

Stumble Through

Inspired by real events

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INT. THE RATTATAT OFFICE - THE PHOTO WALL - DAY

Framed pictures and newspaper clippings paper the wall in the small office.

Pictures that date back 20 years depict people of all ages acting in theatrical productions, in costume, on stage, back stage, sometimes in newspaper stories, reviews, or at award ceremonies, accepting plaques or statues. **Most of these pictures have at least one person with a visible or physical disability.**

These are members of Rattatat Theatre Company, which - as is emblazoned on a plaque on the wall - stands for **Re-imagining Ability Through Theatre And The Arts**. The pictures increase in quality as they get more recent, the reviews are clearly stellar from the first production. The participants are what draws the eye, the pride and joy present on stage is evident in each picture regardless of the age or ability level of those pictured.

Part of the photo wall is labeled "Rattatat's Guardian Angels" and features 12 framed pictures of men, women and a couple children. There is also a photo of a MAN taped to the wall, not in a frame.

Intercut with these images is a video clip of a member of Rattatat Theatre Company talking about her history with the company.

JUDY (40s) has Parkinson's which causes her to shake and speak with a tremor.

VIDEO CLIP #1

JUDY

I remember when I first auditioned. I had been living in Los Angeles as an actress before my diagnosis but I'd given it up because nobody wants an actress who shakes. And I walked in and I saw what we call "the freak show" for the first time. And I turned right back around and I walked out because I told myself "I'm not one of these people. I don't belong here".

(MORE)

JUDY (CONT'D)

And sitting there, this little girl on a scooter rolls by and she just stops and looks at me, and she stretches out her four fingered little hand and she's just like "It's okay. We'll go together." How do you say no to that?

EXT. THE STREET - DAY

THE RATTATAT THEATRE

The theatre company sits in a nondescript strip mall between a tattoo parlor and a tropical fish store. The home made sign above the door reads "RATTATAT THEATRE COMPANY" and the front window is plastered with posters of past stage productions, newspaper articles, etc.

INT. THE RATTATAT OFFICE - DAY

The ringing phone in the two room front office is answered by KATHLEEN MEYERS (26), the youthful but dutiful Director of Development.

KATHLEEN

Rattatat Theatre Company, this is Kathleen... Yes... Let me get the Artistic Director. He's away from his desk, can I have him call you back in a few minutes?... Thank you.

Kathleen pushes herself back from the desk. Kathleen uses a wheelchair since a car accident 9 years prior but she maneuvers like she was born in it.

She rolls down the long hallway off the back of her office towards the Theatre.

INT. THE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Kathleen rolls into the small black box theatre at the rear of the building. A folding table is at the middle of the stage with people in folding chairs and wheelchairs gathered around it.

On the stage, she finds Artistic Director CHRIS WILLIS (28) kneeling next to GREGG (40s) an actor in a wheelchair.

GREGG
... so I told him he could play
with my joystick.

CHRIS
Classic. And classy.

KATHLEEN
Chris, Rachel is on the line from
the Jewish Community Center.
They're waiting on the dates for
the sensory friendly performance?

CHRIS
Can you call her back and tell her
it's the 14th and 15th?

KATHLEEN
Isn't it later?

CHRIS
No, that's when it is.

KATHLEEN
I thought we had an outreach on --

CHRIS
The outreach is next month, sensory
friendly is the 14th & 15th at the
JCC, trust me.

KATHLEEN
Can I check the calender? How can
you be sure.

CHRIS
Because I'm me.

KATHLEEN
Say no more.

CHRIS
And ask her to make sure that their
assisted listening devices are
fully charged this time.

Kathleen starts to go.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Oh, hey wait a minute. Do you have
like a baret or a bobby pin? Can I
borrow it?

Kathleen removes a bobby pin from her hair and hands it to Chris.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Beautiful. Thanks.

Chris has had his hand under Gregg's wheelchair the whole time. He reaches under with the bobby pin and fastens it to something.

