

**DEEJ Script**  
**53-Minute Version**  
**June 15, 2016**

\*\*\*\*\*

***POEM: "Swoon"***

The ear that hears the cardinal  
hears in red;

the eye that spots the salmon  
sees in wet.

My senses always fall in love:  
they spin, swoon;

they lose themselves in one  
another's arms.

Your senses live alone  
like bachelors,

like bitter, slanted rhymes whose  
marriage is a sham.

They greet the world the way accountants  
greet their books.

I tire of such mastery. And yet, my senses  
often fail

to let me do the simplest things,  
like walk outside.

Invariably, the sun invades  
my ears

and terrifies my feet—the angular  
assault of Heaven's

heavy-metal chords.  
I cannot hear

to see, cannot see to move.  
And so I cling,

as on a listing ship at night,  
to the stair-rail.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **EXT GRINNELL HIGH SCHOOL SIDEWALK**

*Titles say "Grinnell High School, Grinnell, Iowa"*

*It is midwinter. DJ braves the cold weather and walks energetically toward the camera and school. He doesn't speak.*

### **INT GRINNELL HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY**

*(230 12:30) DJ walks down busy school hallway. Only now do we hear his narrated voice.*

DJ (as narrator)

My name is David James Savarese, or DJ for short, but I prefer to be called Deej. I attend honors classes at Grinnell High School. I plan to go to college. I look hopefully forward to a golden life of full inclusion.

*Main title appears: "DEEJ".*

### **INT GRINNELL HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE CLASS**

*DJ sits with Mrs. Hanson as Mr. Rudolph speaks.*

MR. RUDOLPH

(096 00:06) ...let's talk about how this // may or may not be a tragedy // if it's somewhat maybe the fault of a character, a tragic flaw that the character has. One more. DJ.

*DJ presses "play" on his Dynavox.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

(096 00:30) // In stark rural poverty, Ethan Frome perseveres and creates a vibrant internal life of hope and love. // Planting seeds of life and joy, tending to them in the midst of desolation, requires fortitude.

NORA

Well, like I agree that all his hope comes from inside. Like nothing is given him like to give hope to him...

DJ (as narrator)

Until I learned to read and write, people thought I had no mind. Reading and writing are rarely taught to nonspeaking autistics. Our silence makes some estimate us as incapable. And soon we are left out of anything meaningful.

MR. RUDOLPH

(096 22:15) Okay; foreshadowing, we talked about; can you think of other examples of foreshadowing in the story?

### **EXT SAVARESE HOUSE, GRINNELL, IOWA**

*Establishing shot; the following text appears: "Two Years Earlier: DJ and filmmaker Robert Rooy begin to work together.*

Emily (off-camera)

(003b 02:12) Did you have certain things on your mind that you wanted to do?

### **INT SAVARESE LIVING ROOM**

*DJ sits on the couch next to Emily; she assists him in typing his response.*

DJ (as narrator)

(394 33:46) my mom // taught me how to learn. She's always there for me. I greet my mom feeling like everything is possible.

DJ (via Dynavox)

(003b 03:10) Yes; yearn to talk to Rob about film.

EMILY

Okay.

*DJ continues to type.*

DJ (as narrator)

(393 43:5) People ask why I have someone support me while I type. The person helps me regulate my nervous system until my breathing slows, and my fingers and eyes can once again communicate with each other. By pulling back on my hand or arm, the person helps me regain control over my movement.

*Back to the scene in the living room; DJ completes his typing and presses "play" on the Dynavox.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

(003b 17:07) You plot to get my people free?

ROB (off-camera)

I hope we can teach people who don't understand autism what it's like, and how to take advantage of your special qualities and gifts.

DJ (via Dynavox) (off-camera)

(003b 19:07) Yes but really freeing my people is as important. //  
(22:13) Hope to help the other kids have meaningful lives.

## **INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE REHEARSAL**

*Establishing shot.*

## **INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE REHEARSAL**

*DJ and the cast members sit in a circle, reading the script together. DJ is playing certain passages in the script.*

DJ (via laptop)

(041 04:25) Most people still perceive of kids with autism as bad.

DJ (as narrator)

Plotting Hope is a play about autism that I wrote and assistant-directed.

DJ (via laptop) (cont)

Instead of treating us with respect, they get us locked up in institutions. Instead of teaching us to read and write, they keep us in segregated classrooms of easy lessons.

*The cast stands in a circle around Elizabeth Hansen, the theatre director.*

MRS. HANSEN

(040 30:44) I think for us to be better communicators is to be better nonverbally // (040 32:01) // we need to understand.

*DJ types out a quick response.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

(040 31:46) Yes, deserting fear by holding pleasure in estimated you as possibly autistic.

## **INT SAVARESE TRAMPOLINE HOUSE**

*DJ sits chatting with select cast members.*

NATALIE SIMS (cast member)

(047 18:43) Just hearing what you have to say and what you've written, it just, it basically X's out the whole disability factor.

DJ (via Dynavox)

(047 17:30) Yes, pointing out my disability is hard because I don't think of myself as disabled.

ERIKA WORLEY (cast member)

(047 18:05) Well; the sappy quote from me: disability shouldn't be the handicap."

### **INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE REHEARSAL**

*DJ and the cast members walk around stage in an early blocking rehearsal.*

ERIKA WORLEY (cast member) (off-stage)

*(pause).* I don't know; I've known you since third grade and never really thought of you as not being able to function, cause I was watching you function since I first saw you.

DJ (via Dynavox) (off-stage)

(047 21:25) Yes, but other classmates hear dear self, and ignore it.

### **INT SAVARESE TRAMPOLINE HOUSE**

*The chat continues as we also watch the rehearsal continue.*

BAILEY MORRISON (cast member)

(050 35:07) People just don't understand, I guess. They don't have experience with it so they don't know what it's like to be you. I mean I don't know what it's like to be you but I hope I have a better understanding after this.

### **INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE REHEARSAL**

*Bailey and some of the cast members, all girls, form a line and speak the last lines of the play:*

*(041 41:12) Trust that they can learn;  
Trust that they have feelings;  
Trust that they want friends;  
Trust that they hear everything you say;  
Trust that they can read;  
Trust that they are human.*

*One of them drops her script; others giggle, and then burst out laughing. Other cast members, in the seats, applaud. DJ sits in the house, witnessing all this.*

## **EXT TENNIS COURTS**

*Ralph coaches DJ on hitting tennis ball with racket, running to and fro to hit DJ's volleys.*

RALPH

(063 33:40) Great, DJ. That's you! Way to move! That's you!

DJ (as narrator)

(393 46:06) My dad is fun. // He // teaches American literature and disability studies at Grinnell College.

*Ralph stops to offer DJ another pointer.*

DJ (as narrator), cont.

I look to him for courage. He views me as able and helps me gain control over my unruly body.

