

Excerpt

I'M NOT AT LIBERTY TO SAY

A play

by

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I'M NOT AT LIBERTY TO SAY

CHARACTERS

CYNTHIA SPALDING, a teacher, Latina/white, late 30's
JAMES SPALDING, her husband, an actuary, white, 40's
LEWIS, an investigator
GABI RICA, an artist, Latina, 20's

TIME

The present

PLACE

The principal action of the play takes place in the homes of two neighbors, the Spaldings and Gabi Rica, in Boston, Massachusetts.

I'M NOT AT LIBERTY TO SAY

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A dark stage. We hear a faint whooshing and crackling sound that grows steadily louder and more powerful. It is the sound of a raging fire. As the sound reaches a crescendo, the stage is suddenly filled with bright orange light. In silhouette is the lone figure of a woman standing upright and still. The sound fades to silence and the light to black. A moment.

The lights come up on the SPALDINGS' living room. The room is tidy and elegantly furnished. There's a small dining room table with two chairs, a dresser, a framed photograph of an infant prominently displayed, a state-of-the-art audio system with CD collection, and some Boston Red Sox memorabilia. On the floor is an Oriental rug. The room has two exits: one leads to the kitchen and the front door, the other leads to the bedroom.

JAMES, dressed in a conservative business suit, is seated in a chair, sipping coffee. There is a briefcase at his side. He is studying a bound report. CYNTHIA SPALDING is looking out of a window onto the street.

CYNTHIA

Do you think it was electrical?

JAMES

(Vaguely, absorbed in his reading)
Probably.

CYNTHIA

God, what a mess. It's like a crime scene out there. All that yellow tape.
What are they doing?

(Slight pause.)

I'll call the rental car place.

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Make a reservation for when we get back. The insurance will pay for it,
right?

(He does not respond. Beat)

At least it happened now. I mean, if it had to happen. Can you
imagine....God.

(Beat)

Are you packed?

JAMES

Not yet.

CYNTHIA

James!

JAMES

I'll do it tonight, before the game.

CYNTHIA

You're not still going to the game?

(He gives her a look)

Honey, we were already cutting it tight. And now, with this?

JAMES

Our flight isn't until tomorrow night.

CYNTHIA

But we've got a lot to do. Did you find it?

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Our marriage certificate.

JAMES

Yes.

CYNTHIA

And it has the seal?

JAMES

It has the seal.

CYNTHIA

And it's raised, right? It's a raised seal?

JAMES

Yes. Honey, I need to do this, okay?

CYNTHIA

More coffee?

(He shakes his head, returns to his reading. Beat)

We're seeing Mrs. Wilson at three fifteen.

JAMES

(Testily)

I know.

(Evenly)

I'm sorry, it's just that...

(Glancing at his watch)

I've got to get going.

CYNTHIA

Shit, the toast!

She runs out to the kitchen, as JAMES' cell phone rings. He answers it. While he talks, he places the report in his briefcase and puts on his coat.

JAMES

(On the phone)

This is James. Oh hi, Andy....I've been better. The car caught fire last night. Well, two o'clock this morning.

CYNTHIA returns.

CYNTHIA

Why is everything BURNING?

JAMES

It's totaled. What?

The doorbell rings.

CYNTHIA

Oh God. Who the hell is that?

CYNTHIA exits.

JAMES

No, no, we're fine, it was parked on the street.... No idea. Listen, I got to run, we'll talk tonight, okay? I'll be a little late—second inning, something like that. I know it's the Yankees, but I've got a hell of a day at work and there's this car thing, and then tomorrow we fly to Guatemala.... Yes, it sure is. Thanks. Look, I'll see you later. Have that beer waiting.

CYNTHIA enters followed by LEWIS.
LEWIS is loud in dress and manner, and irrepressibly affable. His accent is distinctively West Texan.

No, you cheapskate, it's *your* turn.

He flips the cellphone shut.

