



PLACEBO

BY MELISSA JAMES GIBSON



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PLACEBO
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The world premiere of PLACEBO was produced Off-Broadway by Playwrights Horizons, Inc. (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director), on February 20, 2015. It was directed by Daniel Aukin; the scenic and costume designer was David Zinn; the lighting designer was Matt Frey; the sound designer was Ryan Rumery; and the stage manager was Kyle Gates. The cast was as follows:

LOUISE Carrie Coon
JONATHAN William Jackson Harper
TOM Alex Hurt
MARY Florencia Lozano

CHARACTERS

LOUISE, 32

JONATHAN, 30s

TOM, 30s

MARY, late 40s

About the Language: The line breaks, internal capitalizations, and lack of punctuation in general are intended as guidelines to the characters' thought processes, in terms of emphasis, pattern, and rhythm; they should be honored, but should not feel enslaving.

When a line is indented, it indicates a continuation of the previous line. When there is no indentation, it indicates a line break. When a forward slash ("/") appears within the dialogue, it indicates that the next line should begin, creating an overlap with the previous line.

PLACEBO

1.

Two chairs, a clipboard, and a computer.

MARY

I can't um
get excited or
motivated or
into it I guess you'd say It's
hard to focus I
just can't uh
finish
(Longish pause.)

LOUISE

(?)
your sentence

MARY

No no
Sex The sex act I get I get
distracted half the time or lose
track space out I guess or or
I guess I've lost the urge sort of you know
I don't know I
don't
recognize myself because
(Slight pause before words tumble out.)

I used to be someone who wanted to do it all the time I mean All
The Time I used to be someone who'd mess around at the drop

of a hat Just ask my husband just ask Jeff I felt so connected
and now I'm someone who has to force myself to mess around
with my husband I mean now I almost Dread it Oh Oh terrible
word Dread Awful Awful because I Love him okay Jeff Deeply
and this feeling this Lack Of Desire feeling is really messing
with my head and starting to affect everything like Every Single
Part Of My Life to the point where I feel desperate very
Desperately in need of Help because

(Breath, breath.)

I used to be happy okay All my friends thought of me as Happy
like if you said to all my friends describe Mary in one word
Happy all my friends would have said but

(Slight pause.)

Now I'm just

Not

(Louise finishes up noting all of the above, then looks up, radiant smile.)

LOUISE

That is

fantastic Mary

Really Really great

2.

Jonathan sits in front of a stack of open books with a jillion colorful stickies, as well as two open laptop computers. He is trying to work. He is both concentrating very hard and feeling profoundly stuck. He gets up, pulls a pack of cigarettes from a hiding place, and puts it on the table. He reaches for the cigarettes, stops himself. An internal struggle. There is the sound of a key in the lock, first locking the door and then unlocking. He wants to put the cigarettes away, but doesn't have time to do so before Louise enters.

LOUISE

Why don't you ever lock the door

JONATHAN
So it's easier to leave

LOUISE
(?)
Leave-leave

JONATHAN
No leave the apartment

LOUISE
(?)
When do you leave the apartment

JONATHAN
I just like to know that I could

LOUISE
You can /
You should

JONATHAN
(*Gesturing toward his work.*) Noooo I can't
(*Slight pause.*)
But why do I
look like a person who doesn't leave the apartment

LOUISE
(*Yes.*)
Um
(*He tries to work in earnest, but after a moment she says, about the door:*)
And then there's the bad guy
(*A short beat. He's distracted.*)

JONATHAN
(?)
The what

LOUISE
The bad guy
The bogeyman

JONATHAN
(?)
The bogeyman or the boogeyman

LOUISE
Don't say boogeyman boogeyman sounds

JONATHAN
(?)
snotty

LOUISE
I'm just saying the bad guy could get in

JONATHAN
*(Smiling.) Unless he is in
(Louise puts down her stuff, takes off her shoes. He's still mostly focused
on what he's doing.)*

LOUISE
I talked to Susan today

JONATHAN
(?, not looking up.)
Your sister Susan or Suzie Susan

LOUISE
My sister

JONATHAN
How is she

LOUISE
(?)
Susan or my mom
(He looks up, knows he needs to give her full attention now.)

JONATHAN
(The right answer.) Your mom

LOUISE
They sent her home

JONATHAN
Oh
Great

LOUISE
With an oxygen machine

JONATHAN
Oh
(?)
forever

LOUISE
That's how it goes
usually

JONATHAN
I'm sorry

LOUISE
The oxygen machine scares her

JONATHAN
Why

LOUISE
Because it's an oxygen machine

JONATHAN
Right

LOUISE
Without it she'd be breathless basically

PLACEBO

by Melissa James Gibson

2M, 2W

A minty green pill — medication or sugar? Louise is working on a placebo-controlled study of a new female arousal drug. As her work in the lab navigates the blurry lines between perception and deception, the same questions pertain more and more to her life at home. With uncanny insight and unparalleled wit, Melissa James Gibson's affectionate comedy examines slippery truths and the power of crossed fingers.

"... divertingly offbeat comedy-drama. ... Ms. Gibson has a lovely affinity for parchment-dry humor that softens the sadder undercurrents of PLACEBO. And she imbues her characters with an affection for wordplay and the oddities of language ... Ms. Gibson puts amusingly off-kilter, slightly stylized exchanges in the mouths of her everyday characters with convincing grace."

—The New York Times

"Smart, droll, beautifully observed ..."

—New York Magazine

"... subtle yet intellectually explosive ... Gibson's contemporary analysis of relationships and the things that propel them forward into the dark unknown. ... [P]oses interesting questions about the role the mind plays for all of us in every aspect of life — from the basest mechanics of sexual arousal to the most abstract concepts of eternal love. ... Fortunately, everything Gibson gives us in intellectual fodder she translates into emotional content, both surprising and original in its delivery. She leaves us intrigued ..."

—TheaterMania.com

Also by Melissa James Gibson

[sic]

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