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Alone, Together

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Thank you to all the playwrights; directors; actors; designers; dramaturgs; artistic, production and administrative folks; donors; and audiences who have contributed to making LAUNCH PAD a vibrant home for new plays.

Alone, Together

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Foreword

On March 10, 2020, one week before the end of winter quarter, everyone in the University of California, Santa Barbara community received an email from Chancellor Henry Yang instructing us to move to online teaching as soon as possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The theatre/dance faculty immediately came together to figure out what to do to best serve the needs of our students. Final projects and upcoming productions had to be canceled, and students were heading home for the foreseeable future to take classes on Zoom from their childhood bedrooms! We were all thrown into a bit of chaos: how could we create a remote curriculum for all of our aspiring young artists?

It was at that point that my dear friend, festival co-director and head of the B.F.A. acting program, Annie Torsiglieri, had the vision to say: “Let’s commission playwrights to write monologues and plays that are meant to be performed on Zoom.” Well, I went a little crazy and invited every writer who has ever worked with our new play development program, LAUNCH PAD, over the past 15 years to participate. That was around 30 writers, and 24 answered the call! We gave the writers this prompt: *Alone, Together*. A total of 39 plays were written, 23 directors engaged, 61 actors cast, 5 stage managers, 3 designers, 3 dramaturgs and 10 staff assembled virtually, and, together, we created an all-day, live Zoom festival in four chapters on Saturday, June 6, 2020.

What we couldn’t anticipate is that not only would we be rehearsing during a global health pandemic but also in the midst of a revolution. George Floyd was murdered on Monday, May 25, and it reignited the cry against racism in our country. Our company was composed of students, faculty, staff and professional guest artists from across the country. Many were protesting by day and rehearsing by night. Even today, as I write this, the protests continue. It was important to both Annie and me that all of the artists involved in *Alone, Together* knew (and still know) that UCSB Department of Theater and Dance and LAUNCH PAD stand with our Black communities across the country on this day and every day. BLACK LIVES MATTER. We are with you.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in a famous letter from the Birmingham jail in 1963: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” We, as artists, are committed to speaking out against injustice.

Xochitl Clare, one of our actors, announced *Alone, Together* on her Facebook page by quoting performance and installation artist Ester Hernandez who said, “We must continue to use our creative skills to give strength to our political, cultural and spiritual struggle.”

Xochitl then continued with her own thoughts: “‘Is making theatre really important now?’ my heart asks. As a young Black artist, struggling to grapple with our world, channeling my energy towards my craft has provided me some solace. Support me as I move forward in virtual solidarity with fellow theatre artists across the nation to do a very simple, yet important thing—to *come together*.” And that’s exactly what we did on 6/6/20. With an audience of 800 people over the course of the day, we all came together.

As theatre-makers, we communicate through the art we create. The 39 plays in this collection reflect many perspectives on life during the early days of the quarantine. They brilliantly offer moments of joy, pathos, insight, hope and comfort knowing we are never really alone.

—Risa Brainin
Artistic Director, LAUNCH PAD

The Plays

Pick Me Up

By
LINDA ALPER

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(PICK ME UP)

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Pick Me Up was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Leo Cabranes-Grant. Luan Schooler was the dramaturg.

CAST:

CHEFDaniel Herrera

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Why write for a Zoom Fest? It’s what we do—try and stop us. We all need to tell, share and take in stories. I also want there to be useful material for young performers, directors and designers to explore, so they can continue to practice and refine their talents.

And lastly, in dark times, I seem to cling to what’s absurd, funny and occasionally sweet—maybe my way of coping and forging ahead.

—Linda Alper

Pick Me Up

CHARACTERS

CHEF: Any gender.

(A CHEF separates eggs, performing for a camera.)

CHEF. *Amici! Carini! Benvenuti a tutti!*

(Egg yolks plop into a bowl.)

This is my first virtual feed ... food feed ...
From the one, the only ... Bistro Dolce Vita!

Let's celebrate our collective *vitas* by making a famous *dolce*, beloved by
my diners for its many fine qualities—sweet, silky, spongy ...

The Pick Me Up ...

Tiramisu!

(Throughout the monologue, CHEF demonstrates: measuring, mixing and tasting.)

To begin, we blend egg yolks with a quarter cup of sugar.
Beat vigorously, until tripled in volume.

(Whisks.)

Come on, baby. Puff up. Expand. Go, go, go ...

(CHEF steps back, exposing an empty kitchen.)

Usually it's elbow-to-elbow in here. But for the foreseeable future ...
Welcome to my private gondola.

Don't you wish we really were on a gondola? A crowded gondola.
Or wading across the Trevi Fountain, hounded by paparazzi.

Alas.

We are not in Rome.

We are not in Venice.

Italy.

We're not even in Venice, California.

But we are in *Naples!*
At the Montebella Senior Estates ...
In Naples ... *Florida!*

The gondola that never goes anywhere.

Usually, my cucina would be bustling at this hour.
Aneesh and José chopping.
Keisha and Usman setting up.
Mei Ling, Carlos and Fatima. Mihn and Marisol.
And Chaz.

(CHEF looks around, spooked by the empty space.)

Not that we get here early to make sauces. Our diners don't go in for spice.
Not much sugar. And salt?! Nothing crispy, chewy, stringy or tough.
Bake and boil. That's what my horde goes for.

I guess I think of my diners as a horde.

All of them calling out, "The meat is too pink." "Give me the dressing on the side!"

According to Mei Ling, the word "horde" comes from the Mongol invaders—who swept their way across Asia. She says we probably all have a little Mongol horde in our DNA.

Not hoarders—but that's a whole other thing.

(Finishes whisking.)

In China, Mei Ling also tells me, they honor this horde. This horde would be having home-cooked meals. In a real home.
Same in Mexico, according to Carlos.

But as head of the kitchen, I can vouch for Montebella's "variety of home-cooked food, prepared by an international chef."

That's me.

I took a cooking class in Rome.

The real Rome ... not the one in Texas.

Hey, at least this job comes with health insurance.

Anyway. I'm here extra early today—in *anticipo*—which means early, but I think of it as "in anticipation," because I have that heart-beating-fast, touchy stomach that feels like anticipation ...

(CHEF struggles to remain calm and sets out a second bowl.)

Because I have to make a special birthday dessert.

For Ed.

Ed is one of my demanding diners. And last night, Ed demanded a tiramisu.

King Zoom

By

KATIE BENDER

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(KING ZOOM)

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CAST:

DON KING Sean O’Shea
SOPHIA KING Hailey Turner
VERNESSA KING Lana Spring
JAKEY KING Ethan Kim
TINA KING Daniel Stein

AUTHOR’S NOTE

By way of Zoom, King Lear meets *Arrested Development* meets the American dynasty whose last name rhymes with Lump!

—Katie Bender

King Zoom

CHARACTERS

DON KING: patriarch.

SOPHIA KING: wife.

VERNESSA KING: oldest dependent.

JAKEY KING: middle dependent.

TINA KING: smallest dependent.

PLACE: A Zoom meeting mostly at the King estate. April 2020.

(A family Zoom meeting. DON sent the invite; he sits at an executive desk in his office. He is fully dressed and all business.

SOPHIA is in her bedroom, dressing; mostly we just see her décolletage, as if she doesn't want us to see her face.

VERNESSA is on a treadmill in the rec room, full makeup, probably pearls.

JAKEY has a background up, some iconic image from WWII. He's shirtless.

TINA is only an icon on the screen, or some weird dark corner of the house.)

DON. Hello, is this thing on?

Can you hear me?

JAKEY. Dad, stop shouting.

SOPHIA. We hear you, darling—

VERNESSA. Something's wrong with your screen, Mom.

SOPHIA. Honey, don't yell.

VERNESSA. Are you, like ... ? I think your robe is covering the camera?

(She removes her robe and hides a martini set up—)

SOPHIA. I'm getting dressed for the—

DON. Are we all met?

JAKEY. Whoa, Tina showed up. That's a first.

VERNESSA. What the—?

SOPHIA. Jakey, are you ... ? Is that ... ?

VERNESSA. So creepy.

SOPHIA. What is that behind you?

JAKEY. It's like the most iconic WWII image.

It's like Normandy.

SOPHIA. Where are you?

JAKEY. Oh my God.

I'm in my room.

Obviously.

It's just like—

VERNESSA. Must we really be exposed to your weird hairless boy chest.

It's so gross.

DON. Is something wrong with your face, Sophia?

SOPHIA. What? No.

DON. Well, I'd like to see my wife's face.

SOPHIA. I'm flossing.

VERNESSA. Oh my God.

Can't you floss at literally any other time?

There's like twenty-four hours in a day.

JAKEY. Don't be a cunt, Vernessa.

DON. Do you need to be flossing right now?

SOPHIA. Keeping a schedule is important for mental health.

And my mental health—

DON. This is a family meeting—

SOPHIA. As you well know.

My mental health, Don—

VERNESSA. Aren't we all having dinner tomorrow?

JAKEY. We are?

VERNESSA. Didn't you get the invite?

DON. Enough.

JAKEY. No, I didn't.

DON. I SAID ENOUGH.

(Silence.)

DON *(cont'd)*. I have some terrible news.

VERNESSA. Oh God, is Uncle Jack the molester coming to dinner?

SOPHIA. Vernessa!

DON. Vernessa!

SOPHIA. Uncle Jack is not a molester.

VERNESSA. You know nothing, Mom.

DON. He was acquitted.

VERNESSA. The charges were dropped.

For a small fortune.

That's not an acquittal.

JAKEY. Dad, were you abused as a child?

DON. What?

SOPHIA. Jakey!

VERNESSA. More psycho babble?

JAKEY. I've always wondered.

DON. No!

I was very poor, and I worked very hard but—

JAKEY. Two out of three psychotic narcissists were abused as children.

You exhibit all the tendencies:

One, a need to control all conversations—

DON. Will you shut up?

JAKEY. Check.

DON. If you don't be quiet I'll withhold your mutual funds—

JAKEY. Two, a need for others to be reliant on you.

Check.

DON. I'm dying, people.

That's why I called this meeting.

I have all the symptoms.

I'm dying.

SOPHIA. Oh, darling, that's terrible.

DON. Will you please stop flossing!

SOPHIA. Oh, Don.

Here I am.

Bright and beautiful.

(She poses before the screen.)

DON. Thank you!

VERNESSA. Are you sure?

SOPHIA. Oh, Vernessa.

DON. Of course I'm sure.

JAKEY. It's actually pretty implausible.

VERNESSA. You haven't left the house in weeks.

JAKEY. Did the staff bring it in?

SOPHIA. Oh my God, do you think?

VERNESSA. I fucking knew we should have fired them sooner.

SOPHIA. Dad wanted his shirts pressed.

VERNESSA. And now he's dying.

DON. Silence!!!

(Silence.)

The Most Human Human

By
KATIE BENDER

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CAST:

MARIA DESOTO..... Sierra Hastings

The Most Human Human

CHARACTERS

MARIA DESOTO: waitress, part-time philosopher, mom.

PLACE: A video application. Maria films herself from a room in her apartment.

(MARIA is applying to be The Most Human Human in The Turing Test. The Turing Test is a competition held once a year in which programmers try to create artificial intelligence that can convince a panel of judges it is human. No computer has fooled the judges, but some have come close. Every year an award is also given out to the most human human, the human foil most obviously not AI.

(MARIA is at her dining room table.)

MARIA. Hi there—

Howdy—

I'm a little nervous ...

I bet all the robots say that to you.

Yeah, so my name is Maria DeSoto, and I am applying to represent humans against this year's batch of artificial intelligence at the Turing Test.

I am the most human human.

So, I grew up in Denton.

It's a medium-size town in north Texas.

My father and my father's father were farmers.

Mostly soy, cotton.

I was in 4H.

4H stands for Head, Heart, Hands and Health.

My mom is—

My mom was a school teacher.

I'm um—

I'm not great at much...

OK so that's not true—

My boyfriend's always saying how I sell myself short?

I'm good at stuff.

Pandemic Therapy

By

JAMI BRANDLI

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(PANDEMIC THERAPY)

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CAST:

KIM..... Violet Hansen
STEPHEN..... Martin Wong
LORI..... Xochitl Clare

AUTHOR’S NOTE

With this 10-minute comedy, I wanted to explore how a young married couple could have *very* different reactions to sheltering-in-place for 70 days. I also wanted to add a touch of the absurd with the therapist, the person who is supposed to be the most centered ... and it becomes clear she is not.

Special thanks to Risa Brainin and the LAUNCH PAD crew for this unique opportunity.

—Jami Brandli

Pandemic Therapy

CHARACTERS

KIM: mid-20s to mid-30s. Wife, dealing with anxiety and fear.

STEPHEN: mid-20s to mid-30s. Husband, dealing with a new-found passion.

LORI: 20 years older than Kim and Stephen; mid-40s to mid-50s. Their therapist who, during this strange pandemic time, is dealing as best she can.

NOTE: Kim and Stephen are the same age (there is NOT a 10-year age difference) and have been married for about eighteen months. They love each other deeply.

(STEPHEN appears in his Zoom pane, wearing a colorful apron over his shirt. He immediately notices he has some white powder on the side of his face.)

STEPHEN. Ah, crap.

(As he goes to wipe off the powder, KIM appears in her Zoom pane, wearing a sweatshirt. KIM catches him in the act of wiping; she's immediately annoyed.)

KIM. You're at it again.

STEPHEN *(still wiping, playing it off)*. At what again?

KIM. I can smell them, Stephen.

(STEPHEN stops wiping and smiles.)

STEPHEN. They smell good, don't they?

(KIM doesn't return the smile.)

STEPHEN *(cont'd)*. They do smell good, and you know it. *(Sing-songy, trying to make her smile.)* I left you a surprise by the door, and it's really tasty.

KIM. I'm sure it's delicious, but no thank you.

STEPHEN *(off KIM's lack of smile)*. Anyway, I have a surprise for Lori, too.

KIM. A surprise for Lori? What is it?

STEPHEN. If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise—

(STEPHEN's cellphone dings. KIM is even more annoyed.)

KIM. Who's that?

(STEPHEN begins to text back.)

STEPHEN. Um. Work.

KIM. Um. Work. This is our time—

STEPHEN *(overlapping)*. *Our time.* I know. I know. Sorry. *(Finishes text, some guilt.)* Sorry, babe.

KIM. Right.

(An awkward beat as they "stare" at each other. STEPHEN finally breaks the "stare," needing to address the elephant in the room/Zoom.)

STEPHEN. Soooooo. Kim. Are you going to—?

KIM. Where's Lori? She is never late—

STEPHEN. Kim. Are you going to come out—

KIM *(arrested by a terrible thought)*. Oh my God.

STEPHEN. What?

KIM. What if ... what if something happened to Lori?

STEPHEN. No—

KIM. She canceled last time, and I really think something might have happened to her—*(Overcome by the terrible thought.)* OH MY GOD, STEPHEN—

STEPHEN *(treads carefully)*. Kim. Babe. Lori is less than two minutes late. So let's not go ... *there* yet.

KIM. Go *where* yet?

STEPHEN. Go to ... the worst-case scenario.

KIM *(annoyed again)*. I'm just being practical.

(Beat. He still treads carefully.)

STEPHEN. Speaking of practical ... Kim. Honey. Are you going to come out of the office?

KIM. At some point.

STEPHEN. How about today. Are you going to come out of the office *today*?

(Loaded beat.)

KIM. Are you ever going to take off that apron?

STEPHEN. At some point.

KIM. I see.

STEPHEN. That's it. We need to tell Lori about you and the office.

KIM. I don't see *why* we need to tell Lori about me and the office—

STEPHEN. *Why?* Because she's our therapist!

(LORI appears in her Zoom pane. She looks disheveled, though she's trying not to, and gives KIM and STEPHEN a big smile. KIM and STEPHEN quickly force a smile back, covering.)

LORI. Sorry, I'm late. Kim. Stephen. Hello.

(STEPHEN and KIM continue their forced smiles. A beat.)

LORI *(cont'd)*. OK. What's wrong?

KIM. I think the question should be "What *isn't* wrong," don't you?

(As STEPHEN shakes his head, LORI really thinks about that question.)

LORI *(to herself)*. What *isn't* wrong ...

(Then LORI explodes into laughter, which catches them off guard.)

LORI *(cont'd)*. HA! KIM! That is so true. It's good to have a sense of humor!
Very good!

KIM. That wasn't meant—

(As KIM speaks, LORI retrieves bottle of beer in full sight and cracks it open.)

KIM *(um, huh?)*. To be funny.

(LORI nonchalantly drinks half the beer. KIM and STEPHEN look on, confused.)

STEPHEN. Are you drinking ... a beer?

(LORI smiles, calm.)

LORI. No. Everything is going to be OK.

(LORI downs the rest of her beer and then tosses the bottle behind her; it lands with a thud.)

LORI *(cont'd)*. So. Day seventy, huh? Who would have thought that we would all be quarantined for seventy days?

KIM. And counting.

LORI. And counting! Yes. *Yes*. Seventy days *and* counting ... *(Gets lost in a thought.)* Crazy.

Zoom Audition

By

JAMI BRANDLI

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CAST:

EMILYSheila Correa

AUTHOR’S NOTE

With this monologue, I wanted to explore the tricky “new normal” of virtual auditioning—especially while we’re still in the middle of a pandemic. It takes a lot of guts for Emily to audition for a production that may not happen while she’s still processing how different her life has become due to the pandemic.

Special thanks to Risa Brainin and the LAUNCH PAD crew for this unique opportunity.

—Jami Brandli

Zoom Audition

CHARACTERS

EMILY: early-to-mid-20s, determined but wrestling with a darkness.

(EMILY appears in the Zoom pane. She is fresh and polished on the outside, but she's wrestling with an internal darkness that both distracts and frustrates her.)

EMILY. Hi, my name is Emily, and I'll be performing Emily from Thornton Wilder's brilliant play *Our Town*. Which of course you know is brilliant because you're directing it. So "Emily." Crazy, right? Or ironic. Or maybe it's kismet. Who knows! I guess I'll find out when we're able to go outside again!

(Beat.)

Whenever that will be.

(EMILY wrestles with her darkness for a moment ... Then she snaps out of it with a determined smile.)

And whenever *will* be soon—ish. Because this production is still going up in the fall, right?

Of course it is, because that's why I'm auditioning for you, right now. A five-minute Zoom audition, which, of course, is an amazing opportunity.

So thank you. Just gotta stay positive. Gotta stay hopeful. Because we are all in this together!

Right.

Setting my timer now.

(EMILY sets her timer and takes a brief moment to center herself, really center herself. It's a bit of struggle. As she speaks, she looks at various things somewhere in her room and says goodbye, but the goodbyes don't really feel like goodbyes.)

"Good-bye. Good-bye, world. Good-bye, Grover's Corners ... Mama and Papa. Good-bye to clocks ticking. And Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths ... and sleeping and waking up ..."

Zoom Baby

By

LEO CABRANES-GRANT

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(ZOOM BABY)

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Zoom Baby was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Frances (Yizhou) Sun and designed by Kaede Kogo and Allison McSwain.

CAST:

MARCOS.....Cyrus Roberts
ABIGAIL Blake Thonpson

AUTHOR’S NOTE

When LAUNCH PAD announced this initiative, I saw *Alone, Together* as an amazing opportunity to offer support and hope to my community during troubled times. I wanted to join this collaborative effort, not only to stay in touch with my colleagues and friends but also to explore how art confronts a moment of fear and uncertainty. Theatre is a form of dwelling, a way of belonging to a particular place—in this case, we are dealing with the highly mobile, mediated and unpredictable space of online communication. Being a hybrid of television, hand-held filming and stage setting, Zoom provides its own pleasures, challenges and limitations. The indispensable fact about Zoom is that it combines, in uncanny ways, the effects of intimacy (close-ups, close quarters, proximity between object and body) with the possibilities of distancing (we are both here and there, but not exactly). To a certain extent, the medium itself is so self-referential (so Brechtian) that the phone and the computer become characters in their own right. In *Zoom Baby*, I wanted to ponder how a cisgendered couple manages—or not—the pivotal decision of their marriage in the alone-togetherness of Zoom, while the unfolding realities of a pandemic are starting to change everything they take for granted. As their relationship faces a crisis, so does their country. They are not aware of this yet—but we are.

