

MOUTHWATER LOZENGES

A One Act Play

By Cori Diaz

Author's note:

Punctuation is used to indicate delivery, not to conform to the rules of grammar.

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

Words in square brackets [] are not spoken, but have been included in text to clarify meaning.

Stage directions in brackets () function as lines.

SCENE 1

Lights up. In the middle of the stage is VICTOR sitting on a couch, pointing a TV remote towards the audience. His left leg is propped up onto the table in front of him, and a stack of books on the corner of the table. His entire pelvic region is in a cast. AVA sits on the arm of the couch with her arms crossed. To the RIGHT is a kitchenette. To the LEFT is a door and a porch-like platform. LUCA enters SL through the door with a tote bag on his shoulder. He's in scrubs.

LUCA

Good morning - oh!

AVA

Oh, hi, you must be the home aide. Luca, right?

LUCA

That's right.

AVA

I'm Ava, Victor's mother.

LUCA

Oh wow, it's lovely to / meet you.

AVA

I was just leaving, do you mind walking me out?

LUCA

Oh, uh, sure.

Luca and Ava walk through the door SL and stand on the platform. Victor, unperturbed, continues to flip through channels.

AVA

I'm sure Victor has been quite a pain in your ass lately.

LUCA

Ha, well, um, I wouldn't put it like *that*.

AVA

How would you put it? You've been seeing him for quite sometime now.

LUCA

He's not the most difficult patient I have, but he never lets me do anything for him. He's a bit in denial about his injury, so I think he's still trying to adjust to not being able to do the things he used to.

AVA

To be truthful, he doesn't think he needs a home aide. I'm the one that reached out to your agency for you after he refused to have me live with him while he recovers. He needs help, Luca. He wants to believe he can do this all on his own but he just can't. It's impractical.

LUCA

I agree with you 100%. If he did what he was supposed to, he could be walking with the assistance of a cane before the year ended. But the way he's neglecting his recovery could lead to him contracting a bone infection and maybe never walking again. Of course I'm doing my job here, but I can't force him to do anything.

AVA

He was never this unrelenting before the accident, I swear. Everyone always used to tell me how great of a kid he is. He was so kind, caring, selfless. But the way he's abusing his body... well, it's selfish, isn't it?

LUCA

I'd say so.

AVA

But I will admit, even before, he could never accept help. He always wanted to be the one helping. Even as a kid, he hated being cared for and coddled. I don't know why he has this complex, and I'm scared I'm going to lose him to it.

Ava begins to weep. Luca, the natural caretaker, pulls her into his side.

LUCA

(wary, almost unsure)

Ava, I promise you that as long as I'm visiting him, you won't lose him. I'll get him to recover even if it's the last thing I do.

AVA

You're an angel, Luca. I really mean that.

LUCA

Before you go, I have to ask. Is there something or someone that could be some sort of encouragement to him? Something or someone he'd want to recover for?

AVA

I just don't know. Before this, maybe I'd have said his friends or his career. Now, I don't know. I don't know if he feels the passion he did before.

LUCA

So, there's nothing I can do to motivate him? It's just hard to do my job when he won't be honest with how he's feeling and what he needs.

AVA

Like I said, he doesn't know how to need. He only knows how to be needed. When he was a kid, I'd use reverse psychology on him.

LUCA

Reverse psychology?

AVA

I'd pretend to need his help with things to get him to accept my help. Make him feel like he was useful in some way.

LUCA

Huh. I've never thought of that.

AVA

Might be worth a shot.

LUCA

Okay, well, I appreciate / you telling me.

AVA

But, I do think that deep down, past all of his stubbornness, he likes you.

LUCA

How'd you figure?

AVA

He's pretty quiet about you. Nowadays, that's the strongest kindness he can extend.

LUCA
(unsure of how to take that)

I appreciate that.

AVA
Well, I'll let you get in there. Bye, Luca. Don't hesitate to reach out for anything.

They embrace. Ava exits. Luca enters through the door again. Victor does not even look at him.

LUCA
Good morning, Victor.

VICTOR
Morn.

LUCA
What's your level of pain today?

VICTOR
I'm not in pain.

LUCA
Why do you insist on doing this song and dance every morning? You have a shattered pelvis and a broken leg. Of course you're in pain.

VICTOR
I'm not.

LUCA
Okay, do you mind if I feel?

VICTOR
Go ahead.

Luca swipes his hands around Victor's most tender parts - bottom of his spine, outer part of his hips, inside of his groin. Victor winces.

LUCA
I'll put you at an 8.

Luca takes a clipboard out of his tote bag and writes on it.

