

But Did I Leave the Oven On?, a short disaster play

By Jake Alexander

(Lights up on certainly not an underground bunker, but pretty close. The basement apartment of a Brooklyn brownstone. It looks like somebody packed up and left in hurry: scattered books, DVDs, a TV that was discarded after someone realized they couldn't take it with them. It might even still be on. Hardly any clothes, but a few random items hang from hangers in the closet. A few milk crates. STEPHEN sits, while NINA paces. NINA is checking her watch. After a few seconds, a bomb in the distance.)

STEPHEN

(Anxiously) How long this time?

NINA

Around seven and half minutes.

STEPHEN

That's good!

NINA

I guess so.

STEPHEN

No it is! Because that means they are moving further away.

NINA

They could just be sporadic. I don't think they've been, I dunno, striking? In any sort of order anyways.

STEPHEN

The Germans bombed in a pattern.

NINA

This isn't the Germans.

(A beat. STEPHEN gets up, shakes out his body.)

NINA

And the TV definitely doesn't work right? We checked?

STEPHEN

Yes, I checked when we got in.

NINA

Glad I ran into you. Thanks for pulling me in, by the way.

STEPHEN
Sure thing.

NINA
No, I mean, you didn't have to.

STEPHEN
Well. You get into a mindset. When you hear something like this is happening.

NINA
Right.

STEPHEN
Your body just sort of takes over. I didn't want you to, ya know-

NINA
Absolutely. Well I appreciate it.

(A beat. Awkwardness.)

STEPHEN
It's not that I don't care about you.

NINA
I understand.

STEPHEN
We just don't, ya know.

NINA
Know each other well?

STEPHEN
We're just neighbors. I don't think we've spoken before.

NINA
No. We did that one time.

STEPHEN
Did we?

NINA
Yeah. About Diana's not fixing the stoop.

STEPHEN
Right. The cracks.

NINA
And the uneven step. That second one.

STEPHEN
I always tripped over it.

NINA
Right. Well anyways I appreciate it.

STEPHEN
You're in the one-bedroom right? No one else up there with you?

NINA
Just me. And my cat.

STEPHEN
Oh god, is she still up there?

NINA
No she bolted when the first explosions started. She goes out the fire escape.

STEPHEN
I'm sorry. I'm sure she's fine.

NINA
I'm sure she is too. Animals just have a sense about these things, ya know?

STEPHEN
Yeah. I wish I had a pet, but it's times like this, I'm glad I don't.

NINA
Right.

(A beat. More awkwardness.)

STEPHEN
What's her name?

NINA
Who?

STEPHEN
Your cat.

NINA

Oh. Tabitha.

STEPHEN
What's she like/

NINA
/I don't really want to talk about her./

STEPHEN
Oh. Totally understand.

NINA
It's just not helping me.

STEPHEN
Absolutely.

NINA
Sorry.

STEPHEN
No, don't be. I have this nervous condition.

NINA
Yeah?

STEPHEN
Yeah, when I get anxious I talk a lot. Can't really stop.

NINA
That makes sense.

STEPHEN
It's helpful for me just to talk about anything other than the thing going on. When my wife was pregnant with our daughter, I couldn't stop talking.

NINA
I didn't know she was your wife.

STEPHEN
Yeah. The doctor's had to kick me out of the delivery room when she went into labor. She was screaming at me, "SHUT UP SHUT THE FUCK UP". While she was in labor! Literally giving birth to our little girl and she's yelling at me to be quiet.

NINA

That's funny.

STEPHEN
Yeah. Yeah it is. It was.

(A beat. STEPHEN gets profoundly sad.)

NINA
Where are they?

STEPHEN
Hmm?

NINA
Your wife, and your daughter? /I'm sorry I don't know their names./

STEPHEN
/No, oh, no it's okay./ They made it out.

NINA
They did?

STEPHEN
Yeah.

NINA
How come you're not with them?

STEPHEN
I didn't get back in time. They were waiting for me, but I didn't get back here in time.

NINA
Wow. I'm sorry.

STEPHEN
They're safe, that's all that matters.

NINA
Where were they going?

STEPHEN
The coast. It's where we agreed to meet. Jacob Riis or Long Beach. I'll get there when I can.

NINA
Okay. It's safe?

STEPHEN
I hope so.

(Explosions in the distance.)

STEPHEN
What was your plan?

NINA
How do you mean?

STEPHEN
Where were you going to go?

NINA
Oh. Nowhere.

STEPHEN
You weren't trying to get out?

NINA
No. Not really. I was going to the bodega.

STEPHEN
When I walked out and found you?

NINA
Yeah.

