

Covid Cohab

a play by
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CHARACTERS

COURTNEY -- Late 20s to 40s.

CHARLIE -- Late 20s to 40s

HBO ANNOUNCER (voice only) -- You know what they sound like.

MALE TV NEWS ANCR (voice only) -- Local TV news -- again, you know.

FEMALE TV NEW ANCR (voice only) -- Local TV news -- again, you know.

[NOTE: Actors of any ethnicity can play any of these parts. Courtney and Charlie are written as one male and one female, but really could be any gender-identification or sexual orientation.]

[NOTE: This is a very short play made up of very short scenes. It needs to play fast. The blackouts between scenes should only be a few seconds. So, no set or costume changes. It should be played with just three or four chairs. Props should be minimal with the majority being mimed by the actors.]

SCENE 1.

[COURTNEY, late 20s to 40s, is alone in the living room of a small apartment. She pops the cork on a bottle of champagne and pours out a flute. She is feeling celebratory. She sits back in a chair, feet up. Makes an air toast.]

COURTNEY

For better and for worse.

[Thinks, re-considers.]

To a new life. Freedom.

[She pulls a framed wedding picture out of a drawer and removes the photo. Ceremoniously, she either burns it or tears it into tiny pieces (director's choice). Then she sits back again to luxuriate in her new singleness. A slight moment of relaxation before she hears keys in the door. It opens. CHARLIE, late 20s to 40s, steps inside with two or more suitcases, briefcase, backpack, and more.]

COURTNEY

What are you doing?

[He shrugs, closes the door.]

What the hell do you think you're doing?

CHARLIE

I don't know. What's it look like?

COURTNEY

You can't.

CHARLIE

Not my choice, Courtney.

COURTNEY

You can't be here.

[He sheepishly shrugs.]

We agreed. Everything is settled.

CHARLIE

Yeah, well, now it's unsettled.

COURTNEY

You're supposed to be at Kevin's.

CHARLIE

Kevin suddenly remembered his mom has an immune system.

COURTNEY

Then go to a goddamn hotel.

CHARLIE
They're all shut down.

COURTNEY
Oh my God! -- what about the papers!

CHARLIE
Papers? What? Papers?

COURTNEY
The freaking papers! You're getting served at Kevin's address.

CHARLIE
I think the cops have bigger problems than serving --

COURTNEY
Well, you can't move back.

CHARLIE
You think I want to?

COURTNEY
You can't!

CHARLIE
Didn't you hear the Governor? We're in a lockdown. We are locked . . . down.

COURTNEY
You gotta find some place to go.

CHARLIE
What about your sister's?
[She stares at him.]
I mean, why don't you go to your --

COURTNEY
We agreed. I stay, you go.

CHARLIE
Circumstances have changed.

COURTNEY
Not the most important one.

CHARLIE
Hey, I don't want to be here. There's no where else to go.

COURTNEY
You always wanted to see Italy . . .

CHARLIE

Whoah. That is just too dark. Even for you.

COURTNEY

Yeah, well, I'm feeling pretty damn dark right about now.

CHARLIE

Remember, I'm the one who volunteered to leave.

COURTNEY

So leave.

CHARLIE

You're the one who volunteered to fuck your co-worker.

COURTNEY

You're an asshole.

[A pause.]

You can't stay.

CHARLIE

Courtney, I got no where else to go!

COURTNEY

You -- ! Just -- ! You are not staying!

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE.]

SCENE 2.

[CHARLIE's on the couch with the TV remote. COURTNEY's in a chair turned away, headphones on, working on her laptop. A little time has passed.]

CHARLIE

So, how much toilet paper do we have?

[No answer.]

Courtney? How much --

COURTNEY

I thought I had enough. For me.

CHARLIE

Well, you can't know that for sure, can you? Not anymore?

[She gives him a death stare.]

COURTNEY

Why didn't you get your own apartment?

CHARLIE

I was. Kevin's was just a stop-gap. So I could take my time.

