The ones who are there

A play in one Act

By

Dana Golden

404-323-1692

700 Health Sciences Drive

1002A

Stony Brook, NY 11790

Dana.golden@stonybrook.edu

November 23, 2022

CHARACTERS

James, 21

Oliver, 23

Alice, 22

Amy, 21

Linda, 22

Tim, 23

waiter, 28

MOM, 45

Dad, 45

brother,17

boss, 35

landlady, 30

Andi, 47

Time

This play takes place over the course of an evening in May 2021 with backstory to times going back to December 2020.

PLACE

Half the stage is the outside a hipster-ish bar on the Upper East side of Manhattan. The bar still has some remnants of the pandemic like plastic shields and whatnot. The other half is a room with a couch, a desk with a computer on it, and some chairs.

Scene I-1: ALICE arrives

(AMY is sitting alone at the table and quietly nursing a cocktail. They have not been here for long, but they are visibly anxious. They check their phone and one can see on their face that they are worried they will be dining alone tonight. A waiter stops by the table)

Waiter

Are you ready to order ma’am, or are still waiting on someone?

Amy

It’s not ma’am. I’m nonbinary.

Waiter

Oh! I’m so sorry!

Amy

No. It’s my fault. You didn’t know. I’m sorry. I have some friends who are supposed to show up, but you know how it is with this pandemic. Social gatherings are weird. Maybe I should get an appetizer though? Anything good?

Waiter

Our grilled asparagus is great.

(AMY makes a face that clearly indicates they do not like grilled asparagus.)

AMY

You know, it’s been a while since I’ve had grilled asparagus, but that sounds great. I will have one of those...

(WAITER nods towards Amy’s glass.)

Oh! And another glass of wine please!

(WAITER exits. Alice walks in and is nervously looking around for Amy. Amy lights up when she sees Alice. Amy stands up and waves Alice over. Amy forces Alice into a hug. Alice receives the hug but does not reciprocate. Alice is uncomfortable. Alice is wearing a mask.)

AMY

You can take your mask off! I got us an outside table, so we could all be comfortable.

Alice

I am plenty comfortable as it is! I mean… Thanks! I really appreciate it, but I just… I like the mask.

AMY

(AMY is really hurt, almost dejected. They lean away)

Okay, Alice… As long as you feel comfortable. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t push things on you.

ALICE

No, it’s okay. I’m just nervous is all. Are we the only ones here? I could have sworn more people RSVP’d.

AMY

You’re the first one to show. It is so great to see you! How have you been? Do you like grilled asparagus?

(ALICE is looking around and waving, trying to flag down a waiter to get a drink. Amy notices)

ALICE

What’s a girl gotta do to get a drink around here?

AMY

No kidding! We shouldn’t judge them though. They’re probably really short staffed with everything.

ALICE

I guess you’re right. I actually have been just great lately. My work has remote, so no commuting. Don’t have to take the bus anymore.

(AMY makes an overt display of laughter. Amy clearly needs to be liked.)

AMY

You are so right! Congrats again on graduating. You’re a programmer, right? Gosh that is so cool. Work must be awesome.

ALICE

Yeah! Work has been awesome. I love living on my own. It’s been a blast.

AMY

Have you made any friends at work yet?

ALice

Yeah… I love the people there so much. Just awesome.

(WAITER enters and brings the grilled asparagus. He sets it down as Alice struggles to work up the nerve to ask him for a drink. Amy notices Alice’s social awkwardness and seems upset by it but more upset with themselves than Alice.)

AMy

I should have flagged him down for you. I am really sorry about that. I love grilled asparagus… and if the others don’t show, more for us.

(AMY raises their glass to make a toast. Alice nervously does the same)

To your successful adulting!

ALICE

To my successful adulting.

(AMY and ALICE clink glasses and drink. They start to eat grilled asparagus as this side of the stage fades to black)

Scene I-2: ALICE’s pandemic

(ALICE is now on the other side of the stage sitting at the desk at her computer. The area around the apartment area is littered with trash and old takeout food. Alice is on a zoom call with her boss.)

ALICE

I’m sorry. I just haven’t been able to figure out the database.

