

368 FRIENDS – ONE ACT VERSION

By Bradley Walton

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368 FRIENDS - ONE ACT VERSION

A One Act Drama

BY BRADLEY WALTON

SYNOPSIS: Laura is shy, quiet, and awkward, with no real social life to speak of. But online, she has 368 friends. People who care enough to share their lives with her. And that's all Laura needs. At least, that's what she keeps telling herself. But as time goes on, she has more and more trouble believing it. After her posts about depression go unanswered, Laura announces to her 368 friends that she plans to kill herself, and waits to see if any of them will try to stop her.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(15-17 either, gender flexible, doubling possible)

LAURA / LORNE (m/f)	An awkward, withdrawn high school student <i>(94 lines)</i>
DIANE / DAVID (m/f)	A student who sits with Laura in the cafeteria <i>(84 lines)</i>
MR. / MRS. DOWNEY (m/f)	An English teacher <i>(7 lines)</i>
ALEXIS / ALEX (m/f)	Student <i>(13 lines)</i>
PAULA / PAUL (m/f)	Student <i>(11 lines)</i>
GWEN / GARY (m/f)	Student <i>(12 lines)</i>
STEVEN / STEFANIE (m/f)	Student <i>(14 lines)</i>
MILES / MARY (m/f)	Student <i>(11 lines)</i>
ALICIA / ARTHUR (m/f)	Student <i>(13 lines)</i>
PATRICK / PATRICIA (m/f)	Student <i>(11 lines)</i>
COLLEEN / COLIN (m/f)	Student <i>(10 lines)</i>
SAM / SAMANTHA (m/f)	Student <i>(12 lines)</i>
JEREMY / JENNIFER (m/f)	Student <i>(11 lines)</i>
ONLINE FRIEND 1 (m/f)	<i>(5 lines)</i>
ONLINE FRIEND 2 (m/f)	<i>(4 lines)</i>
ONLINE FRIEND 3 (m/f)	<i>(4 lines)</i>
ONLINE FRIEND 4 (m/f)	<i>(4 lines)</i>

The actors in the roles of DIANE and DOWNEY can double as ONLINE FRIENDS 3 & 4

While the characters of LAURA / LORNE and STEVEN / STEFANIE would traditionally be opposite genders, if you wish to have them be the same gender in your production, this is fine with the author.

DURATION: 25 minutes

STAGING

It is recommended that the play be performed with cubes, but it could also be performed with desks, lunch tables, chairs, and possibly a bed.

LAURA's lines spoken while sitting at her computer, as well as her final monologue, can be either spoken aloud by the actress, or pre-recorded and played over a speaker system during the performance.

SOUND EFFECTS

- School bell

PROPERTIES

- Lunch trays and lunches
- Laptop computer
- Pill bottle

NOTE: With the exception of the pill bottle, properties may be mimed.

AUTHOR NOTES

368 Friends was originally published as a 10-minute monologue, which has really seemed to connect with people. I think that those involved in the performing arts are attuned to the fact that a machine is a conduit that can't begin to compare to the spark that passes naturally from person to person when they're in the same room together. Computers and social media are fine, but real life is so much better.

AT RISE: *A high school hallway. The STUDENTS are scattered around the stage, conversing with one another in the following groups: ALEXIS, PAULA, and GWEN; MILES and STEVEN; ALICIA, PATRICK and COLLEEN; SAM and JEREMY. THEY will cluster in these same groups throughout the play. LAURA moves among THEM, completely ignored. SHE obviously wants to join in the conversations she hears, but is too timid to do so.*

ALEXIS: My mother grounded me again. Can you believe it?

PAULA: For what?

ALEXIS: Sneaking out of the house.

GWEN: Geez.

ALEXIS: If she'd just deal with the fact that I'm dating Tony, I wouldn't have to do it.

PAULA: So what are you gonna do?

ALEXIS: Sneak out of the house some more. I mean, what else am I supposed to do?

STEVEN: I got a "C" on my history test.

MILES: You did better than me.

STEVEN: I studied for that thing all night, Miles. What's Mr. Renner got against multiple choice questions, anyway? Why's he always gotta have so many essay questions? It's history, not English, you know?

ALICIA: That movie was terrible.

