



# DETROIT

BY LISA D'AMOUR



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DETROIT  
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The World Premiere of DETROIT was produced and presented  
by Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, IL;  
Martha Lavey, Artistic Director  
and David Hawkanson, Executive Director.

Playwrights Horizons produced the New York premiere  
of DETROIT Off-Broadway in 2012.

DETROIT received its world premiere at Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director) in Chicago, Illinois, opening on September 9, 2010. It was directed by Austin Pendleton; the set design was by Kevin Depinet; the costume design was by Rachel Anne Healy; the lighting design was by Kevin Rigdon; and the original music and sound design were by Josh Schmidt. The cast was as follows:

BEN..... Ian Barford  
MARY..... Laurie Metcalf  
KENNY..... Kevin Anderson  
SHARON..... Kate Arrington  
FRANK..... Robert Breuler

DETROIT received its New York City premiere at Playwrights Horizons, opening on August 24, 2012. It was directed by Anne Kauffman; the set design was by Louisa Thompson; the costume design was by Kaye Voyce; the lighting design was by Mark Barton; the sound design was by Matt Tierney; and the production stage manager was Lisa Ann Chernoff. The cast was as follows:

BEN..... David Schwimmer  
MARY..... Amy Ryan  
KENNY..... Darren Pettie  
SHARON..... Sarah Sokolovic  
FRANK..... John Cullum

## CHARACTERS

**BEN** — Raised in the United States, somewhere inland: Kansas City, maybe Denver. He worked at one bank for five years and another bank for six years. Recently laid off from his job.

**MARY** — Raised in the United States, somewhere inland: Kansas City, maybe Denver. Met Ben after work at a happy hour, when he was working in a bank and she was working as a paralegal assistant. Now she works as a paralegal at a small law firm.

**KENNY** — Raised in several cities in California until he was twelve or thirteen, when his parents finally split up and he moved to Omaha with his mom. Now he works as a warehouse manager. Fresh out of major substance abuse rehab.

**SHARON** — Raised in Tucson, Arizona, until she was nine, when she and her mother moved to Columbus, Ohio, for two 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. Fresh out of major substance abuse rehab.

**FRANK** — Two generations older than the other characters. Maybe he's in his late seventies, early eighties? But he's spry, the kind of man who's been fixing his roof and rewiring the electricity on his house and taking care of his impeccable lawn for many years. He's happy.

## **PLACE**

Not necessarily Detroit. However, we are in a “first ring” suburb outside of a mid-sized American city. These are the suburbs that comprise the first “ring” of houses outside the city proper. They were built perhaps in the late fifties, 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 buy that, knock both houses down, and build a double-lot house.

## **TIME**

Now.

## **CASTING NOTE**

When I wrote the play, I imagined Mary, Ben, Sharon, and Kenny to be around thirty-four years old. I’ve since realized that there is some flexibility in terms of the ages of the characters. For example, the show can be cast with Mary and Ben a little older, in their forties, and Sharon and Kenny younger, in their late twenties, early thirties. It’s also possible that Kenny is quite a bit older than Sharon. I just ask that directors consider how the age of the characters reverberates through the whole script: The focus of the story can shift quite a bit depending on how old they are.

## **SET NOTE**

This play is set in the front and back yards of the characters’ houses. There is a way to produce the play by setting it only in the back yards by cutting certain lines and adding a few lines. See the Addendum at the back of the book.

*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 at what they cannot understand.*

—Heraclitus

# DETROIT

*Lights up.*

*Sharon and Kenny are in Mary and Ben's back yard. They sit in newish looking lawn chairs — part of a set from maybe Home Depot. Mary struggles to get a patio umbrella to go up as she speaks — it's in the middle of the table and it's heavy. 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 onto the wooden pier and 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 an 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 over 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. They take in the sounds of this new landscape: 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.)* I hold it up and I press the button but nothing works

sometimes it stays for like two 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, that was your aunt?

KENNY. 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 back yard.

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. Wait, wait let me help. Oh god this door!

KENNY. Hold on, I've got it. I've got it. *(Kenny opens the door. Mary awkwardly carries the coffee table through the door and places it somewhere on the lawn. 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 it's nice. Do you like it?

MARY. I mean it's a good coffee table, it's 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.)* 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, it's fine, I just have this well I have this oh god plantars wart in the bottom of my foot god so embarrassing but do you know what that is? This is a really nasty yes wart that grows upward, INTO your foot, slowly 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 do 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?

MARY. I work as a paralegal at Furley, Clark and Lamb.

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.

MARY. 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. 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.

BEN. And how important it is to spend a lot of time doing things you're passionate about. If you follow your passions, you're halfway there.

MARY. If you panic and start to cut corners, then forget it, it's like building a house on quicksand.

BEN. It's really all about envisioning your life as financially sound.

MARY. It's scary but I really think it's true. 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 whatchamacallit. With the deposits in the shoebox.

MARY. Oh right.

BEN. Alright, we gonna eat some meat! *(Ben gets up to check the meat.)*

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.)*

# DETROIT

by Lisa D'Amour

3M, 2W

In a first-ring suburb just outside a city that might be Detroit, Ben and Mary see sudden signs of life at the deserted house next door and invite their new neighbors Sharon and Kenny over for a barbecue. As the action unfolds we learn that Sharon and Kenny met at rehab, neither is employed, and they don't own a stick of furniture. The quintessential American backyard party quickly turns into something more dangerous — and filled with potential.

*"... sly, timely and neatly surprising ... very much an of-the-moment American play ... D'Amour perfectly captures a certain pervasive lifestyle of today: atomized, mediated, ersatz and culturally leveled ... cascading, hilarious monologues and minutely calibrated chitchat."*

—**Time Out New York**

*"A sharp X-ray of the embattled American psyche as well as a smart, tart critique of the country's fraying social fabric, Ms. D'Amour's dark comedy is as rich and addictively satisfying as a five-layer dip served up with a brimming bowl of tortilla chips."*

—**The New York Times**

*"... totally nails the great, deep malaise of middle-class suburbia, with a sustained energy and a wicked eye for telling details ... funny as hell."*

—**The New York Post**

*"... a tense, terrific, funny new play."*

—**The New York Observer**

*"... savvy, frequently poetic, and ultimately bittersweet ..."*

—**TheaterMania.com**

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