

TOGETHER

Cast

Denise, 40ish

Maddie, 20ish

Dad, 60ish

Three male voices (can quadruple cast)

Setting

Kitchen of 4-room apartment

Year 2021

Denise

(pacing) What the hell is taking her so long? I hope to god she didn't stop anywhere else. Starbucks is not that far away. A Starbucks is not that far away from anywhere.

Maddie

(enters from right wearing mask, sets down tray holding three drinks and a newspaper, removes mask) Hey.

Denise

(holds out a bottle of sanitizer) Are you ok? You've been gone an hour.

Maddie

(wipes hands) Oh, the drive-thru took forever.

Denise

The drive-thru always takes forever. I think they get a lot of freeway traffic. They should have separate lines, one for locals and one for out-of-towners.

Maddie

(hands over one cup from tray, takes another and sits at right of table right, opens laptop there) And how do you propose that, show your ID just to get a latte?

Denise

I don't see a problem with that.

Maddie

Of course you don't. (starts typing) I've got a zoom meeting coming up with my professor. He's supposed to be giving us our final grades. I don't want to miss it. Then he'll recommend us for job placement. This is what I've spent the last five years working for.

Denise

Finally! When you moved in here three semesters ago, I didn't think it was a big deal, just to crash in the guest room a couple nights a week. Daddy's gall bladder surgery had gone fine and I only moved in myself temporarily to, you know, take care of him while he recuperated. Then you showed up.

Maddie

I only 'showed up' because my mom moved to Costa Rica with Raoul. And Daddy was kind enough to put me up while I finished my degree.

Denise

Daddy was half out of his mind on percoset when he agreed to have the daughter of his harridan of a second wife move in.

Maddie

If a harridan is what I think it is, you have a lot of nerve. My mother rescued him from a life of misery putting up with the craziness of being married to your mom.

Denise

Don't you talk badly about my sainted mother, god rest her soul.

Maddie

She died?

Denise

No, she's running a floating crap game at her retirement community in Pensacola.

Maddie

You might be joining her when this pandemic thing is over. Daddy's not going to want you here permanently. The only nursing you've done for the last six months is nursing gin and tonics starting at noon every day.

Denise

Thanks for reminding me. What time is it?

Maddie

And you're getting a little long in the tooth to be drifting from one boyfriend to the next. You think guys my age are afraid of commitment? Middle-age divorced guys aren't exactly lining up to settle down.

Denise

I don't need dating advice from a 23-year-old who has barely left the house in twelve months.

Maddie

No one has left their house in twelve months!

(Dad enters from left wearing a bathrobe and an elaborate gas mask. He picks up his Starbucks cup and newspaper from the counter and turns to exit.)

Maddie

Two creams and no sugar, Daddy! Just the way you like it!

(Dad holds it high as if to say thanks and crosses left.)

Denise

I'll be there in a minute to fluff your pillows! There'll be chicken noodle soup for lunch today! And oyster crackers! Your favorite!

(Thumbs up as Dad exits left.)

Maddie

Your mother didn't deserve that man.

Denise

Your mother nearly drove him to his grave.

(computer dings)

Maddie

My zoom meeting is starting. (Denise hovers in front of her.) Do you mind?

Denise

Moi? Of course not. I'll just tidy up a bit.

Maddie

(into laptop screen) Professor Turner, so nice to see you this morning. I hope you have some good news for me.

(Denise works her way upstage to wipe counters with a towel and work her way around to see the laptop screen. She acts flirty once she realizes the professor can see her.)

Professor's Voice

Um, yes, let's see. (rustle of papers) I have your print-out here somewhere. I'm afraid I have to ... Well, who have we here?

Maddie

Pay no attention. That's just my step-sister. My much older step-sister.

Professor's Voice

Does she have a name?

(Denise cranks up the sexiness.)

Maddie

It's Denise ... Professor, about my final grade?

Professor's Voice

Huh?

Maddie

My final? Did I pass? How many job interviews are lined up?

Professor's Voice

Oh, yes. Your scores placed you near the bottom of the class, and ..., and..., I don't think I'll be able to ... um, I ... I seem to have lost my train of thought.

Denise

(closing in to get in front of the screen) Maybe the professor would be able to focus better knowing we could meet for drinks this evening. I know this cozy bistro where they look the other way where social distancing is concerned.

