him.

ALBERT'S SHADOW makes a lewd pun—
"ring on penis." He cringes.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

What are you waiting for? You have his number.

ALBERT

I don't know . . .

ALBERT'S SHADOW

You're deaf and gay. You can't be too picky.

ALBERT

Yes I can.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

"Give him a chance."
ALBERT

He's a baby signer.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

"Don't expect too much."

ALBERT stops in his tracks.

ALBERT

All these years looking for something, I never really thought about what I would do if I found it. It's easy to say "Settle down and get married" but where am I going to find someone who understands me?

JUDITH enters with a load of laundry. She begins to fold it.

SLIDE: Michelangelo's "The Pieta"

ALBERT

I remember asking my mother . . . (as child) . . . if I decide that I want to marry someone, how will I know who?

JUDITH

You'll know.

ALBERT

How?

JUDITH

(impatient again) Because you'll know, that's all. You'll know.

ALBERT stares at her perplexed.

JUDITH

Albert, don't worry! Let's just get you through the first grade.

He is still troubled.

JUDITH

(softening) All right. Somewhere out there, there is one person for you.

Just one?

JUDITH

(appalled) One is enough!
ALBERT

But who?

JUDITH

Albert, I have only so much patience.

ALBERT

How did you find dad?

JUDITH

I didn’t find him. His mother found me.

ALBERT thinks this is strange.

JUDITH

And we were right for each other. We were both deaf. We were both Jewish. And his family lived only three blocks away.

ALBERT

I was very impressed. I started thinking of who lived nearby but no one came immediately to mind—

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Except Howard Cook, our paper boy.

ALBERT pulls on his mother’s skirt to get her attention again.

ALBERT

Do you think I will find someone like Dad?

This question disturbs her. She sits him down.

JUDITH

Albert, you are a beautiful child and when you are older you will find a nice girl. A nice Jewish girl. Who’s deaf.

ALBERT looks around, hoping he might see the lucky girl.

JUDITH

You might have to leave Seattle.

ALBERT nods. JUDITH fades.

SLIDE out.
Scene 6

ALBERT'S SHADOW
You tried that. And you came back.

ALBERT
I know. I know. Just like a salmon.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
All the other salmon are spawning, Albert.

ALBERT
All right I'll call him!

A phone rings. PETER rushes to the phone. ALBERT starts typing on a TTY. An OPERATOR appears at a terminal, signing PETER's dialogue and voicing ALBERT's.

OPERATOR
Washington State Telecommunications Relay Service for the Deaf. This is C.A. number 1018. I have a call for Peter Hart. Go ahead.

PETER
Speaking.

An uncomfortable pause.

OPERATOR
Did you want to 'go ahead'?

PETER
(embarrassed) Yes, please.

ALBERT
This is Albert Rose. Sorry I missed the Dolphin-Safe Tuna Rally but I know this great lesbian coffee bar where the beans have been hand-picked by a Colombian dyke collective. Will that be satisfactory? Go ahead.

PETER
As long as they've washed their hands. Go ahead.

ALBERT
Tomorrow after work, then.
ALBERT and PETER each leap to their feet and slap high fives with their SHADOWS.

PETER/ALBERT’S SHADOW

Yes!

SLIDE: A Lautrec print.

Café music.

ALBERT and his SHADOW primp themselves, and sit nervously, ALBERT checking his watch.

ALBERT

(getting up) He’s late.

His SHADOW sits him down.

He’ll be here.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

The SHADOW smacks his hand.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Don’t bite your nails!

ALBERT

Just relax.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Take a deep breath.

ALBERT

A deep breath.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Compliment him. Appeal to his vanity.

ALBERT

No fawning. No clinging. At all costs, maintain your dignity.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Did you bring a condom?

ALBERT

First date, conversation.
ALBERT’S SHADOW

Check his teeth.

ALBERT

Second date, hand holding.  Maybe.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Look at the shoes.  The shoes say everything.

ALBERT

Third date, a cuddle.  And a kiss.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Spawn, dammit!  Spawn!!

PETER and his SHADOW rush in.

ALBERT

Dignity.  Dignity.

ALBERT and his SHADOW pull themselves together.

PETER’S SHADOW

(in his ear)  Now talk about him.  Talk about him.

PETER sits down opposite ALBERT, as the SHADOWS nod approvingly.  He is wearing a stethoscope around his neck.

[NOTE: at this point, though he still uses his own voice, PETER begins to sign for himself, though literally, using English word order.]

PETER

Sorry I’m late.

ALBERT

I like your tie.

PETER discovers his stethoscope and stuffs it in his pocket.

PETER

I came right from the clinic.  We had a last-minute emergency.
Emery/Merkin

Hope it wasn’t serious.

Just a gerbil.

Excuse me?

(realizing the mistake) I’m a veterinarian!

A WAITER appears with her note pad.

WAITER

Albert! How’s it going? (signing only) [So, you finally snagged a cute one.]

He signs.

WAITER

Oops. (to ALBERT) What can I get you?

A double decaf.

ALBERT

A double ‘deaf’?

PETER


ALBERT

That’s a new one for me.

PETER’S SHADOW

Slowly now. With flair.

PETER

(signing slowly) I’ll have a double tall non-fat decaf vanilla extra foam.

WAITER

Of course you will.

The WAITER leaves with a wink to ALBERT.
I like activists.

No fawning. No clinging.

I just want to do my part.

Him. Talk about him.

Ever since Boy Scouts, I’ve been looking for an excuse to learn to sign.

He doesn’t bite his nails.

ALBERT glares at his SHADOW.

It’s really improving.

Thank you. At the clinic, we have around eight deaf clients. So I’m getting there.

He flosses.

ALBERT elbows his SHADOW.

You just need someone to practice on.

Jerry and Leigh aren’t much help.

Who?

My housemates.

The shoes check out. Let’s go.
ALBERT
Full of coffee and all our first date energy we decided to take in that new Swedish film, “Sven’s Last Picnic.”

ALBERT and PETER sit together, flanked by their SHADOWS, their backs to the audience.

SLIDE: A man and a woman on a blanket. The subtitle reads: “Oh, Sven! Only you know how much I suffer from the irony.”

VOICE OVER: (Swedish translation throughout.)

As ALBERT slowly explores whether to put his arm around PETER, the SHADOWS grow more and more frustrated from being separated.

SLIDE: The man and the woman are closer together. The subtitle reads: “I do not come from the starch class. My people understand that a clean shirt should not mean oppression.”

PETER and ALBERT are now cuddled up comfortably. ALBERT’S SHADOW crawls across their laps to get to PETER’S SHADOW.

SLIDE: The man and woman embrace. The subtitle reads: “Sven, we come from different places but our shirts are both clean.”

As ALBERT and PETER watch the movie blithely unaware, their SHADOWS fall behind the seats, going at it full throttle.

SLIDE out. ALBERT and PETER turn their chairs back to face the audience.

ALBERT
Despite equal access, neither one of us understood the movie.

A car. ALBERT drives PETER to park.

SLIDE: The romantic Seattle skyline at night.
ALBERT
But we were beginning to understand something else. We laughed that whole night. In fact, we laughed for the next three weeks.

ALBERT and PETER look at each other longingly. Their SHADOWS approach one another slowly.

ALBERT
And when we’re laughing, we understand each other.

The SHADOWS touch.

ALBERT
And when he lays his head on my shoulder and gently strokes my chest, then we really understand each other.

The SHADOWS start to kiss.

ALBERT
And when we kiss, it’s almost as if we have a language of our own.

