

FUMES

JACKSON: Afro-Latinx. 19-23 years old. Queer. NYC native. Guarded, blunt, and brutal at first. Hiding a heart of gold and years of trauma. Actively trying to break down his walls. Who knows if he's succeeding or not.

WILL: White. 21-25 years old. Queer. Southern boy recently moved to NYC. Happy go lucky, golden retriever energy. Has a lot of love to give. Can be really clueless.

YVETTE: Afro-Latinx. 50's. Jackson's mom. Immigrant. Has been beaten down by the world. She's seen a lot. Cold. Brutal. Mean. Devout Catholic. A glimmer of love still remains, but it's faint.

I: The Apartment

(A studio apartment in Brooklyn. Will and Jackson's shared apartment.)

JACKSON

(Direct address to the audience.)

Are we all not just amalgamations of others? Broken fractals of our circumstances? Just the unloving results of our environments? Pieces of other people's habits and personalities, others strife and happiness.

(End of direct address.)

You left the stove on again.

WILL

Oh. Sorry.

JACKSON

You really need to stop doing that. It's dangerous.

WILL

Yeah.

JACKSON

Like really dangerous.

WILL

Won't happen again.

JACKSON

Are you even listening to me?

WILL

Yes. Jesus, I'm listening. The stove. Yeah. Whatever.

JACKSON

What the fuck do you mean whatever?

WILL

It's just a stove, Jackson.

JACKSON

No it's not. We live in a matchbox of an apartment. This shit could catch on fire so easily. Not to mention our fucking air conditioning bill is already up the ass and the apartment heats up when you leave the fucking stove on for a WHOLE DAY.

WILL

Are you done bitching?

JACKSON

Fuck you.

WILL

No seriously are you done? Or do I need to grovel at your feet and beg for forgiveness?

JACKSON

You're so fucking dramatic.

WILL

I'm the dramatic one? You just gave me a lecture on leaving the stove on like I'm not a grown ass man.

JACKSON

Because you're fucking irresponsible. If you want me to treat you like a grown man, act like one.

WILL

What are you? My mother?

JACKSON

(Beat. That stings.) Man...fuck you.

WILL

J...you know I didn't mean it like that.

JACKSON

No, fuck you.

WILL

C'mon I'm sorry.

JACKSON

You have never, ever called me that before and you decide to now?

WILL

Jackson...

JACKSON

No, no it's fine. I'm a mother now. Call me mommy! You want some breakfast, son? Need me to drive you to school?

WILL

Jesus Christ.

JACKSON

Or maybe I should treat you like my mom treated me? Kneel in rice, hit you with a belt. Call you a fucking faggot.

WILL

Holy shit, you've gone fucking insane!

JACKSON

I've gone insane?! You have treated me like a stranger in my own home for the past two weeks. I'm going through the hardest time in my life right now and I needed you. I needed you to be there and all I got was you leaving the stove on and calling me fucking crazy.

WILL

Jackson, how am I supposed to help you when you won't let me in. You've never let me in.

JACKSON

Because, Will, your life is perfect. Your family is perfect. You come from every kind of privilege imaginable. You will never understand what it's like to experience generational trauma, to feel this insane sense of loyalty to someone, who is literally abusive, for the sheer fact that they decided to bring you across some river 23 years ago.

WILL

So this is because I'm White?

JACKSON

Oh my fucking God.

WILL

No, but that's exactly it isn't it? I'm a privileged, middle class, White man. You're right. I'm never going to understand your experience. I'm never going to navigate this world as an immigrant or as a brown person. But that's not my fault.

JACKSON

Look, I really don't need your White guilt right now.

WILL

(Beat) I can't do this anymore.

JACKSON

What?

WILL

This. I can't do this anymore. A relationship shouldn't be this hard.

II: The Subway

(Jackson and Will sit on the subway. The cart is relatively empty. There is distance between them. They are strangers. Bundled up. It's winter.)

JACKSON

(On the phone.) You left the stove on again? Fuck mom, I just got on the train. I can't just stop everything I'm doing to run back home.

...

Malcriado? Jesus Christ. You're so dramatic.

...

Stop. Just stop. Don't give me the "I've done so much for you" spiel.

...

Ya. Ya no quiero hablar de esto. I'll be home in an hour. I'll turn the stove off then. BYE.

WILL

(Beat) Is it gas or electric?

JACKSON

Excuse me?

WILL

The stove. Is it gas or electric?

JACKSON

It's gas.

WILL

You live in an apartment?

JACKSON

You trynna stalk me, creep?

WILL

No, it's just that most apartments aren't allowed to have gas stoves. So you probably live in a house, right.

(No response.)

If it's gas you should be careful. The flame can go out and the fumes can fill the place. It could combust.

JACKSON

Dude, what is your problem? We're on the train, why the fuck are you talking to me.

(Multiple beats.)

WILL

I'm Will.

(He extends his hand for a handshake. No response.)

I just moved to the city.

(No response. Will's hand hangs in the air. Multiple beats. A decision is made.)

JACKSON

I'm Jackson.

III: The House

(Jackson entering, it's late at night. He sneaks to his room)

YVETTE

And where do you think you're going?

(Jackson retreats back to the kitchen where Yvette leans on the gas stove.)

Do you know what time it is?

