

DETROIT

A new play by Lisa D'Amour

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CHARACTERS

- BEN** 30, maybe 32. Raised in the United States, somewhere inland: Kansas City, maybe Denver. He worked at one bank for 5 years and another bank for 6 years. Recently laid off from his job.
- MARY** Ben's wife. 30, maybe 32. Raised in the United States, somewhere inland: Kansas City, maybe Denver. Met Ben after college, when they were both working, at a happy hour. She works as a paralegal at a small to mid-sized law firm.
- KENNY** 28, maybe 30, but he looks older. In that way people look older when they've been abusing drugs and alcohol on and off for a long time. Raised in several cities California until he was 12 or 13 and his parents finally split up and he moved to Omaha with his mom. Now he works as a warehouse manager.
- SHARON** 28, maybe 30. but she looks older. In that way people look older when they've been abusing drugs and alcohol on and off for a long time. Raised in Tucson, AZ until she was 9, then she and her mother moved to Columbus, Ohio for 2 years and then to Indianapolis, where she went to high school. In her junior year her mother moved back to Arizona with her boyfriend, and Sharon lived with her best friend to finish school. Now, Sharon works at a phone bank, answering customer service calls.

PLACE

Not necessarily Detroit. However, we are in a "first ring" suburb outside of a mid-sized American city. There are the suburbs that comprise the first "ring" of houses outside the city proper. They were built perhaps in the late 50's, smaller houses, perhaps of outdated design. The kind of house many people today would consider a "starter house" or a house you would want to purchase, live in, and keep your eye on the lot next door so you could by that, knock both houses down, and build a double-lot house.

TIME

Now.

"PLYWOOD has a lifespan of 40 years. Over time, the glue that holds plywood together dries up. Then, walls buckle, split and peel. Panels pop loose. Rooms, doors and windows morph into trick-or-treat versions of themselves."

-- Herbert Muschamp, New York Times, October 19, 1997

"Dogs, by this same logic, bark what they cannot understand."

-- Heraclitus

Lights Up.

Sharon and Kenny are in Mary and Ben's backyard. They sit in newish looking lawn chairs – part of a set from maybe Home Depot. Mary is working to get the patio umbrella to go up as she speaks – it's in the middle of the table. There is a grill nearby

MARY

And the man with the birthmark looked up and slid a handwritten receipt across the table to me. He said "Is there anything else I can help you with" and I said no thank you and I turned and walked out on to the wooden pier and just before I woke up I saw a very old seagull swoop down into the water and eat a fish.

SHARON

How did you know it was old?

MARY

I just knew.

KENNY

And the bank was a old card table on the edge of an abandoned boardwalk?

MARY

And all the deposits went into an Adidas shoe box the banker kept under the table.

SHARON

They make those shoes in Germany. I went there for a week on this high school trip and everyone wanted to buy them. We all thought they were cheaper or there. I didn't buy any.

MARY

(Under her breath.)

Shit. Shit shit shit.

KENNY

Can I help you with that?

MARY

No I'll be right back.

Mary goes inside. Kenny and Sharon sit in the chairs in silence. They look hardly even look at each other. The sounds we hear:

birds. A lawnmower in the distance. A clanging sound, like someone fixing something. A siren that we hear and quickly fades. Mary comes out with Ben following her. Ben has a pan full of meat, some kind of steaks. Mary is kind of in a tizzy.

MARY

I hold it up and I press the button but nothing works sometimes it stays for like 2 seconds but then it falls down again.

Ben fools with the umbrella. They all watch. He pulls his hands away. The umbrella stays up. Pause.

BEN

Wa-lah.

Sharon laughs just a couple laughs. No one else laughs.

MARY

It's funny when you first moved in we didn't know if anyone was actually living next door. Ben swore he saw someone coming and going. But at weird times. And the sheets stayed up for so long it still looked empty. It was driving him crazy! So when I saw you yesterday morning I knew I had to grab you. And tell you that we didn't know you were there, that's why we didn't stop by to say hello.

SHARON

We're still not totally moved in. The house belongs to his aunt.

KENNY

Belonged to my aunt. She passed away.

MARY

Oh I'm so sorry.

KENNY

Thanks. We're renting it for a while before they sell.

SHARON

We'll probably buy it, though.

BEN

That's the way to do it, from a friend or family member. You can avoid a lot of closing costs.

KENNY

That's what they say.

SHARON

So yes, it's a new start! I mean we don't have any furniture even!

MARY

Oh everybody says that "We don't have any furniture."

KENNY

Well –

BEN

There are some good outlet stores over on 265. That's where I got my TV chair.

MARY

Oh wait I've got something!

Mary goes inside. She has a little trouble with the sliding glass door. She is just inside the house, so she can call back to the group.

SHARON

Such a great backyard.

MARY

(Calling from inside)

Isn't it great?

BEN

Thanks, we love it. It sold us on the neighborhood.

SHARON

Hey who is the woman who jogs around the neighborhood in the hot pink jogging outfit?

MARY

What?

SHARON

Who is the woman who jogs around the neighborhood in the hot pink jogging outfit?

MARY

I don't know. I've never seen her. Ben, have you seen this woman? Jogging?

BEN

No, I don't think so. There are a lot of people jogging in the morning.

SHARON

This one wears a hot pink jogging suit.

Mary is back at the door, carrying a coffee table, trying to get it through the door.

MARY

I don't know. I don't know who that is.

KENNY

Wait, wait let me help.

MARY

Uh!

