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The Good Girl Is Gone



Comedy/Drama
by
D.W. Gregory

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"*The Good Girl Is Gone* is a winner,
full of wit, wisdom and real-life drama."

— William Westhoven, *The Daily Record*

"A playwright with a talent to enlighten and provoke."

—*The New York Times*

The Good Girl Is Gone

Comedy/Drama. By D.W. Gregory. *Cast: 2m., 3w.* All hell breaks loose in the Bender household the day Mama runs off with that no-good Wayne Hargrove from the filling station. Papa can't believe she's gone, and Lulu just shrugs it off, while Ginny sees Mama everywhere she isn't. But absence makes the head go cloudy, and so Papa begins to see clues of a kidnapping in the farewell note Mama left behind, while Ginny follows Mama through a plate-glass window. Is it any wonder Lulu finds herself strangely attracted to the exhausted, pill-popping medical intern treating her sister? But all that is merely prologue to the biggest test of Lulu's life, the day that Mama walks back into it. Alone in a motel room far from home, finally determined to free herself of a bad love match, Lulu is forced to extract the truth from Mama: Exactly what did happen that day outside the A & P so many years before, and why, after all this time, can't Lulu let go of the nagging fear that somehow, some way, it was all her fault? A dark comedy that careens wildly from pathos to hilarity, *The Good Girl Is Gone* pokes at the bruised heart of the American family to examine the power of memory to torment and heal. Developed at The Shenandoah International Playwrights Retreat, Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, and The N.J. Repertory Co. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 1 hour; 20 minutes. Code: G76.*

Front cover: Playwright's Theatre, Madison, N.J., featuring
Beth Glover and Jim Ligon. *Photo: Carol Rosegg.*

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The Good Girl Is Gone

A Dark Comedy

By

D.W. GREGORY

This excerpt contains strong



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“A playwright with a talent to enlighten and provoke.”

—*The New York Times*

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“*The Good Girl Is Gone* was originally developed and produced
by Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, Madison, N.J.
John Pietrowski, Artistic Director.”

The Good Girl Is Gone was developed at the Shenandoah International Play Retreat and presented in a staged reading there in August 2001.

The play also was presented as part of the New York University/Tisch School of the Arts Hot Ink Festival in January 2005. Lorca Peress, curator. John Pietrowski directed with the following cast:

LULU Anne Petersen
GINNY Kara Hamilton
PAPA Jim Ligon
ELLIE Carol Todd
WAYNE/STEVE John McCarthy

The Good Girl Is Gone was originally produced at Playwrights Theatre, Madison, N.J., February 2–19, 2006. John Pietrowski directed with the following cast:

LULU Anne Petersen
GINNY Anne Popolizio*
PAPA Jim Ligon*
ELLIE Beth Glover*
WAYNE/STEVE Jake Speck*

Stage manager was Lisa McGinn.* Assistant stage manager, Danielle Constance. Costumes by Bettina Bierly, set by Rich Turick, sound by Jeff Knapp, lights by Richard Currie. Georgia Buchanan, managing director.

* Member, Actors' Equity.

THE GOOD GIRL IS GONE

A Play in Two Acts
For 2-3 Men and 3 Women

CHARACTERS:

LULU a pretty woman at 25 and 16. She grew up fast

GINNY 13 at first. Later she is in her 20s

PAPA. a hard-working man in his 40s

ELLIE his wife, a brazenly pretty woman in her 30s,
later a worn-down woman in her 40s

STEVE a doctor. A predatory male, ambitious but
drug-addled

WAYNE HARGROVE. a working man in love
(he can be played by the same man who plays Steve; but
can also be cast separately)

THE TIME: The present and the past together.

THE PLACE: The action moves back and forth between a motel room in Ohio in the mid-1900s to Lulu's home in western Pennsylvania, 10 years earlier. The landscape is a rust bowl of aging factories, fragmented towns, populated by the left-behind working people whose work and purpose has disappeared.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

This play is a dark comedy told in an expressionistic style. It places a heavy demand on the actress who plays Lulu; she never leaves the stage. Thus it requires not only an actress with a strong sense of comedy, but also someone who can shift from woman to child purely through physicality. The action of the play should move fluidly between present—Lulu in the motel room—and past—the kitchen and other places. Past is a skewed memory, not reliable, a place of distortion and exaggeration. Present is a dreary reality, refracted through a harsh lens. The set should be arranged in such a way that Lulu can move between past and present unencumbered. Set changes, if they occur, should be split-second—or else the cast should make them.