## **INT SAVARESE LIVING ROOM**

*Ralph watches from a nearby chair as DJ types with Emily's assistance.*

DJ

(066 36:05) Yes, I fear losing you.

RALPH (off-camera)

Wow, DJ // (066 23:35) It's not an either-or situation. Right? // (066 23:46) You can get free, which means you can become more independent, you can make friends, you can find a special person. None of that means you lose your parents. (23:56)

*DJ listens intently.*

RALPH (cont)

(066 26:33) You never have to worry that we will become so interested with other things that we're not interested in you.

EMILY

No way.

RALPH

No way.

*We cut to interview footage with Ralph...*

RALPH

(012 26:12) I think DJ very much wants to be independent; he just has such a vexed relationship to that concept. // You know, he instinctively senses that the second he's free and independent, something negative will ensue.

*...and then to interview footage with Emily.*

EMILY

(100 23:46) He doesn't realize from our perspective, the reason he's our son is 'cause we fell madly in love with him and couldn't live without him.

## **INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE PERFORMANCE**

YOUNG DJ (Braden)

(053 17:57) . . . silence drew the trees together, wasted freaky actions took over my arms.

*Cast members surround him, chanting "you fear fresh start".*

DJ (as narrator)

Imagine for a minute that you don't have speech and you are removed from your home for reasons no one bothers to tell you – because you can't speak so they assume you can't hear, or think, or feel.

GROWNUP DJ (David)

(052 33:19) Surrounded by areas of resentful, easy-to-get-lost desertion. I grew numb.

**EXT GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA STREET**

*Ralph walks down sidewalk past camera, followed by DJ.*

DJ (as narrator)

When I was barely three, my biological mom got arrested for deserting me and my sister. My sister went to live with our biological father, and I got put in foster care.

*Ralph walks down sidewalk past camera, followed by DJ.*

**INT FLORIDA GUEST HOUSE**

*Ralph enthusiastically hugs Betty Jennings as DJ dances and vocalizes with delight.*

RALPH

(157 02:25) How are you? You look fabulous. Look at you.

BETTY

Oh my God, I'm so old.

RALPH

No, you are not.

*DJ continues to jump up and down with joy.*

RALPH

Do you believe this guy? Do you see how tall he is?

BETTY

I can't stand it.

**INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE PERFORMANCE**

*Emily Sortor, the student playing Betty, is reading a letter.*

COURT-APPOINTED ADVOCATE (Emily Sortor)

(052 08:18) As DJ's court-appointed advocate I believe the hope we have had for Rhonda's success at sobriety is gone. // There is no more time . .

*Her voice fades down as that of Betty Jennings fades up.*

**EXT BETTY JENNINGS' RESIDENCE, GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA**

*Betty reads from a letter she wrote many years ago.*

BETTY

(165 39:14) There is no more time to give. DJ's life is now in the balance. // DJ must be freed by the termination of parental rights of his mother. //

BETTY, cont.

(165 10:12) DJ was placed in a foster home and was subjected to another child in the home that abused him. And because he could not speak // it just was tragedy at its worst.

**INT FLORIDA GUEST HOUSE**

*DJ types a sentence for Betty's*

DJ (via iPad)

(057 43:57) Yes; think years of hurt are greatly gone.

RALPH

Think years of hurt are greatly gone.

## **INT FLORIDA GUEST HOUSE**

*DJ completes his sentence and hits "return".*

DJ (via iPad)

(057 43:57) Yes; think years of hurt are greatly gone.

RALPH

Think years of hurt are greatly gone.

## **INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE PERFORMANCE**

*(053 35:18) Cast members stand in a line, facing away from the audience. With each sentence one or two turns and walks forward toward the audience.*

*Trust that they have feelings;  
Trust...*

## **INT SAVARESE LIVING ROOM**

*(055 2:00) DJ, Emily and Steve Kuusisto sit on the couch; at Steve's feet is Nira, Steve's guide dog.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

(055 28:02) Steve, do you think my dear self is strong enough to move freely in the world?

STEVE KUUSISTO

I think the world will move freely with you. I think that we as people who have physical differences that we, we do change the world...

## **INT GHS AUDITORIUM – PLOTTING HOPE PERFORMANCE**

*(053 35:18) All cast members have come forward; they speak the concluding line of the play:*

*Trust...that they are human.*

STEVE KUUSISTO

...and that the world is full of very good people who like to be part of that. Just like last night your classmates at the school, they were excited to be part of your world.

*The cast members take their bows before an appreciative audience.*

### **INT SAVARESE LIVING ROOM**

*Back to the conversation between Steve and DJ.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

Yes, dear friends help // but hard.

STEVE

(055 32:00) Yeah. Every day we have to make it look easy. You know, I go around smiling a lot, in front of people who aren't disabled – because I want them to see that it's a good way of life; you know. But it's tiring.

### **EXT HERBERT HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY**

*Establishing shot. Title reads, "Herbert Hoover Presidential Library: Uncommon Student Award competition."*

### **INT HERBERT HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AUDITORIUM**

*DJ is delivering a speech in front of a good-sized audience.*

DJ (via laptop)

(181 24:20) As I deserted fear and learned to read and write, I greatly felt empowered. I was able to break the barriers and be included as a real student.

### **INT SAVARESE LIVING ROOM, GRINNELL, IA**

*DJ and Emily are looking over the visual aids by which DJ gradually gained the use of language.*

EMILY

Remember, Dee; in Mrs. Johnson's kindergarten class...

DJ (as narrator)

In my childhood cameras were // translators. Mom and Dad took pictures of everything; fun activities, places, people. They used the photos to teach me that words have meaning, and not just melody.

*The camera moves slowly over more visual aids.*

DJ (as narrator) (cont)

I freely pointed at answer banks to show my teachers what I knew. In fourth grade, everything clicked: sounds suddenly had meaning, and the words on the page stood in an orderly row.

## **INT HERBERT HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AUDITORIUM**

*DJ is still speaking in front of the audience.*

DJ (via laptop)

(181 30:53) My project is a lifelong mission. By showing kids that fresh-thinking, real autists exist, I hope to encourage them to freely read and write.

## **INT GRINNELL HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE CLASS**

*Mr. Rudolph is wrapping up class as the bell rings.*

MR. RUDOLPH

(096 59:31) ...and one essay where you'll have several choices. Okay? You'll only have to do one ten-point essay.

DJ (as narrator)

Years of taking writing from Mr. Rudolph have been life-changing. He // sees what I'm trying to do...

**INT MR RUDOLPH'S CLASSROOM, GRINNELL HIGH SCHOOL**

*DJ sits with Emily as he begins a conversation with Mr. Rudolph.*

DJ (as narrator)

...and helps me make meaning in my own way rather than follow some formula to sound like everyone else.

DJ (via Dynavox)

(102 03:58) Is it scary being a dear man and not greeting the world mean?

