

BURIED IN THE BAHAMAS

Players:

NIKKI, a young woman wearing a bright yellow hat.

BARBRA, Nikki's mother.

JOE, a stranger.

The play takes place in Chicago.

AT RISE: Three unusually tall stools are placed in a row, facing the audience. A vast amount of space separates each stool.

Seating order, stage left to right: Barbra, Nikki, Joe

If spotlights are available, each character should have their own. The players should be illuminated simultaneously with a loud clank and a receding hum, as if an industrial light switch has been pulled.

The players do not leave their stools throughout.

NIKKI

I guess you could say I'm damaged goods. A bruised peach. That's how I see myself. But, if you can get past first impressions, I'm really very sweet inside. No. Really.

It's snowing today and I couldn't be happier. I hold out my hand to catch a single flake and look, really look at what I've caught. The snowflake quickly melts and I think: I've just killed a beautiful thing. It would have lived, if I'd let it fall to the ground. Then again, it would have disappeared into a bank of flakes.

So. You tell me. Which is worse? Melting in my palm or disappearing into a bank of snow?

JOE

Nikki was a loon.

NIKKI

It's snowing today and I look from the Michigan Avenue Bridge up the Chicago River. The skyscrapers look like rotted teeth. Beige, brown, black.

JOE

A nut-job.

NIKKI

Beautiful... [*Cheerfully yells*] Beautiful!

Listen. Last summer, I jumped from this bridge. I was airborne for an eternity. I leapt into a river of reflections. Buildings, flags, sailboats, flyby pigeons and the faces of tourists looking down.

People from downstate Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and even farther flung took note. They saw me. They saw me *flying*.

JOE

I try not to think about her.

NIKKI

But, now it's snowing, and I catch and kill snowflakes with the same joy. I feel warm inside. Winter cheers me, shearling drapes my body and a sunny cap tops my head.

BARBRA

I bought her that shearling on sale. It's cocoa brown with gold stitching. A steal. Nine hundred dollars at Mark Shale. Nobody buys shearling in the summer.

NIKKI

But when they fished me out of the river last summer, I was cold and miserable. Topping that, I'd failed... One of the pitfalls of acting on impulse: I forgot I could swim.

BARBRA

She never escaped that chill. It leached into her bones, making her teeth chatter until winter came. In the winter, she warmed up.

NIKKI

I met Joe in the fall. Late November. I caught his eye, as I did many people's, in my shearling coat and mittens on 60-degree day.

JOE

She was dressed for a blizzard.

NIKKI

I noticed him because she was wearing a yellow carnation in his lapel. Who does that?

BARBRA

They stopped in the street to talk. To make a date. Thoughtless.

It was windy and my shopping bags were ripping. A tear in my Nordstrom bag was especially worrying. One more gust and a filthy cab would drive off wearing my new de la Renta. Such a pretty dress. Marigold with black floral appliqués at hem. One hundred percent silk faille.

JOE

I don't know why I was so captivated. I should have seen the clues. Her mother, for one, struggling with all those bags, trailing her like a pack mule.

NIKKI

Joe had a jovial quality about him.

BARBRA

He needed a shave.

JOE

But, she was beautiful and quirky. She didn't even bother explaining her attire and, in that moment, it seemed appropriate, if not to the warm day, then to her.

NIKKI

I asked Joe about the carnation.

BARBRA

He was wearing it in memory of his dog, a yellow Labrador that had died the previous week. [*Sarcastic*] Quite the line.

NIKKI

O, poor doggie.

BARBRA

I mean, who has a big dog like that in the city? But, she fell for it.

JOE

I blubbered on endlessly. All the details of Yatzee's collision with a laundry truck.

NIKKI

I wondered, who loses a dog that way? Was it an act of carelessness or was the dog suicidal?

It was clear he loved Yatzee. He seemed like a responsible person. So, suicide seemed like the logical conclusion. But what, in psychological terms, I mean, was Yatzee running from? Doggie depression? Milkbone madness?

JOE

She was sympathetic.

BARBRA

She was putty.

NIKKI

I realized that I was more interested in Yatzee than in Joe. But, was that a bad thing? I shrugged it off. Winter was coming in and I was in a good mood.

JOE

We agreed to meet at eight for a drink.

BARBRA

She made the date and the bags held. To this day, I look remarkable in that marigold dress. Thank you, Oscar. Kisses! Kisses!