PETER and ALBERT fall into an embrace as the lights begin to slowly dim, leaving them in silhouette against the skyline behind them.

Scene 7
A loud alarm bell. A light blink. PETER wakes ALBERT up.

SLIDE: the mountains in the morning.

PETER
Come on, nap’s over. You’re going to make us late.

ALBERT
At least we’ll be fashionably late.

PETER
Jerry and Leigh could give a rat’s ass about fashion. They just want to meet you.

ALBERT
Oh, yes. Your “family.”

PETER
Yes, my family. They’re very concerned about marrying me off to a total stranger.
He leans forward to kiss ALBERT but ALBERT pulls abruptly away.

PETER
What’s the matter?

ALBERT shrugs.

ALBERT’S SHADOW
You have to start somewhere.

ALBERT nods. He kisses PETER on the cheek.

PETER
Just relax. You’re gonna love them. And they’re gonna love you. After all, you’re the guest of honor.

ALBERT
Lucky me.

SLIDE: A funky Victorian house.

They begin to walk towards an area where JERRY and LEIGH are preparing dinner.

[During the following, PETER selectively interprets for ALBERT.]

JERRY
There you are, cupcake! Come in, come in!

PETER
This is Albert Rose.

JERRY
What’s that joke about Prince Albert in a can?

LEIGH
Let him out.

ALBERT
What was that?

PETER
[Just a joke.]
PETER
Albert, this is Leigh. [She’s pushy but very nice.]

LEIGH
What’d you say?

PETER
I said your name was Leigh. And this is Jerry.

ALBERT
Very nice to meet you.

JERRY
Haven’t I seen you Downtown?

PETER
[Jerry can be a jerk but he used to have a crush on me so he can’t be all that bad.]

JERRY
What was that?

PETER
I just told him what you said. [And he works Downtown. Do you know him?]

ALBERT
No.

PETER
(voiced only) Where have you seen Albert?

JERRY
Just around. He’s come to the copy center a few times.

PETER
Jerry runs the copy center around the corner from the Bon Marché.

ALBERT
Oh, yes. I’ve been there a few times.

JERRY
(to LEIGH) I wondered why he was so quiet.

ALBERT
(to LEIGH) What do you do?
LEIGH
(voicing and signing) I’m a lesbian. (voicing, to PETER) It’s the only sign I know.

PETER
He asked you what you do.

LEIGH
Oh! I’m a biochemist. I keep this place sane.

PETER
[She’s a biochemist and a control freak.]

JERRY
But even Miss Science answers to me.

ALBERT
What did he say?

PETER
[He owns the house.] Jerry always says that as soon as we all grow up he’s going to run it as a bed and breakfast.

ALBERT
Ah. There’s a lot of potential. Lots of rooms.

PETER
He likes your house.

ALBERT
I didn’t say that.

PETER
It has lots of rooms.

JERRY
Albert, how about one of my killer margaritas?

PETER
[Do you want a drink?]

ALBERT
No, thanks. I don’t drink.

PETER
[Yes, you do.]
ALBERT
I don’t want a drink.

PETER
(voiced only) Make it a gin-and-tonic. He’s a little nervous and he loves gin-and-tonics.

JERRY
Coming right up. (to ALBERT) I understand how you feel. (gesturing broadly and talking loudly) When I get nervous I talk with my hands too.

PETER hesitates but ALBERT looks to him for a translation.

PETER
[He talks with his hands all the time and he thinks it might be confusing.]

ALBERT
He’s not confusing me. You’re confusing me.

JERRY goes to fix a drink for ALBERT. LEIGH stands awkwardly by.

PETER
[I’m sorry if my signing’s sloppy. I guess I am nervous.]

ALBERT
Just take your time and tell me what you say.

LEIGH
Everything okay?

PETER
Fine. (voiced to LEIGH) Just a little protocol.

ALBERT
Everything you say.

PETER
[Okay. Okay.]

ALBERT taps LEIGH on the shoulder.

ALBERT
So how long have you and Peter known each other?
PETER

How long have we known each other?

LEIGH

Five years in July.

PETER

[Five years.]

LEIGH

All three of us were on the same AIDS care team.

PETER

[The three of us were on an AIDS care team.]

ALBERT

I didn’t realize that.

LEIGH

Now we take care of each other.

PETER

(to LEIGH) He didn’t know. (to ALBERT) She said now we take care of each other.

JERRY reenters, precariously carrying a tray of drinks.

LEIGH

If you really want to know, Peter and I look after Jerry.

JERRY

Albert, I always see you Downtown with some kind of portfolio.

ALBERT

What did she say?

PETER

(falling behind) [He sees you with your drawings.]

ALBERT

I’m an architect.

PETER

(anticipating) He’s an architect.
LEIGH

Oh.

JERRY

That makes sense. Everything is visual.

PETER

[Makes sense. Everything's visual.] (to JERRY) But he still has to deal with clients.

ALBERT

I use an interpreter.

PETER

(voiced only) He's got his own interpreter.

JERRY

Yeah, but what a bummer. That's got to slow everything down.

PETER

No. Albert's pretty amazing.

ALBERT

It's not that big a deal.

PETER

He says it's not that big of a deal but he's just being modest.

ALBERT

No I'm not. I'm deaf so I sometimes use interpreters.

JERRY

I think it's really cool.

LEIGH

What did he say?

PETER

(to ALBERT) [They really like you.]

ALBERT

Is it too much to ask you to voice and sign everything?

PETER

[They don't care.]
ALBERT

I do!

LEIGH

What's wrong?

PETER

(speaking only) Don't worry about it. (to ALBERT) [Okay, I'm sorry.] I'm just confusing Albert because I haven't signed everything.

JERRY

I bet that is confusing.

PETER

(reluctantly) He said it must be confusing.

JERRY

I mean all the time.

PETER

(voiced only) He's used to it, Jer.

ALBERT

Look, this is not working.

PETER

[What do you mean?]

ALBERT pulls PETER aside. JERRY and LEIGH fade to the back.

The SLIDE dissolves.

ALBERT

I thought you knew better.

PETER

I didn't think it was going to be such a challenge.

ALBERT

No, Peter. You thought it would charming and sweet, everybody ooh-ing and ah-ing over your exotic deaf boyfriend. I'm not your science project.

PETER

You're probably the first deaf person Jerry and Leigh have ever talked to. I just wanted to make sure they didn't overwhelm you with stupid questions.
ALBERT

How can you be deaf and not know how to deal with stupid questions!?

PETER

So I made a few mistakes.

ALBERT

You made the worst mistake. I'm not "special," Peter. Don't you think I get tired of being treated like I'm "special?"

PETER

You are to me.

ALBERT

That's not how I want to be special!

PETER

It's a little hard to ignore the fact that you're deaf.

ALBERT

But you want to crown me fucking Miss America!

PETER

You're acting like a princess.

What?

ALBERT

You expect me to translate everything.

ALBERT

If you don't want to speak my language then don't talk to me!

ALBERT turns from PETER and finds himself face to face with his SHADOW.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

Now that was a princess.

ALBERT

I just want to be more than deaf to him.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

All right. But don't expect him to be perfect.
ALBERT looks at PETER. ALBERT shakes his head and PETER fades.

ALBERT
Look, I don’t need all this hassle.

ALBERT starts to leave.

ALBERT’S SHADOW
How long are you going to keep running?

ALBERT stops in his tracks.

Scene 8

SLIDE: A small home.

JUDITH and SIMON at home, JUDITH washing dishes, SIMON reading the paper. ALBERT watches them at a distance and then approaches them.