MR. RUDOLPH

// (102 05:45) Sensing my kindness I really appreciate 'cause // I think we're similar in that way. // How do you go about being hopeful and being as kind as you are, DJ?

DJ (via Dynavox)

(102 09:32) Yes, I hold dear people like you in my heart.

MR. RUDOLPH

See how kind you are? That makes me feel really good. Thank you.

DJ (via Dynavox)

(102 11:13) Yes, you free my dear self by feeling free to express your feelings.

MR. RUDOLPH

Isn't that interesting how that works, you know? When one person is, kind of opens up, the other one tends to be more willing to. You've got so much, DJ, to offer and to open up and I'm looking forward to reading your writings and everything.

*Emily rubs DJ's back.*

EMILY

(102 12:30) It's okay.

*DJ reaches toward Emily repeatedly.*

EMILY

(102 14:16) Go ahead. DeeJ, DeeJ, come on, come on. You don't have to be tough. Nobody's asking you to prove yourself.

MR. RUDOLPH

Deej, I'd like to hear what you have to say.

*DJ continues to reach toward Emily.*

EMILY

(102 16:02) // Old habits, old habits. // Stop. It's rude, it's not useful. Stop.

MR. RUDOLPH

(102 19:09) DJ, do you have some other questions for me?

EMILY

Okay? Do you have other questions? Do you have other questions? Hey, stop, it's okay.

ROB

(102 22:12) Do we want to take a ten-minute break or something, and then decide whether we want to continue? I think maybe we could do that.

MR. RUDOLPH

Yep.

*Mr. Rudolph and Emily rise from chairs; Emily leaves room, leaving DJ sitting alone on his chair.*

DJ (as narrator)

I am sad that I ruined the interview. It is very hard to watch the footage. When I'm reaching aggressively for Mom, I am not seeing

her. Rob and Mr. Rudolph disappear shortly after my arms take over. My sense of time leaves me. Mom slides into my birth mom.

*Emily reenters the room, goes to DJ and rubs his shoulders.*

DJ (as narrator, cont.)

Instead of Mr. Rudolph and Mom, I see scary people who want sex. I am very afraid.

DJ (as narrator)

You might ask, how could these very different experiences be connected? The connection is feeling. But one (Mr. Rudolph) is happy; the other is dreadful. Both are overwhelming.

\*\*\*\*\*

***POEM: "ABANDONED AT THREE"***

Mother of the twelve-pack, mother, did you miss me?  
Your genes place their rough hands on my face; they kiss me.

(as you never did), they cry, they tousle my hair.  
Giving thanks to god, they say, "It's you! You as *me!*"

The prodigal son has returned, spitting image  
Of a *Lucky Strike* whore—snarling, wistful me,  
who once thought anger was a kind of redemption,  
Its obsidian aftermath a twisted me,

a heart as black and buried as a Pompeian's.  
"It's me! Me as *you!*" I say to the mirror's me,

to the you lost in love's reflection. You were poor,  
alcoholic. You sold your body in Kissimmee,

Florida. Thrice you tried to drown me in the bath;  
Thrice you stopped yourself. O Rhonda. O David James.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **EXT WALLOON LAKE / INT GRANDY AND BOP'S COTTAGE**

*Close-up of DJ typing, and pressing play. As we hear the output, we frame the face of Grandy, DJ's maternal grandmother.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

You estimated me as kind and heartfelt. How did you know?

*Grandy listens to DJ's question, then replies. As she does, we see old family footage of DJ as a young child.*

GRANDY

Because you had a wonderful smile; and very beautiful eyes that looked right into mine. And you just won my heart.

*Bop joins the conversation.*

BOP

(033 18:59) // you let me actually hug you and tickle you and, uh, that was the way we related to each other.

DJ (as narrator)

Grandy and Bop got me from the very beginning.

## **EXT WALLOON LAKE DOCK**

*Bop is busy cranking his boat down into the water, with Emily's help.*

DJ (as narrator) (cont)

They greeted me as their grandson right away and easy breathed even if I got fearful.

*DJ is in the water, making lazy circles on the innertube, waiting for his ride to start.*

DJ (as narrator) (cont.)

I hope they know that they are my reward for going through foster care. If fresh start deserts me, I hold out hope they'd go find me.

*Bop tows DJ around the lake at high speed. The sun glistens in the water around him.*

GRANDY

(031 33:44) DeeJ, if I could ever say one thing to you, it would be that you have a family that loves you very very much and we would never desert you, we would never leave you on your own-

*The ride is over; with Emily's urging, DJ jumps off the innertube and into the water.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

(033 28:54) How should I fold up fear and go to college individually?

BOP

You're just gonna grow into it; // the great thing is, I've just seen in the last year how much more independent you are.

*Emily and others bring the boating gear up from the dock; DJ stands on the dock, silhouetted against the sky, as Bop secures the boat.*

GRANDY

(031 26:33) // but only you can do it, DeeJ. Nobody can do it for you.

## **EXT CORNELL COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*Establishing shot.*

## **INT CORNELL COLLEGE DORMITORY**

*We follow DJ as he walks down a hallway and into a room where Emily and a campus tour guide are standing.*

EMILY

(169 10:02) So here's what a dorm room would look like.

## CORNELL TOUR GUIDE

And all of our dorms look very different. // This is just one of them.

### **INT CORNELL COLLEGE ACCOMMODATIONS OFFICE**

*DJ and Emily sit in office with woman.*

CORNELL ACCOMMODATIONS OFFICER

(168 17:53) So would Mom be attending classes, or would you have a different assistant or anyone helping you? Or would you be typing on your own at that point?

*DJ types response.*

DJ (via laptop)

(168 19:06) Typing. On my own.

CORNELL ACCOMMODATIONS OFFICER

That'll be fun, get rid of Mom!

### **INT GRINNELL COLLEGE ACCOMMODATIONS OFFICE**

*DJ and his parents meet with the Grinnell accommodations officer.*

DJ (via laptop)

Yes, do you currently have students who type to communicate instead of speaking?

GRINNELL ACCOMMODATIONS OFFICER

We do not, and there will be a learning curve....

### **EXT HOBART & WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGE CAMPUSES – TOUR**

*Emily and DJ ride in golf cart with tour guide.*

## HOBART TOUR GUIDE

(138 21:51) So these are some more dormitories that you could live in.

*DJ types out a question on his iPad.*

DJ (via iPad)

(138 25:15) Yes, do you look at me as weird or equal?

## HOBART TOUR GUIDE

Absolutely equal. Everybody has different things about them.

## **EXT OBERLIN COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*(Photomontage ensues of pretty Oberlin campus and town.)*

DJ (as Narrator)

I hope to greet Oberlin College as a first-year student. // I loved the golden campus. The buildings and the people welcomed me. Dare I say I felt respected?

