

Reach

a short comedy about the ways in which we connect, or try to

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Reach

Characters:

JEFFREY – white male, 30s, deaf brother to JANET

CLAUDIA – black female, 40s/50s, hearing friend to JANET

JANET – white female, 40s/50s, hearing

Location: A Zoom screen in Los Angeles

Time: Early evening on a week night, July, 2020

Dialogue Notes:

— *Indicates a character's dialogue is interrupted, by another character speaking, an event or a character abruptly shifting gears within a line of dialogue.*

... *Indicates a character is searching for words, does not complete a thought or leaves a line of dialogue open.*

// *Indicates the point at which a character starts the next line of dialogue during another character's previous line in cases where there is overlap.*

Casting Notes:

REACH was written for actors indicated in the age range above, but the characters can be younger. Or older. CLAUDIA and JANET should be around the same age. In all cases, JEFFREY should be played by a deaf or hard of hearing actor.

SPECIAL THANKS

to the following artists and advocates

for their roles in the development of *Reach*:

Director Susan Diol, Brian M. Cole, Judith Moreland, Carlyle King,
Christine Joëlle, Jami Brandli, Meeghan Holoway, the Road Theatre Company,
Jessica Broutt and Under Construction playwrights.

Synopsis:

A short comedy about the ways in which we connect, or try to, *Reach* takes a peek at socially-distanced friends during a time when the dual pandemics of Covid-19 and Racism hit Los Angelenos—and bring them together—in rather revealing ways.

Reach

Onscreen, a man appears. This is Jeffrey. He adjusts his screen and we see he is in his bedroom. He waits for the conversation to begin, checks out his appearance, then the screen splits as he is joined by Claudia. She's in her office; her face is not always in full view of her camera as she settles in.

CLAUDIA:

Hi, there! I was surprised to get your text. Well, not really, but I wouldn't have thought you Zoomed. I mean, everyone does now, right, but... I don't know. Hang on let me get... *(leaning out of camera range to grab a glass of wine)* So can you believe it's July, already? At least 2020 is half over! How are you all holding up? And Janet? *(perhaps holding the glass to her lips)* Your family's been okay?

JEFFREY:

You're asking about... *(signing)* My sister?

CLAUDIA:

(putting down her glass and moving closer to the camera) Ah. I am so sorry, Jeff. Of course, Janet, but how are you doing?

JEFFREY:

I am doing okay. How are you?

CLAUDIA:

Okay. I guess I didn't— I didn't think. But I thought— Don't you have captions, or something?

JEFFREY:

I can read lips. And use the chat if I don't // understand anything.

CLAUDIA:

Right! Good thing we're not wearing masks, ha ha.

She places her hands up to illustrate, covering her lips.

JEFFREY:

Masks? That has been a really big challenge.

CLAUDIA:

Yeah. Oh! I never— I mean, it's a challenge for all of us, but, yeah!

JEFFREY:

They threw me out of Whole Foods in Santa Monica. I couldn't understand the checker. I kept telling her I couldn't hear. I brought my own bags; they don't let you use them.

CLAUDIA:

Oh, no, you leave those bags in the car at Whole Foods!

JEFFREY:

Now, I do!

CLAUDIA:
Yeah!

Very short pause.

You really would think Zoom would have captions, though. I mean, if you want to talk with... other...

JEFFREY:
Captions on Zoom are complicated, but deaf people sign to each other. We've had videophones for a long time, way before Zoom.

CLAUDIA:
Oh, sure. I'm just... It's nice to hear from you!

JEFFREY:
You, too. Not the hearing part.

CLAUDIA:
Oh. I'm sorry, I didn't // mean...

JEFFREY:
I am joking. It's a deaf joke.

CLAUDIA:
Ha ha. Well, good. And nice to see you!

JEFFREY:
(signing) Nice to see you, too!

Very short pause.

I feel kind of awkward about this. I wanted to explain // in my text but I didn't...

CLAUDIA:
No! It's okay. I completely understand.

JEFFREY:
You do?

CLAUDIA:
Thank you for reaching out. People have been coming out of the woodwork, actually, since George Floyd's murder. But I'm glad to know that people care and want to be allies. To people of color.

JEFFREY:
No. You don't understand.

CLAUDIA:
No?

JEFFREY:

I mean, yes, I want to be your ally! But that's not why I sent you the message.

CLAUDIA:

Oh.

JEFFREY:

Now I feel bad.

CLAUDIA:

No! That's not... Honestly, I don't know if I can take one more person waking up to the pandemic of racism. Telling me how shocked they are.