JUDITH
Albert! What are you doing here? It’s late.

SIMON
It’s after 10.

ALBERT
I just wanted to stop by, say ‘hello’.

JUDITH and SIMON exchange looks.

JUDITH
What’s the matter?

ALBERT
Nothing.

JUDITH
You look sad. Is business bad? Everything going okay?

ALBERT
Yes. Yes. Can’t I just drop by to say ‘hello’ without the third degree?

SIMON
Sorry. Of course we’re happy for you to come.
JUDITH
It’s not every day you visit. You want some pie?

ALBERT
No thanks. I’m not hungry. Where’s Grandma Rose?

SIMON
She’s at her sister’s.

JUDITH
You sure you don’t want a little slice?

ALBERT
Ma . . .

JUDITH
It’s strawberry rhubarb.

ALBERT
Okay, okay. A small piece.

JUDITH
Good. You have to eat healthy when you can. We won’t always be here to feed you.

ALBERT
I have my own refrigerator.

JUDITH ‘fixes’ ALBERT a slice of pie and a glass of milk.

SIMON
What’s the matter, son?

ALBERT
Nothing.

JUDITH
Albert, in the time I’ve known you—and I’ve known you all your life—you have never just “stopped by” to say ‘hello.’

ALBERT
Can’t I at least spend a little time with my family?

JUDITH
Now he’s giving himself a guilt trip. Something is definitely wrong.
ALBERT
What makes you think so?

JUDITH
You’ve just seemed so happy lately. And now . . .

ALBERT
Okay, so I’m a little down.

JUDITH
Aha! You want some ice cream?

ALBERT
Look, can we just communicate without using food?

JUDITH
Okay, okay.

ALBERT
I’m sorry . . . So I’ve seemed happy, have I?

She nods.

ALBERT
I have been. At least I thought I was.

SIMON
We’re here to listen.

ALBERT
Okay . . .

He pauses, sighing heavily.

ALBERT
I think I might be in love.

JUDITH and SIMON look at one another. JUDITH sits down, folding her arms. SIMON nods slowly.

ALBERT
He’s a wonderful guy. A veterinarian. Funny, warm. You’d like him.

JUDITH abruptly stands and turns away. SIMON is agitated.
ALBERT
(to SIMON) He’s hearing. I’m not sure he...

SIMON nods and turns to JUDITH. ALBERT goes to his mother, placing his hands on her shoulder’s. She jerks away from him.

JUDITH
I don’t want to hear about this.

ALBERT
What? That I’m in love?

JUDITH
That’s none of my business.

ALBERT
So what am I supposed to do?

JUDITH turns her back on ALBERT again. ALBERT beseeches SIMON.

ALBERT
What am I supposed to do?! Pretend I’m not gay?

SIMON
You know your mother doesn’t like to talk about those things.

ALBERT
It’s part of who I am!

SIMON sits and shakes his head. ALBERT goes to face his mother again.

ALBERT
I’m not supposed to have feelings? I’m supposed to be happy and successful but I can’t fall in love? Is that it?

JUDITH
That is not love! I don’t know what to call what you do. I don’t want to talk about what you do. I don’t want to hear any more about this problem of yours!

ALBERT
I don’t have a problem!
JUDITH

Good! Then we won’t talk about it.

She turns back to her dishes. ALBERT turns to his father but he’s already retreated behind his newspaper.

The SLIDE dissolves.

Scene 9

ALBERT runs off to one side, his SHADOW to another. They freeze when IDA appears behind them, a momentary vision.

IDA/ALBERT’S SHADOW

Find your people.

ALBERT

I’m trying!

IDA/ALBERT’S SHADOW

(to ALBERT) You can’t find your place until you find your people.

IDA melts into the ENSEMBLE as they appear behind in silhouette.

ALBERT

Oh, yes! My people! Let me introduce my people.

ALBERT and his SHADOW turn an abrupt about face, stamp their feet in unison, and the ENSEMBLE stand to attention.

ALBERT

Ah, so it is a test. Multiple choice.

JUDITH and SIMON step forward.

ALBERT

As a child, the choice was obvious. The world around me was deaf. Deaf Club. Deaf Bowling. Deaf everything. What I learned, I learned from my parents and I learned it through sign language.

ALBERT’S SHADOW turns him around again, this time to face the rest of the ENSEMBLE, which has become a classroom; DEAF STUDENTS and a TEACHER.
ALBERT
I got a rude awakening at the age of six.

The STUDENTS are learning to pronounce "P's" with strips of paper in front of their mouths. IDA takes ALBERT from his parents and guides him into the class.

ALBERT
My grandmother insisted I go to a school where I wasn’t allowed to sign.

The TEACHER slaps ALBERT’S hands.

TEACHER/ALBERT’S SHADOW
With any luck, by the time he graduates he’ll be able to read lips and speak well enough that people won’t be able to tell he’s deaf.

ALBERT
That was the standard they set. Be something you’re not. And if you can’t, it’s your fault. In public, even my parents were embarrassed by our deafness.

JUDITH, looking about to see who’s watching, stops ALBERT’s hands from signing.

ALBERT
If these were my people, why couldn’t they be that all of the time?

ALBERT’S SHADOW leads him to the ENSEMBLE, a "social group" of college students.

ALBERT
Deaf college. Problem solved. Deaf classes, deaf teachers, an entirely deaf world!

ALBERT walks through the group, acknowledging his friends.

ALBERT
Here my deafness wasn’t a curse, but a blessing. I didn’t have to hide who I was.

The ENSEMBLE has closed into a tight circle, their backs to ALBERT. Suddenly, the group bursts into laughter. The circle opens and we see two MEN in the center, mocking two gay lovers.
Until I realized I was gay.

The ENSEMBLE begins to slowly surround ALBERT in an ominous arc, whispering as they sign.

[Ромор. Ромор. Ромор.]

ALBERT

And with the deaf grapevine—always an hour ahead of CNN—my coming out was thrust upon me.

The SHADOW pushes JUDITH and SIMON from the ENSEMBLE, arguing.

JUDITH

Gay?! You can’t be deaf and gay!

SIMON

Deaf isn’t different enough for you?

JUDITH

You might enjoy being a spectacle, but I don’t want to spend the rest of my life explaining you to people.

JUDITH and SIMON rejoin the ENSEMBLE.

ALBERT

So much for enlightenment among the disabled!

ALBERT’S SHADOW brings ALBERT a newspaper.

So who’s left? The Gay Pride Rally! (reading) The paper said the speakers were going to be interpreted! Of course, I thought, wow! These people will include me. The ENSEMBLE forms a crowd around a SPEAKER. The CROWD roars its approval as the SPEAKER rises to the podium.

ALBERT

And there was diversity everywhere! T-shirts you wouldn’t believe. Hankies in every color you could wish for. Jewelry in places I didn’t know existed. Everyone was holding hands, kissing, hugging, exchanging recipes. It was moving, really.
An INTERPRETER takes to the stage next to the SPEAKER. The SPEAKER acknowledges him, he takes a bow and the crowd applauds.

ALBERT

Then the speech began.

The SPEAKER speaks, soundlessly, and the INTERPRETER interprets with ‘interpretive choreography’, flitting about with pirouettes and grand leaps.

ALBERT

In case you didn’t notice, that was not interpretation!

The SPEAKER finishes, acknowledges the INTERPRETER and the crowd cheers.