CYNTHIA

Honey, this is...

LEWIS

(Flashing an I.D., offering a handshake)
Lewis, Department of Homeland Defense.

JAMES

Hi.

LEWIS

It's a pleasure, sir.

CYNTHIA

I've told Mr. Lewis that we're about to—

LEWIS

I'm here about the fire. Beautiful place you got here. Whoa! Will you look at that! That is one gorgeous rug. Class—y. Where's it from?

JAMES

What?

LEWIS

The rug. Where was it made?

JAMES

It's Persian.

LEWIS

Persian. Is that right?

JAMES

Mr. Lewis, we're just on our way out....

LEWIS

(Sitting down, pulling out a notebook and pen)

This won't take long.

JAMES

I'm sorry, I have a meeting.

LEWIS

It'll have to wait.

JAMES

Excuse me?

LEWIS

This is important, sir.

JAMES

Look, we told the police everything.

LEWIS

Everything?

JAMES

Have you talked to them? They were here for...

CYNTHIA

Two hours.

JAMES

They know everything we know, okay?

LEWIS

I still need to talk to you.

CYNTHIA

I don't understand....why are *you* here?

LEWIS

Why is any of us here? God's big joke, if you ask me!
(He laughs.)

CYNTHIA

No, I mean—

LEWIS

I know what you mean, ma'am. This is a separate investigation.

CYNTHIA

But this can't have anything to do with homeland defense.

LEWIS

What do you think?

CYNTHIA

What do *I* think?

JAMES

It was an accident.

LEWIS

An accident?

JAMES

Something electrical.

LEWIS

Says who?

JAMES

The police.

LEWIS

That's what they told you.

JAMES

In so many words, yes, I mean—

CYNTHIA

You think it was something else?

LEWIS

It was something else.

JAMES

Don't tell me, a suicide bomber.

LEWIS

No.

JAMES

Thank God for that.

LEWIS

But there was a bomb.

CYNTHIA

A bomb?

LEWIS

Yes.

JAMES

Oh, for Chrissakes!

CYNTHIA

You're not serious?

LEWIS

Yes, ma'am, I'm afraid so.

CYNTHIA

They blew up our car?

LEWIS

Yes.

JAMES

Oh, come on!

CYNTHIA

Why? Why would anyone do that?

LEWIS

That's what we're trying to find out.

JAMES

You're saying this was a terrorist attack?

LEWIS

It has all the hallmarks.

JAMES

Like what?

LEWIS

I'm not at liberty to discuss that, sir.

JAMES

But what are they attacking?

LEWIS

What do you mean?

JAMES

Well, there's nothing here.

LEWIS

Nothing?

JAMES

Nothing of, you know... strategic importance.

LEWIS

How do you mean?

JAMES

This is a residential neighborhood.

CYNTHIA

You don't think...?

LEWIS

What?

CYNTHIA

No, no, it's okay, it's—

LEWIS

No, go ahead, please.

CYNTHIA

It's stupid, forget it.

LEWIS

Nothing is stupid in a situation like this.

CYNTHIA

Well, I was going to say, maybe we....no, that's—

LEWIS

What?

CYNTHIA

Maybe we were the targets.

JAMES

What!

CYNTHIA

I know, I know, it's absurd, it's—

LEWIS

It's possible.

CYNTHIA

It is? But why, I mean, it's not like we have enemies.

JAMES

Honey, we don't know anything yet.

CYNTHIA

We know a bomb exploded in our car.

JAMES

Do we? I mean, I didn't hear anything, did you? If there'd been a bomb, we'd have heard an explosion.

CYNTHIA

That's right. It would have woken us up.

LEWIS

But you did wake up?

CYNTHIA

Yes, but it was the sirens, the fire trucks.

LEWIS

You folks must sleep very soundly.

CYNTHIA

No, no, that's the point, I don't, not lately.

JAMES

Is this some kind of prank?

LEWIS

Prank? You think a car bomb is a prank?

