

UN-WORKING CLASS

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET STRIP MALL - DAY

On a busy street in Los Angeles, a coffee shop sits among other retailers side by side on a bright day. Cars rush pass as do pedestrians on the sidewalk in front of the cafe.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUING

A GROUP of friends in their late 20's sit around a table discussing their work.

PATRICK

I just had an audition Tuesday to be a police detective.

JESSICA

Any speaking parts?

PATRICK

Two lines. I would be a member of of the squad of detectives.

JESSICA

They wouldn't even consider a woman for a role like that.

RAUL

Why do you say that?

JESSICA

Because if a woman is a detective she is the center, the starring character. Stereotypes and that is what it is.

Some nod in agreement while others take another drink from their coffee cups.

CHRIS

I could play any role!

PATRICK

Really. How about portraying a mafia made man?

JESSICA

Or what about an African American doctor?

THOM

Or what about a woman?

They all laugh as TRACY their waitress and friend joins in.

TRACY

Oh, come on. Why couldn't he?
Dustin Hoffman in "Tootsie" or
Robert Downey, Jr in "Tropic
Thunder."

RAUL

And do you think everyone who has
played a mafia were actually
connected?

TRACY

Every police detective portrayed
by police detective's? Or doctors
for doctors?

PATRICK

Yeah but playing a role is what we
do and portraying a profession
isn't the same thing as gender,
race, nationality, or age!

THOM

I want to be the next Batman,
Ironman, Superman!

CHRIS

Those are comic book characters.
All I'm saying is that I want to
play a true dramatic role. One
that represents...us! An
authentic, genuine character. I
can play anybody that I can get
really into...being! You know? And
the audience will forget they're
watching an actor!

CLACK CLING BANG

Behind the Group's table a man in a wheelchair, ALEX, bumps
into tables that are too close to navigate. Everyone turns,
freezes and stares at the commotion.

ALEX

Hey, Olivier. Can you play someone
in a wheelchair? Authentically?
Will the audience forget they're
watching an able bodied actor? Can
you honestly represent me?

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

BRIAN prepares for an audition. Elizabethan music plays over
top OF him practicing his lines in front of the mirror.

(Camera dolly's from the profile shot around and behind the mirror to look directly at Brian looking into the mirror and revealing him in a wheelchair!)

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUING

Brian finishes checking his attire and brushing off any lint/dirt. He checks his paperwork with the scene that he will audition for and the directions to the audition.

Brian heads out the front door.

EXT. STREETSIDE BUS STOP - CONTINUING

City bus stops to pick up passengers. All but Brian gets on. The last PASSENGER steps into the bus and then turns around to Brian.

PASSENGER

This is the bus going where you need. Come on.

BRIAN

This one isn't wheelchair accessible. Got to wait for the next one on this route.

Passenger shrugs his shoulders and shakes his head as he turns to go into the bus.

PASSENGER

Sorry, man. That ain't right and really sucks.

Brian smirks with a knowingly look. And as the bus pulls away he looks down the street for the next bus.

EXT. STUDIO BACK LOT - CONTINUING

Busy with people rushing with wardrobe racks, production designs, etc. Brian rolls around the bustle looking at the buildings and the paper with directions for the location of the audition.

Brian spots the building number and quickly rolls to it. Others enter the door to audition as a WOMAN holds the door for Brian.

BRIAN

Thanks, but here I can get it.

Brian rolls to the door and grabs the handle.

WOMAN

No, its okay, I got it.

BRIAN

Please, let me get it for you.

The Woman surprised by the reaction, relents and walks in. Brian follows.

INT. STUDIO BUILDING - CONTINUING

Brian follows the others as they make their way through a maze of corridors that are dimly lit. Once it opens up they see that the audition room is located up on a platform requiring several stairs. The group of actors line up and continue up to the audition room.

Brian stops with a smile as to say "unbelievable and yet expected in this world" and shakes his head. A man, GARY walks from behind Brian with a small group of friends who are also going to the audition, stops and turns to Brian.

GARY

I'll get somebody?

Gary wags his thumb pointing behind him and up the platform. Brian nods with gratitude.

BRIAN

Thanks.

Another small group of female ACTORS walk by and whisper to one another while walking up the stairs.

INT. AUDITION ROOM - CONTINUING

Two CASTING DIRECTORS, the FILM DIRECTOR, and three ASSISTANTS sit behind two fold-up tables and finish auditioning an ACTOR sitting in a wheelchair.

