

## PERSONAL SPEAKER

Characters

**Leona**, a shy copywriter.

**Ashton**, an attractive, upbeat salesman.

**Beck**, the new receptionist. A cute boy-next-door type. Trans female-to-male.

**Connie**, another copywriter.

**Mr. Marker**, Leona's boss.

**Saleswoman**, cheery. May be played by the actor who plays Connie.

Act I, Scene 1

A quiet modern office. Sleek and shiny. LEONA sits at her cubicle, typing on a laptop. She's clearly fidgety. She stops for a moment, takes a breath, pulls out a hairbrush, and runs it down her hair. She will continue to do this throughout. A clock TICKS. A banner high above, reigning over the office, reads "SURMOUNT EACH OPTION."

(LEONA's boss, MR. MARKER, walks past her cubicle with a cup of coffee, yawning enormously.)

LEONA

Good afternoon Mr. Marker.

MR. MARKER

How's the copy? Get it? Cause it sounds like coffee?

LEONA

Strong and...hot off the presses.

MR. MARKER

That's what I like to hear!

(He walks off. CONNIE enters with sunglasses and a large Starbucks coffee and her phone pressed between her ear and shoulder.)

CONNIE

Oh my gawd, that is just like sew insAne. Like I actually cannot. There is literally nothing I can say. He gets with her and I'm legitimately still here alone? Like what kind of sense does that make? Alright the girl who sits behind me is staring--at work, I'm at work, haven't I told you about this job? That was just my lunch break lol--I gotta go, byyyyyyE!

(CONNIE sits down in the cubicle on the other side of LEONA's. To LEONA:)  
Morning Lioness! I got something for you.

(CONNIE pulls a crushed blueberry muffin out of her enormous purse and hands it to LEONA.)

LEONA

What's this for?

CONNIE

I dunno. You always get here so early and seem so sad.

(LEONA tries to eat the muffin. Crumbs fall all over her. CONNIE ignores it and starts humming a song as she types at her laptop. ASHTON comes in from stage right. He fists bumps wildly and smiles hugely, but doesn't say anything. LEONA stands up suddenly, then sits back down, spilling the crumbs in the process. ASHTON walks past without noticing. Right before he exits:)

LEONA

How was your lunch, Ashton?

(He's clearly not about to stop, but:)

ASHTON

It was excellent.

(He does stop, and turns to face her.)

It was one of the fastest deals I have ever closed. Not to mention splendid company.

(His voice sounds a bit robotic. Tinny. Leona notices but ignores it.)

LEONA

That's really great to hear. That's great for...the company.

ASHTON

I am really glad that I can contribute.

LEONA

I think you've always been great...at what you do. I wish I could be a salesman, but I don't think I'm cut out for it.

ASHTON

Do not limit yourself.

LEONA

That's a very nice suit on you.

ASHTON

It is from Men's Warehouse.

LEONA

Ashton, I don't mean to be rude, I'm so happy about the lunch, but/

CONNIE

/What's wrong with your voice?

ASHTON

I am so glad you asked. I actually decided to get the new personal speaker from Nozama. It is/

(MR. MARKER enters from stage left.)

MR. MARKER

Ashton, my man!

(MR. MARKER wraps ASHTON in a hug. ASHTON claps him on the back.)

That thing really works like a charm, doesn't it?

ASHTON

Oh yes. I would highly recommend.

MR. MARKER

I just knew when I saw the reports. I thought to myself, damn it, if we don't get a salesman equipped with one of those, we're gonna be the hare. Like in the story with the tortoise and the hare. You know the one. And you, Ashton, well...with your numbers...

(That isn't a compliment.)

It just made sense. I'm proud of you, Ashton. You've shown real growth.

ASHTON

It has been my pleasure.

MR. MARKER

If you keep this up maybe we'll even talk about a raise.

ASHTON

No need. I am more content with what I earn.

(ASHTON looks puzzled. He shakes his head a little.)

MR. MARKER

Now that's what I like to hear! Imagine how well this thing would run if you all got those. Keep chugging, Ashton.

(MR. MARKER exits stage left.)

CONNIE

I've seen those things on TV.

ASHTON

They work very well.

CONNIE

Isn't there some kind of dating service you can only access if you have one?

ASHTON

That is correct. I enrolled over the weekend and am waiting to find my true love.

CONNIE

That's cute.

ASHTON

And you have seen what it has done for me at work. Did you both know that Melinda is about to be promoted and that her position as Senior Copywriter will soon be available? They are looking to promote internally. But Senior Copywriter is an important position that must deal with lots of important people. Only well-spoken people will be able to get the position. Well, I must get back to work. Lots of calls to make and emails to send, ha ha. Let me know if either of you have questions about the speaker.