LUCA

Do you want anything specific for breakfast?

VICTOR

Do I ever?

LUCA

Well.

There's a first time for everything.

Defeated, Luca heads SR to the kitchen and prepares a bowl of cereal and a pot of coffee. Victor grabs the stack of books off the table and flips through them. Luca brings Victor the bowl and a mug of coffee.

LUCA

Here you go.

VICTOR

Put it on the table.

Luca does as instructed. He goes back into the kitchen and gets himself a mug of coffee. He approaches Victor again and leans against the arm of the couch.

LUCA

Did your mother bring you those?

VICTOR

Mhm.

LUCA

She seems very kind.

VICTOR

Yeah? Did you pick that up in your little front porch gossip session about me?

LUCA

It was not *gossip*. She wanted to check up on you. Mothers do that.

And you said?

VICTOR

And I *said* that you are a passionate young man fully capable of recovery.

LUCA

How specific. Surely that's the truth.

VICTOR

Your mother cares about you, you know.

LUCA

Mhm.

VICTOR

And so do I.

LUCA

Alright.

VICTOR

You've got a lot of people in your corner.

LUCA

Jesus Christ.

VICTOR

What?

LUCA

Please spare me the pep talk. Your enthusiasm feels like a slap in the face.

VICTOR

Well, I can't exactly be a pessimistic nurse, can I?

LUCA

Victor gives him a harsh look.

LUCA

Somebody is extra cranky today.

VICTOR

Don't patronise me, Luca.

LUCA

Did your mom put you on edge?

VICTOR

Everybody puts me on edge. Especially you.

LUCA

Well if we work together, I can get out of your hair faster.

VICTOR

Whatever.

LUCA

Alright, fine. Eat your cereal so I can give you your medication.

Victor begrudgingly eats his cereal. Luca goes into the kitchen and grabs 4 bottles of pills from a cabinet. He methodically puts them into a paper cup.

He goes back into the lounge. He puts the paper cup down. From his pocket, he grabs a lozenge and puts it next to the cup.

VICTOR

What's that?

LUCA

What?

VICTOR

The candy.

LUCA

Oh, it's a mouthwater lozenge. It makes you salivate.

VICTOR

Why?

LUCA

You told me yesterday the pills were giving you dry mouth.

VICTOR

So?

LUCA

So, I thought it would help. Now eat. I'm going to start cleaning.

Luca heads offstage. Victor picks up the lozenge and stares long and hard at it, unsure of what to do with the gesture.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

Victor is still on the couch, casted leg propped up on the table, books next to him neglected. Now, he has a blanket draped over him and the remote control in his hand. He's staring blankly into the audience, as if watching television. There is a DVD case sitting on top of the book stack.

Moments later, Luca enters the room with a rag on his shoulder and a heating pad in his hands. Wordlessly, he hands the pad to Victor, who places it on his abdomen.

Luca falls down onto the couch, keeping a considerate amount of distance between him and Victor. Confused, Victor looks at him.

LUCA

Phew! I'm beat. What are you watching?

Victor picks up the DVD case and presents it to Luca.

LUCA

Never seen it. Mind if I join?

VICTOR

Be my guest.

They watch for a beat.

LIGHTS GO DOWN. LIGHTS COME BACK UP. Luca is sitting in a more active position. Victor has adjusted as much as his injury allows.

LUCA

I don't get it. Was it all a dream? Is he schizophrenic?

VICTOR

You're not supposed to get it. It's all subjective.

LUCA

Huh?

VICTOR

The ending is purposefully open-ended so you can apply your own interpretation to it. I kind of took it all as a metaphor for global warming because of the dark clouds at the end.

LUCA

Wow. You are so smart.

VICTOR

Oh. Yeah. Well.

LUCA

Great thing I watched it with you then. I would've been so confused by myself. Your explanation was very helpful.

Luca grabs their mugs from the coffee table and brings them to the kitchen SR. He enters the living room again.

VICTOR

Uh, Luca?

LUCA

Yes, Victor?

VICTOR

Um.

He presents Luca the heating pad.

VICTOR

Can you heat this up again?

Luca is stunned. Victor has never asked for anything before.

LUCA

Yeah! Yeah, yes, of course, yeah.

Luca grabs the heating pad and goes into the kitchen. He sticks into the microwave and hits a button. As it's warming up, he punches the air in victory.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 3

It's nighttime, way past the time Luca visits. Victor is lying facedown on the ground in the middle of the floor.

Luca enters SL through the door. He does not see Victor on the ground at first.

LUCA

(yelling throughout the house)

VICTOR? VICTOR, IT'S LUCA.

