

COMING TOGETHER

(Inside a spacious, polished boardroom bathed in soft light, a giant screen displays the words: EMPOWER-ABILITY LAUNCH. As the ceremony prepares to begin, Nicholas and Sebastian exchange uneasy glances, visibly troubled by something.)

NICHOLAS: Sebastian... something about this program does not sit right with me.

SEBASTIAN: Why would it? We are not even part of it.

NICHOLAS: I mean, how are they deciding all this without even talking to us?

SEBASTIAN: Honestly, it feels like we were just here to tick a box.

NICHOLAS: Yet we are the ones facing exclusion everyday. In schools, jobs, programs, all of it.

SEBASTIAN: And when it matters, we are not even there.

NICHOLAS: They should not be making decisions for us like we are not even here.

SEBASTIAN: That is what we always say. Year after year. Meeting after meeting. Yet, nothing changes.

NICHOLAS: Maybe walking away might be the only way to make that clear.

SEBASTIAN: Hold on. You are serious?

NICHOLAS: Dead serious. We should not be part of the launch at all.

SEBASTIAN: I get that. But if we leave now, they will just carry on.

NICHOLAS: This whole thing is all *about us*...so how will it work *without us*?

SEBASTIAN: Maybe that is exactly why we stay...so that next time they think twice.

NICHOLAS: Sebastian, if we really mattered, we would be part of this from the start, not brought in now just to fix things.

SEBASTIAN: I still think we should stay and make it harder for them to ignore us again.

NICHOLAS: But...

OPHELIA: (*Entering, composed*) Morning gentlemen...

NICHOLAS: Good morning.

SEBASTIAN: (*Polite but uneasy*) Hey. Excuse me. I might be mistaken, but this meeting is meant for persons with disabilities?

OPHELIA: I am aware of that.

NICHOLAS: Is there an issue, Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN: (*Careful*) I just mean...this meeting is for a specific group.

OPHELIA: And you have decided I do not belong in that group?

SEBASTIAN: I did not mean that. I just...I assumed...

OPHELIA: (*Calm but firm*) Next time ask... instead of assuming.

NICHOLAS: (*Gently, to Sebastian*) That might be a good place to start.

SEBASTIAN: Alright. (*Recalibrating*) Are you...with any disability group?

OPHELIA: I am in the right place.

SEBASTIAN: (*Uneasy*) Perhaps you are looking for the youth hall?

OPHELIA: I am not.

SEBASTIAN: This meeting is meant for persons with disabilities.

OPHELIA: And I am one of them.

SEBASTIAN: But you don't look like...

OPHELIA: (*Quiet, sharp*) Like what?

SEBASTIAN: I just mean... it is not obvious.

NICHOLAS: (*Curious*) Maybe that is the question, Sebastian. If I may ask. What exactly are you expecting to see from...

OPHELIA: Ophelia.

NICHOLAS: Yeah, Ophelia.

SEBASTIAN: I... I don't know.

OPHELIA: It's not obvious to you? **(Beat)** The world reminds me every day...I have dwarfism. Counters too high. Seats that don't fit. People staring like I am less human.

SEBASTIAN: **(Almost apologetic)** But you seem... fine.

OPHELIA: Because I can speak? Because I can walk? Or because I do not match what you had in mind?

SEBASTIAN: I just meant... you don't seem...limited.

NICHOLAS: So if you don't see it, it does not count?

SEBASTIAN: Well its just...I...I just thought...

OPHELIA: You should be able to tell?

SEBASTIAN: **(Grasping)** Yes. I mean, Nicholas, for example...

NICHOLAS: Oh, no, no. Do not draft me into your argument.

SEBASTIAN: What I meant is, there are visible markers. Wheelchairs, crutches...

OPHELIA: **(Measured)** So, those are the entry requirements?

SEBASTIAN: I just mean that if you can see it...you understand it.

OPHELIA: But you can't always see what people are dealing with.

NICHOLAS: Some things are not obvious...but they are still there.

OPHELIA: Some of us are dealing with things you will never see...pain, barriers, assumptions...

NICHOLAS: And that does not make it less real.

SEBASTIAN: **(After a pause)** Can I be honest?

NICHOLAS: This should be good.

SEBASTIAN: Resources are tight. Donors already question the numbers.

OPHELIA: So that makes me... what? Excess?

SEBASTIAN: You know, we can't just widen the scope of disability endlessly. It becomes hard to manage.

OPHELIA: So you narrow it instead?

SEBASTIAN: We are trying to protect the little space we have.

OPHELIA: Inclusion can't just be about what you see.

NICHOLAS: She is right.

SEBASTIAN: **(Caught off guard)** She is?

NICHOLAS: She is not asking for special treatment.

OPHELIA: If people like me are left out, then what are you protecting?

NICHOLAS: Sebastian, you see. When funds are low, we start comparing ourselves...like some struggles matter more than others.

OPHELIA: **(Quiet intensity)** That's what the system does...it turns us against each other.

SEBASTIAN: **(Reflective)** I spent years telling people disability is more than what you see... and I still fell into the same trap.

