

WHAT COMES AROUND...

By Tom Smith

www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOSEPH
OLIVIA
KARLY
JOSH
FIN
MADISON
CASSIDY
ZACK
MANDY

TIME/PLACE

Today. A hip coffee house.

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

Although the play can be performed with 9 actors, feel free to double the roles if you like.

The character of Fin was written to be performed by either a male or female actor.

Feel free to change the gender of other characters if needed; however, please stick to the text and change just names and pronouns.

"OLIVIA"

A hip coffee house. JOSEPH and OLIVIA seated at a table with cups of coffee, mid-conversation.

JOSEPH

It's called La Ronde.

OLIVIA

Yeah?

JOSEPH

And it's this play written by an Austrian guy-

OLIVIA

Australian?

JOSEPH

No, Austrian. It's a country by Germany or whatever. And the whole point is in the play you see different people interact with each other in a chain or something. Like one guy talks to a girl, and then in the next scene that girl talks to someone else, like a soldier or whatever. Then that soldier talks to someone else in the next scene. It keeps going on like that until the last person finally talks to the first person.

OLIVIA

Sounds weird.

JOSEPH

It was good, actually. Dirty, too.

OLIVIA

Not it's not! They wouldn't make us read a dirty play. The school board wouldn't allow it.

JOSEPH

It's an option. It was that or The Glass Menagerie or Death of a Salesman. Maybe that's how they get away with it.

OLIVIA

We read Death of a Salesman in 8th grade.

JOSEPH

I didn't.

OLIVIA

I did. In Mr. Farrell's class. Bor-ing! It's like, die already!

JOSEPH

Who? Mr. Farrell?

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OLIVIA
No, the salesman. Or whoever.

JOSEPH
Anyway.

OLIVIA
Anyway.

JOSEPH
That's why I didn't call you back. I had to finish it before class. We had a test on it today.

OLIVIA
Still. You said you were going to meet up with us last night and then you didn't. And you didn't even return my text!

JOSEPH
I know.

OLIVIA
So where were you?

JOSEPH
Home.

OLIVIA
(Staring him down.)
...Uh-huh.

JOSEPH
I was.

OLIVIA
You sure you weren't off somewhere else?

JOSEPH
Like where?

OLIVIA
I don't know... Making out with Mandy Conn?

JOSEPH
Oh my God! That's so nasty! Can you imagine?

OLIVIA
I know... Ick!

JOSEPH
I just threw up a little in my mouth!

OLIVIA

Gross!

(Beat.)

So, anyway, why didn't you text me back last night?

JOSEPH

I don't know.

OLIVIA

...Uh-huh.

JOSEPH

What?

OLIVIA

Nothing.

JOSEPH

Don't say "nothing" when it's obviously something.

OLIVIA

Forget it. Let's talk about something else.

JOSEPH

Like what?

OLIVIA

(Stares at him.)

Today, in class, we were reading the Quran, and in it, Allah says, "Truth has been made clear from error."

JOSEPH

What does that mean?

OLIVIA

Don't you think it's interesting? I've been thinking about it all day. "Truth has been made clear from error."

JOSEPH

Hey, I'm hungry. Do you have any money?

OLIVIA

I wish you would have taken World Religions with me. It's such a cool class.

JOSEPH

Too much homework. Do you want to split a muffin or something?

OLIVIA

Buddha once said, "There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting."

JOSEPH

You read too much stuff you don't have to.

OLIVIA

I like reading about different religions. It's interesting.

JOSEPH

Yeah, but what good does it do you?

OLIVIA

Maybe I'll come across one I really like.

JOSEPH

Religion has no point.

OLIVIA

Of course it does! It's supposed to make you feel, you know, less alone in the universe. Find a purpose.

JOSEPH

Whatever. All religion is crap.

OLIVIA

No, it's not! We all need things to make ourselves feel less alone. Mine is religion. Yours is...something else.

JOSEPH

(Staring her down.)

Knock it off, Olivia! You said you wouldn't do this anymore!

OLIVIA

Do what?

