

## Spare Change by Mia McCullough © 2007

## Scene 9

LIGHTS UP on Brad and Claire's apartment.  
CLAIRE sits in the arm chair, still wearing her coat.  
She stares off into space, looking upset, angry. The  
door opens and BRAD ENTERS. He does not take  
off his coat.

BRAD

Sorry. That took longer than I expected.

(stony silence)

Are you all right?

CLAIRE

I don't know, Brad. I mean, you left here with a hooker, what? An hour and a half ago? So my brain sort of seizes up when I try to figure out what "That took longer than I expected" means.

BRAD

She's not a hooker.

CLAIRE

She said she was.

BRAD

She was disturbed. She was not like that when I saw her on the train the other day. She wasn't dressed that way, she wasn't talking like that. I mean, she's educated, well-spoken.

CLAIRE

Maybe it wasn't the same woman, Brad.

BRAD

No, I'm good with faces. I remember people. People I meet once, I remember them. I don't dismiss everyone the way you do.

CLAIRE

Why don't we skip to the part where you tell me where you went and what you've been doing.

BRAD

I took her to the hospital to try to help her get her prescription changed, but there was a wait at the emergency room, and really, she ran off at the last possible moment. I looked for her for a little bit, but I couldn't find her.

I see. CLAIRE

Look, Claire, I was just trying to help her. BRAD

And did you? Did you help her, Brad? CLAIRE

No. No. I tried, but — BRAD

And do you know why? That's not how it works. You can't get homeless people off the street by giving them spare change and you can't rehabilitate prostitutes in your living room. CLAIRE

So what do you do, Claire? BRAD

I don't know, but what you did— CLAIRE

Well, if you don't know, don't criticize me. BRAD  
 It may not have worked, but at least I tried.  
 I met a woman on the train the other day: a nice person with kids, trying to survive, like all of us. And today I saw her in some altered state and I decided to help her. Because if I didn't, I'm not sure anyone else would have. I'm not sure anyone else would have known that there was something wrong. I was sitting there, looking at her, thinking, this is how people fall through the cracks. But maybe if I just reach out, she won't fall through. Maybe for once in my life I could *do* something. I could act instead of just letting it go, let somebody else worry about it. And fine. *You're right*. It didn't work. But how *does* it work? Why am I so incapable of coming to the aid of another human being? I mean, there's a whole network of social services out there designed to assist people, and if I needed it, I wouldn't even know where to start looking. It's like some sort of secret underground world. What the hell is in my pocket?

BRAD pulls the cookie fortunes out of his coat along with some coins and throws them on the table.

I really don't get what's going on with you. CLAIRE

BRAD

Nothing is going on.

CLAIRE

Brad. You brought home a prostitute. You want to talk about erratic behavior? What are you doing bringing home strays from the el?

CLAIRE

She could have robbed us!  
I'm asking you a question. This is not like you. Is this some kind of pre-mid-life crisis?

BRAD

Are you calling her a dog? Jesus, Claire! She's a person. How can you talk about someone that way? Maybe this should be like me!

Short pause.

CLAIRE

All right. Let's not yell.

BRAD

I would appreciate some credit — not even credit — a little acknowledgment that I attempted to do the right thing today.

BRAD and CLAIRE stare at one another for a long moment. BRAD paces around the livingroom/kitchen area. He looks in the refrigerator.

CLAIRE

We'll have to do take out.

BRAD

As usual.

He slams the fridge closed.

CLAIRE

Is that an editorial comment on my culinary abilities?

BRAD

No.

Yes.

(beat)

We should know how to cook. You want this Leave it to Beaver lifestyle in the suburbs — one of us should know how to cook. I mean, we own cookbooks, don't we?

CLAIRE

You really shouldn't yell. The neighbors will call the police.

BRAD

I don't care about the neighbors. The neighbors are assholes.

CLAIRE

Can I get you a drink?

BRAD

Why? So you can anesthetize me? Maybe I just want to feel like this right now.

(beat)

I've been pretending for years that this life is okay, but I'm tired of pretending I'm happy. Even content. I'm not even content. Are you content? With this?

CLAIRE

Not at the moment.

BRAD

This is not who I thought we would be. I did not think we'd turn into this.

CLAIRE

What exactly have we turned into?

BRAD

Hypocrites! I thought we had ideals. I thought there was a certain way we wanted to live. Not the white bread world of our parents, but something different. Don't you remember that conversation we had in college?

(CLAIRE is baffled, but it comes to her.)

