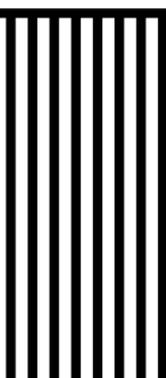


BECKY'S NEW CAR

BY STEVEN DIETZ



DRAMATISTS
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for Kurt Beattie

BECKY'S NEW CAR received its world premiere at ACT Theatre in Seattle, Washington, on October 23, 2008. It was directed by Kurt Beattie; the set design was by William Bloodgood; the costume design was by Catherine Hunt; the lighting design was by Rick Paulsen; the sound design was by Eric Chappelle; and the production stage manager was Jeffrey K. Hanson. The cast was as follows:

BECKY FOSTER Kimberly King
JOE FOSTER Charles Leggett
CHRIS FOSTER Benjamin Harris
WALTER FLOOD Michael Winters
KENNI FLOOD Anna-Lisa Carlson
STEVE R. Hamilton Wright
GINGER Suzanne Bouchard

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CHARACTERS

BECKY (REBECCA) FOSTER — a woman in her late 40s.

JOE FOSTER — Becky's husband, a roofer, late 40s.

CHRIS FOSTER — their son, a psychology student, 26.

WALTER FLOOD — a very wealthy businessman, widowed, 60s.

KENSINGTON (KENNI) FLOOD — Walter's daughter, 23.

STEVE — Becky's co-worker, widowed, 50.

GINGER — a neighbor of Walter's, single, 50s.

PLACE

An American city very much like Seattle.

TIME

The present. Summer.

SETTING

The play will move without transition between four primary locations: Becky's living room, her cubicle at work, her car, and the terrace of Walter Flood's estate.

In point of fact, these are all ONE area, in place onstage at all times. Furthermore, in the case of the cubicle and car, these areas may actually be a part of Becky's living room, which has been redefined by lighting.

Simplify. It is not necessary, nor is it desirable, to fully depict any of the play's locales.

We have two lives — the one we learn with, and the life we live after that.

—*Bernard Malamud*

BECKY'S NEW CAR

ACT ONE

Becky's Living Room. Evening.

Lights rise quickly on the empty room, as we hear what might be a vacuum cleaner running offstage. Next we hear things falling and crashing — being grabbed, discarded, hurriedly put away, and then — Becky appears, in slacks and light sweater, somewhat disheveled, wearing one long rubber cleaning glove. With this gloved hand she is holding a toilet plunger upside down, with a new roll of toilet paper skewered on the handle. In her other hand is a Dustbuster, still running. A cleaning rag is draped over her shoulder. And yet, despite this dubious first impression ...

She is all charm, the perfect (if somewhat ill-prepared) hostess when she greets the audience.

BECKY. *(To audience.)* Hi. Hello. Wait a second — *(She turns the Dustbuster off.)* There we go. Sorry. Hi! So glad you stopped by. I was just picking up the house a bit — *(She gives the new roll of toilet paper to an audience member.)* Could you put this in the bathroom when you go? Thanks. *(She moves about during the following, putting things in place, readying the house.)* You know how it is: Things ran late at work — so I called Joe, he's great, you'll love him, you'll probably end up liking Joe way more than you like me. Anyway, I told Joe I was still at work and could he pick up the pizza? — But he was stuck at his jobsite longer than planned — he's finishing up this apartment south of here, good money but a real long drive — and because of the rain last night, god that RAIN last

night, because of that he had to — wait — *(She finds an empty trash can and hands it to an audience member.)* See that drip right there. Just watch ... *(It drips, just a bit — from the grid — near the edge of the stage. To audience member.)* There. See. Could you put this over there for me? Thanks so much. *(She watches as the audience member puts the trash can under the drip.)* Wait. Let's be sure ... *(She waits with the audience member until a drip of water falls into the trash can. Smiles.)* Got it. Thanks. Did I mention that my husband is a roofer? Yes. A very good one. Twenty-plus years, but you know what they say — the shoemaker's kids and all that ... *(She continues to busy herself in the room.)* I should wake my son so you can meet him — that would be Chris — that would be his crap lying around here everywhere. *(She quickly holds up a piece of newspaper — offers it to an audience member.)* Sports section?

(As needed.) (Here you go.) // (I don't blame you.)

(Back to straightening up.) Don't get me wrong, I love my son — fruit of my actual loins — but God forbid he emerge from the basement where he lives as the Eternal Freeloader, sleeping off another night of grad-student angst and two-dollar shots. He didn't even do the one thing I asked of him, which was to get the dishwasher loaded — so, there you have it, that's the update: My son was loaded and the dishwasher was not — but, anyway, this is our humble home: *(She shoves a final magazine under the cushion of a chair or couch, strikes a friendly pose, and says:)* Welcome! *(Beat, looks around.)* Fact is: We need a new house. My friend, Rita — beautiful, wonderful woman, passed away last year, her husband Steve still hasn't gotten over it — anyway, Rita had this theory:

When a woman says she needs new shoes, what she really wants is a new job.

