

ONE WOMAN SHOW

*Isolation, stigma, and nuance
in the time of a pandemic.*

Playwright: Katie Jacobson

Cast

Main subject should be a woman in her 30s. No other demographic suggestions.

Main subject, when exchanging lines, will be indicated by an "S".

Roommate. No demographic suggestions for the roommate.

When exchanging lines, will be indicated by an "R".

Co-workers and friends.

These should be purely for voice or video work.

Production Notes

The original intent of this production was to have the main subject be alone on-stage, only having allusions to other people in her life through offstage presence and special effects of sound and/or video, if the budget allows.

If it is chosen that the Roommate, Co-workers, and Friends are to appear on stage, then a clear indication by sight-lines, scenic design, and/or subject placement should indicate isolation.

If the Roommate, Co-Workers and Friends *do not* appear on stage, their lines can be programmed into sound cues.

Scenic Notes

Can be as minimal or as elaborate as budget allows.

A central location of home will be where the subject spends most of her time. A comfy couch, a lot of pillows, blankets, and a big window.

Alternate locations could be indicated by lighting elements when the subject steps out from central location.

One act.

30-40 minutes.

Our subject enters. She is carrying a grocery bag, and a big box store plastic/reusable bag in one hand, and trying to talk on a cell phone in the other.

Slow down... slow down... Yes. I got the groceries.

Yes, groceries for two weeks.

WHAT?

No. You said two weeks.

Your sister really said two months? Two fucking months?

I mean, the news is saying we're a few weeks behind Italy, and they're not going to be out of this for a while. But what if we can get ahead of it?

I just think two months is over kill...

Yes, I will have to go back out.

Yes, I got light bulbs. And toilet paper. And batteries. And a screwdriver.

I don't have a snarky tone... This is a virus, not a blizzard.

What time are you done with rehearsal?

Okay. Are you coming straight home?

Yeah, great. I'll see you when you get home.

Bye.

She starts putting away the groceries. A lot of it is non-perishable food items. For the sake of the stage, the items that are snackable will be the only items taken out of the bag. A package of toilet paper should be prominent.

She starts to pace, making notes of what else she might need to get. You can see her count to see what will last - maybe it's the toilet paper, maybe it's one of the snacks and she finishes it, and now has to replace it. She starts going over the conversation in her head.

Hi, I'm Katie. I am a 30-something woman, and I just moved in with my best friend after failing miserably at living alone. I lived alone for nine months. It was the most interesting and busiest time of my life. If I wasn't busy with work, I was getting involved with various spiritual, social and theater groups. And if I wasn't doing any of that, I was busy drinking.

Why you ask? I think for a lot of us, we go from our parents houses, to college dorm rooms or roommate situations, and by the time you are in your thirties - you are either comfortable with those roommates, you're married, or you're living alone. I did all three. Not quite in that order.

Most of my friends are theater people, or theater adjacent - a sponsor, the parents of the kids you did a show with last summer, people who come to every single show for the escape that you give them and want to absorb your energy. I was one of those people, and it sucked me in and gave me a reason to keep living.

It had been non-stop for two and a half years. Work, spiritual group, theater, bar, show-sickness, work (sometimes hung over), spiritual group (self care?), theater (it's always something), bar (some nights to get laid, other nights to pitch the next show), and again, more show-sickness.

Show. Sickness. To the rest of the world - extreme exhaustion. Usually coupled with the cold or flu from that season. Either way, it was the only time I would slow down. It's often the only time any theater artist slows down. Until now.

Picks up journal. Pages through it at first, nostalgically, and finds a page near the beginning.

It's March 13th, 2020. Stages across the state have made the decision to postpone, or downright cancel their shows. This will be the first break many of us have had in months - probably since before the holidays 2019. That is the life we lead. You work on a project, and it is onto the next thing. If you can find a job that works with your rehearsal schedule, great. So the cycle continues... project, work, next project's rehearsal, work, sleep, drinking, eat somewhere in there. Next.

Pause to acknowledge the journal. Step out of scene as to acknowledge passage of time/or omniscient view of hindsight.

My New Year's Resolution was to try and write more. I am a writer at heart, and I had never been able to fill one of these things up. A friend of mine suggested, that instead of writing a day-to-day transcription of your life... try writing down all of the interesting conversations you have, the music you want to listen to, the movie your coworker suggested, quotes, drawings, and everything in between. And it worked.