KATHLEEN
What happened?

GREGG
Catheter tube broke.

CHRIS
There, that should stop the leaking.

LYNDSAY (25) the Stage Manager comes up with a paper cup and a towel. She hands the cup to Chris and starts mopping up a puddle from the floor.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Thanks, Lyndsay.

Chris puts the cup under the wheelchair. Fluid can be heard running into it.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I think that's all of it. Should hold until you get home.

GREGG
Thanks, Chris. Sorry about that.

CHRIS
It happens, right Lyndsay?

LYNDSAY
(mopping)
Hey I live for this stuff.

Chris stands, using Gregg's chair to help pull himself up with barely noticeable effort. He hands the full cup of urine to Lyndsay, who takes it away.

CHRIS
I'll call the JCC.

KATHLEEN
Or maybe you should wash your hands first?

CHRIS
See? That's why we make such a
great team. Hi five!

Raises his hand, then off Kathleen's look, puts his hand
down.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Oh, right. Because of the urine.

KATHLEEN
What are you even doing back here?
Where's their director?

CHRIS
I was doing a drop by, which will
start just as soon as Nick gets
here. Hold my calls.

KATHLEEN
Did you say "hold my calls" or
"crush my balls"? I have trouble
hearing when people treat me like a
secretary.

CHRIS
Noted.

GREGG
(to Kathleen, impressed)
Meow.

INT. THE RATTATAT OFFICE - NIGHT

Kathleen is back in the front office but is readying to go
home. She gets her purse and keys, turns off the lights and
rolls back toward the theatre.

INT. THE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Standing in front of the assembled cast members and the
director, NICK STRAUSE (30s), is cast member JASON SIMMONS
(36) who uneasily reads from a stack of index cards. Around
his neck he wears a digital voice recorder.

Kathleen rolls up next to Chris as he watches Jason on stage.

KATHLEEN
(whispering)
Heading out. What's up?

CHRIS
(whispering)
Jason is struggling.

ON STAGE

JASON
Once you understand how to use the
language of mathematics,
essentially -

NICK
This isn't going to work. It's
going to drag the whole thing down.
We're trying to do comedy here.

BEN
"Try not - "

NICK
Not now, Ben.

JASON
Well I told you I needed help. I
thought that's why you're here.

NICK
I'm here to get this show on its
feet, God willing. And if you
aren't going to be able to remember
it --

JASON
I'll be off book.

NICK
Yeah, I'm sure you'll try.

BEN
"I find your lack of faith
disturbing."

NICK
Ben? Didn't we talk about that?

BEN
Sorry.

NICK
And why do I keep smelling urine?

In the back of the theatre, Chris and Kathleen exchange a
knowing look.

JASON

I just need to keep at it. If I can fabricate magnetic multilayers, I can memorize a stupid sketch.

NICK

Well, sadly, I can't reach into your brain and make it undamaged.

JASON

That is a fucked up thing to say.

Chris makes his way between Jason and Nick.

CHRIS

Okay, I think that's it for tonight. Lyndsay? Let's release the cast.

Jason, still seething, walks away.

NICK

Excuse me, I can decide when my cast gets released.

CHRIS

Nick, let's talk about this in private.

NICK

Do you know how busy I am, Chris? Do you think I have time to deal with all this?

CHRIS

I think you need to make time to accommodate your cast's needs.

NICK

Don't get up on your high horse with me.

CHRIS

Here's a thought: You're 2 weeks in and you haven't shown me any pages. So maybe worry more about that?

NICK

Maybe if I hadn't lost those rehearsals.

CHRIS

One of our members died, Nick.
I don't care where else you work,
if you're going to be part of this
company, you do it my - the
Rattatat way.

NICK

That's an "if" that just got a lot
bigger.

CHRIS

Excuse me?

NICK

I'm here to create a show, not to
baby sit.

CHRIS

You know what? Never mind. Your
services are no longer needed.

