

TO ISOLATE, OR NOT TO ISOLATE

A ten-minute play by Keith Watson

CAST:

JEREMY: a junior at Louisiana Tech

GEORGE: another junior at Louisiana Tech

COVID: a very popular virus

At rise:

Jeremy is in his apartment sitting on his bed. He is holding his head in his hands. His cell phone rings. He reluctantly picks his head up and places the phone to his ear.

JEREMY:

(in a flat tone)

Hello?

George is beside the main set sitting in his parked car with a single spotlight.

GEORGE:

(in his usual upbeat tone)

Hey man! Did you get your results back yet?

JEREMY:

(his voice perking up a bit)

Yeah, I just got back from the clinic. Thankfully I'm negative.

GEORGE:

(punching his steering wheel with excitement)

Awesome! Now you can still come to Rick's thing this weekend. Jeremy gets up and stares out of his bedroom window.

JEREMY:

Well, the nurse said I still have to quarantine until next Tuesday since I was exposed to my cousin over break.

GEORGE:

That's what they have to tell everybody. I swear it's all just a government hoax to control us.

JEREMY:

(watching a group of friends wearing face masks walking the sidewalk)
Yeah, it's just...I don't want people to be avoiding me if I go.

GEORGE:

Dude, literally no one cares! You know that, right? Most people have either had it or have been exposed, so they have that antibody immunity I've heard about.

JEREMY:

Yeah, I guess. It's just—

COVID:

(emerging in Jeremy's room from a puff of smoke)

Just go to the party! Live a little!

Jeremy wheels around to see the man now standing in his bedroom.

JEREMY:

(to George)

Uhhh, something just came up. I'll call you later.

GEORGE:

Okay, just let me know about the par-

Jeremy hangs up and puts his phone away.

COVID is dressed in a red suit, sunglasses and spiky green hair. He is inspecting JEREMY's room. He senselessly flips through the pages of a textbook open on the desk.

JEREMY:

(to Covid, in shock)

Who are you? How did you get here?

COVID:

(turning towards Jeremy and adjusting his jacket fit)

Well, I don't get that very often. You watch the news, kid? I'm pretty famous nowadays.

JEREMY:

(sarcastically)

I'm sorry. I guess I missed last night's segment on the famous guy who randomly appears in people's houses.

COVID:

(unbothered)

It's alright. I'm in most people's houses, but not all are so fortunate to actually meet me like this. Name's Coronavirus Disease. My friends call me Covid.

His mouth forms a cheesy grin, and he extends his hand in a way a king might to a loyal subject. Jeremy takes a step back.

JEREMY:

(in shock)

Woah! How is this happening?(He tenses up and looks at the outstretched hand with contempt.) You suck! Do you know how much you've ruined in this past year?!

COVID:

(retracting his hand)

What do you mean? It's been a great year. I got out there and traveled the world. Also, I've never been more popular! Covid makes a wide gesture of grandeur with his hands.

JEREMY:

Well, I'm glad you've been having a great time, but it's been really crappy for everyone else.

COVID:

(sticking his hands in his pockets and leaning forward) Boo hoo! Your ancestors dealt with much worse. My numbers aren't near as good as the Bubonic Plague; although, I'm sure he is jealous of how my fame has spread further across the globe.

JEREMY:

(rolling his eyes)

Whatever. This pandemic still sucks, and now I have to worry about going out because I was exposed to someone who tested positive.

COVID:

Oh yeah! Your cousin, Jerry. He's a great guy and a very gracious host. He has some extra room to explore after eating all that holiday food.

He pats his stomach.

JEREMY:

Well, I'm sure he hasn't had a chance to work it off because he's felt so bad since you "moved in."

COVID:

(dismissing JEREMY with a swish of his hand)

Ah. I've been easy on him. Just a headache, maybe a little fever. He'll be fine in a few days.

JEREMY:

Alright. Well now I'm supposed to quarantine, so I don't potentially spread your "fame."

COVID:

Don't let me stop you from going out! I'm great at socializing. I'm practically all anyone talks about these days.

JEREMY:

(glancing out the window)

I was really looking forward to Rick's party this weekend, but I'm not sure anymore.

COVID:

(seating himself at the desk)

What's the problem? He doesn't allow potential plus ones?

JEREMY:

I don't want people to avoid me like I'm sick.

COVID:

Well, you tested negative, right? Who's gonna care?

JEREMY:

(rolling his eyes and turning back towards Covid)

Well, if I haven't been graced with your presence, then why was I told I still have to quarantine?

COVID:

Ever heard of being fashionably late? Sometimes I like to make my entrance a little while after you've been exposed.

JEREMY:

(pacing in front of the window)

Well, I don't want to be the reason someone gets sick.

COVID:

Do you actually think anyone going is worried about getting me? George didn't seem to think they would.

JEREMY:

No, most of them have already been exposed or even had it. They had pretty mild symptoms and enjoyed the time off from work and class.

