

Warning Label

A short play

By Charlie Lyons

charlielyonswrites@gmail.com

CHARACTERS:

CHERYL 30s, she/her, might be white, might not be.

ED 30s, he/him, white (probably).

SCENE

Cheryl's in the kitchen on the phone. We're in the present, but it's a landline. The phone's attached to the wall, and the receiver has one of those really long cords. Cheryl has it stretched across the kitchen so she can look out the window.

As she talks on the phone, she alternates between moving about and looking out the window.

CHERYL

(on phone)

He should be back by now. I sent him to the store, over an hour ago.

(listens)

Yes, I gave him a list.

(listens)

Just a few things ... Oranges, oatmeal ... and ...

(smiles, big news)

And ... a surprise!

(listens)

No way. I can't tell you. It's a surprise.

(listens, being pressured)

I can't. Ed and me promised we'd tell you and Mark together.

(listens, floored)

Stop it! Mother f-er. How'd you know?

(listens)

What do you mean, you knew?! How could you know?!

(listens, laughs)

Ha ha. I was beginning to show? Good one, Sophie.

(listens)

How many are we getting? Alright, cat's outta the bag I guess -- Three!

(listens)

I know! Three little babies! I can't believe it!

(listens)

Yes, I know they're all little. And a lotta work. Times three. Thanks for the heads up.

(listens)

I know, crazy right?

(listens)

We've been talkin' about it for a while. It was between two and three, and we just thought ... I don't know, makin' up for lost time, I guess.

(listens)

Yeah, and the odds are way better -- that one'll be normal and outlive us.

(listens)

For real. Right? You need at least one of them to be able to take care of you, when you get older.

(listens)

Uh huh. Totally. An investment. I knew you'd get it. We love 'em and take care of them, and then -- no guarantees -- but then one of them returns the favor, later on, when you're, you know, droolin' and shittin' yourself.

(listens)

Stop. Please. I'm not gonna say that to people. But, I mean, they're all thinkin' it too. Doesn't everybody -- "They better last long enough and not hate us, so they can take care of us."

(listens)

Totally. Hundred percent. I really want 'em too. So bad. I do. I see 'em. I see yours. They're miracles. They are. F'in miracles of life ... of hope ... of the future.

(listens)

I'm serious. You look at them and hold them, and they remind us ... of everything ... of what we once were ... of what we can be ... of what we have to be -- for them. It's all there -- in their eyes, their innocence. Why we have to care about each other and our world and love each other --

(listens, laughs)

Stop. No shit, you'll remind me of all this at three in the morning, when they're crying me awake. That's what you do.

(listens)

Oh yeah, Ed, totally. He's worse than me. A complete sap. He's gonna make such a good father.

(looking out the window)

Oh shit, he's pulling in the drive.

(listens)

No, I can't see them ... Oh wait, oh-my-god -- I see child-seats in the back! ... Now he's getting out of the car ... He's holding a grocery bag ... OK, he's looking through the backseat window at them ... Oh that's cute, he's waving to them, smiling.

(listens)

I can't see 'em, but who you think he's waving at? Oh no, Jesus Christ! He's walking away.

(listens)

I know!

(yells through closed window)

Ed! You don't leave 'em in the car!

(on phone)

Practically rule number one.

(yells at Ed)

Don't leave 'em in the car! At least crack the window! It's a hot one!

(on phone)

No, he can't hear me. In his own world. He's comin' in. I better go.

As Cheryl crosses and hangs up the phone --

ED

(off stage, yells)

Got the oatmeal. The kind you like. It was on sale.

Ed enters holding a brown paper bag with handles. Printed on the bag in green eco-ink:
Loco Co-op. *We got EVERYTHING you need!*

He puts the bag on the kitchen counter.

ED

Place was crazy. Packed. Lines down the aisles. Could barely find a parking space. I mean, it was nuts.

CHERYL

Oh yeah? You manage to get everything?

ED

Uh huh.

CHERYL

Forget anything?

ED

Think I got it all? Let me see ...

(he pulls out the grocery list)

Oatmeal, oranges ... kids.

CHERYL

(Are) the kids in the bag?

ED

That's funny. They're heavy, so I left 'em in the car. I'm gonna --

CHERYL

Ed, just for future reference, you know, if it happens to come up again -- you bring the kids in first, then the groceries.

ED

Uh uh, no. My mom always left us in the car.

CHERYL

Even on really hot days?

ED

Oh yeah.

