

FALLOUT

A Play in One Scene

by

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CHARACTERS

JACK

DONNA

TIME

The present, between 10 and 11 p.m. on a cold autumn night

PLACE

Jack's small, sparsely decorated apartment in a building in some big city

There is a couch front and center, facing the audience. The rest of the space is blank and left to the audience's imagination.

FALLOUT

SCENE 1 (AND ONLY)

(JACK is sitting in the center of his couch, hunched forward, staring out at the audience and his unseen TV. He is in a bathrobe and socks, clicking through channels with a remote control, never lingering on a station for more than a second or two.)

JACK

Infomercial. Infomercial. Boxing. Infomercial...

(JACK shivers, sets down the remote, and rubs his hands together. He stands, pulling his robe tighter around him, and somewhat stiffly retrieves a blanket from just offstage right -- presumably from another room.

On his way back to the couch, there is the sound of knocking on a door from offstage left.)

JACK

Whuh?

(JACK, startled, drops the blanket at his feet. He stares in the direction of stage left, the entrance to his apartment.

Another series of knocks, louder, causes JACK to wince.)

JACK

Who the hell...?

(JACK starts toward the door, but his feet get wrapped up in the blanket, and he falls hard.

The knocking comes again, even louder.)

DONNA

(Offstage)

Jack? Are you in there?

JACK

Donna?

(JACK gets up and angrily throws the blanket on the couch as he crosses to stage left.)

Yeah, I'm coming!

(JACK puts his hand on an unseen doorknob, pauses to collect himself, and opens the door.)

DONNA pushes her way into the apartment. Jack has to step back to avoid getting bowled over.)

DONNA

Oh good, you're up. What am I saying? Of course, you're up. How could anybody sleep in this sorry excuse for a residence? The furnace chooses tonight to give up the ghost, and can our good-for-nothing super be bothered to return a phone call? Ha! That slumlord is probably curled up on a beach somewhere. Meanwhile, we are left here, with the temperature dropping faster than the leaves outside. I was shivering away in my apartment, trying not to turn into a human Popsicle...

(DONNA turns to face JACK.)

...and then I remembered you.

JACK

M-me? I don't know how to fix a furnace!

(DONNA laughs and smacks JACK on the arm.)

DONNA

That's not what I meant, Jack. I just wanted to stop by and make sure you hadn't succumbed to hyperthermia.

(JACK shrugs.)

JACK

Well, I'm not dead yet.

(DONNA laughs loudly and smacks JACK'S arm again.)

DONNA

There's that dark sense of humor we all love.

JACK

We who?

(DONNA ignores the question and barges her way further into his apartment. She walks to the back edge of stage right and futzes with an unseen appliance.)

DONNA

Let's get this oven going. That'll warm things up a little, at least.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Just don't leave it on all night, or you could die of carbon monoxide poisoning.

(DONNA strolls back into the living room, wiping her hands on her pajama pants.

JACK meets her before she reaches center stage, putting himself between her and the kitchen and guiding her back to the door, bodily.)

JACK

Thanks for the tip. Very thoughtful of you.

(DONNA allows herself to be led a few steps but then stops at center stage, directly behind the couch. She looks out at the audience, at the unseen TV.

JACK stops so that he doesn't bump into her.)

DONNA

Were you watching...?

(DONNA and JACK, staring at the TV/audience, cock their heads forty-five degrees to the right in unison, a shared look of amazement on their faces.

JACK comes out of his trance first.)

JACK

Oh God!

(JACK throws himself over the back of the couch, diving for the remote control. He clicks furiously at the TV while in an absurd position, before maneuvering himself into a sitting position. He stares straight ahead, wide-eyed and stock-still.

DONNA walks around the couch and sits beside him.)

DONNA

There's no need to be embarrassed, Jack. Everybody gets lonely.

JACK

No...that's not...I was just...just flipping through!

DONNA

You can call it whatever you want.

JACK

I was channel surfing! It's something I do when I can't sleep. I don't really end up watching anything, and I certainly wouldn't have stopped on this channel if I knew...

(JACK gives DONNA a long look, as though noticing her on his couch for the first time.)

Look, I appreciate you checking in on me, but it's pretty late...

DONNA

I know, but it's way too cold to sleep. Maybe you and I should have some cocoa and a chat.

(DONNA angles toward JACK, half-facing him.)

We haven't talked since...I mean, it's been a while, right?

(JACK shifts away slightly.)

JACK

I don't have any cocoa.

(DONNA scooches a little closer.)

DONNA

How about tea?

(JACK retreats as far as he can, pressing himself against the arm of the couch.)

JACK

Afraid not.

(DONNA rests a hand on his knee.)

DONNA

We could huddle for warmth.

(JACK jumps up, knocking the blanket to the floor at his feet.)

JACK

Uh...no thank you.

(DONNA stands up and puts her hands on her hips.)

DONNA

Honestly, Jack, am I that repulsive to you?

JACK

What? No! Of course not. You're a...a...lovely woman.

JACK (CONT'D)

Not repulsive at all. Any guy would be lucky to have you...just not me because...because I don't really...dating isn't my thing, I guess. I'm not good at it.

(DONNA rolls her eyes.)

DONNA

So that's why you never returned my calls? The whole it's-not-you-it's-me thing? Puh-lease.

(DONNA storms away from JACK but stops before she gets to the door. She spins around and returns to the couch.)