STEPHEN
You weren't trying to escape the city?

NINA
No. I was going to wait it out.

STEPHEN
Well. That's pretty stupid.

NINA
No. It's safer here than anywhere else.

STEPHEN
There are bombs going off out there and you were going to "wait it out"?

NINA

Sure. What else is there to do?

STEPHEN

Go be with loved ones? Run?

NINA

I don't have anyone else.

STEPHEN

How is that possible?

NINA

I don't. Most of my family has passed. I was an only child.

STEPHEN

Oh. I'm sorry.

NINA

It's alright. I was going to be all right. I don't need anyone else.

STEPHEN

I suppose if you grow up that way. You get accustomed to it.

NINA

But. I do appreciate you pulling me back inside. I didn't think they would come this deep into Brooklyn.

STEPHEN

I don't think they are very selective about what they hit.

NINA

I just wish we could get some information.

STEPHEN

(checking his phone) The cell service is out as well.

NINA

Damnit.

(Explosions in the distance. Maybe some shakes. It's coming back this way.)

STEPHEN

Sounds like they are coming back this way.

NINA

Is there any, I don't know, supplies in this room?

STEPHEN

Most of them are back in the kitchen. But when that wall collapsed...I don't think we can get in without damage.

NINA

Anything in here? Like granola bars or anything?

STEPHEN

Oh! Nellie's backpack!

(He locates a small pink backpack. He rummages through, finds her lunch box. He opens it and reveals several boxes of raisins.)

NINA

Oh. Gross.

STEPHEN

Nancy always packs her lunch, she's trying to get her to eat healthier. She told her raisins are candy grapes.

NINA

That's stupid.

STEPHEN

We thought it was working. Apparently not. She must have been just leaving them in her lunch box.

NINA

Well, it's something.

(STEPHEN offers NINA a box. They sit and start eating. There's several moment of silence. For a brief moment, the explosions stop. They both look at each other. NINA runs to the small window overlooking the alley to see what he can see. The explosions resume. They sigh, shake their heads, continue to eat.)

STEPHEN

So. Have you always lived alone?

NINA

In this building? Yeah.

STEPHEN

Where did you live before this?

NINA

Bay Ridge. Further East. I had a roommate there.

STEPHEN
Why'd you move?

NINA
Well. We kind of had, I don't know what you'd call it, a falling out, I guess.

STEPHEN
What about?

NINA
Believe it or not: the dishes.

STEPHEN
Ha! Over whether or not to do them?

NINA
You're gonna think this is ridiculous, but: the correct way to wash forks.

STEPHEN
Is there an incorrect way to wash forks?

NINA
(*Very seriously*) Yes. Yes there is.

STEPHEN.
Oh. Alright.

NINA
You have to get in between the spikes! You have get the crap that gets in between there. There are so many germs, so much bacteria just in between each one. If there are four spikes on each fork, there are three places where you need to CLEAN EVEN DEEPER. Because we use forks to stab things, and that means every item you stab, you leave a little bit behind. Think about it this way: if you use one of those, god what're they called, the rake-things they use to pick up hay? What the fuck are those things? Seriously what the fuck are they called? Dear god I can't remember, this whole thing is fucking with my brain and I can't remember words very well. Anyways. They pick up the hay, and hay is always left behind. Even rakes! When you rake leaves into a pile, there's always leaves that get stuck in the teeth of the rake and you have to use your hands to get those leaves off. Well that's what HAPPENS WITH FORKS TOO. So you have to take a scrubber, one with a handle and a lot of soap, and you have to really get in there. You can't just run over the fork with a sponge and soap and HOPE that every single germ and bacteria has disappeared. And this roommate was so bad at washing forks. I'd watch her just (*she mimes going over one side of the fork with the sponge just once, and then the other side just once*) and that's not cleaning the forks. And so I said to her "hey, could you wash that better?" And she said "better?" and I said "yeah", and she said "are you saying I don't know how to wash

dishes” and I told her, kindly, I said really nice “apparently not. Apparently you do not and this is how I’d do it”. And so I showed her, ya gotta (*she mimes really washing a fork, with a lot of elbow grease*), and ya gotta really get it in there. And it just kind of spiraled from there. She said

I was super anal, and maybe about this thing I was! Maybe I was about washing forks! But I wasn’t about other things. I didn’t care about her hair getting everywhere or her smelly perfume or anything like that. I just wanted her to wash the forks more efficiently. So yeah. Yeah I live alone now.

(A long beat. STEPHEN really doesn’t know how to respond.)

STEPHEN

Clearly.

NINA

I’m not crazy.

STEPHEN

I didn’t say you were.

