

LUISA

Oh, come on, Mr. Sutherland, I don't bite, honestly.

HEWITT

Really? The last time we were together, you threatened to launch an attack on me, if I remember your words correctly.

LUISA

You're not remembering correctly. I didn't threaten anyone. I do embody a threat, though: to the kind of theater you love to the exclusion of all else.

HEWITT

Would you care to tell me what kind of theater I love to the exclusion of all else? I'm curious to hear!

LUISA

No. I'm not playing that game. As soon as I said it, you'd mention that you'd once or twice reviewed something else and hadn't hated it.

HEWITT

Yes, I would, because I review lots of everything and approve plenty of it. Including the last play you produced here, if you'll recall.

LUISA

I do remember that review; everyone making theater around here has to read the great Hewitt Sutherland's reviews. You're the theater critic for the city's only daily paper. So, yes, I read it, and I remember it.

HEWITT

And didn't I approve what you'd done?

LUISA

Oh, the words were there; you're clever that way. You're clever right now - that word "approve." Yes, you approved. But you didn't love; you weren't enthusiastic. Loving's important too.

HEWITT

Why? If I see the merit in your work and identify it, why isn't that enough?

LUISA

Because if you were a good enough critic, you'd love too. As it was, you were praising the play through gritted teeth, and that came out in your review. You kind of got what we were trying to do, I'll give you that, *Señor Crítico*. But you really don't like what we're trying to do.

[Next sentence rendered with exaggerated British accent and enunciation:]

What you want is Lady Bracknell being witty whilst sipping tea. A conventionally-cast Lady Bracknell - a middle-aged cis-gender white woman - of course. If possible, in a production that plays down the fact that the man who wrote the play was gay, not one that picks up on all the places Oscar Wilde was flashing queer signals, even though everybody knows they're there.

Am I right? That's what you love, right? Theater as it used to be? Theater of the European tradition? Mostly of, by and for white men? Where everyone knows their place? Everyone who has any place at all?

HEWITT

Are you finished?

[LUISA nods curtly.]

Liking theater in that tradition is nothing to apologize for. Am I supposed to reject the very things that caused me to love theater in the first place?

LUISA

No.

HEWITT

But?

LUISA

Love it, but give it up. There's no time for that now. There's no room for that. Do not review the next *Hamlet*. Review only the things that are outside your comfort zone. And if you can't give it up, you need to get out of the way.

There are so many stories that haven't been told because of people like you. Black stories, and queer stories and folk

stories and Asian stories and stories told in unusual spaces. There are storytellers who never get to be heard, performers who never get to tell them, because of you.

HEWITT

I haven't drowned out a single voice.

LUISA

Really? What happens just from you choosing whether or not to review a play? Sitting in that newspaper, the source everyone consults, you are really the one who tells most of the local theatergoers what's worthy of notice and what isn't. You tell the grant-makers too. You do so much to determine what's held up as praiseworthy - and what's invisible. Don't you dare doubt that there are shows that never happened because you didn't review the playwrights and the companies and the actors who would have made them happen, or because you said the wrong things when you did review them. *Claro*, you've drowned plenty of voices.

HEWITT

Can you prove that there's a single playwright or company or actor who didn't get to do something because of anything I wrote?

LUISA

You mean is there like a ballistics test showing you fired the weapon? That's not how it works. But what I could show you is what you missed when you reviewed particular shows or when you failed to review them.

HEWITT

Well, we don't have a collection of my reviews here to look at. But in general?

LUISA

In general, you are a privileged straight white male person. And there's an explosion of work out there that isn't aimed at you as an audience. It's like you speak a different language. You haven't once walked down the street in fear of the police or the *migra*. You probably have never been raped. Nobody's ever assaulted you just for walking out of a gay bar or denied you a job on account of your sex. Have you ever been in jail? I doubt that. You have your own car too, I'm sure, so you've never had to take three buses to get to work. You don't live in a food desert. So, no matter what

you've done to educate yourself, it's really hard to conceive of you as qualified to review certain works. Lots of works. The most exciting works that are coming out now. You're going to miss things, that's all.

HEWITT

Oh, it sounds really good when you say all that. But -

LUISA

I'm not done. You asked me what effect you have. Well, it only starts with those problems with what you write. But you and the reviewers like you - maybe you don't even know your strength. Do you believe that male playwrights are 40% better than female ones?

HEWITT

No, of course not.

LUISA

Good, neither do I. But somehow about 40% more of the plays produced in American regional theater are by men. And if it isn't a matter of quality, then there has to be some other explanation.

HEWITT

Not my reviews.

LUISA

I'm sure your reviews are in fact part of the explanation, *compadre*. You reviewers, along with all the other men's clubs in the theater, like the producers and the directors, have a big role in deciding who lives and who dies.

HEWITT

But I review women's works, lots of them.