JEFFREY:

I am not shocked.

CLAUDIA:

I... No.

Very short pause.

Did you have something you wanted to...?

JEFFREY:

It's Janet. She asked me get in touch with you.

CLAUDIA:

Really, why? Oh! Wait! She's not sick!

JEFFREY:

No! She's fine. Everyone's fine.

CLAUDIA:

Good! You had me worried there! I don't think we've really talked since right when everything shut down. I mean, a few times early on...

JEFFREY:

Well. She is my sister. You know how she is.

CLAUDIA:

I do!

JEFFREY:

And she kept bugging me until I agreed to set this up, so you two could talk.

CLAUDIA:

But why did she need you to—?

She's interrupted as Janet joins them onscreen. She is busy in her kitchen and doesn't notice Claudia right away.

JANET:

I am so sorry, Jeffrey! I was putting dinner in the oven and didn't get your text until just now for some reason and so didn't know that you'd... (*seeing Claudia*) that you were both already here.

JEFFREY:

We were having a good conversation.

CLAUDIA:

Hi, Janet.

JANET:

Claudia. Hi. Thank you. I needed this.

CLAUDIA:

You do know we could have Zoomed on our own. Not that I mind seeing Jeffrey, but you could have just called me!

JANET:

I could have?

CLAUDIA:

Yes! Why would you think otherwise?

JANET:

Well, I... I...

JEFFREY:

Okay! I am going to go // now.

JANET:

No! Don't go!

JEFFREY:

Why not?

CLAUDIA:

What is this all about, Janet?

JANET:

Well, I didn't want to call you because I thought... I thought you've been mad at me!

CLAUDIA:

Why would you think that?

JANET:

You haven't responded to any of my posts in over a month!

CLAUDIA:

I— Sorry, but things have been pretty crazy.

JANET:

I know! Of course I know. For all of us, but more for you. I recognize that. The protests, and everything.

CLAUDIA:

Okay...

JANET:

And so I wondered why you didn't reach out.

CLAUDIA:

Why *I* didn't—?

JANET:

(interrupting) And then I remembered. What happened the last time we got together, back in March?

CLAUDIA:

What was that?

JANET:

When we had drinks Downtown? After my work thingy?

CLAUDIA:

Yeah! That was fun!

JANET:

It was! I thought so!

CLAUDIA:

God. Going out for drinks. That's a distant memory...

JEFFREY:

Now I am getting thirsty. See you later!

JANET:

No!

JEFFREY:

Janet, you do this to me all the time. I have a life. You can't just demand that I // am there for you any time you want me to be.

CLAUDIA:

You know what, you two? I'm definitely thirsty and I'm going to get a refill.

JANET:

Hang on! Jeffrey! How do you say "Black Lives Matter" in ASL? Claudia, it's really beautiful.

JEFFREY:

Do you really think—?

JANET:

(interrupting) Yes! This time is all about opening ourselves up and learning. Claudia wants to learn, right?

CLAUDIA:

Sure.

JEFFREY:

It depends. Janet, you and I would do this *(signing)*.

JANET:

(signing, or trying to) I love that!

JEFFREY:

But Claudia could do this *(signing, then correcting Janet who is still repeating his signs)*. Claudia! It's different if you're black.

CLAUDIA:

Yes, it is. And I need more wine.

JANET:

No! I mean, okay...

And Claudia has left her screen.

JEFFREY:

Janet: Whatever problems you and Claudia are having // I don't understand why...

JANET:

What did she say? Did she say there were problems?

JEFFREY:

No! And she didn't seem like she was mad at you. Before this, I mean.

JANET:

No? Well, that's the thing. I didn't think so, either, but then I kept thinking and you know when something sits in your brain, and especially because you're sitting at home—realizing it's *all* about self-examination—you keep re-playing it over and over and over and over again?

Jeffrey turns off Janet's video and we see a black screen with her name. Or she disappears altogether. Jeffrey appears blissful as we continue to hear Janet's voice.

Wait. Where did I go. I can't see me. Can you see me? I guess you can see me. But you know what I'm talking about, right? When you start to question everything and then it's like you stop trusting your instincts!

Claudia moves back into her screen with a full glass of wine. She appears confused for a moment, then we see a Zoom chat appear onscreen. She and Jeffrey attempt benign smiles to mask that they're chatting.

JANET:

Claudia! So I was telling Jeffrey: I just feel all discombobulated, you know? I mean, I know I'm supposed to move out of my comfort zone and believe me I'm doing that.

