



IF I FORGET

BY STEVEN
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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



IF I FORGET
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For Whitney, always

IF I FORGET was originally produced in New York City by Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director; Harold Wolpert, Managing Director; Julia C. Levy, Executive Director; Sydney Beers, General Manager) at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre / Laura Pels Theatre on February 22, 2017. It was directed by Daniel Sullivan, the set designer was Derek McLane, the costume designer was Jess Goldstein, the lighting designer was Kenneth Posner, the original music and sound design was by Dan Moses Schreier, and the production stage manager was Kevin Bertolacci. The cast was as follows:

LOU FISCHER	Larry Bryggman
HOLLY FISCHER	Kate Walsh
MICHAEL FISCHER	Jeremy Shamos
SHARON FISCHER	Maria Dizzia
ELLEN MANNING	Tasha Lawrence
HOWARD KILBERG	Gary Wilmes
JOEY OREN	Seth Michael Steinberg

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to David Berlin, Evan Cabnet, Jim Carnahan, Carrie Gardner, Robyn Goodman, Stacey Mindich, Daniel Sullivan, and Stephen Willems; to my family, for remembering; to John Buzzetti, for never doubting; to Todd Haimes, for his trust in me; to Jill Rafson, for her unstinting support of, and unwavering faith in this play; and finally, to Astrid, for being.

CHARACTERS

LOU FISCHER, 75

HOLLY FISCHER, 48, Lou's daughter

MICHAEL FISCHER, 45, Lou's son

SHARON FISCHER, 39, Lou's daughter

ELLEN MANNING, 43, Michael's wife

HOWARD KILBERG, 51, Holly's husband, Joey's stepfather

JOEY OREN, 16, Holly's son

SETTING

An old two-story, peeling paint white Colonial on a quiet residential street in Tenleytown, a white, upper-middle-class neighborhood in Northwest, Washington, D.C.

After the end of the twentieth century.

NOTE

A forward slash (/) indicates a point of overlapping dialogue.

*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee,
let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth...*

*O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed:
happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.*

*Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth
thy little ones against the stones.*

—Psalm 137

IF I FORGET

ACT ONE:
July 29, 2000

One.

A hazy, humid Saturday afternoon in July.

Outside, the dry buzzing of cicadas mingles with the sputtering cough of Metro buses and the rattle of air conditioners in rotting wooden window frames.

Inside, it is climate controlled and cool.

The guest room.

Miscellaneous home medical equipment has been pushed into a corner in a half-hearted attempt to hide it: a fold-up wheelchair, a rollator, a metal cart carrying an oxygen tank, a dozen unopened boxes of cotton balls, latex gloves, and gauze sponges.

Prescription bottles are scattered on bookshelves, bureaus, and a bedside table.

Ellen sits on the bed, speaking on a clunky Nokia cell phone.

Michael hovers nearby, anxious.

ELLEN. *(Into phone.)* Great.

Beat.

Great.

MICHAEL. *(Impatient.)* What is so great?

Pause.

ELLEN. *(Into phone.)* Great.

MICHAEL. Oh my God.

ELLEN. (*To Michael.*) She says it's completely safe. / She feels completely safe.

MICHAEL. / Well, that's incorrect. She's incorrect. I'm sorry, but.

ELLEN. (*Into phone.*) Because he's worried about you, honey...

MICHAEL. Is she watching the news?

ELLEN. (*Into phone.*) He says, if you saw the news here...

MICHAEL. Tell her to turn on the news.

ELLEN. (*Into phone.*) We don't want you to be scared, honey. / We're just concerned that it's a very volatile situation.

MICHAEL. / Of course we want her to be scared. How can she not be scared? The entire peace process collapsed three days ago...

ELLEN. (*Into phone.*) The peace process is very bad right now, honey.

MICHAEL. The peace process is *over*.

ELLEN. (*Into phone.*) The peace process is over.

MICHAEL. Oslo, the entire Oslo framework, is out the window.

ELLEN. (*To Michael.*) They have security with them twenty-four hours a day.

MICHAEL. Obviously, they have security. They should have security. / That's a given.

ELLEN. (*To Michael.*) / She says, the Birthright people, they don't let them visit anywhere that isn't a hundred percent safe.

MICHAEL. Where are they going tomorrow?

ELLEN. (*Into phone.*) Honey, where are you going tomorrow? (*Listening.*) The Wailing Wall?

MICHAEL. Excuse me?

ELLEN. (*Into phone.*) You should / be excited.

MICHAEL. / She's not doing that. Tell her, she's not going there, Ellen.

ELLEN. Dad's so excited for you to go there, he's jumping up and down. (*Listening.*) Everyone wishes you were here, too, honey, but we're so happy you're having such a good time.

MICHAEL. I'm not happy. Don't tell her I'm happy. I'm very unhappy.

Ellen looks at Michael, as she listens.

ELLEN. It does feel a little bit strange being here. It's very... it feels

very quiet. Without Grandma.

MICHAEL. Let me talk to her.

ELLEN. Do you want to say hi to Dad before...? Just a quick...?

Ellen listens for a moment.

MICHAEL. Can you give me the phone?

ELLEN. Well, we have the cell phone with us, in case anything, if you need to get us for anything.

MICHAEL. You're not going to give me the phone?

ELLEN. Love you, too. Bye, sweetheart.

