

CAN I HOLD YOU?

An Aromantic Comedy

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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?

(Sammie 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 bulldozing. 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.

SAMMIE

And?

ALMA

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

SAMMIE

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.

ALMA

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.