When she says she needs a new house, she wants a new husband.

And when she says she wants a new car, she wants a new life. *(A beat. Becky opens a drawer or cupboard and pulls out a very large [and nearly empty] carton of Diet Sprite. She fishes out a can, pops the top, starts to drink — then, seeing an audience member, she stops. To an audience member.)* Oh, I'm sorry. Did you want one? *(If this person says yes, she digs out the final can, saying:)*

(As needed.) (Here you go.)

(Also: if this person says yes, she turns to the person next to this audience member, saying:) (Sorry. That's all there is. Money's been tight and we let our Costco membership lapse, so ... you know.)

(Becky now ... sits, for the first time in the play. Breathes deeply. And drinks her soda.) I think we'll just stay here in the living room, if that's okay. *(Points.)* The kitchen's that way, if you need something — but promise me you won't look in the backyard. It's a disaster. Used to be a garden. We should just pave it over. Keep our cars back there. Yes, I know that's terrible — but I need to ask you this: Have you ever really been as happy in your garden as you've been on a good day in your car?

All alone. Radio on. Traffic moving, nice and easy.

Heaven.

(Phone rings. Becky goes to a cluttered desk or table in the middle of the room. When she lifts the phone, lights immediately reveal this area to be — Becky's Cubicle at work. Evening. Into phone, upbeat.) Thank you for calling Bill Buckley Lexus-Saturn-Nissan-Mitsubishi, Home of the Fifty-Thousand Mile Smile, this is Becky, how may I direct your call? *(Listens.)* Oh, I'm afraid they've gone home for the night. *(Listens.)* Well, yes, good point: if I'm still here doing paperwork why can't the salesmen still be here selling cars, but that's — *(Listens.)* Yes, right, listen — would you mind terribly if I put you on hold for just a second, thanks so much — *(Presses a button on the phone. To audience.)* Sorry. You know how it is. As soon as you start to have a conversation with someone —

(Phone rings again.) Excuse me. *(She answers. On phone, faster now.)* Thank you for calling Bill Buckley Lexus-Saturn-Nissan-Mitsubishi, Home of the Fifty-Thousand Mile Smile, this is Becky, how may I — *(Stops, listens.)* You were on hold. Why did you — no, I did not hang up on you. I put you on hold. For less than a minute — yes, it was really no more than a sure go-ahead and yell if you want —

(As the caller presumably rants on the other end, Becky sets the phone down, and speaks to the audience.) Anyway, this is where I work. I'm the title clerk and office manager. I process the new car sales. This place used to be Bill Buckley's main car lot — his Super-Dealership — but now he's got plans to open a Mega-Dealership three hours south of here, and he's been trolling our offices to see if any of us are worthy to make the jump from Super to Mega. *(Re: phone.)* Wait. I think he stopped. *(She picks up the phone. Into phone.)* Yes, I wrote down every word you said and I'll put it right in front of your salesman when he comes in tomorrow. *(Beat.)* No, wait, is tomorrow Wednesday? He's actually off on Wednesdays, so

— (*Holds phone away from her ear once again. Re: Caller.*) Oh, there he goes again! (*Into phone.*) I'M GOING TO PUT YOU ON HOLD FOR JUST ANOTHER SEC. (*She puts the call on hold again. To audience.*) I've been here at Buckley's for nine years. With Chris in school — and the economy in ... flux ... just *totally fluxed* — with all that, Joe and I need the money. What else would I do? Bag groceries? Be a crossing guard? Go back to school and study what? — massage therapy?! (*Beat.*) Friend of mind from high school called — my age — husband died suddenly, left her with nothing, no insurance, piles of bills — and do you know what she's doing now? Porn. Older Woman stuff. Tasteful. No animals. Just a little leather and lot of makeup. But, you know what she said? I know what you must think of me, Becky ... but you reach a certain age and suddenly you're just ... *invisible*. I wanted to be *seen*. (*Pause, more quietly.*) Anyway: This is where I work. (*Looks around.*) Let's go back to the house.

(*Light immediately restore to the Living Room.*) Joe should be home any minute and then we can — (*Stops.*) My Sprite. I left it at work. Just a sec. (*To the Booth.*) I need to go back to work. I left my drink. (*Lights immediately shift to: the Cubicle. Becky grabs her soda. To the booth.*) Thanks. (— *And is about to walk away when she remembers.*) — Ooops. (— *And picks up the phone.*) Still there? Sorry, I had to run home — but now I'm back. (*Beat.*) Are you ... are you crying? (*To audience, whispers.*) He's crying. (*Back on phone.*) It's a car ... it's just a car ... and if you don't get this one, well ... I mean, something else always comes along, right? (*Listens.*) You don't think so. (*Pause, quiet and simple.*) I guess I don't think so either. Bye. (*She slowly hangs up the phone. Pause. And then ... her upbeat demeanor returns. To audience.*) Found my Sprite!

