CAN I HOLD YOU?

An Aromantic Comedy
Cast of Characters:

Alma – female-identifying, late 20s, a queer asexual human looking for romance
Finn – nonbinary, late 20s, a love interest who struggles to understand Alma’s sexuality
Sammie – nonbinary, late 30s, of color, asexual roommate and best friend to Alma
Phoebe – female-identifying, early 30s, a partner who wants to make it work with Alma
James – male-identifying, early 60s, a bureaucrat from Blue Cross Blue Shield

Setting:

Alma and Sammie’s apartment and environs in Five Points, Atlanta. And the Haven of the Human Amoeba.

Time:

The present.
Scene 1

The sidewalk outside an apartment building. Night. Finn and Alma enter, walking silently side by side. Alma shivers a bit. Finn presses up against Alma to keep her warm. Alma indicates the building as her own.

FINN

So this is your place?

ALMA

Here we are. I had a really good night.

FINN

Me too.

ALMA

We’ve gotta go back to that place sometime. Best dumplings in Atlanta.

FINN

It was too crowded though. Too many yuppies. It’s much better here. Just us.

ALMA

Yes. Just us.

(Finn leans in for a kiss. Alma is surprised but doesn’t refuse. When it’s done, Alma stays in close to Finn.)

ALMA

In the future, can you, like, ask before you do that?

FINN

What?

ALMA

Before you go in for the smooch. If you don’t, you’re not getting my consent, so it’s kind of like—

FINN

Geez. It was just a kiss.

ALMA

Yeah, no problem.

(Finn goes back to kissing Alma then stops
partway through.)

FINN
You’re funny.

ALMA
Am I? You didn’t ask that time either.

FINN
Lighten up. You’re so tense.

ALMA
How did you know I wanted to kiss you?

FINN
You did want to kiss me, right?

ALMA
Maybe. I don’t know. I didn’t have time to think.

FINN
You shouldn’t have to think. You said you had a good evening. We were right outside your apartment. I just thought it was natural. We’d make out, maybe head upstairs.

ALMA
I said, “I had a good evening.” I didn’t say, “I had a good evening let’s fuck.” Maybe I was thinking, “I had a good evening. Now I’m tired and I’m going to go upstairs alone and read a book or have a marathon of Game of Thrones or get wine drunk with no pants on or whatever I do on a Saturday night.” Or do that with you.

FINN
Is that what you want to do? Leave me here so you can watch Game of Thrones?

ALMA
No. I want to make out and then maybe . . . something else.

FINN
Then why are you making such a fuss? You said you wanted to show me your apartment. We both know what that means.

ALMA
I want you to ask me first. Is that too much to ask?

FINN
We were having a really good moment and then you had to ruin it.

ALMA
I’m not being unreasonable.

FINN
This isn’t how people do it in the movies.

ALMA
Fuck the movies. The movies just show straight people anyway.

FINN
Should I just leave?

ALMA
No no no, Finn. I want you here. Okay okay okay let’s just rewind to the start and try it again and this time you ask me before going in for the kiss. Wait. Go over there. You were standing over there. Okay good. So let’s take it from your first line, “So this is your place?”

FINN
So this is your place?

ALMA
Yup. I had a really good night.

FINN
Me too. Do you want to kiss?

ALMA
Dear lord that was the most robotic come-on I have ever heard.

FINN
Dammit, Alma.

ALMA
(imitating a robot)
Do you want to press your lips against mine?

FINN
I told you it would be awkward. And then I did it and it was awkward.

ALMA
It doesn’t have to be.

FINN

No one does this. People just kiss.

ALMA

No one does this because of a patriarchal culture of—

FINN

Just because you took some gender studies course in college doesn’t mean you have to out-feminist everybody.

ALMA

Ask me again but with more feeling this time. Ask me romantic. Ask me sexy.

FINN

I’m not gonna ask you.

ALMA

Let’s go back to the beginning—

FINN

I’m not in the mood any more.

ALMA

Come on.

FINN

No.

ALMA

Really?

(Finn shakes their head.)

What if I ask you?

(Alma grabs Finn and goes in for a kiss. Finn shoves her away.)

FINN

What are you doing?

ALMA

You wanted to.

FINN
Not anymore. You act like I’m some sort of a slut and now you’re all over me! I am a queer, liberated-fucking-human being.

ALMA

Good, but--

FINN

The last thing I need is for you to come in and blame me for that. I don’t have time for somebody who’s still going through some repressed shit.

ALMA

I’m not repressed, I’m just—Don’t leave.

(Sammie, Alma’s roommate, enters from the door of the apartment. They watch the scene in front of them and debate whether to try to squeeze past.)

I don’t want another night alone in this crummy—

FINN

You act all independent and now you’re all “please, please, I”—

ALMA

So I’m just going to go upstairs on my own and spend a boring night with my roommate and you’re going to take the train alone and go back to whatever hovel you live in and spend the rest of the evening by yourself pouting.

FINN

Yeah. Maybe I will.

ALMA

Finn.