BOSS

I have to tell you Alice. You are taking a really long time to get up to speed. Your work needs to improve. I’ve decided to put you on a performance improvement plan. If you can’t show me you can do better in the next month, you’re not going to be working here any more.

ALICE

I really need more direction. I am not sure what I am supposed to do.

BOSS

We assign mentors to every employee. You have met with yours every week since you started. Why haven’t you asked more questions?

ALICE

I just don’t know what to ask. And whenever I need help Jim isn’t around to give it.

BOSS

Don’t blame Jim. Don’t blame anyone. Just do better.

ALICE

I promise I will try.

BOSS

Trying is not enough at this point. I have another meeting. I hope for your sake you improve.

(ALICE shuts her computer and puts her head on her desk extremely upset. She gets a phone call. She looks at it, lets it ring a few times and finally picks it up.)

ALICE

Hello.

Landlady

Hi Alice! It’s Jill, your landlady. I hate to be the bad guy, but a maintenance worker stopped by your apartment to change the air filters, and he said there was trash everywhere. This is unacceptable.

(ALICE looks around sheepishly.)

ALICE

I guess I didn’t notice how bad it was.

Landlady

It’s a health hazard. There was a dead rat in the air conditioning unit.

ALICE

Okay! I will definitely clean up.

Landlady

We are going to inspect your room in two weeks. If it is not clean by then, I am afraid I will have to start a process. I don’t want to evict you Alice.

Alice

I-I-I (stammering) understand. I will get it under control.

Landlady

Please do. Know that the two weeks is a courtesy. Have a nice day.

ALICE

I appreciate the ti---

(The phone has gone to a dial tone. The landlady has hung up. Alice sits at her desk for a moment and starts to cry. Suddenly, she hears her doorbell. Followed by a shout of the word delivery. Alice goes to the door and opens it in quite a state. A delivery bag is on the floor. Alice picks it up. A neighbor is walking lateral to the door and sees Alice)

Neighbor

Hey! I didn’t know anyone lived in this apartment. Are you new?

ALICE

I’ve lived here for a year.

Neighbor

Huh. I’ve never seen you! I guess we must just have different routines.

ALICE

Honestly, I haven’t really left my apartment much.

Neighbor

Well, it’s nice to meet you

(NEIGHBOR notices Alice has been crying.)

Hey, are you okay?

ALICE

I’ve just been having a really rough---

(ALICE cannot get the words out. She breaks down.)

NEighbor

Hey. It’s been a rough time for all of us.

(NEIGHBOR leans in to force Alice into a hug. Alice attempts to reject but does not have the energy. Finally, she just falls into her neighbor and puts her head on his shoulder, crying.)

NEighbor

I know how hard it is to be young and starting out, but you’ll figure it out.

ALICE

No, I won’t! I’m gonna get fired. And the building will kick me out. And I have no friends! And…

(ALICE starts stammering. She is just sobbing now. The neighbor pats her on the beak, Alice leans in, and the hug continues as the apartment fades to black.)

Scene I-3: Family fun

(Lights back on the restaurant)

ALICE

And what about you Amy? You graduate from NYU next week, right? That’s so exciting!

Amy

Yeah! It’s been a long five years, but I’m finally getting out.

ALIce

It was a really tough job market when you would have graduated. I was just lucky to have something lined up. I think taking a little longer was smart.

AMY

Especially for a cinematography major…

ALICE

Hey, I meant to ask you how remote school back in Georgia was. I bet it was weird moving back in with family. I mean, I would have died.

AMY

It was actually fine. It was great to have family around during such a tough time.

ALICE

I am so glad to hear that. I was worried about you during the last election. How have your parents been about you know…?

AMY

It took them a little while to come around, but eventually they did. My dad has even started calling me they, and my mom no longer says she’s lost a daughter.

ALICE

Well, here’s to you.

(ALICE nervously raises a glass. Amy is almost too eager to toast. They clink.)

I am gonna call Linda. She’s never this late.

(ALICE calls Linda’s number on her phone. After two rings, the call goes to voicemail.)

Two rings… She didn’t even take the call.

AMY

I bet she’s on her way.

ALICE

Yeah…

Scene I-4: Remote School Blues

(AMY is now on the other side of the stage. The desk is on the side of the room and the trash is gone. The main focal point of the room is now the couch. It is a family room. Amy sits on the couch on her computer.)

