



Lena's Car

Performance History

Solo Collective, under the artistic direction of Aaron Bushkowsky and Johnna Wright, commissioned the play. It premiered at Performance Works in Vancouver in October 2003, alongside premieres by Kendra Fanconi and Aaron Bushkowsky.

Performed by Jillian Fargey

Director: Rachel Ditor

Lighting: Alan Brodie

Set concept: Del Surjik

Sound: Amos Hertzman

Special properties: Rob Lewis

Dramaturgy: Aaron Bushkowsky and Jennifer Lord

Producer: Johnna Wright

Stage manager: Jessica Chambers

The play was awarded the Sydney Risk Award for Outstanding Original Script at the Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards.

A Note on Style

In the original production, the set consisted of a front car seat, and not much else. The minimalism and tight focus forced us to be right there with her, and I think this worked quite well. Subtle shifts in lighting and sound helped to portray the various locations and the big shift when she is a teenager again.

I would say, as with all my plays, that less is more. Rebecca is talking straight to the audience, trying to figure out what went wrong. She has a sense of humour, which she knows how to use.

The key may be to find an actress with the bravery and depth of Jillian Fargey and you can't go wrong.

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REBECCA: Tell me something I don't know.

'I love you, Rebecca. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. Always. No matter what. I do.'

That's what he said to me. Last year. When he asked me to marry him.

Neither of us wanted a big wedding, so we did this small thing, just justice-of-the-peace style, which managed to piss off a whole bunch of people.

Thanks for the support.

So we're married. Paul and Rebecca.

That's the thing.

You always think it's going to be different.

That you're different. But if we're so different, how come we all end up saying the same thing? 'I thought it would be different.' 'I thought getting married would change things.' 'I think the secret to a successful marriage is to keep communicating and being open with each other ...'

You hear someone say that and this mechanism kicks in: I'm not like that. I'm different.

Paul will be home soon, and we'll eat something, quickly. Perhaps I'll make it. Perhaps not. Perhaps it'll consist of those frozen vegetables that have been in there for at least three months but neither one of us has done anything about.

We were at the obstetrician today.

We met in the waiting room. 'Hi,' he says. The way he says hi, he's telling me he's in a hurry. 'Hi.' What's the problem? He wanted to do this. I don't say that.

'Thanks for meeting me,' I say.

'That's okay,' he says. 'I mean, great.'

'What?'

'Hm?' He acts like he didn't quite hear me and picks up a magazine. *People*. *People* magazine must be infinitely more interesting than your wife.

Once when we fought, Paul said, 'Well, why don't we just get a divorce then?'

I said, 'Go ahead. If you want to get a divorce, by all means. I'm too tired.'

That didn't go over well.

We are called in and it's like a switch has been flipped. Paul is all smiles, hellos to first a nurse and then the obstetrician.

'Everything is looking fine,' she's saying, looking over a clipboard.

'Tell us something we don't know,' Paul is saying.

I think he's flirting with her. My husband is flirting with the doctor who is telling us about having a baby. Fantastic!

'There is nothing here that says that anything's out of the ordinary. All the tests are coming back nice and healthy. I think we give it a couple of months.'

'So, a couple more months of trying? Well, we're pretty good at that, aren't we, baby?'

Boor. I've never really thought about that word before. *Boor*.

Paul brings home noodles, and we sit at the counter and eat them out of the takeout containers, and drink bottled water, and say, 'How was your day?'

'It was okay.'

Neither of us mentions the visit to the doctor.

'What time do we need to be there?'

There's a party tonight that we're supposed to go to.

This was his plan: We stay here in the city until we start a family, and then we move somewhere. Somewhere ‘rural.’ Like where we grew up.

A family. Like we’ve talked about.

I don’t know why I don’t do anything about this. You know that feeling that your life isn’t yours? That it’s all some movie you’re watching, and you don’t really do anything – it’s more you’re just watching to see what’s going to happen next.

So I’ll put on a black dress. In the bathroom I fix my face and he comes in.

He’s staring.

‘You’re too beautiful for makeup.’

Oh, hush.

We go down to the car. He’s in the driver’s seat. It feels like it’s going to rain.

The party will be in full swing when we arrive. As full as it’s going to get, anyway.

Ahh, parties. Y’know? Everyone’s in the kitchen. So cliché.

Janet and Phil are talking. Loudly. I don’t know them real well. We run into them here and there. The odd dinner. Maybe a brunch.

