



THIS RANDOM WORLD

THE MYTH OF SERENDIPITY

BY STEVEN DIETZ



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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*This play is dedicated to my mother,
Irene Lind Dietz.*

THIS RANDOM WORLD had its world premiere in the 2016 Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville, in Louisville, KY, opening on March 11, 2016. It was directed by Meredith McDonough; the scenic design was by Daniel Zimmerman; the costume design was by Kathleen Geldard; the lighting design was by Paul Toben; the sound design was by Christian Frederickson; the production stage manager was Kathy Preher; and the dramaturg was Jenni Page-White. The cast was as follows:

SCOTTIE WARD	Beth Dixon
TIM WARD	Nate Miller
BETH WARD	Brenda Withers
BERNADETTE	Shirine Babb
RHONDA	Deonna Bouye
CLAIRE	Renata Friedman
GARY	Todd Lawson

THIS RANDOM WORLD was written during a playwriting residency at the New Harmony Project (New Harmony, IN), in May of 2015.

THIS RANDOM WORLD was subsequently developed in public readings at Florida Atlantic Theatre Lab (Boca Raton, FL), Riverside Theatre (Iowa City, IA), and the University of Texas (Austin, TX). Post-premiere revisions were made at Theatre Lab, Ensemble Theatre Company (OH), Austin Playhouse (TX), and Circle Theatre (Fort Worth, TX). The playwright wishes to thank the artists involved in these readings/productions for their contributions to the development of this play.

Additional thanks to the following individuals: Van C. Gessel, Ethan Canin, Anne Marie Nest, David Ellenstein, Liz Engelman, and Kirk Lynn.

And lasting thanks to Allison for everything.

CHARACTERS

SCOTTIE WARD, a woman in her 70s.

TIM WARD, her son, 29.

BETH WARD, her daughter, 38.

BERNADETTE, her aide, 30s.

RHONDA, Bernadette's younger sister, late 20s.

CLAIRE, Tim's ex-girlfriend, 29.

GARY, Claire's ex-boyfriend, 30s.

A MAN, 60s/flexible. *[Not listed in playbill, if possible.]*

A multi-ethnic cast is strongly encouraged.

PLACE

An American city. And various distant lands.

TIME

The present. Late winter and early spring.

NOTES

A few simple and permanent units should suffice for everything.

Transformations between them should be quick and easy.

Beyond that, a world that is warm, mysterious, and evocative would be appreciated.

And rain would be good.

Thank you.

“We must unlearn the constellations to see the stars.”

—Jack Gilbert, “Tear It Down”

THIS RANDOM WORLD

Tim's Small Apartment. February. Rain.

Tim sits on the ground, noodling around on his laptop. He is dressed for a lazy day inside.

Beth, his older sister, is nicely dressed. She reads from a document.

BETH. (Gravely.) "...Elizabeth Ward—known to all as Beth—was a loving sister and a caring friend. Though she will be missed by many, her laughter, her warmth, and her passion for living will continue to echo within our hearts. Memorial services will be held at—"

(Brightly, lowering the paper, to Tim.) —and here you'll just insert whichever place you have the service for me. I've included two options in my End Of Life papers. All that info is in the same folder as my will, which as you know is in my safe deposit box. You've got the key to my safe deposit box I gave you, right?

Tim?

TIM. Oh, to your little box at the bank—

BETH. Safe deposit box.

TIM. (Overlapping.) —yes, right, of course. Got it. Safe and sound.

BETH. Where is it?

TIM. I know where it is.

BETH. Tell me. Say it out loud.

TIM. Beth, you are not dying!

BETH. No—but when the day comes, I am counting on you.

TIM. You just stop living. I'll take care of everything else.

BETH. There's no backup plan for us, you know. With Dad gone and Scottie ready to follow him, now it's just us. Just you and me.

TIM. It's weird that you call Mom "Scottie." When did you start doing that?

BETH. That's what everyone's always called her.

TIM. Still—it's weird.

BETH. What do you call her?

TIM. (*Incredulous.*) I call her... "Mom"...! And I think she's doing okay.

BETH. How would you know that? Have you talked to her? Of course you haven't talked to her. Why don't you talk to her? You're Scottie's favorite.

TIM. No, I am not her—

BETH. Oh my god! You are the golden boy on top of the shining chariot!

TIM. Don't do that. Don't put that "you are the perfect son" pressure on me. No one should have to live up to that.

BETH. Oh, please—

TIM. I've wanted to talk to her—I've been meaning to talk to her.

BETH. But communication is so hard in these days of the telegraph and the Pony Express.

TIM. Forget it.

BETH. You can call her aide. If you can't reach Mom, sometimes it's good to call her aide.

TIM. Mom has an aide?

BETH. Bernadette. You know this. And Bernie says Mom only gets out once a day. To look at the sunrise.

TIM. The *sunrise*—why?

BETH. I don't know but that's it. That's all she does. She has no friends, from what I can tell—no activities she's interested in—even though the senior center has bridge and bingo and an a cappella group that does those old-timey songs—

TIM. Mom would hate that!