ALBERT

I wrote a letter to the editor. “As a deaf person attending the Gay Pride Rally, I was offended by your so-called “interpreter” blah blah blah . . .” I sent it to the newspaper. I waited and waited. And when the next issue came out, they didn’t print my letter. But there were several nice letters commending the speaker on her wonderful speech about inclusivity and solidarity and outreach. And someone else wrote in and said . . .

A WRITER steps forward and reads from a letter.

WRITER/INTERPRETER

I really thought the sign interpretation at the rally was wonderful. It was so beautiful to watch. So elegant. So poetic. It was like mime. It was so expressive that without knowing sign, I could understand the speaker’s words.

ALBERT

Bullshit! This was my language and I couldn’t understand it!! That interpreter wasn’t for me! These people don’t want me. They just want to feel good about being politically correct!

ALBERT’S SHADOW stamps her foot again. The ENSEMBLE disappears, leaving ALBERT and his SHADOW alone.

ALBERT

So who’s left? To the Jews, I am a "faygele," an abomination. To my deaf peers I’m a joke. And gay people think of me as some exotic medal of correctness they can wear on their sleeve. I don’t understand this word "community." Us? Them? What about me? What about Albert? Where is my place?

IDA appears in one corner of the stage.
IDA
(gesturing ) You’re a Jew, Albert. You belong over here with me.

ALBERT starts toward her. But he is stopped as his parents appear in a far corner.

JUDITH
First, you’re deaf. This is your place.

He equivocates a moment and rushes to join them but is stopped again as LEIGH and JERRY appear in a third corner of the stage.

LEIGH
March with us, Albert. You’re part of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, TS/TV and Other community.

JERRY
You’re queer. Stand over here.

ALBERT, getting tired and frazzled, hurries toward them but SIMON beckons.

SIMON
Over here with the deafies.

ALBERT starts toward him but finds himself caught in the middle as the others all try to entice/berate him. In a frenzied pace, ALBERT runs about the stage searching as the others repeat their entreaties in an ever-increasing cycle.

IDA
Over here, Albert! Here with your family.

JUDITH/SIMON
Don’t turn your back. You’re deaf first!

LEIGH/JERRY
What are you, scared?! You’re queer!

ALBERT finally exhausts himself and falls to his knees

ALBERT
(voiced only) Stop!
The ENSEMBLE retreats, leaving ALBERT alone. IDA steps behind him.

RAIN.

IDA

(gesturing) You were born here.

ALBERT

[I was born here.]

IDA

You swam away.

ALBERT

[I swam away.] To fit in.

IDA

You swam home.

ALBERT

[I swam home.]

IDA

Why?

ALBERT

[Why?]

ALBERT turns to his SHADOW.

ALBERT

Because I was lonely.

IDA recedes into the assembled ENSEMBLE behind them.

PETE R appears across the stage. ALBERT turns to see him. PETE R opens his umbrella and they slowly approach one another as the lights gradually fade to blackout.

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

Scene 1

The lights rise slowly on ALBERT and PETER moving towards one another, the ENSEMBLE arrayed behind them in silhouette. Just as they are about to reach each other, IDA steps between them.

IDA

Albert!

Without a thought, she takes PETER’s umbrella and walks ALBERT away with her, She scribbles on her Magic Slate.

IDA

(confidentially) So, have you found your people yet?

ALBERT

(to audience) [She wants to know if I’ve found my people.] (to IDA) [No.]

IDA

No?  Hm. Then have you found your place??

ALBERT

[She wonders if I’ve found my place.  No.]

IDA

Then what have you been doing all this time?!

ALBERT

[She wonders what I’ve been doing all this time.]

ALBERT’S SHADOW assumes her position behind ALBERT.

ALBERT

I’ve been interpreting for you, Grandma Rose!

IDA

What was that? What did you say?

ALBERT/IDA

“I’ve been swimming upstream.”
IDA

What?

ALBERT/IDA

"I'm a salmon."

IDA

All right. Fine. You mock my years of experience, my insights. (writing, gesturing) You don't want my advice on love?

ALBERT reads and then pauses, thinking.

ALBERT [She wants to give me more advice.]

She shakes her head sadly at him and kisses him on the cheek.

IDA

Poor thing. Let me help you. (gesturing, writing) You must find your other half.

[She wants to give me more advice.]

ALBERT

[I must find my other half.]

IDA

It's like a knife and fork.

ALBERT

[A knife and fork.] A knife and fork?

IDA

(scratching that out) That's not it.

IDA

Okay. It's like bread... and butter.

Bread and butter?

ALBERT

ALBERT looks at her doubtfully.

IDA

Picky, picky.

IDA thinks for a moment until a brilliant idea pops into her head.
IDA
I got it! (writing, ALBERT signing) It’s a clam.

ALBERT
A clam!?

IDA
Yes! (gesturing, ALBERT signing) Two sides. They go together. One can’t exist without the other.

ALBERT
A clam! That’s disgusting.

IDA
(gesturing, ALBERT signing) Ever try to pull a clam apart?

ALBERT shakes his head “no.”

IDA
(gesturing, writing, ALBERT signing) You can’t. They last forever. Like your Zayda and I, God rest his soul. Those two halves stick together and if you’re lucky, you get a pearl.

ALBERT
You get a pearl? No you don’t.

He writes.

IDA
(reading, ALBERT signing) That’s oysters not clams.

She is annoyed.

IDA
(writing, ALBERT signing) Don’t be so technical.

ALBERT
Thanks for the advice.

IDA
(writing, ALBERT signing) Be a clam.

SLIDE: A clam.

IDA returns to the ENSEMBLE, satisfied.
ALBERT

"Be a clam!" I'd rather be a salmon.

Scene 2

ALBERT and PETER alone with their SHADOWS. ALBERT watches PETER sleeping.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

Is this my other half?

ALBERT

This morning I woke up and saw this peaceful face sleeping on the pillow next to me. When Grandma Rose talks about the two halves of a clam I don't think she has Peter and me in mind.

ALBERT climbs in bed with PETER. He strokes his head gently, then kisses him lightly on the cheek. PETER wakes up, disoriented, frantic, looking for the alarm.

PETER

What? What time is it?!

ALBERT

Relax, it's Sunday.

PETER

Sunday? Sunday! I have to call the committee, feed the puppies and save the tuna.

ALBERT

Let Tupperware save the tuna. This is our day together.

PETER

Is it? What did we have planned?

ALBERT

Nothing! Thank God.

PETER

Nothing? What about the brunch at Jerry and Leigh's?

ALBERT

Maybe. Can't we just play it by eye. (shrugging) We can take a bath together, breakfast in bed . . . read the newspaper.
The newspaper?

There's a lot of depressing things happening in the world that I don't want to miss.

Yes, and they're out in the world! Not stuck in here on a beautiful Sunday.

You don't want to cuddle?

We've been cuddling for six months.

Are you complaining?

No. I just think you're avoiding something.

ALBERT gets out of bed. His SHADOW stops him in his tracks.

He's right.

Of course he's right! Our neutral territory is very limited.

Yes, your bed!

It's the only place we're both comfortable. Outside of that, it's as if we're living in two different worlds.

Come on! Let's get going. They're expecting your fabulous fruit salad.

SLIDE: Fruit.

JERRY and LEIGH enter with a green cake with six candles. They lip synch and sign/mime along with a recording of Donna Summer's "MacArthur Park."
JERRY/LEIGH
["MacArthur Park is melting in the dark, all the sweet green icing, flowing down. Someone left the cake out in the rain. And I don’t think that I can take it, cause it took so long to bake it, and I’ll never have that recipe again. Oh no . . . no . . ."]