## **EXT GRINNELL HIGH SCHOOL**

*Establishing shot.*

## **INT GRINNELL HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY**

*The bell rings and students begin pouring into the hallway.*

## **INT GHS GUIDANCE COUNSELORS' OFFICE**

*DJ and Emily sit with Mr. Keller, DJ's guidance counselor)*

MR KELLER (DJ's guidance counselor)

(196 04:10) Here's your class rank. You're tenth in your class out of 127, and that's very good, // Now, the other part. Is Oberlin the

only place that you're looking at right now? And you can give me a yes or a no on that.

*DJ answers by pointing to an answer on Mr. Keller's pad.*

MR KELLER

Yes, okay. Here's what I'm going to suggest, okay, as your counselor, is that you look at more than one // because there's no guarantee that you're necessarily going to get into Oberlin.

### **OBERLIN COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*We see the landscape and buildings of the college as we hear DJ's narration.*

DJ (as narrator)

I know that I need to apply to more than one school, but my heart is set on Oberlin. The college has a long history of inclusion, having accepted both the first female student and the first female student of color. I want to be its first nonspeaking Autistic.

### **EXT GRAMMY'S APARTMENT BUILDING, WASHINGTON, DC**

*Establishing shot of Grammy's residence. Title reads: "Residence of ~~Sheila King~~ / DJ's Paternal Grandmother / Washington, DC."*

### **INT GRAMMY'S APARTMENT, WASHINGTON, DC**

*Emily and DJ sit on sofa in DJ's paternal grandmother's apartment; Seth stands in front of them.*

EMILY

(077 11:40) // Here are some things you might want to text to Mom or to Dad, uh, point to one and Seth can help you //

DJ (as narrator)

I'm planning a trip from Washington DC to Boston with my cousin, Seth. I need to practice being out in the world without my mom and dad.

EMILY

Sometimes you guys just like to talk about life; so here might be...

*Emily's words fade out as DJ's words are heard.*

DJ (as narrator)

I want to see the Lincoln Memorial. I love reading about the quest for civil rights. // black people have taught disabled people so much.

*Emily and DJ stand; Emily is ready to leave.*

EMILY

(070 17:46) All right. Have fun.

DJ (as narrator)

I look calm, but I'm feeling like a really breathing hard kid.

EMILY

If you spot Obama, text me. Okay? If you have lunch with him, call me.

*DJ leans over to kiss Emily.*

DJ (as narrator)

Bold Mom is sad.

*Emily goes out door...*

## **INT WASHINGTON DC METRO STATION**

*A train rushes into the station.*

## **INT WASHINGTON DC METRO TRAIN**

*DJ & Seth are seated on Metro train; DJ voices sounds and looks out window.*

SETH

(071 12:31) Checking yourself out? You look pretty good.

*The train begins to move. DJ voices sounds.*

DJ (as narrator)

Seth treats me like a brother. He calms me with wordless encouragement.

*DJ places his hand on Seth's hand.*

DJ (as narrator)

I have to work so hard to hold reasonable self in control that I can't afford to lose myself in the interesting sounds and beckoning sights.

#### **INT WASHINGTON DC METRO STATION ESCALATOR**

*Seth helps DJ gain his footing as they ride up the escalator.*

SETH

Oop; you wanna stand; right now, you're on – yeah, there you go.

*DJ motions to Seth impatiently.*

SETH

We're going. Yeah, we are. We just gotta wait for a minute.

#### **EXT WASHINGTON DC DOWNTOWN STREETS**

*DJ and Seth emerge onto the street.*

SETH

Let's try to figure this out, DeeJ.

*DJ and Seth walk down sidewalk, past federal buildings.*

DJ (as narrator)

I ease into the rhythm of the city.

SETH

Yup, you want me to go ahead? Okay.

DJ (as narrator)

Seth shows me what to do and how to do it. In front of me, he guides me hidden. No one knows that I'm watching him.

SETH

(071 28:16) Let's cross here, DeeJ.

#### **EXT WASHINGTON MALL – WASHINGTON MONUMENT**

*DJ follows Seth along pathway outside monument.*

DJ (as narrator)

When I joyfully see the Washington Monument, all I feel is proud that Mom and Dad aren't here. The fresh air sings to my lungs.

#### **EXT WASHINGTON MALL – REFLECTING POOL AREA**

SETH

(071 38:52) You're okay. We're almost there; we're gonna keep...

*DJ stops Seth and gestures.*

SETH

(071 39:02) I hear you, DeeJ. But you know what? That's just an urge, right? Okay?

*Seth sits down on a park bench; DJ follows. Seth holds out notebook with choices toward DJ.*

SETH

(071 43:54) Any of these, DeeJ?

*Seth shows potential answers in notebook to DJ.*

SETH

You need to get a drink? Okay.

DJ gestures.

SETH

(071) 44:30) And you need to be encouraged? Yeah. We can do that. You're doing a great job today. We've had a fantastic time so far. // (071 49:03) You know what, DeeJ? I think you're just getting a little tired, maybe a little nervous, okay? So we're gonna go get a drink. All right? And then we'll go check out the Lincoln Memorial. Okay?

## **EXT/INT WASHINGTON MALL – LINCOLN MEMORIAL**

*DJ climbs the steps of Lincoln Memorial slowly, at times holding the rail. Then, together, DJ and Seth enter the Lincoln Memorial.*

SETH

(072 05:11) you're good, bud; nicely done. // (072 05:15) So we'll walk around here and check this out for a little bit. Get to stand in the shade too. Look at that.

*Seth points to statue of Lincoln.*

DJ (as narrator)

I greet the Lincoln Memorial free. I look at holy loving Lincoln and give myself the courage I need to free my people. (pause) I love this folding up fear memorial. // I hold my head high in greatness.

*Seth shows notebook to help with question/answer.*

SETH

(072 11:05) Shall we stay here for another minute or two, or shall we start walking back?

*DJ points to notebook.*

SETH

Stay here? Okay. We can hang out here for as long as you want, DJ.

*DJ leans to side and touches base of statue, He stands again, and drinks it all in – the people, the statue, the space.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**PROSE POEM: “UNDERGROUND ALPHABET”**

A moves through the trees at night; B covers her face; C steals a canoe on the riverbank; D hides in a barn; E makes a run for it when cornered; F yells, “Freedom!” at the top of her lungs; G sobs when a fellow slave is caught; H fights off hunger; I sits in a classroom at Oberlin College, recalling her parents, Emiline Eliza and Henry Irving. They learned to read, she thinks, with their feet: striding frantically across the page. Called to the blackboard, Mary Jane Patterson with perfect penmanship writes the word future. Outside it’s winter. Prejudice falls from the sky, blankets everything.

\*\*\*\*\*

**INT SAVARESE FAMILY ROOM**

*Through the windows, we see a snow-covered landscape and a setting sun. A title reads, “End of January”.*

**INT SAVARESE LIVING ROOM**

*Emily and Ralph walk from hallway into living room.*

EMILY

(229 15:51) DeeJ, it looks like something came from Oberlin.