BETH. —yes, okay—but she's got to do something! I thought sure she'd want to travel. They have those package tours for seniors. Remember all the books she had about India, China, Japan?

It's maddening.
Do you have any tissues? Anywhere?

TIM. No. Sorry.
Are you crying?

BETH. She's our mom, Tim.

Pause.

TIM. But she can't travel. What if something happened?

BETH. Like she met someone? Or had a conversation? Or saw more of the world than the three-mile radius she's lived in for the last fifty years?

TIM. But what if she's not—

BETH. Her health is not great—okay—we know that—but her doctor told me if she really wanted to travel she could travel.

TIM. And you'd do nothing but worry about her—call to check up on her—

BETH. That's not true.
That's true.

Does she let you in?

TIM. What?

BETH. She doesn't let me in. Doesn't tell me things. She never calls. And she doesn't seem to want me to call her.

TIM. She doesn't want you to worry.

BETH. I worry because she doesn't want me to call!

TIM. And what would you say if you did? *Hey, Mom: Go on a trip so I'll feel better, but don't go on a trip because I'll worry about you.*

Pause.

BETH. Yes. That's exactly what I'd say.

TIM. Maybe she just wants to stay home and piss off the Travel Nazis.

(Off Beth's look.) You know those people! The ones who travel just to shame other people for *not* traveling: "Oh my god—you haven't been to Such-and-Such?! How can you NOT have been to Such-and-Such?! You *have* to go. I mean, you *HAVE* to go."—

(Before Beth can respond.) —You just know they take those trips so

they can *lord it over you later*—when in fact all they are doing is running away from their lives.

Tim goes back to noodling on his laptop.

BETH. So, I'm off to Nepal.

Tim turns to her.

I told you this—over a year ago. A group expedition.

Dangerous. Expensive.

I told you this. I sent you a link.

TIM. No, you—

BETH. Yes, I did! This Travel Nazi is going on a very expensive and dangerous adventure to Nepal because apparently I need to *run away from my life!*

(Before Tim can respond.) And what about you? I am looking at what passes for your life and your apartment and your “career” and—well—I don't see a lot of proof of your existence either!—

TIM. What kind of thing is—

BETH. *(Overlapping.)* —I mean—really—do you have any *actual evidence* that you are, in fact, living and breathing and connected in some way to the known world?!

*He stares at her, seemingly preparing a really good answer.
Then...*

He goes back to his laptop, avidly.

You should have tissues.

Doesn't Marlene ever need tissues when she comes over?

Does Marlene still come over?

Okay, what's up with Marlene?

Oh, Tim...

TIM. It's okay. We were done.

BETH. I'm so sorry.

Pause.

Maybe it will give you something to write about.

TIM. That's not happening either.

BETH. Since when?

TIM. That has never happened. You know that. Calling me a “writer”

is something you and Mom cooked up to keep from calling me a “failure.”

BETH. That is not—

His look stops her.

Okay. That’s true.

Pause.

What about work?

You had that big freelance project? Those websites? Some kind of programming that I don’t understand.

Did you do it?

Did that end?

Did they let you go?

They let you go.

You did something.

You said something.

It ended badly.

Oh jesus, Tim—not again!

TIM. It’s okay.

BETH. You seem sad. Are you sad?

TIM. I’m not sad. I’m— (*Stops.*)

BETH. What?

TIM. I’m...*composting.*

A lot of shit has happened to me lately—not just Marlene and the jobs—other stuff too—and so I am just...*sitting with it* and letting it *settle the way it needs to...*

He’s just making this up now, but doing so earnestly, convincing himself.

...letting the—you know—little flies and worms and things sort of buzz and dig all around in it...

BETH. Oh jesus god.

TIM. ...until my shit isn’t shit anymore...until my shit is, like, *nutrients*...and then my shit will be *awesome*...my shit will be *good for me*.

Pause.

THIS RANDOM WORLD

by Steven Dietz

"I want to be just beside my life. Because maybe right beside my life everything makes sense. Maybe there...everything connects."

2 men, 5 women

We want to believe that serendipity brings us together, but is that just a myth? Mining the comedy of missed connections, THIS RANDOM WORLD asks the serious question of how often we travel parallel paths through the world without noticing. From an ailing woman who plans one final trip, to her daughter planning one great escape and her son falling prey to a prank gone wrong, this funny, intimate, and heartbreaking play explores the lives that may be happening just out of reach of our own.

"... affecting... The characters are drawn with empathy and humor, and the cascading series of coincidences neatly illustrates the idea that, as the title suggests, we are all hostages to chance." —**The New York Times**

"... succeeds on every level... It's the sort of play you walk away from having fallen completely in love with every person on the stage... The play is also fast and funny, delivering constant comedy that comes from the characters and their foibles, including numerous instances of the laughter that comes from a place of painful self recognition."

—**Arts-Louisville.com**

"... wistful and often very funny... Dietz's premise holds power and grace. It makes us consider—as we constantly reassure ourselves with what is certain—how much we really do not know in any given situation."

—**The Courier Journal**

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BECKY'S NEW CAR
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and others

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