JOSEPH

This. Dropping hints. Acting like you're better than me.

OLIVIA

I'm not acting: I am better than you!

JOSEPH

You know what I mean!

OLIVIA

I didn't say anything!

JOSEPH

Yes, you did.

OLIVIA

What did I say?

JOSEPH

Just...knock it off. I mean it!

(Awkward pause.)

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JOSEPH (CONT'D)
So, do you want something to eat or not?
(She stares at him.)
What?

OLIVIA
You said you stopped, Joseph!

JOSEPH
And I did.

OLIVIA
For five days! And only because your parents busted you!

JOSEPH
So?

OLIVIA
I'd rather you were still smoking than taking pills. They're so-

JOSEPH
I'm through talking about this, Olivia!

OLIVIA
You don't even care what they are anymore! You'll swallow anything that anyone puts in your hand!

JOSEPH
You want me to leave?

OLIVIA
I want you to quit.
(Struggling.)
Everybody at school talks about it all the time. Don't you even care?

JOSEPH
The only people who talk about it are the ones too chicken to try it.

OLIVIA
Oh my God!

JOSEPH
They have nothing else to do with their boring little lives but gossip about everything and everyone. They're idiots!

OLIVIA
Yeah, they're the idiots.

JOSEPH
You're not one to talk. You did it with me.

OLIVIA
Only a few times.

JOSEPH
It doesn't matter.

OLIVIA
Of course it does!

JOSEPH
Still. You're not above it. You did it too.

OLIVIA
Like, only two or three times. Until they made me feel
dumber! Not remembering anything, not-

JOSEPH
So, what, I'm an idiot? I'm dumb-

OLIVIA
I didn't say you were. I said they made me feel-

JOSEPH
This! This is the reason we broke up. Maybe we shouldn't
have gotten back together again.

OLIVIA
We didn't. We're just "hanging out," remember? That's what
you said you wanted. No commitment.

JOSEPH
You said you'd drop it, but you can't! You're so stuck on-

OLIVIA
I have a right to be! You're getting so-

JOSEPH
You think I don't know that you're keeping tabs on me all the
time? You send me texts, like, a thousand times a day. You
call me late at night. You're always asking people where I
am...

OLIVIA
I am not! And, besides, I wouldn't have to text you so much
if you'd just text me back!

JOSEPH
It's getting annoying! You're getting all clingy again!

OLIVIA
It's not like that. I mean... Look, there's something you
need to know...

JOSEPH

There's no way we can ever get back together if you're going to be like this. You have to like me for who I am - not who you want me to be! And I'm not going to stop doing what makes me happy just because you want me to!

OLIVIA

Joseph, no! I...I don't want to get back together. I don't - I'm going out with Michael.

JOSEPH

What?

OLIVIA

I didn't want to tell you like this. Here. It's just... I was tired of waiting around for you to decide. It's been over a month...

JOSEPH

...You and Michael? Huh. Since when?

OLIVIA

Since, like, a week ago.

JOSEPH

Were you ever going to tell me?

OLIVIA

I am. Now.

JOSEPH

Michael's cool, I guess.

OLIVIA

Yeah.

JOSEPH

He and I used to hang out a lot.

OLIVIA

Yeah.

(Beat.)

Before you started partying so much.

JOSEPH

So then why do you keep checking up on me? Why do you keep-

OLIVIA

I'm worried. You're getting worse.

JOSEPH

No, I'm not!

OLIVIA
Yes, you are! It's bad, Joseph. It's getting really bad...

JOSEPH
Whatever!

OLIVIA
I just want you to-

JOSEPH
Hey, Olivia! We aren't going out anymore. You don't get to tell me what you want.

OLIVIA
But, I just-

JOSEPH
Michael, hunh? Well...good luck with...that.

He starts to exit.

OLIVIA
Joseph, wait!

JOSEPH
See ya around!

He exits. A moment later, She texts him. She stares at her phone, waiting for a reply that doesn't come.

"KARLY"

Immediately following. KARLY crosses over and sits at the table.