RALPH

(17:20) Oh my goodness. (pause) Holy moley This is ...

EMILY (reading from letter)

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted to Oberlin College's class of 2015.

*DJ claps in response.*

EMILY (reading from letter)

We saw in you the kind of person who will excel at Oberlin, someone who is academically and socially engaged, someone curious about life and someone ready to take intellectual risks to better yourself and the world. Your accomplishments, your passion, and your commitment to achievement make you a perfect fit for Oberlin.

*DJ vocalizes with excitement; he joins Emily on sofa; Ralph sits on chair.*

RALPH

(19:05) Yes, yes, you worked so hard, man.

*DJ joins Emily on sofa; Ralph sits on chair.*

RALPH

You got in early to one of the best schools in the United States. It's so exciting. So exciting.

*DJ begins to type on iPad.*

EMILY

You're good.

DJ (via iPad)

(20:35) Yes, I'm hopeful that I can greet them free.

RALPH

Of course. // (24:05) Enjoy this.

*DJ claps.*

RALPH

Yes, let the worry about how we're going to make all of this possible come later. Right now, celebrate. Because you know what? You deserve it. *(pause)* // What are you thinking about right now?

EMILY

Or what are you reliving?

DJ (as narrator)

Most college students desert their parents when they go to college. Nights are spent living in the dorm.

RALPH

(229 27:46) It's so exciting, man. Right? // no reason to get anxious...

DJ (as narrator)

Asking your Mom to come ~~tediously~~ devote herself to supporting your ~~hopeful~~ ~~bold~~ dream isn't easy, but no assistive device can do what she does.

*DJ types on iPad.*

EMILY

(229 29:28) That would be great.

DJ (via iPad)

Yes, might easy breathe now.

EMILY and RALPH

Yeah...yeah.

## **INT GHS GYM – COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY**

*Graduates' procession into the gym is in progress. Ralph, Grammy, Bop and Grandy look toward the entrance in anticipation.*

*DJ appears, walks toward the seating area, then down a row of chairs to his seat. The procession ends, to applause; Mr. Seney begins to announce the graduates.*

MR. SENEY (via microphone)

Stacey Chandler Columbo.

*(267 02:54) DJ leans over to see Ralph and Emily and claps.*

RALPH

*(267 05:36) Stop. Stop. Come on; help out.*

*Mr. Seney continues to call names.*

MR. SENEY (via microphone)

*(267 18:07) Jeanne Weiss.*

*Focus is on DJ as he stands in line approaching the stage.*

*We see Bop, Grandy and Grammuy in audience; then Emily and Ralph as they gesture to DJ.*

RALPH

Yeah, go, go, go.

MR. SENEY (via microphone)

*(267 18:50) David James Savarese.*

*Emily and Ralph clap and cheer joyfully. DJ hesitates onstage, looking out toward audience.*

RALPH

Go, go, go. Keep going.

EMILY

Come on, keep going, David.

*DJ slowly moves past others onstage, then descends stairs and returns to seat; Ralph hugs Emily. (20:48)*

## **EXT GRINNELL CITY STREETS**

*DJ rides his bike down the sidewalk; Emily walks ahead of him.*

DJ (as narrator)

I decided to take a year off between high school and college // before I hold myself in control on my own.

EMILY

(044 03:55) We sat down and kinda talked about that and said, you know, the truth of the matter is its this life-learning stuff that you need; you can do the academics.

## **EXT GRINNELL COLLEGE CAMPUS – BIKE RIDE**

*Dj and Emily arrive at the campus. A young woman rides her motorized chair across the street to join DJ and Emily.*

EMILY

(300 42:42) Look who's here. You got out early! Deej!

JEN

Hi.

*Jen pulls up next to Emily.*

EMILY

Deej, how about that? Good timing, man.

DJ (as narrator)

(397 02:50) Jen and I met for the first time in the student center. Mom and Dad saw this meeting as a creative way to cease my anxiety by freely showing me that there were easy breathing students who were breaking barriers just like me.

*Jen rolls up and pivots around so she's facing DJ. A student passing by says "Hi, Jen". Jen replies.*

## EXT SAVARESE HOUSE

*Establishing shot – twilight. Title says “Just before Christmas”.*

## INT SAVARESE LIVING ROOM

*Darlene and Jen arrive.*

EMILY

How do you think, is this okay? Do you want the pillow, or do you want the pillow gone?

DJ (as narrator)

When I see Jen, I see her beautiful smile and keen intelligence. Others see her cerebral palsy.

*Emily sits on sofa. DJ is standing, watching Jen.*

EMILY

(296 01:17) // Why don't you bring Jen her present over?

*Darlene helps Jen open her gift.*

DARLENE

It's beautiful.

DJ (as narrator)

The college she wanted to attend in Georgia wouldn't allow her to live in the dorm. So she moved to Iowa and went to Grinnell.

*Emily helps DJ unwrap a large, framed object.*

EMILY

(05:18) // Look at that, DeeJ.

*It's a collection of DJ's favorite phrases in various fonts. DJ points to the word “hopeful”.*

EMILY

(06:56) Hopeful, yeah. // Molding myself free, yeah.  
These do sound familiar.

JEN

(296 07:30) // Do you like it?

DARLENE (repeating Jen's words)

(296 07:38) Do you like it?

EMILY

Do you like it? Yeah. Fabulous. // (296 10:39) (to DJ) Do you  
want me to go when you tell her? Do you want me to go or you  
want me to stay? Go? Okay. // (12:14) Why don't you share with  
her what you ...

*Emily leaves the room. Jen waits, curious. DJ presses a button on his laptop.*

DJ (via laptop)

(296 12:18) Yes, yes, breaking the barriers uses hope. Yes, yes,  
jolts home to be you and me. Yes, holding you in my mind makes  
me smile.

*Jen voices words.*

JEN

Thank you, Deej. (pause) Thank you.

## **EXT SAVARESE HOUSE – MIDWINTER**

*There is no snow on the ground; but a slight fog accompanies bare trees. The U-Haul truck is poised in the alley.*

## **INT SAVARESE HOUSE – DJ'S BEDROOM**

*DJ and Emily are packing up DJ's belongings to take to Oberlin. DJ is excited.*

EMILY

(299 38:38) DeeJ, you gotta breathe. Listen to me. You gotta breathe. Calm yourself down.

*Emily holds up paper for DJ to do breathing technique.*

EMILY

Better.

*Emily shows items to DJ in packing process.*

DJ (as narrator)

It is the end of January. Mom and I are moving to Oberlin six months early as I need to get familiar with the campus and town.

