

RUNNING

BY ARLENE HUTTON



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RUNNING
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RUNNING was presented by The Journey Company
at The New York International Fringe Festival,
a production of The Present Company.

For Seth and Lee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

William Apfel, David Arrow, Margot Avery, Seth Barrish, Evan Bergman, Phillip Bettencourt, Jim Bracchitta, Deborah Brevoort, Lee Brock, Sharon Carr, Darren Cole, Jennifer Costello, Mark Crockett, Jeffrey Danneman, Meg Davis, Maggie Delgado, Peg Denithorne, Phil De Vita, Rob Doughty, Bill Dyszel, Michael Fellmeth, Bob & Susan Freemon, Lindsey Gates, Alexandra Geis, Kate Erin Gibson, Tori Glendining-Pough, Janice Goldberg, John Goodman, Roger Hall, Lynn Halliday, Missy Hargreaves, Julie Holl, Elena Holy, Lori Wolter Hudson, Darla Hutton, Joanne Jacobson, Emily Kadish, Lori Kee, B. J. Koonce, David Krane, Britt Lafield, Romulus Linney, Mark Lutwak, Linda MacLuggage, John & Maire Martello, Marshall Mason, Pat McLaughlin, Bob McNamara, Todd McNerney, Jacob Moore, Theresa Mueller, Steve Neilson, Eric Nightengale, Ruth Nightengale, Kristine Niven, Shelley Norton, Amy Paris, Philip Paris, Cheri Peters, Porter Pickard, Ron Piretti, Craig Pospisil, Michael Warren Powell, David Roby, Elizabeth Rothan, John Russell, Nina Sacharow, Chip Schoonmaker, Priscilla Shanks, Norman Shea, Adam Siegel, Greg Steinbruner, Jeremy Stuart, Jeffrey Sweet, Cathy Tempelman, Wendy Vanden Heuval, Becca Worthington, Scott Wynn, Y York.

Artistic New Directions, The Barrow Group, Beacon Artists Agency, Blue Mountain Center, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, College of Charleston, FringeNYC, The Journey Company, Lake George Theatre Lab, the MacDowell Colony, MBA Literary Agency, New Harmony Project, NYSSSA, the Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association, Sewanee Writers Conference, Wild Card Productions and Yaddo.

RUNNING received development at the 2010 Lake George Theatre Lab, directed by Mark Lutwak, and at The Barrow Group.

RUNNING was presented at The Cherry Pit for the 2010 New York International Fringe Festival, a production of The Present Company, produced by The Journey Company and Wild Card Productions in association with Artistic New Directions. It was co-directed by Beth Lincks and Lori Wolter Hudson; the costume design was by Margarita Delgado; the production stage manager was Kate Erin Gibson; and the stage manager was Jacob Moore. The cast was as follows:

STEPHEN Seth Barrish
EMILY Lee Brock

RUNNING was presented at The Players Theatre for the 2010 Fringe Encores Series, produced by The Journey Company and Wild Card Productions in association with Artistic New Directions. It was directed by Lori Wolter Hudson; the costume design was by Margarita Delgado; the production stage manager was Kate Erin Gibson and the stage manager was Jacob Moore. The cast was as follows:

STEPHEN Seth Barrish
EMILY Lee Brock

CHARACTERS

STEPHEN, 40s or 50s. Average. Fit enough that it's believable that he can get through a marathon, but not a real athlete. He's a nice guy just trying to get a good night's sleep.

EMILY, around the same age. Attractive. She's not a flake; she's in crisis mode. She's lived in England long enough to occasionally use a British phrase, but she probably doesn't have much of an accent.

TIME

Late Saturday night, in early November.

PLACE

New York City.

A pre-war "classic six" apartment on West End Avenue.

NOTES

Ellipses designates the actor trailing off in the middle of a thought. A dash indicates an interruption.

A "classic six" is a six-room apartment in a New York City pre-war building that has a living room, formal dining room, two bedrooms, kitchen, maid's room, and 1, 2, or 3 baths. The dining room is sometimes converted into a third bedroom.

Dialogue can be changed to reflect the actors' ages. "Fifty" could also be "almost fifty" or "past fifty," etc.

RUNNING

Scene 1

Late Saturday night. Early November.

The set may be either realistic or representational.

A spacious apartment in a pre-war building on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Lived-in, comfortable and airy. Some small original art on the wall. Books lying around. There are exits to the front hallway, the kitchen and the bedrooms. On a chair near the front hall is a stack of folded running clothes on top of a plastic bag with a sponsor logo. A pair of running shoes are underneath the chair, with clean socks neatly tucked inside. We hear voices first from offstage — “Come on in” — as Stephen and Emily enter from the hallway.