CHERYL

That explains a lot. Please go get 'em, would ya?

As he starts to exit --

ED

You're gonna love 'em. Lady at the co-op told me they're not local, but they are free-range and organic.

Ed exits.

Cheryl smiles, as her excitement builds --

ED

(off stage, yells)

I could only get two. That's all they had left.

Cheryl jumps up and down like a pogo stick, clapping her hands as --

Ed enters holding two child carriers.

We can't see the babies. But Cheryl can. And she abruptly stops jumping up and down. Smile gone.

As Ed places them on the counter next to the grocery bag --

ED

I got the last two, lady at the co-op told me they're from the holy land. Isn't that cool!

CHERYL

You're agnostic.

ED

I know, but it's still really cool --

(sees she's upset)

Hey ... Cheryl ... I know you wanted three. But look at 'em. They're beautiful.

CHERYL

(looks at them)

They are. They're the most beautiful. Makes me wanna cry.

ED

So ... two's enough ... right? That's all we need.

Cheryl nods, but is tight lipped. *Bothered.*

ED

Hey ... what? Lady at the co-op helped me pick 'em out. She said they're really sweet. Brother and sister. You could see how close they are, bonded, and obviously, they need a home ... Right?

CHERYL

Knew I shoulda gone with you. You even read the list I gave you?

ED

Of course.

CHERYL

Do me a favor, read it now.

ED

Really?

CHERYL

Yeah. Humor me.

ED

OK.

Ed pulls out the grocery list --

ED

Oranges ... Oatmeal ... Three kids --

CHERYL

What's it say about the kids?

ED

"Kids must be somewhat cute, young-ish, and ..."

(stops reading)

Oh that, I thought you were joking.

CHERYL

Why would you think I was joking?

ED

Cuz ... that's crazy ... they're children. They're all the same --

CHERYL

They are ... And they aren't. Bet the lady at the co-op saw you comin', didn't she?

ED

What do you mean?

CHERYL

Happy guy, wants some kids --

ED

Yeah?

CHERYL

She's probably some hippie-dippy scam artist, trying to move some babies. Bet she took the warning label off 'em.

ED

Warning label?

CHERYL

The warning label they're all s'pose to come with.

ED

(looks closely at babies)

Oh wow, I didn't even ... Thought those were some hospital band things.

CHERYL

Still there? Good. Read it.

ED

(reads)

“Under penalty of law, not to be removed except by --- ”

CHERYL

Below that.

ED

What do you know ...

(reads)

“Warning: As they grow, may talk back and have attitude.”

CHERYL

Keep reading.

ED

(reads)

“Gender may be fluid.”

CHERYL

Below that.

ED

(reads)

“Depending on color of skin or ethnic, religious, or cultural background, nation states may kill them in self-defense.” No ... Really? In self-defense?

CHERYL

Yup.

Finished reading, Ed stands up straight.

ED

I’ll be ... That can’t be right.

CHERYL

(quizzing him)

Why do we want kids, Ed?

ED

You know ... For all the reasons.

CHERYL

Which are?

ED

To love them, to raise them, help them flourish in life. To see all that happen. To see everything they do. I mean, to be a part of it all. To love them --

CHERYL

You said that already. What else?

ED

...

CHERYL

We talked about something else, didn't we? Something we both wanted.

ED

That bit about when it's their turn to take care of us?

CHERYL

Yeah, that bit. And what do they have to be to take care of us?

ED

... Alive?

CHERYL

Alive. Bingo. They've gotta be alive. And what did you bring home from the market?

ED

I know, but ...

CHERYL

What's the warning label clearly say?

ED

...

CHERYL

They're killable, Ed. It's right there on the label. We're screwed, or could be.

ED

But look at 'em. They're beautiful.

CHERYL

(looks at them)

They're so beautiful. They're incredible.

ED

See?

CHERYL

See? You think they see 'em? You think they look at 'em? Why do you think they use bombs? So they don't have to.

ED

(rubs his head, upset)

But what do we do? Are you saying ... You're not saying you wanna return them?

As Cheryl stares at the babies --

And Ed waits for an answer ...

...

CHERYL

No, it's too late for that. Look at 'em. They belong with us.

ED

I knew you'd love 'em.

Cheryl nods, puts her arm around Ed.

As they both look at the children --

ED

I mean. We'll just have to make 'em unkillable. Who do we need to talk to about that? That shouldn't be too hard, right?

CHERYL

No, it shouldn't be too hard.

As they both gaze at them --

BLACK OUT