PATRICK: Oh, I hated it. What's with the whole shaky camera thing? Is it too much to ask for the camera to hold still?

COLLEEN: It's like, a style thing.

PATRICK: It's a lousy style. I had a headache for two hours after it was over.

SAM: Have they posted the cast list for the musical yet?

JEREMY: Nope.

SAM: Why's it have to take so long? The suspense is killing me.

JEREMY: Why? It's not like you can even sing. There's no way you're gonna get a lead role. The best you can hope for is maybe a spot in the chorus.

SAM: Yeah. I know. Chorus or nothing. In or out. Could go one way just as easily as the other. Do you see the cause of my anxiety here?

A bell rings. The scene shifts to a classroom. LAURA and the STUDENTS sit at their desks. MR. DOWNEY enters and begins addressing the class.

DOWNEY: How did the reading of *No Exit* go last night?

GWEN: It didn't.

MILES: It sucked. (Or "stunk.")

STEVEN: Total bait and switch. Not cool.

DOWNEY: One at a time, please. Steven, why did you think it was a bait and switch?

STEVEN: Well, I mean, you told us it was about these three people who died and went to Hell. Which kind of sounded like it might be, y'know, interesting. But for crying out loud, they're just sitting in this locked room, and they're talking. And they keep talking. They argue some, but the arguments are boring. And at the end of the play, it's like, they're going to keep talking some more. And I just wanted them to stop whining and shut up.

DOWNEY: That's actually a fairly understandable response.

STEVEN: Then what was the point?

DOWNEY: You're not supposed to like them or respect them. They're not whole people. They're not self-actualized.

GWEN: What?

DOWNEY: They depend on the people around them for self-affirmation. They have no sense of self-worth unless somebody else sees them as having worth. Like, if you don't think you're a cool person unless somebody else tells you you're cool. If you get that from somebody else—they tell you they think you're cool—then you feel good about yourself. But if you don't get that, then you feel bad. You're not capable of feeling good about yourself on your own.

ALICIA: I got a question.

DOWNEY: Yes?

ALICIA: How do you pronounce the author's name again?

DOWNEY: Sart. The "r" and the "e" on the end are silent.

ALICIA: So it rhymes with—

The bell rings. The scene shifts to a cafeteria. The STUDENTS are eating and talking in their groups from the first scene. LAURA is sitting and eating lunch alone. DIANE enters and joins HER.

DIANE: Hey, Laura.

LAURA: Hey, Diane.

DIANE: How's it going?

LAURA: Okay.

THEY eat in silence for a few seconds.

DIANE: Pizza tastes like cardboard today.

LAURA: Yeah.

DIANE: How do they do that, you know? Make pizza taste like cardboard? I mean, it's pizza. It's cheese and tomato sauce on some kind of crust with little chunks of meat stuff. How do you not make that taste like pizza?

LAURA: I dunno.

DIANE: It's like some kind of reverse miracle. Instead of water into wine, it's pizza into cardboard.

LAURA: Yeah.

DIANE: And yet here we sit eating it. What does that say about us?

LAURA: That we're hungry, I guess.

DIANE: Yeah. I guess we are.

STEVEN walks by. LAURA looks up at HIM just long enough for DIANE to notice.

DIANE: You were looking at Steven.

LAURA: He walked by.

DIANE: Other people have walked by.

LAURA: So?

DIANE: So you didn't look at them like you looked at Steven.

LAURA: I looked at him. I didn't *look* look at him.

DIANE: You totally *look* looked at him.

LAURA: No, I didn't.

DIANE: It's okay. You don't have to be embarrassed about it.

LAURA: Then why are you making a big deal about it?

DIANE: You should talk to him.

LAURA: He'd never talk to me.

DIANE: He might.

LAURA: There's no reason he would want to talk to me.

DIANE: You have no self-esteem, you know that?

LAURA: I just...y'know...I feel weird walking up and talking to people.

DIANE: The walking up part's got nothing to do with it.

LAURA: What do you mean by that?

DIANE: You've spoken to me more in the last 30 seconds than you do in a normal week.

LAURA: Sorry.

DIANE: Why?

LAURA: I don't know.

DIANE: And like, the only reason I got you talking was because I provoked you.

LAURA: Does this mean you're going to start provoking me?