—Leo Cabranes-Grant

Zoom Baby

CHARACTERS

MARCOS: A Puerto Rican born in New York, 36 years old.

ABIGAIL: A white American born in New York, 30 years old.

(On the screen we see MARCOS. The space behind him is evidently a hotel room. He is getting ready to send an invite. He wears a good shirt and tie.

Now on the screen, we see ABIGAIL responding to his invite. The space behind her is evidently a small apartment main living room. She is wearing casual clothes.

It's early February. The winter of 2020. He's in Seattle for a conference. She's in Brooklyn, where they live.)

ABIGAIL *(she looks tense, and cautiously smiley)*. Oh, hello.

MARCOS. Yes, hello, hello—my pretty honey bee. We're Zooooooming!

ABIGAIL. I don't like it. I'm sure I look awful—with this bad lighting.

MARCOS. I wanna try it. *(Sensually)*. *Te ves muy bonita. Siempre.*

ABIGAIL *(tense)*. *Muchas gracias, sweetie.*

MARCOS. No more FaceTime. Zoom is the substance now.

ABIGAIL. It will pass. *(Unable to smile.)* How did your presentation go?

MARCOS. My paper was well received, I guess—but—I could have done better.

ABIGAIL *(she looks tense, but controlled)*. You're never satisfied with your work.

MARCOS. My panel was not well attended. Everybody's doing digital. I'm still doing literature.

ABIGAIL. Don't worry about it. You just got tenure. *(Staring at the screen, tense.)* I have something to tell you.

MARCOS *(while taking his tie off, not listening)*. Have you heard anything new about that flu?

ABIGAIL. Not today. But I think they're starting to be quite concerned about it.

MARCOS. Yeah, it sounds serious. The president just restricted the entry of travelers from China.

ABIGAIL. I haven't listened to the news since the morning.

MARCOS *(while unbuttoning his shirt)*. Seattle had some cases already. Maybe I should wear a mask.

ABIGAIL (*abruptly*). Marcos—stop rambling. Listen to me.

MARCOS (*listening, at last*). Yes—I'm all ears.

ABIGAIL. I had to go to the doctor yesterday.

MARCOS (*truly alarmed*). You? Did you have an accident?

ABIGAIL. The *fertility* doctor.

MARCOS. Is the baby OK?

ABIGAIL. There's been a mistake.

MARCOS. What kind of mistake?

ABIGAIL. Some labels got messed up. It was not your sperm.

MARCOS. What?

ABIGAIL. The sperm they used for us came from a different client.

MARCOS. Whom?

ABIGAIL. It's not clear yet.

MARCOS. That's not possible.

ABIGAIL. Unfortunately—it was.

MARCOS. Shit.

ABIGAIL. Lots of it.

MARCOS (*quietly angry*). Those assholes—I'm gonna sue that clinic until they fall dead—how could they make such a stupid error?

ABIGAIL. We have to find a lawyer. This has to be litigated—it's completely unacceptable.

MARCOS. And they'll have to pay for the abortion—and all the expenses related to this. And the emotional distress—this is so upsetting.

(*ABIGAIL looks at MARCOS—she is extremely serious.*)

MARCOS (*cont'd*). Hey. (*Neutral.*) We're not keeping that baby—are we?

ABIGAIL. I'm afraid it's too late.

MARCOS. Late for what?

ABIGAIL. An abortion.

MARCOS. But it's not our baby.

ABIGAIL. It's not *your* baby.

MARCOS. Are you telling me that you're willing to have *that* baby—without my sperm?

ABIGAIL. They're still my eggs.

MARCOS. You must be kidding.

ABIGAIL. I'm almost at the end of my first trimester.

MARCOS. You knew about this yesterday—and you waited until today to inform me?

ABIGAIL. You were reading your paper this morning—You're so anxious before those things—and I needed some time—to think things through—to figure things out.

MARCOS. There's nothing about this you should be figuring out without me.

ABIGAIL. I was in shock. How can they be so clumsy? What a bunch of morons—

MARCOS. You should have called me as soon as they contacted you.

ABIGAIL. Well—I didn't. (*Dismissing his complaint.*) Do you really want me to have an abortion?

MARCOS. C'mon—I'm sure you thought about that too.

ABIGAIL. It crossed my mind—I can't deny it.

MARCOS. There we go.

ABIGAIL. But it's not an option. It isn't. Not for me.

MARCOS. So—you're planning on choosing—this guy's baby—over me.

ABIGAIL. That's too simple, Marcos. I knew you were going to react like this—

MARCOS. You bet.

ABIGAIL. I don't want to be here when you come back.

MARCOS. And where exactly are you going?

ABIGAIL. I'm staying with my mother—for a few days.

MARCOS. Don't tell me you're hiding in New Rochelle again.

ABIGAIL. Mom suggested it.

MARCOS. Of course she did.

ABIGAIL. She thinks I should be with her right now.

MARCOS. And what about your husband? What about me?

ABIGAIL. This is a *woman's* issue, Marcos. And I don't want to fight. You know how this place is—thin walls and eager neighbors.

MARCOS (*ironically*). We can take long walks along the promenade and admire the skyline while we talk.

ABIGAIL. Ah—imagine all the Brooklyn joggers turning their heads, gawking at the mad couple.

MARCOS. Who cares.

ABIGAIL. We have to be reasonable.

MARCOS. Easy for you to say. You wanted your own child—and so did I. That's why we discarded adopting one. But now that you have *your* baby—you're taking me out of the picture. I'm sure this is one of your goddamn mother's ideas—

ABIGAIL. Don't get nasty, Marcos—please, don't. You're quite good at verbal basketball. I don't want one of your lectures.

Dynamite Sales

By

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(DYNAMITE SALES)

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Dynamite Sales was originally written and performed by Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta as part of their *Deb & Dan's Show* at The Improvisation Theater, Los Angeles, and subsequently recorded for audio as part of Dan Castellaneta's *I Am Not Homer*. This Zoom adaptation was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Daniel Stein.

CAST:

SHEILA WARING..... Hailey Turner
WINTHROP BEJOU Varrick Weir
PERSON Frances Domingos

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When asked to submit work for *Alone, Together*, we immediately thought of this piece called *Dynamite Sales*. Although we had performed it as part of a stage show, and as an audio recording, we felt it would work even better in a Zoom format—especially in light of so many people now conducting business and work meetings remotely. A business motivational speaker waits for more people to sign in before she starts her seminar on dynamic selling. But she ends up with only one lone misanthropic student. It's complete miscommunication between the sexes. In writing this for Zoom, we discovered this awkward encounter between complete strangers became intensified. It's the close-up nature of the medium that allows for a wonderful, sometimes hysterical, kind of tension, as this business seminar ends up revealing more about each character than either of them ever wanted to.

—Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta

Dynamite Sales

CHARACTERS

SHEILA WARING: Female, 30s, an attractive professional who's all business all the time. But deep down, she has doubts about where she is at in her career.

WINTHROP BEJOU: Male, 30s, wears out-of-date, ill-fitting clothes and needs a shave. He lacks an understanding of social cues and says whatever comes to mind. And he's a bit depressed about recently losing his job.

PERSON: Either gender, 20s-30s.

(A Zoom meeting. SHEILA WARING sits at a table. Behind her is a whiteboard or poster, upon which is written: "DYNAMITE SALES WITH SHEILA WARING." In another Zoom window is WINTHROP BEJOU. They sit for a long time in silence. SHEILA keeps glancing at her watch hoping someone else will join the Zoom meeting. WINTHROP does the same. After a long uncomfortable moment ...)

WINTHROP. Excuse me?

SHEILA. What?

WINTHROP. It's eight-fifteen.

SHEILA *(thinking to herself)*. Eight-fifteen.

WINTHROP. Shouldn't we get started?

SHEILA. Let's just wait a bit more.

WINTHROP *(waits a moment)*. OK, I waited a bit more. I don't think anyone else is joining in.

SHEILA. Well I expected more students.

WINTHROP. *I'm here.*

SHEILA. I can see that.

WINTHROP. Y'know, I Venmo-ed my fee for this seminar, and you already cheated me out of fifteen minutes of education. I don't think I should be deprived because someone has lame DSL.

SHEILA. Oh OK, we'll begin. *(Clears throat.)* Welcome to—

WINTHROP. Uh excuse me.

SHEILA. What?

WINTHROP. Could you tell me how long it will be before I become a dynamic salesman, or should I say "salesperson?"

SHEILA. Well that all depends on you.

WINTHROP. I'm afraid not. I paid you good money, so now it all depends on you.

SHEILA. Let's begin.

WINTHROP. I don't know what to do. I have no idea how to start.

SHEILA. My name is—

WINTHROP. Sheila Waring. I know your name. It's right there behind your head. C'mon, let's get going. Now, it's eighteen minutes I've lost.

SHEILA. My name is Sheila Waring. I'm the author of—

WINTHROP. *Dynamite Sales.*

SHEILA. Oh you've read my book.

WINTHROP. Yes, and it didn't help. That's why I'm here.

SHEILA. I'm sorry, but maybe you didn't quite catch the principles of dynamic selling.

WINTHROP. Yes, I did. Know yourself. Know your product. Know the customer. So?

SHEILA. Well let's put those principles into action and maybe someone else will join us.

WINTHROP. Don't count on it.

(SHEILA writes on the whiteboard.)

SHEILA. First principle—Know Yourself. Let's start there. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Let's list your weaknesses.

WINTHROP. Right here in front of everybody?

SHEILA. Yes.

WINTHROP. That was a joke.

SHEILA *(pause)*. So what are your weaknesses?

(SHEILA writes on the whiteboard as WINTHROP lists his weaknesses.)

WINTHROP. I have body odor, I have a wandering left eye so I can't look straight at anybody, I can't meet girls, I drive badly, I have a lousy apartment, I don't have a lot of money, I can't resist Hostess Ho Hos, I got a crummy name, my mother hates me—

SHEILA *(cutting him off)*. OK, let's start with your name. What is your name?

WINTHROP. Winthrop Bejou. *(Pronounced: BEE-OH.)*

SHEILA. Oh dear.

WINTHROP. It's spelled B-E-J-O-U.

SHEILA. Isn't that Be-joo?

WINTHROP. No! It's Bee-oh. It's French!

SHEILA. Let's list your strengths.

WINTHROP (*thinks for a moment*). I know my weaknesses.

SHEILA. That's it? That's your strengths?

WINTHROP. Yeah. I just remembered another weakness.

SHEILA. Yes?

WINTHROP. I have a low opinion of myself. Put that on the list.

SHEILA. Well that's gonna change right here and now.

WINTHROP. Good. Go. Change me.

SHEILA. Know yourself. I'm sorry. What's your name again?

WINTHROP. Oh my God, how am I supposed to know myself? You don't even know me. Winthrop.

SHEILA. Winthrop. It seems right now your weaknesses outweigh your strengths.

WINTHROP. Duh.

SHEILA. But that can change. We take one weakness at a time and turn it around. Turn a negative into a positive. Let's start with ... your rudeness.

WINTHROP. I consider that a strength.

SHEILA. Then how about your lousy attitude?

WINTHROP. OK.

SHEILA. Now, what's the opposite of lousy?

WINTHROP. Not lousy.

SHEILA. Or?

WINTHROP. Very not lousy.

SHEILA. Which is—

WINTHROP. The opposite of lousy.

SHEILA. I'll help you out.

WINTHROP. I thought I was doing pretty good.

SHEILA. You were, but I'll just expedite things along here. The opposite of lousy is ... um ...

WINTHROP. I'm telling you—not lousy.

SHEILA. Terrific.

WINTHROP. Thank you.

SHEILA. No, the opposite of lousy is terrific. So you need to feel terrific. Simple isn't it?

WINTHROP. No. I don't understand.

SHEILA. What's the problem?

WINTHROP. I can't feel terrific because I feel lousy spending my money on this seminar.

Rosebud

By

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(ROSEBUD)

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Rosebud was originally written and performed by Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta as part of their *Deb & Dan's Show* at The Improvisation Theater, Los Angeles, and subsequently recorded for audio as part of Dan Castellaneta's *I Am Not Homer*. This Zoom adaptation was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Maria Zelaya Santillan.

CAST:

GEORGE Jonathan Buhrer
RENE Alyssa Longwill

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A couple has been dating for only three months and then COVID-19 hits. Their relationship goes online, and the romantic bloom is off the “Rosebud,” so to speak. *Rosebud* has had various incarnations over the years. It was performed in a live theatre show and as an audio recording. Each time, the format informed our characters in different ways. It's amazing how Zooming online can actually reveal more about a person than being in the same room, or on the same stage, with them. All you have is the screen to gaze upon. So each facial tic, each eye roll, each pause, reveals what is left unspoken. And since the play deals with the film *Citizen Kane*, the cinematic quality of the Zoom format also allows us to play with some techniques of cinema. As writers, setting *Rosebud* in a Zoom world let us more closely examine the idea of communication between couples, and how one person's film obsession can devolve into the ridiculous and absurd—which pretty much reflects the world we now find ourselves living in.

—Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta

Rosebud

CHARACTERS

GEORGE: Male, 20s-30s, comes off as a pseudo-intellectual film snob. He's in a relationship with Rene.

RENE: Female, 20s-30s, doesn't get George's film obsession at all.

(GEORGE and RENE, each in their own Zoom windows in their respective homes, are in mid-conversation. We catch RENE giggling a bit too long about something.)

RENE *(giggling)*. So did you see that video I sent?

GEORGE. Not yet.

RENE *(still giggling)*. It was *so* funny. No matter what that Roomba did, the cat never fell off! You gotta watch it.

GEORGE. Uh huh. Great. So did you watch *Citizen Kane*?

RENE. Yes, I watched it on Netflix.

GEORGE. So wasn't that something?

RENE. What, George?

GEORGE. The ending of the movie.

RENE. I didn't get it.

GEORGE. What do you mean? You saw the ending, right?

RENE. Yeah.

GEORGE. What was the ending?

RENE. There was a fire. And there was a sled. And that's the ending of the movie.

GEORGE. Yes. Amazing, right?

RENE. What did the sled have to do with anything?

GEORGE. Rene, it was the only thing in the world that meant anything to him.

RENE. Then why did he burn it?

GEORGE. He didn't burn it. He's dead.

RENE. Well who burned the sled then?

GEORGE. It doesn't matter who burned it.

RENE. Then why was it in the movie?

GEORGE. Rene, he was rich. He owned everything. But his last words were "Rosebud."

RENE. That was the blonde in the lace outfit.

Quietus

By

MIA CHUNG

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(QUIETUS)

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CAST:

I Colson Lynn

AUTHOR'S NOTE

qui·e·tus, /,kwī'ēdəs/, noun. LITERARY, death or something that causes death, regarded as a release from life; ARCHAIC, something that has a calming or soothing effect.

(This monologue is an excerpt from *Quietus*, a full-length work in progress.)

Quietus

CHARACTERS

I: Any gender, any race.

I. I've been feeling lately a queasy feeling when I'm alone.

A sort of suffocation.

A sort of butterflies feeling ... but all the butterflies are in my head.

Sort of like the feeling of being underwater.

And my skin seems to be getting tighter and tighter.

My body is folded over and I am hugging myself.

Or maybe it's that I'm getting bigger and bigger and pressing up against my skin.

Is it my skin? Or is it the walls of the room that I'm in, which feel like skin.

And like Alice, I don't fit anymore.

[REDACTED]

End

Which Actually Isn't So New

By

MIA CHUNG

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(WHICH ACTUALLY ISN'T SO NEW)

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Which Actually Isn't So New was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Kate Bergstrom.

CAST:

KAYKEY Xochitl Clare
EMILIA..... Roz Cornejo

AUTHOR'S NOTE

ac·tu·al·ly, adverb. 1. As the truth or facts of a situation; really; 2. Used to emphasize that something someone has said or done is surprising.

Which Actually Isn't So New

CHARACTERS

KAYKEY: A woman, any race.

EMILIA: A woman, any race.

(Two screens.

One with the username Kaykey shows an emptyish room. A really old printer. A collection of manila envelopes and empty boxes. And a few items of personal interest [trinkets, a postcard taped up, perhaps a dying cactus].

On the other screen: EMILIA waits. She sips a cup of tea. Scrolls through email on her phone.

Distant sounds of voices. EMILIA listens, increases the volume on her laptop. The distant sound of a door closing, muffling further sounds.

EMILIA checks her watch.

Note: The following actions are not visible to anyone but EMILIA:

EMILIA writes and revises a text. Then revises it again. She sends it off, then hits Leave Meeting. The pop-up “Do you want to leave this meeting?” appears on EMILIA’s screen.

Just as EMILIA is about to leave, KAYKEY appears on the screen and quickly sits at her laptop.)

KAYKEY. Sorry sorry sorry sorry—I just—I didn’t realize / I had left a—I had to run downstairs and then—

EMILIA. It’s OK.

Kaykey—

Kaykey, it’s OK.

(KAYKEY finds her phone and sees the text from EMILIA.)

KAYKEY. Oh my gawd, you were about to leave.

EMILIA. Is every/thing—

KAYKEY. I’m fine. Yes, sorry, I’m sorry, that was so rude of me, do you have to go? I’m so sorry.

EMILIA. I’m not sure if I / can—

KAYKEY. Oh, of course.

EMILIA. It's OK, but—

KAYKEY. I understand. I'm so sorry.

(A short beat.)

EMILIA. You were gone for a while.

(A beat. KAYKEY sorrowful and watchful, not sure what is going to happen.)

EMILIA *(cont'd)*. Let's just do a quick catch-up.

KAYKEY. Oh yes! We can make it really / really—

EMILIA. So how long have you guys been in Amherst?

KAYKEY. A few years now, let's see maybe like, oh wow, it's been *(Counting in her head.)* yeah, like two and a half, over a half actually, so like over two and a half years.

EMILIA. Wow.

KAYKEY. Yeah.

EMILIA. Do you like it?

KAYKEY. Yeah, it's great. We bought a house. It's small, but ...

It's a house. With a yard. A small yard. I wouldn't have time to take care of much more than a small yard. As it is, I don't really—hey, what about you? Do you still have your herb garden? In your window box? Where do you live now?

EMILIA. I'm still in DC. But in a different apartment. Sadly, I had to leave the window box in that apartment. That was actually two apartments ago.

KAYKEY. Oh wow, sorry, yeah, I'm horrible at keeping in touch.

EMILIA. It's me, too. I haven't reached out.

KAYKEY. No, but I'm worse. I'm the worst.

EMILIA. Oh, come on.

KAYKEY. We've just moving a lot and—

EMILIA. I hate this blame thing, let's not let that be—

KAYKEY. The ball was in my court. And I dropped the ball.

(A short beat.)

EMILIA. OK, fine, it's your fault.

KAYKEY. I'm sorry.

EMILIA. I'm just—oh my gawd, stop. Like immediately.

Otherwise we're not going to ever feel like talking / to—

KAYKEY. I always feel like talking to you!

Cha-Cha

By
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(CHA-CHA)

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Cha-Cha was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Hala Baki.

CAST:

SALMA..... Kerry Jacinto
JUSTIN Harut Simonian

AUTHOR’S NOTE

My first response to the writing request was “no.” The call to writers came early in the pandemic, and I simply was not in a writing frame of mind. The enormity of the disaster came in waves, and as soon as I thought I’d settled on the emotional toolkit I’d need to get through it, another realization of just how unprecedented and colossal all this was hit me. I was too numb to react even to the loss of productions.