COVID:

Exactly! They seem to be a bright crowd. I'm not so bad when you actually think about it. I can help you play a little hooky from work or uncomfortable family events and, let's be honest, I doubt some of you would have passed those courses had they not been online.

JEREMY:

Okay, sure. There have been some small benefits to quarantine, but they definitely do not outweigh the bad. I know a lot of people who lost their jobs because of you, and they are struggling to even get by. Also, a lot of others have really struggled with isolation and the feeling that they're all alone in this time of hardship.

COVID:

Well you can't be as successful as I am without breaking a few eggs, kid.

JEREMY:

Maybe I'll just wear my mask so I don't breathe on anyone to be safe.

COVID:

Well that sounds like a good compromise! Then you can just take it off for a quick drink or a bite to eat. And maybe, if no one

else is wearing one, you can just take it off when you stop worrying so much.

JEREMY:

That's how it's normally been. I just wear one at first to see if everyone is cool or in case we take a picture.

COVID:

Yes, of course! I personally never wear one because no one can ever hear me talking.

JEREMY:

Yeah, that does suck. Especially when you're trying to understand—
(He straightens his posture.)
But this time will be different. I'll definitely try to keep it on the whole time.

COVID:

If you say so. I don't get what you're still worried about though.

JEREMY:

Well what if I pass it to someone who passes it to someone at risk?
I know a lot of people who go home pretty frequently to see their parents.

COVID:

Hey, I don't know what you're implying, but I'm a stand up guy. Many of my contacts have no problem bringing me home to meet their folks.

JEREMY:

Well you're a little more difficult on older people.
What if they get really sick?

COVID:

(in a hushed tone)

I didn't want to have to bring this up, but my numbers aren't exactly where I want them to be. Many times I only weaken people's defenses for some other vulture disease to seal the deal, but thankfully I'm still the one getting all the buzz.

JEREMY:

I'm not sure I'm comfortable taking that gamble. Some people go home and see their grandparents. That could be really dangerous.

COVID:

(holding his hands up towards Jeremy)

Whoa there. You're going through all these hypotheticals, but it's not your fault if someone you possibly infect possibly infects another person. Isn't it their problem then?

JEREMY:

No! Well kinda. I don't know. I guess I can't control what they do, but I can control my own actions.

COVID:

(crossing his arms and leaning back in the chair)

Well I hate to say it, Jeremy, but I will still probably make it to that party whether you go or not. I've pretty much made it on every V.I.P. list this year.

JEREMY:

That may be true, but it's a step in the right direction. If we want things to return to normal, then it will take a lot more people making choices like this to stop the spreading.

COVID:

(with a big huff)

You still think that I am just a phase?(sitting up, with a raised voice)I'm not going anywhere! The spotlight is on me, and I am far too popular to be certain called by some loser too scared to go to a little party.

JEREMY:

(standing still, directly facing Covid)

Well this "loser" is sick of dealing with you. I'm not saying things will completely go back the way they were before, but maybe enough so we can stop living in your shadow. It's going to take a lot of "losers" taking similar precautions, but I know it can be done.

COVID:

(settling back in the chair)

Things seem fine to me! Just relax a little, kid.

JEREMY:

(with an exasperated, but passionate tone)

You still don't get it! I'm tired of the isolation. I miss seeing people's smiles, now hidden behind a mask. I miss seeing the business of campus, full of energy and hope for the future. I wan- I need to get back to that, and I'm willing to make a few small sacrifices in hopes of getting there.

Covid stands.

COVID:

Well then. If you're so eager to get rid of me, I think I'll take my leave.

JEREMY:

I think that would be best.

COVID:

(looking at the ground, adjusting his jacket fit once more) Well, I have millions of super fun parties to go to anyway. Hopefully I'll get a chance to converse with lots of the attendees. Sayonara, Jeremy. I'm sure I'll see you around.

Covid gives Jeremy a devilish grin and chuckles. He disappears in the same styled puff of smoke in which he entered. His laugh fades with the clearing vapor.

JEREMY:

(standing tall)

Not if I can help it.

Jeremy dials on his phone and places it to his ear. A spotlight appears on George standing where his car previously was. He answers his phone.

GEORGE:

George here!

JEREMY:

Hey. I won't be at Rick's this weekend.

GEORGE:

(his upbeat tone falls slightly)

Aw, man. Are you sure? It won't be as much fun without you there.

JEREMY:

(confidently)

Yeah, I'm sure. I'm going to take things more seriously, like with the quarantine and stuff. I'm ready for the spotlight to fade on COVID, and I don't feel like I've been doing a good job to make that happen.

GEORGE:

Oh, I understand. Well since you aren't coming, I probably won't even stay that long. And you know what? Maybe I could wear my mask so I won't have to smell Dillon's horrible beer breath when he gets too close.

They share a laugh.

JEREMY:

That sounds like a good plan. You wanna grab lunch Tuesday or something?

GEORGE:

Yeah! That sounds good. I'll see you then.

JEREMY:

Alright, awesome. Stay safe, and I'll talk to you later.

GEORGE:

Will do. Bye.

Dial tone. Black out. End of play.