

BABY IN THE BASEMENT

A Short Play by David-Matthew Barnes

Baby in the Basement (2nd ed. – 02.12.09)
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Cast of Characters

GIRL: Young. Sad. Desperate. Hopeful.

BOY: Young. Sad. Desperate. Hopeful.

Time

A night in March. Present year.

Place

The basement of an old, abandoned warehouse in an unnamed American city.

Music

A suggested song to be used in a production of *Baby in the Basement* is *Dusted* as recorded by the band Belly.

Production History

Baby in the Basement received a world premiere at The California Stage Company in Sacramento. The play opened on March 12, 2003. The production was presented by DNPAC Productions and produced by Nick A. Moreno. The original cast was as follows:

GIRL.....Tara Henry

BOY.....Logan Hesse

Baby in the Basement received a New York premiere at The Creative Place Theatre. The play opened on February 4, 2004. The play was presented by Love Creek Productions and directed by Melissa Springer. The original New York cast was as follows:

GIRL.....Denise Centola

BOY.....Kenan Wei

*This play is dedicated to the memory of Caitlin Quinn.
And to Tanya Donnelly for the gift of her music.*

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(When the play begins, we are in the squalid basement of an abandoned warehouse in an unnamed American city. The basement is littered with liquor bottles, trash, cigarette butts, etc. A dark haired BOY is sleeping on a filthy mattress. He is alone. His only source of warmth and light comes from a flickering candle. He wakes suddenly, alarmed by loud, crashing noises near a crawlspace entrance to the basement.

A striking, petite GIRL enters the basement, through the crawlspace. She trips and falls to the floor. She is dressed suggestively, as she is a prostitute. She is startled by the sight of the boy.)

GIRL. I thought I was alone.

BOY. So did I.

GIRL. I'm leaving.

BOY. Don't.

GIRL. Why?

BOY. You smell good. Like perfume.

GIRL. I got a free sample at the store.

BOY. Come here. It smells nice.

GIRL. I gotta go.

BOY. It's cold in here. You must be cold. Want my jacket?

GIRL. I'm not cold.

BOY. Well, it's here, if you want it.

GIRL. You live here?

BOY. When I got no place to go.

GIRL. A girl I know told me about this place.

BOY. Who? Shelley?

GIRL. Yeah. You know her?

BOY. Some guy raped her and cut her up. They found her body down at the docks.

GIRL. (*Hiding her shock:*) She was stupid. I told her to be careful. She trusted too many people.

BOY. She told me about this place, too. Told me I could crash here until she needed it.

GIRL. She won't be needing it anymore.

BOY. Why are you scared of me?

GIRL. I'm not.

BOY. What's your name?

GIRL. Whatever you want it to be, babe.

BOY. That's funny. I got the same name.

GIRL. I was just looking for a place –

BOY. Are you a shooter?

GIRL. I never touch the stuff.

BOY. You look like you do.

GIRL. You look like a tweaker.

BOY. I wish I were. It's too expensive and people don't give that stuff away for free.

GIRL. You hustle?

BOY. When I have to. You?

GIRL. Got no choice. It's a warm bed. A free meal, if you're lucky.

BOY. Yeah, if you're lucky.

GIRL. I'm not lucky.

BOY. You hungry?

GIRL. Whatcha got?

BOY. I got a candy bar. It's a Milky Way. Some old lady gave it to me this morning.

GIRL. Maybe she put razor blades in it.

BOY. She didn't seem like a serial killer.

GIRL. You can never tell. Look what happened to Shelley.

BOY. Yeah, but like you said, Shelley was stupid.

GIRL. Did you know that she was pregnant?

BOY. You serious?

GIRL. Her step-father did it to her and then kicked her out of the house. She didn't want to have an abortion. I got a step-father, too.

BOY. Was he messin' with you?

GIRL. No, way. He's a minister. My Mom adores him. She thinks he's a Saint. I think he steals money from the church, but what do I know?

BOY. So, why'd you leave? I mean, if things were cool at home.