Professor

Please, can you all keep your cameras turned on? It is very important that I be able to see you in order to teach. Thanks to Amy who always has their camera on!

(AMY is proud of themselves. They take a lot of pride in the fact that their teacher likes them.)

Now, do I have any volunteers to present first?

(AMY takes her Zoom off mute.)

Amy

I would love to present first. I am really excited!

(AMY’s dad comes in wearing bike shorts, a white collared shirt, a suitjacket, and a Make America Great Again hat. He stands behind Amy in view of the camera.)

Dad

Amy, I have a really important business meeting, and you are taking up all the bandwidth for your class. Would it kill you to miss one class? Look at your brother! He skips all his classes!

student in amy’s class

Maybe Amy would have done better to keep her camera off.

(Muted laughter comes in over the speakers. Amy is incredibly embarrassed.)

Professor

That’s eno-

(Teacher frizzes out and is cut off by wifi problems.)

Dad

Great! Now the wifi isn’t even working! Awesome job Amy!

(AMY’s mom walks in carrying a plate of cookies.)

Mom

Does my little girl want some cookies?

AMy

I am not really hungry right now.

Dad

Figures. She thinks she’s better than all of us. Moved to New York to go to college and suddenly she’s too good for Georgia.

Amy

Please dad. I am not better than you. I love you. And you know it’s they. We talked about this.

Dad

You kids and your pronouns! It’s ridiculous! You know what my pronouns are?! Donald Trump won the 2020 election! Does your teacher talk about that in class? How the election was stolen?

Amy

The election wasn’t stolen dad!

Mom

Don’t talk to your father that way!

(AMY kind of goes inwards. You can see them physically but unknowingly make themselves smaller. They are rubbing their arm to calm themselves down. They are just trying to cope.)

Amy

I’m sorry dad. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be mean.

Dad

That’s a little better. Just stay off the wifi!

(DAD walks to the desk on the side of the room, plugs in headphones, and starts his business meeting. BROTHER walks in.)

BROTHER

I smell cookies!

(DAD does not look up or take his headphones off as he says the following line. It is unclear how he even heard.)

dad

I’m sure you worked up quite an appetite smoking weed and playing Minecraft! Shame your mother couldn’t make you brownies as well!

(AMY has kind of tensed up. They are clearly uncomfortable. Over the next few lines, they will slowly curl up into a ball on the couch, just trying to hold things together.)

Mom

He has a learning disability!

DAD

Yeah! It’s called laziness!

AMy

(Sheepishly.)

Please! Let’s not do this…

BROTHER

Nothing I learn in school matters anyways! It’s dumb and pointless liberal drivel! It’s all critical race theory bullshit!

Mom

Let’s watch our language.

(DAD takes off his headphones, slams his laptop and walks to the center of the room.)

Dad

How would he even know sleeping half the time and playing video games the other half?

mom

He’s just going through a rough time. His therapist said—

Dad

That therapist takes enough of my money without telling me what to do! We can cancel the therapy anyways! Lot of good it’s done him.

brother

Fine by me!

Mom

Don’t say that!

(DAD, Brother, and Mom continue to bicker amongst themselves. Amy is now curled up into a ball on the couch with their headphones in their ears. The lights cut to black on the family, and a spotlight falls on Amy. Over the speakers, we hear the sound coming through her headphones.)

Professor

I don’t know if they’re still with us, but I think we can all agree that Amy’s film was quite moving. Amy is quite talented.

student in amy’s class

Really awesome work Amy! Can’t wait to see what you do next!

(A smile starts to creep across Amy’s face. Fade to black on Amy.)

Scene I-5: Linda gets here

(This scene takes place in the hipster restaurant. The grilled asparagus plate is mostly empty. It is still just Amy and Alice.)

Amy

Oh my god! That was so good!

Alice

I didn’t like it. You should finish it off.

Amy

I just couldn’t. I don’t want to take food from the others.

ALICE

At this point, I am not sure they are coming.

AMY

It’s okay! We’re all we need!

ALICE

It’s just… It’s just awkward. What if things aren’t the same without…?

AMY

Oliver was great. I miss him.