ACTOR

STELLA! STELLA!

The actor melodramatically falls out of the wheelchair onto the floor where he reaches up with one hand toward the Casting Directors. They look at one another and the actor collapses completely on the floor.

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

Okay. That's good enough.

CASTING DIRECTOR #2

Yeah, that wasn't a scene from our script.

FILM DIRECTOR

And we are not doing a new version of "Streetcar..." That's all. Thanks.

The actor pops up from the floor and as he leaves through the door, Gary enters to tell the Directors about Brian.

GARY

There's a guy out here who is in a wheelchair and cannot get up the stairs.

The Directors looked confused at one another.

CASTING DIRECTOR #2

Do you think he's just trying to "play" the part to get our attention?

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

Could be but after all the character we are casting is a gimp in a wheelchair!

The Film Director looks at Gary.

FILM DIRECTOR

Okay thanks. We'll get someone to handle it right away.

The Film Director motions to one of the Assistants who quickly comes over to his side with clipboard in hand.

FILM DIRECTOR

(continuing)

See if there is another way up here and show him where it is.

The Assistant nods and leaves the room.

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

Maybe we should just go out there and have him audition from there.

CASTING DIRECTOR #2

Yeah, it's probably just a hoax anyway. A trick so we know his commitment to the role.

FILM DIRECTOR

Even if he is really in a wheelchair, what kind of experience can he possibly have? And we can't hire him for a thirty-two day shoot.

Assistant #2 leans over to Assistant #3 and whispers.

ASSISTANT #2

Don't know why not. I met a paraplegic who could outlast any able bodied man I know!

Casting Director #2 stands up.

CASTING DIRECTOR #2

Everyone knows to try and avoid kids and animals in productions. Handicapped come in the list below that!

ASSISTANT #3

Why?

The Directors looked befuddled at one another.

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

Because that's just how it's always been done. If he's really paralyzed he can't do everything an actor can.

ASSISTANT #2

How do you know? Have any of you worked with an actor with a disability?

They all shake their heads.

ASSISTANT #2

(continuing)

Know anyone who had a person in a wheelchair on a production?

CASTING DIRECTOR #2

No! Nobody does and there must be good reasons for it. He can't navigate a wheelchair around a busy set. Look he can't even get in here to audit...

FILM DIRECTOR

Yeah. We should've thought about this before. For now let's just wait and see if he can make it in here. Meanwhile, let's get the next person in here and finish this!

Assistant #3 goes to and opens the door to call the next actor in.

INT. STUDIO SOUND STAGE BUILDING - CONTINUING

Assistant #1 leads Brian through empty, dimly lit corridors to get up to the audition room.

BRIAN

Are you sure this is the way?

ASSISTANT #1

I don't know. These are the directions I got.

Assistant #1 waves the sheet of paper with the directions.

ASSISTANT #1

(continuing)

Do you want me to push you?

BRIAN

No, at this I'm quite able!

Brian and Assistant #1 come to a well lighted opening and find it to be where everyone is waiting for the audition.

ASSISTANT #1

Here we go. Just wait here. I was told to bring you in next.

Assistant #1 enters the audition room. The waiting room all stops and stares at Brian. Brian waves.

BRIAN

Hello.

Assistant #1 opens the door and invites Brian in. As he rolls in the ACTOR #2 auditioning stands up out of the very basic wheelchair and rolls it toward Brian.

ACTOR #2

Whoa! Looks like you came prepared!

BRIAN

Yeah, I guess you could say that.

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

It's okay. Just push the wheelchair back over there in the corner. Thanks.

Actor #2 complies and leaves the room.

INT. WAITING ROOM - CONTINUING

ACTOR #3 leans over to ACTOR #4 and #5.

ACTOR #3

Well I guess that's it. He'll get hired for the job since he's in a wheelchair.

ACTOR #4

Whoa there. Don't rush it. I was at an audition earlier this year for a commercial that had six characters in a wheelchair. There were a handful of actors in wheelchairs that showed up and none of them got the job.

ACTOR #5

How do you know?

ACTOR #4

Because I did. I was one of the six.

ACTOR #3

Well they must've sucked at acting!

Actor #3 laughs and sits back in his chair.

ACTOR #4

Hardly. Brian, the guy who just went in was one of them. He's been acting for a long time. He's in my acting class. Well actually half the time he's teaching the class and he is really good.

ACTOR #5

What gives?

ACTOR #4

Makes no sense to me, but that's just the way it's always been.

ACTOR #3

Always?