OPHELIA: **(Gentler now)** If we can't even see each other...what do we expect from everyone else?

SEBASTIAN: **(Nods)** I see it now.

NICHOLAS: If I may ask, what took you so long?

SEBASTIAN: If we start excluding people just because their experience looks different...

NICHOLAS: Then we rebuild the very barriers we claim to fight.

OPHELIA: This isn't about which disability has it worse.

SEBASTIAN: *(Finally aligned)* I know. We are dealing with the same things...just differently.

(Just then, Penelope and Cleopatra stride into the room, project files in hand, their broad smiles radiating pride and accomplishment)

PENELOPE: Apologies for the delay. And thank you for your patience.

CLEOPATRA: Let's quickly walk you through what we have built.

PENELOPE: We have been working on this for a few months...

CLEOPATRA: And we are ready to share where we have landed.

SEBASTIAN: *(Firmly)* Before you continue... who is this program meant for?

NICHOLAS: Who put this together?

OPHELIA: Yes. We had no hand in building it.

CLEOPATRA: *(Recovering)* Well...if you could hold that thought...we will take questions shortly...

SEBASTIAN: We have already waited long enough to ask.

NICHOLAS: *(Steady)* We watched this program evolve...draft after draft, proposal after proposal...

SEBASTIAN: And we remained in place the whole time. Waiting.

NICHOLAS: Nothing changed for us.

3PENELOPE: Let us not make this confrontational.

CLEOPATRA: There is no need for conflict. This was supposed to be a positive step.

OPHELIA: For whom?

SEBASTIAN: You can't claim this is for us...yet we had no hand in shaping it.

NICHOLAS: Clearly, you are building something in our name without us in the process.

PENELOPE: *(Measured, composed)* I get what you are saying...

OPHELIA: That's easy to say.

PENELOPE: Can we just stay with this for a second?

CLEOPATRA: Inclusion was part of what we were trying to do.

SEBASTIAN: *(Quietly)* Then you missed the point!

CLEOPATRA: But this program came out of work around disability access.

OPHELIA: You cared about the idea...not the people.

CLEOPATRA: *(Tightens slightly)* I get why you are frustrated...but let's focus on progress...

NICHOLAS: Progress for whom?

CLEOPATRA: For getting this off the ground.

PENELOPE: We did talk to different groups...government, civil society, policy experts...

SEBASTIAN: You did consult...just maybe not enough with us.

CLEOPATRA: *(Exhales)* Look, you know how things go...limited funding, tight schedules, budget pressures.

PENELOPE: *(Hesitates)* We did not set out to shut anyone out.

CLEOPATRA: That was not our intention...

SEBASTIAN: Maybe not. *(Beat)* But it happened anyway.

NICHOLAS: You framed it as collaboration. *(Beat)* We didn't see it that way.

OPHELIA: Coming in at the tail end is not being part of the project.

CLEOPATRA: But we did not mean to exclude you.

NICHOLAS: It rarely feels intentional.

PENELOPE: We were only trying to hold the program together...to protect it.

SEBASTIAN: Protect it from what, exactly?

OPHELIA: From becoming difficult?

CLEOPATRA: *(Softer now)* From failing. From donors pulling away.

OPHELIA: So you went around us...?

NICHOLAS: You worked past us instead of working with us?

PENELOPE: Maybe we misunderstood each other?

SEBASTIAN: No... we were not having the same conversation.

OPHELIA: At the end of the day...this is about who decides.

NICHOLAS: Right. Who is in charge of the objectives...the timeline...the budget...

OPHELIA: You see, this is deeper than a misunderstanding.

CLEOPATRA: *(Almost to herself)* Well...we treated access as something extra...not basic.

PENELOPE: We made it optional when it should not have been.

CLEOPATRA: Something offered... not something required.

PENELOPE: A gesture of some sort.

OPHELIA: And that's how people like us end up left out of the room.

SEBASTIAN: Yes. We just get pushed out...slowly.

PENELOPE: *(Softer, less certain)* So what happens now?

CLEOPATRA: Where do we go from here?

NICHOLAS: *(Carefully)* Maybe... we take a step back.

SEBASTIAN: We pause...then we rebuild from there.

OPHELIA: *(Gentler now)* We need to do this differently...

SEBASTIAN: Yes. With us actually included this time.

CLEOPATRA: Even if it delays everything?

PENELOPE: Any delay could cost us the project.

NICHOLAS: It will cost you even more if you get it wrong now.

OPHELIA: Sorry...but that's where we are.

PENELOPE: *(Exhales, a shift)* So...we go back and fix it?

CLEOPATRA: *(Nods slowly)* We start again...properly this time.

PENELOPE: Agreed. We will have to rethink how we do this...from the ground up.

CLEOPATRA: It will not be perfect...but it will be better.

SEBASTIAN: That is all we are asking.

OPHELIA: Let's do it right...

NICHOLAS: Or we don't do it at all.

(The disability and inequality activists gather around the project files, united in purpose and energized by a shared commitment to advancing inclusion and social change)

THE END

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