(*Lights instantly restore to: the Living Room. Calls toward basement.*) CHRIS. ARE YOU DOWN THERE? I NEED YOU. (*To audience.*) He's a good kid. Studying psychology — which might come in handy. I mean, he's twenty-six years old and I just wish he'd meet a nice young woman who is, I don't know, completely the opposite of every girl he's ever dated. Is that too much to ask? (*Chris enters in basic slovenly college garb, pencil in his mouth, carrying a large textbook.*)

CHRIS. Yeah — hey — what's up —

BECKY. Oh, hi, you're here —

CHRIS. — Trying to study down there, you know? —

BECKY. Yes, I'm —

CHRIS. — Got midterms next week — full load — pressure's on, big time —

BECKY. Yes, right —

CHRIS. — But hey — okay — I'm here now, so: Lay it on me.

BECKY. “Lay it on you?”

CHRIS. You needed something?

BECKY. I need you to pick up the pizza. Down at Angelo's. Money in my purse. Dad'll be here soon. I'll make a salad.

CHRIS. I already ate.

BECKY. I told you I was ordering pizza tonight.

CHRIS. Yeah, but on the way home I was walking by Angelo's — and it smelled good —

BECKY. You already ate there?

CHRIS. I was hungry. I was awake.

BECKY. But I got something special tonight — I had a coupon — I ordered the —

CHRIS. (*Finishing her sentence.*) — The Double Ham and Artichoke Supreme.

BECKY. How do you know that?

CHRIS. I saw the guy write it down.

BECKY. You were there when I called?

CHRIS. He was ringing me up. I saw him write your name down.

BECKY. And you couldn't sit there for twenty minutes and —

CHRIS. Not twenty minutes — more like thirty-seven to forty minutes — because it's DEEP DISH —

BECKY. Okay, okay — but you couldn't call me and say, I'm right here at Angelo's, Mom — I'll wait — read the paper — flirt with some spoiled coeds — and then BRING OUR DINNER home with you?!

CHRIS. I NEEDED TO STUDY.

BECKY. WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR LIFE?
(*Quick beat.*)

CHRIS. Huh?

BECKY. You're a twenty-six-year-old man —

CHRIS. I thought this was about pizza —

BECKY. — And you're still shackled up with your parents —

CHRIS. Oh, can we please not ...

BECKY. (*Overlapping.*) — And, hey, we love you to death but when does a psychology student get around to all that stuff about

BECKY'S NEW CAR

by Steven Dietz

"And when a woman says she wants a new car, she wants a new life."

4M, 3W

Have you ever been tempted to flee your own life? Becky Foster is caught in middle age, middle management and in a middling marriage — with no prospects for change on the horizon. Then one night a socially inept and grief-struck millionaire stumbles into the car dealership where Becky works. Becky is offered nothing short of a new life ... and the audience is offered a chance to ride shotgun in a way that most plays wouldn't dare. BECKY'S NEW CAR is a thoroughly original comedy with serious overtones, a devious and delightful romp down the road not taken.

"Perhaps the highest praise that can be given to Steven Dietz's praiseworthy new comedy is that it's funny. Not ironic. Not hysterical in a slapsticky kind of way. Just gently and consistently funny — right up to the point that it's touching, and then even a little bit after that. BECKY'S NEW CAR takes the audience on a smart, comic cruise through the perils of middle-aged longing and regret." —Variety

"On a classic mistaken-identity premise, playwright Steven Dietz has constructed a warmly humorous and nimble romantic farce that doesn't oversell itself, or ever sell its American Everywoman protagonist short. Dietz has created a comedy of modern manners ... one that derives as much power from its humanity as its fine-tuned craftsmanship." —The Seattle Times

"The world premiere production of Steven Dietz's warm and amiable new comedy is the perfect two-hour escape from the endless political campaign, stock market collapse, and other daily woes of modern life. You won't see a comedy this good on television or in the neighborhood multi-plex." —Talkin' Broadway

"Playwright Steven Dietz's new production is a laugh-out-loud amusement-park ride where the comedy spins out of control like a bumper car. BECKY'S NEW CAR is witty and droll, with delicious deadpan humor and U-turn plot twists. But it turns out there's more under the hood of BECKY'S NEW CAR than just the comedy. The story has depth. It has themes like confronting the unexpected. It has conflict such as a woman being pulled in two directions. It has, like Yogi Berra once suggested, a person coming to a fork in the road and taking it." —Everett Herald

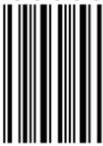
"BECKY'S NEW CAR is that perfect blend of hilarious comedy and substantial weight, a story about choices and consequences that could believably happen to anyone." —The Broadway Hour

Also by Steven Dietz
LAST OF THE BOYS
PRIVATE EYES
YANKEE TAVERN
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ISBN 978-0-8222-2393-1



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