Professor's Voice

Why, yes. That would help. Definitely.

Denise

Now, what were you saying about my sister's grade? I'm sure she passed with flying colors, with a lucrative position becoming available very soon.

Professor's Voice

Wait, here. (papers rustling) As a matter of fact you did quite well, Patty.

Maddie

Maddie.

Professor's Voice

That's correct! Ahem, I can set up an interview for you within the hour. Online, of course. Can't be too careful these days.

Maddie
(stares at Denise) Umm ... of course, ahhh, thanks so much professor. You won't be sorry.

Professor's Voice
No, I don't think I will.

Denise
So, eight o'clock at Luigi's downtown.

Professor's Voice
I'll be there. And good luck with the interview, Betty.

Maddie
Maddie. (closes the laptop, then to Denise) How could you do that to me?

Denise
Do what? Help you get a passing grade on your final?

Maddie
I had a passing grade! You embarrassed me by acting like a fool in front of my professor.

Denise
Sounded to me like you were circling the drain there, and I threw you a lifeline.

Maddie
By coming on to my college professor?

Denise
Don't be so dense. He's been cooped up for way too long, just like the rest of us. And I'm only looking for a little fun. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Besides, he was kind of cute ... from the shoulders up.

Maddie
I don't believe you.

Denise
Come down off your high horse. How's your dating life going? How many guys are swiping right on you? Or is it just one unsolicited dick pic after another?

Maddie
I suppose I could have it worse. I could be a forty-something single woman moving from one failed relationship to another, hoping to catch the last eligible bachelor on the planet.

Denise

Don't you concern yourself with me. I've been doing quite well, financially and otherwise. I only broke the lease on my condo because I knew I'd be taking care of daddy full-time.

Maddie

That's not what I heard. Glenn – was that his name? – Glenn kicked you to the curb for a waaaay younger flight attendant from your own crew. That's what you get for choosing a career where the ultimate goal is to meet some businessman in first-class who's gonna sweep you off your feet and make you a kept woman.

Denise

You have no idea. I made great money. I traveled the world. I met the most interesting people. I didn't waste my youth staring at a computer monitor, gaming and watching YouTube videos, until five minutes before my next school assignment is due.

Maddie

Hey, I do some of my best work at 11:55 at night!

Denise

I bet you do.

Maddie

(angry) That's it!

(Maddie rushes to Denise and grabs her by the shirt, Denise steps back toward the counter and reaches behind her, her hand searches for something - a butter knife. They wrestle with it. Dad enters from left, still clad in robe and mask. The girls freeze. Dad grabs an apple from the counter, polishes it on his lapel while watching the girls, nods and turns to exit.)

Maddie

Are you comfortable, Daddy? Would you like me to turn up the thermostat?

Denise

I'll make you some hot cocoa, Daddy! With little marshmallows, just the way you like it. Would you like that?

(Dad raises a thumb as he exits.)

Maddie

(to Denise) Freeloader.

Denise

(to Maddie) Deadbeat.

(they lower the knife, set it down.)

Maddie

Look, neither of us knows how much longer we're going to be here, so we're going to have to figure out a way to get along.

Denise

Everything was fine when you first got here, always at class or hanging out at school, or with your friends. And I could get some 'me' time in the evening once daddy was out cold, but now, now, you're always, just ... here. Every time I turn around, you're there. Every morning I wake up, you're there. I have a little lunch or watch some tv, and you're there.

Maddie

I get it. Every time I turn around I see your face. Whenever I look up from my computer or my phone, there you are. You leave the bathroom a mess. And you can't pass a mirror without stopping to primp.

Denise

And you hum. All the time. I don't even think you know you're doing it. Wait ... you're humming right now, aren't you?

Maddie

What is it with you anyway? I don't even know what you are. A laid-off flight attendant? Waiting on the settlement from when that anti-masker anti-vaxxer guy decked you? Then you weaseled your way in here to 'nurse' Daddy back to health. And what did you do before that? Cosmetic sales? Real estate? I'm pretty sure you were just a golddigger.