Janet says, ‘Well, I was just getting so tired of trying to slow down my biological clock, you know? And we decided that we were going to adopt. And so we did a little research, and now –’

And Phil goes, ‘We didn’t want to say anything until our dossier was finalized, but, well, we’re headed to China next month to pick up a new baby girl!’

A man with a moustache makes a joke about a stork.

Paul looks at my half-drunk wineglass.

I know what he’s thinking: drinking means I’m not pregnant.

When you’re learning to write, they teach you about ‘inciting incidents.’ The first plot point of the story: a human being is living a life that is more or less in balance. Then along comes the

inciting incident, and *boom!* – the protagonist is forever changed and the story really gets moving.

Shift. She is fifteen.

We have this thing where we call something ‘Lena’s car.’ As in, that is so ‘Lena’s car.’

Lena, okay, she’s this girl at school who drives a car, like, every day – I mean Jill Haywood sometimes has a car, but not, like, every day. Anyway. Lena drives her car, excuse me, her mother’s car, ‘cause how would she be able to buy a car really, right? She’s, like, sixteen. But anyway, she drives this car, and one day she wasn’t around – like, she was at a basketball game at another school or something, and there were a few of us just hanging around the back parking lot. Maybe we were smoking. Oooooo.

Mom doesn’t like that I smoke. But she smokes. So that makes sense, in a sort of don’t-become-like-me kind of way. Well, you really don’t have to worry about that, Mom! Yeesh.

I think she’s really just mad ‘cause I don’t smoke Players Lights. Ugh.

Only mothers smoke Players Lights.

Anyway, we’re all hanging out, there’s like seven of us or something. Susan was there –

‘Fuck off.’

That’s Susan.

So Susan was there, and Susan should be enough for anybody. So we’re out there, and we like to wear black and listen to Depeche Mode. So cliché. Ugh. Anyway, we’re smoking and, like, just staring.

She stares for a while.

Once in a while it’s almost like someone has an idea about what to do, but not really – have you been here? Yeah, right, why would

you? You probably have enough parking lots and gravel pits of your own to hang out in, why come here? Unless maybe you were feeling like your life was too fast or something. Nobody complains that life is too fast here. We complain that we can't get anywhere, and that there's nothing to do, and why aren't the cops at least nice to us, and that we don't get enough spares at school. So we can hang out more.

She thinks about this.

Hunh. Never mind.

Anyway, we're in the back parking lot and someone, probably Barry or somebody, notices that Lena's car is sitting there, and that it's unlocked, and so a couple of the guys get in and push it to another spot. And when she got back she was all, like, confused because it wasn't where she thought she left it.

But nobody really knows 'cause we'd all gone home by then. And none of us hang out with her, so we didn't even ask the next day if she noticed. So it was all totally stupid.

Ever feel like no one gets it? Like, *gets it?* Aauuugh. Or gets you? Fuck. I hate it here.

(finding her place) 'It was all totally stupid ...'

(getting it) Oh, right. And that's the point, 'cause now when something is dumb or whatever, we just say, 'That was so Lena's car.'

(as Susan) 'Shut up, Becca. That was totally Lena's car.'

Um. Right. Thanks, Susan.

There's not much to do around here. This town goes nowhere.

Like, nowhere.

The truth is, there is no good road out of the town where I grew up.

Whatever.

On Saturday nights, Susan and I sneak out of the house and troll Mackenzie Avenue looking for tricks.

A look.

As if. Seriously.

No. This is what we really do on Saturday night: we sneak out, or we do that thing where we tell the parents that we're at each other's houses, which totally works, a little tip for ya. Unless something weird happens like some little brother needs to be picked up or something's gone wrong and one of the moms phones over and's, like, 'Is Becca there?' and then you're completely fucked.

Mom's pretty cool. Dad's gotten a bit weird. Like he's going through a second puberty or something. He can't look me in the eye anymore. Anywhere else, except my chest. My chest and my eyes. Grow up! But they're still pretty happy. Which is more than I can say for Susan's mom.

Susan snorts.

She's pretty fed up with the whole man thing.

And I know what she means.

As if. Seriously. I'm fifteen.

You know.

We'd just met them, and now we're in a hotel room. Motel. Wait. Back up, back up.

So we're out around Mackenzie Avenue that Saturday night and there's, like, this roving gang of boys. Like a ski team. For real. It was, like, totally not Lena's car. So we're all in the Kmart parking lot, with the roving ski team, and we start to gravitate together, like, which boy Susan wants and which boy I want.

Gabe and Turk.

Seriously.

Wait. Did I say 'Gabe and Turk'? I meant Dirk.