[Trying to lighten the mood:]

Hey, you want to watch something? Binge? That's what everybody's doing to get through --

COURTNEY

Watch whatever you want. I'm trying to work. Just keep it down.

[He clicks the remote: the theme to "Game of Thrones".]

COURTNEY

No, no, no! Not Game of Thrones!

CHARLIE

Come on, you loved Game of Thrones -- you said wanted to watch it again.

COURTNEY

That was before I realized what a misogynistic, rapey, adolescent, torture-fantasy it was.

CHARLIE

I thought that's what you liked about it.

COURTNEY

Not funny. There's a million shows on.

CHARLIE

What do you wanna watch?

COURTNEY

I'm workng.

CHARLIE

Oh, wait. Here we go.

HBO ANNOUNCER (voice only)

And now, the HBO feature presentation . . . "Contagion".

[He instantly looks hypnotized by the TV. She looks and is hypnotized, too. She slowly moves closer for a better look.]

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE.]

SCENE 3.

[COURTNEY is on the couch, blankly staring at the TV. CHARLIE is working on his laptop. After a moment, he coughs. She glares at him. He coughs a little more.]

COURTNEY

Jesus, cover your goddamn mouth.

CHARLIE

Oh, right. Sorry.

COURTNEY

I swear, if you give me the virus, I will literally kill you.

CHARLIE

Don't worry. We're young. Strong. We're basically immune.

MALE TV ANCR (voice only)

More reports are coming out about Covid-19 striking younger people.

CHARLIE

Yeah, with compromised systems.

FEMALE TV ANCR (voice only)

Including young, strong, healthy young people.

[COURTNEY has a spray can of Lysol and starts spraying CHARLIE, who jumps up to get away.]

CHARLIE

Hey! What the hell?!

COURTNEY

Yeah, what the hell, indeed.

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE.]

SCENE 4.

[Both are on the couch, blankly watching TV.]

HBO ANNOUNCER (voice only)

And now, the HBO feature presentation . . . "Outbreak".

[They both lean in, mesmerized.]

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE]

SCENE 5.

[A little time has passed. COURTNEY and CHARLIE are on separate conference calls, each wears a headset. Their laptops are on TV trays, faced away from each other. Each one-sided conversation goes back and forth. They each find it harder to hear and have to get louder. Soon, they're basically shouting into their headsets at the same time.]

COURTNEY

Hello? Courtney's here.

CHARLIE

Is everybody on the call?

COURTNEY

It is weird, working from home.

CHARLIE

Bill, you work remotely all the time.

COURTNEY

Well, let's get to the brief. Does everybody have it in front of them?

CHARLIE

So, Bill, if nothing's changed for you, why do you say you won't make your numbers this quarter?

COURTNEY

Xternity Cable's social media campaign, detailing how Xternity is helping their customers during this worldwide pandemic.

CHARLIE

[Over his shoulder to COURTNEY.]

You don't have to say "worldwide".

COURTNEY

[To CHARLIE.]

Shhh . . . I'm on a call.

CHARLIE

[To COURTNEY.]

"Pandemic" means it's "worldwide".

[She flips him off, sternly.]

COURTNEY

We want to say Xternity cares, that we're here to help . . .

CHARLIE

Nothing's changed for you, dude.

COURTNEY

Hah, no, Beth, you really think Xternity Cable would suspend monthly payments? Yeah, fat chance in hell.

CHARLIE

So what if your customers aren't doing business? You are.

BOTH (Courtney & Charlie)

Could you repeat that? It's a little hard to hear in here.

COURTNEY

No, Xternity is only saying they're going to help. They're not really going to help.

CHARLIE

As long as you've got phone numbers, you can make calls.

COURTNEY

I don't know. By providing quality entertainment to take their minds off the pandemic?

CHARLIE

I don't know. Because once this is over, they'll be ahead of everybody else?

BOTH

[To each other.]

Hey, can you please keep it down over there?

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE.]

SCENE 6:

[COURTNEY is in a deep conversation on the phone.
CHARLIE, on the other side of the room, listens.]