I ended up filling it up by the time this pandemic hit the year mark. Yes, that's right. Over one year to get this under control from when it truly started in November 2019.

Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives in the United States alone. Grandparents who never got to hold their grandchildren's hands one last time. Parents who prematurely fell ill... years or maybe even decades before we were ready. Friends who worked the front lines day in and day out and got run down by it all.

It was a lot to take in day in and day out. I wasn't on the front lines. I am just a writer. And writing is what I did.

Overheard, offstage a door opening and closing as if someone is coming in/home. It is the roommate.

R: I'm home!

K: That's my roommate. The one I was talking to before on the phone.

R: Are you getting all weird and self-reflective again?

K: No, what makes you say that?

R: I could see you pacing through the window as I was walking up. Like you were trying to memorize a monologue - and there aren't any shows coming up for a while.

K: So, what if I was?

R: Do you want me to come out there? So you have an audience?

K: No. You're fine.

Anyway...I read so many books, and I worked on myself. And I journaled. A lot.

She pages back through the journal.

The first time I wrote about this was January 7th, 2020.

"I want to make strides like I was before. I want to have big conversations with people I admire about things that matter to them, to me, and to the world. Right now, I'm stuck in this thought pattern of — We've never been here before as a species or a society. We've never had fires this big or waves this strong, or have the earth seemingly reacting with so much anger. Yet we, it seems... sometimes... that maybe some of us have been here before. On the cusp of a world war. It's 2020, and the twenties curse it's either a world war or a pandemic, right? And it sounds like the pandemic is already starting halfway around the world."

Journals, I've noticed, are for all those things we didn't want to say out loud. The tough stuff. It was not easy to talk to friends everyday and have the pandemic permeate every conversation.

But it had to be processed somewhere.

The stigma. The isolation. The nuance.

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Subject goes to groceries. Pulls out an apple (or whatever fruit/vegetable the actor would like to cut and munch on throughout the scene/show).

So my roommate has been a saving grace during this. I had lived alone, but I didn't really enjoy living alone. Does anyone like living alone? It was good at times, it was mostly cathartic, but there was a lot of drinking. Kind of like 2020. It was good if you survived, it was unnecessarily cathartic. There was a lot of drinking.

My roommate decided last August that we were sick of not seeing each other when things got crazy at work. So, living together, we thought, would be a perfect solution. And BOY, WAS IT!

When stay-at-home orders eventually came from the governor, it was a built in friend and confidant. It was the one person you could hug. It was someone you could share your fears, as well as your meals with.

The entire next conversation will happen with the other person off-stage.

Offstage: Are you eating something?

Subject: Yes. I'm eating an apple.

O: Can you eat something else please?

S: I don't feel like it.

O: You have to have something more than an apple. You didn't have dinner last night.

S: I can't eat when I'm anxious.

O: Okayyyyyy...

(Back to audience.)

Twenty pounds lost at the beginning of this pandemic. I can't eat when I'm nervous. I can't even eat before a show... *(Realizes what she's saying.)* Don't worry - I don't *think* I will pass out on you all tonight. Look! Another apple slice! *(Eats slice.)* I'll be fine!

Shouts to offstage: I said...I'll be FINE!

O: Riiiiiiighhhttt...

Subject could be going through grocery bags organizing/putting away items as she talks about them.

It wasn't until about a month and a half in that I started eating semi-normally again. It had to be comfort food. Pizza, carbs, as well as potatoes in all their glorious forms. The occasional salad, fruit, or something uncooked. It was still a bit chilly out in late April/early May, so it was nice to have something warm to eat. Something comforting. I ended up gaining back most of the weight I lost.

But I didn't care. I was eating. It meant I felt safe. Friends went through a similar fluctuation, and it seem we all collectively stopped caring about what we all looked like, and focused on how we felt.

I was "fat" and happy. My body has gotten me through worse, and I know I could treat it better, but at this moment in life, I was alive. And for key moments, I was happy.

Subject starts pouring coffee. She then looks around, looks offstage, and then takes a bottle, smells it, and adds it to the coffee. She then stirs it, and sips it. Adds more alcohol to taste. Takes coffee cup, picks up computer, brings it to a comfortable work spot on stage.

Subject puts on something slightly more work appropriate, and then sits in her "work spot".

Working from home. It happened almost immediately. It wasn't long before all of the those jobs your bosses told you that could never be done from home, magically could be done from home. People still had to come in to make sure the mail could be delivered, or to manage some of the more customer facing parts of a the job. For the first time in a long time, people were excited to come into work - be it to get away from their families or just for a change of scenery.