GIRL. I don't know. I guess I was bored. It probably took them three weeks before they even realized I was gone. I called home once but I got voice mail. I just hung up. I should have left a message, I guess. But my sister would have just deleted it. She hates me. She's older than me and has a rich husband and a new baby and she prays like a bad habit. Always talkin' to God. Amen, amen. She drove me

GIRL. (*cont'd*) crazy with that religious stuff. I came home with a hickey on my neck from this Mexican guy and she told me I was a whore and that I was going to hell. Personally, I think she was just jealous. You should see her husband. Ug-ly. She doesn't care. She'd lay down with a midget if he had money and shouted "Hallelujah". No, I had to get out of that place. My Mom is cool. But my sister had it in for me. Real bad. I think she asks God to kill me, so that she can be an only child and have all of the attention for herself. When I was a baby, she tried to set my crib on fire. I'm not kidding. She tried to burn the whole house down, with me in it. I worry about her little baby. She might bury the thing in the backyard if she thinks the baby is a sinner. My life was normal at home. Too normal. That's why I left. There was nothing to do. I wanted to be on my own.

BOY. And now?

GIRL. I'm not gonna lie to you, babe. It sucks. Despite it all, I proved her right. My sister. Look at what I do for money. She won. Sometimes, I wish the crib would have burned. Hey, did you know that Shelley and I were planning to get a place together?

BOY. I didn't know her that well. We smoked out a couple of times together and one time we crashed at this guy's house. He was a skinhead and he tried to get down Shelley's pants in the

BOY. (*cont'd*) worst way. She let him do it, just so we could be warm. It was Christmas Eve. Shelley said she wanted to wake up on Christmas morning in a house. She didn't care whose house it was, as long as it had four walls. And a fireplace. The guy did her, right there on the living room floor, right in front of me. Shelley kept looking at the fire, like she was some place else.

GIRL. She was.

BOY. Oh yeah?

GIRL. Shelley wanted to go to Paris.

BOY. What about you? Where do you wanna go?

GIRL. I just wanna make it to heaven, you know.

BOY. Are you sure you aren't cold?

GIRL. My stomach is warm. Some old guy bought me a cup of coffee and made me take my shirt off. I don't even like coffee, but it warms you up a little.

BOY. I used to steal bourbon from my father.

GIRL. Is he a drunk?

BOY. No, but I was.

GIRL. You're not anymore?

BOY. I got bored with it.

GIRL. You got a girlfriend?

BOY. No.

GIRL. A boyfriend?

BOY. Sometimes.

GIRL. What's his name?

BOY. Carlos.

GIRL. A Mexican?

BOY. Yeah.

GIRL. So, you're gay?

BOY. No. I don't know.

GIRL. I've never been with a girl. But Shelley and I kissed once. Some guy gave us ten bucks to French each other. Maybe that's why I miss her so much.

BOY. You miss Shelley?

GIRL. I'm allowed to have feelings, aren't I?

BOY. I didn't realize that you and Shelley were that close.

GIRL. Well, we were. Can I have a bite of that candy bar?

BOY. Sure. *(He opens the candy bar and divides it into two equal pieces, hands her a piece.)* You know what I wish we had?

GIRL. A million dollars?

BOY. No. I wish we had a plan. Like you and Shelley did.

GIRL. Why? You don't even know me.

BOY. Yeah, but then, we would have something to look forward to.

GIRL. Sorry. I'm not into playing house.

BOY. I want a house someday. Far away from my parents. My father is a corporate pig and my mother starves herself to death.

GIRL. You mean, a house in another country?

BOY. Yeah. Maybe Paris.

GIRL. I've never been there.

BOY. Do you want to go?

GIRL. Sure. How are we gonna get there?

BOY. Carlos gave me some pills.

GIRL. What kind of pills?

BOY. The kind of pills Shelley should have had with her when they killed her.

GIRL. Shelley didn't take drugs because of the baby.

BOY. (*Pulls out a pill bottle:*) I have to tell you something.

GIRL. Tell me.

BOY. I have a plan. There's a reason why I came here tonight.