ALIce

I didn’t even go to the funeral.

amy

I didn’t even know what to say to Tim. I mean what do you say to someone in that situation.

alice

Probably why he’s not here…

amy

Probably. God! I feel so bad.

alice

Totally.

(They sit there in silence. Linda walks up without them noticing. Linda is scantily and provocatively dressed.)

linda

Hey party people! Who is ready to get some shots?!? Hey waiter, if you bring me some small cups with vodka, I’ll show you some big ones with milk!

AMY

Hey! I am so glad you could make it! You look amazing!

(ALICE is embarrassed.)

alice

You know this is a casual dinner, right. We’re not like going to a strip club after…

linda

Have a little fun for once! What’s life for if not adventure?

(WAITER brings three shots. Linda downs one and flashes the waiter. Alice tries and fails to get the waiter’s attention. Waiter walks away.)

ALICE

Seriously? All I want is to order a drink.

Linda

It’s so great to see you guys! Is you-know-who going to be here?

amy

I did invite James, but I am not sure if he is coming. I hope that’s okay.

(ALICE hopes this is a problem.)

alice

Is that a problem?

linda

No! No problem. It’s a little weird. We haven’t seen each other since the breakup.

AMY

You lived together for a while. How was that? I bet it was hard. I’m sorry for asking.

ALice

You’re sorry for everything tonight.

Linda

You know, actually it wasn’t that bad. It just didn’t work out. I didn’t lose any sleep over it. Just been discovering who I am and figuring things out. Girl power, right?

amy

Totally! And NB power! We are such bad bitches!

Linda

The baddest!

(ALICE rolls her eyes.)

Alice

Yeah! We’re such goddesses.

linda

Wait. Are goddesses and bitches gender-neutral?

amy

I think it’s fine. (polite laughter) I think anyone can be a bad bitch goddess regardless of gender.

linda

You certainly are one then.

amy

Thanks! I was really worried about you during the breakup. I am so glad it worked out for the best.

linda

Thanks again for letting me call you every night! I really appreciated it.

amy

What are siblings for?

linda

To being single and the sisterhood—(looks at Amy)—Err… to the siblinghood!

(LINDA grabs another shot and raises it to a toast. Amy grabs the final shot and raises it also. Alice toasts with a visibly empty glass. Alice kind of muffles her way through the next line, unsure what she is supposed to say. Amy and Linda are one hundred percent on the same page though.)

all

To the siblinghood!

Scene I-6: Linda’s terrible breakup

(The next scene takes place on the other side of the stage. The room is still set up like a family room but is now filled with boxes. Linda sits on one side of the couch on her computer. She is now wearing a bathrobe that is closed. A box is right next to her. She is talking to herself)

Linda

Carpet cleaner? Can’t stand the smell. Financial analyst? Not qualified. Copywriter? That’s a maybe.

(LINDA’s mother Andi walks up to the couch and stands there without Linda noticing. Linda continues to read jobs.)

Linda

Accountant? I mean I am pretty good at math. Programmer? No, I am no Alice. Hair stylist?

(LINDA examines her own hair, running through it with her fingers.)

Maybe…

Andi

You should do it! You were always the creative type.

(LINDA jumps slightly clearly surprised.)

Linda

Mom! I told you not to sneak up on me!

Andi

Oh Lin-Lin! I have been standing here for ages. I hardly snuck up.

linda

Mom! Please don’t call me Lin-Lin! I’m not four years old anymore.

Andi

I’m sorry Linda. I was just thinking about how nice it was to have you back home. I’d been so lonely since you left, and your father died.

linda

It’s fine. Thanks again for letting me stay. I promise it will only be a few weeks.

Andi

Stay as long as you want. No matter how old you are, you’ll always be my little girl.

(LINDA goes back to her computer and starts listing jobs again. Andi just stares lovingly.)

Linda

Construction worker? I’m not that strong. Bus driver? I’m not that good with directions. Stripper? I’m not that desperate…

andi

What about teacher? You know, the thing you went to school to learn to do?

Linda

I can’t go back into the classroom. I haven’t been in there since…

andi

Since you and James broke up? Honey, you know it’s time to move on.

Linda

It’s not about that. Teaching is just really rough.

andi

You used to love it though! I remember how excited you were that first semester. Remember how the students all made you a big going-away sign, and you called me crying?