Well? KARLY

No luck. OLIVIA

You did what you could. That's how it goes, I guess. KARLY

...Yeah. OLIVIA

Anyway, I've got to be at work at nine, so we should start on our project. KARLY

God, Karly, how can you do that? Bus tables from nine to midnight every night, then get up in time for school? OLIVIA

I have no choice. My dad is a total freak about grades. KARLY

Mine too. Well, my mom more than my dad. OLIVIA

KARLY
(Grabs two pills from a vitamin bottle from her purse and swallows them.)
I've got a ton of afterschool activities that my dad says will help me get into a good school. So the late shift is all I can do. Anyway, I pulled this off the web.

(Lays down a huge stack of research she's pulled from her bag.)
I think we just need to skim it so we can organize the major points of our presentation.

Wow! This is a ton of stuff! OLIVIA

I really need to get an A on this project. KARLY

You get an A on everything. OLIVIA

KARLY
No, I don't!

OLIVIA
Well, you seem to, anyway.

KARLY
I wish I did. Then maybe my dad wouldn't-
(She stops herself.)
Hey, where's your stuff?

OLIVIA
What stuff?

KARLY
I told you to bring all your research.

OLIVIA
I don't have any.

KARLY
Why not?

OLIVIA
The book I wanted from the library was already checked out.
Probably by you.

KARLY
What about stuff online?

OLIVIA
Look at all this. I don't think we're hurting for
information. This is a lot of material.

KARLY
That I brought.

OLIVIA
We don't need more than this!

KARLY
Fine. Whatever. Did you at least read anything about him?

OLIVIA
A little. I mean, I know the big stuff. But, I mean...
Well, what do you think we should talk about?

KARLY
I think we should focus on Fremont's five expeditions, then
end it talking about his bid for the presidency.

OLIVIA
Sure. That sounds good.

She quickly sends another text.

KARLY

Don't.

OLIVIA

What? Text?

KARLY

Don't not work hard on this.

OLIVIA

I'm doing my part. I'm here, aren't I?

KARLY

I'm not dumb. You only wanted to meet here because he would be here. But you can't do anything about it.

OLIVIA

I don't want to talk about Joseph.

KARLY

Fine. Then let's talk about John Fremont. Did you do anything for this project, Olivia?

OLIVIA

I already told you I did some stuff.

KARLY

Like what?

OLIVIA

I Googled him, and I got some pictures of him. I thought maybe we should include some maps.

KARLY

Cool.

OLIVIA

Then we could talk about that whole cannibalism thing.

KARLY

I don't know. We only have 10 minutes, and there's so much other stuff...

OLIVIA

It's the best part of the story, though. He had to eat people to survive.

KARLY

He didn't eat anyone, Olivia. His men did. When he left them to go get help.

OLIVIA

Still: it's totally gross.

KARLY

What could they do; they didn't have any food. They got trapped in a cave for months during a huge blizzard. They needed to live.

OLIVIA

They could have done something else. They didn't have to eat each other.

KARLY

If you need something bad enough, you'll do almost anything.

OLIVIA

...What do you think he needs?

KARLY

I just said: food. They were starving and-

OLIVIA

No: Joseph. What do you think he needs? That I can't give him? I just don't get why he does what he does...

KARLY

Who knows? Let's get back to the project!

OLIVIA

Look, I totally understand that we're not friends, Karly. I mean, we've had classes together and everything but we're not...you know.

KARLY

Yeah.

OLIVIA

But, still, I don't know who to talk to about all this stuff. I mean, my friends just keep telling me to let him go. But how can I? We dated for over a year. I can't just watch him continue to mess up his life.

KARLY

Maybe they make him happy. The pills. It's not that big a deal.

OLIVIA

How can you say that?

KARLY

It's no secret he was on ADHD meds in elementary school. I just think that if your body gets used to the idea of drugs, maybe it makes sense that when you first try pot or whatever that it somehow feels right too.

OLIVIA

But he's changed so much. They're are really screwing him up.

KARLY

Maybe he was screwed up already. Maybe the drugs actually make him feel ok about things.

