

No Fools

By Marnie Azzarelli

Characters

ALYSSA: An African American girl, 16. She is determined, intelligent, and strong willed.

MOTHER: An African American woman in her late forties to early fifties. She can be an intimidating woman when pressed, but melts for her children.

AVERY: An African American in their 20s. They can be any gender. They are world savvy and sarcastic.

FATHER: An African American man in their late forties to early fifties. He has no spoken lines, but is a hardworking man, who's job takes up the majority of his life so he can keep his family secure.

Act 1, Sc. 1

A teenage girl, dressed in clothes she would wear to school, walks onstage and a spotlight falls on her. This is ALYSSA.

ALYSSA: I suffer no fools gladly.

She makes a mean face to the audience, softens, laughs.

ALYSSA: I have lived with my (mostly) functional family for 16 years. Mother, father, sibling.

As she says this, the three, MOTHER, FATHER, and AVERY come onstage. As she talks about each in turn, one of them will step up and pantomime some of what she's saying. First, the MOTHER, dressed in a smart business suit steps into the light.

ALYSSA: Mother is a real estate agent. On the phone 24/7, a life-long hustle. When I was little, she'd read me stories before I'd go to sleep. She taught me how to love books and far off places. She also made sure I took my education seriously, helping me with any homework I'm stuck on. She drives me to every practice or every lesson, and still makes sure I have a full dinner when we eventually get home. Now when I go to sleep, I'll hear her at her laptop or on her phone, still making sales even at night. The day is never done for her.

MOTHER moves back as AVERY takes the stage.

ALYSSA: Avery is older and far away. They took a trip before college, decided Europe was their reason for living and I see them on Christmas. Sometimes. When they were a teenager I followed them like a plague. Everything they did, I copied and while their response was indifferent to annoyed, I still felt their love. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

AVERY steps back and FATHER comes into the light. He is dressed in a suit.

ALYSSA: Father is the accountant of a well established tech company in Silicon Valley. Spoiler alert, not Apple. It's not a glamorous job, but it has kept us comfortable and secure in a well developed suburb for most of my life. I remember him as a pretty happy guy when I was a kid, but the last decade seemed to wear him down. He slumped home, more of than not, long after the dinner dishes were put away, and would crash on the living room couch with his rumpled suit still on.

She pauses as FATHER suddenly walks out of the light, a look of fear and shock on his face.

ALYSSA: That's why Mom and I didn't question when he wasn't home at a normal time that night. And we didn't really question when he still wasn't home an hour after the local news came on at 11pm. It wasn't until the morning when Mom called his office, after calling his phone all night just to get his voicemail, when she found out that he did in fact leave around 5:30 the night before. That's when she called the cops. And everything became so, different.

Scene changes to a family kitchen. ALYSSA sits at the kitchen table with a text book and laptop or tablet in front of her. She bounces her leg at a steady, restless pace. Her attention is more on the laptop than the schoolbook as she types something, hitting Enter often. She's searching. Across the table the MOTHER is on her phone. She talks while the daughter types and scrolls.

MOTHER: I just don't know, Joanne. No one's heard anything and the police aren't even taking it seriously. I can't report it until tomorrow even though I read online that you can report a missing person before 48 hours in California, but of course its a different situation when it comes to us. I just, I feel so lost, I don't - *(her head pops up)* hold on, I'm getting another call. *(she taps her bluetooth or phone)* Hello? Avery? What? Honey, I can barely hear you. Coming home? Taking a connecting flight now? From where? *(her phone starts to beep and then hangs up)* Avery? Ugh, dammit!

The MOTHER puts her head in her hands while ALYSSA continues to type, scroll, and bounce her leg.

MOTHER: Will you please stop?

ALYSSA looks from around her computer as if looking at a ghost. She points to herself.

ALYSSA: Me?

MOTHER: Don't be wise, Alyssa. Yes, you.

ALYSSA: What am I doing?

MOTHER: Driving me insane.

ALYSSA then notices that her bouncing leg is making everything on the kitchen table bounce too, so she stops while still staring at her screen.

ALYSSA: Oh, sorry.