ALBERT
(to PETER) That’s a real song?

PETER nods.

ALBERT
Hearing people.

JERRY and LEIGH take a bow. ALBERT and PETER clap.

JERRY
(gesturing) Mazeltov! Six months!

LEIGH
(gesturing) Congratulations, Peter. That’s a new record for you.

PETER
[She says six months is a new record for me but it’s longer than she’s ever had.]

LEIGH
What was that?

PETER
Deaf humor. You wouldn’t understand.

PETER catches himself when he realizes ALBERT is not pleased.

ALBERT
(to audience) It’s a balancing act.

My needs. His needs.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

My world. His world.

ALBERT

They are trying.
SLIDE fades out. LEIGH and JERRY wander off, talking.

ALBERT
But I’m still the outsider. He wants his “family” to be mine, but how can that be when everything I say must go through Peter? (to PETER) I will always be attached to you, an extension of your mouth.

PETER
I feel the same way around your deaf friends.

ALBERT
You can communicate with my friends. You don’t need me.

PETER
True. But sometimes I get tired of playing the go-between, the one who can hear and sign. When we go out, your friends always expect me to interpret for them. They don’t even ask. They just expect it.

ALBERT
We can’t choose when we want to hear and when we want to sign.

PETER
I know that. But sometimes I just get deafed out. I’m your lover, not the information superhighway. I don’t want to have to always work so hard to think.

ALBERT
So I suppose it’s my turn.

PETER
Albert, wait—

ALBERT
Do you know how my grandmother defines work?

PETER
No, but you’re going to tell me.

ALBERT
She says work is only work if you’d rather be doing something else.

A pause. PETER stares at ALBERT, hurt.

ALBERT
So... is that the way it is?
PETER

No. You know that.

ALBERT

Do I?

PETER

I love you, Albert. I can't always find the right words, the right way of telling you, but you must know that's what I feel. You must.

ALBERT

I just don't want it to be work, that's all.

PETER

There's nothing else I'd rather be doing. Okay?

ALBERT shakes his head and kisses PETER. They freeze. IDA appears, a pointer in hand. ALBERT breaks out of the freeze. IDA claps her hands together, the lights go out and the SLIDE screen appears.

IDA

Connect, Albert.

SLIDE: "Connect, Albert."

IDA points at the words as she says them.

ALBERT

I thought I was!

The SLIDE changes. She follows her dialogue with her pointer.

IDA

I mean your family, Albert. I mean six thousand years of tradition, Albert. I keep making delicious meals every Friday hoping against hope . . .

She bangs the pointer on the ground. The SLIDE catches up.

IDA

That you'll show up!

ALBERT

What about my other half?
IDA
There's enough for everybody. You want to grow? You have to eat!

IDA raises her pointer and disappears.

SLIDE: The dialogue slide is instantly replaced with a Dutch Masters still life of a table set with a feast.

Scene 3

PETER snaps to his feet and pulls ALBERT into an expensive French restaurant.

I'm starving.

PETER

The ENSEMBLE affect other PATRONS and a MAITRE'D. The MAITRE'D leads PETER and a befuddled ALBERT to a table and gives them menus.

I wasn't expecting this.

ALBERT

It's a special occasion.

PETER

Can we afford it?

ALBERT

It's on me. I had a whole litter of Dachshunds neutered this morning.

PETER

What're you going to have?

ALBERT

(pointing to the menu) This looks good. Either one of these.

PETER

That's the wine list.

ALBERT

PETER picks up the second menu.

All this meat!

PETER flags down the MAITRE'D.

We were wondering if the veal was cruelty free.

It's dead.

ALBERT

(PETER voicing) Do you have any vegetarian specials?

Perrier.

The MAITRE'D exits haughtily.

We can go somewhere else, if you want.

I can always have the sorbet.

Let's go.

They rise to leave.

SLIDE: Bare branches.

Two ENSEMBLE members wielding pairs of umbrellas create a cluster of trees. A park, at night.

Look, why don't we stop by the market, pick up some veggies and I'll make you a gazpacho that will melt your tongue.

I wanted this to be special.

My cooking isn't special?
PETER
Well, yes. But I wanted the atmosphere to be — you know — romantic.

ALBERT
I'll take care of that.

ALBERT reaches over to kiss PETER. PETER stiffens.

Why are you so jumpy?

PETER
I've had something on my mind.

ALBERT
Something good or something bad?

PETER
It depends.

ALBERT
On?

PETER
Your answer.

ALBERT
I see. A question.

PETER
Right.

ALBERT
Okay.

PETER
A really hard question.

ALBERT

PETER
Harder.
ALBERT
Am I going to have to guess or are you going to ask me?

PETER paces nervously about. Finally he stops in front of ALBERT.

PETER
All right. Okay. Here’s a hint.

He kneels on one knee in front of ALBERT. ALBERT is taken aback momentarily.

ALBERT
Oh. What a relief. I was afraid you wanted a kidney.

PETER
I’m serious!

ALBERT
So am I!

PETER
So that’s your answer, is it?

ALBERT
You haven’t asked the question yet.

PETER
I’m not sure how. I want to get the words right.

Look me in the eye.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

PETER’S SHADOW

You’re just going to laugh.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Trust me.

PETER
I want to . . . the right words just don’t exist! I want to marry you, join with you, commune, become one. I want you to be my . . .

PETER’S SHADOW

ALBERT'S SHADOW

Other half.

ALBERT stops. Slowly, he pulls PETER up on his feet. PETER is about to sign but ALBERT holds his hands still.

I got the question.

PETER

And the answer?

ALBERT

Yes . . .

ALBERT'S SHADOW

But.

ALBERT

(to his SHADOW) Is it too quick?

ALBERT'S SHADOW

It's risky. He doesn't know.

ALBERT

(to PETER) It's going to be hard for you.

PETER

For both of us.

ALBERT

Maybe.

PETER

I love you, Albert. We'll just have to do what it takes.

They embrace. As they freeze, their SHADOWS step aside and converse with the audience.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

He says he understands but how can he know what it will be like? He's going to have to adjust. Is he really willing to do all the work?
PETE'S SHADOW
He thinks I don't get it. He spends all his time second-guessing me instead of asking himself what he's willing to give.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
Then again, I've never had a lover like Peter before.

PETE'S SHADOW
He feels so right in my arms. I just wish he would trust me.

PETE and ALBERT pull apart momentarily.

Do you trust me?

PETE

ALBERT

Of course I do.

They embrace again.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
He doesn't trust me. He thinks I'm neurotic.

They pull apart again.

You trust me?

ALBERT

PETE

Yes! Of course.

They embrace again.

PETE'S SHADOW
I knew he didn't trust me.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
I can't just jump into this. He has to know what I will expect.

PETE'S SHADOW
Okay. I'll lay down the law.

ALBERT pulls out of the embrace.

ALBERT

There's something I have to say first.
Me too.

ALBERT

You go first.

PETER

You brought it up.

ALBERT

All right. I want this to work. I’m just worried that... I’m worried that —

PETER’S SHADOW

Doesn’t trust me.

ALBERT

I’m wondering if you’re ready to make the sacrifice.

PETER

What? You mean like a fatted calf?

ALBERT

Let me put it this way. You have your world. And I have mine. But our world has to be deaf.

PETER steps back momentarily.

PETER’S SHADOW

What? He thinks I don’t know that? He thinks I’m such an idiot.

PETER glares at his SHADOW. He turns to ALBERT.