OLIVIA

You don't know him, Karly. He's different now. He used to be really nice and laid-back and sweet and now he's totally...not.

KARLY

He was that way because he was taking ADHD meds. Face it: you've never known Joseph when he wasn't on drugs; who's to say who he really is.

OLIVIA

Why are you defending him? I would have thought that with your grades and whatever that you'd totally be... Oh.

KARLY

What?

OLIVIA

I get it. No wonder you can stay awake during school.

KARLY

I take caffeine pills, Olivia, not drugs. God! You're so judgmental...

OLIVIA

That's what Joseph said.

KARLY

Well, he's right.

OLIVIA

Don't be mean!

KARLY

It's true!

(Mimicking her.)

"I get it. No wonder you can stay awake during school." I mean, what is that?

OLIVIA

I don't know! I don't mean to be like that. I just... Maybe it's too many religion classes.

KARLY

Let's get back to our project. We should both cover the five expeditions. And then you can cover his early life, and I can do his later life and the whole presidency thing. Fine?

OLIVIA

Fine.

KARLY

Good. Why don't you go get some information and then call me and we can find a time to go over stuff.

OLIVIA

We probably don't need to meet any more.

KARLY

Why not?

OLIVIA

Well, you know what you're doing. I know what I'm doing. We can just meet right before and put it all together.

KARLY

Yeah, but we should do a dry run to figure out the transitions, and make sure we don't go too long, and-

OLIVIA

(Rising.)

We can just meet right before.

KARLY

...Oh, I get it. You're all mad at me. Fine, whatever. Anyway, just do your half; I'm not going to cover for you.

OLIVIA

You won't need to!

KARLY

I'm going to be very clear with Mr. Andrew which parts of it you are responsible for.

OLIVIA

Fine!

(Starts to leave.)

Hey, Karly?

KARLY

Yeah?

OLIVIA

Don't get used to them, ok? The caffeine pills, or whatever you say they are. At some point, you're going to crash.

KARLY

I'll crash in the summer, when I can afford to. But right now, they keep me going, and they make me happy.

OLIVIA

I don't think they do. I think they just make your parents happy.

KARLY

If my parents are happy, then I'm happy.

Olivia exits.

"JOSH"

Karly gathers up her research and starts to go. JOSH stops her.

Stop. Sit. JOSH

What? KARLY

Big drama. JOSH

Who? KARLY

Olivia and Joseph. JOSH
(Karly looks around.)
They aren't here.

What's going on? KARLY

Olivia wants to upgrade. JOSH

To who? KARLY

Michael. JOSH

Anderson? KARLY

God, no! Tompkins. JOSH

Really? KARLY
(Thinks it over.)
I can see that.

So...? JOSH

What? KARLY

JOSH
Joseph's available. Or will be, like, any minute. As soon as she breaks up with him.

So? KARLY

Jump on it! JOSH

No way. KARLY

Why not? JOSH

I don't know. KARLY

You've liked him for, like, a hundred years. JOSH

Yeah, when I thought there was no chance! KARLY

That makes no sense. JOSH

You wouldn't get it. You're a guy. KARLY

I'm just saying, if you don't go for it now, you'll lose your chance. JOSH

Why? Because someone better-looking will swoop in? KARLY

I didn't say that. JOSH

I can get guys, you know. I don't have to only get them when they're on the rebound, or whatever. KARLY

Don't freak, Karly. I didn't say anything. JOSH

You always make me feel so good about myself, Josh. KARLY

Ever hear of the word "projection?" JOSH

Why don't you go for it? KARLY

JOSH
Um, because I'm not into guys!

KARLY
Uh-huh.

JOSH
Our making out at Deborah's party should have proved that to you!

KARLY
It proved you like making out. It didn't prove that you don't like guys.

JOSH
You want proof that I'm straight? I'd rather date creepy Mandy Conn than Joseph.

They laugh and creep out at the thought of it.

KARLY
I'd pay you a hundred dollars if you did.

JOSH
Make it a thousand!

KARLY
It still wouldn't be worth it!