NINA

Well you’re sort of implying that.

STEPHEN

No. I just think you’re passionate about fork-hygiene.

NINA

I am. I’ll own that.

STEPHEN

How do you like living alone?

NINA

It’s okay. I keep to myself anyways.

STEPHEN

You do.

NINA

I do find that I get lost sometimes. I forget the little things. And then when something like this happens, it highlights...

STEPHEN

Highlights what?

NINA

(realizing) Jesus Christ.

STEPHEN
It highlights Jesus? Like the Lord?

NINA
No. Fuck.

STEPHEN
What's going on?

NINA
I just realized. I think I left the oven on.

STEPHEN
What're you talking about?

NINA
When you ran into me, I had the oven on.

STEPHEN
When I ran into you we were on the street.

NINA
I know. I was going to the bodega.

STEPHEN
Why would your oven be on if you were going to the bodega?

NINA
I was going to get a frozen pizza.

STEPHEN
That doesn't explain why your oven was on.

NINA
I was going to make a frozen pizza but then I realized I didn't have one, but at that point I really, really wanted one so I decided I could leave the oven and then just run down to the bodega to get it.

STEPHEN
That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

NINA
And I think I left the oven on.

STEPHEN
Who the fuck cares?!?

NINA
Well if it's still on then the gas has been building up and with everything going on out there, it could be ya know-

STEPHEN
Why would you care about your oven right now?

NINA
Because I turned it on and I can't remember if I turned it off!

STEPHEN
Fuck. I have got to get out of here.

NINA
What?? And go where?

STEPHEN
I've got to find my wife, I've got to get to Nellie. I can't be trapped here with you anymore.

NINA
With me? Why add that in?

STEPHEN
I have to go. Stay if you want I have to get out of here.

(STEPHEN picks up the pink backpack, he starts packing stuff he might need, although there's not much to pack. He divides the raisins and leaves some for NINA.)

STEPHEN
I'm leaving some of the raisins for you. Stay as long as you want, I have to go.

NINA
There's nothing out there!

STEPHEN
They are still out there! They are waiting for me!

NINA
No they aren't! There's no way they are still alive.

STEPHEN
(shaken) Take that back.

NINA
I won't.

STEPHEN
They aren't dead. They are still waiting for me. They are at the coast.

NINA
They aren't.

STEPHEN
I just have to get to Jacob Riis. As long as I get to the beach I'll be fine.

NINA
It's not safe!

STEPHEN
They are at the beach. I can make it there and then we can do the next best thing.

NINA
They would've hit the beach. Jacob Riis is right next to the airport, they would've hit that first. Even if your wife and daughter did make it out of there in time, you'll never reach them. It's not safe.

STEPHEN
I can't not be with them.

(A beat. NINA doesn't know what to say.)

NINA
I really hope I didn't leave the oven on.

STEPHEN
I thought you said you did.

NINA
I might've turned it off. When the explosions started. It's all sort of a blur.

STEPHEN
I suppose we will know.

NINA
Soon enough.

(A beat. It's awkward. They are stuck.)

NINA

How long does it take gas to fill up an apartment? I mean if I lit a match right now, would we just (*makes explosion noise*)?

STEPHEN

Jesus fuck!

NINA

What?

STEPHEN

I'm going to die here with a person who thinks there's a right way to clean a fork.

NINA

Hey. I know you're upset. But you don't have to be mean.

STEPHEN

You're right. I'm sorry.

NINA

I'm the only one here. And I'm with you.

STEPHEN

You're right. I'm sorry. I'm glad you're here.

NINA

Thanks. I really do appreciate that you pulled me in.

(A beat. The explosions start getting closer.)

STEPHEN

Why do you care so much about the oven?

NINA

I'm not sure.

STEPHEN

You've brought it up a few times.

NINA

Yeah?

STEPHEN

The likelihood of us dying from the explosions is much higher. Why care about the oven?

NINA

I guess. Because it's something I can control. Could've controlled.

STEPHEN

Oh.

NINA

We can only be in charge of the things we can control, right?

STEPHEN

Right.

NINA

Like your daughter with the raisins.

STEPHEN

Right.

(A long beat. The explosions get very close.)

STEPHEN

How long now?

NINA

I'm not sure.

(He starts checking his watch. Exactly two and half minutes go by before the explosions start again, this time very, very close.)

NINA

Two and half minutes.

STEPHEN

Okay. Jesus.

NINA

I suppose the forks don't really matter now.

STEPHEN

Well. Maybe not.

(A beat. The explosions get really close.)

NINA

But did I leave the oven on? That's gonna eat at me.

(Lights down. End of Play.)