VICTOR

Down here.

Luca looks to the ground.

VICTOR

Hi.

LUCA

Hey there. That doesn't look very comfortable. Hold on just a second.

Luca runs off SR. He comes back with a wheelchair. He approaches Victor with it and puts down the brakes.

With a great deal of effort, Luca is able to get Victor onto the wheelchair. Victor is groaning in pain. Luca wheels him towards the couch and helps him sit on it.

LUCA

I'm going to check for bruising. Is that okay?

VICTOR

Not like I have any pride left.

Luca lifts up Victor's shirt and inspects. He touches Victor's hip, causing Victor to hiss and push his hand away.

LUCA

Sorry.

VICTOR

It's fine.

Luca kneels down in front of Victor.

LUCA

I don't think you hurt yourself too bad. Just some bruising that is definitely going to hurt more in the morning. I can give you some gel and a compression pad for that.

VICTOR

Right.

LUCA

Can I ask what happened?

VICTOR

I was upstairs in bed and I wanted some water. My crutch missed a step.

LUCA

I don't want to lecture you, but just remember that your house is really old and isn't designed for crutches, so you've gotta be extra careful when you're doing stuff by yourself, okay?

VICTOR

Yeah.

LUCA

Thank you for calling me. That's exactly what I want you to do if this happens again. If for some reason I don't answer, you have to call emergency services. Okay?

Mhm. VICTOR

Can I trust you to do that for me? LUCA

For you? VICTOR

Yeah. It's not going to look good to my boss if my patient re-injures himself. Kind of the opposite of what I'm hired for. I'm not a... snurse. LUCA

What the fuck is a snurse? VICTOR

A sinister nurse. LUCA

What? VICTOR

You go to smedical school and get your smaster's degree and go to straining. LUCA

You're so full of shit. VICTOR

I am. Sorry. I wanted to make you laugh. LUCA

Right. Well. Good thing you're a nurse and not a -- VICTOR

A snurse? LUCA

A scomedian. VICTOR

Ouch. Hit me where it hurts. LUCA

They laugh. A beat of silence.

LUCA

Alright, do you want me to help you back to bed?

VICTOR

Yeah, uh, sure.

LUCA

Okay. Up you go.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 4

Morning. Luca is passed out on the couch.
Victor walks in on crutches. He sees Luca on the couch.

VICTOR

Luca?

He shakes him awake. Luca shoots up.

LUCA

Oh, shoot. What time is it?

VICTOR

It's early. What are you doing here?

LUCA

I, uh. I was waiting to see if you needed anything else before I left last night and I guess I fell asleep. I'm sorry.

VICTOR

No, it's okay.

LUCA

Here, sit.

They swap places.

LUCA

I suppose I'll make coffee.

VICTOR

Wait, I, uh.

Yeah? LUCA

I didn't, um, thank you. For last night. VICTOR

Oh, you don't have to thank me. It's what I'm here for. LUCA

Then fuck off. VICTOR

What? LUCA

I was kidding. VICTOR

Oh, right. Haha. LUCA

Yeah. So, coffee? VICTOR

Right, coffee. LUCA

Luca goes into the kitchen. He puts on a pot of coffee.

LUCA? VICTOR

YEAH? LUCA

ARE YOU ITALIAN? VICTOR

Luca rushes into the living room with urgency.

What? LUCA

VICTOR

I was just asking if you were Italian.

LUCA

Oh. No, I'm not actually.

VICTOR

But Luca is such an Italian name.

LUCA

Yeah, I'm actually named after the character from *The Godfather*.

VICTOR

Why?

LUCA

My parents watched it on their first date.

VICTOR

Weird first date movie.

LUCA

That's what I said.

Luca goes back into the kitchen. He prepares Victor's cereal and medications.

VICTOR

I'M NAMED AFTER THE MAIN CHARACTER IN *GLAMORAMA*.

LUCA

ISN'T THAT BOOK ABOUT DRUGS?

VICTOR

YEAH. MY MOM IS REALLY INTO TRANSGRESSIVE FICTION.

LUCA

COOL.

Luca brings out the cereal and medications. He puts it on the coffee table.

LUCA

Alright. What is your level of pain today?

Victor simply looks at Luca, as if to say - *don't make me say it.*

LUCA

Can I take a look?

VICTOR

What if I said no?

LUCA

Then I wouldn't take a look.

VICTOR

But then you couldn't do your job.

LUCA

Exactly. Which is why I'm hoping you'll consent to letting me take a look.

Victor allows it. Luca inspects meticulously.

LUCA

You're in a goofy mood.