Linda

Teaching isn’t the same. If going back to teaching meant standing in front of students at a whiteboard, I would go back in the heartbeat, but this pandemic changed things…

andi

This pandemic changed a lot of things. The kids are still there though.

Linda

Barely. I didn’t even see their faces, and half of them never turned in work. Ugh! It’s just so hard. I really did love teaching, but I just fell out of love with it.

Andi

No wonder it reminds you of James.

linda

I miss him so much. If I’m being honest, when we broke up, he was the one I wanted to talk about it with.

andi

You can talk about it with me.

linda

It’s not the same! Look, I need to get back to applications.

(LINDA goes back to her computer and focuses on it once more. Andi waits a beat, looks around, and delivers the next line casually.)

andi

Have you gotten any interviews?

linda

Not a single one! 300 applications, one job interview. You know I couldn’t even get an interview as a garbage collector. They said I was overqualified.

andi

You are though. Maybe if things are not working out you could take a break for a little while. Work somewhere local or get a graduate degree.

linda

No! I mean, I need to move on.

andi

I know baby. But I like you here. Things are so much more fun when you’re around.

Linda

Thanks… I’m sorry I sometimes seem ungrateful. It’s just weird. For a while I lived alone with James and had a big-girl job. Now, I’m living at home, and I don’t have a job or a dollar or a date or an idea what I’m doing. I’m just lost.

(LINDA buries her face in her hands frustrated at the situation.)

andi

Can I be honest?

linda

(confused) What?

andi

The last few years have been the hardest years of my life. I’ve started having hot flashes, I can’t sleep at night, I don’t even know what to do with myself now that I’m not working, and to top it all off, my best friend and the person I want to talk about it all with is dead. I wish it had been me.

linda

Don’t say that!

andi

But I’m glad it wasn’t. Because I get to see you become the beautiful amazing young woman I know you’ll be. It will happen. Don’t try to rush it.

linda

Awe mom! Thanks! Give me a hug.

(ANDI and Linda hug for a little while. Linda closes her eyes and leans in. She then opens them and peaks at her computer screen.)

Huh. That’s funny.

Andi

What?

linda

I got an interview at an educational technologies company. They want to meet as soon as possible.

andi

Do you know anything about educational technologies?

linda

(Defiantly, as if defying the world) No, but I’m as good a student as I am a teacher. We’ll get through this together.

(LINDA and Andi continue to hug as the scene fades to black.)

Scene I-7: An awkward reunion of former lovers

(LINDA, Amy, and Alice are sitting alone in the restaurant talking and eating. Appetizers have come, so there are small plates and something in the middle of the table. They have not ordered yet. Amy receives a text.)

amy

James just texted he was on his way.

linda

(LINDA pronounces the first word of the next line nervously, more like GRREEEEAATTT than great. She clearly is trying to seem more okay with this than she is.)

Great! It will be like old times.

alice

Sure you’re okay with it?

linda

Why wouldn’t I be? Seeing James again is great. Everything’s great.

Alice

Great! Any word from Tim?

amy

I don’t think we should count on Tim coming. He was pretty broken the last time I talked to him.

linda

When was that?

amy

A while ago… Sometimes it feels like

alice

Like we lost Tim when we lost Oliver.

(AMY nods her head.)

amy

He just hasn’t been the same.

linda

Maybe none of us have been.

amy

What do you mean?

LInda

Oh come on Amy! You can’t not think meeting up together without Oliver just feels weird.

alice

More than weird! It feels wrong.

amy

I think Oliver would have wanted us to stay friends and keep in touch.

Linda

(LINDA sighs.)

Amy, he has to be here to want things. Look, I appreciate how you’ve kept us all together, but maybe when this group gets together, it just reminds people of…

alice

Simpler times.

amy

I’m sorry.

linda

No! It’s not you. You’re great. It’s just everything.

Alice

I thought everything was great?

(EVERYONE nervously laughs. Then they sit there in silence enjoying their appetizers. James walks up and quietly takes a seat. Alice and him make eye contact. Then they turn away. Both stare down at the table.)

amy

I’m glad you could make it James.

james

(JAMES is still staring at the table.)