It was also a lesson for those in charge that everything can be done virtually. Before the pandemic, there was an add on social media for something called "Remote Year". Many of us with office jobs did just that. We could go anywhere that was open and had WiFi to do work. Yet, I think there is a good portion of us that are ready to go when/if things open back up again.

Productivity was...interesting. I would have a to-do list, and I would often get that done before noon. If I felt productive, I worked ahead and put in a whole 8 hours, but what equaled about two days work. On the flip side, I had days where social media, the news, the latest streaming binge session or a socially distant walk seemed more “productive”. There were days I would do nothing, and then 1pm would hit, I would put in 8 hours of work in 4 hours and be done for the day.

The virtual meetings became tiresome. What would normally be a face-to-face conversation in the office became one-on-one meetings virtually. When I’m entirely focused on a project, I do much better with a check in or a conversation via email.

Yes. Those meetings you had before the pandemic - those that you sat through, annoyed, thinking - “This could have been accomplished by an email.” Finally started getting accomplished by email.

Subject logs into meeting. Gets comfortable in her spot. Sits up straight.

S: I’m here.

C: Hello? Katie? Are you there?

S: Yes. Hello? Hi.

C: I think you’re on mute.

S: FUCK. *Presses button to take herself off mute, responds with a chipper tone.*
Hi! Hello. Sorry... Katie is here. Good morning everyone.

Roll call continues, but fades.
Next bit, subject reacts to the computer.

You became keenly aware of your face, what it was doing, how many chins you had, what the fuck was your hair doing. Yet, the brief time away gave you a chance to roll your eyes or smirk at the dumb thing your least favorite coworker said. So beverages, especially in large coffee cups, were absolutely necessary for hiding your disdain from your coworkers, and even more importantly, your boss.

These large contraptions held the lifeblood to your day. Coffee, tea, water, vodka... interestingly enough ceramic is my least favorite contraption to drink beer out of...

Now before you say anything, I would wait until at least 4pm to pour myself something alcoholic. Unless of course, it was just past noon on a Friday and the week was extra shitty. Or it was Monday morning after a wild virtual party with your friends and I needed some hair of the dog. The point is... coffee cups. I have many of them. And I love them all.

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Katie gets up to pour another drink in another coffee cup.

Offstage: I’m going to Zoom with my family.

K: Do you want me to leave? Do you want the living room?

R: No, I’ll be in my room. It’d be nice to actually see a human face in front of me - we should hang out when I’m done.

K: Agreed. I have a Messenger Video chat with high school friends, too. We'll see how long that goes.

R: Screens free day on Saturday?

K: We can sure try.

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We didn't try. Screens free day never happened.

Thank god this pandemic happened during the age of technology. These devices that we would get annoyed at ourselves (or others) if we were on them too much, suddenly became a lifeline. Services like Skype and Zoom that you would use for work, became a way to hang out with your friends too. Virtual Happy Hours. Watch Parties for the new streaming movie you all wanted to see. And yes, there was even an app that came out of all of this - or at least got big during all of this - called HouseParty. That was confusing to try and tell your coworkers the next week. "No! I didn't break the stay at home orders, it's an app!" It allowed a decent sized group to video chat, play around with filters, play virtual games. There was a weird balance we had to strike between reliance and obsession. It added to what many ended up calling "Zoom Fatigue", and as the pandemic dragged on for much of the United States, the virtual happy hours became less frequent. The lack of true personal interaction, staring at a screen for hours on end... it definitely showed you exactly where you should be placed on the introvert/extrovert scale.

Sound of FaceTime/Zoom/Skype ringtone. Our subject looks at all of her devices. Her phone. Her computer. Her tablet. She picks one and answers it.

K: YASSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS

You hear 4 other voices chime in - Sydney (a well travelled friend), Deidre (aka Deed), Amir (the transgender man of the group) and Zibby (Liz, Zil, Bitzy) - all friends from high school. "Hey girl", "Finally", "Is this working?", "Heyoooo"

Katie: I'm so glad we've been able to reconnect so much during this pandemic. I feel bad for not talking as much to you all when life was happening.

Deed: You were busy! Don't feel bad!

Amir: Is it working? Am I frozen?... *(our subject reacts)* There it goes. HEY!

(To audience.)