PETER

I said I’d do whatever it takes and I mean it.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

I guess he does.

PETER

But you have to understand something too.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

Here it comes.
PETER
If you want me to fit into your life, then you're going to have to open up your life to me.

PETER'S SHADOW
In other words, trust me.

ALBERT'S SHADOW
What does he mean?

ALBERT elbows his SHADOW.

ALBERT
What do you mean?

PETER
I mean your life, Albert.

ALBERT
We do everything together. What more do you want? A take-your-lover-to-work day?

PETER
I'm talking about your family.

ALBERT
What do they have to do with this?

PETER
They're not part of your life?

ALBERT'S SHADOW
He has a point.

ALBERT
Of course they're a part of my life. They're another part of my life.

PETER
So you want to keep everything in it's own separate box?

ALBERT'S SHADOW
He's got you there.

PETER
Are you ashamed of me?

ALBERT
You know I'm not.
Emery/Merkin

PETER

What about them?

ALBERT'S SHADOW

God, he pushes my buttons.

ALBERT

I'm not sure you're going to get along.

PETER

We'll never know until we meet each other, will we?

ALBERT

Shall I set up a blind date?

PETER

It doesn't have to be traumatic, Albert.

ALBERT

Though that can be arranged.

PETER

We'll just get together, meet, have tea . . .

ALBERT

There's no such thing as "tea" with my parents. My mother will be cooking for five days straight.

PETER

Then we'll meet on neutral territory.

ALBERT

Kind of like a prisoner exchange.

PETER

The old coffee routine.

ALBERT

I would not recommend caffeine for this meeting.

PETER

Then what? Should we do a photo swap first? Hire a mediator? An interpreter? What? You want to do this on Oprah?

ALBERT

Okay, okay. You'll meet them. I'll arrange it. Let's just keep it simple.
Emery/Merkin

PETER
Fine. We’ll meet and then you can invite them.

ALBERT
Invite them? Invite them where?

To the ceremony.

ALBERT
Ceremony?

Taken aback, ALBERT turns to his SHADOW.

ALBERT’S SHADOW
I don’t have a thing to wear.

Scene 4

ALBERT turns to the audience.

ALBERT
Two different worlds. Peter wants to marry them but all can picture are two planets colliding.

SLIDE: A Jewish wedding with a chuppa.

IDA, SIMON and JUDITH are busy readying themselves for dinner.

IDA
Albert! For heaven’s sake! What a surprise! You’re joining us for dinner!

ALBERT
(kissing IDA on the cheek) Hello, Grandma Rose.

JUDITH
So you do remember us!

SIMON
You haven’t been home in five months.

ALBERT
I’ve been busy.
JUDITH
Too busy for your parents.

SIMON
He’s been working hard. Tell her you’ve been working hard.

ALBERT
I’ve actually taken a little time off.

JUDITH
I see. A vacation from your parents.

ALBERT
You know why I haven’t been home.

SIMON
We understand.

ALBERT
You do?

SIMON
You were angry. Let’s forget it ever happened.

A long pause. ALBERT is clearly uncomfortable. He stands again.

SIMON
So work is busy?

ALBERT
Yes. Yes. Look, I came to talk with you.

A doorbell LIGHT blinks once. PETER enters.

PETER
(voicing and signing) Jeez, try to find a parking spot in this neighborhood!

An awkward stillness fills the room.

IDA
What’s going on? Albert?

ALBERT
I want you to meet Peter Hart.
PETER extends his hand to shake. Tentatively, IDA shakes his hand. JUDITH remains with her arms folded.

PETER

(spoken only) Hi. Peter Hart.

IDA

Mrs. Rose.

ALBERT

My father . . .

SIMON shakes PETER’S hand.

ALBERT

And my mother.

JUDITH stands stock still.

IDA

(covering) And what do you do?

PETER

[She asked what I do.]

ALBERT

Peter’s a veterinarian.

PETER

(voiced only) He said I’m a veterinarian.

IDA

(to herself) That’s not bad.

JUDITH

So what is this about?

ALBERT

I wanted you to know something . . .

PETER

(voices/SHADOW signs) We wanted you to know.

Another awkward pause.
Go on.

I can’t keep you apart.

IDA pulls out her Magic Slate.

What?

You need to know that I love Peter and that he’s an important part of my life.

(to PETER) What’s he saying?

We’re committing to one another.

Wait —

What?

We’re having a commitment ceremony.

Ceremony?

IDA hands the Magic Slate to PETER. PETER takes the board and scribbles a word.

Wedding!?

What is this?

We... we’re planning to spend our lives together.

(chiming in) So we’re having a ceremony.
And I want you to be there.

We want you to be there.

ALBERT’s family stands still in shock. He looks first at them, then to PETER.

ALBERT

It will mean the world to me.

The lights fade slowly on SIMON and JUDITH as IDA looks frantically back and forth trying to figure out what has happened.

Scene 5

ALBERT sits, contemplating what has happened. PETER joins him.

Well?

I hope you’re happy.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

PETER pats ALBERT on the back.

I’m proud of you, Albert.

ALBERT’S SHADOW

I wish that I was.

PETER

Do you think they’ll come?

ALBERT shrugs.

PETER

You never know. If they really love you, they’ll be there.

ALBERT

You know, sometimes I think the mouth’s too close to the brain.
PETER
What are you talking about? If they can’t respect you, screw ‘em.

ALBERT
That’s easy for you to say. You haven’t talked to your parents in five years. You cut them off.

PETER
No, no, no. It was their choice. I said “You can’t keep the half of me you like and throw away the rest. It’s all or nothing.”

ALBERT
So now you have nothing. No family.

PETER
I have family. Jerry, Leigh... you.

ALBERT’S SHADOW
Jerry and Leigh are your family, not mine.

ALBERT
I don’t have the luxury of picking and choosing.

PETER
It worked for me.

ALBERT
I am not you. There’s not a lot of us deafies and we’re stuck with each other.

PETER
So you put up with their shit.

ALBERT
No more than I will yours.

PETER
What’s that supposed to mean?

ALBERT
You expect too much.

PETER
I don’t ask anything of anybody that I don’t ask of myself.
ALBERT
That’s right! You want everyone to be just like you. To go at your speed. If they can’t keep up then leave them all behind!

PETER
Don’t pin it on me. You’re afraid of your parents.

ALBERT
I’m afraid for them. I love them.

PETER
Letting them walk all over you is no way to love them.

ALBERT
What do you know? They never had the opportunities you had. They never even had mine! They had one 1950s choice. Fit in. Fit in or you’re a failure.

PETER
I thought you all looked after your own.

ALBERT
Yes! Now you want me to cut off their oxygen so I can breathe.

PETER
What good are you if you can’t breathe?

A beat.

PETER
You can’t spend your whole life carrying all this deaf baggage on your shoulders.

ALBERT
Is it any different than you and the gay community?

PETER
Nobody tells me how to live my life.

ALBERT
Except what books to read, clothes to wear, people to vote for, beer to boycott!

PETER
(voiced and signed) Okay! (signed only) What do you want me to do?

ALBERT
I don’t know. I just need some time to figure this out.
PETER

I'm just trying to help you, Albert.

ALBERT

You're good at that.

PETER

I promise I won't let you down.

Scene 6

ALBERT'S SHADOW

Your other half, Albert?

IDA steps forward in a pool of light.

IDA

Be a clam, Albert.

ALBERT

My other half. Yes. Yes. But what do you mean? My inside? My outside?

ALBERT'S SHADOW

The left? The right?