COURTNEY (on phone)

I'm coming home -- right now . . . It's only 4 hours . . . Hell, I've got to see Nanaw . . . Mom! Please, if she's already got the virus, then I can't give it to her . . . You're sure? . . . You're sure she feels okay? . . . Well, hell, we're all quarantined now, aren't we? . . . Let me know if there's any changes . . . I love you, too.

CHARLIE

Nanaw?

[She nods, somewhat teary. He moves hesitatingly to her.]

But the symptoms are just light?

COURTNEY

[Shakes her head no. Tears really start.]

For now! But she's got it, Charlie! The virus. My Nanaw is sick!

[CHARLIE tries to hug her. She pushes him away.]

Get away from me.

CHARLIE

Courtney! I'm sorry. I love Nanaw, too.

COURTNEY

[Stares at him.]

No! You don't get to love her anymore.

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE]

SCENE 7.

[CHARLIE is laying on the couch, flipping through channels. COURTNEY comes in the front door, breathing hard. She's been jogging. Sniffing, a bit of a cough.]

CHARLIE

I can't believe you go out jogging. And without a mask.

COURTNEY

Running. And they said it's safe. Just maintain the six feet.

CHARLIE

Sounds like you caught it.

COURTNEY

I always do this after a run. You know that.

CHARLIE

Well, just stay clear of me. Besides, you always stink after jogging!

[She's pissed, jumps on top of him on the couch and breathes in his face.]

Aggh! Get off of me!

[Pushes her off; jumps up.]

I can't believe you did that! You're a psycho! You're -- just stay away from me.

COURTNEY

Stay away from you? Dammit, Charlie, that was my plan! To stay as far away from you as --

[Her phone rings. She sees who's calling.]

Oh, shit. Oh, shit.

[Takes a breath, answers it.]

Hi, Mom.

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE.]

SCENE 8.

[COURTNEY and CHARLIE sit apart on the couch, looking a little haggard. Time has passed. Quarantine is taking its toll. The apartment is littered with dishes and fast food containers. They are staring blankly at the TV. They react to what we hear from the TV.]

FEMALE TV ANCR (voice only)

Here's something to help us all get through Quarantine 2020.

MALE TV ANCR (voice only)

The New York City Health Department has issued a helpful and healthful new report on living with the coronavirus.

FEMALE TV ANCR (voice only)

"Sex and Coronavirus Disease 2019" answers questions like, "But can you have sex?" and offers "tips for how to enjoy sex and avoid spreading COVID-19."

[COURTNEY and CHARLIE show interest, try to hid it.]

MALE TV ANCR (voice only)

Something we're all interested in, right, Maureen? Helpful tips include: "You are your safest sex partner."

[C&C both nod: "That's a given."]

FEMALE TV ANCR (voice only)

According to the report: "Masturbation will not spread COVID-19" -- Gavin -- "especially if you wash your hands before and after."

[C&C again both nod: "That's a given."]

MALE TV ANCR (voice only)

"As well as any sex toys."

[C&C look around: "Who? Me?"]

FEMALE TV ANCR (voice only)

"The next safest partner is someone you live with."

[C&C: disturbing, though potentially good, news.]

MALE TV ANCR (voice only)

"Having close contact -- including sex -- with the person sitting next to you is recommended over outside play."

[C&C: disturbing . . . arousing? They edge closer to each other?]

FEMALE TV ANCR (voice only)

"Kissing can easily pass COVID-19. Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of contacts. So, Gavin, no long, hard, deep, hot, passionate kissing."

COURTNEY

[Jumps up with remote. Clicks off TV.]

Okay. Nothing we need to hear.

CHARLIE

Yes, thank you. Unnecessary information, I think.

COURTNEY

Well, I suppose it was helpful -- up to a point.

CHARLIE

Right. I mean kids could be watching. There's no school, for Christ's sake.

COURTNEY

You know, it makes sense. Keep sex contained among people already exposed to each other.

CHARLIE

Of course.

COURTNEY

For some people, that could be a viable option.

CHARLIE

Definitely, there are people that would work for.