DIANE: It would make the lunch conversations a lot more interesting.

LAURA: Why do you sit with me, then?

DIANE: Because when I moved here the seat next to you was open.

LAURA: You can sit with somebody else if you want to.

DIANE: People have their groups. It's awkward to butt in.

LAURA: Yeah, I guess.

DIANE: You guess? You're living proof.

LAURA: So are you.

DIANE: Yeah, but you've lived here your whole life. I just moved here a couple of months ago, so at least I have an excuse. And I'm probably going to move again before the end of the school year, so going through the rites of social initiation hardly seems worth the trouble. I don't go out of my way to make close friends anymore.

LAURA: Do you keep up with any of your old friends on *(Insert name of current, popular social networking site here.)* or anything?

DIANE: I email some of them once in a while, but my parents won't let me have a *(Name of website.)* account *(The word "page" may be substituted for "account".)*

LAURA: What, they think it's like driving a car or something?

DIANE: Well, I used to have an account. Long story short, there were problems, so my parents took it away. I thought about setting one up under a fake name, but if they found out somehow...it wouldn't be worth it. And it's not like I'm that close with anybody from any of my old schools.

LAURA: Huh. Bummer.

DIANE: You have one? A *(Name of website.)* account?

LAURA: Nah.

DIANE: How come?

LAURA: I'm not that interesting.

DIANE: It would be a way to break the ice with Steven.

LAURA: You think he has a *(Name of website.)* account?

DIANE: Everybody our age has a *(Name of website.)* account.

LAURA: Except us.

DIANE: Pretty much.

LAURA: So that makes me even more of a...

Beat.

DIANE: What? A loser.

LAURA: Sorry. I didn't want to say it. You don't have, y'know...

DIANE: I'm not allowed to have one. The only thing holding you back is you. So "loser" is a pretty dead-on choice of words.

LAURA: *(Sarcastic.)* Thanks.

DIANE: I'm just saying.

LAURA: You think I ought to have a *(Name of website.)* account?

DIANE: Yeah. And then send Steven a friend request. *(Update reference as necessary.)*

LAURA: I can't do that!

DIANE: Why?

LAURA: What if he turns me down?

DIANE: He won't.

LAURA: How do you know?

DIANE: Because the only thing people like more than talking about themselves is talking about themselves to as many people as possible.

The scene shifts to LAURA's bedroom. There may be a bed or other furniture, or LAURA can sit in a chair or on a cube with a laptop computer, or sit facing the audience at an imaginary desk typing at an imaginary computer.

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LAURA: Okay. There it is. I now have a (*Name of website.*) account. Do I look up Steven? This feels weird. Like I'm stalking him. Should I? Maybe I shouldn't. Oh, who am I kidding? He's the whole reason I'm doing this. Well, okay, maybe not the whole reason, but like 99% of it. I've gone this far. Might as well. Does he spell his name with a "v" (*"f" if female.*) or a "ph"? I think it's a "v". Right. That looks right. Okay. Here goes...no, that's not him. No. Wow. There's a bunch of people with the same first and last name. Weird. (*Gasps.*) And there he is. Diane was right. Crap. (*Or "shoot."*) What do I do? Do I go through with it? Do I send him a friend request? Of course I do. That's what I'm here for. So I do it. All I have to do is push the button. Just like that. Easy. Yeah. So. Do it. Push it. Push the stinking button. Come on. What's the worst that can happen? He can turn down the friend request. How bad is that? I'll have lost something I never had in the first place. Except then I'll know for sure that he doesn't want to have anything to do with me. Right now it's a maybe. Right now it could go either way. Right now I don't know. And if I do know, then that could be better, or it could be worse. But it's not like we even talk to each other anyway. What's it going to hurt? How bad is the worst-case scenario, really? Except...what if he turns me down and tells everybody? Then I'm going to look like an idiot in front of everyone at school. People would laugh at me behind my back. Maybe I shouldn't do this. But I probably should. I need to try to talk to people more. I *want* to talk to people more. I want to have life. Not be so darn shy. No...not shy. Shy's what my mom calls it. But that's not the right word. "Withdrawn" is a good word. "Pathetic" is a better word. That describes me pretty well. I need to not be so pathetic. This would be good for me. This might help me be less pathetic. I should do this. I *will* do this. I will do this right now. Now. So just do it. Push the button. It's easy. It's a button. You push it. With your finger. Just...just...there! I...I...oh, crap. Crap crap crap crap crap! (*"No" may be substituted for "crap" here.*) What did I just do? Am I out of my mind?!? I just sent Steven a friend request! What if he turns it down? What am I gonna do? I'm gonna look like such an idiot! I should never have listened to Diane! Why did I let her talk me into this? I'm so gullible! Aaargh! Maybe I can take it back.