*DJ is animated and voices sounds. DJ and Emily go through clothes in closet and dresser.*

EMILY

(36:33) They're too small. You just sort of keep them for sentimental reasons. // (41:59) This one's sort of ragged. Could we put that one in the closet? You might need it? Okay. // (36:52) // (42:11) // We've got too much stuff going. Are you really going to wear that? Can it stay? You need to take it?

## **INT/EXT TRAMPOLINE HOUSE**

*(303 17:53) Ralph and Emily are wrestling with a huge couch, trying to load it into a U-Haul truck.*

RALPH

(303 17:55) No, I don't want you to go up too high; you don't need to do that! Go forward.

*DJ watches the proceedings from inside the tramp house pensively.*

EMILY

Ralph, relax. Relax, okay?

## **EXT GRINNELL COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*Jen moves down the sidewalk in her chair. DJ follows Jen. Bringing up the rear are Emily and Darlene.*

*Jen and DJ pause; as Jen voices words to DJ, they appear on the screen.*

Jen

I really love you and I will miss you a lot.

*Then cut to DJ, alone on the sidewalk, watching as Jen leaves with her mother; then, DJ follows Emily.*

## **EXT HIGHWAY TO OBERLIN**

*The U-Haul truck pulls away from the house, followed by Emily in the family Subaru.*

*The U-Haul truck and the family Subaru head down the highway, past the foggy Iowa countryside.*

DJ (as narrator)

Moving to a new place is really scary. I dread confronting people who misunderstand me. I want to live where I feel safe, and free to be myself.

## **EXT OHIO TURNPIKE REST AREA**

*Moving truck pulls into rest area. Fade to...*

## **EXT / INT OBERLIN TOWNHOUSE**

EMILY

(307 01:53) We're here, guy. What do you think?

RALPH

Are you going to help?

DJ (as narrator)

The townhouse in Oberlin looks sadly empty. I am afraid that Mom and Dad are going to leave me on my own.

*Ralph hugs DJ.*

RALPH

Squeeze in. Squeeze in. Deep breath. Look at me. Look at me. Look at me. Modulation. I'm serious. I'm serious. *(DJ takes a breath)* Yes, that's it.

*(307 37:22) Ralph and Emily carry items from the truck to the townhouse.*

DJ (as narrator)

As the familiar furniture appears, I don't feel alone anymore.

*DJ stands on the staircase, then in his new room, watching.*

## **INT OBERLIN TOWNHOUSE – EVENING**

*(310 02:12) DJ and Emily are seated on sofa together; Ralph sits on facing chair; DJ begins typing.*

DJ (via iPad)

Yes, heartfelt Dad, I love you.

RALPH

Deej, Dad loves you. Deej, hey, look at me, buddy. I'm really gonna miss you // I'm going to see you a lot, we're going to iChat.

DJ (via iPad)

*(08:49) Yes, bold but dear Mom fears missing you.*

RALPH

I know, it's tough on your Mom and your Dad. It's really tough on your Mom and your Dad. But look, look at me. // (09:08) // hey, every time somebody said something wasn't possible you, me and mom put our heads together and we imaginatively thought about, let's see what we can do.

DJ (via iPad)

(19:08) Yes, molding free.

RALPH

Yeah, right.

#### **EXT SIDEWALK – OBERLIN CAMPUS**

*Emily walks along a tree-lined street in Oberlin. DJ follows, fifty feet behind.*

DJ (as narrator)

I'm living in uncharted territory. Mom and Dad have sold the house in Grinnell and Dad has accepted a fellowship at Duke University in North Carolina.

*On another sidewalk, Emily walks as DJ follows slowly on his bicycle.*

EMILY

(315 02:26) How are your tires; holding steady? Yeah?

*On another sidewalk, Emily walks as DJ follows slowly on his bicycle.*

DJ (as narrator)

I take in a perpetual blizzard of detail, It exhausts me. *(pause)* I'm surrounded by people who don't know anything about me...

EMILY

(315 13:28) Are the shadows confusing you?

DJ (as narrator)

...and my joking body feeds them fodder.

*Emily walks on. DJ stops, gets off his bike and waits, not sure what to do next.*

### **INT TOWNHOUSE LIVING ROOM**

*Dobromir sits and talks to DJ, who is standing nearby.*

DOBROMIR

(335 45:45) You want me to get up?

DJ (as narrator)

Dobromir is a fourth year (student) at Hiram College. He cares so much about my journey. // I hired him immediately.

### **EXT OBERLIN STREETS NEAR CAMPUS (MONTAGE)**

*Dobromir and DJ walk through park and residential streets.*

DJ (as narrator)

(393 03:10) // I am grateful to see someone other than mom.

### **INT SAVARESE TOWNHOUSE – LIVING ROOM**

*Emily and DJ welcome visitors: Grandy and Bop.*

GRANDY

(10:24) Hello! Hey, Mr. DeeJ, how are ya? // (10:57) Yeah, it's good to see you. Whoa!

EMILY

(12:23) // say, hey you guys! Thanks for coming to visit me in Oberlin, right?

## **EXT OBERLIN CAMPUS AND STREETS**

*DJ, Emily and Bop walk down sidewalk.*

EMILY

(332 28:09) Are you on campus with your Bop? Yes?

BOP

We are on campus!

## **EXT OBERLIN CAMPUS AND STREETS – DJ’s DORM**

*We see a sign, “Price House”, with DJ’s dorm in the background.*

EMILY

(35:56) If, and or when DeeJ decided that he wanted to live in the dorm, that's an apartment. He could live right there.

DJ (as narrator)

The dorm I will break barriers in calls to me, ~~and I very much love it.~~

## **EXT OBERLIN CAMPUS AND STREETS**

*DJ, Emily and Bop stand together on the sidewalk.*

EMILY

(332 51:04) Honey, honey, honey, listen, okay, you're having a panic attack. Breathe. breathe in, // come on.

DJ (as narrator)

I feel so much hope about the dorm that the sassy voices inside my head start taunting me, saying: “No nonspeaking autistic has ever lived like a typical college student.”

*The camera lurches back into motion.*

EMILY

(332 53:38) Hey; listen to me. Nobody's saying you have to live anywhere. Okay?

*DJ vocalizes loudly.*

EMILY

(01:01:40) DJ! Get a hold of yourself! Right now!

*Emily and DJ walk down the sidewalk toward the camera; Bop follows.*

EMILY

No, listen to me! Get a hold of yourself, right now! Okay? Your name is DJ Savarese; you are twenty years old. You are on a walk, in a neighborhood. You have perhaps lost track of your body; you are not in danger.

*The walk continues; DJ follows Emily and Bop at considerable distance.*

DJ (as narrator)

As college nears, I hold mom hostage more and more. I care so much about mom and dad and I'm sad to be stressing them out.

## **EXT OBERLIN COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*(383 05:08) We see a series of shots of campus architecture and life. Title says, "August...just before classes begin". We hear Rob's voice, reading iChat exchange with DJ. Highlights from the exchange appear as titles on the screen.*

ROB

(385 00:19) Can we talk about some other filming opportunities? Such as walking across campus, or in some kind of orientation session.