JOSH
Suddenly I show up at school one day with black lipstick all over my neck!

KARLY
(Laughing uncontrollably.)
Stop it!

JOSH
My lip all torn up.

KARLY
Josh! Oh God...!

JOSH
Smelling like smoke and pee.

KARLY
Oh my God! Oh my God!

JOSH
Not even for a thousand dollars!

Poor Mandy!

KARLY

Don't "poor Mandy" her. She peed her pants back in fourth grade.

JOSH

I know. And she'll never live that down.

KARLY

I saw it happen!

JOSH

I smelled it happen!

KARLY

I'm surprised she's not here tonight. She's always here.

JOSH

She's probably changing her pants!

KARLY

So, anyway, I've got big news.

JOSH

Bigger than Olivia and Joseph breaking up?

KARLY

Much bigger.

JOSH

(Hums a little fanfare.)
I'm quitting the tennis team!

KARLY

So we can spend more time making out?

JOSH

I'm serious, Karly.

KARLY

What? Really? Why?

JOSH

I need to change things up. I'm going to be a senior next year and I have no identity outside of tennis.

KARLY

Because you're nationally ranked.

JOSH

So?

KARLY

It's impressive. Last year they had that whole assembly just for you.

JOSH

Yeah. But so what?

KARLY

What else would you do?

JOSH

I don't know. Just take the year off. I'm so tired of getting up at 5 every morning to go train. Then 6 a.m. practice. School at 7:30. Practice again after school, then another work-out before I get home. Homework. I mean, that's my life. There's nothing else!

KARLY

But you've been doing it for years.

JOSH

Exactly. Which is why it's time for something different. Something new.

KARLY

You wouldn't know what to do with yourself. You'd go crazy.

JOSH

No way! There's so much I haven't done in, like, forever.

KARLY

Like what?

JOSH

See a movie the day it came out. Hang out at the mall. Play video games. Meet people.

KARLY

People are over-rated.

JOSH

I just feel like I've given up a huge part of my life for something that may not pan out. I mean, if it's going to happen, I should already be on my way. I should be training in Florida year-round. But I'm not.

KARLY

You're nationally ranked!

JOSH

Not high enough. And if I'm not the best now, then when is it going to happen?

KARLY

I think you're just tired. Maybe you should take a week off. Sleep in. Eat whatever you want. Party.

JOSH

I wish.

KARLY

Just do it.

JOSH

Sure. But explain that to my coach, my nutritionist, my trainer, my parents...

KARLY

There are worse things than being known for playing tennis. At least people know who you are.

JOSH

I guess.

KARLY

It's something. You wouldn't want to be...invisible.

JOSH

I guess not..

(Beat.)

Hey, you don't really think I like guys, do you?

KARLY

Of course not.

JOSH

Ok. Good.

KARLY

It's the tennis thing. Everyone always says all the guys on the team are gay. It's just a joke.

JOSH

Yeah, I know. And the women's basketball team-

KARLY

Are lesbians. Although, frankly, I think more than a few of them actually are.

JOSH

Hey, maybe I should get a job here.

KARLY

At The Bean? When would you have time?

JOSH

When I quit the team. If I quit the team.

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KARLY

Get up at 5 a.m. to serve coffee, go to school, work a shift after school, then homework. Yeah, your life would be so much easier.

JOSH

At least I wouldn't have to run suicides.

KARLY

There is that.

JOSH

There is that.

KARLY

I'm going to take off. I've got to drop this stuff off at home then go to work.

Grabs a few pills from her vitamin bottle and swallows them quickly.

JOSH

I can't believe you work so late at night!

KARLY

You have your routine, I have mine.

JOSH

Give Joseph a call!

KARLY

You give Joseph a call!

She exits.

"FIN"

Watching Karly leave. FIN,
dressed alternatively, crosses to
the table.

FIN

Hey.

JOSH

Oh, hey.

(Looking around, nervous.)

FIN

Is it cool if I sit here?

JOSH

Sure.

FIN

(Noticing Josh looking
around.)

We can move to one of the tall booths so no one can see us.