I’m glad you invited me. Is that grilled asparagus?

amy

I know how much you love it! Ordered it for you

james

(JAMES lets out a chuckle)

I actually hate asparagus.

amy

Well, we have other appetizers. Here, try some bread!

(JAMES takes a piece of bread and enjoys it. He starts to feel a bit more comfortable.)

james

So Alice, how is Amazon?

Alice

I wouldn’t know. I haven’t worked there since last September.

linda

(LINDA uncomfortably makes an attempt at humor, but it just comes off as mean.)

Typical James. Always forgetting the ones around him.

James

(JAMES does not engage.)

Oh. What are you doing these days?

alice

I’m a freelance web developer.

James

That sounds really cool. I bet you loved that. I remember that you designed Linda’s class page for teaching, and she was so excited about it!

Linda

(LINDA starts to feel more comfortable. She’s warming up to James again. James is warming up to her too.)

Remember how much fun you had playing with the cell game I got Alice to build?

james

I mean mitochondria as a power plant and the nucleus as a control room, how did you even think of that?

linda

You always were a sucker for a good video game story. Remember when you played the new Call of Duty for two days straight?

james

You pulled the plug on the second day and told me you’d treated yourself to a spa day with my credit card.

linda

You took out your wallet, handed me your card, plugged in your X-box and said I should get another.

james

You were so upset! I think I had to take you to dinner every night for a week to make you forgive me.

linda

(JAMES and Linda are now smiling and looking directly into each other. Linda turns away sharply. James cools off)

Yeah. I remember.

james

Was it something I said?

linda

No. It’s just… It hurts to remember.

james

(JAMES tries to change the subject.)

I know what you mean. Hey! Do you know if Tim is coming?

Amy

I haven’t heard from him. He RSVP’d maybe though.

Linda

Hope nothing happened to him.

amy

Probably just needs a little bit of space.

Alice

We’ve given him a lot of space already though…

james

Maybe we should order. I’m starving.

linda

You always are. You’ll probably order a few beers too.

James

I won’t be drinking tonight.

Linda

(LINDA is shocked.)

What! James not drinking. What’s gotten into you?

james

Just don’t feel like it tonight. I could use a meal though…

alice

Good luck getting the waiter James.

Amy

Let’s toast again. To being back together.

All

(LINDA and James toast halfheartedly. James and Alice toast with empty glasses)

To being back together!

(Fade to black.)

Scene I-8: Love in times of pandemic

(JAMES is sitting on the couch on the apartment set. Linda is standing up close to him. There are still some boxes in the apartment but enough to lift and take out. There are also some beer bottles on the floor.)

James

You don’t have to go.

linda

You know I do.

james

We could work things out. Things were good at the start of this year.

linda

Look. I love you James. You know I love you.

James

We can work it out then!

linda

But we spent too much time together too soon.

james

Pandemics don’t last forever. We will be able to be apart some very soon.

Linda

I need to move out James. Face it. It’s happening.

james

You mean so much to me. I hate losing you.

linda

I can’t share you with a bottle James.

james

I’ll change. I’ll go to AA.

linda

No you won’t! You never change, and you never will.

james

I will. I want to change for you!

linda

You won’t have me around, but please. Change for yourself.

James

I wish we could start over. That we could get a second chance.

linda

I wish that too. But with your videogames and your drinking, sometimes it feels like I do everything around here, and you’re no better than the kids I teach.

james

Used to teach.

(LINDA is on the verge of tears. James notices.)

I am sorry. I shouldn’t have gone there.

linda

No. You shouldn’t have.

(A honking is heard from outside. Linda gets up and picks up the last boxes.)

I really should go.

James

Can I hug you one last time?

linda

I’m worried if I let myself hug you, I’ll never let go.

james

Maybe we can hug for an instant, and you can pretend it’s forever then.

linda

No.

james

But…

linda

Goodbye James.

(LINDA walks out of the apartment with the boxes leaving James all alone. James picks up his phone and makes a call.)

james

Hey Dave! I know it’s been a long time. Listen, I was thinking about what you said about alcoholics anonymous, and I want to come to a meeting. Tomorrow? Sure.

(Fade to black on the apartment.)

Scene I-9: Still here

(ALL are sitting around towards the end of a meal. Plates are empty except for Amy’s which is mostly full. It is wrapping up, and people are getting antsy.)

alice

I guess we should ask for the check.

amy

It’s a real shame Tim couldn’t make it.