VICTOR

No I'm not. I've never felt goofy in my entire life. I was born stoic.

LUCA

You've got some crazy bruising from where the top of your cast likely hit your stomach when you fell. How you even stood from your bed this morning is beyond me, you klutz.

VICTOR

Oops.

LUCA

Will you let me put some gel on this?

VICTOR

If it'll make you feel better. I'm personally not a little bitch.

LUCA

Yeah okay, Mr. Macho. I know that stings whether you admit it or not.

Luca stands and heads towards the kitchen. He grabs a clear tube from one of the cabinets.

VICTOR
MR. MACHO? WHY ARE ALL OF YOUR INSULTS 80 YEARS OLD?

LUCA
BECAUSE IM 80 YEARS OLD.

Luca enters the living room. He gets on his knees in front of Victor and lifts up his shirt. Victor hisses as he applies the gel.

VICTOR
Ow. Ow. Ow. How old are you actually?

LUCA
What?

VICTOR
You expect me to believe that you're 80?

LUCA
I'm 78.

VICTOR
Fuck, that's cold. Fuck. What is in that gel, acid?

LUCA
I thought you weren't a little bitch.

VICTOR
You're 35 at MOST.

LUCA
I'm 52. This shouldn't be stinging you as bad as it is.

VICTOR
Stop bullshitting me. You're like, my age.

LUCA
I'm definitely older than you. Stop squirming.

VICTOR
Motherfuck.

LUCA
Fine, you caught me. I'm 12. I'm a nursing prodigy. Suck in for a second so I can see if you're bleeding.

VICTOR

This is as much as I can suck in. Stop evading my question.

LUCA

Nope, not bleeding. You're just sensitive.

He closes the cap of the gel bottle and stands.

LUCA

I'm 28.

Luca goes into the kitchen. He puts the gel bottle back and prepares two cups of coffee.

VICTOR

I'M NOT SENSITIVE.

LUCA

YEAH, AND I'M NOT 28.

VICTOR

YOU'RE NOT?

LUCA

NO, I AM. SEE, I WAS MAKING A JOKE.

VICTOR

SEE, THE JOKE DIDN'T LAND BECAUSE I'M NOT SENSITIVE AND IF I HAD LAUGHED I WOULD'VE BEEN ADMITTING TO MY SUPPOSED SENSITIVITY BUT I'M NOT SENSITIVE SO I DIDN'T LAUGH.

LUCA

THANK GOD YOU'RE NOT A SCOMEDIAN.

Luca comes back into the living room. He puts one cup of coffee on the table and sips the other one.

From the side of the couch, he grabs his bag and takes another lozenge out. He puts it on the coffee table.

LUCA

While you eat, I'm going to run home to shower and change, and then when I come back I'll help you shower and I'll clean. Sounds good?

VICTOR

Sounds boring but yeah, sounds good.

LUCA

Boring? How dare you. Maybe later we can watch another movie or something.

VICTOR

We'll see.

Luca grabs his bag and exits. Victor picks up his bowl of cereal and sighs.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 5

A week later. Victor is in a bathtub upstage. Luca is giving him a sponge bath with a meticulous tenderness.

LUCA

Victor, I have something I want to run by you.

VICTOR

So you waited until I was naked and vulnerable?

LUCA

Oh, I can wait --

VICTOR

Kidding. You need to unclench every once in a while.

LUCA

Ha. Ha. Anyways, next month one of my friends from school is coming to visit me for a weekend, and I'm pretty excited because I haven't seen him -- or really, any of my friends -- in a long time.

VICTOR

Uh-huh.

LUCA

And, well, I feel like you and I have made good progress recently, right?

VICTOR

I guess.

LUCA

And, you know, I think you'll soon get to a point where we can enroll you in physical therapy and you won't need me around as much.

VICTOR

Mhm.

LUCA

So, I guess the question is...

VICTOR

Yeah?

LUCA

Would you be okay if I had someone else come for those few days so I can take off?

VICTOR

Oh. I. Oh.

LUCA

What?

VICTOR

I thought you were going to ask if I wanted to...

LUCA

Wanted to what?

VICTOR

Never mind. You don't need to ask my permission to take off. I'm not your boss.

LUCA

Yes I do. I see you every single day and your approval is important to me.

VICTOR

But what do you think I'm going to say? 'No Luca, you can't see your friend, you have to stay here with me?'

LUCA

You could, if you felt that way.

VICTOR

I don't.

LUCA

Every day counts. I don't want to put a cog in your recovery.

VICTOR

You're not.

LUCA

You're being short with me.

VICTOR

No, I'm like 2 inches taller than you.