Stephen is dressed in khakis and a sweatshirt, wearing socks, but no shoes. He's pulling a fairly large wheeled suitcase or two behind him and is followed by smartly-dressed Emily, who has a carry-on computer bag and a purse.

STEPHEN. I made some calls —

EMILY. Thanks —

STEPHEN. — Called some hotels —

EMILY. — Thanks —

STEPHEN. — A bunch —

EMILY. — No luck —

STEPHEN. — Nothing. Nothing nearby, nothing midtown, nothing downtown. Sorry.

EMILY. So kind of you — (*She sees the room for the first time.*) Oh, my god. Look at this place.

STEPHEN. No luck. I really tried.

EMILY. It still looks the same.

STEPHEN. I tried all the big chains, too. There's nothing.

EMILY. That's what they said at the hotel. When they didn't have my reservation. They said everything was booked.

STEPHEN. Nothing online. Expedia, hotels dot com, Orbitz, triple A. I tried everything I could think of.

EMILY. (*Looking around.*) I can't believe I'm back in this place.

STEPHEN. (*Overlapping.*) I've been trying for I don't know how long. Ever since you called. Booked the only thing I could find.

EMILY. What?

STEPHEN. For tomorrow night. There's nothing before then. Only the one night. I didn't know how long you'd be — I didn't have a number to call and ask, but —

EMILY. My mobile doesn't work here.

STEPHEN. So you said.

EMILY. I thought it would —

STEPHEN. You're welcome to —

EMILY. — but it doesn't.

STEPHEN. So, they lost your reservation?

EMILY. They didn't try to find me another hotel, either.

STEPHEN. Everything's booked for the —

EMILY. Yes, but they didn't even apologize.

STEPHEN. The whole city's booked.

EMILY. They said I didn't have a reservation. The night staff. Imbeciles. Bloody fools.

STEPHEN. Yeah.

EMILY. They didn't even want to let me use their phone. Until I threatened to sleep in the lobby. Thank god you answered.

STEPHEN. I almost didn't. You called the landline. We don't use it —

EMILY. I didn't wake you up, did I?

STEPHEN. I thought it might be Stephanie.

EMILY. I thought Stephanie would be here.

STEPHEN. She's in London.

EMILY. I wouldn't have —

STEPHEN. She's still in London.

EMILY. Really? I didn't know.

STEPHEN. Oh. I thought maybe you had talked to her before you left.

EMILY. No.

STEPHEN. I thought that's why you called here.

EMILY. No. It's the only phone number I remembered. *(A pause.)*

STEPHEN. Oh.

EMILY. Well. What to do. I guess I'll ... I'll ... Blasted mobile. *(A pause.)*

STEPHEN. You can use our phone. Right over there. Call your friends ... There must be ... someone ...

EMILY. It's late. I don't want to bother anyone else.

STEPHEN. *(The irony is not lost on him.)* No, of course not.

EMILY. I haven't been in New York in such a long time —

STEPHEN. — I see —

EMILY. — It's been a long time.

STEPHEN. Okay. Well, if Stephanie were here ...

EMILY. What's Stephanie doing in London?

STEPHEN. Galleries.

EMILY. Of course.

STEPHEN. But if she were here, she'd say, ask you, invite you, to stay with us.

EMILY. That would be lovely. Thank you.

STEPHEN. Um. Yeah.

EMILY. Thank you so very much.

STEPHEN. Not at all. Plenty of room. You're welcome to stay.

EMILY. Thanks.

STEPHEN. You're welcome.

EMILY. My coat? Where should I put —

STEPHEN. Oh, the closet. Right ... *(Emily knows where it is.)* there. Yeah.

EMILY. *(Looking around.)* Oh. Oh. My. *(A pause.)*

STEPHEN. *(The gracious host.)* Have a seat.

EMILY. Thanks.

STEPHEN. Are you hungry?

EMILY. I ate on the plane.

STEPHEN. How was the food?

EMILY. Not bad for airplane food.

STEPHEN. Good.

EMILY. I would like a cup of tea, though. If you don't mind.

STEPHEN. Tea. Okay. Tea. *(Stephen exits.)*

EMILY. Or water. Water's fine. Anything wet.

STEPHEN. (*Offstage.*) I can make tea.

EMILY. Do you have a beer?

STEPHEN. (*Offstage.*) I think so.

EMILY. A beer would be smashing.

STEPHEN. (*Offstage.*) Coming right up.

EMILY. (*Calling offstage.*) I almost missed the, um, the meal. On the plane. I was asleep. Flat out. But I had put a little note on my tray: "Wake me for food." And they did. Wasn't I clever? (*Stephen reenters with beer.*)

STEPHEN. Clever. Here's your beer.