In the production at Playwrights Theatre the kitchen and motel room both appeared on stage from the top of the show—and lighting was used to effect the shifts from past to present. However, the play can be staged so that all the action could take place in the motel room—and that as memories intrude, parts of the room transform fluidly to Papa's house or other locations. It seems to me that the kitchen wall could bleed through the motel room wall, for example. The closet door could become the door to Steve's house, and the exit to the bathroom, a doorway into Papa's kitchen. If the motel room were large enough to contain a bed and a table and chairs, as many do, then, through the judicious use of props, lighting, and costumes, the past could intrude and retreat at will. There is value, I think, in finding Lulu alone in the motel at the top of the play, with no hint of another world lurking in the memory.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *In darkness. Sound of a telephone ringing far away. A machine clicks on and the sound of an answering machine with STEVE's voice:*

STEVE'S VOICE. Hey we're not here. You know the drill. Enlighten us...

(Lights rise on LULU in a low-rent motel room. She's got a self-help book on her lap, the motel-room phone next to her, and her own cell phone to her ear. There's a small table or bench nearby, with a bottle of whiskey, a small plastic glass and several books. An unopened suitcase stands by the door, and another on the bed, lid down but unlocked.)

LULU. Not home yet. *(She clicks off the cell phone.)* Steve is going to have a bird. Boy, will he. But what choice do I have? Like my therapist told me. Lulu, what choice do you have? *(With irritation.)* That makes sense. *Then rage.)* Nothin' bugs me MORE than when my THERAPIST makes SENSE! *(She calms down and dials again. Brightly:)* Maybe I should leave a message, though. Just to let him know I'm okay. *(Then she stops, bursting into tears.)* JESUS CHRIST, WHAT AM I DOING? I'm an

idiot, an IDIOT! STOP IT STOP IT STOP IT STOP IT!
(As she slaps herself in the face with a self-help book.)
Don't think about STEVE! *(With resolve.)* Think about something ELSE.

(GINNY, as a child, erupts from a drawer, or some other unexpected place. She is the very picture of starched innocence.)

GINNY. The capital of Brazil?

(LULU starts. PAPA, in an apron, pops through the motel-room door with an enormous pan of lasagne.)

PAPA. A nice lasagna?

(LULU jumps up in a panic.)

LULU. NO! NO LASAGNE!

(PAPA and GINNY disappear.)

LULU. I can't be thinking about THAT! Not NOW! I've got to get ready for Mama. I've got to get PSYCHED!

(Frantically she searches for a self-help book. As PAPA emerges again from another location.)

PAPA. All right then. A nice chicken pie!

(GINNY pops out again.)

GINNY. My favorite, Papa!

PAPA. With a flaky brown crust!

GINNY. Mmmmm!

LULU (*horrified, waves the memories away*). Jesus! No!
Don't think of the CHICKEN pie! No!

(PAPA and GINNY disappear again. LULU tosses the book, grabs the whiskey and pours herself a shot. Takes a sip, hacks and coughs.)

LULU. Crap. (*Dialing the motel-room phone.*) Good afternoon. Yes, I'm in 330... Three. Thirty. And I, like, okay so where's the ice machine? I've been up and down the hallway... Oh it is?... So, is there another one that works?... Oh. Okay, then. Guess I'll just drink it warm. (*She slams the phone down and mouths an obscenity. Then she starts to cry again.*) GAWD! Nothing like traveling first class! Thanks to you, Mom. Thanks to YOU! (*She sips the whiskey sedately. It's not so bad.*) Okay. Let's just get it over with. (*She takes an envelope out of her purse and consults a phone number written on it. She picks up the receiver. As she punches a number:*) Christ, what am I gonna say to her? (*A nice-girl voice:*) Hi, Mom! It's Lulu. (*With increasing venom.*) I've got your money. HOPE YOU CHOKE ON IT!

(A suitcase on the bed flops open and STEVE appears.)

STEVE. I told you to mail that check, Lulu.

(LULU is not particularly disturbed at the sight.)

LULU. I told you, Steve: I wanna TALK to the woman. I gotta WORK things OUT!

STEVE. Well...she's not answering the phone, now is she?

LULU. Maybe she's in the shower.

STEVE. Yeah right, the shower. Good one, Lulu. Good one.

LULU. She could be in the shower! (*LULU closes the suitcase. But from inside STEVE is snickering.*)

STEVE (*off*). The shower. That kills me.