NICK

I think your Board Chair, who
practically begged me to -

CHRIS

Clearly this little cripple theatre
company doesn't rank too high on
your list of priorities.

NICK

Listen you self righteous prick -

CHRIS

You can talk to Kathleen about
settling up your contract. We're
done.

Nick scoffs and looks around. Most of the cast has stopped
packing up and has been watching the whole confrontation.
Nick leaves in a huff.

Chris finds Jason in the corner, Lyndsay, RAY (blind) and
TERRI (lupus) are trying to help him calm down.

JASON

If he would just fucking listen to
me... you know?

LYNDSAY

I know. Nick is a dick. This isn't
news.

JASON

I just want to punch him in his smug little face.

TERRI

You're doing great, Jason.

RAY

He sounds like he has a smug face.

CHRIS

We going to be okay?

JASON

Yeah. I'm sorry, I have problems managing my anger and --

CHRIS

I know, Jason. It's cool.

JASON

I just can't believe I can't get this right. I have a damn PhD.

CHRIS

Yeah. And a brain injury.

TERRI

Or did you forget about that?

JASON

I can't expect this treatment when I go back to the college to teach.

CHRIS

When is the school going to let you know?

JASON

Soon, I think. But a friend is letting me guest lecture this week for practice.

CHRIS

Well in the meantime, tell me and Lyndsay how we can support you. Muscle memory exercises? Recordings of rehearsals? Say the word.

JASON

Thanks...?

CHRIS

Chris.

Jason grabs his digital voice recorder and starts speaking into it as he goes.

JASON
Let director know about help I need
with...

Jason walks away. Chris notes the cast still watching.

CHRIS
Okay, folks. Show's over. See you
all tomorrow.

The cast goes about leaving again.

INT. CHRIS' OFFICE - NIGHT

Chris bends down and pulls up his pant leg and adjusts the PLASTIC LEG BRACE concealed underneath. He unfastens the Velcro and rubs his hands along the sides of his leg where the plastic has worn deep groves into his flesh and spots on his leg are rubbed bald and raw. Nevertheless, he resets his leg in the brace and pulls the Velcro as tight as he can make it go.

Kathleen appears at the door and Chris sits up quickly, keeping his legs out of sight behind the desk.

KATHLEEN
You okay?

CHRIS
Just need a minute.

KATHLEEN
I meant about Nick.

CHRIS
Whatever. It's fine. I'll just take
over. Not like he ever put much
effort into it anyway.

KATHLEEN
You need a break, Chris. You've
been going nonstop since you got
hired. And also, pretty much since
I've known you.

CHRIS
It's been an active decade, I'll
admit. I can handle it.

Kathleen grabs one leg and tosses it over the other.

KATHLEEN

I've got my legs crossed.

Chris crosses his fingers as well.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

Also, the Board meeting is tomorrow night.

CHRIS

Didn't we just have that?

KATHLEEN

We had that monthly meeting roughly a month ago, yes.

CHRIS

They are going to love hearing about Nick.

KATHLEEN

He came highly recommended.

CHRIS

We need to print up the staff report and handouts for our estimated production expenses.

KATHLEEN

I already took care of everything.

CHRIS

Of course you did. Can you make a reservation at La Hacienda?

KATHLEEN

I can make *another* reservation if that's what you mean.

CHRIS

Look, on the ground, it's a turtle!
It's a car! It's Super Crip!

KATHLEEN

By the way, the latest box office numbers are not looking good at all.

CHRIS

So we need the marketing team to come up with a new strategy, yes?

KATHLEEN

Yes.

CHRIS
Good. Hey marketing team?

KATHLEEN
Yeah?

CHRIS
Have I got a job for you!

KATHLEEN
I literally can't wait.

CHRIS
Watch it. I'm going to have to ask
the office manager to have a talk
with you about your attitude.

KATHLEEN
Okay.

CHRIS
Hey, office manager?

KATHLEEN
Yeah?

CHRIS
Bad news about Kathleen.

KATHLEEN
Good night, Chris.

