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TINY DISABLED MOMENT #1

SMALL MOMENTS OF DISABLED KNOWING

There's so many tiny moments of disabled intimacy and knowing that the abled world doesn't have words for. So we, the disabled, don't always have words for them either. But they still exist. We're still making them happen, all the time.

"This is the 'most accessible route'? That's what the Airbnb lady said?" I say.

"Yeah," says my friend Jonah. We look at each other and just start cracking up.

We're the only two queerdos with canes in this weird bougie neighborhood that is deliberately very hard to find, like down fourteen one-way side streets, where the fragrance-free-ish Airbnb is. We very much want to go to the amazing park with the ocean view and the railroad tracks and salmon-spawning creek we have been told about. The "most accessible trail" to said park is a muddy dirt trail that plunges below us. It's almost total slope. Like, we could maybe use some ropes to get down it.

We look at the map: the actually more accessible trail is almost a mile's walk away, and then it's even farther to get to the beach. We probably don't have spoons to walk it and also get through the park and also get back.

"Welp."

"You wanna try it?" they say.

“Yeah. OK. We can always stop. We can go as slow as we need,” I say, those kind of crip chants we say to each other. Jonah nods. We start slowly, slowly easing our way down the hill.

We are in constant contact as we descend. I don’t mean that we talk all the time—that kind of chatter wouldn’t be accessible to either of us—but we are always crip-noticing and looking out for each other. Jonah says “Nice foot placement” on the way I place my feet at an angle as we descend a step at a time; I tell them it’s a balance hack against sliding that an old friend who’s an amputee showed me one day when our adventurous clambering down to a promised-on-All-Trails clothing optional beach turned into two hours of descent.

“I like your branch grabbing!” they holler as I grab small branches to brace myself as I go lower. We walk. We marvel as the muddy deer trail turns into a paved, accessible path. We stop when we need to catch our breath. My paper NIOSH N95 is working OK—I keep the bill of my rain jacket, zipped over a parka, pulled forward to keep the water off. I occasionally ask permission to pull it off. There’s no one on the trail but us and it helps me to gasp some deep breaths of unfiltered air.

As we stumble on and the trail opens up to a clearing, we see that there’s a parking lot! “Shit, this would’ve been the most accessible path! Why don’t they ever consider cars as access?” one of us snorts.

We find a circle of stumps under uncut cedar and fir to watch the water, the crows, to talk and catch up with each other. Then we look together for the gate a purple-haired queerdo getting out of hir car told us about. We walk through, and north, to a bridge to the beach that is accessible on the way in, stairs on the way down. We note that the metal stairs are scary because you can see right through them to

the ground plunging away below, encourage each other to walk down as quickly as we need for anxiety, as slowly as we need holding on to the rail with both hands, taking each stair with two feet then moving forward—for autism and balance and pain.

Finally we get to our prize: a winter beach that's totally deserted except for two public works workers who keep their distance from us. We flop on the ground. We get plastered with rain and water. We talk, and are silent, and watch the ocean. We're happy.

On the way back, when we get to the first big hill—because all that descent on the way down means ascent on the way up of course—my friend says, "I'm starting to get a little overwhelmed at all the uphill." I just hear them. I don't tell them *don't worry it'll be fine* or try and panic-fix it. We just witness each other. We walk even slower. We groan. We stop more. My breath is coming faster. One of the last times, we hear, before we see, a great barred owl. We stop and listen to her hooting.

When we get to the top, they say, "Without you here, I would've given up. I wouldn't have even tried that trail. I would've taken one look at it and been like, hell no, I'm going back to bed."

I laugh in recognition. "Oh, me the fuck too."

So much of the time when I get an anxious, "How do we make our group accessible?" question from some well-meaning abled person, I don't know how to answer the question. I mean, I do—there are so many access suggestions and audits and resources and essays, and I will send them all to them.

But what it's harder for me to convey is how real access, crip-made access, is the rich and flexible and subtle dynamics of noticing each other, working shit out, trying things, moaning and groaning,

laughing and stopping, and negotiating we find as disabled people in disabled-on-disabled friendships, like mine with Jonah.

I love so many of the access tips and tools out there. But some well-meaning ableds using one for the first time might say, *Look at that hike, oh, there's no way that's accessible for the "differently abled."* And they wouldn't have been wrong to not hold their team-building hike on that trail or whatever.

But crip access is also a knowing, a dynamic, built out of a disabled-disabled friendship that has been building knowledge of each other's bodies and minds for years. Something more fluid and complicated and sarcastic and knowing. The ways we spot and witness and notice and praise and support each other. The ways we let ourselves laugh crip-ruefully "what the fuck?" at this totally inaccessible "most accessible path," stay with each other, fall on our ass, know that stopping or turning back at any time is possible, and slowly make whatever way we want, together. These small moments of disabled knowing, the ways I know Jonah knows me and that their knowledge is not static.

That disabled knowing, the sweetest crip kiss, one of the things that makes a fucking amazing disabled life.