

Out of the Frying Pan

A Short Play

By

Klae Bainter

Characters:

Octavia: early 20s, knows the care that goes into a cast iron skillet. Has a lot of patience. Lives with Athena.

Athena: early 20s, knows how to cook using a microwave... and very little else. She means well. Lives with Octavia.

SCENE ONE

OCTAVIA is (SL) and ATHENA (SR) are in the same space, but they are in different kitchens.

Between them a small table with two chairs. There is a MICROWAVE and a SKILLET.

As the piece moves along-- the spaces becomes one.

Note: *The lines they speak together both start and stop the respective dialogue of each. It should flow smoothly as the end of one and the beginning of the other.*

When one is speaking the other should be frozen except for the shared line.

OCTAVIA

ATHENA

I have this image in my head-- I have this image in my head--

OCTAVIA

And I need you to get it-- My grandfather in his underwear, a white t-shirt, and striped socks. The "every Sunday morning" uniform for cooking breakfast. It isn't glamorous, but there's love. "Just putting a little more skill in the skillet."

He always asked me what I knew about the history of that skillet-- *this* skillet, he would say, is magical. Every Sunday morning since I was old enough to come down the stairs by myself. I smiled, because it never got old. The oily sheen that had been created over time by the care and adoration of my family shows a whole line of faces gazing out at me-- and there I am, among them...

OCTAVIA

*My face reflected back into
my own eyes.*

ATHENA

*My face reflected back into
my own eyes...*

ATHENA

From the plastic window of the microwave door the second the light goes out. I wanted fast food, but this is how my mother would cook for me on Sunday mornings-- It wasn't a lot... but it's what we had. She's not the most pleasant person to be around most days-- I don't fault her for that, she's on her feet at the café every day but Sunday, that's when I get to see her... it was almost like an apology. She's tired and she's doing the best she can-- I'm little and I don't quite understand, but with the light on and plate spinning inside I feel safe. We don't have much-- but we have that microwave. Red, scraped up, and given to us. Each October she surprises me with a box of each General Mills Monster Cereal: Count Chocula, Boo Berry, Franken Berry, Frute Brute, and Fruity Yummy Mummy and that's fine during the week. But Sunday is always microwaved breakfast sandwiches-- It's how I remember every Sunday smelled... greasy sausage, buttery biscuit, and bubbly cheese. My mom always lies about where they come from. They aren't that great, probably. But they spoke for her... that microwave was the warmth of our kitchen, I dunno... Its what we had-- but it wasn't like...

OCTAVIA

*An Heirloom passed down over
and over again...*

ATHENA

*An heirloom passed down over
and over again.*

OCTAVIA

This skillet-- an artifact given from generation to generation-- gaining a little more from each that had inherited it. Both gaining and learning a little bit of who my family is-- my aunt couldn't eat pepper, grandma never washed her steak, my father can't stand onions-- picking up a little bit of what was left in the cast iron, and leaving a little bit behind. "You can taste our whole lineage in this pan. You just keep your palette clean, now, and you can taste em too." And oh my God do I swear I can.

In the bacon or the eggs, and, so little, I'd look up and say
I could taste them, pa! I can taste--

OCTAVIA

The tiny Ghosts in each bite.

ATHENA

*The tiny Ghosts in each
bite...*

ATHENA

Floating in the bowl of Boo Berry cereal, And that was sweet,
but it wasn't the nuclear love that came from the microwave.
My mom worked so hard to give me even the smallest bit of
normalcy. She did. She really did-- but she couldn't afford
more. She would set me up at the table and pretend that she
knew Mr. McDonald-- "I just called him up and asked him for
the recipe to the McMuffin. So, we don't even have to go to
the drive thru." Pure joy. My mom knew Mr. McDonald... never,
my mom can only afford shitty Aldi breakfasts. I know she
forged these moments as inexpensive gifts. That was my life:
microwaves and cereal. I don't know if we owned a pan at all.
I was okay with what we could manage, even if it wasn't
exactly--

ATHENA

What I truly wanted in this
world.

OCTAVIA

What I truly wanted in this
world...

OCTAVIA

... more than anything-- to leave my own stories in that pan.
Each and every Sunday I tried. Sitting around his table
eating breakfast, and listening to him tell me, between every
bite, how important it was to keep the pan full of memories.
How careful we must be with our memories. Watching the
delicate attention in keeping cast iron seasoned-- first, you
place it on the burner and let the oil warm up, and then pull
it off and rub it with a cloth kept for the sole purpose of
massaging the metal-- something hanging from a magnet on the
fridge-- soiled and lasting, you repeat these efforts until
it's drank every drop-- he taught me how to care for it, how
to love it, every Sunday morning. It would be mine someday
and--

OCTAVIA

*I never really cared to have
anything more.*

ATHENA

*I never really cared to have
anything more...*

ATHENA

...than what we had. I never learned to cook. I never lerned how to do more than nuke up breakfast in the microwave. I thought I was doing something nice for my roommate-- You've been out of town, and I wanted to organize our space. I didn't understand what I was doing, and I guess that doesn't really mean anything now-- I just thought it was a dirty pan... I mean what do I know about seasoning... what do I know? Washing dishes is washing dishes. To me it was just some greasy pan sitting on the stove that looked like it had never been cleaned. So, yeah, I ran a sink of soapy water and submerged it-- when it looked like it hadn't done much I put it in the dishwasher-- but...

ATHENA

I swear I didn't know!

OCTAVIA

I swear I didn't know...

OCTAVIA

... That he was actually going to bequeath it to me in his will. But, he did. The man didn't have a lot of anything. Just his socks, always falling down, and this skillet. And it's ruined. You ruined it. You scrubbed away every Sunday morning. Every Sunday story-- his, the stories of his mother, and the way he could smell her kitchen when the pan got warm, by the time the oil was dancing in the pan we could smell *his* grandfather's steak, and when the butter turned brown we were breathing in the hash browns he and his sister had as kids. You've washed all of that away-- without thinking, without asking. The sun has set on decades of care-- Now, it just smells like Dawn. All I see is rusted metal. Faded, dry, and cold. I guess I should've told you it was my treasure. That is was my grandfather's gift to me. Honestly, pawpaw, from the bottom of my heart...

OCTAVIA

I am so, so sorry.

ATHENA

I am so, so sorry...

ATHENA

From the bottom of my heart. I just didn't know-- I thought it was just dirty. You have to understand I've never been exposed to something like that-- in my family hand-me-downs were clothes that smelled like moth balls, and I guess, I dunno... the microwave we used came from my mother's job. When the restaurant got a new one for the kitchen they asked my mom if she wanted the old one... that's the closest we got. Please accept my apology. I feel terrible. Please sit down, please? I know it isn't a lot, but I want to make you a breakfast sandwich-- it's the only thing I know how to make. Will you let me show you I'm sorry-- It's the only thing I can do... I'll try if you'll let me... But

ATHENA

I don't know if I can.

OCTAVIA

I don't know if I can.