Can I take it back? (*Stares intently at the computer screen.*) There's got to be a way to take it back. Come on, come on...where's the "undo"? Where is it?!? I've got to fix this now! Before he sees it! What if he's online right now? What if he—he—he accepted it. He accepted my friend request! Holy cow! That was fast. I guess he really was online. He was online and he accepted my friend request! He doesn't think I'm a total freak! I have an online friend and it's Steven! I have a friend!!! I don't suck! (*"I don't suck!" may be omitted.*) I'm not a loser! This is awesome! Wow. That was easy. Should I try more? Would that be greedy? How many friends does Steven have? 416. Wow. That's...wow. That's a lot. But Steven's awesome. So...yeah. 416. That seems totally logical, I guess. Anybody I know? Okay. Yeah. Lot of people from school. Should I try a couple of them? Would they accept? Steven accepted me. Other people would, too...right? Sure they would. There's Gwen from English class on Steven's list. She seems pretty cool. Maybe I'll try her. Sending the second friend request has got to be easier than the first one, right? Okay, so...here goes...(*Inhales deeply.*) Done! Yes! Much easier. How about Miles? Do I send Miles a friend request? Sure, why not?

The scene shifts back to the cafeteria. DIANE is eating lunch and the other STUDENTS are also eating in their groups or milling about. LAURA enters and sits down next to DIANE.

LAURA: Guess what?

DIANE: What?

LAURA: I did it.

DIANE: What? Set up a (*Name of website.*) account?

LAURA: Yep.

DIANE: But did you send a friend request to Steven?

LAURA: Yep.

DIANE: For real?

LAURA: And he accepted!

DIANE: Or course he accepted.

LAURA: I didn't know for sure that he would. And neither did you.

DIANE: You're awkward, but you're not repulsive, and he's not a jerk, so yeah, I was pretty sure he would. And I was right.

LAURA: Thanks.

DIANE: You're welcome.

LAURA: And not only that, but—

DIANE: Did you send him any messages?

LAURA: To Steven?

DIANE: Yes, to Steven.

LAURA: I sent him the friend request.

DIANE: No, besides that.

LAURA: You mean...did I try to chat with him?

DIANE: Well, yeah.

LAURA: No!

DIANE: Why not?

LAURA: What would I say?

DIANE: You could start with "hi." Lots of people start conversations with "hi."

LAURA: Just send him a message that says "hi"?

DIANE: Sure.

LAURA: That would be weird.

DIANE: No, it wouldn't.

LAURA: If somebody that you never talked to in person sent you a message online and the only thing the message said was "hi," you wouldn't think that was creepy?

DIANE: Okay, maybe. That might be creepy. So here's an idea: say "hi" to him in person.

LAURA: No!

DIANE: You could message him with a question about English class.

LAURA: But what if I don't have any questions about English?

DIANE: I have Mr. Downey for the same class first period. You read *No Exit* like we did, right?

LAURA: Yeah.

DIANE: Nobody in my class got it. Did you get it?

LAURA: It's about three losers in Hell who aren't self-actualized.

DIANE: Right, I picked that up from the class discussion, too. But do you get it?

LAURA: No. I'm completely taking the teacher's word for it.

DIANE: Okay, then.

LAURA: I wouldn't know where to start to even ask Steven about it. And I don't think he really understood it either. What if I make him mad?

DIANE: So send him a message complaining about it.

LAURA: I might sound whiny or annoying.

DIANE: Yeah, I can see that as a definite risk. How about the fact that it's a French play, but we read it in English. Doesn't that seem weird to you?

LAURA: Yeah.

DIANE: There you go. Instant conversation starter, right there.

LAURA: I don't know.

DIANE: (*Exasperated.*) Of course you don't.

