

ACT TWO

The office. Mid-morning. About a month later.

The portrait of Washington is no longer on display.

Janine bustles around, tidying, making tea from a small hot water boiler. She wears a back brace. She does not walk or move quite as comfortably as she did before.

Zoe enters. She watches Janine for a moment, then clears her throat.

JANINE

Hello! Welcome. Welcome.

(it's possible that Janine initiates
the world's most awkward hug)

Would you like to uh - to take a seat?

ZOE

I'm good.

JANINE

Would you like any tea, by any chance? I was about to have tea.

ZOE

No thank you.

JANINE

Oh - you know - I won't either.

(she takes a seat)

Thank you. For coming in.

ZOE

You're welcome.

JANINE

How are you?

ZOE

Um...

JANINE

I know, I know, that's a - what a ridiculous question.

ZOE

A bit, yeah.

I am keeping it together.

JANINE

That's good.

ZOE

Haha, yeah, real good.

How are you?

JANINE

I am trying to keep it together, as you say.

This whole thing has been - quite something. If I had known how many people could be persuaded to care about a history course I would have - I thought it would be good for us to meet.

Zoe I want to apologize.

I've gone back and listened to that recording of our conversation again and again. The things I said have haunted me.

I didn't understand your feelings. And instead of trying to understand them, I tried to talk you out of them.

ZOE

Yes.

JANINE

And you tried to tell me that too, and I didn't listen.

And for all of that - I apologize.

People may not always be able to agree. But we can believe that another person feels the way they say they do. And that they have reasons for feeling that way.

Beat. Zoe takes a moment.

ZOE

You know-

JANINE

I really-

JANINE

I'm sorry - you go.

ZOE

My friends tried to tell me not to come today.

They said you'd disappoint me again. Upset me further.

JANINE

Well I certainly hope to prove them wrong.

ZOE

I thought they would probably be right.

But I guess I'm just -

I've been feeling alone in all of this.

I mean my friends have been *so* supportive. Most of my friends.

My real friends.

They tell me that I'm brave. And that I am beautiful. And strong.

But I am not feeling any of those things.

I mean it's insane! All of this has been *insane*.

Like, first came the nice articles. Saying it's high time we reexamine how we teach American history. Saying I called much needed attention to microgressions in academia. Calling me a hero.

JANINE

Yes.

ZOE

...Did you read the one about how one of Washington's former slaves later led an unsuccessful revolt in Sierra Leone?

JANINE

I did, yes. I thought it was a good article.

ZOE

Lots of flair.

Then there were the articles I expected. Free speech. Back in my day we weren't so sensitive.

That kind of thing.

Then came the pieces listing all of the points I had forgotten to make.

The one about how microaggressions have a disproportionate effect on poorer students and I couldn't possibly understand their feelings-

JANINE

I didn't think that was fair though-

ZOE

No, they were right.

JANINE

I didn't know you were from Westchester, incidentally.

I'm from Tarrytown.

My mother used to clean houses in your neighborhood.

ZOE

Then the articles about how I hadn't mentioned that Latinx history is even more under-represented than African American history.

JANINE

Well *they* forgot Native Americans, who were much more involved in the Revolutionary War.