[ALBERT'S SHADOW signs for IDA — not for ALBERT's sake, but for the audience.]

IDA

Are you asking me about love?

ALBERT

Am I?

IDA

I can't ask and answer the questions for you, Albert.

IDA fades away.

ALBERT

Okay! I'm in love.

ALBERT'S SHADOW

Check.
He's a terrific guy.

Check.

We have a lot in common.

We do?

Okay. We have enough in common.

Check.

Two halves of a clam.

Stuck together.

What's the word I'm looking for?

ALBERT throws his arms into the air in frustration and the LIGHTS rise sharply on the ENSEMBLE. In one quick move, they step with purpose around him.

JUDITH steps forward.

JUDITH

You say it with actions not words.

Say what?

JUDITH

We're talking about marriage, right? Commitment is commitment. "I do" means "I will." I promised to love him until I die. (with a sideways glance at SIMON) It won't be easy but a promise is a promise.
JERRY
No, no, no. Actions are important, yes. Flowers, candy, an exceptionally juicy kiss. But words say everything. You love someone when you can bring yourself to say "our cat" instead of "my cat." It’s not easy. But that’s the true test. Try saying it: "Our kitchen. Our dinner party. Your turn to do the dishes . . ."

ALBERT
I’ll wash. You dry.

SIMON
It’s not what you share so much as what you give up. You overlook their faults. You forgive them for . . . (a sideways glance at JUDITH) . . . being pushy or bad-tempered or stubborn or—

JUDITH
We get the point.

SIMON
So you accept that they’re human like you and you forgive them for what they put you through. When you can do that, then you know it’s right.

PETER
They come first—their feelings, their needs, their desires. You look after them and you always put them first.

ALBERT
But that puts you last.

PETER
(voiced and signed) No, no, no. (signed only) They put you first too.

SIMON
I don’t get it.

JUDITH
Who’s first?

PETER/PETER’S SHADOW
You both are!

JERRY
So you trust them?

PETER
Yeah. That’s it. It’s trust.
Period.

That’s all?

Sounds simple.

LEIGH

But it’s more than that. You’d rather listen than talk. You want to know everything they’re thinking. You want to get inside their head, wear their skin, see what they see, walk a mile in their combat boots. You know?

ALBERT

No.

JUDITH

I don’t want to walk in his boots. At the end of the day I’m tired and I want to take off my shoes and not have to hear about his sore feet.

SIMON

And I don’t want to wear her skin.

JUDITH

What do you mean by that?

SIMON

It’s your skin. You look lovely in your skin.

JUDITH

And you in yours.

PETER

What she was saying had nothing to do with skin.

JUDITH

So why bring it up?

PETER’S SHADOW

It’s a metaphor.

PETER

You want to be that person.
PETER: They’re your role model.

JUDITH: Your hero.

JUDITH: Hero!?

JUDITH takes a long hard look at SIMON.

JUDITH: We’re not talking about ideal love here, kiddo. We’re talking about flesh and blood. Bodily functions. Heart and soul, yes, but 37 years of gas.

PETER: So you two lovebirds are the experts, huh?

JUDITH: Well, certainly not you or that girl with the unfortunate hair.

LEIGH: Hey!

JERRY: She has the nerve to criticize someone’s hair.

ALBERT: Stop it! What are we even talking about?!

The ENSEMBLE stops, they look at one another quizzically. The LIGHTS slowly begin to fade on the ENSEMBLE.

JUDITH: You don’t know?

JERRY: We thought you knew.

SIMON: Who are you living for, Albert?

ALBERT: What?
SIMON

Who rules your heart?

ALBERT
Wait a minute. What was that? What did he say?

The ENSEMBLE has disappeared.

Scene 7

PETER enters with a box of chocolates.

PETER

Are you ready?

ALBERT is shaken, distracted.

ALBERT

What?

PETER

Dinner. The last thing I want to be is late.

ALBERT

What's the rush? They're on deaf time.

PETER

But your grandmother invited us. I want to make sure I get on her good side.

ALBERT

I wouldn't worry about it. You're hearing.

A bell. The lights flash. PETER and ALBERT stand at the door. IDA answers it.

IDA

There you are! I was beginning to think you weren't coming.

She steps past PETER and gives ALBERT a hug. She then extends her hand to PETER.

[During the following, PETER interprets for IDA where indicated. He voices for himself only for IDA's benefit, and otherwise, where indicated, signs for himself, leaving his voicing for his SHADOW.]
Emery/Merkin

Good to see you, Paul.

[Paul?] Peter.

That’s what I said.

IDA

IDA

PETER

ALBERT escorts PETER into the room.

ALBERT

Hi, Mom. Dad.

He hugs JUDITH and SIMON.

ALBERT

You remember Peter.

IDA

He’s a veterinarian.

IDA

PETER

Good to see you.

He extends his hand to shake. SIMON hesitates then shakes his hand. JUDITH nods and smiles faintly.

SIMON

Please. Make yourself comfortable.

IDA

(enunciating) He’s an animal doctor.

IDA

PETER

(voicing) Yes. Yes. They know. (voicing and signing) Animal doctor.

SIMON smiles. JUDITH goes into the “kitchen” and busies herself.

PETER

Smells delicious.

IDA

Thank you. Albert’s mother made the latkes — a bit greasy — but I think you’ll like my borscht.
PETER
[Your mother made latkes. She says they’re greasy.]

IDA
You do like borscht?

PETER
Yes. [She’s making borscht.] I think Albert uses your recipe.

ALBERT nods.

IDA
You’ll have to forgive me. (gesturing wildly for ALBERT’s benefit) My father used to slaughter calves for a living so my vegetarian repertoire is a bit limited.

ALBERT looks at PETER quizzically.

PETER
[She says her father was a butcher so her vegetarian dishes are limited.]

PETER hands IDA the box of chocolates.

Do you like chocolate?

IDA
Oh, how sweet.

SIMON pulls ALBERT aside. IDA sits PETER down next to her and unwraps the chocolates.

SIMON
Let them get to know each other. You tell me about work.

ALBERT
Nothing new. Lots of clients.

JUDITH
How’s that girl doing? That interpreter?

ALBERT
She’s getting better. But I don’t need her so much now.

JUDITH
Why not?
I have some deaf clients now.

(surprised) You do?

Deaf people have architects now? What a world.

PETER joins them.

Where did you get all these deaf clients from?

All over.

You know, deaf network.

We know the deaf network.

Awkward pause. Sensing trouble, IDA comes to the rescue.

So Albert, why don’t you tell your parents about the party you’re planning.

[She wants you to tell your parents about the party.]

It’s not really a party.

(voicing only) It’s not really a party. (voicing and signing) But you’re right, it is a celebration.

We just got the invitations back from the printers.

(voicing only) We just got the invitations.
Invitations?

Oh, how nice.

IDA returns to the kitchen, keeping one eye on the conversation.

ALBERT
Your cousin, Walter, did them for us.

JUDITH
So now cousin Walter knows.

PETER
Of course. We gave him the first invitation.

ALBERT
I wanted to ask you about some other people.

JUDITH
What other people?

ALBERT
Just some addresses.

JUDITH
Like who?

ALBERT
Family, friends.

PETER
We want everyone important in our lives to be there.

SIMON
We don’t really know many gays.

ALBERT
It’s for everyone, Dad. My buddies from Deaf Club, oral school.

PETER
The whole point is to be as public as possible.
JUDITH
That’s what you people do, isn’t it?

PETER
For something as important as this, yes.

ALBERT
Let me explain it. It’s a commitment ceremony, Ma. Like you and dad.