LULU. It's not like she wouldn't want the money, you know! (*She piles some stuff on the suitcase and goes back to the telephone.*) I mean it's not like she'd be avoiding my call. (*Slipping confidence.*) Would she? (*Then refocusing.*) Well! We'll just. Give it a few minutes. (*Pours another drink, sips it. A beat.*) Just stay calm, Lulu, that's all. Think NICE thoughts.

(*Curtain flies open and PAPA and GINNY appear at the window.*)

PAPA. Hey—why don't you THINK about THIS? You used to be a sweet little kid. Like your sister. What happened?

LULU. Shut up! (*He is silent.*) You know what happened. (*She yanks the curtain shut.*) Screw this, I gotta get a grip here. (*She grabs some books.*) All right, let's READ! Okay. Here we go— How to Be Your Own Best Friend. No, that's not it. Here it is. Reinventing Your Life. Okay! (*Reading.*) "We all live in a world of our own invention..." I ALREADY read that part..."control your thoughts...control your life..." CRAP! WHERE IS IT!? (*Finding the chapter.*) Ah. "Fact: Your emotions are

a direct consequence of the THOUGHT you hold in your head at any given moment.” Okay then. *(A drawer starts to creak open and LULU hurls one of the books at it. It slams shut. Reading.)* “Are you guilty of global thinking? Rationalizing? Catastrophizing?” Well, maybe. “For example: suppose you fixate on an unhappy memory. Why does it make you so unhappy?” Because it SUCKED! *(Reading.)* “Because of the THOUGHT you connect to that memory.” Hunh.

(PAPA enters from the bathroom wearing an apron and carrying a chicken pie. And GINNY is with him, with her homework.)

PAPA. How about that chicken pie?

LULU. I told you. NO CHICKEN PIE!

(PAPA and GINNY settle at the motel-room table, as if it is their kitchen table at home.)

PAPA. Nothin’ like comin’ home to a house // that smells like a pie bakin’, huh? And I got a great new recipe outta *Home and Garden*—tarragon. Tarragon in the chicken, huh?

LULU *(reading, overlapping on //)*. You can rewrite the HISTORY of your life—not by forgetting the past—but by REINVENTING it.

PAPA. Tarragon in the chicken.

LULU *(stares at him)*. You never put tarragon in the chicken.

PAPA. Not for you, maybe.

(Music up, a sexy beat. Suddenly, ELLIE enters in memory, crossing to PAPA. She is just off work, dressed in the uniform of a supermarket checkout girl. Brazenly pretty, she moves with great pleasure in her shapely body. The lights shift and Papa's kitchen comes into view. ELLIE pinches GINNY on the cheek.)

ELLIE. Pretty little thing. *(She presents GINNY with a lollipop.)*

LULU. Oh. My gawd. Don't think about THAT!

PAPA. Babe.

ELLIE. What's cookin', old man? *(ELLIE slides past PAPA, too close on purpose.)*

PAPA. You tell me. Sugar.

LULU *(muttering underneath the following)*. Don't think about that. Don't think about it.

PAPA *(grabs ELLIE and pulls her close)*. C'mere.

ELLIE. Jack. Now, c'mon.

PAPA. You c'mon. *(He grabs her and kisses her. ELLIE tolerates it.)*

ELLIE. Oooh, my. What a day. What a day I had. And my feet—they feel like somebody sprinkled hot peppers on 'em.

PAPA. Oh yeah? Want a massage?

(He is all over her as GINNY rolls her eyes. LULU slaps her hands over her eyes, then curls her arms around her head to block out the sounds. She can't resist peeking, though.)

GINNY. Eeeuu! Yuck! Mama!

ELLIE. What's with you?

GINNY. I'm doin' my homework here!

ELLIE. Kitchen ain't no place for homework.

PAPA. Ginny. Huh?

(He gestures and exit GINNY with schoolbooks as PAPA and ELLIE prepare for passion on the kitchen table. It's all too much for LULU.)

LULU. KNOCK IT OFF!

(Annoyed, ELLIE and PAPA break it up.)

PAPA. What's your problem?

(ELLIE saunters off.)

LULU. I don't want to think about THAT! That's got nothin' to do with me. *(She turns away.)*

PAPA. Oh yeah? How d'ya think ya got here in the first place?

LULU. I KNOW how I GOT here, okay? That don't mean I have to DWELL on it.

PAPA. Aw, set the table.

LULU. I'm at a MOTEL!

PAPA. Always got an excuse.

(Cell phone rings. PAPA disappears. LULU ponders the ringing phone.)