Why did you even agree to go on a date with me in the first place if you weren't interested in a relationship?

(JACK considers the question.)

JACK

So you'd stop asking me?

(DONNA glares at Jack.)

DONNA

Well, excuse me for trying to be nice. You said you were new to the city, and you didn't seem to have any friends. I mean, I have never seen anyone else coming or going from this apartment. Is it so crazy of me to think you might be lonely?

JACK

Just because I'm alone doesn't mean I'm lonely.

DONNA

Good for you. You've certainly developed a talent for keeping people away. Glad it's all working out for you.

(JACK folds his arms defensively.)

JACK

There's nothing wrong with enjoying one's own company.

DONNA

Don't you think you've taken it a little far, though? You're practically a hermit! And when you finally deigned to have dinner with me, you barely said two words the whole time. I had to do all the talking!

JACK

You were more than up to the task.

(DONNA frowns and takes a deep breath.)

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DONNA

Someone had to keep the conversation going. Or would it have been better if we just sat there in the restaurant like a couple of mutes? I'm telling you, it's not healthy to be so closed off. Mark my words, Jack O'Leary, pushing others away will be your downfall!

(JACK laughs humorlessly.)

JACK

What are you, my shrink? I don't have to take this from you. You're just my neighbor...emphasis on bore.

(DONNA jerks as though physically struck. Her expression fades from angry to wounded.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Look, I didn't mean that, Donna.

(DONNA raises a hand to cut JACK off. Her tone is now soft and tremulous, and she pointedly avoids JACK'S eyes as she speaks.)

DONNA

I know I don't lead the most fascinating of lives. My stories aren't as interesting as your TV shows...and God knows I'm not nearly as limber as the ladies you seem to like.

(DONNA gestures at the unseen TV.)

But I won't apologize for who I am. It's true I don't like silence. Never did. You just don't know what someone is thinking in situations like that. When a person is talking, though, they share a piece of themselves. Even if the words aren't always true, the connection is real. Silence, though...silence is...soulless.

(DONNA now looks over at JACK. Their eyes meet for several long seconds.

Finally, JACK looks away.)

DONNA (CONT'D)

Have it your way then. I didn't think it was possible, but you've managed to make tonight even colder.

(DONNA turns and makes her way to the door, not too fast, not too slow.

JACK tries to follow but trips over the blanket. This time he stays on his feet and hurries to meet Donna at the door.)

JACK

Donna, I am sorry.

(DONNA pauses in the doorway at far stage left but doesn't turn around to face JACK.)

DONNA

Enjoy your silence.

(All stage lights go out, bathing the stage in black.

DONNA screams.)

DONNA (CONT'D)

Oh God. First the furnace and now the electricity. Everything is falling apart!

(JACK hurries across the stage to retrieve a flashlight from the kitchen, offstage right. He stumbles and generally makes a ruckus while navigating his apartment in the dark.)

JACK

I think I have a flashlight...around here...somewhere...

(JACK clicks the button, and a few stage lights turn back on, casting the scene in a half-light.)

Let me walk you back to your apartment. It's the least I can do after--

DONNA

Please let me stay, Jack! I hate the dark more than I hate silence, and I promise I won't make a peep. We'll just sleep on the couch. Silently. That's all.

(JACK stares at her, trying to come up with a good reason to refuse her request. At last, he throws up his hands.)

JACK

Yeah. Sure. Fine. But just so you know, I probably won't fall asleep anytime soon. I don't sleep much on a good night.

(JACK returns to the couch, holding the flashlight out in front of him.

DONNA follows closely behind him, her gaze darting back and forth at the shadows that ring the room.

The two awkwardly arrange themselves on the couch, sitting upright and fairly far apart.

JACK tries to spread out the blanket, but DONNA is too far away to get completely covered by it.)

JACK

You can get closer.

DONNA

Are you sure?

JACK

Yeah.

(DONNA moves toward the middle of the couch but still leaves some space between her and JACK.)

JACK hesitates but then moves closer to her. The two of them are now sitting side by side.

JACK shakes his head and laughs to himself.)

DONNA

Not how you thought your day would go, huh?

(DONNA slaps her hands over her mouth.)

Oops, sorry! No more talking!

(DONNA sucks in her lips and looks around the gloomy apartment for a while, bored.)

After several seconds of silence, JACK coughs.)

JACK

You know you were right before...when you mentioned the it's-not-you-it's-me thing. It is me, Donna. I've never figured out how to talk to people. I don't know why it's so difficult for me...but it is.

(DONNA glances over at him.)

JACK (CONT'D)

I can be a good listener, though, if you want to talk.

(DONNA smiles.)

DONNA

Well, now I don't know what I'd talk about. Kind of feeling on the spot here, and it's almost too cold to think.

(As DONNA talks, JACK'S eyelids start to get heavy, and by the time she is done speaking, his eyes are closed. More can be added to the dialogue below to stretch it out.)

DONNA (CONT'D)

And if it's already this cold in October, I can't imagine what winter is going to be like. We've been getting more and more snow every year, too. Might as well move to Alaska. Of course, you're probably used to this since you're from...

(JACK'S head lolls to the side, resting on DONNA'S shoulder. She looks over at him and smiles again.)

Then she gently takes the flashlight from his hand and turns it off.

The stage goes black.)

THE END