(ASHTON exits off Stage Left. LEONA looks off after him. CONNIE does too.)

CONNIE

I bet his dick is huge. No wonder girls are getting that thing.

(LEONA picks the last muffin crumbs off her raggedy cardigan. Runs the brush through her hair. Gets back to typing. Blackout.)

Act I, Scene 2

An upscale store. A bouncy SALESWOMAN in a bright jumpsuit guides LEONA to a warm-colored room. There's a chair that looks like a mix of a dentist's and a LA-Z-BOY. A robotic-looking surgical arm hovers over it.

SALESWOMAN

The procedure would take place in a room just like this. You'd be under anesthesia, so no pain! There is some soreness and adjustment after, so we normally suggest that clients take a couple weeks to work from home before getting back to it! Give your throat some time to rest. And no silly business during that time either. But the benefits more than make up for any discomfort. You won't find anyone who says otherwise. Other questions?

LEONA

How does it always know the right thing to say?

SALESWOMAN

The speakers use an advanced neural network to analyze people and situations you encounter, and are also networked to our larger database. We've gathered enough data to get the speakers going, but they'll only sound more natural as they continue to bond with their hosts and proliferate.

LEONA

Is that why you sound so much more normal than my friend who just got one?

SALESWOMAN

It is. It takes some time for them to adjust to how the people around you speak. Every home, every company, uses vernacular that's a little different. But once it's acclimated, the words will just roll off your tongue.

LEONA

Has anyone ever asked to have one removed?

SALESWOMAN

No. No one's who's gotten one has ever asked for anything like that.

LEONA

And that dating service? It works?

SALESWOMAN

We've had five hundred marriages in the past month alone.

LEONA

That many people have it?

SALESWOMAN

Soon everyone will. You don't want to get left behind.

LEONA

How much is it again?

SALESWOMAN

Just a low price of \$199 for the installation, with a \$10 monthly service fee after.

LEONA

And if you stop paying?

SALESWOMAN

No one stops paying.

LEONA

But if someone did?

SALESWOMAN

She stops speaking.

(LEONA looks at the chair. Blackout.)

Act I, Scene 3

LEONA types away at her desk. MR. MARKER enters with his coffee.

LEONA

Good afternoon, Mr. Marker.

MR. MARKER

Is your copy committed to climbing to the climax of the cliff? The cliff is Google.

LEONA

Yes sir.

MR. MARKER

Capital!

(He exits off Stage Left. CONNIE enters from Stage Right with her Starbucks and sunglasses. She pulls off the sunglasses, tucks them in her purse, sits straight down at her desk, and starts to type.)

LEONA

You're back!

CONNIE

(With the robotic tin of ASHTON in Scene 1:)  
It is so good to be back.

LEONA

You sound so different.

CONNIE

I have decided to improve my life.

LEONA

That's great.

CONNIE

It is very exciting.

(CONNIE types away at her desk. She turns occasionally to look at LEONA, but LEONA doesn't see. ASHTON comes in, looking worn down.)

CONNIE

How was your lunch, Ashton?

ASHTON

Another sale!

CONNIE

That is excellent.

ASHTON

Yeah, it's...oh my god, you got one too!

CONNIE

Yes I have and it is amazing.

ASHTON

That is so cool! I really like your shirt today.

CONNIE

Thank you it is from Men's Wearhouse.

ASHTON

I love Men's Warehouse!

(LEONA pulls out her hairbrush and starts stroking.)

ASHTON

Did you enroll for the dating program?

CONNIE

I will soon but I am afraid I will not be matched with the person I want.

ASHTON

That would be very unfortunate.

CONNIE

Yes would it not?

(Their eyes meet in a long beat. MR. MARKER breaks the tension.)

MR. MARKER

How was lunch, Ashton?

ASHTON

Another sale.

MR. MARKER

Hell yeah!

CONNIE

I was so delighted to hear of Melinda's promotion in the memo that you emailed to us while I was away.

MR. MARKER

It's gonna take someone really special to fill that spot. Someone with just the right words. How's the new speaker working for you, Connie?

CONNIE

It is truly life-changing. You should really consider getting one, Mr. Marker.

MR. MARKER

What would I tell my wife while we make l...asagna?

ASHTON

The recipe for lasagna's very simple.

MR. MARKER

But it can get messy.

CONNIE

It really would improve your performance, Mr. Marker.

MR. MARKER

My performance?

ASHTON

Melinda's a very excellent speaker.

MR. MARKER

You all should get back to work.

(He exits off Stage Left.)