KENNY

Hold on, I've got it. I've got it.

Kenny brings the coffee table through the door. It is an older model, kind of heavy and clunky, maybe with a glass top.

Mary puts the coffee table down in front of Sharon.

MARY

This is for you.

SHARON

What?

MARY

You said you didn't have any furniture. So this is for you.

BEN

Honey that's our coffee table.

MARY

I hate this coffee table. Do you like it?

KENNY

Uh yeah its nice. Do you like it?

MARY

I mean it's a good coffee table, its very sturdy I think it will be good for you I just –

SHARON

I love it.

Pause.

Thank you.

MARY

It's for you.

SHARON

I know. It's amazing.

Sharon half-touches the coffee table.

MARY

Now Ben has to buy me a new table! Ha Ha!

BEN

Ha – Ha.

Sharon sits and indicates the coffee table to Kenny, like 'nice table right?' Ben speaks kind of loud.

BEN

Alright everybody I'm going to throw these puppies on the grill!

KENNY

(To Sharon. If Mary hears her, she pretends not to hear it.)

Can you imagine if they really were puppies?

Sharon and Kenny giggle at their private joke. Mary speaks to Ben.

MARY

Did you do the marinade?

She takes a step and something hurts in her foot.

OW!

Sharon half gets up from her chair.

SHARON
Are you OK?

MARY
Yes, no, ow, its fine, I just have this well I have this oh god planters wart in the bottom of my foot god so embarrassing but do you know what that is? It is this really nasty yes wart that grows upward, it grows into your foot so it takes you a while to notice it and when you finally do it hurts hurts hurts and you try to put that drugstore wart remover stuff on it and it won't work, and so you go to the doctor – I went to the doctor, I went to the doctor today - and he said he could cut it out but he would have to inject anesthesia into my foot and then do minor surgery – I know - and since I knew you all were coming over I thought it would be best to wait so I'm having it done next Thursday and just making due until then. It is only when I step a certain way....it must hit a nerve or something.

KENNY
Like when you have a cavity?

SHARON
Oh right and you bite down on ice or something soft like an apple that goes way up?

KENNY
Or like a caramel candy.

MARY
And start chewing everything super cautiously, like half-chewing because you're afraid of that zap and then one day you forget and you bite regular –

Everybody kinds of groans and cringes.

BEN
OK OK let's not – eew – now you've given me the creeps.

KENNY
Let's talk about something else.

MARY

Yes, let's. Sorry, let's.

BEN

So where do you guys work?

KENNY

I work in a warehouse over off of 694.

SHARON

I work in a phone bank. Is that what you call it? It's like customer service. I sit in one of the booths take the calls and either give people answers or send them on to the supervisor.

MARY

Oh that sounds interesting.

SHARON

Really?

KENNY

What do you do Ben?

BEN

Ha ha I'm a deadbeat. No but really I got laid off my job at this bank, I was a loan officer and they like laid everybody off like literally I don't know who is doing the work anymore and so they gave me this like halfway decent severance pay and also I could get unemployment so I am using it as an opportunity to set up my own business.

SHARON

He's home all day.

BEN

It's a financial planning business. Helping people with their credit scores, that sort of thing.

SHARON

Ha we could use that help!

BEN

You and a lot of people, it can slip so fast.

SHARON

And then you can't get it back up again.

BEN

Well, there are strategies, but it takes a lot of patience. We can have a session sometime.

SHARON

That would be great.

BEN

I need to practice on people. You all can be my test case. And then when you're hanging out on your private yacht I can use a quote from you on my website.

SHARON

Sounds good to me!

MARY

He's designing a website. The whole business is going to be run right inside of it.

BEN

It takes some time. I'm building it myself to save money.

MARY

He's got this great book and it talks a lot about breathing deep and taking your time.

SHARON

Uh huh.

MARY

Because if you panic, when you're building a new business, when you panic and start to cut corners then forget it, it's like building a house on quicksand.

BEN

You have to value your planning time. You have to take stock of the time you put into your work and understand that it is valuable.

MARY

It's scary but I think it's true, I really do. It's a great book.

KENNY

Oh so maybe that's why you had that dream?

MARY
Dream?

KENNY
The one about the bank being a card table at the edge of an abandoned
whatchamacalit. With the deposits in the shoebox.

MARY
Oh right.

BEN
It's really all about envisioning your life as financially sound. You'd be amazed at
what can happen.

SHARON
(To Ben.)
Are you British?

BEN
What?

SHARON
Are you from England?

BEN
No, why?

SHARON
I don't know. Something about the way you talk. "Now you've given me the
creeps."

BEN
"Now you've given me the creeps" I didn't even realize I said it like that. Huh.

SHARON
Maybe you're British.

BEN
(Kind of laughs but he doesn't really know what she means.)
Yeah, maybe.

We hear the meat sizzling on the grill.

SHARON
Wow steak.

We hear the grill and some surrounding sounds.

BEN
Does anyone want a beer?

Kenny and Sharon overlap in their reply.

KENNY AND SHARON
We don't drink.

Mary speaks under her breath.

MARY
I told you that Ben.

Short pause.

BEN
Oh well does anyone need anything? What are you drinking seltzer?

KENNY
I'm OK.

SHARON
I could use a little more ice.

MARY
Oh I'll bring out a bucket.

BEN
Mary these are just going to be a couple more minutes if you want to check the potatoes.

MARY
Oh right.

Mary exits.

KENNY
So this is a nice patio. Was it here when you moved in?