MOTHER: What are you doing, anyways?

ALYSSA: Looking up stuff.

MOTHER: What kind of stuff?

ALYSSA: Uh, just homework stuff, you know?

ALYSSA looks up, obviously hoping her MOTHER will take the bait.

MOTHER: Hm, for which class?

ALYSSA: History.

MOTHER gets up and goes around to the other side of the table to look at ALYSSA's laptop. ALYSSA doesn't try to hide it, knowing better than to try and hide something from the formidable woman.

MOTHER: Oh yes, I remember learning about the best way to spread a missing person's info through social media and how to ping someone's cellphone from the comfort of your own home when I took AP History.

ALYSSA: I just can't sit here, Mom. Not if we can find him.

MOTHER: I know, honey. But I don't know what else we can do.

ALYSSA: The neighbors! We should try to get them to help! Do a search party and everything.

MOTHER: I wish we could, and I already tried, but I just keep getting told "well, maybe he just needed to get away," or "he'll come home soon, don't worry." They're not going to take this seriously until the police do.

ALYSSA: That's such bullshit!!

MOTHER: Hey! I don't like it anymore than you do, but I can't force people to believe us. We know he would never just leave. And I swear if I saw one more pitiful face as I went door to door this afternoon I was going to scream. The whole neighborhood thinks he just - ran off.

ALYSSA: They don't know anything.

ALYSSA suddenly comes back into a spotlight.

ALYSSA: Now for me, I'm considered somewhat of a prodigy. Above grade averages all of my life, musically inclined, mildly athletic. If there was something I could at least try to succeed at, I did it. And if I failed, I burned that bridge until I found something new. "Find where you are most gifted in life and build on it until you become a master." My father used to tell me that. He's proud of his work, a whiz with numbers, and according to his coworkers, the nicest and hardest working man at the company. Most days they see him with a smile on his face no matter how exhausted he is on the inside. I, on the other hand, maybe see him on the weekends and on the rare vacation, but even when he can be with his entire family, he spends most of his free time in his office with more work, more numbers to crunch. The company means everything. Keeping us feed means everything. Even if it means forgetting we exist sometimes.

ALYSSA sits back down to her computer, and her MOTHER is on her phone again, the blazer she was wearing laying wearing haphazardly across her chair. On the kitchen table there's a pizza box with empty, stained plates near ALYSSA and her MOTHER.

MOTHER: And I'm telling you that this is not normal for him! Andy, you're the head of the neighborhood association. They'll only listen to you. I know, I know, it's very late and I'm sorry, but I need to know that by morning we'll have some type of flyering, or community search, or something, please. I'll get a plane to write in the sky if I have to, I'm that sure that something has happened to him. *(A pause as the person on the phone speaks. MOTHER physically gets frustrated at whatever the person is saying)* Fine, yes, Andy. I'll just have to wait until I can file a report. Sure, bye. *(She turns off her phone and growls in frustration).*

ALYSSA: If it's any consolation, my friends and I have been blasting his info everywhere. Hell, people in Siberia are probably searching for him as we speak. I'm also ready to contact the ACLU if the police don't let us file a report before tomorrow.

MOTHER: Well, here's hoping he's in Russia and the cops come to their senses.

She looks to ALYSSA for a few seconds before breaking down at the table. ALYSSA gets up, awkwardly trying to figure out what she should do in the situation. She opts to walk over and hug her MOTHER. The MOTHER responds by hugging her back and wiping at her tears.

MOTHER: You're a good girl. Did you know that?

The MOTHER strokes ALYSSA's hair before suddenly looking at her phone.

MOTHER: God, it's almost 12:30 and you have school. Did you even finish your homework?

ALYSSA: Uhhh, yeah.

MOTHER: You're a terrible liar. Any tests or quizzes you know about for tomorrow?

ALYSSA: No, maam.

MOTHER: Okay, good. Well, if you call it a night right now, no staying on your phone, then you don't have to go tomorrow. How does that sound?

ALYSSA rushes to gather all of her things that she left strewn on the table.

ALYSSA: Okay!