So Gabe and Turk-I-mean-Dirk have some beer somehow, and Susan and I are out looking for trouble – there's not much else to look for if you're a teenage girl in a small town. It's like *The Truth: Young Girls in Small Towns Will Look For Trouble*. And they will find it.

So I'm pretty much leaning in the general vicinity of Gabe, and Susan is with DirkTurk, and they have this motel room, which seems unbelievable, but it's true. I know, where are the parents? So we sit around and drink this room-temperature beer. We're, like, 'So what's your town like?' and they're, like, 'Stupid,' and they're, like, 'So, what's this town like?' and we go, 'Totally Lena's car!'

Actually we didn't 'cause they would've thought we were a bit retarded.

I mean disabled.

I mean handicapped.

I mean challenged.

Seriously.

DirkyTurkey tosses a coin and Gabe says, 'Tails,' and I'm, like, 'Whatthefuck? You're gonna flip for us?' But all it means is he and Susan get the bed. Which leaves Gabe and me on this cot. That's trouble, right? I found it!

It's pretty lumpy and coiled springs, and there's no room – we're pretty much right on top of each other.

Yeah, you heard me.

'What's your name again?'

'Most people call me Becca. Which is short for Rebecca.'

'Oh yeah?'

'Yeah.'

It's like we're in a soap opera.

'I like you, Rebecca.'

Does it get any better?

Than a ski-team guy, warm beer and a lumpy cot?

Oh, but yes, yes it does.

There is movement from the bed, Susan and Whatshishead underneath the orange bedspread.

‘Let’s get out of here. Where can we go?’

I know a place.

Gabe quietly opens the motel door and heads outside. It’s just starting to get light. There is one bird, chirping. The air is cool.

The doors are unlocked, as I knew they would be.

‘This your car?’

‘No.’

‘Whose car is it? A friend of yours?’

‘Sort of. Lena.’

‘Yeah, this is totally Lena’s car.’

She starts to giggle.

‘What’s so funny?’

‘Oh. Um. Nothing. It doesn’t matter. I mean, I can’t explain it.’

I turn to kiss him.

‘This is so cliché.’

‘What’s cliché?’ I ask.

‘This. This hooking up with someone you don’t know. We do this, we won’t see each other again, sure we might talk on the phone, like, twice, but then ... I mean, it’s fun and everything. But what’s the point?’

He’s like a Greek philosopher all of a sudden. Aristotle, the slalom king.

‘I don’t know.’

‘Can’t we do more than just this? Can’t there be some meaning to it?’

'I dunno.'

'Okay. Try this. Try telling me who you are.'

'What? C'mon.'

'I'm serious. Who are you?'

This is stupid.

'Okay, fine. My name is Rebecca. I've lived here my whole life. And that's it.'

'No, it's not.'

'Okay. My parents. They're still together, but I don't think they're happy ...'

I don't know what to say.

'There's gotta be something else.'

'Okay, umm. I'm dying to get out of here.'

'Then go.'

'No, not here. I mean, this town. I can't wait to be somewhere else. Away from this. Away from this town, and these people. All these people, even Susan. And I want to do something, you know, like, really do something, be a person who does, like, things. And dances, without feeling stupid. Maybe get something written, like, published. And be able to move around, whenever I want, and do whatever I want, and not feel like such a freaky freak all the time, yeah, even wear what I want.'

And then he kisses me. On the cheek. On the cheek, for freak's sakes. Who does that?

And he was the very first. How romantic. The windows fog. Me. And Gabe.

'Who are you?'

Shift.

Back in the car with Paul. After the party. Back to our house. Paul turns off the engine.

'Paul?'

He's drumming his fingers on the steering wheel.

I'm running out of things to say.

Paul looks at me. A look that says: I've been hearing you, I know I know I know I KNOW, and I'm so angry and so terrified, but I'll stick around for the next three years until I can't stand it anymore. I don't know what else to do.

He turns away.

We stare for a while. At the glove compartment. At the door handle. At the gear shift. Glove compartment. Door handle. Gear shift.

He looks out the window, as if something caught his eye in all the blackness.

'Who are you?' he says.

Now he's looking at me.

'Who are you?'

He gets out. He shuts the door.

You may never understand this. No, I'm almost sure you won't.

I can't change what's happened. I can't change that.

I don't want to have a baby.

Tell me something I don't know.

Well, I don't know how we got here. How I got here. Without noticing, I mean. It's like ... it's like Lena's car.

Somebody moved the damn thing while I wasn't looking.

This is totally Lena's car.

Lights fade.

End of play.