Every. Single. Video call. You think that WiFi and other technologies could have made, or worked through, so much growth during this time. But it didn't. Most of it could be blamed on user error, I'm sure. But come on with the WiFi signal!

(Unmute sound effect. You hear a muffled Alexa/Siri/Computerized voice speaks in German.) "Sie haben bereits "Block geräucherten Cheddar" auf Ihrer Einkaufsliste."

(Collective reaction from group.)

Katie: I already have “Block geraucherten Cheddar” added to my shopping list too.

Sydney: Verpiss dich. Anywho... how is everyone? What’s the latest? What is the hippity-haps?

(Others start answering. Sound effect of muffled Zoom call sounds trail off as Katie starts explaining Sydney to audience.)

That is Sydney. As her name might suggest, she is a world traveler. She spent a few years abroad in Germany and Austria teaching and tutoring English before returning to teach Deutsche in the States. She has a unique perspective on how other countries are handling this comparatively. Her stories of being abroad magnify the feeling of being stuck here. The feeling of existential dread that there might not be a way out of this. Sydney has a keen sense of dark humor, and thinks and often reacts in German. On the flip side, she is the sharer of uplifting memes, using the cool phrases her students are using, and keeping us and her colleagues sane during all of this. It’s about balance.

(The video conversation fades in. We hear Amir.)

Amir: This weekend, my boyfriend and I are going to pick out a Christmas tree. He doesn’t understand that I don’t really celebrate it.

Katie: Don’t feel like you have to do anything you don’t want to, Amir.

Amir: It makes him happy. And the lights make me happy. My family and I always loved driving around and looking at all the houses during this time of year.

(Video conversation trails off. Katie does business like pouring a drink, before settling in front of the computer again)

Amir came to the United States with his family when he was 5 years old. I assume, looking for more opportunity, a “better” life. Sorry Amir. Now you’re stuck here. For now.

Amir is a social worker, spending most of his time at a school, and the rest of his time either gardening, doing DIY projects around the house, volunteering at a hospital, or being cute on Instagram with his boyfriend. Amir is good people, and seemingly has it all.

Prior to the pandemic, he spent most of his school days working with kids and addressing any reason they might be falling behind or acting up. He still does this remotely, but now part of his days are spent helping out teachers who just... Cannot. Take it. Anymore. Sydney would share how hard it is to teach a class without receiving any verbal or energetic feedback from kids. Yet teachers, social workers and other school support staff are dealing with the harsh realities that teaching remotely can bring. WiFi issues, kids who have 4 siblings and have to share one computer, kids who don’t want to share their “rooms” on video classroom time because it’s not as cool as the most popular, and richest, kid in the class. This is cracking open huge disparities in kids’ lives and exposing the haves and have-nots further than in-person classrooms ever did. Students during this pandemic were having trouble connecting, in actuality and emotionally.

Amir - whose family came here to have a better life - is working tirelessly to ensure his colleagues and students do too. He’s already coming up with plans on how to address these disparities once the pandemic is “over”.

(The video conversation fades in. Laughter. We hear Deidre.)

Deirdre: Katie, do you remember those toasted, meaty, cheesy snacks your mom used to make around this time of year?

Katie: Of course I do, Deed. What about 'em?

Deirdre: What were they called?

Katie: Hand to God... we called them Meaty Cheesies.

Deirdre: I want to make them. If I'm not coming home for the holidays, I still want a taste of the holidays. Do you have the recipe?

Katie: Somewhere, otherwise I will have her send it to you.

(Video conversation trails off.)

Deirdre. Dee Dee. Deed. She and I have been friends since childhood. She was as selfless then as she is now. Another social worker - but she has worked in hospice and currently works for the VA. She helps families understand what is going on, make arrangements for their stay or their care from home, and if necessary what the next steps the family needs to take at the end of their relative's life.

She has a level head about all of this. She sees the bright side. She sees the light at the end of the tunnel. She doesn't know how she knows - but she knows that life is, and will be, better than this. She adds in humor to everything, and when there isn't anything left to say she makes you laugh with inappropriate yet well-timed goofy sound effects.

(Video conversation fades in.)

Deidre: *(Loud burp.)* Whoops.

Zibby: *(Laughing, almost uncontrollably.)* That wasn't real... was it?!

Deidre: It totally was! So sorry.

Zibby: I haven't laughed that hard in a while.

Sydney: I hate to keep putting you up to this Zibby - but how are things?

Zibby: Fine. They are fine.