JAMES

No, of course not, no, it's just that...It doesn't make sense, that's all.

CYNTHIA

Unless...

LEWIS

What?

CYNTHIA

Liz Markham heard something.

JAMES

Now there's a reliable source.

LEWIS

The old lady across the street?

JAMES

She's nuts.

CYNTHIA

Half the time she thinks she's Isadora Duncan. She prances around her garden in this kaftan. It's quite sweet really. The other half she's—well, it varies. Last week it was Emily Dickinson. Or was that the week before...?

LEWIS

But she heard something?

CYNTHIA

Yes. Well, she said she heard—I mean, we were standing there in our robes, watching the firefighters, and she said she heard a kind of muffled boom.

LEWIS

(Savoring the phrase)
Muffled boom.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

Muffled. Boom. Oh man, that is so sweet. What do they call that—you know, when a word sounds like what it means?

CYNTHIA

Onomatopoeic.

LEWIS

That's it. Like Chickadee. Or crunch. Or, or... gobsmacked! Now there's a great word. You heard of that? Gobsmacked? It's British. Means blown away, totally surprised. Like the other day I was reading in the newspaper that story about the linebacker with the Cowboys? Oh, you don't know about this? Oh, man. This guy, okay, he's a big mother, three hundred and fifty pounds, built like a Hummer on steroids, and he's born-again, a soldier for the Lord. Well, turns out the guy's a flaming-ass faggot! Even owns a gay bar! I kid you not. I mean, I was gobsmacked.

(Beat. They are gobsmacked.)

See? In't a great word!?

JAMES

What are you talking about?

LEWIS

Don't you just love language!

JAMES

Mr. Lewis, we were talking about a bomb. About terrorism.

LEWIS

And that is another kind of language entirely.

CYNTHIA

But we don't know it was a bomb—the muffled boom, I mean. It could have been anything—a window blowing out. Or, or...the gas tank exploding. Doesn't it happen like that? A big popping booming sound?

LEWIS

We have evidence.

JAMES

What evidence?

LEWIS

Forensic evidence. It is conclusive.

CYNTHIA

No. No, no, this is not happening. This cannot be happening.

JAMES

Honey—

CYNTHIA

Shit. SHIT!

JAMES

Let's try to stay calm.

CYNTHIA

Calm! What, do you mean, calm?! We're thirty-six hours away!

LEWIS

What's happening in thirty-six hours?

CYNTHIA

We're going to Guatemala to pick up our daughter. I can't believe this. It is so unfair, my God...

(To JAMES)

Do you believe this?

(Composing herself)

Go ahead, Mr. Lewis. No, no, it's fine. Go ahead, please, ask your questions.

LEWIS

You sure now?

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

You quite sure, because, you know, I can...

CYNTHIA

Positive.

LEWIS

Ok-ay.

(He opens a folder and a takes out a pen)

Let's see. First off, I need to verify some personal information. Mr. Spalding, you are forty-five years old and an insurance company executive.

JAMES

Yes.

LEWIS

What is your actual job?

JAMES

I'm an actuary.

LEWIS

(Savoring the words)

Actually an actuary. Oh man, don't you just love that illiteration!

CYNTHIA

A-lliteration.

LEWIS

Excuse me?

CYNTHIA

A-lliteration. With an A. As in...er..

LEWIS

Asshole. Come on now, that's what you were thinking, right?

CYNTHIA

No, actually, I...

LEWIS

Sometimes I say to myself, Larry, you have the heart of a lion, you're hung like a horse, but man, you are brain-dead as a turkey on Thanksgiving.

JAMES

Show me your I.D.

LEWIS

Excuse me?

JAMES

Show me your I.D.

LEWIS

I already did.

JAMES

Show it to me. Please.

LEWIS

(Handing over his I.D. to JAMES)

Sure. Hey, if I was you, I'd wonder about me, too.

JAMES

You think this is funny?