LUISA

Just count.

HEWITT

Anyway, according to you I'm not qualified to review them. Should I be doing something you say I'm not even qualified for?

LUISA

No! I'm saying there should be more people who are qualified.

HEWITT

So I should just curl up and die to make room for them? Or slink into a corner so that someone fortunate enough to have lived in a food desert or run from *la migra* could take my job?

LUISA

[sighing]

I was hardly talking about you personally at all.

HEWITT

Really? Because it all sounded pretty personal to me!

LUISA

Yes and no. Yes, you personally have a bunch of blind spots. How do I mainly know that? Because most white male *gringo* critics have the same ones.

HEWITT

Every single one?

LUISA

No.

HEWITT

So you don't actually know whether I've got them or not.

LUISA

Oh, I can guess. Quick test: Can you tell me the Shakespeare plays in which a woman pretends to be a man?

HEWITT

Um, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Cymbeline* -

LUISA

Stop! That's fine! Now, can you give me the name of even one contemporary Latinx play in which the same thing happens?

HEWITT

Um, no.

LUISA

I rest my case! I mean, we could keep doing this, but we'd probably get the same result every time. There's a literature here, a vibrant, exciting literature, that you just don't know. You don't even know that you don't know. You see what I'm saying?

HEWITT

But I'm very open to reviewing new things when they come up. In this city, we have a pretty good arts scene, but there are only a limited number of plays by the kinds of artists you're talking about. I can't know - and I can't review - and I can't get acquainted with what I can't see.

LUISA

Well, aren't you making my point still? That's why I'm selecting the works I do for our theater. You're right. We're not in New York here. Not even in Chicago. And there hasn't been much opportunity for people like you to see, oh, María Irene Fornés or Luis Santeiro on the stages of this town. Let alone the hundreds of playwrights from all the traditions I'm trying to get on this stage. Isn't it about time we broadened our horizons?

HEWITT

Somewhere, but you're taking the one stage that -

LUISA

Oh, I know, the sacred stage! Sacred to the works of the white man!

HEWITT

I meant no such thing. It was sacred to the classics, though, before you got here.

LUISA

You can describe it that way if you want. But I've examined the Public Rep's whole production history since the doors opened in 1975. So I know what's been produced there. Sure, they had a few outliers: Lorraine Hansberry and August Wilson and Domingo Colman. But fourteen Shakespeare plays? Ten Shaw? Four Tennessee Williams? White, white, white. Male, male, male. It was like pulling the shades and paying no attention to the world outside.

And here's another thing. Notice where the Public Rep is situated.

HEWITT

You mean in our town?

LUISA

Right, in our town. It's not in such a hot neighborhood, you know?

HEWITT

Some of the buildings and homes around are lovely. It's on the upswing.

LUISA

Spare me. It's a neighborhood that all the white people ran from just about the time the Public Rep was founded. And I don't think that's a coincidence. I think the Rep was left behind by the white people as a white people's fortress, to tell everyone that this was still white turf. That white people would go right on enjoying their Ibsen and O'Neill in the midst of the neighborhood whatever the neighborhood wanted or didn't want. White space. Much like this campus and this club, incidentally.

HEWITT

You have not a shred of evidence that anyone was thinking like that.

LUISA

Oh, I know, it's not as obvious a marker as a Confederate monument. But that's what I think. There are too many theaters like the Public Rep situated in places like that in too many cities for it to be a coincidence. Anyway, that's what the space you call sacred was actually like, if you look at it. Not very sacred. More like an expression of fear and defiance. Well, I'd like to make it sacred *en realidad*, but the way you do that is you make it speak to and for everyone.

HEWITT

That's not what you're doing. Do I have to remind you about the public statement you put out at the beginning of this season?

LUISA

Which one? There were several.

HEWITT

The one that said it was important right now to decenter white men, onstage and off.

LUISA

Sure, I said that.

HEWITT

Decentering is marginalizing. Right? The very thing you say the Public Rep used to do to women and people of color? So what are you doing, *en realidad*,
[air quotes]
except switching who's included and who's excluded? As I look at your schedule I see no white male playwrights or directors at all this year. You're telling everyone else's story, but not the story of people like me. So it's not for everyone, as you put it. Just a different bunch of someones.

LUISA

It's still for everyone. It won't do a bit of harm to people like you to listen to the rest of the world for awhile.

HEWITT

How long is awhile?

LUISA

Oh, we're anxious, are we? How long before order is restored? *Dios mios*, awhile might be a while.

HEWITT

So you're not giving me any assurances?

LUISA

Uh-uh. Your dismay is too much fun. I need to savor it for a bit.

[As HEWITT responds with an annoyed look, RICHARD walks in.]

RICHARD

Good morning, all. You must be Ms. Contreras. I heard you might be here this morning. My name's Richard Leverage.