LUCA

Victor.

VICTOR

Look, you're being dramatic. You can send anyone here, I don't care.

LUCA

Well, I'm not going to just send anyone. I'll likely ask my coworker Edora. I think you'll like her even though she's not nearly as funny as me.

VICTOR

You already have someone picked out. You must be desperate to get away from me.

LUCA

No, I just wanted to give this a lot of thought because you're... you know.

VICTOR

Difficult?

LUCA

Strong-willed.

VICTOR

Oh please.

LUCA

So, you're really okay with her coming for a few days?

VICTOR

That's what I said.

LUCA

And you're going to be nice to her and cooperate?

Whatever. VICTOR

Victor. LUCA

Luca. VICTOR

I'm going to ask her for a full report and if she tells me you were being stubborn, I'm going to be really upset. LUCA

Luca, I'm 24 years old. Don't talk to me like I'm some fussy toddler that you're hiring a babysitter for. VICTOR

Okay, then don't act like one. LUCA

I'm not that codependent, am I? VICTOR

No, in fact, you're very independent. And that's why we butt heads sometimes. LUCA

Because I won't let you cosset and coddle me? VICTOR

You're being unfair. I'm a nurse. My job is to provide care. LUCA

I'm not having this argument with you. I'm cold and I want to get out. VICTOR

I can use warmer / water. LUCA

I want to get out. VICTOR

Fine. LUCA

Luca stands. He grabs a robe off the toilet.

LUCA

And I was not arguing with you. We need to be able to be practical about these things.

VICTOR

Don't worry, I'm as practical as practical can be. Help me up.

Luca hovers over Victor, but makes no motion to help him.

LUCA

Please don't be mad at me. I just want you taken care of.

VICTOR

You're taking advantage of your position.

LUCA

I refuse to be at odds with you. You're not getting out of the tub until you tell me we're okay.

VICTOR

Seriously?

LUCA

Yes seriously. I'm not letting you walk away all mad at me and I have no choice but to sulk around and wonder what I did wrong when things were going really well.

VICTOR

I'm not mad. We're okay, of course we're okay.

LUCA

You promise?

VICTOR

Cross my heart.

LUCA

And hope to die?

VICTOR

Luca, I'm shivering.

LUCA

Okay, okay.

Luca helps Victor stand. He hands him the robe.

VICTOR

Ugh, so now somebody else has to see me naked?

LUCA

Oh come on, she's a registered nurse. Besides, your *pelvis* is in a *cast*. There are far more offensive showering situations I've been in than yours.

VICTOR

(amused)

Meaning?

LUCA

Don't be inappropriate.

VICTOR

You said it, not me.

Luca helps Victor out of the tub.

LUCA

Good?

VICTOR

Good.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 6

Nighttime. Victor is making tea in the kitchen, standing with the aid of his crutches. Peeper frogs can be heard outside of the window. It's tranquil.

All of a sudden, Luca barges in through the front door. Notably, he is not wearing scrubs, but rather something more casual. He's not reporting for work.

LUCA

VICTOR, IT'S LUCA. I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.

Victor appears in the doorframe of the kitchen.

VICTOR

What are you doing here? It's, like, 10 PM. I thought your friend was visiting.

LUCA

Do you want to tell me why I just received the most horrid report I've ever received in my entire career from Edora?

A beat. The floor looks very interesting to Victor.

LUCA

That was *humiliating*. We were making all of this progress, and now my agency probably thinks I can't even do my job. What happened?

VICTOR

I didn't want her help.

LUCA

Why? What was so wrong with her?

VICTOR

I'm fine on my own.

LUCA

Okay, I've had it. I'm so fed up with your attitude. I get it, okay? You're a big strong independent man who hasn't so much as relied on his own mother his entire life. You don't need anyone but yourself. But Victor, you. Can't. Walk. Okay? You can't fucking walk. I get that you hate me and don't want to feel helpless but you just can't do this on your own and if you never want to see me again, you have to work with me. I am the one thing that will give you back your independence, but if you refuse to cooperate, then you'll probably be seeing me till the day you die, dammit.

VICTOR

I don't hate you. I don't hate you at all. I just hate you and Edora and my own fucking mother looking at me with all of this pity, like I'm disabled.

LUCA

But you are disabled! You're disabled and you're going to be disabled for the rest of your life and there's nothing wrong with that! The sooner you accept that, the less heartache you'll have down the line when you're 68 and you're using 2 canes to walk when it could've been 1 had you taken care of yourself all of those years before.