GIRL. I'm not sure if I want to be a part of it.

BOY. You won't, when I tell you. These pills are lethal. It only takes three to kill you. Their illegal. Carlos got them in Mexico.

GIRL. I interrupted your suicide?

BOY. That's okay. I'm still going through with it.

GIRL. Are you for real?

BOY. You can leave if you want to.

GIRL. And if I don't?

BOY. You can stay here and watch me die. I already took two pills. I was waiting to take the third one.

GIRL. Waiting for what?

BOY. I don't know. I just had this feeling that something was coming, something was about to happen. Maybe it was you.

GIRL. I don't think so. You're really gonna go through with it?

BOY. Why shouldn't I?

GIRL. Because...

BOY. You'll have to do better than that if you're trying to change my mind.

GIRL. Are things really that messed up for you?

BOY. No. That's why I'm doing it now. Before things get worse.

GIRL. Well, I've thought about it. Everybody has.

BOY. I have some extra pills.

GIRL. No. I can't.

BOY. Well, you're lucky. I guess you got a lot to live for. Just like Shelley did.

GIRL. Can I have your jacket?

BOY. Take it. Put it on. (*She does.*) It looks good on you. You can have it.

GIRL. I feel like I should try to talk you out of this.

BOY. Don't bother.

GIRL. What about the boy? The Mexican? Does he know?

BOY. He gave me the pills, didn't he?

GIRL. Maybe I could call someone.

BOY. Who? I haven't talked to my parents in five months. I'm sure they've taken my picture down from the mantle by now.

GIRL. I'm nervous. I feel anxious.

BOY. For me to die?

GIRL. I don't want you to.

BOY. But we don't even know each other. You said yourself.

GIRL. What about a plan? You said we could make a plan?

BOY. You go ahead. Make a plan for us. (*He opens the pill bottle and takes the third pill.*) I'm listening.

GIRL. You just took another pill.

BOY. There's enough left in here for you.

GIRL. We could get an apartment.

BOY. I'd rather have a house.

GIRL. Then we'll move into a house.

BOY. What color is it?

GIRL. It's yellow, with shutters and trim around the windows. And there's flowers. Yellow roses and white carnations and even some daffodils. It's a beautiful house. It's not too fancy. It's simple. Like us. There's a basketball hoop in the driveway. And a dog. He's a golden retriever and he's always happy to see us. And a porch – a real big porch with a wooden swing on it. A place where we can sit and watch the world walk by. *(The boy is lying down. She goes and sits next to him. She picks up the bottle of pills and holds them in her hand.)* At night, we can sit on the porch and look up at the stars and make a ton of crazy wishes on them. And our friends will come over and we'll feed them a ton of food and we'll play some cool music and we can dance. Someone will say something funny and you and I will look at each other and speak silently and we'll talk about things later. And in the summer, we'll save up our money and we'll go to Paris and we'll say a prayer for Shelley and we'll say her name, almost like she would be there with us. We'll take pictures and we will send postcards. Postcards to our families. Maybe

GIRL. *(cont'd)* they will miss us while were away on our vacation. *(She looks to the boy and she realizes he is dead. She opens the pill bottle.)* They won't miss me. They won't even realize I'm gone. My father will give his sermon. My mother will ignore me. My sister will damage her baby. Leave her in a basement. Just like this one. I would never do that to my baby. I would keep her warm and safe. I haven't even picked out a name for her yet. What do you think I should name my baby? I've only got five months to decide on a good one. Five months to get my life together. *(She takes a pill, swallows.)* What do you think of Tanya? Do you like that name? *(She takes another pill, swallows.)* I always liked the name Courtney. It's a pretty name. *(She takes a third pill, swallows.)* No. I will definitely name my baby Shelley. She was a good friend to me. *(She lays down next to the boy, pulls his arm around her so that he is holding her.)* I guess we got a plan, after all. *(Pauses.)* You're a sweet guy. You've got a cute smile. *(Pauses.)* I can't wait to see Paris with you.

(Her eyes close. The pill bottle slips from her hand.)

Lights fade to black.)