ACTOR #4

Think of all the movie characters that have a disability. Just think of those who use a wheelchair. Now, how many of them had an actor who understands living in a wheelchair?

ACTOR #5

Well, certainly not "Born on the Fourth of July." Nor "Coming Home" or "The Waterdance."

ACTOR #3

Not "My Left Foot." Nor
"Dodgeball" or "The Ex".

ACTOR #4

Not even one of my favorites,
"What to do in Denver When You're
Dead."

ACTOR #3

They all did a great job though.

ACTOR #4

Agreed. But none were actors with
a disability. Except for those
with Christopher Reeve after his
accident.

ACTOR #3

Yeah but, he was already an actor
and a famous one at that. "up, up,
and away!"

ACTOR #5

So we don't have anything to worry
about him in there auditioning
right now.

They all relax in their seats.

ACTOR #4

Probably not.

INT. AUDITION ROOM - CONTINUING

Brian is finishing the scene for his audition.

BRIAN

"And what am I suppose to do from
here?"

Assistant #2 reads the opposite role while standing next to
the Directors.

ASSISTANT #2

"Well you continue on here,
inspiring people."

BRIAN

"That's not that bad..."

Brian pauses in mid-sentence. The Directors begin to look at
one another.

Assistant #2 repeats.

ASSISTANT #2

"Well you continue on here,
inspiring people."

Brian remains in deep thought but only for a moment. He nods his head and clears his throat.

BRIAN

That's no that bad...

Another unexpected pause.

BRIAN

(continuing)

You know, actually it is bad. I don't want to be the community's inspirational story to tell their friends. "Oh, I know this guy, I don't remember his name but I'll never forget him because he lived his life with challenges of a disability." Or, "because he gave great motivational speeches to high schools." I just want to be a man. Not a man in a wheelchair. A man. I want to be recognized as being a person, a lover, a husband, a father, a colleague. A man with ups and downs as everyone else.

Assistant #2 sets the script down and sits on the edge of the table.

ASSISTANT #2

I understand. You want to be treated normal.

Brian smiles and shakes his head.

BRIAN

No, not normal. Equal. I just want to be treated as an equal. But you don't see me as your equal. Not even as an equal to all of those actors out there wanting this job.

Another pause but this is not accompanied with deep thought from Brian. Instead the Directors and Assistants relax in their chairs and quietly confer with one another.

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

I am concerned if he will be able to handle the shooting schedule and the obstacles found on the sets. Or even the location shooting.

ASSISTANT #2

But how will you know unless you try?

CASTING DIRECTOR #2

I saw a YouTube video that had these guys in wheelchairs at a skate park! They were like Tony Hawk on four wheels! Only more 'cause they were sitting and only able to use half their bodies!

FILM DIRECTOR

I saw some of that. They'd fall and get right back up.

Brian paces his chair back and forth in the room.

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

Yeah, it's amazing but hiring one of them? Not all of them are agile athletes.

ASSISTANT #2

And they are not all actors either! My roommate's boyfriend was "one of them"...

Assistant #2 looks directly at Casting Director #1 with disdain.

ASSISTANT #2

(continuing)

...and if you knew how dedicated and passionate about their craft, their talent, their desire for acting. And how they continue to work and hope when everyday they are faced with the stereotypes and discrimination that you guys are perpetuating right now.

ASSISTANT #1

At least they are talking about it!

ASSISTANT #2

Well, they go through so much just for a background part, you have no idea what they would overcome so they don't look needy in everyone's eyes. They'd avoid every little thing, even if they needed it, so it doesn't appear in the slightest toward the
(more)

ASSISTANT #2

(continuing)

stereotype that they fear will automatically be seen in your eyes.

ASSISTANT #3

Can you image what they'd endure and go through on a set for a speaking role?

CASTING DIRECTOR #1

True. And this is for a featured role.

The Film Director breaks up their quiet conference as he has made his decision. They all go back to sitting up in their chairs. Brian stops his pacing.

FILM DIRECTOR

Well, you did veer off the script there at the end and it was great from there, but...

Brian quickly interrupts.

BRIAN

But. Always there is the but. I know, I get this all the time. We'll call you.

Well, let me save you from the hassle of telling what you won't even admit to yourself but is as real as the adolescent acne on your face.

The Directors look a little confused. Brian pauses for a second as he looks at them then continues as if this has been on his chest for a long time. Because it has!