NIKKI

Later I regretted it. Did I really want to spend an evening with a guy who was still in mourning for his retriever?

BARBRA

She seemed sullen when we returned home. It occurred to me that I hadn't bought her anything.

NIKKI

Could I handle his emotions? What if he broke down?

BARBRA

So I gave her my new Louis Vuitton clutch. I lied and told her it was for her all along.

NIKKI

What if he cried? What if I couldn't? I like to appear empathetic.

BARBRA

But, that didn't help... What's a mother to do? I let her sulk.

NIKKI

Then I realized, what better symbolizes acceptance than a yellow carnation?

Yellow is a very life-goes-on kind of color. Jaunty in a scarf, daring in gloves, crisp in a hat. It's a cheerful, defiant color. It says, I can accept what comes with confidence.

JOE

At home, I took the carnation out of my lapel and placed it in Yatzee's water bowl. It floated, causing the steel to glow, as if his thirsty muzzle hovered above.

A beautiful yellow glow.

BARBRA

There was a draft in the house. I looked and looked, but couldn't find its source. If I was feeling it, Nikki certainly was. So, I checked on her.

She was in her bedroom, wearing a silk dress, a Juicy Couture chapeau, a chiffon scarf and a pair of lacey gloves. Yellow from head to toe. Her windows wide open.

My God, I told her. Shut those windows. You look ridiculous. Windows wide open. Chiffon in the fall. What were you thinking?

NIKKI

I was thinking about how quickly summer had passed. How I hadn't worn any of these things. How I hadn't wanted to wear anything feminine, bright or cheerful in the summer, and how, now, with my mood brightening, it was too late. Or was it?

BARBRA

But, darling, it's not the season. You can always wear that dress next summer.

[*Scolding*] You mustn't obsess so much about wearing this year's fashions next year; and you mustn't be so frugal that you feel compelled to wear everything I buy.

Honestly. Imagine that dress topped by your shearling.

Hideous. Dreadful. Atrocious.

JOE

Horrific. Horrendous. Morbid.

That's how she looked when we met at the Coq d'Or for drinks. Her coat was no longer charming. She looked like a cattle herder in Dior.

NIKKI

[*Slyly*] Shepherding me into the darkest corner of the Coq. I knew where the night was going... But, he played coy.

JOE

The booth wasn't spacious enough.

NIKKI

When our drinks arrived, I gave his knee a gentle squeeze.

JOE

She clawed me. I jumped.

NIKKI

He upended the table and our martinis flew. Whoosh! Crash! Bang!

[*Elated*] We were the center of attention.

JOE

[*Irritated*] The very center.

BARBRA

I heard about it the next morning from an acquaintance. An *acquaintance*.

Now. Don't get me wrong. I'm not ashamed of my daughter. She's somewhat of a celebrated neurotic in the North Shore.

NIKKI

It was wonderful.

JOE

It was horrible.

BARBRA

O hell, if she were any more celebrated, there'd probably be a parade.

NIKKI

Earthquake, everybody! Earthquake! [*Shrill laughter*] Get down! Under the tables!

BARBRA

So, why discourage it?

NIKKI

[*Laughter suddenly stopping, examining her hands*] Sticky.

BARBRA

After all, having a famously neurotic daughter has a certain cachet.

NIKKI

That's when it dawned on me. [*With joy*] Yes. Winter was coming and I was in love.

I climbed back up into the booth, batted my lashes and leaned in for a kiss.

JOE

She lunged. I panicked.

NIKKI

Listen, Joe. Let's sip our martinis and reel in their wake. Who knows what might happen? Who knows where the night might go?

JOE

Driven by stark terror and self-preservation—

BARBRA

He left her in the Coq.

JOE

I got the hell out of there.

NIKKI

And poof. He was gone.

The waiter gave me the eye. [*With a growl*] He'll be back, you'll see!

BARBRA

He never came back.

NIKKI

Five martinis later, *I* could not see.

A man in a Pershing cap poured me into a cab. He looked angry.

To hell with you!

People on the sidewalk gawked.

To hell with you too! It was his dog—*his* dog, you know, that [*hiccup*] committed suicide.
His dog was bad dog.

Bad dog!

Will Nikki recapture Joe's affections?

Will Barbra find a fabulous pair of Ferragamo flip-flops at Neiman-Marcus?

Would you like to read the lesbian version of this play?

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