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Alone, Together

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Corona Chicken (Part Two)

By
CHERYL L. WEST

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(CORONA CHICKEN [PART TWO])

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Corona Chicken (Part Two) 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 Katherine Hamilton.

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?

KAREN. Your eyes are a little redder today, Mom.

GRACE. Just a little cold.

KIRK. She's been crying, stupid.

KAREN. Don't call me stupid ...

GRACE. Would you two stop? Please! And I have not been crying. This time of year, I have terrible allergies.

KIRK. Yeah, right.

GRACE. Let's shoot for a little maturity, Kirk.

KIRK. Can we at least turn the news off?

GRACE (*a little too sharply*). No!

KIRK. But it's distracting. It's not like they're telling us anything new.

GRACE. That's not true ... very smart minds are working to corral this virus and keep us all safe ...

KIRK. I thought parents were supposed to keep you safe.

(The kids exchange apprehensive looks. A freighted beat.)

KAREN. Why don't you shut up, Kirk?

GRACE. Karen, don't tell your brother / to shut up.

KIRK (*overlapping, muttering under his breath*). We're all going to die anyway.

GRACE. What did you say?

KIRK. Nothing.

GRACE. No, Kirk, I want to know what you said.

KIRK. No, you don't. (*To his sisters.*) Remember, I tried to warn you. First Bertie, then one by one we're all ...

GRACE. That's enough, Kirk.

KIRK. If the virus doesn't get us, then ...

GRACE. I said that's ENOUGH! (*She sets a timer.*) I'll set the timer for ten minutes. Please start writing.

KIRK. I'd rather draw.

GRACE. I'd rather you write.

SAMANTHA. Do we have to fill up all these sheets of paper?

GRACE. Not all at once. Whatever inspires you based on what your book title is.

KIRK. This school thing is so stupid.

GRACE. Perhaps. But you're the student, thus you don't get to dictate ...

KIRK. Neither do you. I have rights, constitutional rights ...

GRACE. Oh, OK, so write about that, your "constitutional" rights.

KIRK. Why would I want to do that?

KAREN. Kirk, why don't you just do it? Stop being such a butthead.

GRACE. Unless you want to write the entire day, I suggest you get busy.