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# LENS

A Play for Deaf and Hearing Actors and Audiences

by  
Rebecca Ryland

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# LENS

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## CHARACTERS

ANA, (Pronounced “Ah’-na): *A deaf woman in her 20’s. Ana does not speak but communicates through sign-language. She can read lips.*

JACK: *Ana’s husband; 20’s to early 30’s. Deaf due to an accident when he was in his teens.*

ANNA, (Pronounced “A-nna”): *Ana’s voice that Jack “hears”. She speaks Ana’s lines and often mimics her moves but sometimes speaks directly into Jack’s ear. **She is not an “Interpreter”.***

## TIME

*Genetic screening can identify, before a baby is born, whether or not it will be deaf. The time is the near future when an embryo’s DNA can be edited so that it will not be deaf even if it carries the genetic code for deafness. Once changed, the deaf gene is forever eradicated from its DNA and can no longer be passed down. At the time of the play, this technology is available to the public.*

## PLACE

*Ana and Jack’s home; precisely, their bedroom.*

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### SETTING:

*A bedroom represented by a stool at a dressing table DRC, a black stool nearby, a sitting chair L next to a lamp table, a clothing rack UL and a dressing screen UR. On the lamp table is a random stack of photographs, among them a photo of a country stream and the flowers on the banks. The entrance to the room is UC.*

### AT RISE:

*ANA (ANNA) and JACK arrive home dressed in semi-formal wear from an evening out. ANA signs her lines. ANNA, ANA'S VOICE, speaks her lines.*

*ANA, (Signing)  
ANNA, (Speaking)*

What a lovely evening.

*JACK helps ANA off with her coat and hangs it on the rack. He does not look at her so she does not know what he says.*

JACK

*(Not looking at ANA)*

Nice enough.

*ANA, (Signing)  
ANNA, (Speaking)*

*(Once ANA'S hands are free; to JACK)*

You seemed to enjoy yourself.

JACK

I was uncomfortable.

*ANA turns JACK towards her.*

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Look at me, please.

JACK

Sorry.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

(*Not needing an apology*)

Not sorry.

*ANA takes JACK'S hands and places them on her hips. Then she puts her hands around his neck. ANNA remains behind ANA.*

JACK

(*Looking directly into her eyes*)

We need to discuss this.

*JACK drops his hands, removes his jacket and hangs it on the back of the chair L.*

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking directly into JACK'S ear*)

Not now. It's late.

*ANA takes his hands and once again places them on her hips. She puts her arms around his neck and begins to dance. JACK does not respond.*

JACK

You brought it up in front of your friends.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

(*Steps back*)

Our friends. (*Brushing it off*) After-dinner conversation.

*ANA begins to dance solo/ANNA follows her moves. ANA is attempting to divert the conversation to something more romantic, to seduce JACK.*

JACK

I know what they think.

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking directly into JACK'S ear)*

*(Still dancing, signing)*

You always like watching me dance.

JACK

I like watching you drink coffee. I like watching you sleep. I like watching you snore.

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

*(Stopping)*

I don't snore.

JACK

And I don't like being put on the spot.

*ANA crosses towards JACK, gives him a kiss on the cheek and sits at the vanity. ANNA sits on the second stool nearby. ANA begins to remove her earrings and necklace. JACK watches from behind.*

JACK, *Continued*

You stopped taking your pills. We agreed to wait until we worked this out.

ANA, *(Signing, towards the mirror)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

I see you in the mirror. Why so angry?

JACK

*(Watching in the mirror)*

I'm not angry. I'm concerned.

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

*(ANA turns towards JACK)*

About us?

JACK

About this.

ANA, *(Signing)*  
ANNA, *(Speaking)*

We both want a baby.

JACK

That isn't the problem. You told your friends you would never agree to a baby conceived in a petri dish.

ANA, *(Signing)*  
ANNA, *(Speaking)*

I want to carry my baby the same as other women.

JACK

It's not the way it's done.

ANA, *(Signing)*  
ANNA, *(Speaking)*

In utero?

JACK

No, in a petri dish.

ANA, *(Signing)*  
ANNA, *(Speaking)*

The result is the same.

*ANA rises, as does ANNA. ANA slips out of her dress and places it over the dressing screen. ANA dances seductively with her back to JACK. JACK does not watch, but says aloud what he thinks, what he wants to say.*

JACK

No, it's not. We have a choice to remove the deaf gene from its DNA. We can edit it just for our child or we can remove the mutation in the genome and it will be gone from her lineage for good.

*JACK now turns back towards ANA but still does not go to her. ANNA has failed to change the subject or seduce JACK. She turns towards him. It's time to address the issue.*

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Jack, do you find me attractive?

JACK

Of course. You know I do.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

If you could, what would you change?

JACK

(*Sitting on chair L*)

Nothing.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

You accept me exactly as I am?

JACK

Ana, you know I do.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Then why do you think having a baby just like me is bad?

JACK

You cannot help your deafness.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

I am a deaf woman. It is not something that needs help.

JACK

And I am a deaf man.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

No, you are a man who lost his hearing. Had you not been in an accident, this (*Referring to "them"*) would not have happened. You would have continued your life in the hearing world and me, mine in the Deaf world and we would never have met.