DJ (via Dynavox)

Yes. Not sure we agreed to so much filming at Oberlin.

ROB

(01:20) But do you think you might hold open the possibility of doing something modest along those lines? I'm trying to think of ways to say, this is the beginning of a new chapter in DJ's life.

DJ (via Dynavox)

Yes, reassessed hopeful and fearless by you, but I thought you said few brief moments was all at Oberlin.

*Title reads: DJ offline. And then, another title reads: "Deej and Rob decide to suspend filming indefinitely."*

### **EXT WALLOON LAKE**

*(032 29:24) We are back at the lake and Bop and Grandy's cottage. DJ stands in silhouette on the dock; Bop secures gear nearby.*

DJ (via Dynavox)

(397 11:10) Dear Grandy and Bop: Sad to be writing you. I hoped you might nestle in my must-be-positive fresh-thinking heart. Could you e-mail me some of your hopeful memories of me?

BOP

(57:03) DJ, when I think of you, I see you standing at the end of the dock in silhouette against the early evening sunset. That image has always seemed to portray to me your love for this place and for Grandy and me. You never miss a chance to tell us how much we mean to you. Few people do that. Breathe easily, dear grandson, and remember that a smile cures many ills.

### **EXT DOWNTOWN OBERLIN**

*(357 40:10) Establishing shot of downtown, with Christmas decorations hanging from lamp posts.*

DJ (as narrator)

It is December; nearly the end of my first semester.

## **EXT PARK NEAR OBERLIN COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*(362 48:01) Dobromir exits car; DJ follows.*

DJ (as narrator)

I'm so glad to be at Oberlin. The workload has been doled out at a phenomenal rate. But I love encountering new ideas.

*Backpack on, DJ exits the back of the car and follows Dobromir toward campus.*

DJ (as narrator)

I'm not in the dorm overnight yet, but I do homework there; and meet friends. The idea of living in the dorm is scary; because it creates hope that I can stay here on my own.

## **INT OBERLIN COLLEGE DISABILITY SEMINAR**

*DJ and his classmates listen attentively to Professor Elizabeth Hamilton.*

PROFESSOR HAMILTON

358 [00:06:51.06] // How much did you already know about invisible or chronic disability...

DJ (narration)

I love my first-year seminar on disability. At first I wasn't sure I wanted to take it. Being visibly disabled in college is hard enough. Why call attention to it?

PROFESSOR HAMILTON

358 [00:06:21.20] And Kat has graciously said no question is off-limits today // So thank you in // [00:06:49.15]

DJ (narration)

The professor understands the obstacles to inclusion, taking extra care to get me discussion questions ahead of time.

*Kat, a student seated next to Professor Hamilton, takes up the conversation.*

KAT (DJ's classmate)

358 [00:13:06.25] // [00:11:57.12] // my pain is just pain straight up for no good reason. // [00:12:25.04]

*Kat continues as DJ and his classmates listen.*

KAT (DJ's classmate)

358 [00:15:41.28] // I've gone through a revolving door of doctors and pain pills and // (16:45) There's not really anything besides narcotics, which ultimately make you worse.

*Professor Hamilton calls on DJ.*

PROFESSOR HAMILTON

358 [00:09:13.02] // DJ, did you want to respond to that?

DJ (in-class response)

361 (29:36) I do understand Kat. Some of my disability's very visible like my not speaking, but my movement and breathing disabilities drive my anxiety, and these most important aspects are not so visible. [00:20:30.05] There's nothing more hopeless than working to exhaustion and being told you're not working hard enough.

KAT (DJ's classmate)

358 [00:22:21.09] I have run into a lot of disbelief, and that is one of the more sad and frustrating parts of my life. // [00:22:44.15] // so for me, having diagnoses is a great comfort.

*As the class comes to a close, Professor Hamilton wraps things up.*

PROFESSOR HAMILTON

(358 50:18) Join me in thanking Kat for this really... (applause).  
[00:50:24.19] // Thanks a lot; have a good rest of the day.

*Jesse, one of the class' participants huddles briefly with DJ and Dobromir, making plans.*

DJ (narration)

This course has given me fresh-thinking allies who understand that autism is so much more than // what I need help with.

*As DJ and Dobromir gather their things, another student walks up.*

STUDENT

That was a good discussion, I thought.

*(DJ is animated).*

DOBROMIR (to DJ)

Did you think it was a good discussion? *(pause)* Did you think it was a good discussion today?

*DJ nods.*

DOBROMIR

Yeah; me, too.

## **INT OBERLIN SWIMMING POOL LOBBY AND LOCKER AREA**

*(380 38:51 ) DJ and Emily enter from outside and walk through toward the pool.*

EMILY (to desk attendant)

*(380 38:46)* Do you need to see his ID or you remember...Okay?  
Thanks.

EMILY (v.o.)

*(356 19:20)* One thing that definitely caught all three of us by surprise was just what a monumental life change it is not to be living as a nuclear family under the same roof.

## **INT OBERLIN SWIMMING POOL**

*Goggles in place, DJ jumps into the pool and begins to swim laps.*

EMILY (v.o., cont)

(355 45:30) My mom said, you do realize that every big thing in DJ's life has changed; and you are the only thing that has not changed. // She said, really, are you that surprised that he's holding onto you // (375 15:25) But I'm really stressed out, and I'm really exhausted....

## **INT OBERLIN DINING HALL**

*(381 06:06) DJ unzips his jacket and heads for the food service . Emily follows.*

DJ (as narrator)

Fixated on Mom's fatigue, Rob conspires to make me feel guilty. He thinks that for the film to be "honest," he needs to reveal the toll my dream is taking on my parents.

*Emily stands with DJ, helping him focus and make selections.*

EMILY (to DJ)

You want me to stay here?

DJ (as narrator) (cont)

My dad once said, "You have as much right to dream as anyone. Don't apologize for the additional effort required."

*DJ, carrying his tray, makes his way to an empty seat in the dining room.*

DJ (as narrator) (cont)

I'm proud of myself. I'm able to eat in a cafeteria for the first time since 4<sup>th</sup> grade. If I come early, few people are here, and the // noise is at a minimum.

## **EXT OBERLIN COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*DJ and Duncan, an aide, walk through snowstorm.*

DJ (as narrator)

(398 15:53) I have proven that I can do the work. And my

professors and my peers welcome what I have to say. // (393 13:19) I am able to use my poetry to gain control over my emotions, and say all the terrifying things I know.

*DJ and Duncan, an aide, continue to walk across campus through the snow.*

DJ (as narrator) (cont.)

But I still feel exposed to the gawking of strangers.

### **EXT OBERLIN COLLEGE DORMITORY**

*(369 23:55) Establishing shot. Title reads "Oberlin College Dormitory".*

EMILY (to DJ

(370 00:18) Ready for bed? Okay.