VICTOR

Well of course that's fucking easy for you to say, you can shower and shit by yourself! It's dehumanizing to be a fully grown adult and not being able to do a single thing without assistance. Did you know I used to run marathons, hmm? I used to run and play sports and go to bars and dance and now the most remarkable thing I can do is sit on my ass and eat lozenges. And now, once I do "recover," everyone's going to be staring at me and wondering why someone so young is using a cane all because I stepped in front of that --

LUCA

You... what?

Deafening silence.

LUCA

I was told you were driving.

VICTOR

You were lied to.

LUCA

My agency told me that.

VICTOR

And who told them that?

LUCA

What reason does your mother have to lie?

VICTOR

Take it up with her.

LUCA

Victor, I / didn't know.

VICTOR

Look, I didn't mean to admit that to you, and I don't want to have this conversation.

LUCA

I'm a healthcare professional, I can't just / pretend you didn't say that.

VICTOR

Stop looking at me like that.

LUCA

Like what?

VICTOR

Like you're fucking scared, or something.

LUCA

I'm not scared. I'm sad that you felt / that way.

VICTOR

Please stop.

LUCA

Okay.

VICTOR

You have more to say.

LUCA

I do. But I don't have to say it right now.

VICTOR

Then don't.

LUCA

But I'm going to say it soon.

VICTOR

I'll pencil it in.

A beat.

LUCA

Okay, look, this was all very inappropriate of me. I shouldn't have said any of the things I said to you, and I'm sorry. I crossed a line and it wasn't my place. I'm going to go home.

VICTOR

Why did you come here?

LUCA

Because Edora called me and told me all of that and I, I was just, I was seeing red because I know you're better than that. But I should go to bed.

VICTOR

I don't want you to leave while you're mad at me. I won't be able to sleep.

LUCA

I'm not mad at you. I do hope you're a little mad at yourself for how you behaved with Edora, and I do want an explanation for that, but not right now.

VICTOR

You said you were seeing red.

LUCA

I was. I've calmed down. Goodnight.

Luca opens the front door.

VICTOR

Don't go.

LUCA

Victor, I've done enough to lose me my job for tonight.

VICTOR

You know I wouldn't report you or anything.

LUCA

But I couldn't blame you if you did. So, let me go home before I continue to make an ass of myself.

VICTOR

But wait. Luca, I -- Luca, wait.

LUCA

What, Victor? What?

Victor drops his crutches and throws his arms around Luca's neck and kisses him. Panicked, Luca grips the small of his back to keep him from falling. He doesn't get a chance to consider all the rules he's breaking.

Luca kisses him back for a few moments, and then breaks it.

LUCA

Victor, you're going to fall.

VICTOR

No, I'm holding onto you.

LUCA

You can't put that much weight on your / leg.

VICTOR

Please just kiss me.

Victor kisses him again. Luca breaks it again
after a few moments.

LUCA

Can we just move towards the couch?

VICTOR

I'm fine. Nothing hurts. Pain level: 0. Please.

LUCA

It doesn't hurt right now, but tomorrow --

Victor kisses him again and pushes him into the
front door. A few moments go by.

VICTOR

Stop trying to lift me off the ground.

LUCA

I'm not, I just, put your weight on me --

VICTOR

I am.

LUCA

No, fully. Like that. There you go.

They kiss again. It breaks again.

LUCA

You can't be comfortable right now.

VICTOR

Can you just fucking kiss me and not worry about my injury?

LUCA

No, I can't actually. Physically, I'm unable to. What's wrong with the couch?

VICTOR
Do you want to kiss me?

LUCA
I do.

VICTOR
Then shut up for once in your life.

They kiss one more time. Luca lifts himself off the door and lifts Victor off the ground.

VICTOR
If you mention the fucking couch again I swear to God --

LUCA
I was going to move upstairs.

VICTOR
Upstairs?

LUCA
To your bedroom.

VICTOR
Oh. Okay.

LUCA
Not to, like / you know.

VICTOR
No, yeah, obviously.

LUCA
Is that okay with you?

VICTOR
Grab my crutches.

LUCA
I don't want you to feel like / you have to.

VICTOR
Oh my God, shut up. You were a boy before you were a nurse, weren't you? Let's go upstairs.

They exit.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 7

The next morning. Victor is waiting by the door, supported by crutches.

Luca approaches the front door. He hesitates. He pulls himself together. He opens the door. He jumps.

LUCA

Jesus. You scared me.

Victor kisses him.

VICTOR

Good morning.

LUCA

Good morning. Go sit, I'll make you breakfast. Cereal?

VICTOR

Cereal is fine, thank you. I already put the coffee on.

Luca puts his bag down near the couch and then goes into the kitchen. Victor follows him.