Kathleen leaves. Chris takes a bottle of Extra Strength Pain Reliever out from his desk and pops a few before finishing tightening his braces.

EXT. LA HACIENDA - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT: A NEIGHBORHOOD MEXICAN RESTAURANT, ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE RATTATAT OFFICE.

INT. LA HACIENDA - THE TABLE - NIGHT

In a private room in the back of the restaurant, the Rattatata Board of Directors has convened. The group of 10 is composed of several people with disabilities and several able bodied members, including CHAZ (40s) and DONNA (50s), all of whom sit around the table listening to Chris, who sits next to Kathleen at the foot of the table.

CHRIS

The show will still open as scheduled so we won't have to change any of the marketing.

DONNA

And which show is this again?

CHRIS

Rattatattle Tales? It's the sketch comedy show we've been talking about.

DONNA

That's right. People still tell me how much they loved *Into the Woods* last year.

CHRIS

That was two summers ago, but thanks.

DONNA

I don't... was it?

CHRIS

I was assistant director for it. Trust me.

KATHLEEN

It doesn't really matter. It was a good show.

DONNA

It really was.

CHRIS

Well, thanks, Donna. We like the big sellers in the summer time but we have to challenge ourselves once in a while, you know?

HAZ

It's one thing to challenge ourselves. You decided to publicly fire a highly respected member of the theatre community and take on writing and directing yourself.

CHRIS

He confronted me in front of the cast. I did what was necessary.

CHAZ
There might have been other ways of
dealing with it.

CHRIS
I can't do the job of an Artistic
Director if people are always
questioning me.

KATHLEEN
Like Nick.

CHRIS
Yeah, like Nick. What's done is
done.

KATHLEEN
And I fully support his decision.

CHAZ
It's not that I don't trust you.

CHRIS
Isn't it?

DONNA
Chris, don't take this personally.

CHAZ
You're a terrific director. But
you're not a writer. Nick was, so
if you want to go on without him,
we need to find someone to help
you.

CHRIS
I can handle it.

CHAZ
I move that we vote on the issue.

DONNA
Second.

CHAZ
All in favor of bringing on a
writer?

8 hands are raised.

CHAZ (CONT'D)
Opposed?

No hands.

DONNA

What's Danielle Regan been up to?
Is she still at that add agency?

CHRIS

I don't think she'd be the best
person to --

HAZ

The Executive Committee will
discuss suitable candidates in
private.

CHRIS

Shouldn't this be an Artistic
Director decision?

HAZ

Not until your 6 month probationary
period is over in a few weeks. The
vote stands. How are ticket sales
looking, Kathleen?

KATHLEEN

A little soft. Luckily we're not
paying anything for rights.

HAZ

Well that actually brings me to the
treasury report, I think, if the
staff report is done?

CHRIS

We're good.

HAZ

Not necessarily.

KATHLEEN

What do you mean?

HAZ

Well, actually it's neither of you,
it's the bookkeeper we had hired
earlier this year just before you
came on board, Chris.

KATHLEEN

What about him?

HAZ

Well we tasked him with building a
fiscal year budget based on
anticipated profit and loss and...

(MORE)

CHAZ (CONT'D)
well there seems to have been a mix
up somewhere down the line.

CHRIS
How big a mix up?

INT. LA HACIENDA - THE BAR - NIGHT

Chris sits at the bar with an empty shot glass in front of him. Behind him, Kathleen bids goodbye to Chaz and other board members as they leave. She comes into the bar.

KATHLEEN
Need anything?

CHRIS
Either 27 grand or a new career.

KATHLEEN
Don't be so dramatic.

CHRIS
That is literally part of my job.
And how about that Chaz? Way to
spring it on me in front of the
whole board. That guy never liked
me.

KATHLEEN
Well, maybe you shouldn't have
dumped his daughter for that hot
wheelchair girl.

CHRIS
I was 17. And in my defense, you
were super hot back then.

KATHLEEN
Back then?