Amir: If there is one thing I have learned from all of you, is that when a woman says fine, she is certainly not fine. I think Sydney means, how are things at the hospital?

Zibby: Well...

(Video conversation trails off.)

Zibby. The person with the most fun name, and the least fun job. At the beginning of the pandemic, when these virtual happy hours started, she was just as bored as I was. Both of us were partially furloughed for two very different reasons. As coronavirus started to really hit our area, her work picked up and never seemed to stop. Zibby has always been a quiet person, but this was a different type of quiet.

She works in the ICU. She and her colleagues are mentally, emotionally and even spiritually drained. The hardest hitting wave came right after Halloween. It didn't seem to let up at all until

just before Christmas when the vaccine was finally released. Zibby doesn't always check in with us, but she's constantly on our minds. She's constantly on mine.

(Katie closes laptop. Gets up. Pours another drink. Paces for a bit.)

Then there is me. The person who works in the arts. Sure, you can argue that people are at home and watching anything that streams so people are constantly absorbing visual art. Yet, at my level - I am lucky if I get a grant to continue to do what I love. Otherwise, I am looking for jobs wherever someone will take me. At my age, I'd like the job to be something...that if you take away the art that I do...is still worthy of an elevator speech. This leaves me with jobs that were among the first to go and the last to come back. Non-profit work makes for a good elevator speech, but often not essential. Bartending - as much as we could argue this point... not essential. Retail - It did better than expected because no one wanted to see a failing economy - yet at various points, non-essential.

"Earth without 'art' is just 'eh'." I saw that plastered everywhere. People stuck in their houses learning to play an instrument. Learning the art of baking. Painting their first, and maybe last, masterpiece. Art continued to happen - it was whether or not someone would pay for it.

(Finishes drink. Contemplates cup. Goes back to kitchen table for what we think might be a drink.)

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Your morning "coffee" with Irish Cream turned to your afternoon coffee with whiskey, which turned into your happy hour whiskey and ginger ale... which led to your late night bottle of wine with friends. The first few weeks, it sucked. The next few weeks you got used to it. And once the weather started getting warmer you ended up contemplating AA.

(At this point our subject puts her drink away, and grabs a water bottle to drink. She grabs some tennis shoes, and starts putting them on.)

As it got warmer, people headed outdoors to "socially distance" with friends. Walking, hiking, sitting on a beach, having a lunch six-feet-apart in a park. I think I was outside more in 2020 than I had been in my entire life leading up to this point. I found out that I, indeed, am able to tan. I wore shorts for the first time in ages, in a desperate attempt to get some vitamin D on parts of these legs that hadn't seen the light of day in nearly a decade.

People started to walk for meetings, walk to work, walk to the store. It was like everything slowed down just enough for us to realize that our bodies can actually do things.

In light of that, some people took up sports. When the pandemic hit, some local folks were already starting to train for the local marathon. Others figured they had more time, and quickly caught up to the training schedule. The marathon committee ultimately cancelled the actual event, but allowed people to submit times and distances to still obtain their metals and "finisher" shirts. For the locals, it was a challenge to do something different. The mostly flat, but at parts grueling and tiresome, course was not necessarily the route they needed to take. Some people created loops that were much more fun. Some people ran on trails. Some people ended up walking a lot of it, but got it done.

I probably should have signed up for it, with the amount of walking I did. I was happy with my jaunts in the local parks, checking out trails I had never knew existed. Seeing people who I

never got to see with my schedule, and realizing others in your social circles were from your neighborhood but you never knew lived there.

The world got slower. The world got smaller. And for a moment, the world got happier.

We all started appreciating the small things in life. The way coffee tasted. The way the air smelled. The sounds of the nearby river. And every once in a while. The occasional hug.

(Depending on set, the subject can move to a more comfortable part of the "apartment". Subject is lounging looking at her phone. We realize from her facial expressions and "swiping" that she is on a dating app.)

Dating during a pandemic. For those of us that are single, it was nice to give it a break for a bit. Keeping up with the Joneses, making our parents fret less because we are being "taken care of", whatever the reasons we had for dating... we didn't need to do anymore. It was nice. And if we did come across someone we did like... we had even more reason to make sure they were worth it.

It made it really easy to take things slow, if you wanted. It also made you have the talk, that alcohol and hormones often prevent you from having.

(Katie starts texting.)

Have you gotten tested?

(Waits for response. Drinks coffee/water, paces.)