EMILY. Thanks so very much.

STEPHEN. My pleasure.

EMILY. (*Noticing he's not drinking.*) Nothing for you?

STEPHEN. I don't want a beer right now. Cheers. (*Emily drinks her beer and looks around the room.*)

EMILY. Oh!

STEPHEN. What?

EMILY. The flat. The apartment.

STEPHEN. What about it?

EMILY. It looks the same. The flat. It looks the same. Almost. Maybe a little nicer, neater. Oh, this is strange. In my mind it's always the same, the flat, but I would have expected ... after so many years ...

STEPHEN. How long has it been?

EMILY. Since I was in the flat?

STEPHEN. Yes.

EMILY. When I lived here.

STEPHEN. You haven't been back since then?

EMILY. I don't think so. When did you...?

STEPHEN. The eighties. I moved in then.

EMILY. Which room?

STEPHEN. Mine?

EMILY. Yes.

STEPHEN. The rear corner.

EMILY. Nice. All the windows. Lovely view.

STEPHEN. It's my office now.

EMILY. Your office.

STEPHEN. Yes.

EMILY. Brilliant. (*A pause.*) So you were the last roommate.

STEPHEN. (*Laughing.*) “The Last Roommate.”

EMILY. Weren't you?

STEPHEN. “The last roommate”? I guess I was. The one who never left. I'm the one who never left and you're the one who never came back. You've missed the annual roommate alumni parties.

EMILY. Yes.

STEPHEN. But you and Stephanie, you've seen each other —

EMILY. In London.

STEPHEN. London, of course.

EMILY. Stephanie and I had lunch. A while back. At the Tate Modern. I don't remember when.

STEPHEN. She goes over every year. To see, I don't know, galleries, shows. A conference, maybe. There's a regular London conference or something.

EMILY. Really?

STEPHEN. I thought you would've seen each other, gotten together. I'm sure she mentioned she'd seen you. Sometime.

EMILY. Not recently.

STEPHEN. Oh. I can't keep all the old roommates straight.

EMILY. There were a lot of us over the years. (*Stephen gets the photo album.*)

STEPHEN. (*Showing a page to Emily.*) We have a chart. A graph of who lived here when.

EMILY. I had forgotten the chart.

STEPHEN. It's in the book. (*He opens the photo album to the chart and shows it to her.*)

EMILY. How many roommates?

STEPHEN. Forty-seven.

EMILY. Forty —

STEPHEN. Seven. Yup. Over fifteen years.

EMILY. Oh! There I am. And Barbara, gosh, David, Shelley, and oh, I forgot about ...

STEPHEN. (*Pointing at the chart.*) And there's me.

EMILY. (*Still looking at the chart.*) I'm the year before.

STEPHEN. (*Pointing.*) It looks like you were here two years.

EMILY. Not really. Three semesters, I think.

STEPHEN. Look. We just missed each other.

EMILY. Funny. We were almost roommates.

STEPHEN. Yeah.

EMILY. Well, I guess we are for tonight!

RUNNING

by Arlene Hutton

1M, 1W

It's the weekend of the New York City Marathon and Stephen, preparing for his first race, needs a good night's sleep. Emily, his wife's old roommate, shows up unexpectedly in the wee hours of the morning. In crisis and unable to find a hotel room, Emily is returning to the apartment she once lived in and where, years ago, she and Stephen may or may not have met. Seeing her old home brings back memories and Stephen, dealing with his own troubles with marriage and work, is jarred from his complacency and forced to face his failures. Late night conversations become late night confessions and connections. Will Stephen be running on empty?

"The audience gets to know the characters as they get to know each other over the course of the night. Their talk becomes more intimate and more revealing as the play progresses, and the comic tone becomes more melancholy as the themes of middle-age loss, self-knowledge and loneliness push through. Ms. Hutton, best known for The Nibroc Trilogy, has a fine ear for the fits and starts of conversation ... the loose, thinking-it-through-as-we-go quality is part of its charm."
—The New York Times

"Accomplished playwright Arlene Hutton has written a smart, funny script with a strong narrative and complete studies of two identifiable characters ... a very real, human drama."
—NYTheatre.com

"A remarkable script that flows sweetly and smoothly ... gifted writing."
—NewYorkTheatreReview.blogspot.com

"Arlene Hutton's slick, frequently insightful RUNNING investigates the titular action as a means of coping with life's disappointments ... a strong showcase for Hutton's wit and craft."
—Time Out New York

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ISBN 978-0-8222-2512-6