COURTNEY

You know what's ironic? The only thing we really had going for us was sex.

CHARLIE

The only thing?! Yeah, okay, you're right.

COURTNEY

And yet, here we are. Locked-down . . . just the two of us.

CHARLIE

With the NYC Health Department telling us we should -- ya-know -- each other.

COURTNEY

But, we just can't do that.

CHARLIE

I know. We just . . . can't.

[Both look up (and straight ahead)]

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE]

SCENE 9.

[COURTNEY is lying on the couch, staring blankly at the TV. The door opens and CHARLIE enters quickly, clutching a 4-pack of toilet paper. He is disheveled.]

CHARLIE

It's a madhouse out there. Ya' hear me -- a madhouse!

COURTNEY

You get the TP?

CHARLIE

I had to fight off three other maniacs. This is the last in town.

COURTNEY

That's all you got? Christ, we need way more than that!

CHARLIE

Did you hear what I said? The world's gone crazy.

COURTNEY

Did you buy a gun?

CHARLIE

No, of course, I didn't buy a gun!

COURTNEY

Not that we need one. It's just that --

CHARLIE

Right. It's just, you know, in case.

COURTNEY

I was only kidding, you know. I would never want a gun in here.

CHARLIE

I'm so glad to hear you say that. I hate guns. And all the gun places are closed.

[He collapses on the couch. Both stare blankly at the TV.]

HBO ANNOUNCER (voice only)

And now, the HBO feature presentation . . . "World War Z".

[They move slowly toward each other, put their arms around each other, their eyes still glued on the TV.]

SCENE 10.

[COURTNEY on the phone. CHARLIE stands a few feet away, waiting for news.]

COURTNEY

Mom? Just say it . . . Shit!

CHARLIE

Shit? Is she . . . ?

COURTNEY

[To CHARLIE:]

ICU! She's in the ICU.

[Back to phone:]

Well, when can she get one? . . . The respirator, Mom! When will she -- ?!

COURTNEY (continued)

What do you mean? If she needs it -- . . . No, Mom, wait. Mom!

[Mom's hung up. COURTNEY speaks, in shock:]

She needs a -- they don't have any fucking respirators. They don't have -- !

[Goes to CHARLIE who wraps her up in a hug.]

Charlie, how can they not have any goddamn . . . ?

[After a full hug, she slowly pulls away.]

Well, shit, I'm going. I've got to go.

CHARLIE

Home? You're going -- ?

COURTNEY

I've got to be there. I'm going right now.

CHARLIE

Courtney, you can't.

COURTNEY

Hell, yes I can.

CHARLIE

You can't do anything for her. You can't get near her. Or your parents.

COURTNEY

I'll wear a mask, gloves. I'll stand outside their house. In the goddamn street if I have to! Charlie, I have to go there!

[Stop. Looks at him.]

You understand that, right?

CHARLIE

Yeah, sure, I guess if you have to.

[She moves on, to get ready.]

You gotta do what you gotta do.

COURTNEY

[She stops.]

Is that it?

CHARLIE

What?

COURTNEY

You're not going to come with me, are you?

CHARLIE

Well, no. I don't think it's the smart thing to do.

COURTNEY

I thought you'd -- . I could use your help. I could really use --

CHARLIE

I don't think you should go.

COURTNEY

You said you loved Nanaw!

CHARLIE

Yeah, but . . . there's nothing you can . . .

[She just stares at him.]

Hey, it's not like you and I are . . . you know. Anymore.

COURTNEY

[Stares at him for a few moments.]

Right. Yeah. That makes sense. Just, uh, typical.

[She exits to pack a bag.]

It's not like we're people. Anymore.

CHARLIE

Courtney.

[CHARLIE sits back, second-guessing his decision.

Picks up the remote and clicks.]

HBO ANNOUNCER (voice only)

And now, the HBO premiere presentation . . . "Marriage Story".

[CHARLIE stares blankly at the TV.]

CHARLIE

Fucking HBO.

[BLACK OUT - END OF SCENE]

[END OF PLAY.]