LUCA

Oh, hello. I said you could sit.

VICTOR

Don't want to.

LUCA

Alright then. So, what is your level of pain today?

VICTOR

A solid 4 and a half.

LUCA

Any bruising?

VICTOR

Nope.

LUCA

Are you lying?

VICTOR

You were excessively gentle. Annoyingly gentle, honestly.

LUCA

Well *excuse me* if I didn't want a makeout session to be the reason your injury gets aggravated.

VICTOR

You could break my leg all over again and I'd thank you.

LUCA

I don't find that funny or romantic.

VICTOR

I'm sorry.

The most awkward beat of silence you've ever experienced in your entire life.

VICTOR

Something's wrong. Say it. This honesty thing goes both ways.

LUCA

I don't know how to. Every time I look at you, every sensical thing I want to say just turns into a jumble of mush.

Luca hands Victor a mug of coffee but he's too pissed to take it.

VICTOR

Oh, I get it. You're feeling guilty, is that it? You didn't actually want to kiss me?

LUCA

That's not it. God, that's so not it.

VICTOR

Then what?

LUCA

Ethically, I shouldn't have kissed you.

VICTOR

Your ethics are telling you that you can't kiss someone who wants to kiss you?

LUCA

My ethics are telling me I shouldn't kiss someone I provide care for. The rulebook at my job is actually saying the same thing.

VICTOR

But do you want to?

LUCA

Victor, this is not about what I want to do. I sometimes want to kill the person who cuts me off on the highway, but do I? NO. Because I'm NOT ALLOWED TO.

VICTOR

That clearly didn't concern you last night. You were one pelvic injury away from / fucking me.

LUCA

As long as I work for you, we can't.

VICTOR

Okay then you're fired.

LUCA

You can't fire me. Your mom hired me and you consented to me being here.

VICTOR

I only consented because my bitch mom made me. I can revoke my consent.

LUCA

You're going to have me out of a job because you want to kiss me that bad?

VICTOR

Can't you just approach your agency and ask for a different patient?

LUCA

Not without a valid conflict of interest. I'd be opening up a whole case that would probably cost me my job regardless. And anyway, would you even cooperate with someone else? You clearly wouldn't work with Edora.

VICTOR

We're not talking about that right now.

LUCA

But we are, though. Because it's really strange how I'm the only one you'll work with and I would truly hate to think that the only reason you've been doing better is because you have feelings for me.

VICTOR

Look, I'm sorry about Edora, okay? Having to need someone new is hard for me.

LUCA

Why didn't you just say that?

VICTOR

Because I wanted you to feel like you had freedom to leave me even though you're the only thing that makes me feel any kind of hopefulness.

A long beat as Luca processes the gravity of the situation he caused.

LUCA

Victor, I care about you so much. Unhealthily so. More than I've ever cared for a patient before.

VICTOR

But that's all I am to you. A patient.

LUCA

Because that's all you can be, Victor. The way we depend on each other is wrong. Look, if you were someone I met at a bar or through friends or even on Tinder, then it would be different. But you're my patient. There's a million rules against this.

VICTOR

Nobody would have to know. I wouldn't tell anyone.

LUCA

Doesn't matter. It all comes out in the end. I've seen it before. I kiss you, and a mailman walks past your window and sees it. The mailman tells his wife. His wife goes to work at the supermarket or whatever and she tells her coworker. Her coworker goes home and tells her dad and what'll you have it? Her dad is my boss. Bam, I'm fired and will never work in medicine again. I can't do it. I love my job too much. I was born to take care of people.

VICTOR

So then I'll keep my blinds closed.

LUCA

You do realise that, with your insistence, you're asking me to risk everything while you're risking essentially nothing? Am I wrong?

VICTOR

If I had something to risk for you, I would.

LUCA

What an easy thing to say. I wish you wouldn't be so naive about this.

VICTOR

So you're saying I'm a child?

LUCA

Oh my God. There's no winning with you, is there?

Luca checks his watch.

LUCA

I have a job to do, so if you'll excuse me.

Luca pushes past Victor in the doorway into the living room. Victor follows him.

VICTOR

That's clearly the case. If this were really about your job, then we could find a way to make it work. But you don't want to. And why don't you want to? Because you don't want to admit the fact that you don't want to be with someone who's --

LUCA

Don't even finish that. Is that seriously the bullshit you believe?

VICTOR

Yes.

LUCA

Victor. I'm going to say this once and once only. This is not about your injury. The fact that you could even consider that is an insult to my character. Are we clear?

No response.

LUCA

Wow.