LEWIS

Sir, I couldn't be more serious.

JAMES

I'd never have guessed.

LEWIS

The good Lord gave me a funny bone that tickles easy, that's all. Don't you worry, sir, I get the job done.

JAMES

We're counting on it.

(Beat. He examines the I.D., then hands it back)

LEWIS

Look, I know this is tough, with the baby and all. Couldn't have come at a worse time—not that there's a good time for something like this. Anyways, I'm sure you're in good hands with Mrs. Wilson.

CYNTHIA

Yes. Yes, we are.

JAMES

How do you know about Mrs. Wilson?

LEWIS

How do I know about her?

JAMES

We never mentioned her.

LEWIS

No, I don't believe you did.

JAMES

Or the adoption. How do you know about the adoption?

LEWIS

It's my job to know.

JAMES

It's your job to know our private business?

LEWIS

Sir, this is a national security investigation.

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis, we're adopting a child. An infant.

LEWIS

From a foreign country.

CYNTHIA

(Laughing, in spite of herself)

You're not serious?

LEWIS

Guatemala has a history of terrorist activity.

CYNTHIA

And what? The babies are terrorists?

LEWIS

Ma'am, these days we can't afford to leave a single stone unturned.

CYNTHIA

Well, no, of course not. Absolutely. I mean, you never know what you might find. Bombs in cribs. Bottles of mass destruction.

JAMES

How do you know about our adoption?

LEWIS

How do you mean?

JAMES

What was it? The visa applications? What?

LEWIS

Sir, I can't tell you that.

JAMES

What do you mean, you can't tell me?

LEWIS

It's classified.

JAMES

Classified?

CYNTHIA

You're investigating them. Oh my God, that's it. You're investigating the agency.

LEWIS

Mrs. Spalding—

CYNTHIA

Are you?

LEWIS

Ma'am, it's early in the investigation.

CYNTHIA

Are you? Are you investigating the agency?

LEWIS

I can't comment, ma'am, I really can't.

CYNTHIA

Oh, come on, you can't just say something like that!

LEWIS

It is unfortunate.

CYNTHIA

What? What's unfortunate?

LEWIS

I'm not at liberty to say.

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis, please.

LEWIS

I'm sorry, ma'am.

CYNTHIA

You have to tell me, you can't just...I mean, Jesus...Okay, okay, answer me this.

LEWIS

Ma'am, like I said—

CYNTHIA

If you were in our position, and knowing what you know, about Mrs. Wilson and her agency, would you feel comfortable going ahead with the adoption? Yes or no.

LEWIS

Mrs. Spalding, I—

CYNTHIA

Yes or no?

LEWIS

I wish I could—

CYNTHIA

Yes or no!
(Beat.)

LEWIS

Yes.

CYNTHIA

Oh God, thank God. Why did you do that? God! You had me scared me to death for a moment.

LEWIS

That was not my intention, ma'am, I can assure you.

CYNTHIA

Well, don't do it again. Okay? Christ, I sound like a mother already!
(She laughs nervously, LEWIS laughs with her.)

LEWIS

You're gonna be great. Kids are a blast.

JAMES

Mr. Lewis!

LEWIS

Yes?

JAMES

Do you have other questions?

LEWIS

I sure do.

JAMES

Well, could you make it quick? Please. We have a lot to do.

LEWIS

I understand, sir. I'll do my best. Mrs. Spalding, you are a teacher.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

Eighth and ninth grades, right?

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

Oh boy, you are doing God's work. All them raging hormones? Whoa! My eldest, Jasmine, she's fourteen—talk about a rollercoaster ride! Man! Then we got the twins, Max and Elly-May, they're right on the cusp, so to speak, bright as pole stars, ready to set the world on fire. But no cars, right?!

(He roars with laughter)

You had this kind of thing before? On Arcadia Avenue?

CYNTHIA

You mean, bombs?

LEWIS

Cars burning up. Mysterious conflagrations.