MOTHER: Hey, that homework better be the first thing you do when you wake up! And be sure to ask all of those friends that you're constantly texting about tomorrow's homework and notes!

ALYSSA: Will do!

ALYSSA runs off with her things leaving the MOTHER on her own. She stares into the distance with worry, a thousand thoughts on what she should do next running through her mind. She looks at the time again and sighs. It's too late to do anything. Suddenly, ALYSSA comes back onstage and sits back down at her side of the table. MOTHER looks at her.

ALYSSA: I'm not tired.

The MOTHER chuckles and nods. She's about to reply when there's a knock heard in the distance. A look of shock and expectation plays across both of their faces as MOTHER rushes to open the front door offstage. ALYSSA is about to follow her when she hears her MOTHER.

MOTHER: (offstage) Avery! Oh my God!

The MOTHER and AVERY come rushing into the kitchen. AVERY is dressed in casual, obviously slept-in, clothes.

AVERY: Mom, I wanna hug and reunion too, but I just got off of a 5 hour flight, after taking a 6 hour one first, so just listen, please.

AVERY pulls out their phone, and after fumbling with it a bit, plays a voicemail, a robotic voice indicating that the message came from “Dad.” What they hear next is the sound of someone talking, garbled and indistinct. Then the voice turns from normal to a scream so loud that it takes all of them aback. There’s a sound of water splashing and more grunts and yells until a voice clearly screams “please!” and then the call disconnects. The MOTHER and ALYSSA stand there in shock.

AVERY: This is why I came home.

The lights go down on the three of them staring at each other.

Act 1, Sc. 2

It’s the next night. Offstage sounds of multiple footsteps and voices can be heard until the MOTHER’s voice comes in the clearest.

MOTHER: I don’t know where the key to his office went, but break the lock if you have to, I guess.

A loud bang can be heard.

MOTHER: Or kick the door in.

While this exchange happens, ALYSSA is back at her side of the table, still in the same clothes as the day before, typing on her laptop. She’s so deep into whatever she’s doing that she’s not even shaking her leg. AVERY (still in traveling clothes), meanwhile, is gathering up empty Chinese food cartons from the table. They are about to go offstage when MOTHER comes barreling in (in yesterday’s clothing as well), and takes AVERY with her back to the table.

MOTHER: No, no, no, no. We're staying in here. Give me that. A little dirt won't hurt us. (*MOTHER grabs the empty containers and tosses them back on the table*). I'll take the garbage out when that circus is out of here and I can breathe again.

AVERY: They can't stay here too long, can they?

MOTHER: I don't know. But they're going through everything, everything! They were already in our room, emptying every drawer. They just broke down his office door. Lord knows what they'll find. He barely even let me in there.

More ruckus can be heard offstage and MOTHER looks ready to explode.

MOTHER: I just need them out NOW!

ALYSSA: Well if you two could shut up for like two seconds and let me focus I might be able to help!

AVERY: What are you doing?
me?

MOTHER: What did you just say to

ALYSSA: Uh, that was mostly towards Avery? What a loud mouth. (*MOTHER continues to stare at her*) I'm sorry, Mom.

MOTHER: Mmhmm. Avery's right though. What are you doing?

ALYSSA: Well, first I tried to see if I could find out where Dad's phone is, but since it's turned off, none of the apps made for the purpose of locating missing phones can help. So I tried to see if there was a way I could figure which cell phone tower his phone pinged off of when he made that call, meaning that we could narrow it down to one small area to search in instead of, you know, the entire country. The problem is, unless you have permission from his carrier, or are a part of the police force, you can't legally get that data. But -

AVERY: You didn't!
lady -

MOTHER: Young

ALYSSA: No! No, what do you take me for? I would never! Also it's actually not that hard to figure out where he was with or without his phone being on. Okay, Mom, what's Dad's Google password?

MOTHER: (*confused*) What? Why do you need that?

ALYSSA: (*huffs*) Because! If I can log into the same Google account that he uses on his phone then I can see through the Maps app where he was for that entire day.

AVERY: Mmm, that's a longshot. How do you know he had his location on?