Then, as will happen, a couple of voices (or personas) lugged themselves up from whatever ink-soaked recesses of the imagination I use to start and finish a project. The characters—Salma and Justin—were thankfully charming enough for me to experience a little respite from the pandemic.

The other little voice that nudged me forward to write was a little more atavistic. And that was the call to adapt. Live theatre was at a standstill. I knew I depended upon writing for many things, including keeping my sanity, so ... I would simply have to adapt if I wanted to mentally and emotionally stay afloat.

So here I am adapting. To goddamn Zoom. And thank God for connectivity by any means necessary.

—Yussef El Guindi

Cha-Cha

CHARACTERS

SALMA: Mid-20s, graduate student, can be of any ethnicity.

JUSTIN: Mid-20s, graduate student, can be of any ethnicity.

(JUSTIN and SALMA are mid-conversation. SALMA doesn't look well. Perhaps she blows her nose on a tissue.)

JUSTIN. Salma?

SALMA. Justin.

JUSTIN. Please? Call?

SALMA. I promise you, it's seasonal crap. Spring comes and everything that can leak leaks. Remember last year? I was a sneezing factory.

JUSTIN. Or—

SALMA. Or?

JUSTIN. It could be that.

SALMA. Could be the sky's about to fall on our heads; but it probably won't.

JUSTIN. Babe?

(Or another term of endearment.)

SALMA. I like this side of you.

JUSTIN. What side?

SALMA. Caring; worried. Look at that little frown on you, it's so cute. Little cutie nurturer. I don't see this side too often.

JUSTIN. I've always been a nurturer. What are you talking about?

SALMA. I see it now and again—peeking out. You disguise it real well under all that manly—he-man stuff.

JUSTIN. “Manly he-man”? That's—a whole lot of man. Thank you, I think. But you know you'd get bored with me real quick if I was always like, *(Overly solicitous tone.)* “Are you OK? How are you feeling? Can I get you anything? Are you sure?”

SALMA. Are you kidding me? Pamper me to death, please. I love seeing this warm beating heart of yours. I mean—I'm a big fan of some of your other warm, beating parts. Love getting real close to those too.

(JUSTIN perhaps makes a face to register the innuendo.)

SALMA (*cont'd*). But when you're this cute worrying.

(She almost coughs the last word as she starts a short coughing fit. She picks up a glass of water and drinks.)

JUSTIN. Have you taken your temperature?

SALMA. I don't have a thingy.

JUSTIN. Do you feel feverish?

SALMA. I am hot. Say more. Let's skip the small talk.

JUSTIN. You have to risk seeing a doctor. They're not going to deport you if you come in and they find out you have it.

SALMA. They'll just wait until I'm better and then do it. Then they'll come after my mom and dad.

JUSTIN. All that kind of enforcement has been suspended.

SALMA. You know that for sure? Do *they* know that? (*Before JUSTIN can continue.*) Look, if I did have it they'd only tell me to stay home, right? So—can we change the subject? This is date night. Fun night.

(Perhaps she moves a small vase with a flower in it into the frame—or not.)

JUSTIN. Salma—

SALMA. I have a great idea for what we can do.

JUSTIN (*just occurring to him*). You know what ... so do I.

SALMA. Oh? What?

JUSTIN. Well ... why don't we ... and think about it before you say anything. Why don't we ...

SALMA (*when he doesn't continue*). Yes? Listening.

JUSTIN. Because when I think about it, my first reaction is, "Well—why not?"

SALMA. Did I miss something you said earlier?

JUSTIN. Why don't we just get hitched now?

SALMA (*digests that for a second*). Hitched?

JUSTIN. Yes.

SALMA. You mean?

JUSTIN. I do ... That is what I mean.

SALMA (*digests that for a second*). Did you loop me into this conversation earlier and I just forgot about it?

JUSTIN. Aren't you bored? Let's just get married.

SALMA. Is that a good idea? Making life decisions out of boredom?

JUSTIN. Out of—you know, out of love. You wanted to see more of my warm beating heart, didn't you?

(Throws his hands up as in, “Voila.”)

SALMA. Marry? Now?

JUSTIN. Perfect time. Celebration in the midst of panic. We’ve already all but said we’re gonna do it. We’ve talked about places we might live after graduating. We’re figuring out what careers would put us in the same city. That’s what people heading towards the big “M” talk about, right? Let’s—let’s just make it official.

SALMA. Right now?

JUSTIN. Not during this call, but within the next few days, yeah. It would make a bunch of miserable people around us very happy.

SALMA *(occurring to her)*. Oh. Because throwing a big wedding where no one shows up would be your ideal wedding?

JUSTIN. Everyone shows up online. We’d make it a public event. Everyone gets invited.

SALMA. And you could just sit on the couch. Getting married would almost feel like playing a video game.

JUSTIN. You’re selling the idea even more, yes. You know, I kinda just blurred it out, but, I’m really liking the idea the more we talk about it.

SALMA. Justin.

JUSTIN. Seriously, let’s figure out the paperwork. We get you legal now and then you can go see a frickin’ doctor.

SALMA. All this: applying for a green card, getting me legal, not to mention arranging the wedding, it would have to happen within the next week if I’m really getting sick and the whole point is to get me to see a doctor. A process that usually takes years.

JUSTIN. If you’re really sick I’m coming over and taking you to a doctor myself. Fuck the quarantine.

SALMA. Sweetie.

JUSTIN. Not joking.

SALMA. Six feet apart.

JUSTIN. I’ll come around with a forklift. I’ll just load you onto the truck and drive you. I wouldn’t even have to touch you.

SALMA. That’s so romantic.

JUSTIN. Agreed? We get married?

SALMA. Have you even officially proposed yet?

JUSTIN. I was just getting to that.

(He gets on his knees.)

JUSTIN *(cont’d)*. Salma. Love of my life; thorn in my side. Best cook, and worse selector of movies ever, will you ... ?

Late Night Prayer

By

ANNE GARCÍA-ROMERO

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(LATE NIGHT PRAYER)

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Late Night Prayer was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Daniel Andres Blanco.

CAST:

FELICIA ALVARADO Kerry Jacinto
LUIS GONZALEZ Daniel Andres Blanco

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Late Night Prayer continues a conversation I began with Risa Brainin and LAUNCH PAD in 2015 when we developed my play *Staging the Daffy Dame*, which UCSB produced in 2018. *Staging the Daffy Dame* explores a contemporary university theatre department that is producing *The Daffy Dame* (*La Dama Boba*), a 17th-century Spanish Golden Age comedy by Lope de Vega, which highlights the education of women and the transformational power of love. *Staging the Daffy Dame* aims to amplify these classical themes through a modern lens by focusing on Lupe, a Latina theatre professor, who directs this play while grappling with the plight of her DACA student actors. *Late Night Prayer* picks up where *Staging the Daffy Dame* leaves off, at the end of an academic year after Felicia and Luis have performed leading roles in *The Daffy Dame* and are now sheltering in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. In these difficult times, we are confronted daily with issues of survival: physical, psychological, economic, artistic and spiritual. Our undocumented students face all these issues as well as the vulnerability of their immigration status. *Late Night Prayer* explores how these two students search for hope and faith while facing an uncertain future.

—Anne García-Romero

Late Night Prayer

CHARACTERS

FELICIA ALVARADO: 20, university junior, student actor.

LUIS GONZALEZ: 21, university senior, student actor.

SETTING: Present. California suburbs.

NOTE: These characters are from my play *Staging the Daffy Dame*. Dialogue in italics ought to be spoken in Spanish.

(Lights rise on LUIS and FELICIA in the middle of a FaceTime call. They are each in their own bedrooms. It is late at night.)

LUIS. Where are you?

FELICIA. In her guest room.

LUIS. Is it weird?

FELICIA. *Lupe's* chill.

LUIS. Living with your professor has got to be a little weird.

FELICIA. I'm grateful.

LUIS. Yeah, when the dorms closed we all scattered.

FELICIA. I could have gone to stay with Evelyn and her family but that felt more weird.

LUIS. Evelyn's the best.

FELICIA. I know. I just thought that staying in town, with *Lupe*, in her guest room, would be better. It's quiet.

LUIS. I'm here with my three younger brothers and it is not quiet. Fighting for table space to do homework. Internet crashing.

FELICIA. How're your parents?

LUIS. Honestly? Scared. But they still have to go to work. At the supermarket. They come home at night and throw all their clothes in the washing machine in the garage.

FELICIA. Are you wearing your mask?

(LUIS suddenly puts on a colorful lucha libre-type mask.)

FELICIA *(cont'd)*. Are you joking?

LUIS. What? You don't like my mask?

FELICIA. That cannot protect you from the virus and it's ridiculous ... even though it is funny.

(Luis takes off his lucha libre-type mask. He holds up a surgical-style cloth mask to his face.)

LUIS *(regarding the surgical-style mask)*. A man like me wearing a mask like this can be dicey.

FELICIA. Wear the mask. And gloves. Whenever you go to the store or wherever. Please.

LUIS. So you don't hate me?

FELICIA. I don't.

LUIS. I messed up so bad. I didn't mean to hurt you. I thought we could all talk about our DACA status together. The whole cast. Like a family.

FELICIA. I get it.

LUIS. Is that why you FaceTimed me? To tell me you forgive me?

FELICIA. Maybe. I also need your advice.

LUIS. Go for it.

FELICIA. I don't know if I can do this, *Luis*. *(Beat.)* It was hard enough to think about acting in the world before the virus hit ... a world where actors like you and me have to fight tooth and nail to find work ... a world where there is systemic racism that keeps actors of color out of mainstream theatres, films and TV shows ... a world where if there is a role, a spot, a place to work, then it goes to the actor who most clearly fits the Latinx slot ... and I don't ... my family is a mix ... of Spanish, Lebanese and Mexican cultures ... I don't have that traditional look.

(LUIS puts on his lucha libre-type mask again.)

LUIS. What about this look? *(As lucha libre wrestler.)* We're fighters, *Felicia*. *Luchadores*. We're gonna keep fighting.

(LUIS roars, a sotto-voce, late-night-and-people-are-sleeping kind of roar.)

LUIS *(cont'd)*. Rrrrrroooooaarr. *(Beat.)* Come on ...

(After some initial hesitation, FELICIA replicates the roar.)

FELICIA. Rrrrrroooooaarr.

LUIS. There's *la luchadora*.

(They sotto-voce roar together.)

FELICIA & LUIS. Rrrrrroooooaarr.

The Art of Coping

By
IDRIS GOODWIN

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CAST:

COPING ARTIST Vishay Singh

AUTHOR’S NOTE

The Art of Coping is written for the web screen—think Zoom or Skype or YouTube—and it’s live, and this voice is by no means that of a pro. This person is like anybody else. They are making it up as they go, hoping someone on the other end is listening.

—Idris Goodwin

The Art of Coping

CHARACTERS

THE COPING ARTIST: A young adult.

(*THE COPING ARTIST speaks to the audience on some sort of livestream.*)

COPING ARTIST. First: peanut M&M's. I know, I know. The red and blue dyes, the refined sugar, the corporate malfeasance ... but they are peanut and chocolate, a perfect union.

Each one a tiny hug. Your righteousness does *not* feel like a tiny hug.

Next:

The Art of Coping requires ten seasons of the classic sitcom *Friends*.

I know, I know

Some things ... problematic.

But I was twelve the first time I saw it and right now going back to age twelve feels better this time around.

Next:

A yoga mat ... But don't do yoga on it!

I mean, of course if yoga is your—like, do yoga if you wanna do yoga—

But The Art of Coping requires a mat—take it outside when the sun is out.

Or when there are clouds.

I like to lay on it.

I don't want no grass stains.

I lay and I close my eyes and I *imagine* that I am doing yoga.

One time I fell asleep for five hours.

Which reminds me—

Sleep.

If you can get it.

My sister has two kids—

Twins, eight months old—

Gets about three hours of sleep average.

So—if you don't have twins—

Sleep.

Talk Tomorrow

By
IDRIS GOODWIN

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CAST:

YOUNGER SIBLING Dillon Redd
OLDER SIBLING Mario Yanes

Talk Tomorrow

CHARACTERS

YOUNGER SIBLING

OLDER SIBLING

NOTE: < > indicates 1.5-second intervals of silence in which our characters decide whether to talk or wait, search for what to say.

YOUNGER SIBLING. Hey.

OLDER SIBLING. Hey

YS. Good?

OS. I guess.

YS. Maintaining?

OS. Yep.

YS. Day by day.

OS. Day by day.

YS. Good as we can.

OS. Yeah.

YS. Did you see what they said on the—

OS. Uh-huh.

YS. Good God what do they—

OS. What was that?

YS. Can you not hear me?

OS. Ugh.

These damn computer video—

YS. Right I miss the rotary.

OS. I know.

YS. Right. The rotary. Remember the rotary?

OS. Remember Grandma had the—

YS. Yup, yup.

OS. And if you touched it—

YS. You better not touch it—

OS. Yeeeaah.

<>

<>

YS. So.

I just been workin’.

OS. Oh yeah.

YS. They got me workin’.

OS. Uh-huh.

YS. Cuz they got the remote site.

OS. Oh.

YS. You know people still have to—

OS. Yup.

<>

YS. You hear from Mom?

OS. Phone tag.

YS. Dad?

(OS makes a sound.)

YS. Yeah I know. He’s trying.

<>

YS *(cont’d)*. You good tho?

OS. Yeah.

YS. Like your situation and all that?

OS. My situation.

YS. Yeah.

OS. My situation.

YS. You on Venmo or Cashapp?

OS. What?

YS. Venmo or Cashapp. For—

OS. I’m all right.

YS. You got food?

OS. They can’t evict me.

YS. Right but do you got food?

OS. I’m eatin’—look at me—come on, look at me, I’m eatin’.

YS. All right because you got to keep your immune system—

Do Not Go, My Love

By

ENID GRAHAM

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(DO NOT GO, MY LOVE)

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CAST:

SUE Sara Neal
CHRISTOPHER Aaron Arpon

AUTHOR’S NOTE

When I first heard from Risa Brainin about writing a short play for *Alone, Together*, my first thought was, “I can’t do that.” I live in New York City, and we had just begun our quarantine. My husband and I were both out of work with our projects “indefinitely postponed.” My three children were suddenly being homeschooled, and I was desperately afraid for my family and neighbors. Our life had been turned upside down, and our beautiful city was beginning the horrible upward climb on the COVID-19 new cases graph that is, by now, too familiar. I couldn’t imagine writing anything. But, after a few weeks, I began to think about the wonderful UCSB students I had the good fortune to work with in the LAUNCH PAD program in 2019. I felt very sorry that these talented young people were having their school year so disrupted—many of them in their senior year. So, I sat down at my kitchen table to try to write something to contribute. And in trying to help keep the students’ creative spark alive through this crisis, I was able to reconnect with my own creative life. *Do Not Go, My Love* is a small play about humans connecting in hard times and the hopeful dream of a better future when we can all be together again.

—Enid Graham

Do Not Go, My Love

CHARACTERS

SUE: A young woman, maybe 30.

CHRISTOPHER: A young man of about 20.

(A Zoom window is open, showing a woman, SUE, waiting. SUE wears comfortable, at-home clothes and maybe a cardigan. Her hair is in a loose ponytail. She has been waiting a long time and is doing the kind of things one does while alone on hold, maybe eating something or singing to herself or yawning and scratching. Suddenly, another Zoom window opens, and CHRISTOPHER, dressed in a button-down shirt, appears. He speaks with the flat voice of someone who has had to repeat the same thing a million times.)

CHRISTOPHER. TeleGov Financial helpline, hello I'm Christopher. How may I assist you today?

SUE *(jumping up, surprised)*. Oh hello! Hello, hello! Finally, a person! Hello, hello, hello! *(She laughs.)* I can't tell you, I've been . . . I've been waiting for like, for like forever! So hello to you! Wow, so glad to see someone's face. Hello, person! Wow!

CHRISTOPHER. How may I assist you?

SUE. Did you know—now I know this isn't your fault so I'm not saying that— but I wonder if you know how long the wait is to get through on this line? It's like, I mean, like hours a day. By which I mean hours for several *days*. Now, like I say I know this isn't your fault—Christopher, right?—but I just thought you should know in case you have some kind of meeting with, you know, higher-up types and then you could maybe mention that you are killing people out here with the waiting! I started on Thursday of last week and was on hold for several hours but on that day I had to get off because I got a delivery. Anyway, after I disinfected the box and then disinfected myself and all that, it was pretty close to five so I thought, "Tomorrow!" And the next day, Friday, well I got kind of a late start cause on Thursday I couldn't sleep, plus I had a wee little cocktail and I—too much information!—anyway, suffice it to say I got a late start on Friday and couldn't get through again. Then on Monday I got up nice and early and called right away, and after about twenty tries I got through to being on hold, and there I waited until about three when suddenly a recorded voice came over the thing and

said, “We are sorry. Due to increased activity, we are unable to process your call at this time. Please try again later,” and it disconnected me! And on the screen, it changed from the holding page thing, you know with the logo, to this small animated piece of fruit, like a cherry with a stem, but the cherry had a face with a little half-smile and eyes with eyebrows going up and one little gloved hand making this “oh well” gesture. Just like, “sorry!” I would love to know who designed that, who thought that, after holding for five hours and then getting cut off for no reason, it would somehow make it better to show a shrugging piece of fruit. Like, as if someone who had just wasted half their day and still wasn’t any closer to getting their money that they desperately need for their rent or for *food* or whatever would see this little cherry-man and be like, “Oh haha! What a cute fruit. I’m so hungry, but it makes me feel better to see that cute little guy.” And that night I got pretty depressed, started thinking about everything and how crappy it is and just that there’s no hope and even when it gets better it’s still going to be crappy and there will still be people that think they can control the masses with a cute, little cherry-man and that they are probably right and I had a couple more wee little cocktails and it was a bad night. BUT, I woke up and it was a new day. And I decided to have a new attitude. So today I was like, on a mission to get through, like this was my calling in life, like I was a Jedi in training and that little cherry-man was my Yoda, “Call again, you will,” and nothing was going to deter me, every time I saw that little cherry fucker I was just like, “Again!” and I’d try again right away and then finally, at long last, *your face!* Oh my God, I can’t believe it!

CHRISTOPHER (*small pause*). How may I assist you?

SUE. Right! Oh right. Down to business. Got it! (*She shuffles around a large stack of papers.*) OK, so I called, I need help with ... let’s see ... (*She laughs again.*) It’s so good to have you here! Let me just gather my thoughts ...

CHRISTOPHER. We have a high volume of calls on hold, so if you could get to your question.

SUE. Oh really? Well, those folks can just get to know little cherry-man like I did. “I can’t get through ’cause some lady is talking too much.” (*She makes the cherry-man face and gesture.*) “Oh well!” (*She laughs at her own joke.*)

CHRISTOPHER. Your question?

SUE. OK, OK, sure. So ... when I applied for my 492968B I seem to get through all the windows fine until the confirmation page. Then every time I get a code that says, (*Reads notes.*) “File un-owned. Please contact server.”

CHRISTOPHER (*typing as he speaks*). I see. Did you register your LTM code?

SUE. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. In both places?

All the Cranes in the World

By
ARLENE HUTTON

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CAST:

MEREDITH.....Andalyn Honselaar

AUTHOR’S NOTE

The never-seen child in *All the Cranes in the World* is based on and named after my 5-year-old cousin, Vivien. As I began to craft a script around her, I wondered how to make the play active, not knowing what objects would be available to the actor in this time of quarantine. I thought origami would be a good prop, something that could be created wherever the actor was living and performing. That reminded me of the legend of the origami cranes, and the monologue came together.

—Arlene Hutton

All the Cranes in the World

CHARACTERS

MEREDITH: 18 years old.

(April 2020. MEREDITH, a college-age student, is on FaceTime with Vivi, her five-year-old niece. We see MEREDITH on a screen as Vivi would be seeing her. We do not see Vivi.)