Ellen hangs up.

She's going to call tomorrow night, when they check into the next hotel.

MICHAEL. She didn't want to talk to me?

ELLEN. I think she heard everything you wanted to say, Michael.

MICHAEL. Well, good.

ELLEN. And she was running out the door. Her friends were going to leave without her. They're doing a moonlight tour of Jerusalem.

MICHAEL. Perfect.

ELLEN. She could be spending this whole trip sitting in the hotel room by herself, OK? She's going out with people, she's doing all the activities...

MICHAEL. I guess, I just still don't really understand why we had to send our daughter to Israel in the most—the worst time to be in the Middle East / in the last twenty-five years.

ELLEN. / I did not, we did not “send” her anywhere. She's nineteen years old, she can make her own decisions.

MICHAEL. Well, except this was a decision, you did happen to encourage this particular decision.

ELLEN. Her doctor told us this would be the best thing for her, socializing with other, meeting people her own age...

MICHAEL. That's called an internship. That's a summer job at an ice cream parlor. It's not a ten-day bus ride through a war zone.

ELLEN. It is not a war zone.

MICHAEL. Not yet.

ELLEN. It means a lot to her, to be there, which frankly I think is not the worst thing in the world for a teenager to be interested in learning about her heritage.

MICHAEL. OK...

ELLEN. And you, being the Jewish parent here, I'd think you would maybe appreciate that.

MICHAEL. "Heritage" is actually, that's actually a very problematic concept, first of all.

ELLEN. Can we just—she's having a good time, thank God. Can we please try to just be happy that she's happy? For a second?

MICHAEL. Is she sleeping?

Ellen says nothing.

Is she?

ELLEN. Yes, Michael, she is.

MICHAEL. You asked her that?

ELLEN. I didn't need to ask her that. I trust her to tell us if there's a problem.

MICHAEL. So she's eating? She's definitely, she's taking her medication / and...?

ELLEN. / I would have heard it in her voice if something was going on.

MICHAEL. That hasn't, historically, that hasn't always been the case.

ELLEN. (*Putting an end to the conversation.*) I think maybe right now you're upset about other things, Michael, OK? And you're putting all of that negative energy onto Abby...

MICHAEL. What other things?

Beat.

What other things?

ELLEN. It's completely normal to feel / like—

MICHAEL. / I feel fine. I'm fine.

Beat.

ELLEN. It's good that we're here. It means a lot to your dad to have you.

MICHAEL. Did he say that?

ELLEN. I could tell.

Michael nods, skeptical.

Why don't you go spend some time with him? Before everyone else gets here...

MICHAEL. I'm only halfway through the galleys.

ELLEN. It's his birthday.

MICHAEL. His birthday's Tuesday.

ELLEN. The two of you have a lot to talk about...

MICHAEL. I need to send the galleys back by Monday.

She gives him a look.

I have a deadline, Ellen.

ELLEN. Don't do this to me.

MICHAEL. Do what?

ELLEN. What you always do when we're at your parents' house. Lock yourself in this room, pretending you have work to do, and I'm stranded downstairs, trying to entertain your family.

MICHAEL. I do not always do that.

She looks at him.

I have occasionally done that.

They smile.

ELLEN. It is quiet, though. Isn't it?

MICHAEL. I didn't notice.

Beat.

ELLEN. When I told Abby, when I said, Dad wishes that you were leaving Israel and coming home. You know what she said?

Michael shakes his head.

She said, "I already am home."

Long pause.

MICHAEL. Huh.

IF I FORGET

by Steven Levenson

4M, 3W

In the final months before 9/11, liberal Jewish studies professor Michael Fischer has reunited with his two sisters to celebrate their father's seventy-fifth birthday. Each deeply invested in their own version of family history, the siblings clash over everything from Michael's controversial scholarly work to the mounting pressures of caring for an ailing parent. As destructive secrets and long-held resentments bubble to the surface, the three negotiate—with biting humor and razor-sharp insight—how much of the past they're willing to sacrifice for a chance at a new beginning. *IF I FORGET* tells a powerful tale of a family and a culture at odds with itself.

"...passionate and provoking... Irritable and animated, the Fischers come vibrantly alive in [Levenson's] funny, bruising, searching voice... IF I FORGET speaks to both the head and the heart."

—**The New York Times**

"...a trenchant depiction of American Jewish identity at a crossroads... IF I FORGET is ambitious and often very funny. It has the sparky intracultural conflict of Joshua Harmon's Bad Jews, the propertied-socialist guilt of Tony Kushner's iHo, the looming family dread...of Stephen Karam's The Humans and Tracy Lett's August: Osage County. ...[Levenson] gives us a lot to talk about, and a play to remember."

—**Time Out New York**

"...one of those rare family dramas in which you believe that the characters are actually related to one another. The interpersonal dynamics will ring bitterly true for anyone who's ever fought with a sibling...and the emotional and physical toll of caring for an infirm parent is rendered with heartbreaking poignancy. The play also blends its complex political and personal themes in uncommonly skillful fashion... [IF I FORGET] rings with stunning emotional truth."

—**The Hollywood Reporter**

Also by Steven Levenson

CORE VALUES

THE LANGUAGE OF TREES

THE UNAVOIDABLE DISAPPEARANCE
OF TOM DURNIN

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

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