ALYSSA: Well I'm happy you asked. Last year when Mom, Dad, and I took that wonderful trip to NYC without you, Dad refused to take a cab so he tried to drive everywhere and was lost for what percentage of time would you say, Mother?

MOTHER: About 90%.

ALYSSA: Exactly! So he used Maps the entire time. And I know what you're going to say "Oh, he works for a tech company. Of course he would know better than to keep his location on all the time," but to that I say: ha.

AVERY: Ha?

ALYSSA: Ha. Ha, because I was the one who had to not only set up his Maps app, but also turn his location on for him because he had no idea how. Obviously, years of working around techies has not rubbed off on our dear old, Gen X dad.

AVERY: Huh. You might have something there. So what is his password, Mom?

MOTHER: Oh, are we now talking to your old, Gen X mom?

ALYSSA: Hey, I only said Dad was old. That never includes you.

MOTHER: Hmm, I'll let it slide, for now. And the password is, uh, Avery1997.

AVERY suddenly bursts into a fit a laughter.

ALYSSA: Wow, and I'm doing all this work for him. I see.

MOTHER: Don't take it personally, he's been using that password since he got his first computer in '98. He uses it for practically everything.

AVERY: Woah, Lyssa definitely wasn't wrong. He's real bad with tech.

ALYSSA: (*excited*) I'm in! (*embarrassed*) I mean, I logged on. Look.

They gather around wherever ALYSSA is with her laptop.

ALYSSA: Okay, so let me click on that night, and. There we go. So it shows him going to work around his normal time, but then after he went to -

MOTHER: The Kitten's Den Strip Club?!

EVERY: Oooo, damn Dad!

ALYSSA: Okay, but look, he then went to a bar near his office about an hour later, and then another bar, and then it looks like he went to some other club around midnight. And then after that, the Sunshine Gas Station on Garcia Ave.

EVERY: That's like 13 miles away from here! Why would he be there?

ALYSSA: I don't know. What time did you get that call again?

EVERY: It was 6:30 in Amsterdam, so it's a 9 difference making it -

ALYSSA: 3:30. I can zero the location down right by the minute. Alright, by that time, it looks like he was at (beat) Shoreline Lake?

EVERY: That's even further! What were you doing, Dad?

MOTHER: (*gasps*) the water!

ALYSSA: Water?

MOTHER: There's splashing in the voicemail, isn't there?

EVERY: Yeah, it sounds like there's some gurgling at some points too!

ALYSSA: So he had to be there. He had to be at Shoreline Lake.

They all kind of stand where they are, not sure of what to do next.

EVERY: I guess-

MOTHER: We need to tell them what you found.

ALYSSA: But, Mom. We can go there ourselves and look. What if he's still there and he's hurt and confused?

MOTHER: All the more reason to tell the police! I don't like it anymore than you two do, but this has gone on for too long already. We're not detectives. *(to ALYSSA)* Give me your laptop.

ALYSSA looks like she's about to argue, but instead hands her MOTHER the laptop. The woman goes offstage with it to presumably give it to the cops, leaving the siblings to look at each other, a mix of anger and fear playing on both of their faces.

Lights down.

Act 1, Scene 3

The next morning. All three family members are in the kitchen and caught up in their own worlds. On the table there are discarded protein bar wrappers, empty glasses of juice, and a box of cereal with a bowl next to it. EVERY is looking at their own laptop, sitting opposite of ALYSSA who scrolls through her phone in her usual seat, while MOTHER paces back and forth behind the table. ALYSSA stares at her screen a little more until her leg starts to jump again. She notices, slams her phone on the table and stands up. No one notices. She huffs and the spotlight suddenly shines back on her again.