This might be a little different.

ALBERT
We’d like you to help.

JUDITH
Us? What do you want us to do?

PETER
We’d like to come up with a way of including you.

JUDITH
We haven’t decided whether we’re coming.

PETER
Then what are we doing here?

JUDITH
Ask his grandmother. It was her idea.

PETER and ALBERT exchange looks.

SIMON
Wait. Maybe we’ll be there.

JUDITH
We haven’t decided.

PETER
Then maybe we should decide now.

ALBERT cautions PETER with a hand on the shoulder.

SIMON
Albert, you’re our son. If you want us to come and watch, then we will.
Emery/Merkin

ALBERT

Good.

PETER

We'd rather have you included.

JUDITH

So you're hiring an interpreter?

PETER

You don't understand. It's a deaf ceremony. The interpreter is for the hearing guests.

SIMON

It seems like you have everything under control.

JUDITH

So what do you want from us?

PETER

We just want —

JUDITH

I asked my son.

ALBERT

I want you to do whatever you're comfortable with.

JUDITH

Then I'll stay home.

JUDITH turns to leave. IDA steps in her way.

IDA

What's going on?

PETER

(voicing and signing) She doesn't want to come to the ceremony.

IDA

Oh, for God's sake. Simon, will you talk to that woman.

SIMON hesitates. ALBERT goes to his mother. IDA hurries to get her Magic Slate.
ALBERT
Ma, this is for you as much as anyone else.

JUDITH
I don’t need to be at your gay party. Why do you have to drag all us deafies through this?

PETER
Deaf and gay are not as separate as you think.

ALBERT
I’ll handle this.

SIMON
Maybe we should talk about something else.

PETER
No.

ALBERT
Peter.

PETER
(voices and signs) We’re talking about the rest of our lives! (signed only) Who cares if she’ll be embarrassed by all her deaf friends.

IDA
Listen to me . . .

JUDITH
(to PETER) You think I’m afraid of gossip? You think I care anymore what anyone thinks? I’ll tell you what I think. (to ALBERT) You embarrass me. You’re turning your back on your own family. You’ve turned into this big-headed architect with his own interpreter. You think you’re hearing now. Good for you. Be hearing! Be gay! Just don’t expect me to take part. You want a blessing? Go to a rabbi.

ALBERT
I’m sorry you feel that way.

PETER
(voicing and signing) Don’t apologize.

ALBERT
This is not your place.
PETER
Look, if she doesn't want to be part of your life, that's her choice.

JUDITH
(to PETER) I don't want to be part of your life!

PETER
Just what are you afraid of?

ALBERT
Stop it! Both of you.

PETER
You need to be strong. Stand up to her!

ALBERT
This is my family! I will talk to them.

PETER
Why? She doesn't want to hear! She just wants to be deaf!

ALBERT holds.

I think you should leave.

ALBERT
Go. Leave.

Shaken, PETER looks at them all and exits.

JUDITH
Congratulations. Now you have someone speaking for you!

ALBERT turns and points at IDA.

ALBERT
Like her? She speaks for you. She tells you what to do.

SIMON
That's enough.

ALBERT
No. She runs your life! But you can't run mine!
JUDITH
You’re so selfish!

SIMON
We only want what’s best for you.

ALBERT
Bullshit! You’re trying to run my life because you’re scared of your own. You’re stuck. You’re stuck in a world of Deaf Club and gossips and everyone’s a printer or a seamstress. No choices. Everybody’s business is everybody else’s. Nobody knows any better and they sure as hell don’t want to. They’re happy being nobodies!

JUDITH
You’re the nobody!

ALBERT
No, I made it. You gave up.

SIMON is stricken.

JUDITH
You think you’re better than us.

ALBERT
No. I think we’re all better than this!

A long pause. Sensing opportunity, IDA steps in with her Magic Slate.

IDA
Albert —

SIMON stops her.

(speaking only) No!

ALBERT
People have always said I was trying to be hearing, that I was too proud, too ambitious. And I ignored them because I wanted to be someone that I could be proud of. I had thought that someday you would be proud too.

JUDITH
How can I be proud of this? I am ashamed of you.
ALBERT
I love you, Mom. I can’t be the son you want me to be.

JUDITH
Then go. Be somebody else.

ALBERT
No. You will have to face this.

JUDITH
Leave. Leave me alone.

He embraces her for dear life but she freezes. ALBERT slowly breaks away. He looks about the room once and begins to leave.

Scene 8

Rain. ALBERT’S family freezes in tableau. JERRY, LEIGH and PETER’S SHADOW slowly open umbrellas one by one. Gently, as if in a dream, they approach SIMON, JUDITH and IDA from behind, shadow them with their umbrellas and keeping them in their shade, they recede together leaving ALBERT and his SHADOW alone.

ALBERT’S SHADOW retrieves the set of building blocks and presents them to ALBERT. He methodically tries to arrange them anew.

PETER emerges slowly, approaches ALBERT and touches him gently on the shoulder.

PETER
I’m sorry.

ALBERT holds.

PETER
I said I was sorry.

ALBERT
I was ready to jump off a cliff for you. But you pushed me.
Emery/Merkin

PETER
I was just trying to help you.

ALBERT
No. You don’t think I’m strong enough to stand up for myself.

PETER
Sometimes you don’t.

ALBERT
Sometimes I do.

PETER
Okay. I should’ve trusted you. From here on out it’s you and me. That’s all that matters. You and me. One heart.

ALBERT
No.

PETER
One heart, Albert.

ALBERT
No. We are two people, Peter.

ALBERT, pointing, draws a line between them.

ALBERT
This is where you end and where I begin.

PETER
I don’t understand.

ALBERT
You will.

ALBERT kisses PETER. PETER watches
ALBERT continue on.

ALBERT

ALBERT is lost in this thoughts while behind him, JUDITH steps forward.
JUDITH
I don’t understand this journey, Albert. I don’t know if I can accept it. I wish I had a choice. But I don’t. I can’t protect you forever. Go.

She steps back into the ENSEMBLE. SIMON steps forward.

SIMON
I always wanted a better life for you than I had for myself. But now that I see you grown, I see how small I’ve been. My mother’s son, a husband, but never my own person. Do what’s best for you, Albert. I don’t want you to be me.

He steps back into the ENSEMBLE. IDA approaches.

IDA
Albert?

ALBERT
[Go away!]

IDA pulls out her Magic Slate and writes.

IDA
Albert, I want to talk to you.

He gently stops her, pushing the pad aside.

ALBERT
It’s time for us to grow up.

IDA
I don’t understand.

ALBERT
(signing, gesturing) [It’s time for us to grow up.]

IDA
(voicing and gesturing) You’re my only grandson.

ALBERT
[I am not yours. I am nobody’s. I belong to me.]

IDA
What are you saying? What are you saying?
ALBERT
(repeating, gesturing) [I belong to me.]

IDA
You belong to you?

He nods.

IDA
(singing and voicing) You’re home.

ALBERT
[I know. I know.]

IDA
[I love you.]

He nods and kisses her on the cheek. She retires into the ENSEMBLE. He turns and looks at them all one by one.

ALBERT
Something was missing. My place. My people.

ALBERT and his SHADOW look at one another as if for the first time. Together their hands join to sign.

ALBERT / ALBERT’S SHADOW
My other half.

As the ENSEMBLE watch, the SHADOW slowly, gently folds ALBERT in her arms.

ALBERT
My self.

The lights fade to black.

SLIDE: A rose.

END OF PLAY