BRIAN

(continuing)

I can't represent my people. My people can't get any authentic representation because your pre-conceptions which no one in here has first hand knowledge of any truth, in any of them. None of you have challenged what is accepted as truth but is far from it. Just business as usual.

Brian rolls away and toward the corner of the room. Before reaching it he stops and turns back around to the Directors and Assistants.

BRIAN

(continuing)

You think all I do, all anyone who uses a wheelchair does, all day is have others take care of them. That I live in a small one bedroom apartment. Well, that part is true. Or in a hospital, or rehab facility having nurses dress me, feed me, take care of me all the time. And why not? Your impressions, your opinions are probably based on the images you've seen in movies and television.

Brian takes a quick breath.

BRIAN

(continuing)

You know it's these very images that have the power to change, or perpetuate the stereotypes and clichés.

And when using able bodied actors - nearly exclusively, means that you think, you feel that a disability is only as significant as an actor learning a accent.

Brian uses the accent of each as he says them.

BRIAN

(continuing)

A Southern accent. A Brooklyn accent. An Irish accent. A French accent. And what really scares me is the power to change or to keep it the same rests on you.

Brian slams his hands down on the table.

BRIAN

(continuing)

Casting and the film's directors, the producers and studios, financiers and distributors in charge of granting or denying the change in the images that impress on our culture, which in turn influences society's opinions and treatment of those with a disability.

Brian picks up the script from his lap.

BRIAN

(continuing)

You really ought to get a writer who has the same disability as your story's character and then the dialogue won't be so, so...

Brian throws the script precisely to land on the table.

FILM DIRECTOR

Actually, Brian, I was going to say, we all loved what you had to say and in fact we would love to offer you the job right now but we have to finish the auditions as we promised in the casting call.

BRIAN

Really? You really want me for this starring role?

FILM DIRECTOR

In fact we hope you can help with some of the dialogue.

BRIAN

Maybe, but I know a writer who happens to be a paraplegic!

The Directors all get up and come congratulate Brian.

INT. SOUND STAGE FOR FEATURE FILM - DAY

Brian exits the makeup room and rolls toward the set one hundred feet away. SET CONSTRUCTION CREW MEMBER intercepts Brian.

SET CREW MEMBER

Just wanted to say I saw you popping your wheelchair casters up to get over the cables there near the set. So to make it a little easier I made a little ramp that just goes over the cables. You just have to enter the set on this side.

Set Construction Crew Member points to the ramp that is wide enough without being obstructive.

BRIAN

Thanks, man. You didn't have to do that.

SET CREW MEMBER

Oh, I know but I really wanted to.
And I did get approval so you
don't have to worry about that.

BRIAN

Thanks again. That will really
help.

SET CREW MEMBER

Listen, I just wanted to say
thanks to you.

BRIAN

Why? For what?

SET CREW MEMBER

For keeping the faith, so to
speak.

I know it could not have been easy
for you to keep going to auditions
and waiting for something that
didn't seem was ever going to come.

BRIAN

No problem. Well there were plenty
of problems but I kept going
because acting is what I love to
do.

SET CREW MEMBER

I know. But my son has a
disability and even though he
isn't in a wheelchair and his
challenges are a bit different, I
know how much he's going to love
to see a guy in a wheelchair being
a...guy in a movie.

BRIAN

Good, I'm glad. I know this will
have a much bigger impact than
most of the industry realizes. For
now! And I hope it is just the
beginning and someday seeing an
actor with a disability on the
screen will be a regular thing and
not an event most never thought
would happen. And that should open
it for your son and others with a
disability to even dream about
being an actor.

SET CREW MEMBER

That would be great! Let's try the
ramp.

The two of them walk and roll to the ramp where Brian easily rolls over the cables.

INT. SOUND STAGE SET - POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUING

Brian rolls to his mark on the feature film, "LONDON TIME" set of a police interrogation room where characters "DETECTIVE RICHMOND" who is leaning up against the wall and note taking on his hand held and suspect, "JOHN PENA" sitting behind a fold up table is being questioned by Brian's character, "DETECTIVE LONDON". The hussle all comes to a quiet stop.

FIRST ASST. DIRECTOR

Quiet on the set. Were taking it from shot two-three-six. And...roll audio. Clapper.

FILM DIRECTOR

And action.

DETECTIVE LONDON

You didn't see Greg Brown at all that night?

JOHN PENA

No. I didn't.

London gets that look in his eye.

DETECTIVE LONDON

What time is it?

John annoyed shakes his head.

(Camera angle goes from the Production POV, to the Film's POV.)