SAMMIE

(Squeezing between the two of them.)

Hi. Sorry for interrupting. Actually, I’m not sorry. You good, Alma?

ALMA

Yeah, I’m fine.

SAMMIE

I’ll be at the store if you need me.
(Sammie steps away and motions to Alma to text them to let them know if she’s all right.)

Sorry. That was my roommate.

FINN
Maybe you two could watch Game of Thrones together. Or do whatever you do rather than kiss me.

ALMA
I want more than that tonight. Please stay.

(Sammie exits.)

FINN
I said no. If you care so much about consent then no means no, asshole. You think I need you that badly? I’d rather spend the night with Netflix than with a pretentious prick like you.

ALMA
Fine. I’ll give you some time to cool off. When will I see you again?

FINN
You won’t.

ALMA
Text me if you change your—

(Finn exits. Alma sighs.)

Shit.
Scene 2

Transition to Alma and Sammie’s living room. A slow, depressing violin version of the Game of Thrones theme plays. Perhaps Alma moves heavy set pieces. Then she crashes on the couch. She plants her face on the coffee table. Sammie unlocks the door as quietly as they can, cracks the door open, and tensely peaks their head in. They see Alma and take her in. They put down their shopping bag.

Sammie
Hi, hooligan.

Alma
Hi.

Sammie
Can I give you a hug?

(Alma nods. They do.)

Alma
This keeps happening to me.

Sammie
How did you tell them?

Alma
Hmm?

Sammie
Your date. How did you tell them you’re not interested in sex?

Alma
No. It wasn’t about that.

Sammie
You didn’t tell them?

(Alma lets go of the hug)

This was your fourth date. The rule of thumb is you have to tell them by the third date, otherwise they’re gonna draw the wrong conclusions. And that seems like what happened—

Alma
When I tell people, they freak out. They act like they’re fine with it, then they leave after a week.

Sammie
Maybe you’re not confident enough.

ALMA
You of all people shouldn’t be giving me dating advice.

SAMMIE
I read the forums.

ALMA
The last time you went on a date was high school.

SAMMIE
I have an outside eye.

ALMA
It took you a month to realize your girlfriend wanted to kiss you at the movies. You just thought she was turning to you for popcorn.

SAMMIE
Oh, I know this game! Let’s pick on the aromantic person and make them feel like a freak.

ALMA
I wasn’t calling you a freak. You don’t feel a romantic spark for people and I do. But apparently I suck at dating. So maybe we’re both freaks.

SAMMIE
And that’s why we’re so good for each other. You’ll tell them next time, though?

ALMA
There isn’t gonna be a next time.

SAMMIE
Oh.

(The news sinks in. Sammie goes to their grocery bag, pulls out a bar of chocolate, and holds it out to Alma. Alma looks at Sammie.)

SAMMIE
It’s your favorite—dark chocolate with the sea salt.

ALMA
(taking the chocolate)
What did I do to deserve you?

SAMMIE
Alma, my dear. Nobody deserves me.

(Alma eats some chocolate but still looks miserable.)
I may have lost my job today.

(Alma looks at Sammie.)
We had the diversity training I’d been talking about.

ALMA
The one you wanted to host.

SAMMIE
Well, no. I didn’t want to do it myself. But Frank approached me, the only person of color in the Atlanta office—besides the secretaries—and basically commanded me to set it up. He said, “Goldman Sachs is a progressive company.” Anyway, I googled outside services that would do it, but they were all, like, “let’s practice tolerance,” as if queer people and people of color and disabled folks are a problem that must be tolerated. I am not a problem I am a fucking gift. So, whatever, I agreed to run the training myself. And oh my god it was beautiful. Frank had Cathi introduce me, and she gets my pronouns wrong. Which was fun.

ALMA
Great.

SAMMIE
And then I start my lesson plan with Audre Lorde—“The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” and talk about how “inclusion” is a really bad mantra, like, if you include people in a messed up structure, that doesn’t work. You gotta change the system, bulldoze the house. And then Ed asked if I was calling him a master. Like, if he was the master whose house I’m bulldoizing. Mhmm. And people looked uncomfortable. Anyway, I was feeling sore about being misgendered so I was like, yes, all of y’all masters, and I’m your token black, nonbinary consultant so you can feel like you’re being progressive and not destroying the world.

ALMA
Black, nonbinary, asexual consultant.

SAMMIE
Nobody has a token asexual . . . yet. Well, at this point I’m clearly upset, and then everyone comes back at me like, “we really value having a diverse person like you at our firm.” And I’m like, “a person can’t be diverse. A group is diverse. A person is a person.” And then they’re like, “Oh, we know you’re a person. We don’t see you as black. We see you as Sammie.” And then I said, “I can be black and a person and Sammie all at once, and those don’t need to cancel out each other. And if you don’t see color, then why was I the only one approached about this stupid ass diversity training and none of y’all had to put in any damn work.” And that seemed like a good stopping point, so I say training’s over and walk out. So all in all it was a great success.

ALMA
Amazing! Bulldoze that bullshit.