LAURA: I sound like a pathetic loser, don't I?

DIANE: If the drama club does a production of *No Exit*, you should totally audition.

LAURA: No way am I like any of those characters. I picked up a bunch of new friends online last night. Which you'd know if you hadn't interrupted me before.

DIANE: You sent friend requests to more people?

LAURA: Twelve. And they'd all been accepted by this morning.

DIANE: Good for you.

LAURA: Gwen's going to visit family out of town this weekend. Patrick had major bed-head this morning, and Alexis had a fight with her boyfriend. I feel like I'm starting to have a social circle now. It's so cool!

DIANE: Did you actually communicate with any of these people, or was this stuff that they posted?

LAURA: It was stuff that they posted.

DIANE: Right.

LAURA: What?

DIANE: Nothing.

The scene shifts to LAURA's room. SHE sits at her computer as SHE did before, looking at the screen. The other STUDENTS stand facing the audience, speaking their status updates aloud.

LAURA: Did those last three get accepted yet? Yes! That puts me up to thirty-nine! And...oh...oh cool, I got two friend requests sent to me! Jack from algebra class...yes, I will happily accept that. And...who the heck is this Carla person? Looks like she's friends with Alexis. I guess she's friending me because I'm friends with Alexis? Sure, why not. Now...what's everybody up to?

ALEXIS: Mom's driving me nuts. Again.

PAULA: Blue or purple?

GWEN: Most days I love my sister, but today's not one of them.

STEVEN: Just for once, a night off from homework would be so nice.

MILES: Shouldn't have eaten that chili.

ALICIA: Might download a movie tonight.

PATRICK: Going to cost four hundred bucks to fix my car.

COLLEEN: Hate it when my dad talks politics.

SAM: I got cast in the musical!

JEREMY: I just found the most disgusting thing ever! Check out this link.

LAURA: *(Grinning and contented.)* Wow. I have friends. *(Pause. LAURA pushes a button on the computer.)* Ugh! That is so gross!

The scene shifts back to the cafeteria. DIANE is eating. The other STUDENTS are also eating and moving about in their groups. LAURA enters with her lunch and passes by STEVEN. SHE seems to want to talk to HIM, but decides against it. STEVEN does not seem to register HER presence. LAURA sits down next to DIANE.

LAURA: Guess what? I'm up to 153 friends now!

DIANE: I'm happy for you. But it's not that big of a deal. Keep it in perspective.

LAURA: It's a big deal to me. I've always felt like this complete outsider all my life, and all of a sudden, it's like, I'm accepted.

DIANE: Okay. Tell me something.

LAURA: What?

DIANE: Of the people with us right now in this cafeteria...how many are you friends with?

LAURA: I dunno. A lot of them.

DIANE: So why aren't you speaking to any of them?

LAURA: They're...busy. Look at them. You know how it is.

DIANE: Yeah. I know how it is. *(Pause.)* Listen, I just found out...we're moving again.

LAURA: You are? When?

DIANE: Today's my last day here.

LAURA: For real?

DIANE: Yeah.

LAURA: That quick?

DIANE: My dad's got one of those kinds of jobs.

LAURA: Bummer. I'm sorry you're going.

DIANE: Yeah, me too. For as much as I've done the whole up and leaving thing, it's still a pain. But I'll survive. What about you? You going to be okay without me?

LAURA: Why wouldn't I be?

DIANE: Laura, as near as I can tell, I'm pretty much the only person outside of your immediate family who actually speaks to you.

LAURA: I have friends, Diane.

DIANE: Are you sure about that?

LAURA: 153 of them.

DIANE: Oh, please!

LAURA: What?

DIANE: Listen...I know it was my idea, okay? But I didn't think you'd latch onto it like this. These people on the internet that you say are your friends...they're not *friends* friends.

LAURA: I know I don't talk to them one on one, but they share things with me. They communicate. There's a connection there. They give me this sense of...of completion...of fulfillment. There are 153 people who think enough of me to want to include me in their...y'know, their lives. I'm good with that. I'm really, really good.

DIANE: Laura, you...*(Sighs.)* Forget it. Thanks for eating with me.

LAURA: Let me give you my email address.

DIANE: *(Getting up.)* No. Don't worry about it. You've got 153 friends. You don't need me.

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