### **INT DJ'S DORM APARTMENT – OBERLIN, OH**

*(370 02:09) With Emily's help, DJ is getting ready to go to bed. Emily starts up DJ's sound machine and organizes things in the kitchen.*

EMILY (v.o.)

(366 1:02:13) // Since we got back on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, // DeeJ has just sort of taken off. And we said, you know, it would be good to // (1:02:34) just for a week explore what it would be like to live in the dorm // and // he was like, yeah, okay; I'll do that.

*DJ climbs into bed and signs to Emily.*

EMILY

(370 13:44) Love ya, guy. Nestling? Okay. Love ya.

*Emily flips off the lights.*

### **INT DJ'S DORM APARTMENT – LIVING ROOM**

*Emily welcomes Andrew, DJ's night aide. Emily prepares to leave.*

EMILY (whispering)

(370 52:28) Thanks a lot. I hope we're not adding to your fatigue.

ANDREW

Don't worry about it. Please.

EMILY

Call if for some reason he doesn't settle down 'cause you do need to sleep.

**EXT DJ'S DORM APARTMENT COMPLEX**

*(370 54:10) Emily exits the dorm.*

**INT DJ'S DORM APARTMENT – LIVING ROOM**

*Andrew prepares to sleep on the day bed.*

**EXT DJ'S DORM APARTMENT COMPLEX**

*Emily drives off into the night. Fade down, then up on:*

**EXT DJ's DORM COMPLEX**

*(369 28:13) It's now daylight. Onscreen title says "The next morning..."*

**INT DJ'S DORM APARTMENT – BEDROOM**

*(372 31:30) DJ sits up in bed, awake and apparently relaxed.*

DJ (as narrator) (cont)

I am grateful to be exactly where I am today. I'm feeling more respected now.

**INT DJ's DORM LOBBY**

*(382 39:54) DJ and Duncan walk down the hall toward DJ's room.*

**INT DJ's DORM LIVING ROOM**

*(382 43:35) DJ and Duncan sit on the couch, working.*

DJ (as narrator) (cont)

Old fear fades away, and new friends learn to ignore my gestures...

DUNCAN

Can you tell me with the letter board?

DJ (as narrator) (cont)

...honoring the intelligent person inside.

*DJ uses a pencil to point without assistance to individual letters on a letter board.*

**EXT COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*DJ and Duncan head across campus.*

DJ (as narrator)

I still care so much about the kids whom poverty and false assumptions leave outside the door.

**INT FLORIDA GUEST HOUSE**

*DJ sits with Julia and Lisa, two of his kindergarten classmates, as they look through a scrapbook and reminisce.*

JULIA

I miss kindergarten!

DJ (as narrator)

When I greeted the world in kindergarten, joyful kids surrounded me.

**INT FLORIDA PLAY CENTER – DJ AS A CHILD**

*(Early DJ 01 12:19) DJ, with help from his dad, opens birthday presents, surrounded by other children.*

DJ (as narrator, cont.)

I feel immense pride, and guilt, for saving myself while others get stored away and forgotten.

*DJ swings high up, near the ceiling, on a trapeze as his friends and his parents cheer.*

DJ (as narrator, cont.)

Being included is every kid's right. It shouldn't be a lottery.

*The children shout, "Happy birthday, DJ!"*

\*\*\*\*\*

**POEM: "RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT"**

Round and round and round  
they roll, voices blurred  
by the pulsating beat  
and metallic whir  
of wheels on wood.

My fellow kindergartners—  
curly-haired Nikki  
and half-grinning Julia,  
Austin in his baseball cap,  
and Lisa of the trampoline.  
"Deeeej," they squeal,  
a kind of moving sun, hands joined, reaching,  
stretching, hoping to add me  
to their ray.

They don't see autism yet,

don't know that I've been "included."  
1 and 1 and 1 and 1 makes 4  
and 1 makes 5....  
The disco ball freckles us  
with light.

"Red light," the Skate Station manager  
exclaims, and we drop hands,  
careening like cars on an icy bridge,  
arms and legs flailing.  
Nikki bumps Julia  
who yanks Lisa.

And Austin trips.

I staccato past,  
unable to stop.

Later, bare-toed and sandaled,  
I stand at the exit of the roller rink,  
blinded by the sun.  
"Green light," Austin whispers,  
gently taking my hand.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **EXT PARKING LOT, TOWNHOUSE COMPLEX**

*Establishing shot, summer.*

*(345 39:42) Jen exits van; both Jen and DJ are very animated and seem very pleased. Emily laughs.*

*DJ walks with Jen as they follow their mothers to the townhouse.*

DJ (via iPad, off-camera)

Yes, Darlene; dear of you to create this opportunity.

RALPH (off-camera)

Darlene? Dear? Dear of you?

## **INT TOWNHOUSE**

*The families are chatting in the living room.*

EMILY (reading from the iPad)

Dear of you to create this opportunity.

DARLENE (Jen's mom)

Deej, if I didn't do that, I would never have been able to live with Jen.

JEN

Yeah!

*Everyone laughs.*

## **EXT TOWNHOUSE BACK YARD**

*(353 27:14) DJ's parents, Jen's mom and Dobromir and his wife, Timi, assemble at a picnic table, and begin to eat.*

DJ (as narrator)

I live in the dorm overnight now, and talk to my dad online. At least once a month, he comes to visit. Mom works in town and helps me manage my support team. This allows us to be mother and son.

*Multiple hands begin to light candles on a birthday cake.*

DJ (as narrator)

Self-determination and compassion are my goals now; not independence.

*(353 37:58) DJ blows out all the candles by himself.*

RALPH

Oh, one breath! Deej, that was awesome, man! One breath!

*Conversations continue.*

RALPH

(353 1:04:16) You want to know who the most stubborn person at this table is? (*points at DJ*) I mean, it's saying something, but this man here, this man, are you kidding me?

DARLENE (saying Jen's words)

(04:59) I think you have to be stubborn....

*Subtitle appears as Jen talks: "...to do what we do..."*

RALPH

Oh, absolutely.

DJ (as narrator)

Holding Jen in my heart is easy. We give each other assurance that justice will open eyes.

EMILY (to DJ)

Out loud or whisper? Whisper or out loud?

*DJ points; Emily makes her way to Jen's end of the table and whispers to her; she laughs; Darlene grins.*

RALPH (*excitedly*)

Deej! We gotta go...

DJ (as narrator)

My family is fresh thinking. But the world outside greets me either as a hopeful exception or as a real burden to society.

*Close wide shot of everyone seated at the table.*

DJ (as narrator, cont.)

I have work to do; neurotypical people have work to do, too. Hope lives on, messy, imperfect.

*Distant wide shot of everyone seated at the table. Fade to black. Credits roll.  
End.*