JOHN PENA

You got a damn watch right there. Why are you fucking asking me?

London continues to stare and grins at John.

DETECTIVE LONDON

I asked a question and it looks like I'm going to have to answer it myself.

JOHN PENA

You're damn right, 'cause this whole thing is a waste of time. That's what time it is.

John snickers and leans forward with his arms under the table and his fingers tapping the underside.

JOHN PENA

(continuing)

My grade school in Brooklyn was
tougher than this.

John looks directly at London and grins. Immediately, London
PUSHES THE TABLE WITH HIS CHEST as he rolls forward capturing
John by surprise. London, John and the table move as one due
to London's pure force and the slick linoleum tile floor
paired with the feet on the table and John's chair. They
travel as one unit until John's back hits the wall.

BAM!

With John's arms caught under the table and his body pinned
between the wall and the table, London reaches down to lock
the brakes on his wheelchair and lifts his arms above the
table grabbing John's shirt and pulling him forward so that
they're FACE TO FACE.

LONDON

I DIDN'T ASK you what it was like
for you growing up. Did I?

John shakes his head no.

LONDON

(continuing)

Did I, Detective Richmond?

Detective Richmond remains calmly leaning up against the wall.

DETECTIVE RICHMOND

No.

LONDON

I asked what time it was. Do you
know what time it is now?

John again shakes his head no.

LONDON

(continuing)

Detective Richmond, what time is
it?

DETECTIVE RICHMOND

It's London time.

London grins.

LONDON

That's right. It is London time
and that means it's time for the
truth. And the truth is we have an
(more)

LONDON

(continuing)

eye witness that saw you at "The Zone" the night Greg Brown was killed. Moments before he was killed. So what happened and how?

John nods his head.

JOHN PENA

Alright, alright, I'll tell you all I know.

London releases his grip on John's shirt but continues to keep the table tight.

(Camera pulls back from the Film's POV and into the Production's POV.)

The Film Director moves from behind the monitors and toward the set.

FILM DIRECTOR

And CUT! That was fantastic. I knew it all long!

FIRST ASST. DIRECTOR

Alright lets set up for shot two-three-seven.

EXT. RED CARPET EVENT - EVENING

Brian rolls down the red carpet with a BEAUTIFUL DATE, surrounded by fans applauding him, photogs taking pictures, and other well known actors/celebrities.

AUTHENTIC DIRECTOR (V.O.)

I hope this will be the first step, or first roll in the right direction. There are a lot of people with a disability working behind the scenes that have a disability, struggling against being noticed and getting their chance to make it in this already very tough business, but also against the stereotypes and discrimination. But the good thing is that there is a wonderful pool of material and talent just waiting. I hope that the future...

INT. DAYTIME TALK SHOW SET - DAY

The AUTHENTIC DIRECTOR sits with the TALK SHOW HOSTESS. He continues uninterrupted.

AUTHENTIC DIRECTOR

...will bring this near historic turning point in American cinema to include those with a disability into the every day way of business in Hollywood. And that with fair opportunities and exposure, actors like Brian will become well known and listed among the beloved household named celebrities.

TALK SHOW HOSTESS

I really look forward to an authentic perspective and portrayal of those with a disability.

(Camera pulls back to show the production set.) The Authentic Director rolls away from the interview and toward the camera. He stops half-way between the talk show set and the camera. CREW MEMBERS break the set in the background.

The Authentic Director BREAKS the FOURTH WALL and speaks directly into the camera.

AUTHENTIC DIRECTOR

As you can see, I really am a paraplegic. I wrote and directed this short film. Everything you have seen here really happens to performers and people with disabilities throughout our industry. Often unconsciously and unintentionally, but it still happens. You've just witnessed our common perspective and from our reality.

All other cast members walk and roll to gather around the Authentic Director. Along with other wheelers, people with other forms of disabilities showing unity and support.

AUTHENTIC DIRECTOR

(continuing)

As you saw portrayed here, there are a lot of mis-conceptions that are rarely challenged. But given half a chance they would be easily disproved and the American Scene can be equally and fairly representing the inclusion of the largest and fastest growing minority, those with a disability. Nearly all other minorities have that and we are here joined
(more)

AUTHENTIC DIRECTOR

(continuing)

together to represent an America
that embraces everyone, regardless
of their personal challenges, or
disabilities...now, will you join
us?

The Authentic Director turns to the crowd gathered around him
as they all shake hands and embrace one another.

FADE OUT: