

DINER HOUR

A 10-Minute Play by Grace Cancro

FINAL 6/1/24

CHARACTERS

Will- late 20s, does something in finance (he doesn't even really know what it is), kinda an asshole, wearing something kinda nice, like a finance bro on his off day

Cynthia- 17, member of a doomsday cult, Luna Lovegood vibes, recently became a recruiter for the cult, smiley and overly positive, wearing whatever Mabel thinks she would wear (I trust you completely my dear)

Angie- 30s, waitress, excellent eavesdropper

TIME

Now ish.

PLACE

Anywhere, really.

SCENE 1

A typical 24-hour diner. It's late, almost midnight. WILL is sitting at a table in the diner alone. He has his laptop out and is working on something. There's lots of keyboard clacking so it must be very official. ANGIE wordlessly sets down a cup of coffee in front of him and he takes a sip. Unbeknownst to WILL, CYNTHIA enters. She sits down at his table across from him, quietly twiddling her thumbs, looking around the diner, maybe swinging her legs. WILL is completely oblivious. This continues for a few seconds until ANGIE arrives to take CYNTHIA's order.

ANGIE

Can I get you anything? Water? Coffee?

WILL is still engrossed by his laptop and doesn't look up at ANGIE when he answers. CYNTHIA politely waits for him to finish before speaking. In the middle of CYNTHIA's line, WILL looks up at her. He's too self-engrossed to notice right away. He is hella confused.

WILL

I've got the coffee you just gave me, but thanks.

CYNTHIA

Hmm, I'll take a water please. No ice... Make that 3 ice.
,dddsssKLJSALKADJADSJAKKLJJLJKLJKKLJJLJMKMLJHHHJNMLLNMM,,NM,

ANGIE is visibly confused.

CYNTHIA (cont.)

Cubes.

ANGIE

Uh, got it.

WILL (to CYNTHIA)

Who the hell are you?

CYNTHIA (to WILL)

Cynthia.

ANGIE (to WILL)

You don't know her?

WILL (to ANGIE)

No!

CYNTHIA (to ANGIE)
I'm Cynthia.

ANGIE
(she points to her nametag) Angie.

WILL (to CYNTHIA)
I don't know you!

CYNTHIA
Not yet.

ANGIE
She's Cynthia.

WILL
Can you stay out of this?

ANGIE backs away from the table.

ANGIE
I'll get that water for ya.

CYNTHIA
(completely genuine) I'm just bursting with excitement!

CYNTHIA turns back towards a still bewildered WILL and lays a pamphlet down on the table.

CYNTHIA (cont.)
Now,—

CYNTHIA pauses midsentence waiting for WILL to fill in the blank with his name. He just keeps staring at her. She leans in to say this next part.

CYNTHIA (cont.)
(whispering) this is where you tell me your name.

X
WILL
Um, Will.

CYNTHIA
Lovely name. Now, Will, has it ever occurred to you that the world could very well end tomorrow? Maybe even in—

CYNTHIA checks her watch.

CYNTHIA (cont.)
—oh, a half-hour or so?

WILL
(baffled...to say the least) Excuse me?

CYNTHIA
That any second—

At this moment a perfectly timed bell rings (one of the ones you'd find on a front desk at an office where the secretary hates their job and doesn't want to sit at the desk all day and would rather wait for the bell to ding to interact with people) and a voice says, "Order up!" CYNTHIA also makes a little explosion motion with her hands at the same time the bell rings.

CYNTHIA (cont.)
Everything could catch fire and explode and flood and, you know, all the normal apocalypse stuff, and anyway we could all go—

The bell rings at the perfect time again as CYNTHIA makes another little explosion motion. This time WILL jumps.

CYNTHIA (cont.).
—and everything would be over—

CYNTHIA peeks at the pamphlet on the table to get notes. She reads the next few words from the pamphlet.

CYNTHIA (cont.)
—gone, kaput?

WILL
(laughs) Look, sweetheart—

CYNTHIA
Cynthia.

WILL
Cynthia. I'm in the middle of something for my very important job, which is what most people in the real world spend their time doing instead of unnecessarily bothering other people, so—

CYNTHIA
Hmm, um...