(Sammie makes bulldozing noises, slowly losing energy and collapsing into Alma.)

ALMA
You didn’t really lose your job, though?

SAMMIE
I don’t know. Frank said I should find work that “aligns more with my values.” I couldn’t tell if that was a suggestion or a command.

ALMA
It’s not awful advice.

SAMMIE
Yeah, but I need the health benefits if I want to go to therapy. Or get hormones. Or see any doctor who respects that I’m trans.

ALMA
I’m just sayin’ I got your back no matter what happens.

SAMMIE
Appreciate that.

(a breath)
Why did you tell what’s-their-face that it’d be awful spending the night with me?

ALMA
Don’t worry about that.
SAMMIE
I’m gonna keep worrying about it whether I want to or not.

ALMA
I was being stupid.

SAMMIE
If you say you got my back, I need to know you got my back.

ALMA
Sometimes I just want to make out with people, you know?

SAMMIE
So you throw me under the bus?

ALMA
When you’re feeling really connected to someone, it’s just nice to have them pull you in and get close to you and just hover there for a second. And then there’s the moment when you feel their lips on yours. And put your hands on the back of their neck. Or slide your tongue over their tongue.

SAMMIE
Mhmm. Let’s just pretend that sounds appealing. You’re not gonna abandon me, are you?

ALMA
No no no. Why would you say that?

SAMMIE
You’re putting a lot of energy into dating.

ALMA
I’m feelin’ the pull.

And?

SAMMIE
I want someone I can come home to and have that romantic mmm with.

ALMA
You can go around and mmm with whomever you want. But that doesn’t mean you need to put all your eggs in one person.
It feels right.

SAMMIE
That’s the heteronormativity talking.

ALMA
I still have your back.

SAMMIE
You’re assimilating. White picket fence and all that.

ALMA
But what if I just know that I want one special person and society has nothing to do with that?

SAMMIE
Then I’ll be watching from the sidelines as your little romantic comedy falls apart.

ALMA
Okay, so I guess we’ll just stay here being roomies forever.

SAMMIE
Doesn’t sound too bad to me.

ALMA
Nnn. I’m gonna keep dating, though. If we live together forever, we’d be like one of those married couples who rips each other apart for fun.

SAMMIE
AKA all married couples.

(Sammie’s phone buzzes.)

SAMMIE
Oh, sorry I should—
(picking up)
Hello?
(pause, then to Alma)
Aww, shit. It’s Goldman.
(into the phone)
Thanks for following up. I think the training went swimmingly.
(Sammie takes the phone to the other room.)
With Sammie gone, Alma eats chocolate and scrolls through her phone. Her phone buzzes. It’s a notification from OkCupid. Alma hesitates and then takes a look. Suddenly, Phoebe jogs by playing the saxophone and wearing running shorts. Alma is puzzled but intrigued. Her eyes follow Phoebe. As if Alma’s scrolling, Phoebe runs by more two more times playing the sax before Alma follows Phoebe out.

Sammie re-enters, shaken.)

Sammie
No no no this isn’t happening. Alma?
Scene 3

(Alma and Phoebe appear. They’re on a date.)

PHOEBE
I like your scarf.

ALMA
Thanks. My roommate made it for me.

PHOEBE
It looks good on you.

ALMA
Aw, you don’t need to say that. So Phoebe, your profile says you like running and playing the saxophone. You must be in great shape.

PHOEBE
Maybe.

ALMA
I’d go five steps and be out of breath.

(She mimes running and playing the saxophone.)

PHOEBE
I don’t do both at the same time.

ALMA
Oh.

PHOEBE
You thought—

ALMA
No. Of course not. I meant separately. They would be difficult separately.

(Alma takes a sip of her drink.)

PHOEBE
I’m not great at the saxophone but it makes me happy. So what are your hobbies other than sending me emojis?

ALMA
I like listening to podcasts, I tap dance, sometimes. And I go foraging.

PHOEBE
With the berries and mushrooms and everything.

ALMA
Exactly. And then you make salads and stuff with what you find in nature. It’s really good.

(Phoebe gives her a look.)
Okay, so I feel stupid, but I actually thought you ran and played saxophone at the same time.

PHOEBE
It was all over your face.

ALMA
I was that obvious?

PHOEBE
I didn’t call you out on it because I thought you might be embarrassed. Not that you should be.

ALMA
Well.

PHOEBE
You have a vivid imagination.

ALMA
I thought it was nice of you to give the other runners musical accompaniment.

PHOEBE
I could have been part of a very fast marching band.

ALMA
Wearing fuzzy hats and short shorts.

PHOEBE
I can’t believe we’re picturing this.

ALMA
This was not where I was expecting our night to go.

PHOEBE
And the night’s just getting started.
ALMA
You know we don’t have to cram this all in one night.

PHOEBE
I know.

ALMA
With OkCupid I never know exactly what script people are following.

PHOEBE
In my book, OkCupid’s just an okay cupid. It’s a’ight.

ALMA
Okay.

PHOEBE
But we can make this what we want it to be.