But I also feel like I need something to anchor me, and right now that's my brother. Thank you, Jeffrey!

You can see me, right? I wonder if I need to— My screen is being weird.

But what I'm learning, doing the work to be accountable, is that first, there's a conversation. And that's what I want to do.

I mean, if it's okay with you.

To have that conversation.

Claudia?

Claudia!?

Me/Jeffrey to Claudia (private):
Use the chat.

Claudia to Me/Jeffrey (private):
Where's your sister?

Me/Jeffrey to Claudia (private):
I needed a break. You hear her, right?

Claudia to Me/Jeffrey (private):
Yes! You are a very sneaky man in the Zoom of it all.

Me/Jeffrey to Claudia (private):
I've learned to develop survival skills.

Claudia to Me/Jeffrey (private):
Never underestimate the dead!

Me/Jeffrey to Claudia (private):
Good idea. Especially zombies.

Claudia to Me/Jeffrey (private):
Huh?
OH! *deaf. SORRY!

CLAUDIA:

Yes! Of course. A conversation.

And Janet appears again. The chat screen closes and Janet gives a thumbs up to Jeffrey.

JANET:

Oh! There I am. Hey! *(newly struck by her own image onscreen)* What do you think of the new color? I was tired of white.

CLAUDIA:

Yeah, I—

JANET:

(interrupting) My hair! I meant my hair! I'm sorry, I—

CLAUDIA:

(interrupting) I realized that. It's great.

JANET:

Okay. So this the sort of thing we just need to talk about.

CLAUDIA:

You wanna talk hair?

JANET:

No! God no! That, I would never presume! Here's what's been weighing on me. The last time we met? I realized I may have crossed a boundary. And I wanted to own that, and apologize if I offended you.

CLAUDIA:

Janet, I honestly don't remember—

JANET:

(interrupting) It was the hug!

CLAUDIA:

What hug?

JEFFREY:

Did you say, "hug?"

JANET:

Yes. The hug! After we had drinks. They were just starting to warn about shaking hands and keeping your distance and when we were walking to our cars, I just... hugged you!

CLAUDIA:

Okay.

JANET:

But I didn't ask you. And then I remembered: earlier that evening you didn't want to hug someone.

CLAUDIA:

There are plenty of people I didn't want to hug, even pre-pandemic.

JANET:

(interrupting) But I should have asked you. And now I've been trying to ask *myself* some very hard questions, so when I hadn't heard from you I looked back and started wondering if that moment was *really* about me exercising my power and privilege.

JEFFREY:

Hugging your friend?

JANET:

Not getting consent!

JEFFREY:

That's a different movement.

JANET:

Only a man would say that. *(to Claudia)* It's all the same. I mean, not the *same*, but connected! Right, Claudia? Or am I just...? Oh, it's like I'm looking at the world through this new filter and all I can see is race! And it's so, so painful for me!

Janet starts to cry.

CLAUDIA:

Okay, I can't do this right now.

JANET:

But do you forgive me?

CLAUDIA:

For the hug? Sure.

JANET:

Thank you! I love you so much! So you don't think I'm a racist?

CLAUDIA:

That is a whole other conversation, Janet.

JANET:

I mean, I know— You know what I mean. But I have been so upset. It's like every day, a new police video, and it's all so shocking!

JEFFREY:

I've been telling you about the police for years—my own experiences!

CLAUDIA:

As a white man.

JEFFREY:

A deaf man!

CLAUDIA:

Who is white.

JEFFREY:

I can't hear commands. They think I'm resisting arrest!

CLAUDIA:

But you're still—

JANET:

(interrupting) Did he tell you about Whole Foods? Good thing he *wasn't* black, right? Oh! Claudia! I wanted to say that I was blown away by your last post. The video you put together? The narrative you created—so moving. Did you see I loved it?

CLAUDIA:

Thank you. I'm... very proud of it.

JANET:

Actually, I gave it a hug. Did you watch it, Jeffrey? You're friends, aren't you?

CLAUDIA:

I think so.

JEFFREY:

We are.

JANET:

Oh. Shit. Something's burning.

She quickly walks out of her screen; we might continue to hear her cursing in the background. After a moment,

CLAUDIA:

(to Jeffrey) So. Did you watch it?

JEFFREY:

Your video? No.

CLAUDIA:

No? Why not?

JEFFREY:

I couldn't. There were no captions.

Claudia and Jeffrey take each other in. It's a surprisingly real connection.

End of Play