WILL
What...

CYNTHIA
One moment, please.

She keeps flipping. ANGIE walks over with the water.

ANGIE
Water with 3 ice cubes.

CYNTHIA
Thank you, Angie.

ANGIE
Sure thing, hon.

CYNTHIA
Uh...oh! Here it is. *(reads to herself)* has something more important to do, blah blah blah, aha!
(reads from the binder) But are you happy?

WILL
That's a loaded question.
HHHHJJJJKKJLLKJJSLKJLKJJKKJLJLKJLJLKOJLKJLKJJK

CYNTHIA
(still reading from the binder) If you are so busy and fulfilled then why are you sitting in a fill in
bl—, oh in a diner at ti— oops I mean at *(she checks her watch)* 11:34 at night? Shoot I am really
messing this up. I'm sorry, Will, this is my first time.

WILL
(laughing a bit at the ridiculousness of this proposition) What, talking to a stranger at—

CYNTHIA
Yes.

WILL
But you're like—

CYNTHIA
17.

WILL

(short and clipped way of saying this, doesn't finish the words completely) What? How? Who are you?

CYNTHIA

I'm Cynthia. *(directed off-stage)* Excuse me? Angie?

ANGIE enters.

CYNTHIA (cont.)

Can we have two slices of pie please? Whatever kind is your favorite will do.

ANGIE

You got it.

ANGIE begins to exit.

CYNTHIA

I've always wanted to do that!

WILL shakes his head. At this point, he has started to just accept the crazy and the fact that this is the most interesting thing that has happened to him in a long time. Lights go down.

SCENE 2

ANGIE is off-stage again. WILL and CYNTHIA are sitting where they were, except that now CYNTHIA's water is half-gone and there is a half-eaten slice of pie in front of each of them.

WILL

So, so, let me get this straight, you stay in the commune thing—

CYNTHIA

"Happiness Community"

WILL

Yeah whatever. But you stay there until you turn 17? You never get to leave?

CYNTHIA

Well, when Pastor Steve left Mars and landed in Northwest Iowa, he commanded that all followers must stay in our home "Happiness Community" until we're of age. That way we're surrounded by people like us as we're growing and developing and all that without any of the, you know, scary real-world influences. And then of course, we become of age and are sent off to positively influence the minds of others.

WILL

Recruit them, you mean. By going around and telling them the world is gonna end at midnight.
(to himself, he can't believe the conversation he is having right now) Jesus Christ.

CYNTHIA

No, I don't think I do! See, it says it right here in the binder under section 15, second meeting, appendix 4G...oh shoot! I wasn't supposed to tell you that last part yet.

WILL

(half joking) Don't worry, I won't tell anyone.

CYNTHIA

(very relieved) Oh, thank goodness.

WILL

Um, alright. *(pause)* So, this is seriously the first time you've ever been outside in the real world. And you came here. Huh.

CYNTHIA

Oh yes! And I am loving it so far! Especially the pie. *(off stage to ANGIE)* Great choice, Angie!

CYNTHIA (cont.)

Now back to you, Will. *(she flips to a new page in the giant binder)* Are you happy?

WILL

You already asked me that.

CYNTHIA

Oh, uh *(she flips through the binder, a little flustered)* uh...um... Well, um, well are you?

WILL

(starts to lose his cool a little bit) I, I don't know. Is anybody?

CYNTHIA

I am.

WILL

(laughs) Yeah, of course you are.

CYNTHIA

What's that supposed to mean?

NJNJNNKNNN

WILL

You're a kid. You don't know anything about how the world works yet. You just escaped a cult and tried goddamn pie for the first time! You think the world is gonna end in what, 10 minutes or something for christ's sake! Anyone that naïve would be stupid if they weren't happy.

CYNTHIA

(quiet and a bit defeated) "Happiness Community." Cults are very bad. Everyone knows that.

Pause as WILL just looks at her a bit dumbfounded. He looks behind him and makes eye contact with ANGIE who looks the same.

WILL

(not heated yet, just to the point) Look, Cynthia. Happiness isn't real in this world. Maybe it is on whatever planet you came from, but not here. I learned that a long time ago. You know what's real? Money's real. And an apartment is real. And a steady job, no matter how shitty, is real. Whatever you're selling, that's not real. Whoever told you it is was lying to you.

CYNTHIA starts to open her binder to look for an answer but stops midway through. She closes it and pushes it off to the side.

CYNTHIA

I, um, I'm sorry you feel that way, Will.

WILL

Okay. Thanks.

CYNTHIA

I can't imagine being so lonely that I feel that unhappy.

WILL

Who said I was lonely?

CYNTHIA

Well, you're sitting in a diner, alone, at almost midnight. And you never answered my question about why you're here. So, I guess, I—

WILL

I focus better here.

CYNTHIA

But what about your fancy apartment?

WILL

It— Look, I'm not gonna join your "happiness community" so just drop it, okay? You're lucky I'm still talking to you right now.

CYNTHIA

Maybe you're still talking because you're lonely.

WILL

Just drop it!

CYNTHIA

Okay. *(pause)* But what about—

WILL

(he loses it here) Fine! Fine. I'm lonely! You win, Cynthia. I'm so lonely and unhappy that I would rather sit here alone in this crappy diner for hours than be in the apartment I'm paying way too much for. Because being there is just too damn depressing. Is that what you wanted to hear? Congratulations! You did it.

CYNTHIA

Oh, I, um, I—

WILL

You think I wanted to do this with my life? You think I wanted all of this *(he gestures to his laptop and the diner around him)* No! When I was your age I had dreams, I wanted to do something important and "change the world" or whatever it is they tell kids to do. But then I grew up! And I realized that that's not sustainable. And that every fucking person is unhappy and lonely and that's just how the world works, Cynthia! The sooner you find that out, the better.

At this point, CYNTHIA looks close to tears. She's sitting there trying to hide the fact that she feels this way but WILL notices. There's a beat as she looks down at her pie and WILL starts to feel bad. He realizes that it was too much, and he lost it with her because of his own problems, not hers.

WILL

Look, Cynthia, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to— Just trying to, I don't know, I—

CYNTHIA

I think you're wrong Will. I don't think that everyone here is unhappy. I know I'm not.

WILL scoffs a bit at this, but he's losing a bit of his asshole-ness. It's not as snarky as his other scoffs.

CYNTHIA (cont.)

I think that maybe there are a lot of people who are unhappy and lonely and not fulfilled in their lives, just like you, Will. But I think that there's still a way for you to be happy, for everyone. Even if maybe you're not doing what you wanted to do or if you don't like your job or your apartment or your money. It's still possible.

WILL

Come on, that's a nice thought but you don't know anything about the real world.

CYNTHIA

Well, no. Except that I really like pie. But I do know people. And I think, well, I know, that people want to be happy, even if they don't think it's possible anymore. Everyone wants to be happy, everyone craves it. Even you. You can still be happy, Will. Everyone can find a way somehow.

WILL

(he smiles slightly) Maybe you're right.

CYNTHIA checks her watch.

CYNTHIA

(gasps) It's almost time!

CYNTHIA grabs WILL's hands from across the table and holds on tight. WILL holds her hands a little bit too. CYNTHIA squeezes her eyes shut and braces for impact. A few seconds pass. Nothing happens. CYNTHIA peeks one eye open and looks to her left and right. She opens her other eye, lets go of one of WILL's hands, and checks her watch. She exhales softly and begins to pack up her bag, leaving the pamphlet on the table.

CYNTHIA

Oh well. Not today. Perhaps tomorrow.

CYNTHIA stands up and puts her bag on her shoulder.

CYNTHIA

Goodbye, Will.

She waves, turns around and begins to walk out of the diner.

WILL

Goodbye, Cynthia.

WILL shakes his head, picks up the pamphlet and looks at it for a moment, smiles ever so slightly, and turns back to his laptop. The click-clacking of typing resumes. ANGIE comes over and refills his coffee cup. WILL looks up at her and says “thanks” before returning to his laptop.

THE END