MEREDITH. Happy birthday, Vivien!!! It's your Aunt Meredith. You are five years old! Happy birthday! Wow! Five years old! What does five feel like? Vivi, honey, I can't hear you. I just see your mouth moving. It's your Aunt Meredith. Can you see me? Can you hear me? Vivi? Vivi? Is there a little drawing of a microphone on the screen? It has a line through it. Your mike is off.

(She jumps back, startled by something she sees on the screen.)

Oh, look at the—what are you holding?—a bunny! That's so cute. Was that a birthday present? I had a stuffed bunny when I was—Vivi, when you hold the bunny so close to the camera I can't see you. That's better. What a cute bunny. What's its name? What's the bunny's name? Vivi, I can't hear you. Your mike is turned off. There's a, do you know what a cursor is, oh, wait you're not on the computer, are you on your dad's phone? Oh, no, your dad's on the phone in the other room. Are you on his iPad? Are you on Daddy's iPad?

(MEREDITH sees Vivi start to move.)

No, don't go get your dad. Don't go get Daddy. Stay here with me. Daddy has to be on the phone now. You and I are going to have fun together. I'm babysitting you. It's like I'm there with you, right? Just like Christmas break, remember? You and I spent the day together while your daddy and mommy were shopping. So it's your birthday, and I know your mommy wanted to be here for your birthday, but you're going to have to wait. She ... she told me to tell you happy birthday! She did! I talked to her three days ago and ... I know! I'm going to make something for you for your birthday, and I will mail it to you. Look, look, no, don't put the bunny on the screen again. Stay with me. Stay here. I'm all alone in my apartment, and you are the very best company, and I want to spend time with you on your birthday. Look what I'm making. *(Holds up a white origami crane.)* Look at this! See its wings?

Neither Here Nor There

By
ARLENE HUTTON

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CAST:

KATIEHayley O’Toole
ALEXANDRA.....Sheila Correa

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Neither Here Nor There is inspired by my own experiences, first as a student and later on the faculty of various colleges where I saw a wide disparity between wealthy undergrads and scholarship students. While living in a dorm can be a leveling experience, financial and cultural differences widen during school holidays and are all the more apparent when schools shut down in the middle of the semester. I always think that the way to talk about big issues is to tell a story about specific people. These two characters have a friendship that will not only survive secrets and betrayals, but because of living through an extraordinary time in history, they will remain close friends for the rest of their lives, finding a common ground of compromise that is neither here nor there, but someplace wonderful in between.

—Arlene Hutton

Neither Here Nor There

CHARACTERS

KATIE: 21, a junior at a small, exclusive liberal arts college in Florida.

ALEXANDRA: 21, her roommate since freshman year, also a college junior.

TIME: Sometime after spring break, April or May 2020.

PLACE: An online video session.

(KATIE and ALEXANDRA on separate video screens; both can be seen simultaneously. KATIE is in her childhood bedroom, Fox News heard from another room.)

KATIE. Oh, my God, here you are!

ALEXANDRA. Hi, there! Finally!

KATIE. Oh, my God, your hair!

ALEXANDRA. I know.

(A beat. Fox News is playing in the background.)

KATIE *(calling off)*. Can somebody turn down the TV?

ALEXANDRA. Well, you look great.

KATIE *(calling off)*. Thanks! *(To ALEXANDRA.)* I missed your birthday.

ALEXANDRA. I haven't had cell service.

KATIE. Well, happy birthday. We haven't had internet—

ALEXANDRA. Me neither, until now.

KATIE. It feels like ages.

ALEXANDRA. Yeah.

KATIE. Everything's changed.

ALEXANDRA. Yeah.

KATIE. I miss you.

ALEXANDRA. I miss you, too.

KATIE. I'd thought I'd see you in a week. Who knew we weren't going to go back after spring break. I like didn't bring anything home from the dorm, have to wash my clothes like twice a week, unless I wear my sister's. You didn't even take your computer.

ALEXANDRA. I know. Thank goodness I packed my iPad.

KATIE. Oh! How was the cruise?

ALEXANDRA. It was ... my stepdad, my mom ... it's OK, wow, seems like it's been forever, it's been OK. How are you doing? Tell me everything. How's things in Florida?

KATIE. I'm OK, we're all here in the house on Anna Maria Island, I'm sharing my old bedroom with my sister and my cousin, it's like high school all over again, and with my grandmother and my aunt there's like seven of us.

ALEXANDRA. But you're right by that beautiful beach.

KATIE. Yeah, great, it's closed. And you know how small our house is. Like built in the fifties or sixties. Three bedrooms. One bathroom. My dad and my grandmother listen to Fox News all day. It's a nightmare.

ALEXANDRA. And everybody's healthy?

KATIE. Yup.

ALEXANDRA. So you're good.

KATIE. Same old spring break. Not like when you came to visit freshman year.

ALEXANDRA. That was a great spring break.

KATIE. It was. The best. You know, when you grow up by the beach, spring break is redundant. A few weeks ago, I was picking up as many waitress shifts as I could get, but now the bars are all closed. And the tips during spring break aren't nearly as good as during the Christmas holidays or even the summer. But oh, my gosh, you were on a cruise! A cruise! My mom and dad went on a cruise to the Bahamas for their twenty-fifth. My dad gained like ten pounds in four days. Are you at your dad's now in DC?

ALEXANDRA. I'm still with my mom and stepdad.

KATIE. I thought you didn't like your new stepdad.

ALEXANDRA. He's turning out OK.

KATIE. That's great.

ALEXANDRA. Maybe third time's the charm.

KATIE. 'Cause, I know your real dad's a nightmare.

ALEXANDRA. He wasn't so bad when I was younger.

(Silence. Then, simultaneously.)

KATIE. So— ALEXANDRA. Have you talked to—

(They laugh.)

KATIE. You go.

ALEXANDRA. No, you.

A Pandemic Romance Monologue

By

LILA ROSE KAPLAN

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(A PANDEMIC ROMANCE MONOLOGUE)

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CAST:

ROWANCatherine Ballantyne

A Pandemic Romance Monologue

CHARACTERS

ROWAN: Late 30s, any race.

(Doorbell.

ROWAN wears a Renaissance gown and holds a package.

The dress is red velvet, deeply cut, the works.

She does not look like someone who should be wearing a gown.

She looks too modern for the gown.)

ROWAN. My husband has a problem. He can't stop buying romance novels. They lie in stacks all over our bedroom. They snuggle together, making friction. They keep me up at night gazing at each other. There used to be books about statistics, but now there are British lady scientists who fall in love with other British lady scientists and do unspeakable things under all those skirts.

There's a pandemic outside. We should be making masks and worrying together. Also, we just moved into this house, and we should be unpacking. Instead, he's reading. Constantly. These romance novels are killing my marriage.

I wake up and I'm surrounded by true love, soulmates and happy endings. I'm from New York. We can't be happy. You people from California can be happy, but we can't. We can be busy or disgusted or funny, we can be bitterly funny. But you're not born in New York hoping for a happy ending. You might as well be dead. My husband suddenly wants to be happy. *(Little beat.)* What did he order now?

(She looks in the box. She inspects each book.)

(Reading titles.) Brazen and the Beast

It Takes Two to Tumble

And ... A Thief in the Nude.

How can I compete with a thief in the nude? Seems like she has a lot of time to be naked and steal paintings.

Did you know the French word for orgasm is *le petit mort*? It means the little death. It means you basically die for a few moments while having an

Les Mots Justes, or Hold Your Tongue

By

WILLIAM DAVIES KING

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(LES MOTS JUSTES, OR HOLD YOUR TONGUE)

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CAST:

A..... Sara Neal
B..... Shekinah Bryant
C..... Alyssa Longwill

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I was hesitant about using a French title, but these three words seemed inevitable—“the right words.” *Les mots justes* are not just correct, they are exact, perfect, just what you need. When the virus crisis hit, I did not know what to say, much less write. I felt stunned, thunderstruck, which is what “astonished” literally means. With large gatherings canceled and the Trump administration utterly failing to cope, the social fabric was tearing apart and revealing the cruelties of history as cruelly present as ever. In this damaged environment, the theatre becomes a lens everted to see the affliction as worse than a mere virus. Health is good laughter and love. It’s breathing deeply without constraint—or an infection or a knee. Breathing is spirit. It is what love and laughter celebrate, but together, not alone. Everyone I know is in a search for some fitting expression, yet also trying to avoid *faux pas*—the exact wrong thing. Hold your tongue, but not literally! Speak your piece.
Peace.

—William Davies King

Les Mots Justes, or Hold Your Tongue

CHARACTERS

A: Any gender, any age.

B: Any gender, any age.

C: Any gender, any age.

(The characters are all human beings in remote spaces. Otherwise, whatever. The casting could go many different ways. But be aware: any casting choice will end up telling an incidental story of difference—we're all different—so notice where it takes you.

A, B, and C are in a remote space. The “buzz” is a penalty sound. Could be an actual buzzer. Could be a whistle or airhorn. Could be a finger snap or a red light. Could be different effects at different moments.

Note: the following directions refer to the way Zoom worked in June 2020. If it works differently in whatever digital medium you are using, find a way to adapt. The point is that they are all alone and yet strangely in the same space, so they notice one another, laugh and frown and point at one another, even make eye contact, in a way.

A is alone, looks right, looks left—nothing. A looks up, sees nothing more than a crack in the ceiling, perhaps, nothing important. Sighs. Oppressively bored, needy.

Suddenly, B is there, in the next box, and B is looking directly [through the box, you could say] at A. A quickly notices and looks directly at B, quizzically, hopefully. Beat. B looks back and is glad to see A watching. B gives a little nod of greeting. A nods back. They draw closer to each other.

Suddenly, with a buzz, C is there, in the box below, looking up at them, first one, then the other. A and B both immediately notice C and draw back from each other—to an appropriate distance—and C looks away from them to the camera. All three stare at the camera. Beat. Nothing interesting, nothing important. Who has anything? Anybody? No.

Finally, A gets restless, sighs, looks to B, who doesn't notice, looks to C, who doesn't notice, looks back at the camera. Then B gets restless, looks around. Sighs. Even C gets a bit restless, sighs. Boredom is turning to frustration for them all.

A moans, then looks up and addresses the camera. The others notice. Everything is heard by everybody at all times, and sometimes that's uncomfortable, sometimes welcome.)

A. I have this *urge*—it's a longing, I guess—to social proximate.

B. Prosecute?

A. Proximate.

B. Procreate?

C (*buzz*). That's inappropriate!

(Each time C buzzes, A and B look down at C. But there comes a time when they start [mostly] ignoring C. They enjoy what they have together. C will have to overcome that.)

A. No, not appropriate, not prosecute or procreate. *Proximate*, *PROXIMATE*, and not *approximate*. Cut distance! Get close! Be nigh!

B. Ah! I see. Proximate, in the sense of getting in the proximity of.

A. Or with.

C (*buzz*). That's inappropriate!

B. How about "un-distance"? Antisocial indistance.

A. Counter-distance? De-distance?

B. Desist!

A. Desist and cease!

B. And seize!

C (*buzz*). That's inappropriate!

(Pause.)

A. Synonym.

B. Cinnamon.

A. Sinsemilla!

B. Sin ...

C (*buzz*). ...

B. What????

C. Sin. You know, all of that is just inappropriate.

B. *Sin-cerely*??? (*Laughs.*)

C. You know the rules.

A (*slowly and deliberately*). Syn ... ec ... doche. Synecdoche.

C. I don't know what that means.

B. Part for the whole.

Auld Lang Syne

By

JENNY MERCEIN

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CAST:

DAN..... Irwin Appel
ABBY..... Annie Torsiglieri
MATTHEW.....Michael Bernard
KIDS Harry and Jackson Bernard

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Whether it’s time on our hands due to social isolation, or fear of death, or some combination of the two, this pandemic has inspired many of us to reconnect with old friends. It’s also forced us all to spend way too much time staring at our faces on a computer screen (which, if you are over 40, isn’t that much fun). When I think back on COVID-19, these virtual reunions will stand out as silver linings. In a time of isolation and uncertainty and fear, the entire process of writing and rehearsing this play has brought me nothing but joy. I hope readers and audiences will feel the same. Thank you to Risa, Annie and everyone at UCSB for bringing this incredible community of artists together. Thanks to all the ex-boyfriends who inspired this play, and to the husband who gave me such great notes and ideas.

—Jenny Mercein

Auld Lang Syne

CHARACTERS

DAN: *A man in his 40s-60s.*

ABBY: *A woman in her 40s-60s.*

MATTHEW: *A man in his 40s-60s.*

NOTE: If possible, Abby and Matthew should be played by actors who are quarantining together, so they can appear in the same frame. In scene 2, Abby refers to having teenage boys. If the actors playing Abby and Matthew happen to have children of a different gender who want to play the offstage voice screaming “Mom,” feel free to change the gender of the children Abby mentions. I am happy to consult on the song at the end if the actor playing Abby or the director wants suggestions.

Scene 1

(DAN is looking at himself in the computer screen/camera frame. He makes faces of disapproval at the image he sees, shifting the chair and the position of the computer to try to find a better angle, maybe adjusting lights in the room, opening a window shade, etc. He messes with his hair; maybe picks something out of his nose or teeth? He’s trying to look the best he can ... but he’s a bit scruffy. He finally presses the button to start recording. He takes a big inhale, as if he will speak, then stops—he forgets how he wanted to begin? Or he just loses his nerve for a second?—He stops the recording, shakes it off, and hits record.)

DAN. Hey. Hi. It’s me. Dan. Blum. From high school. I know it’s been—Fuck.

(He stops the recording. Maybe makes another physical adjustment. Starts again. Maybe a little too enthusiastic this time.)

DAN *(cont’d)*. Hey! It’s me—

(He freezes. Stops recording. Takes a deep breath. Starts again.)

DAN *(cont’d)*. Hey, Abby. It’s been a long time. God, I can’t get used to looking at myself. OK, sorry. So, it’s me. Dan. From high school. I, I know it’s been forever, but, well, I’ve certainly got time on my hands these days, so I thought I would reach out. How are you? I’ve thought of you so much

over the years, and I was so excited to see your name on the RSVP list for the reunion this spring. I usually go to those things because I still live close by, but I know you're all the way out there in Oregon. Anyway, I was so happy you were making the trip this time. I was really looking forward to seeing you. So, when I got the email today that they are officially canceling, I just thought, screw it! I'm reaching out. *Carpe diem*, right?

So, I thought I'd just tell you a little bit about myself and what I've been doing for the past, oh, 40 years or so ... I think the last time we spoke was during my first year at USC. Remember I went there to study film? Of course you do. Me and my Super-8 camera. And who could forget your star turn in my magnum opus "Cleopatra's Revenge"? I still can't believe I got you to hold that snake on camera. And all that fake blood? *(He laughs.)* Man, you put up with a lot ...

Anyway, USC was hard. The students there were all just so ... rich. Or at least that's how it felt to me. So I ended up transferring back home to UNL in my third year. I just never fit in in California. And by that time your parents had moved. I could have tried harder to find you, but ...

Well, needless to say, my dreams of becoming the next Scorsese dried up pretty fast being back in Nebraska. But I still work in film. Sort of. If you can believe it, I am a wedding videographer. I know. From horror movies to wedding videos ... Business was pretty great for a while. But recently, folks are just shooting stuff on their iphones. Kinda like me, right now. And now with this virus ... I've had seventeen gigs cancel in the past three days. It's pretty grim.

The irony of spending my life recording weddings is that I never made it down the aisle myself. Both my parents died back in the mid-90s, so those years were rough. And running my own business ... I guess I just always figured it would happen someday, and then one day I woke up and realized I'm kind of old. I don't know how that happened. *(He laughs.)*

Anyway, I want to hear about you! Are you still singing? You had the most magnificent voice. I'm just so sorry I won't see you at the reunion. I was really happy when I saw your name on that list of attendees. So, I don't know, I thought maybe we could connect ... Maybe FaceTime or Zoom or whatever ... I really hate looking at myself, but it would be so great to see your face. I guess I could have just emailed you, but I figured this video might ... make more of an impression. I don't know. Who knows if I'll even send this ...

OK, Abby. I'm going to go now. I hope I send this. I mean, we're all stuck in our houses now, so we might as well try to connect somehow, right? OK. Well, I'm gonna go. I hope you are well. God, I hope you are healthy—I can't believe I didn't say that sooner—and I hope I hear from you.

Bye.

I'm Not Coming Home

By
BRIAN OTAÑO

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CAST:

TERRY Dillon Redd

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When this nightmare began, I was living with a roommate who wasn't inclined to practice social distancing or any other precautions. Did he think he was immune? I couldn't tell you. When it became abundantly clear that he wasn't going to change, I moved. That's where I started, thinking of all the people who are saddled with cohabitants, partners or other extenuating-circumstance people who continually put them at risk. I started there. I took my first step into this piece with a song lyric:

“Member when I was so sick and you didn't believe me?”

That's a line from “Regret,” my favorite track on Fiona Apple's *The Idler Wheel*. The whole song could melt your fucking face off, but *that particular line* paints such a distinct picture of both a shitty partner and a shitty relationship dynamic. I love it so much, I stole it for this monologue—which ultimately wound up being about a young person learning the steep price that comes from handing over your agency. It's also an acknowledgment of all the people who have been forced to shelter in place while in necrotic relationships with dysfunctional, potentially abusive partners. And that's that on that.

—Brian Otaño

I'm Not Coming Home

CHARACTERS

TERRY: early 20s.

(TERRY can be played by a performer of any gender or ethnicity. The character is in a gay relationship with Stevie, whose gender should match TERRY's.

TERRY is in their early 20s, with many of their biggest mistakes and successes [all lessons] still ahead of them. They're from one of those small towns in Pennsylvania that's close to Atlantic City and Philadelphia, but far enough for its young citizens to be somewhat sheltered. TERRY has been living in New York City.

TERRY doesn't walk away from anything without feeling an immense sense of guilt, as if every move they make might be construed as a failure to meet an obligation. That's TERRY's big problem at the moment, and they are reckoning with the fact that their nature as a Type-B person is part of what got them into this mess in the first place.

TERRY is a COVID-19 patient who has been in a relationship with Stevie for a little over a year. Stevie is older, powerful, moneyed, charismatic. In a relationship, they don't really allow a partner to have much breathing room or much of a say. TERRY has been living in "The Stevie Show" for a little over a year. TERRY's been lost in this relationship pretty much the entire time it's been happening.

At lights up, TERRY is sitting in a hospital bed. They've had about four or five days on their own to take stock—and the situation is pretty dire. They're going to survive—in fact, they're being discharged in a day or so. However, the undeniable truth is that they can't stay in New York. Their job is vaporized and their landlord has let them out of their lease—a shitty move, but also a mercy, given how badly legislation in Albany has fallen short. TERRY has two choices—stay and get lost in "The Stevie Show" again or go back home to their family, hole up in the garage for a week until it's safe to be around people and quietly slip back to the life they had before college, while the world rages.

At lights up, TERRY has made a decision.)

TERRY (*in darkness*). Hi ... umm, is this ...

South Lake Tahoe, California

By
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CAST:

HARRIET Sara Neal
GLENN Matte Kranz
JACKIE Julie Caudill
MIKE Vishay Singh

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I’ve been a fan of horror stories since before I could read or form complete sentences. True story: the image of JoBeth Williams swimming in a muddy pool of skeletons during the climax of *Poltergeist* is my first TV memory. As I’ve grown older, I’ve found that the horrors visited upon us by ghosts and slashers don’t hold a candle to the real-life nightmares that have unfolded in the world during my lifetime. Terrorist attacks, natural disasters, elections, this pandemic—one of the things they have in common is that they make me feel utterly powerless. In this play, I explore that powerlessness and tip my hat to the brave folks who continue to face down danger in order to help the afflicted.

—Brian Otaño

South Lake Tahoe, California

CHARACTERS

HARRIET: The keeper of the Zoom meeting. She's the mama of every friend group she's ever had, and that's how she likes it. Her shit's together, she's brave. Camping, escape rooms, the apocalypse—you want her around for all these moments. Her heroes: Ellen Ripley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She's currently residing in a small town east of Carson City, Nevada.

GLENN: A pushy, slightly toxic cishet guy from a conservative family. They all secretly vote Republican (“We’re fiscal conservatives,” they’d say). He can recount the fact that one of his sisters died but won’t say how, won’t register any emotion and would rather pretend that she never existed. Think the family from *Ordinary People*, without the help of Judd Hirsch. He doesn’t have any heroes. Grew up with Harriet in Carson City.

JACKIE: A hyperactive stoner from Queens, New York. She doesn’t have an accent but can talk a blue streak. She has swag for days. She’s not gay, but she’s an ally. She’s the gal drag queens always save a seat for at the bar shows because she’s cool like that. She always carries cash and knows how to tourniquet a knife wound. Her heroes: Ginger McKenna from *Casino* (as played brilliantly by Sharon Stone) and Shangela Laquifa Wadley (drag superstar and three-time contestant on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*). After taking care of a very intoxicated Harriet at an unbearable theatre nerd party, Jackie and Harriet have been inseparable.

MIKE: A wealthy, somewhat sheltered kid from Northern California. He doesn’t deal well with pressure and isn’t very good at being uncomfortable. He’s the youngest in the group. He likes scary movies but hates being in the woods, which makes his current predicament all the more taxing—at present, he is quarantined in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., at his family’s lake house. He’s totally one of those kids who ignored the social distancing measures because he assumed that even if he did catch COVID, he’d be OK because he’s young. Of course, he got sick. His heroes: Batman and Mark Zuckerberg. Seriously.

(All characters are in their late teens to early 20s. Their bond: they’re all classmates at UCSB.)

HARRIET logs into a Zoom meeting. While she waits, she messes around with background images. Her room is charming, fastidiously decorated.

MIKE arrives, his video screen pops up next to HARRIET's. He's wearing earbuds.)

HARRIET. Hey, Mikey!

MIKE. Hi.

HARRIET. How are you feeling?

MIKE. I'm OK. What are you up to?

(GLENN logs in, his video screen appearing next to hers.)

GLENN. Hey.

HARRIET *(to MIKE)*. Oh, you know, chillin'. Recovering after a particularly daunting afternoon of bleaching all the high-touch surfaces in my apartment and sitting on my couch. *(To GLENN.)* Hey, Glenn. I thought you had a family game night. What happened?

GLENN. We attempted a game of charades, but the whole thing got weird. My brother had a meltdown.

HARRIET. What do you mean?

GLENN. He started crying, and he couldn't stop.

HARRIET. Really? What happened?

(JACKIE arrives, her video screen popping up in the grid.)

GLENN. My sister held up her cat to the camera, and he lost it. *(To JACKIE.)* Hi, Jackie.

JACKIE. What's happening, you junkie whores? Glenn, who lost it?

GLENN. My brother.

HARRIET. Because of a cat?

GLENN. Yeah.

JACKIE. ... Put a pin in that. Mike! How's it hangin', Rapunzel? Are you feeling any better?

MIKE *(pissed off)*. Yeah, I'm feeling fucking fine.

(A confused pause.)

JACKIE. OK. Dial back the spice, baby, I'm just asking.

MIKE. Sorry.

HARRIET. What's the matter?

MIKE. My parents won't let me come home.

JACKIE. But it's been two weeks.

GLENN. Are you still sick?

MIKE. No, but they don't want to chance it, so they just dropped another assload of groceries on the front deck and told me I have to wait another week.

JACKIE. Did you do the pasta carbonara recipe I sent you? From the Bon Appetit video?

MIKE. Yeah, it came out OK.

GLENN. Why won't they let you come home?

HARRIET. His grandmother.

MIKE. Yes, my fucking grandmother is at home with them. She's got COPD, so they're being super paranoid.

HARRIET. I'm sorry, Mike.

MIKE. When all this started, they said we'd only be cooped up for a couple of weeks—

JACKIE. Yeah, but that was bullshit. We all knew that was bullshit—

HARRIET (*delicately*). I mean ... listen ... I get that you're feeling stir-crazy, but ... you're in a bougie, solar-powered smarthouse with a firepit and a Jacuzzi.

JACKIE. Yeah, that house would make Elon Musk cream his panties—

HARRIET. It sucks that you got a visit from Ms. 'Rona, but as far as quarantining goes, you could do a lot worse.

MIKE. I know. I'm just over being up here by myself.

HARRIET. Do you want me to come hang out on your front lawn? If I do ninety, I can get there in twenty minutes or so, I could—

MIKE. No, I'll be fine, I just ... I don't like it up here. Forget it, though. It be what it be.

HARRIET. OK ... So, wait, Glenn, back to your brother, he had a breakdown because he saw your sister's cat?

JACKIE. I'm lost, what—?

GLENN. We tried to have a Zoom game night, and my brother just started sobbing. I think the isolation's finally broken him.

HARRIET. I don't blame him. Colorado is remote as fuck under the best of circumstances. But the cat ... ? I don't get it.

JACKIE. That makes sense, people are wired differently. Someone sent me a video of a drag queen performing at this bar back home and that just sent me into a spiral.

HARRIET. Was her makeup bad?

JACKIE. No, I just miss drag queens, I miss *going out* and getting turnt, you know? I don't know. So, what did you do, Glenn?

GLENN. We all just slowly backed away from our computers and logged out one by one.

But Here I Am

By
LYNN ROSEN

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CAST:

CHRIS.....Alexandra Singleton
TAYLOR..... Navnoor Singh Kahlon

AUTHOR’S NOTE

But Here I Am was written in the midst of the pandemic as I was longing for connection with all the people I could no longer see—even the people I had trouble getting close to. *Please note:* The scene should be energetic, funny and crisp—but a shared grief for their late mom, their love for each other, and a need to connect is bubbling beneath the surface. But don’t sit in the sadness about the mom or about the pandemic that’s occurring. The scene won’t work if the momentum sags. Instead, think about how the siblings are striving to come to an understanding. Although Chris and Tyler are like oil and water, they never give up on trying to get along. Slashes (/) are interruptions.

—Lynn Rosen

But Here I Am

CHARACTERS

CHRIS

TAYLOR

NOTE: Chris and Taylor are ideally played by two men, but any gender for either part is fine. Feel free to change pronouns as needed.

(Night. A Zoom chat between siblings. There is love, yet they can't seem to connect. Help always feels like criticism and love feels like judgment. CHRIS is more emotional, a cosmetician at Sephora, bright PJs, a fast talker. TAYLOR is stoic, impatient, a spy novelist, plaid PJs. CHRIS does his own makeup as they talk, but he is fully present. TAYLOR is futzing with something as he sits. They're very distracted.

TAYLOR starts flipping through a book.

NOTE: Slashes represent interruptions.)

CHRIS. It's all so crazy, right?

TAYLOR. So so crazy.

CHRIS. The people across from me never turn their lights off. So annoying.

TAYLOR *(distracted)*. Wow. Weird. Annoying.

CHRIS. Maybe they're scared of the dark. Evening feels the most normal to me. I watch something alone, I eat alone—normal, you know? Day and nighttime are the freaky time when—Hello? Taylor!

TAYLOR. What? I'm/ listening.

CHRIS. What are you looking at? / Stop that.

TAYLOR. I'm listening! I'm here. I accepted your Zoom invitation, it's two a.m., but here I am.

CHRIS. Are you mad I woke you up?

TAYLOR. Nope.

CHRIS. You seem mad.

TAYLOR. I said nope.

CHRIS. Now you seem madder.

TAYLOR. Do you *want* me to be mad? I can do that for you / if you want me to.

CHRIS. No, I do not want / that, obvi.

TAYLOR. Cuz you're pushing me there, Chris. You looove doing that. Ever since we were kids.

CHRIS. I don't think so.

TAYLOR. Look—

CHRIS. “Look.” Always a good way to start / a sentence.

TAYLOR. Look, I can have a different feeling than you, that doesn't mean it's any less valid.

CHRIS. Oh, you have feelings? I mean I see them in your books, but in real life—

TAYLOR. Are we done? Cuz now it's 2:04 a.m. and I have a book due to an editor in the morning.

CHRIS. Lucky you.

TAYLOR. Yes.

CHRIS. Lucky, lucky you, that you can still work and make money during all this CRAZY-ASS CRAZINESS!

TAYLOR. Quiet! Jesus! Amber is sleeping. *You* can work too, you know.

CHRIS. How so, Taylor? I do people's makeup. I need humans. I need cheeks and lips and eyelids. I need people asking me to make them look beautiful, and I do it very well P.S.

TAYLOR. I don't doubt / that.

CHRIS. I need humanity to survive. I'm not like *you*, writing *Justin Penumbra* crime bomb spy thrillers all day alone in my attic. I hate being alone.

TAYLOR. I think my *Justin Penumbra* series is more literary than that but / whatever.

CHRIS. I am a dream maker! And I don't have that anymore.

TAYLOR. You could.

CHRIS. Oh, I could? How's that exactly?

TAYLOR. You could come up with a creative way to ply your trade, Chris—

CHRIS. It's not a “trade,” I've told you—

TAYLOR. Your “calling,” fine. Offer tutorials on YouTube. That's a plan! Call clients and offer private consults via Zoom. That's a plan! You could start a business plan for the salon you've always dreamed of but never do anything / about.

CHRIS. Here we go! I'm such a disappointment.

TAYLOR. I'm just trying to sharpen your / focus.

CHRIS. Thanks for reminding me of my many shortcomings in the midst of a pandemic. / Nice!

That Flower, That Flower

By
LYNN ROSEN

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CAST:

EDIE Lana Spring

AUTHOR’S NOTE

This is adapted from my play *Apple Cove* produced by WP Theater in 2011. I revisited the character of Edie for *Alone, Together* for a few reasons.

- A. I regret not giving Edie a moment like this in *Apple Cove* when it was first produced.
- B. Edie’s need to break free is what we all wish we could do during COVID-19!
- C. Edie’s exuberant escape from a place of rigidity, fear, homogeneity and tribalism is symbolic of my wish for America.

NOTE TO ACTOR: Discover these thoughts *as* they occur. Edie didn’t plan this. It’s a last-second idea. She’s speaking off-the-cuff. No time to think or pause because Alan could wake up any second and convince her to stay. In other words, a snappy pace will help you find intention. Also, although Edie says she’s sad, and she *is* sad about many things, don’t play this sad. Think energy and exuberance! She’s freeing herself. Lastly, there is funny stuff in here, but Edie doesn’t know it’s funny. This is all real and urgent to her.

—Lynn Rosen

That Flower, That Flower

CHARACTERS

EDIE: A woman in her 20s.

PLACE: A gated community in Florida where there are rules for everything, from what flowers to grow, to what paint to use, to what clothes to wear.

TIME: Present day.

(EDIE records a “Dear John” video to her husband, Alan, 20s, into a security cam. [If that’s not doable, she can do it on Alan’s computer.] The flower she speaks of is awesome and powerful. It’s her awakening. She’s been betrayed by Alan but still has love for him. Her dainty dress contrasts with her wild hair, the dirt on her face, under her nails, on her hands. It’s like she’s gone through a metamorphosis. She is very close to the camera.)

EDIE. It was that flower, Alan.

That flower that came from nowhere. From the ooze and silt.

That ugly, pretty, thorny, black, brown, gold and purple flower.

I knew the rules of The Cove by heart—tulips only, hedges only so high, bushes only so bushy, English speakers only—so when that flower popped up in my garden, I dared not touch it.

But every day, Alan? I got a little bit closer.

I caressed a leaf.

I bled on a thorn. Yeah! That’s where all the Band-Aids went! Ha!

I inhaled its moldy mocha-soil scent, its dirty scent, and it was succulent.

I know the word succulent embarrasses you, Alan, I’m sorry, but it was succulent.

It infected me, and it was like *I* grew thorns and curves and colors!

Like *I* burst up from the manicured lawn!

Like *I* became succulent!

It’s wise, this flower. It was here long before they butchered the trees and drained the swamps, before they killed the bees and birds and otters. Before the gates of this Cove were built to keep out the chaos, the stranglers, the strangers. *(Aren’t we taught to welcome strangers?)*

Before my mom ran after that kite and never came back.

The Shakespeare Section

By
LYNN ROSEN

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(THE SHAKESPEARE SECTION)

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The Shakespeare Section was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Daniel Andres Blanco. It was designed by Kaede Kogo and Allison McSwain.

CAST:

STUDENT Matte Kranz

AUTHOR’S NOTE

The Shakespeare Section was inspired by, well, my life! Who hasn’t pined away in a library, tussling internally about how to win over the AMAZING person you have a crush on? Who among us hasn’t tried and failed to seem cool? But it’s also inspired by my urgent need during the COVID-19 pandemic to play, to dream, to connect and to remember love, joy and new beginnings.

—Lynn Rosen

The Shakespeare Section

CHARACTERS

STUDENT: Man, woman or nonbinary. Feel free to change all pronouns to anything. Ideally 20s but can be any age.

PLACE: A library.

TIME: The present.

(STUDENT is at a desk pretending to read, but really he's gazing at the person he's in love with. Although this is an internal monologue delivered to the camera [or live audience]—i.e. to STUDENT's own subconscious—he's in a library and an outburst can be heard by the public, so he often tamps his passion down. But there are a few places where control gives way to passion, which then must be contained again. A swift pace is your friend. No need to rush, but this is stream of consciousness so, for the most part, let it flow. I suggest a few places where you speak directly to the camera/us, but feel free to play with that.)

STUDENT *(alternating between speaking to camera/us and speaking toward "her")*. There she is. Her hair is down. I like it down. I like it up. She's smart. Pink suits her. Sweaters suit her. Light and clouds and rain and shine suit her. She's at the circulation desk, she has the cutest piece of paper in her hand. The librarian is pointing her my way! I'm by "S" for Shakespeare. Does she like Shakespeare? I can like Shakespeare! I'm gonna talk to her this time. No more wussing out!

(An unseen person says "Shh!" offscreen/offstage.)

Sorry. *(To self again, quietly but intensely.)* Here she comes. I'm gonna be all "Shakespeare." Play it coolth. Oh! She passes and her scent doth blanket me softly like a—like a—like a sigh of relief! What is her scent? Roses? Beach? A garden by the sea? Is that her dream place? Am I with her in that garden by the sea? Of course not, freak! She doesn't know you exist. You hide behind your *(Doing air quotes.)* "Lessons in Nutrition" textbook while she doth touch the spines of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and that other really long one. Oh, that those spines were mine, and I could but feel her sea-salt skin

The Great Greats

By

CHERI STEINKELLNER

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(THE GREAT GREATS)

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The Great Greats was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Cheri Steinkellner.

CAST:

GRANDMA ELSIEJane Morris
ANGEL Martin Wong
ELLIOT..... Angel Villalobos
TAYLOR..... Matte Kranz
AVERY..... Valerye Jimenez
RILEY..... Mario Yanes
CHARLIE Navnoor Singh Kahlon
JORDAN..... Violet Hansen
QUINN.....Maison “Bub” Bray

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Two weeks into COVID quarantine 2020, I hadn’t written for two weeks. Like cousin Jordan, in the play, I was immersed in confusion—and completely blocked. Then I attended my younger brother’s Zoom birthday party and this play found me. *The Great-Greats* is a patchwork of near-verbatim conversations I witnessed through my screen in the early days of isolation. The only character I pulled from another time and place is my Grandma Elsie, who for the last many years of her life, only spoke the words, “No wonder, no way”—but through those few words, communicated the world. Every grandchild was her favorite, and she was all of ours. This play is for Grandma.

—Cheri Steinkellner

The Great Greats

CHARACTERS

ANGEL: 20s, an aide in Grandma's assisted-living facility and her adopted grandchild.

GRANDMA ELSIE: 100 today. A stroke left her with few words, but she makes herself clear.

ELLIOT: 22, a Trader Joe's crewmate, now an essential service worker.

TAYLOR: 23, a comic without a stage.

AVERY: 25, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur and a stealth Republican.

RILEY: 25, a law-school dropout/bartender/breathwork coach.

CHARLIE: 24, a healthcare worker, down with the virus.

JORDAN: 21, a student playwright, stuck in London with writer's block.

QUINN: 22, a Galactic Light Force worker.

(AT RISE: a blank screen.)

ANGEL *(off screen)*. OK, birthday girl. Let's see how you look for the great-grandkids.

(Close on: GRANDMA. She sees her face, too close.)

GRANDMA. No way.

ANGEL *(off screen)*. Yeah way.

(GRANDMA pushes the screen away.)

GRANDMA. No-wonder-no-way. No-wonder-no-way. No-wonder-oh-God—

ANGEL *(off screen)*. Don't worry, they'll be here. C'mon, fixed you a little birthday cocktail while we wait. Alcohol, sugar, lemon-wheel, yummmmm—

(He hands her a glass. She drinks.)

GRANDMA. No-wonder-no-way-no-wonder-no-way—

ANGEL *(off screen)*. I'm sure this is the link. Lemme try it on my laptop—

(Second screen opens on ANGEL.)

ANGEL (*cont'd*). Yeah, that's it. Oh wait, yay—someone's coming! Here we go—

(*Third screen: ELLIOT, in a Trader Joe's crew Hawaiian shirt, holding a TJ's cake with a flaming taper and singing.*)

ELLIOT. HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, GRANDMA ELSIE AND ELLIOT—

(*Zoom ding. A new voice, singing fancy.*)

TAYLOR. HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOOOOU!

(*Fourth screen: TAYLOR, in front of a Zoom background of Ellen's Oscar night group selfie.*)

TAYLOR. Hey Grandma, just me and the squad here to say HAPPY BIRTH—
GRANDMA. No-wonder-no-way—

ELLIOT. Taylor? Tay? You froze up, cuz. Hang up and call back—

TAYLOR. Duh, Elliot. I was joking, dumbass.

ELLIOT. Earmuffs, Grandma. Please excuse my cousin, uhh—?

ANGEL. Angel. I work with your grandmother. I mean, if you could call it work. It's sorta more like she's my grandma, right, Elsie?

(*GRANDMA blows a kiss. ANGEL catches it.*)

ELLIOT. Except she's not.

TAYLOR. Yeah, you have your own.

ANGEL. Actually I don't. All mine died when I was little. So yeah, she kinda is.

ELLIOT. Except she's not.

TAYLOR. Back down, cuz. We know who she loves best. (*Grins, an animated sparkle bounces off his teeth.*) Hey, Grandma, look what I gotchu—

GRANDMA. No-wonder-no-way!

(*TAYLOR changes background to: a mountain of toilet paper rolls.*)

ELLIOT. Not funny, Tay. Real people are still hoarding. Yesterday at work there was a literal fist-fight over two-ply.

TAYLOR. You still slumming at Trader Jokes?

ELLIOT. As opposed to living off my mom and dad? Um, yeah. And also, in case you missed it: I'm an essential worker, a-hole. Like a nurse or a firefighter. People thank me for my service.

TAYLOR. Grandma, Elliot called me a-hole!

ELLIOT. He called me dumbass!

TAYLOR. Hey, control your rage issues, huh? I'm here for the woman I love.

(New background: a vintage photo of a younger GRANDMA as a new voice is heard.)

AVERY *(off screen.)* Zoom is such bullshit, you guys. *(Fifth screen opens.)*
HearNow is such a better app.

ELLIOT. Why, because you built it?

AVERY. My team did, yeah.

TAYLOR. Whoo, Avery has a team.

AVERY. Correction: Teams. Also: My teams have teams. Also: They're all working right now. Remotely. From home. On HearNow. To which I sent you all a link for a free month's trial, so why the hell are we still on Zoom?

(Screen six opens. RILEY enters.)

RILEY. Because no one trusts you with their PayPal?

AVERY *(yells, pounds wall)*. Shut your damn door, Riley, I'm getting feedback!

RILEY *(hollers back)*. You shut your door!

AVERY. We don't have sound issues on my app. I built in filters—

TAYLOR. You mean your team did—

ELLIOT. You mean her team's team did—

RILEY. Shut up you guys, it's Grandma time. *(Raises a glass of wine.)* Happy b-day, gorgeous! Love you!

GRANDMA. No-wonder-no-way!

ELLIOT. Oh? Are we day-drinking now, Riley?

AVERY. Unrelentingly.

RILEY. Are we the party mom now, Elliot? Grandma, guess what? I'm training online to be a breathwork coach.

AVERY. AKA, quit law school and is working as a bartender.

RILEY. Uh, so was AOC like two years ago. Whuttt, bitch?

(Zoom ding: CHARLIE enters, in bed, sideways, buried under the covers.)

ALL. Charlie/Char-Char/Ohmygosh/Are you OK? Do you have it?

(CHARLIE shrugs, coughs out of control.)

TAYLOR *(to ANGEL)*. Our cousin Charlie's genuine medical, Angel. Graduated early to be on the frontline. That's a service, Elliot.

Abundance
(a requiem on Zoom)

By
JAMES STILL

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(ABUNDANCE [A REQUIEM ON ZOOM])

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Abundance (a requiem on Zoom) was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Risa Brainin.

CAST:

ANNIE Julie Fishell

AUTHOR’S NOTE

A requiem on Zoom, written for one person, *Abundance (a requiem on Zoom)* takes place in an emotional space that might seem like limbo, bardo and twilight all rolled into one. *Abundance (a requiem on Zoom)* is about one person’s surprisingly joyful and heartbreaking moments between death and the mystery of what comes next. But at its heart the play is very much about epiphany and generosity, about discovery and gifts, about connections and saying goodbye. Can you see me? Is anyone out there?

—James Still

Abundance

(a requiem on Zoom)

CHARACTERS

ANNIE

NOTE: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever way the play is cast, it will tell the story of abundance.

(A woman—let’s definitely call her ANNIE—flickers into view.

Don’t get cute with the background—the space should be empty, not even neutral—empty.

Empty can be beautiful.

ANNIE looks out at us. We can see her, but she can’t see us.)

ANNIE. Hello?

(...)

Hello?

(ANNIE looks around.)

Huh.

(...)

Anyone there?

(...)

Maybe you can see me?

(...)

Am I on mute?

(ANNIE leans in and fiddles with her device.)

This was the link, I mean, this is Zoom, right?

I’m on Zoom.

I don’t know why I’m on Zoom, but this was definitely the link.

Am I in the right place?

(ANNIE looks at us.

She waits.

...
...
...)

Well.
(...)

Um ... I came as soon as I could,
as soon as I got the text with the link, the invitation.
As soon as I—
this is so new to me.
You probably hear that a lot.
But I'm not sure what happens next.
You probably hear that a lot too.

(...)

OK, why don't I talk—
and if you want to say anything—
can anyone hear me?
I don't know what I'm supposed to be looking for.
Or *who* I'm supposed to be looking for.
I— ...
I don't know if this is what usually happens—
I don't know how long this part lasts,
I mean, things ended sooner than they should have—
or maybe they ended exactly when they were supposed to.
But I'm no longer—
I mean, obviously—I'm not, you know ...
What I want to say
is that I'm guessing most people come here to tell you
that they didn't have enough time,
that there was so much more they wanted to do,
and that maybe they could make a bargain.
I'm just guessing?—
but you hear about that kind of stuff, that kind of reaction.
And sure, part of me feels that way too.
That's human, right?
Am I making any sense?
Can anyone see me—because I still can't see anyone.
Are you ... ?
(...)
I'm getting the feeling you aren't going to answer me.
If I could just see you—

Mom's Kids
(a reunion on the Zoom)

By
JAMES STILL

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(MOM'S KIDS [A REUNION ON THE ZOOM])

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Mom's Kids (a reunion on the Zoom) was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Michael Bernard.

CAST:

MOM..... Cheri Steinkellner
JACK..... Harry Davis
JILL..... Betty Galindo
THOR..... Dillon Redd

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There has been a lot of conversation about being at our best while sheltering in place—and then there are Mom's kids ... I wrote *Mom's Kids (a reunion on the Zoom)* wondering about people who didn't get that memo, siblings who aren't swayed by gratitude for Zoom and habitually turn everything up a notch so they are actually at their worst. Of course under the dark/savage humor of the play are the bare anxieties and fears that so many of us are feeling in the spring of 2020. And Mom? She has something to say, but her children are too busy freaking out to listen. And then they do. Wait—Mom said WHAT???

—James Still

Mom's Kids

(a reunion on the Zoom)

CHARACTERS

MOM: a woman in her 50s

MOM'S KIDS (in their 20s): JACK, JILL and THOR

NOTE: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever way the play is cast, it will tell the story of a 21st-century family.

*(The four of them are in different locations, alone and together on Zoom.
We drop in on the middle of something.)*

JACK. ... but what was so important we had to do this on Zoom? Are you OK?

JILL. Are you sick?

THOR. Are you having symptoms?

JACK. Are you out of toilet paper?

THOR. What the fuck, Mom?

JACK. Oh God.

THOR. What? What did I miss?

JILL. Your lighting there is terrible, Thor. You look awful.

THOR. Shut up. Why isn't Mom talking?

JACK. Mom! So what is this? Are you marrying that guy?

THOR. What guy?

JACK. The guy.

THOR. I didn't know Mom was seeing a guy.

JILL. That guy's a loser, Mom. Please don't ruin your life with a loser.

THOR. What guy?

JACK. Mom?

(...)

JILL. Mom!

JACK. Why isn't she talking?

JILL. Maybe it's a bad connection.

THOR. Blink twice if you can hear us.

JILL. Mom! Talk!

THOR. Why is she being so weird?

JACK. Shut up, Thor. She's not being weird—

THOR. You don't call this weird?

JILL. I hate both of you—just everybody shut up! Mom, seriously, what's going on?

THOR. Don't be all pretend-y with Mom—don't do that in front of us—

JACK. "Pretend-y" isn't really a word, Thor.

THOR. Shut up, Jack, I'm talking to Jill. So don't act like we don't know what you're doing.

JILL. What? What am I doing, Thor?

JACK. Don't play innocent, Jill—we know all your tricks.

JILL. My tricks?

JACK. You're such a manipulator.

JILL. For fuck's sake, would the two of you not gang up on me—for once? Just for frickin' once?

THOR. You're so good at playing the victim.

JILL. When someone gets attacked they ARE the victim!

JACK. We did not attack you.

JILL. What do you call it then? The two of you coming at me—it's always like this—

THOR. Always??? Queen of the hyperbole, your royal asswipe.

JILL. Very mature, Thor.

THOR (*mocking her*). "Very mature, Thor."

JILL. Shut up!

JACK. Who's attacking who?

JILL. I can't stand to be anywhere near the two of you, I never have, I never will—

JACK. Well lucky for all of us, with this virus thing we can't be anywhere near each other.

THOR. I already hate this whole fake Zoom culture stuff, it makes me feel *too* connected. It's overwhelming, right?

JILL. I still hate you both, I hate you equally, I hate you twice as much as I hate you each.

THOR. That is just stupid.

JILL. I hate you even more on Zoom.

JACK. You don't even make sense.

JILL. How would you know?

Waiting for Now
(a duet on security cameras)

By
JAMES STILL

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(WAITING FOR NOW [A DUET ON SECURITY CAMERAS])

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Waiting for Now (a duet on security camreas) was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Leo Cabranes-Grant.

CAST:

ESTHER Ryan Hollon
POLLY Alexandra Singleton

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Set in a prison and seen on security cameras, *Waiting for Now (a duet on security camreas)* is written for two incarcerated women who are caught in a disturbing loop of timelessness and middle-of-the-night existential questioning. Inspired by my work in the prison system (with a humble nod to Mr. Beckett), I wanted all of us to remember one of our more vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 crisis.

—James Still

Waiting for Now

(a duet on security cameras)

CHARACTERS

ESTHER: Older.

POLLY: Younger.

NOTE: In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever way the play is cast, it will tell the story of two souls.

(They are in separate prison cells, right next to each other.

They can hear each other but can't see each other.

We can see them both—at the same time, separately.

We are watching them on security cameras.

The two women look out at us.

They don't know if it's night or day. It feels like night.

Far away on another floor, in a place where it's allowed, we hear the far-away sound of a song playing on the radio.

ESTHER and POLLY listen and can hear Nina Simone singing "Consummation," or something similar.

After the song has established—just enough but not too much, the radio is suddenly snapped off.)

POLLY. Hey! Why'd they do that?

(...)

Why'd they kill the music?

ESTHER. They just do.

POLLY (*shouting*). MURDERER!!!

ESTHER. Stop it, you'll get us in trouble. Again.

POLLY. I'm not afraid anymore.

ESTHER. Good for you.

POLLY. Why'd they kill my music?

ESTHER. They kill everything. They kill us if we let them. Always *doin'* things. They're like a verb with too much confidence.

POLLY. What's that mean, a verb?

ESTHER. A verb, you know: action, doing something. It's something you do.

POLLY. Do? What about us? What do we do?

ESTHER. We wait.

(...)

We wait.

(...)

We wait.

(...)

POLLY. What are we waiting for?

ESTHER. We're waiting for ... now ... and ... now ... and ... now. Time. It's time.

POLLY. Time for what?

ESTHER. Time to wait.

POLLY. The blind don't know time, don't know what it is.

ESTHER. You blind?

POLLY. I'm not blind but that doesn't mean I can see. I can't see the past—the now. I can't go on like this.

ESTHER. That's what you think.

POLLY. It's what I know.

ESTHER. It's what you think you know. Let it be. Wait.

POLLY. What are we waiting for?

ESTHER. I just told you—

POLLY. No—what are we waiting *for*? What is there to wait for? I mean, all this waiting ... what if ain't worth it?

(...)

What are we waiting for?

ESTHER. We're waiting for different things.

POLLY. But how can I wait if I don't know what I'm waiting for?

ESTHER. You'll know when you know.

POLLY. But when will that be?

ESTHER. Now but not yet.

(...)

POLLY. I can't go on like this!

ESTHER. That's what you think.

POLLY. What can we do? What verb you wanna be?

ESTHER. (...)

POLLY. Is it morning yet?

**Whitman v. the United States:
Case 36 (on Zoom)**

By
JAMES STILL

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(WHITMAN V. THE UNITED STATES: CASE 36 [ON ZOOM])

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CAST:

ROBINMaison “Bub” Bray
JUDGE.....Brian Harwell

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Part fever dream and part digital trial, *Whitman v. the United States* is about a writer battling some very particular demons while the world shelters in place. With all the arts shuttered in the U.S., many of us are wandering around not sure why we’re writing and whether or not any of it will ever see the light of day. With anxiety and uncertainty as a writer’s primary companions, this play takes things a bit further as a writer imagines being on trial for writing stories that have no plot.

—James Still

Whitman v. the United States: Case 36 (on Zoom)

CHARACTERS

ROBIN
JUDGE

NOTE: In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever way the play is cast, it will tell the story of a storyteller and a judge.

(ROBIN—a writer of stories—stands before a JUDGE in a U.S. court of law. Except they may not be standing, they aren't really in a court of law—each are in their own domestic spaces. The case is happening via Zoom. Or maybe it's happening in ROBIN's writerly imagination ...)

JUDGE (*formal*). ... heretofore as charged by the government of the United States, you, Robin Whitman, plaintiff in Case 36 also known as “Whitman v. the United States,” have been asked by this court to state your reasons for bringing this matter to the court’s attention. Let the record show that you have waived your right of representation and that you will be speaking on your own behalf. Please acknowledge such for the records.

ROBIN. Um—

JUDGE. Let us also acknowledge the unusual circumstances that have forced this court to hear this case not in the usual way. While we continue to observe sheltering-in-place, the work of the court is being held in this digital space rather than the usual courtroom setting.

(Less formal.) Fine. The court will now hear your side of things. And this better be good.

ROBIN. Right. OK. So—I’ve been charged by the United States government with preferring stories without plots ... I ask the court to consider the irony—I mean, we live in a time when it’s usually the *opposite* charge made against its citizens—that being a charge of “plotting” to overthrow the government or some such sinister and dark wrongdoing.

JUDGE. The court asks that you get to the point. You are charged with telling stories with no plot.

ROBIN. And my point is that telling stories without a plot is its own kind of plot.

It's like negative space—do you understand? The concept known as “negative space” is still a kind of space. In a story that has no plot—*that is its plot!*

JUDGE. How do you figure?

ROBIN. Well, I'm here defending plotlessness—and yet by doing so I'm actually *creating* a plot which in its own strange way then is defending the plot by pretending to defend plotlessness.

JUDGE. Whoa, whoa, whoa—

ROBIN. There's plot in everything!—Think about nature: we even call it “a *plot* of land.” And on that plot of land one might plant a seed—let's call that the inciting incident. It's an action that disrupts something that's otherwise static. Then at a certain point, it might rain—and not long after that some kind of shoot might poke out of the ground. Now “*shoot*” is an interesting word because of course in my telling “shoot” is a noun. But “shoot” is also a verb—and a verb is action. And as I'm sure you know a plot is often (and maybe always) characterized by action, by what happens in its story. So the shoot in the plot of land gets inspired and grows little by little, maybe it has a sudden spurt of growth. Do you know that there is anecdotal proof that corn has been known to grow so fast that one can actually hear it growing at night?

JUDGE. Anecdotal proof? That's not something permissible in a court of law.

ROBIN. I understand, your honor—

JUDGE. Do you?

ROBIN. Well since you brought up the court of law, I imagine there may be long stretches of time in your courtroom when there seems to be nothing going on—when there seems to be no plot. Still—I am sure you would agree that those days or weeks in a courtroom when nothing seems to be happening—it is not without a story. Something is happening below the surface, information is being assembled and presented—and sometimes that takes a long time.

JUDGE. So am I to believe that your commitment to “plotlessness,” as you have so “poetically” dubbed it—that it only has to do with things that take time?

ROBIN. Time is an ingredient in storytelling—but it's only one part of the experience. The issue at hand is whether or not plotlessness is a crime against humanity. I have been charged with a crime, have I not?

JUDGE. You have. And if you don't get to the point, I may charge you with additional crimes.

ROBIN. And that's what I'm here to argue against. I cannot defend plotlessness one way or another—

JUDGE. Then what are we doing here?

Flight

By
ALISON TATLOCK

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(FLIGHT)

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CAST:

QUEEN Lindsay Ray
RUNNER Cyrus Roberts

AUTHOR’S NOTE

This piece was inspired by my 15-year-old daughter’s obsession with dystopian young adult novels. It was written during a quarantine ... and performed during an uprising.

—Alison Tatlock

Flight

CHARACTERS

RUNNER (m)

QUEEN (w)

(Dark. We hear heavy breathing. The screen comes alive with an abstract, chaotic image. A young man is running down a dark street, panting, filming himself with his phone. This is RUNNER. He's in a panic.

The screen splits, and a second frame opens. A woman's face fills the other half of the screen—serene, regal, imperious. This is QUEEN. She wears an elaborate crown of indeterminate origin and heavy, stylized makeup—dramatically lined eyes, painted lips, colorful rouge. A glorious wig frames her powdered visage. The collar of her gown is bright and silky.

RUNNER continues to flee. His camera catches what it can—shadows, flashes of his features, random close-ups of his breathing mouth, his furrowed brow, his heaving chest. It slips from his hand, he catches it.

QUEEN incants in fluent gibberish, her voice powerful.)

QUEEN. Stahhh, badda-badda, stahhh. Cheen-ah-reen-tee, cheen-ah-rone-tee. Tim-timmer, time.

(RUNNER runs. The contrast between the QUEEN's steady face on one panel and the chaotic movement on the other panel is disorienting.)

QUEEN *(cont'd)*. Our son.

(No response. At first, QUEEN is empathetic.)

QUEEN *(cont'd)*. Son-bun ... please. Stahh, badda-badda.

(She watches him.)

QUEEN *(cont'd)*. It's good you are still with us. But you must stop. You will stop.

(RUNNER flattens himself against a wall.)

Here Comes the Sun

By

ALISON TATLOCK

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(HERE COMES THE SUN)

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Silver Lining Entertainment

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Here Comes the Sun was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Irwin Appel.

CAST:

LAURAL Annie Torsiglieri
RICARDO.....Michael Bernard
STEVEN Jeff Mills
DAN.....Daniel Stein
DINA.....Jenna Scanlon
DARRY Brian Harwell
EVIE Catherine Ballantyne
MYLA..... Hailey Turner
TEDDY Johnathan Buhrer
ROBIN Sabra Weber

AUTHOR’S NOTE

When the shelter-in-place first took effect, I was moved, delighted and sometimes irritated by the many earnest and uplifting musical collaborations shared around the globe via Zoom. What if my own well-meaning, talented, complicated circle came together to attempt such a heartfelt project? *Here Comes the Sun* offers one answer to that early quarantine question.

—Alison Tatlock

Here Comes the Sun

CHARACTERS

LAURAL (w): 40s-50s.

RICARDO (m): 40s-50s.

STEVEN (m), 30s-50s.

DAN (m): Older.

DINA (w): 30s-50s.

DARRY (e): 30s-50s.

TEDDY & MYLA (e): Teenage twins.

ROBIN (e): 30s-50s.

EVIE (w): Any age.

(A dark screen. Silence. Then, one square pops to life with a woman's face. She stares into the camera with a knowing smile. Her lips part, and she starts to sing, a cappella. Her voice is wonderful.)

LAURAL. Little darlin', it's been a long, cold, lonely winter
Little darlin', it feels like years since it's been here ...

(A second square pops to life featuring a man playing a ukulele. LAURAL stops singing as RICARDO takes over.)

RICARDO. Here comes the sun
Here comes the sun

(A third square pops on: STEVEN sits at a piano. He takes over for RICARDO.)

STEVEN. And I say, It's all right ...

(A fourth square appears. It's dark. It says the word: DAN. But no face appears.)

The others wait, deer in headlights. Silence. Then ...)

DAN (*off screen*). Hello?

(Beat.) I'm having technical difficulties.

(LAURAL looks into the camera, miffed.)

LAURAL. Really? We've been through this—

STEVEN. You have to press “start video”—

DAN (*off screen*). I did!

RICARDO. No, you didn't—

DAN (*off screen*). Yes, I di—!

(DAN's face pops to life on the screen.)

DAN. Sorry.

LAURAL. Should we start again?

(A fifth square pops on. A couple appears, singing.)

DINA & DARRY. Sun, sun, sun ... here it comes!

(DINA realizes no one else is singing.)

DINA. What's happening?

DARRY. Sun, sun, sun—

(Loud giggles. Then a sixth frame opens. Two teenagers appear—upside down. They sing poorly, through laughter.)

TEDDY & MYLA. Sun, sun, sun, sun, sun ...

TEDDY. That's too many suns—

MYLA. Here they come!

TEDDY. You're high.

MYLA. Shut up—

TEDDY (*to camera*). She is.

MYLA. You're dead.

(They tussle, still upside down.)

LAURAL. *Turn the computer around.* Ricardo—?

(RICARDO gets up and moves away from the screen. Chaos as the twins push/pull their laptop. RICARDO shouts.)

RICARDO. Cut it out!

LAURAL. Guys, come on.

(The twins' frame goes dark.)

First Date

By

ANNIE TORSIGLIERI

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CAST:

EDWINA..... Ryan Hollon

First Date

CHARACTER

EDWINA: Female or nonbinary, any race, any age.

(EDWINA has done her best to create the intimacy and romance of a cute café, including mood lighting and wine.

Mid-Zoom date. Headphones on, so we do not hear her date's replies.

This must be played with absolute truth.

It is a play about loneliness.)

EDWINA *(toasting)*. To you!

What are the odds?! No seriously, OK ... if you like were gonna figure it out with true numbers and things. *You* like water without ice, *I* like water without ice. *You* like Animal Planet, *I* like Animal Planet. We both watch Nick at Nite ... we BOTH like the old Darren.

I never dreamed we'd have so much in common.

.....

Susie never mentioned you were so quiet!

I mean I love ... quietness ...

.....

Susie said, "I promise you'll love him—he's so cute and smart ... " but she never mentioned quiet!

.....

"Is this thing on?"

.....

What do you do again, George? ... Oh, right. That's right. That must be interesting.

My *dentist* is an accountant.

.....

Do they let you use a calculator or do you have to do it all in your head? ... Oh, well I'm sure that makes a big difference. Yeah, because, you know, why not? I mean this isn't high school right? It's not a test! ... (DO they test you? ... Right, right.)

.....

Do you love what you do?

The Safest Space

By

ANNIE TORSIGLIERI

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CAST:

MILO Lindsay Ray

BOCK Harry Davis

The Safest Space

CHARACTERS

MILO

BOCK

NOTE: MILO and BOCK can be any gender, race and age.

(Each space is sparse but specific. A tough, bombed-out, post-apocalyptic world.

Pace is key.

BOCK's face appears. The screen glitches.)

BOCK. Knock, knock ...

(A pause. MILO's face appears, bad connection.)

MILO. Did you fix it? Is it fixed? Bock?

BOCK. Knock, knock ...

MILO. First tell me, tell me if it's fixed.

BOCK. It's ...

MILO. Fixed?

BOCK. It's ...

MILO. Fixed?

BOCK. It's ...

MILO. Fixed?!!

BOCK. Why do you keep asking if it's fuckin' fixed when you know I don't have the parts to fuckin' fix it?!!!!

(A pause.)

BOCK *(cont'd)*. Knock, knock ...

MILO. You don't have the parts to fix it?

BOCK. I don't have the parts to fix it ...

MILO. You don't have the parts to fix it?

BOCK. *I don't have the parts to fix it.*

MILO. Oh ... I kept thinking ...

(A pause.)

MILO *(cont'd)*. Well then.

(MILO chews their cuticle thoughtfully.)

MILO *(cont'd)*. I thought Dave got you the parts.

BOCK. No.

MILO. No?

BOCK. No.

MILO. No?

BOCK. *No! No!* Dave did not give me the parts.

.....

MILO. OK.

(A sigh.)

MILO *(cont'd)*. OK. Jeez ... You don't need to jump down my throat.

BOCK. Dave has stopped delivering parts. He's out of the parts-delivering racket.

MILO. Out of the parts-delivering ... ???

BOCK. Racket. He's out of it.

MILO. Oh. I had no idea.

BOCK. And he was the last one.

(A pause. The enormity of that hits them.)

BOCK *(cont'd)*. The *very* last one.

MILO. Well ... There's got to be ...

BOCK. Nope.

MILO. Not even ... ?

BOCK. Gone.

MILO. Phil from ... ?

BOCK. Dead.

MILO. Angie.

BOCK. Escaped to Canada.

(A shocked pause.)

2084

By
JOHN WALCH

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2084 was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Iris Skeen.

CAST:

CUSTOMER.....Ivana Cruz
CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENTShekinah Bryant

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I wrote this play because a trusted and long-time collaborator and colleague asked me to help by writing a play ... and that’s a good reason to send a writer to their chair. The impulse/prompt that I started the play with was simply: “Help.” It evolved from there to: “How do we seek help from others, especially when the power dynamic is skewed to those whom we are asking?” This took me to customer service agents on the lighter side and Orwell on the more dystopian side, and got me thinking about what happens when those who work within systems designed ostensibly to help those in need—the vulnerable and cursed—are really operating to consolidate their own authority.

—John Walch

2084

CHARACTERS

CUSTOMER: Female or male. Forever 21, until they aren't. Wanted to be a stand-up comedian.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT: Male or female. A real person, any age.

PLACE: A Zoom session connecting the customer's childhood bedroom turned bunker to a Zoom customer service agent in their own sparse work bunker.

TIME: 2084.

“In the side wall, within easy reach of Winston's arm, [there was] a large oblong slit protected by a wire grating. This ... was for the disposal of waste paper. For some reason they were nicknamed memory holes. When one knew that any document was due for destruction ... it was an automatic action to lift the flap of the nearest memory hole and drop it in, whereupon it would be whirled away on a current of warm air to the enormous furnaces which were hidden somewhere in the recesses of the building.”

—George Orwell, *1984*

(Scene: A Zoom video session. CUSTOMER has contacted Zoom customer service and awaits the agent. The background behind the CUSTOMER might have some sort of poster of an iconic stand-up comedian from circa 2020—Sarah Silverman, John Mulaney, Chris Rock. Whatever the poster is, it should be the genuine choice of the performer of a favorite comedian. Or maybe the poster is too much—a blank wall works as well.)

CUSTOMER. Please, please ... help me, I'm dying.

CS AGENT (*popping enthusiastically on screen*). Hello, (*Insert name of performer.*), thank you for being a trusted and valued member of the Zoom community. I am your trusted Customer Service Agent responding to your complaint. For security purposes you are on a recorded line. How may I assist you today?

CUSTOMER. Are you a real person?

CS AGENT. Of course, Zoom is all about connecting *people*, all of our Customer Service Agents are just like you.

CUSTOMER. Then please, this time, please help me.

CS AGENT. Yes, I see you are inquiring about case #9207jv10139 first opened April 6, 2020, and I see you have reopened this case many, many, many times over the years—

CUSTOMER. This time. This time is my last shot—I'm dying.

CS AGENT. You look perfectly heathy to me.

CUSTOMER. I'm eighty-four years old and dying.

CS AGENT. Eighty-four? Hmmm. Turn to your left—

CUSTOMER. What, why?

(Customer complies, is there a sound effect?)

CS AGENT. Please just turn to your left. Good. Now turn to your right. Good. You claim you are eighty-four?

CUSTOMER. Yes, yes—

CS AGENT. My facial profiling sequencer tells a different story; you have the bone structure and tissue density of a twenty-one-year-old—a picture of health. Congratulations.

CUSTOMER. It's because of the curse.

CS AGENT. Oh, I see: the curse?

CUSTOMER. Yes, yes, the curse. I'm forever doomed to live as a twenty-one-year-old in my childhood bedroom.

CS AGENT. Oh, I see: doomed?

CUSTOMER. Yes, doomed by Zoom.

CS AGENT. Doomed by Zoom. That's very catchy, clever.

CUSTOMER. Please, I'm telling you, I'm cursed to live as my twenty-one-year-old idiot self, because of what I did to my mom.

CS AGENT. Oh, I see: your mom. This gets better and better.

CUSTOMER. Please, I caused my mom's death, all for a bad joke I recorded on Zoom—

CS AGENT. Yes, I have all the history and details in the case file from over the years: *(Scanning the details.)* “Spring 2020 ... classes canceled
... moved back in with mother in the suburbs
... wanting so bad to be different
... dreams of being a stand-up comic ... ”

CUSTOMER. So bad.

CS AGENT. “March 2020 ... 21st birthday ... Beware the Ides of March ...
Global pandemic
... Amateur comedy night at popular bar
... knew you shouldn't go—”

CUSTOMER. I know, I know—

CS AGENT. “But the wanting was so bad.”

CUSTOMER. So bad.

CS AGENT. “Crowded club ... drinks ... laughter ... mini-birthday cupcakes for all my friends!

... Record two-minute set on Zoom ... share it out ... goes viral

... Go home ... go viral on mom ...

... Never grow old ... Never become comic ... Stuck as twenty-one-year-old self ... Doom by Zoom ... ”

That is quite a tale.

CUSTOMER. Not a tale—truth.

CS AGENT. Yes, I see. You have been petitioning Zoom to incinerate the master source file in the memory hole for decades now.

CUSTOMER. Please ... I just want it gone, erased, forever.

CS AGENT. Please bring your right hand to the screen.

(CUSTOMER complies.)

CS AGENT *(cont'd)*. Good. Now open it.

(CUSTOMER does so, there's now a pill in the CUSTOMER's palm.)

CUSTOMER. What's this?

CS AGENT. I just Zoomed you an anti-delusional sedative.

CUSTOMER. I'm not crazy. I *know* your records show when I originally signed up, I've been through this with you and your agents so many, many, many times before. Please, all I'm asking is you drop the source file in the memory hole.

CS AGENT. You know that's not possible for me to do. You know our policy: “everything is recorded, logged, archived.”

CUSTOMER. Please, I'm eighty-four years old, and I really am dying, this is not what I want to be remembered for.

CS AGENT *(turning harder)*. You accepted our terms and conditions.

CUSTOMER. I clicked a button when I was twenty-one years old, told some stupid jokes, laughed with friends, ate mini-cupcakes, all because I just wanted, wanted so bad, so, so bad to connect, to feel alive.

CS AGENT. “Desire is dangerous.”

CUSTOMER. I know the slogan.

CS AGENT. Not a slogan; our universal passcode required to unlock all individual account portals.

CUSTOMER. I know the passcode.

CS AGENT. Then repeat it for me.

(Pause.)

CS AGENT (*cont'd*). While I wait, I can watch that original video. Shall I play it for you now?

CUSTOMER. “Desire is dangerous.”

CS AGENT. Because?

CUSTOMER. It causes things to spread.

CS AGENT. Please, use the Zoom platform’s approved metaphor.

CUSTOMER. “Wanting is the flame; desire is the wind that spreads it.”

CS AGENT. Zoom knows this. Which is why Zoom was an industry leader in the purging of emoticons and strictly banning their use. Which is why, as a global leader on a platform that allows for us all to connect safely and cheerfully, Zoom quickly realized the danger that unchecked spread could have and took heroic measures to lock down and aggressively enforce our security policies. We keep everyone safe—separated but together. And we are proud our heroic strict measures have prevented another—

CUSTOMER. You’re not going to drop my file in the memory hole, are you?

CS AGENT. You know I cannot complete that request; Zoom records everything.

(Beat.)

CS AGENT (*cont'd*). But I am curious ... what was the joke?

CUSTOMER. It was stupid, I told you.

CS AGENT. It couldn’t have been that stupid to be shared over ... wow that is a lot of shares over the years. Now I really want to see this joke; shall we watch it together?

CUSTOMER. No, please.

CS AGENT. Come on, you are eighty-four, one last laugh before the big screen in the sky goes dark forever?

CUSTOMER. You’re going to torture me with your chirpy cheer like all the other agents before you?

CS AGENT. How is a joke torture?

CUSTOMER. It wasn’t just one joke; it was a mini-routine—a comic little riff I worked up.

CS AGENT. Well, let’s watch this comic little riff, it’s only a minute fifty-six seconds. Surely you can take it for that long.

CUSTOMER. No, please. Please! ... It’s dangerous—awakens my desire all over again. I hate it, but it still does.

CS AGENT. When I scanned you earlier, I noted you had not completely drained yourself of *this* desire. You say this is how we *torture you*. We say

Corona Chicken (Part One)

By
CHERYL L. WEST

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CAST:

PENELOPE.....Jenna Scanlon

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Pandemics inspire great fear, often followed by a type of hysteria that leads to unmitigated chaos. In such a climate, we are all capable of inflicting great harm on ourselves and on each other. We are not ourselves. Sadly, our best self has transformed into the stranger that seeks only to tease us.

—Cheryl L. West

Corona Chicken (Part One)

CHARACTER

PENELOPE

(PENELOPE struggles in with a rolling cart teeming with groceries, notably a multi-roll toilet paper pack and, toward the bottom, a whole chicken wrapped in a plastic meat bag. She's well dressed in suburban chic—tasteful jewelry, the hair just so. But she's a bit off-kilter—the labored breath, the arm-length rubber gloves, the face mask askew and tangled in her string of pearls. Or perhaps it's her profuse sweating that signals she's a woman in jeopardy. Once safely inside, Penelope quickly flips the lock, positions her back as a human barricade. She wills her breath to slow. Deep breaths. Finally, in control, she and her rolling cart move in. She looks around, then suddenly stands at attention and recites the Girl Scout three-finger motto.)

PENELOPE. “On my honor, I will try: To serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by ...”

(She smiles solicitously at us.)

“Penelope, darling, you're such a Girl Scout.” That's what they'd say. “So unwavering ...” That's me. A good girl.

I ask you, what are we without the exchange of goodness and kindness? Forgiveness and hope? I tell my kids that all the time. I have two ... wonderful, well-behaved, exceptional children.

Right now they're supposed to be at the park with the nanny. Actually, she's really just a babysitter. I call her the nanny so I can keep step with the other mannequin wives around here. I keep telling my husband that I'm the best person to care for our children. I'm their greatest example ... I set the standard.

(She starts to take out groceries from her cart, wiping them down as she goes.)

So happy to see name-brand toilet paper again ... With the virus, everything is in such short supply. Still no wipes, but I'm bleaching like a fiend. Oh my ... I almost forgot.

(She removes her gloves, squirts hand sanitizer, cleans her hands thoroughly.)

I have sanitizer in every room, no excuses. Robust hygiene, that's the key to protecting your family.

Corona Chicken (Part Two)

By
CHERYL L. WEST

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CAST:

GRACE Roz Cornejo
KAREN Carissa Stewart
KIRK Frances Domingos
SAMANTHA Magan Tran

AUTHOR’S NOTE

The aftermath. We attempt to repress or ignore grief in times like these, exhausted by its relentlessness. And yet ignoring grief simply allows it to become more potent, more volatile, more demanding. The virus has delivered us all to the mourner’s bench. There are new assaults, new losses on a daily basis—our jobs, our health, our loved ones. It seems so senseless, and yet could it be an opportunity to reflect and reset our fractured souls and tenuous connections?

—Cheryl L. West

Corona Chicken (Part Two)

CHARACTERS

GRACE

KAREN: 10 years old, determined.

KIRK: 11 years old, sullen.

SAMANTHA: 8 years old, eager.

(GRACE sits at her kitchen table holding up a five dollar bill while sobbing. Nearby are three table settings with school supplies neatly stacked at each setting—pencils, workbooks, highlighters. The news drones on in the background—something about the growth of more COVID-19 cases and virus hotspots. Finally, she’s spent. She gingerly folds the five dollar bill and hides it in her bra. She blows her nose and wipes her face with a cool rag. She puts on her eyeglasses, then generously squirts on some hand sanitizer.)

GRACE *(with exaggerated cheer)*. Kids. Come on. Time for homeschool. Kids?

(KAREN, KIRK and SAMANTHA appear and take their seats.)

KIRK *(already registering his irritation)*. I thought we were ...

SAMANTHA. Grieving.

(In exasperation, KAREN and KIRK both hit at SAMANTHA.)

SAMANTHA *(cont’d)*. Ouch! But that’s what Dad said.

GRACE. Samantha, sometimes your dad doesn’t choose his words carefully.

The sooner we return to normal the better.

KAREN. I agree, Mother ... wholeheartedly.

GRACE. Nice use of your vocabulary words, Karen.

SAMANTHA. Mommy, I’m a wholehearted, too.

GRACE. Yes, you are sweetie! You’re awfully quiet, Kirk.

(He mutters something nasty under his breath.)

GRACE. Sit as far apart as you can.

KIRK. That won’t be hard.

(GRACE chooses to ignore the last comment. She hands them each a homemade book with handwritten titles.)

SAMANTHA *(reading)*. “Samantha’s Tales of Joy.” Yippee. My book is going to be happy!

KAREN *(reading)*. “Karen’s Tales of Patience.” Why couldn’t I get the happy one?

SAMANTHA. Because I’m always happy, and you’re always impatient.

KAREN. But Mom, I’ve been working on being more patient.

GRACE. And don’t think I haven’t noticed, Karen.

SAMANTHA. Well, I haven’t. You’re still so mean.

(KAREN sticks out her tongue at SAMANTHA.)

SAMANTHA *(cont’d)*. Mommy, Karen stuck her tongue out at me.

GRACE. That’s enough you two. *(She places an oversized Webster’s dictionary in the middle of the table.)* And here’s your dictionary.

KAREN. Why can’t we look up words on the computer, like regular?

GRACE. Because we need to limit our screen time. Dictionaries were not always online you know.

SAMANTHA. What’s your book title say, Kirk?

(KIRK doesn’t respond.)

GRACE. Aren’t you going to answer your sister?

KIRK. We’re all damned ...

GRACE. Kirk, watch your language.

SAMANTHA. Oh-oh, is it time for recess?

KAREN. Samantha, school just started.

GRACE. We’ll do a little writing first, then some math. For recess, maybe we’ll go for a nature walk ...

(SAMANTHA claps her hands giddily.)

SAMANTHA. Yes!

KAREN *(trying too hard to smile)*. That sounds so nice, Mother. We appreciate you.

KIRK *(mocking KAREN)*. “So nice, we appreciate you, Mother.” Such a suck-up.

GRACE. Kirk! Oh, and I was thinking, maybe today’s elective will be cooking.

KIRK. If it’s an elective that means I don’t have to do it, right?

GRACE. Wrong.

KIRK. Get serious. You’re not going to make us go back to that grocery store again, are you?

Safety Net

By
CHERYL L. WEST

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CAST:

LUCILLE.....Shaunyce Omar

AUTHOR’S NOTE

The pandemic infects many but apparently is killing more Black folks. Why is that? The character Lucille posits, “It’s gonna kill more Black and brown folks ’cause we ain’t got enough tools to fight with or enough people in power to fight for us.” As a Black woman at risk, I too wonder whether anyone would strive to save my life or will I become just another marginal—a mere statistic much like my character Lucille?

—Cheryl L. West

Safety Net

CHARACTER

LUCILLE

(Lights on LUCILLE, 40ish, listening on speaker phone. She listens to the cacophony of recorded sound beginning with the obnoxious drone of a busy signal. And then ...)

UNEMPLOYMENT PHONE RECORDING. Your call is important to us ...

LUCILLE. Hello? Hello?

UNEMPLOYMENT PHONE RECORDING. Due to enormous volume, we are experiencing record delays ... Please try again later ... We're sorry, we're experiencing an extremely high volume of calls at this time ... We recommend you hang up and go to www ... ”

LUCILLE. This don't make no sense. I been calling this damn unemployment office every day ... 100, 200 times a day ... And every time I think I'm getting through and get a little hope, I hear ...

UNEMPLOYMENT PHONE RECORDING. Please try us at another time ... Goodbye.

(And once again the obnoxious sound of the busy signal.)

LUCILLE. But I'm running out of time. Tomorrow's the first of the month. Everything comin' due. Oh yeah, boo, I'm in more than a mood today. See, first they cut my hours, that's after they had us cleaning everything with this new stuff so strong it was making me break out in rashes, had my eyes watering like they was raining. But I didn't complain, too happy to still have a job. Went every day, cleaning up whatever COVID nasty somebody left behind, praying on the hour not to get infected myself.

But I tell you, anything that's killin' Black *and* white folks while getting blamed on the Chinese, shoot, that's some powerful shit. But you watch, in the end, just like AIDS, it's gonna kill more Black and brown folks 'cause we ain't got enough tools to fight with or enough people in power to fight for us. You think I'm lying? Look how they wanted to hurry up and open the country when they found out it was mostly folks that looked like me who was the ones dying. Yeah, I might not be educated, but I know enough to know there's a reason it's called the White House.

LOL OL

By
SHERI WILNER

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(LOL OL)

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LOL OL was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Stefan James. Liz Engelman was the dramaturg.