I'm sorry. VICTOR

Don't speak to me. LUCA

Don't be like that. VICTOR

Shut up.
I'm going home. LUCA

Stop it, stop it. Don't leave. I can't stop you, I'm helpless. VICTOR

You're not helpless. I wouldn't have made out with you if you were helpless. You're just a dick. LUCA

You can't leave. I need you. VICTOR

I'll send coverage. LUCA

I won't cooperate. I'll even refuse to eat. VICTOR

You're trapping me. LUCA

No I'm not. You're getting paid to be here. VICTOR

How do you think it makes me feel when you say stuff like that, huh? You know how much I care about you. LUCA

Then don't leave. VICTOR

You've upset me. LUCA

VICTOR

I'm sorry.

LUCA

You're not, though. I come here every day and exhaust every ounce of my patience for you and you repay me by saying whatever you can to hurt me.

VICTOR

I appreciate everything you do for me.

LUCA

But you don't. Clearly you don't see the extra mile I've gone for you over and over again.

VICTOR

I don't let anyone take care of me and I let you take care of me. I relinquish all of my control the moment you step through the door. I allow you to keep me alive.

LUCA

Now you're just saying anything to get me to stay. Six months ago I was begging and pleading with you to let me in, and now you're saying you can't live without me. What changed, huh? Why flip the script now?

VICTOR

Stop it. I love you.

LUCA

Yeah, okay. You don't say mean things to people you claim to love.

VICTOR

You do if you don't mean it.

LUCA

So I deserve mean things said to me because I'm unwilling to sacrifice my career for you?

VICTOR

No.

LUCA

If you could go back in time and stop your accident from happening knowing you would never meet me, would you? Would you sacrifice me for your ability to walk?

Silence.

Luca goes back into the kitchen. He hastily prepares a bowl of cereal and a small plastic cup of pills. This time, Victor hesitates before following him.

VICTOR

That was a mean question to ask.

LUCA

Right, because coercing me into staying when I want to leave by saying you need me is not mean?

VICTOR

We manipulate each other. It's why we work.

LUCA

Is this what it looks like when something's working to you?

Luca once again escapes into the living room. Victor follows. Luca puts the bowl and the cup onto the coffee table.

LUCA

Sit down and eat so you can take your pills.

Victor finally sits. He eats his cereal.

LUCA

I messed up with you, I think. I tried too hard to convince you I cared and then I ended up caring too hard and I broke all these boundaries and now we're here.

VICTOR

I thought you liked me.

LUCA

I'm trying to do what's in your best interest. You need a completely impartial and much more professional caregiver and I've been abusing my position. As much as I thought I was helping, I've been letting my emotions get in the way of your recovery this whole time. I'm disappointed in myself. It would probably be better if I did try to get you a different nurse, despite the risk of retaliation. But I think if I approach it the right way, it should be okay.

VICTOR

No. You can't. If we can't be together then you can't leave.

LUCA

You need to focus on recovering for yourself, and I'm distracting you.

VICTOR

I'll tell the agency you kissed me if you try to do that.

LUCA

You came onto me.

VICTOR

And you carried me to my bed and kissed me there for hours.

LUCA

I didn't do exactly what you wanted so now you're going to blackmail me?

VICTOR

You didn't give me anything to take my meds with.

Luca goes into the kitchen, grabs the previously ignored cup of coffee, and brings it to Victor.

VICTOR

No lozenge?

LUCA

Lozenges are for good patients who don't threaten my job.

VICTOR

Luca, if I could physically get on my knees right now and beg you not to hate me, I would.

LUCA

Do not.

Luca sits on the ground next to Victor's legs to keep him from trying.

VICTOR

Ha. You see? I didn't even say I was going to and you flip out. You care about me too much to let me go.

LUCA

At least I'm willing to admit that the way I care about you is unhealthy.

Luca reaches for his tote bag leaning against the couch and rummages through it.

VICTOR

I feel like you think I'm crazy right now, especially because of what I said last night.

LUCA

Crazy's not the word, and it has nothing to do with that.

VICTOR

You know, less than twelve hours ago, we were making out in my bed. And you were feeling me up as much as you could. And you wanted me *badly*. I could see how --

LUCA

Okay. I get it. I was there.

VICTOR

And the whole time I was thinking, 'how far would he go if I wasn't in a cast? Where would he touch me if he had the chance? What would he do, if he could do anything?'

Luca grabs Victor's hand. They sit like that for a moment. Eventually, Luca kisses his hand and stands.

LUCA

I'm going to clean.

Luca exits. Victor looks at what Luca left in his hand. It's a lozenge.

BLACKOUT.