Reads: Of course. I'm negative.

Greeeat... *Texts:* Negative on what exactly?

Reads: Negative for all of it.

Cool. *Texts:* Like all of it... all of it?

(Not-so-long dramatic pause.)

What is taking so long to respond?

Reads: All of it. Coronavirus. AIDS. The Clap...

Jeez... who the hell calls it the clap anymore? *Shrugs.* I like it!

Continues reading: Shall I go on?

Pausing...

This is the most direct communication that I have had at this point in a relationship ever.

Person responds.

Reads: So... now that we got that awkwardness out of the way... 7pm at the beach?

Awww... the beach. Things are getting real.

Responds to text. Yes. 7pm. Beach. I'll bring the wine.

The increased communication was wonderful. Figuring out each other's boundaries quicker than usual was fantastic. The pandemic, while not the healthiest time for our communities, our country, or the world... turned out to be decently healthy for my relationships.

Roommate: Can I have the house later? I just need some time alone.

Katie: *(To audience.)* Even the relationships with my roommate and my friends got easier with more communication. *(To offstage)* Sure thing!

Back to audience.

As we all know, having people laid off, working from home, working odd jobs to stay afloat - it gave everyone time to think and talk about real issues. Some of those issues were internal. Even without a pandemic, losing a job is something that often sends someone into a spiral. Therapy was needed.

The world slowed down enough, and people started processing their shit. From how losing their job made them feel, to that bad breakup that they never talked about from last year, to the relationship they had with their parents. With the increase of communication, came an assessment of the key relationship in a lot of peoples' lives. Their parents. Therapy was needed.

It wasn't in person. It was a text. A phone call. A video chat. Regardless, therapy was needed.

And if it wasn't therapy, it was a deeper dive into spirituality. Meditation. Prayer. Energy work. Chakras. Jesus. Buddha. Allah. God. Whoever it was, now was a time we really hoped a higher power was there, or at least listening.

There was an article that came out at the beginning of the pandemic that mentioned the belief that diseases of the chest are often tied to grief. Coronavirus affected your whole body, but was most prominent in the lungs. After diving deeper into spirituality and reading this article... it made sense. The world needed to grieve.

Grief turned into action. Actions that affected our communities and how we each see the world.

On May 25th, an unarmed black man named George Floyd was killed by police on the streets of Minneapolis. This wasn't the first black man of 2020 to be killed, and unfortunately he was not the last - but his death happened at such a time that it set the whole world on fire. It was a wake up call to us white people that this is a very real, scary and true reality for many of our friends. On top of a pandemic - they have to deal with this as well. And they have been dealing with it for far too long.

Black, Indigenous and people of color were speaking their truths and were trying to be held up by their allies. Places of business, sports teams, corporations were all offering support and showing their colors. Yet, there were those speaking against them, which drew a very deep, yet necessary line in the sand.

We lost Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg. And if all of that wasn't enough, the United States had - what felt like, and in actuality - the biggest election in its history. There was a lot riding on the outcome of this election.

This whole year felt like one long wait. Wait for Coronavirus test results, wait to hear about your job status until next week, wait to hear who is going to be the next President of the United States. Many news sources - left, right, and center - stated that it might not be until December that we would know and outcome. I was so worried for my BIPOC friends, my gay friends, my transgendered friends, my theater community, the world community... Decisions that could affect any of their lives seemed to take forever. It was one. LONG. Wait.

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*(This next section is meant to be a “final straw” of stress and frustration.
Smoke alarm failure beep - the sound it makes when the batteries should be changed.)*

What the? *(Beep.)*

Well, there's not a fire anywhere. *(Beep.)*

*(Looks for where it could be coming from. Brings chair to check different parts of the stage/
“home”.)*

A little help would be nice! *(Beep.)*

That's not the one. Fuck.

I'm going insane. I said I'm going insane here! *(Beep.)*

(Moves to other places on stage.)

Can you at least let me know you're okay? Hello? Do you hear this beeping? *(Beep.)*

FUCK.

*(Starts to really freak out. Ripping up couch cushions - places that obviously wouldn't have a
smoke alarm.)*

*(Beep. Katie finally finds the location of the beeping fire alarm. Fixes it, and then sits down,
defeated in the chair she was using to find it.)*

S, to offstage: You there?

No answer.

S: I'm really scared and could use someone right about now.

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November 3rd, 2020.