CAST:

DOT Sierra Hastings
PARTICIPANT #1..... Hayley O’Toole
PARTICIPANT #2..... Emilianis Torres
PARTICIPANT #3..... Harut Simonian
PARTICIPANT #4..... Emma Cardoso
PARTICIPANT #5..... Celine Khuu
PARTICIPANT #6..... La Jae Johnson
PARTICIPANT #7..... Ethan Kim

LOL OL received its world premier production at Alleyway Theatre, Buffalo, N.Y., Chris J. Handley, Artistic Director, in November 2020.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I didn’t want to write a Zoom play. To be honest, I was angry that all of the material artists were creating for Zoom at a time when in New York City, where I live, the world was ending. I spent my days reading about ventilators being shared by four patients at a time and the unnamed dead buried daily on Hart’s Island. I was terrified about my 80-year-old father in Boston and about my own mental health living alone during an apocalypse. So email invitations to write or watch Zoom plays were immediately deleted. Even the one to write this play. But then Risa Brainin and Annie Torsiglieri each asked me again. Ever since Risa directed and Annie starred in my play *Kingdom City* for LAUNCH PAD in 2010, they have both helped me so much personally and professionally, I could not say no. And so I decided to write a Zoom play that expressed all of my ambivalence about writing a play that would not be shared with a live, assembled audience. What was better, I wondered—to write for a platform that to me is the exact antithesis of the theatre, or to stop sharing work until theatres could reopen? Instead of dealing with the question directly, I chose to write about a laughter yoga class, which, like theatre, really only works when it is a shared group experience. Should such things cease during this time, or should we attempt to recreate these experiences “alone, together”? I hope this play poses that question, which I’m eager to debate with you, ideally in person.

—Sheri Wilner

LOL OL

CHARACTERS

DOT DARCY: 35 to 55. A laughter yoga instructor. She is physically fit, exudes lots of energy and is a consummate professional. She runs a very successful laughter yoga studio and is terrific at her job. But she's lonely. And sheltering in place alone has intensified her sadness.

LAUGHTER YOGA STUDENTS: There are six to nine of them. Any race, age, or gender*. Individual companies performing this play are encouraged to have fun creating the characters, their settings, their circumstances and their reasons for participating in the class. There are some specifics the text asks you to fulfill, but with these few exceptions, who and where the characters are should be determined by the directors and actors. Just please, no broad, sitcom-style portrayals. All of these people have dignity, intelligence and a genuine human need to connect. Actors should also create profile names they would use on a dating site rather than use their actual names. If they refer to each other in the script, they should also use their dating names. Nothing raunchy please. Everyone on the site is looking for a long-term relationship. Given the shelter-in-place order, no one is looking for a one-night hook-up!

* The script will refer to each character as “they” rather than “she” or “he,” since any gender can perform any of the characters. When you see “s/he” in the script, please choose either “she” or “he” depending on the gender of the actor.

For a terrific sample of a Zoom laughter yoga class, as well as instructions on how to do the exercises mentioned in the play, here's a very helpful YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPWa1RRS6y&t=831s>

SETTING: The, by now, very familiar interface of a Zoom meeting.

TIME: Any time, beginning two weeks after a town's shelter-in-place order has been issued, to a later time when the shelter-in-place order is still in effect.

(A Zoom meeting is about to begin. Among the participants is DOT DARCY, who will be leading the class. The other participants are also present and in the familiar Zoom “Brady Bunch” formation. Who the participants are, their genders, where they are Zooming from, their reasons for attending this class and their personalities can be determined by the company. Some characters

are invested and enthusiastic, some are skeptical, some are desperate for interaction and are deeply depressed. The specific things that must happen though are:

PARTICIPANT 1: Organizing this event was all their idea, and so now they are the anxious host hoping everyone is having a great time. Although they appear to be enjoying the class, underneath all of their behavior is an urgent need to find relief for deep loneliness.

PARTICIPANT 2: Has their cellphone close and anxiously checks it whenever it “bings” with a new notification. The bings happen just occasionally at first, but then become very frequent where indicated. It should be clear from their reactions that the calls and messages are about a loved one’s dire health crisis.

PARTICIPANT 3: Begins the class feeling very irritated/angry. They drink beer throughout the class.

PARTICIPANT 5: Should look unwell and have a persistent cough. They cough only once in a while at first, then much more frequently where indicated.

In addition, the characters should encounter typical Zoom problems—frozen video, connectivity issues, etc.

With these exceptions, please have fun creating the characters, their dating names, settings and circumstances. Different ages and races should be represented. I just ask that the tone and characterizations avoid being overly broad and silly. The humor should come from the situation and the inherent irony and not through any silliness or “jokiness.” DOT is fantastic at her job, runs a successful business, and unreservedly believes in the benefits of what she does, as much as any seasoned professional. After all, there are actual and confirmed benefits of laughter yoga.)

PARTICIPANT 1. Hello everybody! This is (*Dating site name.*), the event organizer of tonight’s special (*Your city’s name.*) Singles Meetup group!

(PARTICIPANT 1 and some of the others cheer.)

PARTICIPANT 1 (*cont’d*). I’m excited you guys could be here after such a horrible month. And I hope tonight ... you know, know, this class ... helps. It’s actually ... something I’ve wanted to try long before any of this craziness began, and so when I found out someone was doing it on Zoom, I thought it would be a really cool way to restart our group. I mean ... I don’t know about you guys, but I haven’t seen anyone, in person, in over a month. I thought being single was bad before this, but ... (*S/he sighs.*) Have you all been alone this whole time?

(All of the participants, including DOT, nod and/or respond by saying “yeah,” or “sure have.”)

PARTICIPANT 1 (*cont'd*). Well ... it's great to see you guys, and I think this might help.

PARTICIPANT 6 . Thanks, (*Dating site name.*)!

PARTICIPANT 7. Yeah, thanks.

PARTICIPANT 1 (*to PARTICIPANT 7*). Hey, you're engaged. You can't be in a singles group anymore!

PARTICIPANT 7. S/he broke it off.

PARTICIPANT 1. Oh God. / I'm so sorry—

PARTICIPANT 2. PARTICIPANT 3. PARTICIPANT 6.
Oh no! Sorry dude. Damn!

(The other participants might add similar condolences. PARTICIPANT 7, overcome with sadness, turns their video off.)

PARTICIPANT 1. Shit! OK. Um ... so ... to those of you new to (*Your city's name.*) Singles Meetup, welcome. We hope you're only with us for a really short time and you meet someone amazing really soon.

(Maybe they cross their fingers and hold them up.)

PARTICIPANT 1 (*cont'd*). OK. So now, I'd like to introduce our Laughter Yoga instructor, Dot Darcy. She's going to lead us through some really fun exercises to get us laughing. Thanks for being here, Dot.

DOT. You're very welcome, (*Dating name.*)—very fun name by the way. Well, like s/he said, I'm Dot Darcy and I'm the founder and owner of LOL Yoga, located in beautiful downtown (*Nearby city or town.*). LOL Yoga of course stands for Laugh Out Loud Yoga. For those of you brand new to laughter yoga, it's a whole-body wellness practice consisting of guided exercises that initiate prolonged voluntary laughter. It's based on research that says voluntary laughter provides the same amazing health benefits as spontaneous laughter, which gives us a big DOSE of happiness.

(She holds up a sign with the word "DOSE" printed in big letters. Printed near each of the four letters are the words "dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, endorphins.")

DOT (*cont'd*). That's right. Laughter serves us that feel-good chemical cocktail of dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins that improves our mood and helps us think more positively. Raise your hands if you could use some help with *that* right now.

(All participants raise their hands. PARTICIPANT 7 turns their video back on. They look horribly sad.)

Alone, Together

Festival Chapters

Chapter 1 (about 90 minutes):

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Alone, Together Company

Playwrights:

Linda Alper
Katie Bender
Jami Brandli
Dan Castellaneta
Leo Cabranes-Grant
Mia Chung
Yussef El Guindi
Anne García-Romero
Idris Goodwin
Enid Graham
Arlene Hutton
Lila Rose Kaplan

William Davies King
Deb Lacusta
Jenny Mercein
Brian Otaño
Lynn Rosen
Cheri Steinkellner
James Still
Alison Tatlock
Annie Torsiglieri
John Walch
Cheryl L. West
Sheri Wilner

Directors:

Irwin Appel
Hala Baki
Kate Bergstrom
Selene Betancourt
Michael Bernard
Daniel Andres Blanco
Risa Brainin
Leo Cabranes-Grant
Shianne Dingeman
Julie Fishell
Katherine Hamilton
Billie Stouter Hassebrock

Stefan James
Sara Rademacher
Jack Richman
Riya Sahasrabudhe
Iris Skeen
Daniel Stein
Cheri Steinkellner
Yizhou (Frances) Sun
Annie Torsiglieri
Nicole Zahner
Maria Zelaya Santillan

Actors:

Irwin Appel
Aaron Arpon
Catherine Ballantyne
Michael Bernard
Daniel Andres Blanco
Maison “Bub” Bray
Shekinah Bryant
Johnathan Buhner

Emma Cardoso
Julie Caudill
Xochitl Clare
Roz Cornejo
Sheila Correa
Ivana Cruz
Harry Davis
Frances Domingos

Julie Fishell
Betty Galindo
Violet Joy Hansen
Brian Harwell
Sierra Hastings
Daniel Herrera
Ryan Hollon
Andalyn Honselaar
Kerry Jacinto
Valeryee Jimenez
LaJae Johnson
Celine Khuu
Ethan J. Kim
Matte Kranz
Alyssa Longwill
Colson Lynn
Jeff Mills
Jane Morris
Sara Neal
Shaunyce Omar
Sean O'Shea
Hayley O'Toole

Lindsay Ray
Dillon Redd
Cyrus Roberts
Jenna Scanlon
Harut Simonian
Navnoor Singh Kahlon
Vishay Singh
Alexandra Singleton
Lana Spring
Daniel Stein
Cheri Steinkellner
Carissa Stewart
Blake Thompson
Emilianis Torres
Annie Torsiglieri
Magan Tran
Hailey Turner
Angel Villalobos
Sabra Weber
Varrick Weir
Martin Wong
Mario Carlo Yanes

Designers:

Irwin Appel
Kaede Kogo

Allison McSwain
Ann Sheffield (design mentor)

Dramaturgs:

Liz Engelman
Eric Nightengale

Luan Schooler

Stage Managers:

Emily Coin
Sophie Lynd
Rebecca Moreno

Maria Zelaya Santillan
Nikki Stark

Staff:

Devin Gee
Lillian Hannahs
Daniel J. Herrera
Lauren Marquez
Eric Mills

Una Mladenovic
Sandarbh Tripathi
Denise Umland
Mark Williams

Author Biographies

Linda Alper's work has been produced by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, The Acting Company and many others. Her play *Shanghai* was developed with LAUNCH PAD and produced by Artists Repertory Theatre. A leading actress for 24 seasons at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Alper is also a resident artist at Artists Repertory Theater. She is a Fulbright senior scholar and Fulbright specialist grantee.

Katie Bender (she/her/hers) is a playwright, theatre maker and pimento cheese enthusiast. Her plays *Survivors*, *The Fault*, *Instructions for a Séance* and *The Howling Gallery* grapple with American myths, revel in female bonds, and delight in physical exertion. She was thrilled to return to LAUNCH PAD to write *Zoom* plays for the super-talented students and faculty. For more information, visit: katiebenderplaywright.com.

Jami Brandli's plays include *Technicolor Life*, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, and *BLISS (or Emily Post is Dead!)*—The Kilroys List and *Los Angeles Times* critics' choice. Her work has been developed and produced by New Dramatists, New York Theatre Workshop, The Road Theatre and The Women's Voices Theater Festival. Brandli has earned the Humanitas PLAY LA prize, John Gassner Memorial Playwriting Award, Holland New Voices Award and Aurora Theatre's GAP prize, among others. For more information, visit: www.jamibrandli.com.

Leo Cabranes-Grant is professor of performance and intercultural studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is an award-winning scholar, playwright and poet. His plays have been produced in San Juan (Puerto Rico), New York and Boston. For more information, visit: theaterdance.ucsb.edu/people/leo-cabranes-grant.

Dan Castellaneta, four-time Emmy recipient, is consulting producer/writer on *The Simpsons*. His plays include *The Sons of Mothers*, *Food Court*, *Where Did Vincent Van Gogh?* and *For Piano and Harpo*, starring as the acerbic Oscar Levant. Castellaneta co-wrote *Fortunes*, *Empire Burlesque* and *Earthers* with Deb Lacusta. His is the co-founder of Instant Theater, Improv Co-op, Immediate Theater and Second City Chicago.

Mia Chung's *Catch as Catch Can* received its world premiere in New York City in 2008 by Page 73 and was subsequently produced by Steppenwolf. *You for Me for You* premiered at The Royal Court (London), the National Theatre Company of Korea (Seoul) and Woolly Mammoth Theatre (Washington, D.C.); and is published by Bloomsbury Methuen. She received a 2019 Helen Merrill Award for Playwriting.

Yussef El Guindi's most recent productions include *People of the Book* at A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle, *The Talented Ones* at Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland (and UCSB's LAUNCH PAD) and *Threesome* at Portland Center Stage at the Armory. Methuen Drama, an imprint of Bloomsbury, recently published *The Selected Works of Yussef El Guindi*. For more information, visit: www.facebook.com/yussef.guindi.

Anne García-Romero's plays include *Lorca in New York*, *Paloma*, *Mary Domingo*, *Provenance*, *Juanita's Statue*, *Earthquake Chica* and *Santa Concepción*. She is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama (playwriting) and UC Santa Barbara (Ph.D. in theatre studies). She is an associate professor of theatre at the University of Notre Dame. For more information, visit: www.annegarciaromero.com.

Idris Goodwin is a playwright, break-beat poet and director of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College. His plays include *And in This Corner Cassius Clay*, *How We Got On*, *Hype Man* and *This Is Modern Art*. Goodwin serves on the advisory boards of TYA/USA and Children's Theatre Foundation of America. For more information, visit: www.idrisgoodwin.com.

Enid Graham is a writer and actress living in New York City, where she is a fellow in the Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program. In 2019, her play *What Martha Did* received a preview production in the LAUNCH PAD series at UCSB. Her play *Ruth* was seen at the 2018 National Playwrights Conference (NPC) at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and the 2017 newTACTics New Play Festival in New York City. *What Martha Did* was a finalist for the 2015 NPC and a semifinalist in the Blue Ink Playwriting Festival in Chicago. Other plays include: *Pathological Venus* (current NPC finalist), *Something Unrecognizable* and *For I Know the Plans I Have for You*. For more information, visit: enidgraham.com.

Arlene Hutton is a New Dramatists alumna, member of Ensemble Studio Theatre, MacDowell Fellow and three-time winner of the Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Short Play Festival. Hutton's plays, including *Last Train to Nibroc* (Drama League best play nomination) and *Letters to Sala*, have been produced off-Broadway and worldwide. She teaches at The Barrow Group. For more information, visit: arlenehutton.com.

Lila Rose Kaplan's plays shine light on the stories we don't tell about women. Productions include Huntington Theatre Company, Second Stage Theater, South Coast Repertory, American Repertory Theater, Merrimack Repertory Theatre and Geva Theatre Center. Development includes Arena Stage, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Center Theatre Group, New York Theatre Workshop, PlayPenn and The Lark. Kaplan lives in Somerville, Mass., with her marine-biologist husband and her curious daughter. For more information, visit: www.lilarose.org.

William Davies King is a distinguished professor of theatre at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has published several books of theatre scholarship, recently concerning Eugene O'Neill. His critical edition of *The Iceman Cometh* is just out from Yale University Press. He is also the author of *Collections of Nothing* (University of Chicago Press) and a dramatic adaptation/sequel, *Collections of Nothing More or Less*. For more information, visit: williamdaviesking.com.

Deb Lacusta is a writer/actor/improviser. Her plays include *Old Man in a Big Car*, *In Exile*, *Lock Up the Grass* and *The August*. She writes for *The Simpsons* and co-wrote the musical *Empire Burlesque* (ASCAP Musical Workshop selection led by Stephen Schwartz). She co-founded the Chicago improv scenario group Instant Theater, Improv Co-op and Immediate Theater in LA.

Jenny Mercein is an actor, teacher, director and writer. Along with KJ Sanchez, Mercein co-created *X's and O's*, a docudrama about football and traumatic brain injury (Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Baltimore Center Stage). Her solo shows include *Beautiful Mount Airy Lodge* and *Waiting*. She earned her bachelor's degree at Yale and her M.F.A. at the University of Washington. For more information, visit: www.jennymercein.com.

Brian Otaño (he/him/his) is an L.A.-based playwright and TV writer. His plays include *The Dust*, *Dolores Slayborne*, *Tara*, *Zero Feet Away* and *The Dooley Street Trilogy*. His TV work includes *Cruel Summer* (Freeform/Hulu, airing in 2021). Otaño is an alumna of Center Theatre Group's L.A. Writers Workshop, Geffen Playhouse's Writers' Room and Ars Nova's Playgroup. He is the recipient of New Dramatists' Van Lier Playwriting Fellowship and New York Theatre Workshop's 2050 Artisict Fellowship, as well as a Launch Commission from Atlantic Theater Company. Otaño earned his bachelor's degree in dramatic writing at State University of New York—Purchase College.

Lynn Rosen is a playwright and TV writer. Her plays have appeared in theatres across the country. She currently has three pilots in development and is co-creator of the award-winning comedic webseries *Darwin*. Rosen is a resident playwright at New Dramatists and is currently under commission with Red Bull Theater and TheatreWorks Silicon Valley. For more information, visit: newdramatists.org/lynn-rosen.

Cheri Steinkellner (she/her/hers) has earned four Emmys, two Golden Globes, a Writers Guild Award, People’s Choice Award, World Animation Award and British Academy Award for writing/producing TV’s *Cheers* and Disney’s *Teacher’s Pet*, as well as a Tony nomination for writing *Sister Act the Musical* with husband, Bill. Mom of three writer/artists, Steinkellner teaches writing at the Univeristy of California, Santa Barbara and Stanford, and lectures worldwide.

James Still’s (he/him/his) plays have been produced throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa, China and Japan. He is a four-time Pulitzer nominee, and a five-time Emmy nominee and is honored to have developed several of his plays with LAUNCH PAD. He is the playwright in residence at Indiana Repertory Theatre and lives in Los Angeles.

Alison Tatlock (she/her/hers) currently writes for the AMC series *Better Call Saul*. Her previous television credits include *Halt and Catch Fire*, *Stranger Things* and *In Treatment*. Tatlock’s plays include *The Shore* (Ensemble Studio Theatre—The LA Project), *The Catch* (developed at New York Stage and Film) and *Untitled IV by Ruth Markofsky* (University of California, Santa Barbara’s LAUNCH PAD).

Annie Torsiglieri has been seen on Broadway in *Top Girls*, *Parade*, *Blood Brothers* and *Miss Saigon*, as well as in the national tour of *Les Misérables* as Fantine. She is the writer/performer of “A” *Train*, an award-winning solo play about her family’s journey in the world of autism (Best Production at United Solo Festival 2017 and Best Encore at United Solo Festival 2018). Torsiglieri is a professor in the department of theater and dance at the Univeristy of California, Santa Barbra. She is a graduate of Princeton University and The Juilliard School. For more information, visit: <https://theaterdance.ucsb.edu/people/anne-torsiglieri>.

John Walch's plays have been produced, commissioned and developed nationally at theatres such as Center Theatre Group, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Public Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Kitchen Dog Theater, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Theatre at Boston Court (Boston Court Pasadena) and off-Broadway at Urban Stages. Walch is a proud alum of New Dramatists and currently heads the M.F.A. playwriting program at the University of Arkansas.

Cheryl L. West's plays have been produced in England, off-Broadway, on Broadway and in numerous regional theatres around the country. She has written TV and film projects at Disney, Paramount, MTV Films, Showtime, TNT, HBO, CBS and BET. Currently, she is working on commissions for Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Seattle Rep and the Goodman Theatre.

Sheri Wilner's plays include *Bake Off*, *Relative Strangers*, *Father Joy* and *Kingdom City* (LAUNCH PAD, 2010) and have been presented at La Jolla Playhouse, The Old Globe, Guthrie Theater, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, the Old Vic and numerous others. She teaches for New York University and the Dramatists Guild Institute.