Denise

When did you get so self-important? The last time I saw you, you were a snotty teenager at Daddy's 60th birthday party. Did you even graduate high school? You must have gotten a GED to get into college. And, oh, how many different colleges did you go to? I've seen the tuition bills Daddy pays ... East Dakota State, Central Kentucky A&M, the University of Kalamazoo? And now you're closer to home why? Because the money ran out.

Maddie

(hurt) Look, I try. I truly want to help Daddy. I don't want to be a screw-up. I don't want to be a nuisance. I go out and run errands just to get out of the house. I even bring you coffee.

Denise

(softening) I know. I know. I worry when you go out. I worry about you. And about Daddy, and everything. Jeezus, what's wrong with me?

Maddie
Nothing. Nothing at all. (they hug)

Denise
(still hugging)Umm, when was the last time you washed your hands?

(computer dings)

Maddie
My interview! (steps back, runs hands through hair, straightens shirt) How do I look?

Denise
You look great. Knock 'em dead.

(Maddie sits at table, opens laptop)

Manager's Voice
Ms. Hampton? Hello, I'm Gerald Dunlap, HR Director.

Maddie
Hello, Mr. Dunlap, so nice to meet you.

Denise
(crosses left, to herself) Dunlap. Dunlap. Where do I know that name from? And that voice ... I know that voice.

Manager's Voice
I see here from your transcripts that you've taken a... a... variety of classes.

Maddie
Well, I did change my major.

Manager's Voice
Seven times?

Maddie
Ummm ... you see ...

Manager's Voice
And your employment history is ... non-existent?

Maddie
Well, they've all been under-the-table, so to speak.

Manager's Voice
And these references ...

Denise
(close by, deep in thought, lights up) Bubba?! (races around to see screen over Maddie's shoulder) Bubba Dunlap! Is that you? Oh my gawd! You look great! So you did graduate!
I haven't seen you since you signed my yearbook (puts her hand over her mouth and mumbles a number [25?]) years ago!

Maddie
(is aghast, looks over her shoulder at Denise incredulously) Ummm ... as you can see, Mr. Dunlap, things are a little crowded here at the old Hampton household.

Manager's Voice
Pooh Bear?! Look at you! You still look exactly like you did in school! I was just reminiscing about the old days. Since my divorce – thanks, Covid – I've been getting a little sentimental.

Maddie
Mr. Dunlap, about the job, I can bring so much ...

Denise
Funny, I was just going through some old photos, and I do believe you have gotten even more handsome, Bubba, if that's possible.

Maddie
(shakes her head, incredulous, then decides to take charge of the situation) Mr. Dunlap, my dear sweet sister and you should take advantage of this serendipity and get together. There's a little bistro in town that looks the other way when it comes to social distancing. Say ... 2pm for Mimosas at Luigi's? You two have a lot of catching up to do.

Denise
(shocked at Maddie) Why yes! I can't wait.

Manager's Voice
Ms. Hampton, I like your style - a problem solver who gets results. You're hired! I'll see you Monday, bright and early. And Pooh Bear, come hungry, lunch is on me.

Maddie
(closes the laptop, rises, turns and punches Denise lightly on the shoulder.) That's for horning in on my zoom meeting ... again!

Denise
(punched her back lightly) And that's for ruining my plans for today. I was going to sit around in my pajamas and watch Netflix.

Maddie
(hugs Denise) You wanna get out of here? We need to go shopping.

Denise
All the stores and restaurants are finally open. We have our pick. Just bring your vaccination card..

Maddie
Then mask up! We're off to Walmart . I need to buy some of their finest workwear. Spare no expense!

Denise
And I have not one, but two dates lined up. I suppose I can find a scarf or some costume jewelry. You know, little sister, our ability to accessorize is what separates us from the animals.

Maddie
We're certainly caged like them, big sister. Mask, check. Card, check. Pocket-size sanitizer, check.

Denise
Let's get a little breakfast. I'm buying. You pick the drive-thru!

(They exit right. Daddy enters from left looks around the empty place, grabs a water bottle from the fridge. Clicks on the tabletop radio.)

Radio Newsman/woman

... I repeat, the number of new cases has dropped for the fifteenth consecutive week. The governor confirms that the CDC has found no new variants. The long national nightmare will soon be over.

(Daddy puts back the water bottle and pulls out a beer, cracks it open, raises his mask and has a drink.)

END