JACKSON

Mmm mmm...

YVETTE

Speak. Up.

JACKSON

I dunno...

YVETTE

What time do you think it is?

JACKSON

Late.

YVETTE

How late?

JACKSON

Mom...

YVETTE

How late is it? Ten? Midnight? Two AM? Five?

(No response.)

Where have you been?

JACKSON

I went out with Will.

YVETTE

You went out with Will. Where?

JACKSON

Mom, I'm a grown man.

YVETTE

You think you grown at 21? A grown ass man who still lives with his mama, who don't pay rent, who don't got a job, don't got a girlfriend, wanna come strollin on in here at 3AM smellin like booze and piss. Where the fuck have you been?

JACKSON

We went out drinkin.

YVETTE

Where?

JACKSON

A bar on 14th and 8th Ave.

YVETTE

Mmmm. So you went to a gay bar in West Village and then wanna come back into my house--

JACKSON

I never said that!

YVETTE

--You wanna come back to my good Christian home and desecrate it with your faggotry.

JACKSON

I am not talkin about this right now.

YVETTE

Oh you not talkin about this? Mmm, pobrecito. No quiere hablar de esto. You think you got a choice? Child, you funny.

JACKSON

Why are you so fucking miserable all the time? Why you always on my back like I don't do shit around here. Like I don't help you clean the house or cook dinner or go to school. What I do in my private life is not your business.

YVETTE

Child, I carried you on my back in the heat of the desert. I almost drowned for you, left everything behind for you. I work two jobs for you, my fingers bleach stained and pruned for you. I brought you into this world. I think it's all my business what you can and can't do.

JACKSON

(Beat) I'm moving out.

YVETTE

You must be outta your mind. With what money?

JACKSON

Will wants me to move in with him. He'd pay for all of it.

YVETTE

So you sellin yourself to this boy.

JACKSON

That's not what I said.

YVETTE

Nah, he's pimpin you out. He your sugar daddy and you just his slutty little twink bitch. Oh, Lord I can't wait to see you crumble. For you to get out there and realize how cruel the world is. How it don't have no mercy for immigrants, or gay folk, or black folk. And guess what honey, you're all three. You are going to fall apart without me there to save you.

JACKSON

No. You know what mom. I think *you're* the one that's gonna fall apart without *me*. No one here to remind you to take your meds, or get the groceries for you, or bail you out when you talk a little too much shit to the lady at the bodega. No one to come turn the stove off for you when you forget, or listen to your miserable bitching about your boss and your job and your life. You need me just as much as I need you! The only difference is that you left everything behind and turned into this sad shell of a woman. I'm leaving everything behind and I've never. Felt. Fucking. Happier!

(Jackson leaves. The door slams.)

III: The Apartment

(Will and Jackson's shared apartment. In bed.)

JACKSON

Aren't we all just...like...amalgamations of others? Like broken fractals of our circumstances? The unloving results of our environments? We're just a bunch of pieces of other people's habits and personalities, other people's strife and happiness.

WILL

I don't know. I don't think so. I feel like that's kinda a sad way to look at it. Cause then doesn't that mean that we-- our personalities-- aren't our own. They're just a bunch of pieces we've picked up from all the people we've come in contact with. Everyone we've loved and cared for and hated. What about individualism?

JACKSON

I dunno. I think it's true. I see my mom's cynicism in myself. Her mistrust. Her...walls.

WILL

But you're not at all like your mom. You're excited about the world. You're kind and loving and soft.

JACKSON

I mean, don't you think she was like that at one point. Before she crossed a border into some... new galaxy a million miles away where people make fun of her for the way she speaks and bosses take advantage of her for not having papers. And then she had me and that added to the cynicism, to the stress....

WILL

You can't blame yourself for your existence.

JACKSON

I don't need to, she does that for me everyday.

WILL

I don't think you're anything like your mom.

JACKSON

I think I'll end up just like her.

WILL

You won't. I know you.

JACKSON

What do you know?

(He says this as both a joke and a challenge. Beat.)

WILL

I love you.

(They share a moment. Perhaps a kiss. Perhaps a dance. Or a pillow fight. Or a loving stare.)

IV: The Hospital

(Yvette lays on a hospital bed in a coma. The heart monitor's beep steadily underscores the monologue. Many, many beats before Jackson speaks. He takes all the time he needs.)

JACKSON

You left the stove on again.

...

You really need to stop doing that. It's dangerous.

...

It's dangerous.

...

I thought when I left you'd be able to remember but... I guess. You didn't.

...

Why did you do it? I know life was hard, you reminded me everyday just how hard, but why?

...

Was it me? Was it my fault?

...

Was it because I left.

...

...

I know you didn't forget. I know you did it on purpose.

...

I guess it makes sense. You always wanted things done your way.

...

Will and I broke up. Yipee. Like you always wanted.

...

I think it was time. He never truly understood me. Or maybe I just didn't let him. I dunno.

...

I just wish he'd fought a little harder.

...

I love him...loved him. I miss him.

...

...

Mom, I miss you. And I wish I didn't, but I do.

I hate you. I hate who you made me. I hate how cynical and guarded and upset at the world you made me. I hate how much you hated the world. I hate how much you hated me.

...

I hate you. I should hate you.

...

Please wake up.