That was a crystallizing moment in my life, that conversation. We talked about traveling to Africa, Asia, Vietnam, experiencing different cultures, having our eyes open to the world. We were going to join the Peace Corps. But we didn't go anywhere. Maui. And now we live in this tiny little world. Our city is huge, diverse, and we live in this tiny piece of it, up above it all in this high rise, ignoring everything we don't have time for, which is... everything, I think. Everything important. And now you want to move to the suburbs. The suburbs!/  
/Brad.../

CLAIRE

/Brad.../

BRAD

/Stripmalls and mediocrity masquerading as life, as safety. Or that fucking place where Beth and Philip live. A gated community where people walk around, no, I'm sorry: *drive* around, like zombies. Pretending their development is community when really it's isolation. Is that what

(MORE)

BRAD CONT'D

you want? Because if that's what you want.... I didn't sign up for that. That place makes my skin crawl. If we move to a place like that we may as well sell our souls and become Republicans.

CLAIRE

Brad... all I want is a place for our kids to run around, trees to climb, frogs to catch. It's not a political statement.

BRAD

Yes it is! You move out there where everything's white and clean, and you forget. You forget that everybody's not just like you. And then you don't have to care. And I feel like I've *already* forgotten to care, even here, in the middle of everything.

What happened to us?

CLAIRE

Nothing happened to us, Brad. We grew up, we got jobs. We got jobs in the middle of the recession, I might add, which is why we didn't join the Peace Corps. We took on responsibility.

BRAD

Responsibility for what? To whom?

CLAIRE

To each other, for instance.

BRAD

But we have a responsibility to more than just us, don't we? Didn't we believe that? Or were we just saying it?

CLAIRE

Brad....

BRAD

Do you realize that everyone we know is white?

CLAIRE

That's not true. And what does that have to do with anything?

BRAD

What does that— ? It has *everything* to do with it. This neighborhood we live in, *this neighborhood*, and we don't know anyone. I was so proud of us when we bought this place, thinking that I was joining a diverse community. We're not part of this community. We go to work and sit in our little boxes, and we try not to rub elbows with the people on the train so we

(MORE)

## BRAD CONT'D

can come home to our slightly bigger box and eat our take-out and watch TV, not even looking out our windows long enough to notice all the brown people getting pushed out because a Starbucks opened on the corner. And then you give me a hard time because I let down my walls for half a second and try to help someone.

Beat.

## CLAIRE

I'm not sure you get full credit for that one. She wasn't very brown.

Pause.

## BRAD

Why are you making light of this?

## CLAIRE

Because I don't know why we're talking about this! I don't know how it works that *you* bring home a hooker, and *you're* the one who gets to be angry. All I wanted was to come home and tell you about my day, but I couldn't because there was a whore in our living room and you turned into some crazed, over-zealous boy scout.

## BRAD

Well, let's face it, finding a whore in your living room has got to be more interesting than the rest of your day.

## CLAIRE

You don't know anything about my day.

## BRAD

Oh please, you spend your time finding ways to create a sense of need in people. Wouldn't you rather make people feel uplifted, fulfilled?

## CLAIRE

Maybe I should turn tricks with your new friend.

Beat.

## BRAD

I don't think I like you very much.

Pause. After a moment of staring him down, CLAIRE very slowly, very methodically, with one finger, pulls every coin into her hand. This keeps

her from crying.

BRAD CONT'D

Why are you still wearing your coat?

CLAIRE

You're still wearing your coat.

BRAD

Yeah, but you've been here a long time.

(pause)

Are you cold?

CLAIRE

Not particularly.

BRAD

Were you on your way out when I came back?

CLAIRE

I was waiting for you to come back when you came back.

BRAD

So, what? You never took your coat off?

She shakes her head, swallowing back tears.

BRAD CONT'D

You just sat here. In your coat. Waiting for me.

CLAIRE

I made some calls.

BRAD

So, now your mother thinks I picked up a hooker.

CLAIRE

Not unless Keira tells her.

BRAD

Great. Happy Thanksgiving!

(CLAIRE hurls the coins at BRAD. )

Jesus! Claire!

She stands. Tears are coming now, but she is still trying to keep it together.

CLAIRE

I'm going to go.

BRAD

Go where?

CLAIRE

I'm not sure. I don't think I'll be home tonight. So don't wait up.

BRAD

You're leaving?

CLAIRE

You can't possibly want me to stay. You don't like me, remember? And I really don't want to hear you or look at to you right now, and this apartment is too small to ignore someone so.... dissatisfied.

(CLAIRE crosses to the door and opens it.)

My doctor says I'm pregnant, by the way. About nine weeks.

(BRAD stands, turns.)

And she thinks I ought to tell you about the two miscarriages I've had in the past year and a half. That's the boring news about my day.

*Don't follow me.*

She leaves, closing the door behind her. LIGHTS  
GO TO BLACK before one can be sure if he  
intends to follow.