JOSH

What? No. I don't care.

FIN

What's up?

JOSH

Nothing. I was just talking to-

FIN

Karly. Yeah. She's pretty, hunh?

JOSH

Oh, do you think...? We're just friends.

FIN

I know.

JOSH

Nothing's going on.

FIN

I know.

JOSH

So, what's up with you, Fin?

FIN

Nothing much. Killing time.

JOSH

Before what?

FIN

Before nothing. Just killing time. I'm surprised to see you here. Don't you have practice or training or whatever?

JOSH

Usually. My coach called a short practice today so we could rest before the match tomorrow.

FIN

Won't you get in trouble if he catches you drinking caffeine?

JOSH

Probably. But I don't think anyone will tell him.

FIN

I guess not. Not many jocks come here.

(Josh laughs.)

What?

JOSH

No one ever calls tennis players "jocks."

FIN

Well, then, no one from your team ever comes here. You guys usually just meet in secret somewhere to drink beer and make-out with each other, right?

JOSH

That's not funny!

FIN

Sorry! I'm just kidding!

JOSH

Just shut up about that. We're not- I'm not.

FIN

I know.

(Beat.)

So.

JOSH

So.

Drinks, and glances around quickly.

FIN

Geez, am I that much of a freak?

JOSH
What?

FIN
You keep looking around, trying to see if anyone sees us together. I can go, you know. If you're so embarrassed.

JOSH
I'm not. Sit down.

FIN
People who come here don't really care if the freak and the tennis star are drinking coffee together. In fact, that's why they come here.

JOSH
Fin, you're not a freak.

FIN
No? Then I guess I'm not doing my job.
(Josh smiles. Beat.)
You said you were going to call me. After you left Deborah's party.

JOSH
Yeah, well, I was there pretty late.

FIN
Oh.

JOSH
I was.

FIN
I said you could call anytime. My grandma was already asleep.

JOSH
It would have been, like, 2 a.m.

FIN
I said anytime.
(Beat.)
...Look, Josh, are you freaking out about it?

JOSH
I don't want to talk about this here!

FIN
Then where? And when? On the tennis court during practice?

JOSH
Stop it, Fin!

FIN

I don't want to talk about it either. I just want to know if it was a one-time thing.

JOSH

Yes!

FIN

Oh.

JOSH

It was nothing. It meant...nothing.

FIN

...Cool.

Gets up.

JOSH

Wait!

FIN

What?

JOSH

Sit down. Sit.

(Fin does.)

Did you...tell anyone about it?

FIN

You mean, aside from posting it on the school's website?

JOSH

I'm serious!

FIN

No, I didn't tell anyone about it! That's my specialty, you know. Keeping quiet about stuff like this. You're not the first, Josh. I've done it a lot. With guys and girls. Everyone thinks I'm, like, some kind of loner or whatever. But I get more action in one week than most people get in a year. I'm just discreet about it.

JOSH

Oh.

FIN

Don't look like that!

JOSH

Like what?

FIN

Disappointed. You were...different.

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JOSH

Sure...

FIN

I'm not just blowing smoke. You really were... I like you, Josh.

JOSH

Oh.

FIN

Don't freak out about it. I'm not going to stalk you. If it was a one-time thing, cool. Whatever. We had a moment. It's all good.

JOSH

Cool.

FIN

But, if you ever decide that you want to do it again, I'm cool with that too.

(Grabs Josh's hand.)

I don't make that offer to everyone. Very few people actually.

JOSH

(Pulls away, embarrassed.)

...Thanks.

FIN

Just don't freak out about it.

JOSH

I'm not...

(Awkward pause. Both rise to leave.)

No, you stay. I've got to go.

FIN

So do I. I've got to meet up with someone.

JOSH

Oh.

FIN

Not for that. I'm not a-

JOSH

Just...can you just stay at the table for a minute, though? Just until I...

FIN

So no one sees us walking out together?

JOSH

No. I mean...

FIN

It's cool. I get it.

Want to read the entire script? Click on Place an Order to receive a free non-printable perusal copy!