I didn't want to be alone that day. My roommate took a job out of town, and usually came home on weekends. But I had coronavirus.

So I was forced to be alone. Instead of hugging my friends, and holding them tight as we watched the results I was texting, calling people on the phone, and thankfully a little bit later, joined some friends on a virtual election night watch party.

We talked about how the Electoral College process worked, we talked about what certain elections meant for certain parts of the United States, we talked about my diagnosis, and we talked about the numbers of people who had died from the illness. We disagreed on some things, but we talked it out and understood where the other people were coming from. We agreed on all of the things that matter.

And as if some collective God heard all the prayers, the results came quicker than any of us expected. The race was not called that night, but over the course of the next few days, as absentee and mail-in ballots were processed, it became clearer and clearer. By Saturday night, we were hearing from the President-elect.

Many people who were dumbfounded by the election results in 2016 were not quick to believe any of this.

“I’ll believe it when Associated Press calls it.”
“I’ll believe it when President Trump concedes.”
“I’ll believe it when President-Elect Biden finally gets sworn in.”

It was 2020. Anything could happen.

Subject takes her temperature. Writes it down in her journal.

In case you missed it, I contracted COVID. Coronavirus. ‘Rona. The Vid. Whatever you called it, it was not a fun sickness to have, and I had a fairly mild case of it. I tried to brush over it before because of the stigma.

This sickness drew lines in the sand everywhere. Another line, was how careful you were being. Some people went to the extreme of never seeing anyone. Others would reason their way out of needing to quarantine, desperate to see people. This time was so isolating, and I can’t fault anyone for how they handled the stress of it all.

Here’s what happened... I’m not proud, or asking for special consideration. This is the honest truth about how it spreads.

The week of October 11th, I was halfway between wanting to see my friends and wanting to be safe. My friend had written a book, and I wanted to pick it up for my dad’s birthday. (I was supporting local and, I mean... come on, it’s my dad.) I met another friend at a brewery to do a brief gift exchange (Breweries seemed to be handling the pandemic restrictions better than bars.) At the end of the week, I went over to a friend’s house for dinner with four friends from 3 different households. (At the time, restrictions on intimate gatherings had laxed, and this was a group of friends that followed the guidelines pretty closely.)

Like I mentioned before, my roommate took a temporary job out of town, so hanging out with friends felt like it became a need. I knew it was risky. All of it. I spent the next week and a half worried that I may have done something wrong. I checked in on the friends I had dinner with daily.

The “God it was so awesome to see you the other night!” Turned into... “How are you doing?” “How are you feeling?” Everything seemed fine. Maybe I was overreacting. And interestingly enough, none of us from the dinner party ended up getting it or having it.

Maybe I was overreacting.

Then, my friends who just had a baby called. They invited me over to meet their new little one. The thought was, once they both went back to work, that I could help out for a few hours here and there. They were so cautious that no one had seen their baby, other than pictures, since it was born. The mom had *just* gone back to work as a hairdresser. Salons were one of the cleaner establishments you could go, and she worked at a place where she wasn't around a customer for more than 15 minutes.

They were taking precautions. It seemed like I had dodged a bullet with the friends I had dinner partied with a few weeks prior. I was becoming a hermit, and I missed my friends.

I got home that night feeling happy to have seen my friends, their new baby, and I felt safe. We had been masked the whole time in their apartment, we were 6-8 feet apart, and I didn't even hold the baby.

The next day, I went on a walk with a friend.

I got home, made dinner, and had a virtual game night with another group of friends.

Then I got the call.

(Below are the subject's responses to her friends answers.)

"Hey, friend... how's the baby doing?"

"Oh. Okay."

"No. I'm not mad."

"Stop apologizing. You're gonna get a test tomorrow right?"

"First thing, that's good. That's all you can do."

"Honestly, I think you may have finally felt relaxed last night... and maybe it's just a bad cold."

"I swear I'm not mad. And even if you *do* have it, it's like getting pregnant your first time. Crazier things have happened."

"Honestly, I don't think I could be mad if I tried. We did everything we were supposed to do. I would be more mad - *at myself* - if I got it somewhere else like a bar."

"We're all going to be in it together. You, me, your hubby and the baby. I promise."

"Okay, let me know... Love you too... bye!"

(Hangs up phone.)

And then, we wait. While I waited, I called the friend I had seen on Saturday to let her know. I was so glad it was only one friend.

My friend, her newborn, and her husband all ended up having it.