CHRIS
I think that's the booze talking.

KATHLEEN
Uh-huh. Look, it'll be all right.

CHRIS
Right! Because Artistic Directors
are never fired for stuff like
this. And small non profit art
organizations never go under in
this city.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

It's not like that happened to 3
theatre companies this year alone.
Oh wait, it totally did!

(to the BARTENDER)

Uno mas por favor!

KATHLEEN

I'll find the funding. It's what I
do.

CHRIS

Kath, you're awesome. But no one
just finds that kind of money.

The Bartender brings him his last shot.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I acted with this group since I was
in high school.

KATHLEEN

I know, Chris.

CHRIS

They told me I was the future of
this company.

KATHLEEN

You still are.

CHRIS

When they offered me this job, you
know what my first thought was?

KATHLEEN

"I win?"

CHRIS

Close. "Am I going to do a good
job?"

KATHLEEN

And you will. I mean, you are.

CHRIS

What chance did we ever stand
anyway? Just a bunch of gimpy
theatre queers.

KATHLEEN

There's the new bumper sticker.

Chris downs the shot. He stands, wobbles, and grabs a chair
for support.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
How many did you have?

CHRIS
Not that.

KATHLEEN
What's wrong?

CHRIS
I can't move my leg.

KATHLEEN
Spasming?

CHRIS
It'll pass.

KATHLEEN
Let me help you to the car.

CHRIS
How, you got a spare chair?

EXT. THE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Chris sits sideways on Kathleen's lap as she makes her way to her van parked in the handicapped spot. She lowers the ramp with a remote.

CHRIS
This brings back memories...

KATHLEEN
Shut up.

CHRIS
You know, when I took the job, I thought that at first, things would be weird between us.

KATHLEEN
Yeah?

CHRIS
But they're not. Are they?

KATHLEEN
Aside from the lap dance?

INT./EXT. KATHLEEN'S VAN - NIGHT

Chris lays down on the very back seat. Kathleen has transferred into the driver's seat, but she adjusts the mirror to see Chris dozing off in the back.

KATHLEEN

Take tomorrow, go see your specialist.

CHRIS

(eyes closed)

Maybe I will. And maybe I will.

Kathleen laughs softly, then gives Chris one last look before readjusting the mirror and starting the engine.

INT. THE CLASSROOM - DAY

Jason is standing in front of a college classroom, attempting to give a lecture. He has note cards in hand and a projection on the wall to which he refers. He is clearly nervous.

JASON

This tendency of all objects was first formalized by... anyone?

(no answer)

Newton. His first law states that an object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion --

A cell phone goes off and is silenced quickly, but Jason has lost his train of thought. He looks to the projection.

JASON (CONT'D)

An object... So... I need the next slide?

The next slide appears, but Jason's next card does not match.

JASON (CONT'D)

No, that's... Hang on a minute.

He looks up at the bored and impatient faces of the STUDENTS.

JASON (CONT'D)

The short version would be --

STUDENT (O.C.)

Too late.

Snickers from the class.

JASON
 (snapping)
 Hey, shut up you little shit.

The PROFESSOR (40s), Jason's friend, comes up from his spot by the door.

PROFESSOR
 Let's have a hand, thanking Dr. Simmons for his time.

The class claps, halfheartedly. The Professor gives Jason a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

INT. THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Chris sits on the examination table across from DR. EDITH WIGGINS (50s). His pants are rolled up and his braces are in a chair across the room.

DR. WIGGINS
 You realize I'm a cerebral palsy specialist, right?

CHRIS
 Yeah.

DR. WIGGINS
 And therefore, when I see someone who has clearly been neglecting their condition for an extended period of time, that might be kind of obvious to me?

CHRIS
 I guess.

DR. WIGGINS
 Such as someone who hasn't been taking muscle relaxers as prescribed by their specialist?

CHRIS
 Uh huh.

DR. WIGGINS
 Or attending regular physical therapy sessions, or doing daily stretches which they were told are necessary by that same specialist?