ALYSSA: I suffer no fools gladly. We've heard nothing for hours! I know, I know, there are other crimes and drunks that need to be stopped on the highway, but come on! They just got a search party going this morning when they knew where he was since last night. And that call? We know something happened and it wasn't good! Every helicopter should be shining spotlights into every bit of woods around Shoreline Lake, which there isn't a lot of, and the thing should be dragged like right now because there's a strong possibility that he's *(beat)* No, I'm not thinking about that. He's fine. He has to be. Maybe he's just lost and disoriented because he's still dehydrated from what I'm guessing was one lit night. Although I don't really remember Dad drinking so much that he wouldn't remember to come home at some point. *(she has a thought)* Or maybe, what if, oh, maybe he was kidnapped! The whole thing is just weird. I mean, yeah Dad went out for a drink with some work friends maybe like once every few months, but he

would never go to some strip club or any place where there would extremely loud music and dancing. And he'd never have a reason to go to a gas station so far from home. Maybe he was trying to escape. Maybe he still is trying to escape. If only they would DO something!

A phone rings. It's MOTHER's. She picks it up and immediately, looks at her kids and quickly walks out of the room.

EVERY: Hey, so don't tell Mom, but I've been researching missing person situations that aren't too different from ours, and it's not really looking good.

ALYSSA: We don't know that yet. And did any of your sources have a strange voicemail left right before the person went missing?

EVERY: Not exactly, but on guy did call his wife saying he was shot before he disappeared.

ALYSSA: Did they ever find him?

EVERY: Yeah.

ALYSSA: And?

EVERY: Dead. They found his body on some hiking trail under a pretty steep cliff. No signs of a gunshot or any wounds deemed as "foul play," but it did seem like he died from falling off that cliff. Whether it was by someone else throwing him off, or the dude just jumped, they couldn't figure out for sure.

ALYSSA: They couldn't figure it out because they're all useless!

EVERY: C'mon being pissed off is not bringing Dad back any faster.

ALYSSA: And neither are they. They've been giving Mom the run around for two days, Avery. Hell, the neighborhood still thinks Dad just ran off on us like he was going for a pack of cigarettes and never came back. And all the while Dad could be lost, or he could've been...you know, kidnapped.

EVERY: I highly doubt our father was kidnapped and I'm holding out for him just being lost as much as you are, but we have to face it -

ALYSSA: (*another sudden thought*) His coworkers! If Dad really was barhopping that night, he definitely did not do it by himself and you know it.

AVERY: Yeah Dad isn't much of a "drink alone" type of guy. And I highly doubt he'd go to a strip club on his own.

ALYSSA: Exactly, so what if whoever was with him DID something to him?

AVERY: Or maybe they could just give us a better idea on where they last saw him.

ALYSSA: Eh, my idea seems more plausible. But anyway, do you know of any Dad's friends?

AVERY: Uhh, I haven't even been here for the last year. Do you think I would know who dad's work friends are?

ALYSSA: You can be so useless sometimes.

AVERY: Awh, love you too, sis.

ALYSSA: I'll ask Mom. I know there's something to this that I'm just not -

A scream or loud sob from MOTHER can be heard offstage. The siblings run out of the kitchen to the source of the sound. They bring back their MOTHER who is openly weeping.

ALYSSA: Mom, Mom, Mom hey. What's happening?

AVERY: Here, sit.

As MOTHER sits, she tries to calm down, but is near hysterics and can't say anything. She hands AVERY the phone, indicating that someone is still on the line.

AVERY: Hello? Yes, I'm their child. What? Oh my God.

AVERY puts their hand to their mouth and starts to tear up. ALYSSA just stares at both of them in shock until turning to the audience. A spotlight falls on her for the last time.

ALYSSA: It was one of his friends. He didn't hurt him or anything like that. He was trying to get Dad to his house right near the Sunshine gas station, but they were both pretty drunk and when his coworker stopped at a light, Dad just got out. In Dad's office they found that Dad was

signing up for unemployment the night before he went missing. The corporation laid him off without notice, so the next day, without telling anyone the real reason, he decided to take his friends out for a final night of fun. What the police eventually pieced together was that after Dad left his friend's car, he wandered until he found the lake and somehow, maybe he was just trying to call Avery to tell them how much he missed them, but as he called he must have slipped and fell into the water. Being as drunk as he was, he was probably too shocked from the water to make it out of there fast enough, or have the stamina to stay above water for long. Some old couple, who just planned on an early morning walk around the lake, found his body washed up to shore, still in his suit and tie. (*Pause, she looks directly at the audience*) I suffer no fools, gladly.

Lights down.