LULU. I'm not answering. I am not answering. You wanna know where I am, Steve, you can sit up all night and WONDER, okay? *(LULU ponders the ringing phone,*

her anxiety builds to the breaking point.) Unless it's Ginny. (She grabs it and pops the phone open. In a strange voice, carefully:) Uh, yeah?... Ginny... Yeah, I'm okay... I'm not being weird...I thought you were Steve... Well, I don't want to talk to him, that's why... Because... I haven't seen her yet... I don't know—I guess I'll go to her place... Sure she'll be there. She wants the money, she'll be there... Ginny—Ginny—Ginny— Listen! Has Steve called?... I'm just saying, IF he calls, you don't know where I am, okay?... Because. (Deep breath.) I'm not going back to him... Yeah, now you're getting it... Yes, he will...he'll certainly have a bird. // Probably a whole FLOCK of birds...

(Enter PAPA again with the pie, which he puts on the table. As he speaks, LULU tries to wave him away, then talk over him...so his voice is more muted.)

PAPA *(overlapping on //)*. Yes, sir. There's nothin' like the aroma of a fresh chicken pie...with saffron. That's how we used to have it all the time, with saffron.

LULU. Forget the saffron!

PAPA. ...gave it that yellow color. Just the way you like it, too.

LULU. Will you STOP IT!?! Not you, Ginny.

(The kitchen emerges again and GINNY appears to set the table.)

PAPA *(continuing underneath as he helps himself to some of LULU's whiskey)*. Yellow gravy, big chunks of flaky white meat under that crispy, short crust. You want a

good pie, any kind of pie, apple, cherry—beef pie, chicken pie. Ain't the meat, ain't the potatoes that make the pie...it's the crust.

LULU (*overlapping him*). Nobody... Ginny?... No, Ginny, I gotta go now... I gotta get ready, okay? I'll call you later...the minute she goes...the very minute she goes, I will call! Okay? Okay, Ginny. Okay. Bye now, Ginny. Bye. (*She hangs up and approaches PAPA.*)

PAPA. The secret to the pie is in the crust...the shortening in the crust. (*PAPA drinks the whiskey.*) Yep. (*He crosses back to the kitchen.*)

LULU (*longing*). The crust was my favorite part.

PAPA (*just a tad tipsy*). ELLIE! Dinner's on!

LULU (*to PAPA*). Crisp brown on top and underneath, soft white, with bits of chicken and peas stuck to it. I ate it first.

PAPA. That's how my old man liked it, too. Just like this. The old kraut had to have his chicken pie just so...and my mother made it for him, just so. Every night, five o'clock he come to the front of the house, into the kitchen, and Ma had dinner on the table. Just like this. Every night. ELLIE! Dinner! LULU! Dinner!

(*LULU gives up and crosses into the scene, morphing into a teenager as she goes.*)

LULU. Oh my GAWD, PAPA! I can smell that chicken pie out on the STREET.

PAPA (*as he serves*). Every night, five o'clock, he sat down to eat, hot barley soup, rolls fluffy and sweet, melt on your tongue. Homemade marmalade. And butter forced through a little mold, to look like a swan. It was a god-

damned work of art, the way that woman laid a table. And what did that bastard do? NOTHIN'. Just sat there, eating. Never says NOTHIN'. You know some women. Some women, they just don't have no luck with men.

LULU. Gimme more, Papa! (*PAPA gives her more.*)

PAPA. Till the day she died, my poor mother never got over him walkin' out on her. Him leavin' like that. To the very END she loved him like nobody's business; the damndest thing, he never did give her no cause.

GINNY. What'd she love him for?

LULU. 'Cause she was stupid.

PAPA. No not stupid. She just couldn't help herself. "That's the way of love" is what she said to me. "You don't stop lovin' somebody just 'cause they broke your heart."

LULU. That IS stupid.

PAPA. Know what I said to that? Bullshit, I said. B-u-u-ll-SHIT! You love somebody, they break your heart?—Screw 'em. That's what I say. Screw 'EM.

GINNY & LULU. Screw 'EM!

PAPA. Take my advice, girls. Don't never love nobody so bad they can break your heart. ELLIE! (*To the girls.*) Your mother say anything about working overtime?

LULU (*winces*). Not specifically, no.

(PAPA, GINNY freeze as ELLIE and WAYNE appear, clinging to each other. He's a muscular fellow in T-shirt, jeans. A bluesy number plays—the kind two people can't dance to without clinging to each other. We don't make his face. In the dim blue light of a taproom, we don't need to. LULU watches.)