CHRIS

I meant to, I just don't have the time. If you knew what my days have been like --

DR. WIGGINS

Chris, this is the worst I have ever seen you, including your binge drinking days. If this continues, you'll end up in a chair before you're 30.

CHRIS

I'm not going to end up in chair.

DR. WIGGINS

You're right. What do I know? I'm just a cerebral palsy specialist.

CHRIS

I know, I just... What would you recommend?

DR. WIGGINS

Aside from everything else I've just enumerated, you need to slow down and make sure you're resting.

CHRIS

I've been running myself ragged trying to do a good job.

DR. WIGGINS

You're not a kid any more, Chris. I can't force you to take pain meds or take any other recommendation. You let me know when you change your mind. We'll see if you can still walk by then.

INT. CHRIS' CAR - DAY

Chris is on the phone, sitting at a stop light.

CHRIS

Hey Chaz, it's Chris. Can you give me a call back? I just wanted to know, hypothetically, what would happen if we decide to cancel *Rattatattle Tales*?

Chris hangs up and looks out the window. On the corner is a Disabled Man (STEVE, 40s) in a shabby, worn wheelchair.

He holds a sign that reads "Disabled, Out of Work, Anything Helps."

The light changes and Chris drives on.

INT. THE RATTATAT OFFICE - DAY

Lyndsay, wearing a tool belt, comes down the hallway to Kathleen's desk.

LYNDSAY

Hey, is Chris around?

KATHLEEN

I made him see the doctor.

LYNDSAY

Good for you. A controlling girlfriend is a caring girlfriend. Or so I tell my girlfriend.

KATHLEEN

We're not together.

LYNDSAY

Oh... Yeah, no, I just... I saw some pictures of you two that seemed --

KATHLEEN

Yeah, we were. When we were kids, sort of off and on. Honestly, I don't like to talk about it at work.

LYNDSAY

Oh, okay. It's cool that you guys can still work together, though.

KATHLEEN

Well we're friends. And coworkers. And that's it.

LYNDSAY

Been there. My girlfriend and I did the same thing for a while. And we worked together and I was totally still into her the whole time, too. So I get how you feel.

KATHLEEN

How do you know I'm still into Chris? I mean *if* I... what makes you say --

LYNDSAY

You know I have some screws to... screw. So I'm just gonna...

Lyndsay heads back down the hall. Chris comes in the front.

KATHLEEN

Hey! I've got some news. You should sit down.

CHRIS

Easy for you to say.

KATHLEEN

Seriously, Chris, this is pretty huge. I think I found the money.

CHRIS

No way.

KATHLEEN

There's a grant. But it's a little different. They're doing these *Shark Tank* kind of things now to make them more exciting. But the grant is for arts organizations that cater to marginalized populations. For up to \$30,000 at a time.

CHRIS

Holy shit. That's awesome.

KATHLEEN

They have a forum a month from now. Performance groups have to have one of our productions evaluated. A live show.

CHRIS

A... live? By next month?

KATHLEEN

Yeah, and at least 60 pages or an hour long. So it'll have to be *Rattattatle Tales*, I guess.

The weight of this realization clearly hits Chris hard.

CHRIS
Yeah. I guess it will.

KATHLEEN
How long is the show now?

CHRIS
I'll find out tonight, I guess.

KATHLEEN
Great. Legs crossed.

She manually crosses her legs again. Chris, lost in thought, sees this and crosses his fingers in response.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
They're coming to opening night.

CHRIS
Of course they are!

KATHLEEN
And you'll need to do a sit down
with one of the judges before then.
What did the doctor say?

CHRIS
Hm? Oh, turn your head and cough.
Take two of these. The usual.
Excuse me.

Chris darts into his office, closes the door and draws the shade on the window.

INT. CHRIS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Chris leans back against the door, bending over to rub his leg.

CHRIS
Shit.

His phone rings. It's Chaz. He sends it to voice mail.