James

I guess we won’t be back together again. It will never be like it was.

amy

We can be thankful for what we do have though.

alice

Maybe we can be thankful for that on our own.

linda

Maybe.

(WAITER walks in and leans towards AMY’s plate. Tim starts to slowly walk in but is not yet recognized.)

waiter

Can I take your plate ma’am?

amy

It’s not ma’am. I’m NB.

waiter

My mistake. Terribly sorry.

amy

No, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t make a big deal out of it.

(TIM finally reaches the table. Waiter starts to take all the plates.)

tim

You shouldn’t have to apologize Amy. It is a big deal.

amy

Tim! You made it.

tim

Sorry I’m late. I had some trouble finding the place.

Amy

But you’re here!

alice

You missed entrees.

tim

I’m not too hungry anyways. Maybe we could order desert though? Anyone have their eye on anything?

james

Their souffle looks amazing.

tim

(TIM turns to the waiter.)

Very well! We will take a souffle and a Whiskey.

(WAITER nods and walks away with plates.)

Linda

We were worried you weren’t going to come because of…

tim

Yeah. I’m still pretty shaken about that I guess. It kind of still feels like he’s here.

AMY

That must be so hard.

Tim

Yeah. It is.

amy

I’m so sorry.

Tim

Don’t be. Everyone has had a rough time the past few years. It’s not just me. How are all of you?

(ALL awkwardly turn away from Tim.)

Tim

What, you’re telling me you all had great pandemics?

(ALL sit in silence for a moment.)

Alice

I have a confession. I haven’t been doing as well as I said. I got kicked out of my apartment. I have been couch surfing, which is hard because I don’t have that many friends, and I’m not the cleanest.

amy

I haven’t talked to my parents in months. They kicked my little brother out, and I just couldn’t look my father in the face anymore.

linda

I’m still not over James. I know we’re better apart, but I haven’t felt the same since we broke up. I’ve been partying and playing around and acting like a slut just to fill the empty void.

james

I got a girl pregnant. I wanted to keep it. She didn’t. She said we would talk about it in the morning. I went to sleep with my arm around her. When I woke up she was gone. Just gone. Never saw her again. I wish Oliver were here! He would know exactly what to say.

Amy

Yeah. He would.

Alice

It’s just so hard!

linda

Why does it have to be so hard?!

TIM

Stop! Just stop! This isn’t what Oliver would have wanted. Oliver lived in the moment. He loved his life, and he would have wanted us to love every second of ours. We have our lives ahead of us. It’s a crime to waste it complaining. Now, let’s go around the table and say one good thing going on in each of our lives. I’ll start. I got offered a writing job on a video game. It’s not much money but it’s a great opportunity.

(ALL think for a second.)

alice

My neighbor, well my former neighbor, from across the hall had an idea for a startup. I’ve been writing the code for the app. The prototype will blow away the investors.

linda

I got promoted last week at my ed tech company. My boss thinks I could be really good at user interface design. I get to go to a conference next week and everything.

james

I joined AA. For the first time in years, I am 90 days sober. It’s been great. My life is getting back on track.

linda

I’m so happy for you! That makes me so proud!

amy

We all are proud of you James.

Tim

Amy?

Amy

Oh yeah!

(AMY thinks for a second.)

My film won best short comedy at a film festival last month. A producer said he want to hire me on as a staff writer.

Tim

That’s incredible!

Alice

Really awesome Amy!

James

We should toast.

Linda

We should.

tim

To my writing job and Alice’s startup and Linda’s ed tech and Amy’s film and James’s sobriety. To remembering what we lost but always celebrating what we have.

all

To what we have.

(Fade to black.)

Scene I-10: What we lost

(The penultimate scene takes place in the apartment set. The boxes are gone. Oliver is laying on the couch covered by a blanket. Oliver is sick, coughing, and shivering. Tissues are piled up around him. Tim sits on the chair placed right next to the couch. Tim is wearing a mask, but it is not pulled over his nose and mouth.)

oliver

I feel so cold.

tim

Don’t worry. We’re going to get you to the hospital. You’ll be okay.

oliver

I don’t think I will be. I think this time is it.

tim

You always pull through. You’re the strongest person I know. Cancer couldn’t take you. Chemotherapy couldn’t stop you. This small fraction of a virus won’t defeat you. I won’t let it.

oliver

(OLIVER has a coughing fit.)