ASHTON

(To Connie.)

Did you hear that Cara is leaving too?

CONNIE

I did not.

ASHTON

Maternity leave.

CONNIE

How wonderful. I have always wanted to be a mother.

(Her face looks unsure. ASHTON's lights up.)

LEONA

Me too.

ASHTON

It's so refreshing to hear women have such natural ambitions.

(All three look uncomfortable.)

Hey, would you happen to be free after work today?

CONNIE

Yes I am free after work today. For what purpose?

ASHTON

Would you like to grab a drink with me?

(CONNIE nods. LEONA turns to the corner of her desk. Blackout.)

#### Act I, Scene 4

The lights are off. LEONA turns them on, comes in, sits at her cubicle. Runs the brush through her hair. Sniffs the cubicle. It's off. She opens her mouth. Coughs. No discernable words. There's a low HUM, and that clock still TICKING. She starts to type. MR. MARKER comes in from Stage Right with his coffee.

LEONA

Good afternoon, Mr. Marker.

MR. MARKER

Catch any mice, copycat?

LEONA

(With the robotic tinny:)

No, I have not seen any mice.

MR. MARKER

Oh...I just meant, how's the work going?

LEONA

It is going very well.

MR. MARKER

It's good to have you back.

LEONA

It is so good to be back.

(He pats her on the shoulder and walks back off Stage Left. LEONA brushes her hair. CONNIE and ASHTON come in, arms wrapped around each other. They each have a small Starbucks. CONNIE looks more adult, professional. No more sunglasses. ASHTON looks tentatively happy.)

ASHTON

I mean wasn't that just so rude?

CONNIE

So incredibly rude.

(They get to CONNIE's desk. CONNIE kisses ASHTON long and passionately on the lips. He goes as if to sit in LEONA's cubicle. Sees her, takes a step back.)

ASHTON

Hey, welcome back.

LEONA

It is so good to be back.

CONNIE

How was the recovery?

LEONA

Painless.

(Something on her face betrays the word.)

ASHTON

That's good.

(MR. MARKER comes back out.)

MR. MARKER

There's my power couple! The top salesman and the Senior Copywriter!

LEONA

(Face blank.)

Congratulations on the promotion, Connie. You completely deserve it.

CONNIE

I'm very excited to be able to contribute in this new way.

(LEONA starts to brush her hair.)

ASHTON

(To Leona:)

Your hair looks so smooth and untangled.

(She puts the brush down.)

MR. MARKER

Look at us all. I just feel that we're all so connected. In sync.

ASHTON, CONNIE, AND LEONA

Perfectly.

CONNIE

Except for you, Mr. Marker.

MR. MARKER

I'm gonna get back, I have a call.  
(He leaves.)

CONNIE

You should get to work darling. I love you.

ASHTON

Love you more.

(ASHTON kisses CONNIE gently on the forehead and exits Stage Left. CONNIE puts in earbuds and goes to work. A doorbell BUZZES. LEONA looks up to see if Mr. Marker or anyone else will hear it. Connie clearly won't. LEONA goes off Stage Right to open it. BECK is there, fresh-pressed, carrying a small briefcase.)

BECK

This is the floor for Surmount Each Option, right?

LEONA

Yes, that is correct.

(LEONA gestures at the banner.)

BECK

Oh. Haha. Thanks. I'm Beck, the new receptionist. I guess I should probably know what floor my own company is on.

LEONA

Well, now you do.

BECK

Hooray!

LEONA

I will go fetch Mr. Marker for you.

BECK

Thanks so much.

(LEONA exits off Stage Left. BECK looks around at the silent office: just the sounds of TYPING and the CLOCK. LEONA comes out with MR. MARKER.)

MR. MARKER

You must be Becca!

BECK

Just Beck. This is the quietest office I've ever seen.

LEONA

Everyone is very hard at work.

MR. MARKER

You can see how much effort it takes to bring the right result to the top. Search engines are the battlefield of our time, and it's up to us to optimize them for our clients. The ultimate showdown: man versus algorithm.

BECK

(Playful.)

Who will win?

LEONA

I will show you to your desk.

(LEONA pulls him away to a reception desk Downstage Right, dragging his hand. When he sits, she puts her hand on his shoulder, a beat too long, before drawing away. Blackout.)

Act I, Scene 5

CONNIE and ASHTON leave for lunch together, but not touching. LEONA runs her brush through her hair. She reaches into her bag and takes out a small tupperware and a fork in a baggie. BECK walks over to her with a little salad.

BECK

Can I eat with you? I know I usually go out, but/

LEONA

/Yeah, of course.

(BECK pulls CONNIE's chair out from her cubicle.)