Her test was Sunday, she got results on Monday, and I *needed* a test on Tuesday. My roommate, who had gone to stay with family while he did a job during the week, was eager to come home on weekends - but wasn't able to until this week because they had *just* gotten out of quarantine from a family member having it. If you come into contact with someone, you have to wait until their sickness is over or for 10 days since their positive test - whichever is longer.

Then, and only then, can you start your 14 day quarantine. The timelines were not only confusing, but extremely frustrating.

So, I was eager to get a test. The quickest place was closed Tuesday, and there was rumor that one of the nasal swab places had a quick turn around time. I signed myself up for that and went in. Not only was the swab uncomfortable, but you are in your car, in a weird drive through garage, and alone. It's not pleasant, it was actually downright scary. It had been 5 days since I was exposed. I don't know if it was nerves or something else, but I started to feel sick that day.

And I waited. And waited. No results. By Thursday morning I was getting antsy and the saliva testing site with a nearly 24-hour turn around time was open. I went and got at the test. You stand in line, then you stand at a table and spit into a vial. You are with other people, who are all gathering their spit, and often you see someone you know. I ran into friends who had a very similar experience to me. It felt like we were all in this together. With my roommate coming home that night, I needed to get it done, and I knew we could handle the 24 hours of me being isolated as we waited for those results.

Friday morning, I surprisingly got my results from the test I took on Tuesday. Negative. Woocommerce... what a wave of relief! It had been 5 days since my exposure. I talked with my roommate, with a mask on. Whatever sickness I was feeling was probably just a cold. Maybe allergies. We both decided... "Come on, what's the likelihood that your second test is positive? Let's go for a drive and celebrate... get you out of the house." Without a mask? Sure why not.

So we did. We got in a car together and went for a drive. The people who I ran into at the saliva testing site texted me that they got their results. They were negative. Yes! They had a similar encounter with their close contact like mine. I had received my negative results from the earlier test - so why would it be any different? But, I was still curious, opened up my results from the saliva test.

POSITIVE.

FUCK.

S: Hey, friend... um... I just got my saliva test results back.

O: And?

S: *Pause... speechlessness.*

O: And?

Pause for effect. Our subject paces as she gathers herself. She's dumbfounded.

I was speechless.

I did everything I was supposed to do.

I still got it. I thankfully quarantined as soon as I heard from my friend, and I tried to take every precaution with my roommate.

The other thought was - what if I had never got a second test? And I still went about my life doing things with people - like socially distant walks and picnics, riding in the same car but with masks on, the occasional masked hug - those little allowances we gave ourselves for the sake of sanity, but possibly at the cost of someone else's health or life.

Was it worth it? No.

I was mostly healthy. I got over it in a matter of days. Others were not so lucky. The CDC stated that once most people have it, they seem to have immunity for up to three months. With me taking every precaution before, I wasn't so sure. My parents wanted to see me. I said no. Friends wanted to see me. I said no.

The other big story about coronavirus that got big media coverage was the state of a survivor's mental health. Now mostly, this was for those who had it bad enough to be in the hospital. You couldn't breathe, you couldn't sleep, you couldn't do things. It was basically getting PTSD from being in the hospital.

But even as someone who had a mild case of it - the isolation was what was really the hardest part. Not seeing anyone, not being in the same room with anyone. No matter how many video calls you had, it wasn't the same as seeing someone face to face. It was hard. It started to make you feel crazy. And I had it easy.

Subject grabs journal.

As many people, places, businesses, commercials, and songs said "We are in this together", you felt more alone than ever. It was just you, an individual. You could be concerned about how your actions would affect others all day long, it didn't mean the next person would be doing the same. That was the huge problem. In a time when we had to worry about ourselves, were forced to be alone - instead of collectively coming together, albeit virtually or distanced - some people just thought about themselves.

It's hard enough trying to describe it to you. Empathy. Who had it. Who didn't. As a theater person, you survive in the business if you have empathy. It's how your character reacts, it's how the music director knows when to add in a few extra bars to give you a second to breathe. Those who have even the smallest amount of empathy know what it feels like to have the weight of the world on your shoulders. Even for a second, it can be too much... let alone 11 months and counting.

(Acknowledging journal.)

By the time I got done writing this chapter of my story - coronavirus vaccines started being distributed, but over 300,000 people had died. The end was in sight for those of us that had made it, but for others it came too late.

Young. Old. People who had plans. People who had lives left to live.
Their stories stopped short.