You might not have a choice.

Tim

Don’t say that. I’m not ready to lose you. It’s my fault I never should have let you go into work. I know your job at the lab is important, but you’re immunocompromised.

oliver

If I lived it again, I would do the same thing.

tim

What? You can’t mean that.

oliver

I’m proud of my life. I’m proud that I lived every moment of it like it was my last. And if this moment is my last, this is exactly how I would want to spend it, with you.

tim

I can’t let you go.

oliver

(OLIVER has a coughing fit.)

I can’t breathe.

tim

Please don’t go.

oliver

(OLIVER is getting quieter. He’s losing his strength.)

Hey, I love you. Do what I did when I’m gone. Keep living like you’re dying because you are. We all are.

Tim

I will.

(TIM hugs Oliver. Oliver closes his eyes. Whether he is sleeping or dead is unclear. Fade to black.)

Scene I-11: The before times

(This final scene takes place in December of 2019 at the same restaurant. Any precautions from covid are gone. No one is wearing a mask. Everyone is sitting together including Alice, Amy, Linda, James, Tim, and a still-alive Oliver. They look much more comfortable. James and Linda are sitting together and behaving like lovebirds. The plates and glasses are empty, and the dinner is dying down. All of them laugh before the next line.)

Alice

No! You did not! There’s no way!

Oliver

I one hundred percent did. I took edibles before my freshman year linear algebra exam.

Linda

Didn’t you make like a perfect score on that exam?

oliver

Highest in the class! Look, linear algebra is really theoretical. It’s just easier high!

Tim

You tutored me in lin alg! You couldn’t have at least mentioned your secret was taking the tests high?

oliver

Couldn’t let my little bro outshine me! Hey, you still passed though!

Tim

Barely. That reminds me. Can I borrow your dispensary card?

Oliver

If I recall correctly, you’re an English major now, so you don’t have to take math exams anymore.

tim

I still have to write essays!

oliver

No matrices, no mary Jane. Save the bud for people like Alice who have to take machine learning finals.

aLice

I mean I won’t say no… Be honest, did it take you so long to graduate because you were high the whole time?

Amy

I think it took so long for him to graduate because he got two majors and a master’s degree.

Tim

My big bro, the genius.

oliver

Don’t you ever forget it!

AMy

So what’s next for NYU’s resident genius?

oliver

I got a research job with a promising little immunotherapy startup.

linda

Remember us when you cure cancer!

Oliver

That’s the dream. My childhood will have been the last one wrecked by it.

(EVERYONE laughs.)

James

Where’s the waiter?

linda

I’ll handle this!

alice

Absolutely not! We do not need you flashing another waiter.

(EVERYONE laughs.)

Linda

Oh waiter!

(WAITER comes right up.)

It’s more charm than anything. We’d like one more round of shots and the check please.

Waiter

Right away!

tim

Dang! Did you hear about this new virus coming out of China? It sounds really serious.

Amy

Yeah! I heard all of Wuhan is on lockdown. No cases in the US yet though, thankfully.

alice

What if it’s like the black death? Another worldwide plague. I heard the black death killed a third of Europe.

(ALICE looks around the table and points to people as she says their names.)

That’s James, Linda, and maybe me just gone.

james

(JAMES is looking at Linda. They hold hands and look into each other’s eyes. They are still young lovers)

If we die, at least we’ll die together.

linda

We could be together forever!

Amy

Don’t say that! It’s all gonna be okay, right Oliver?

Oliver

I can’t predict the future. But life isn’t about the what-ifs. Life isn’t about worrying that you won’t be around next week or next year. Life is about the here and now. Life isn’t about who we lost or what we lost. It’s about what we find. It’s not about who can’t be at the table. It’s about being together with the ones who are there while you can.

tim

And showing up to final exams high as a kite while you can!

oliver

That too!

Amy

I’m gonna miss you so much when you graduate.

(AMY sidehugs Oliver.)

Tim

(TIM raises his glass.)

To the ones who are there!

All

To the ones who are there!

(ALL toast.)