BECK

How long have you worked here?

LEONA

Just a year.

(She shakes her head. Holds up three fingers.)

BECK

What do you do?

LEONA

I write copy. You know, the words that go with the ad.

BECK

Oh yeah. I'm a marketing major. I just graduated.

LEONA

Congratulations.

BECK

So you've really been here a year? Can I be honest with you? I don't know how long I'm gonna last. Even these couple weeks have felt like forever. This place just seems so cold.

LEONA

You just don't have the right words to synchronize with us yet.

(She mouths "get out of here." But Beck doesn't read lips.)

I found it really hard to fit in here until I got a personal speaker.

BECK

I think I've seen those on TV. I guess I'm used to not fitting in.

(LEONA takes his hand. He lets her.)

LEONA

Anyone can fit in. You just need the right words.

BECK

I spent so long looking for the right words, the right ways, the right moments...but in the end it didn't matter. People just believe what they believe.

LEONA

Words are everything.

BECK

Are you happy?

LEONA

Of course.

BECK

Cool.

(For a few beats they just eat.)

What's it really like to have one of those things? The speaker?

LEONA

My life has improved in every way.

BECK

I wonder what you were like before.

LEONA

I was nothing. Just a fly on the wall. But now I know how to connect with people.

(She squeezes his hand.)

They have a dating service. You can only enroll if you have one.

BECK

Are you enrolled?

LEONA

(Shaking her head "no.")

Yes.

BECK

Are they cool with people like me?

LEONA

Everyone deserves love.

(He looks at their hands, still touching. ASHTON and CONNIE come back in. She walks ahead of him, looking furious. Sees Beck in her chair:)

CONNIE

Excuse me, I need to get back to work. You should get to work darling, I love you.

ASHTON

Love you more.

(He leans in to kiss her. She slaps him.)

BECK

What are you doing? Where's Mr. Marker?

LEONA

He has his procedure today.

CONNIE

You should consider getting a personal speaker, Beck. It's really brought the office together.

(ASHTON storms off.)

Don't worry about us, we're fine. You know how lovers' spats go. Ashton, dear!

(ASHTON comes back.)

I'm so sorry for making you mad. Will you forgive me?

ASHTON

Of course darling.

(There's an icy space between them.)

BECK

Alright. As long as you guys are fine.

(ASHTON exits again. Something starts printing from a printer. LEONA goes and picks

it up. She folds it and walks to BECK's desk.)

LEONA

This is a very private letter that you must not let anyone but Mr. Marker read.

(He takes it seriously. She goes back to her desk and prints something else. Takes it back to BECK's desk. Doesn't fold it--slams it right in front of him.)

LEONA

Do not read that paper. That paper is a lie. Rip it up. Now.

(BECK obeys. LEONA goes to print another paper. Stomps up to BECK. Shoves it in front of his face. CONNIE has stopped doing her work. ASHTON has come out to watch.)

LEONA

If you read this paper you're fired.

(BECK balls it up and throws it away. LEONA cups his face in her hands and brushes her lips on his. He's surprised but returns the kiss. A sweet moment. She breaks away and smiles.)

LEONA

You know, you're really nice, but I don't think I'm into girls after all.

(BECK is crushed. Starts packing his things. CONNIE and ASHTON, looking ashamed, go back to their tasks. BECK leaves. LEONA throws the hairbrush on the ground and stomps on it. Breaking it. CONNIE comes over and puts her hand on LEONA's shoulder. ASHTON brings a box of tissues. The three of them look at each other, wordless. Blackout.)

Act I, Scene 6

LEONA working at her desk. MR. MARKER comes in with his coffee.

LEONA

Good afternoon with Mr. Marker.

MR. MARKER

I hope your work is going well.

(At the same time, in ASL:)

Looks like our copy machine has some competition!

(He goes to his desk. CONNIE comes in, with her Starbucks and sunglasses.)

CONNIE

Good afternoon, Leona.

(At the same time, in ASL:)

I picked up an extra breakfast sandwich, you want it?

LEONA

(In ASL:)

Oh my God, you're a hero, thanks.

(ASHTON comes in, back from lunch. LEONA goes over to hug him.)

LEONA

How was lunch, Ashton?

ASHTON

No sale, but a great meal!

(In ASL:)

It was a shitshow. Your hair looks great.

(CONNIE comes over.)

CONNIE

(In ASL:)

Do you guys want to get drinks after work?

(They nod and smile. As lights fade:)

SALESWOMAN

(Pre-recorded voiceover.)

With the new Exact-o gloves, you'll never have to worry about what your hands are saying ever again!

(Blackout.)