JACK

You are a gift—



ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

A consolation prize?

JACK

The most important thing that ever happened in my life.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Then I don't understand.

JACK

How can you?

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

You think because you were born with something deaf people don't have that it makes you "better" in some way?

*JACK does not respond.*

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

*Continued*

Is that it? And that the only way that our child can be "better" is if it hears?

JACK

I won't dignify that with an answer.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

*(Statement of fact)*

You won't chance having a deaf child.

JACK

I want my child to hear.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

You want your child to be "normal."

JACK

I want her to know what it means to hear. If that is normal, then, yes. I want her to be normal.

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

What is normal for you is the same for me. Who we are, how we are born is *normal*. Deafness is normal. It is one of the possibilities of life. Would you change the color of our baby's hair? Or the color of its skin?

JACK

Of course not.

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Why would you think that something intrinsic to my very existence is not "normal?"

JACK

So is it wrong, then, to want my child to be like me?—

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Like you were—

JACK

The way I was born? My normal?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

I told you. I am willing to take the chance. It is only fair. What genetics our child carries will come from us both. What is more fair than that?

JACK

This isn't about fairness. This is about giving our child the opportunity to experience life through every nuance, every single sense and sensibility she could possibly possess. To provide her with the quality of life she deserves. To place at her disposal every single advantage she needs for success. Life is challenging enough.

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Has deafness stopped you in any way? Has it kept you from success?

JACK

No. It hasn't.

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

You have done quite well without hearing.

JACK

I still hear. That is why I succeed when other artists fail.

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

That makes no sense. You cannot hear. It is what you see, how you perceive the world through your eyes not your ears that allows you to interpret life through the lens of your camera as only an artist sees it.

JACK

I am not interpreting the images I photograph through the lens of the camera. The lens is merely the tool I use to remember what it means to hear.

*ANA looks at JACK and shakes her head, not understanding. She returns to the dressing table. JACK crosses to the lamp table and grabs a handful of photographs. He returns to ANA, rummages through the photos and then holds one out in front of her.*

JACK, *Continued*

What do you see?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

I don't know what you mean?

JACK

Do you see water flowing over rocks?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

*(Annoyed)*

Well, that's obviously a photo of a stream.

JACK

Do you see how the ripples reflect the sunlight?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Yes, you captured it beautifully.

JACK

Do you know what water feels like?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

Water?

JACK

Yes. Cold water rushing through your fingers?

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

You mean what it feels like to hold my hands under a faucet? Yes.

JACK

Good. See the wildflowers on the bank?

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

Yes.

JACK

What do they smell like?

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

I don't know specifically what those flowers smell like. Should I?

JACK

Stand up.

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

Why? *(Looks at him and sees he is serious)* Alright. *(Stands)*

JACK

Remember the flowers in the bouquet you carried the day we were married? You told me you could still smell them hours after.

ANA, *(Signing)*

ANNA, *(Speaking)*

So?

JACK

*(Grabs her hands)*

Hold them. In your hands. Feel them. Smell them. Remember them.

*After a moment ANA begins to walk, as if down the aisle, holding her hands as if they hold a bouquet. Then she spins, stops and throws the bouquet over her head. She turns back to JACK.*

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

I'll never forget that smell. Whenever I smell flowers now, it reminds me how lucky I felt that day. To have you in my life.

JACK

(*To himself*)

Sensory memory is amazing, isn't it? (*To ANA*) Now, (*Holding up the photo*) look at the flowers. Do you smell them now?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking directly into JACK'S ear*)

(*Smiling*)

Yes.

JACK

And have you ever tasted sparkling fresh water?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

(*Finally enjoying the game*)

Yes, you know that I have. I showed you where we got water from a spring, at my grandmother's house. Where we played when I was growing up. You tasted it yourself.

JACK

And you remember what that tastes like?

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

(*Laughing*)

Like a bit of heaven swishing around in my mouth.

JACK

(*Pointing at the photo*)

Taste the water in the stream. Taste it now.

ANA, (*Signing*)

ANNA, (*Speaking*)

(*Staring at the photo*)

Mmmm, fresh, pure water.

JACK

Now, look again. Tell me what you hear?

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

(*Keeps eyes on JACK*)

What I hear?

JACK

Yes.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

(*Offended*)

I feel sound. I know what it is.

*ANA crosses and sits at the vanity,  
ANNA follows.*

JACK

When I look through the lens I only photograph things I hear.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

That you feel.

JACK

(*Insistent*)

That I hear. If the sound of what I see is unclear, if I can't recall it— If what I see can't refresh my memory so that I hear the music it makes— No matter how exotic the image, how rare the smell, how intense the taste or distinct the touch— If I can't *hear* it, I leave it. I walk away.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking*)

And when you look at me, through this lens, what do you hear?

JACK

Simple things. (*Pause*) In the morning, when you bathe, I hear the sound of splashing water. When I watch you in front of the mirror getting ready for work, I hear the wispy sound a brush makes sliding through hair. Huh! At night, when I turn out the light and you snuggle up next to me, and I whisper 'I love you', I hear the sound of my voice.

ANA, (*Signing*)  
ANNA, (*Speaking directly into JACK'S ear*)

(*Whispering*)

And I hear you.

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
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