

ABOUT HER

by Dennis Bush

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ABOUT HER

A Dramatic Ensemble One Act Play

by Dennis Bush

SYNOPSIS: When a woman's husband drags her out of a social event, what do you know? When she screams, "Let me go!" and you hear it all the way across the street, what do you do? When you *think* you know what you *think* you know, what you think you know *isn't* what you know. As a young woman tells the story of meeting the man who would become her husband and, at the same time, we hear from neighbors about what they think goes on in the couple's home, we make choices about who and what we believe. We're confronted with our own assumptions and excuses, and we realize that we don't know what we thought we knew. And, whether we know it or not, it isn't about us.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 1 male, 4 either; gender flexible)

SHARLA (f).....	Mid-20's; lives with Jason. <i>(60 lines)</i>
AUSTEN (m/f).....	Mid-20's/early 30's; lives next to Sharla and Jason. <i>(47 lines)</i>
KAI (m/f).....	Mid to late 20's; lives near Sharla and Jason. <i>(49 lines)</i>
MACKENZIE (m).....	Late 20's/early 30's; dating Finley; lives near Sharla and Jason. <i>(48 lines)</i>
REECE (m/f).....	Mid to late 20's; lives near Sharla and Jason. <i>(50 lines)</i>
DENVER (m/f).....	Mid to late 20's; lives near Sharla and Jason. <i>(46 lines)</i>
FINLEY (f).....	Mid-20's; A nurse, dating Mackenzie; lives near Sharla and Jason. <i>(34 lines)</i>

DURATION: 30 minutes.

TIME: Set in the present and recent past.

SETTING: In the homes, driveways and thoughts of seven people whose lives are connected by proximity and complicity.

SET: A bare stage or a very simple set.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting and staging, and to avoid literal use of inferred props or to group actors together so it appears that conversations are happening in places where a character may be speaking directly to the audience.

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

About Her had a process workshop in New York, in October 2018, a reading in Toronto, in November 2018, followed by the world premiere run in Phoenix, AZ, in January 2019, with the cast as follows.

KAI.....	Ben Collison
REECE	Ryan Bernardino
MACKENZIE.....	Kaveh Moasser
AUSTEN	Andrew Urban
FINLEY.....	Rylee Garvey
DENVER.....	Matt Maurer
SHARLA	Avery Sanowski
Director.....	Dennis Bush

DEDICATION

The playwright offers special thanks to Meggy Lykins, Logan Umbanhowar, Monika Rzezniczek, Sarah Malay, Emily O'Brien, Nick Petrovich, Melissa Teitel, Kelsey Torstveit, Hailey Araza, and Joe Pascale for their kind assistance and inspiration, during the creation of *About Her*.

AT RISE: *Lights up on SHARLA, alone. SHARLA speaks only to the audience. She does not acknowledge or interact with any of the other characters at any point in the play. Lights up on AUSTEN, REECE, KAI, DENVER, MACKENZIE, and FINLEY, scattered around the playing space.*

SHARLA: I don't know what day it was, or what time of day – other than it was daytime.

ALL: *(Except SHARLA. To audience.)* You don't know.

The other actors should not address SHARLA or speak directly to her, or appear to speak directly to her, at any point in the play.

SHARLA: I know it was daytime. Because the sun was out.

AUSTEN, KAI, and MACKENZIE: You don't know what I know!

REECE, DENVER, and FINLEY: What *you* know?

AUSTEN, KAI, and MACKENZIE: What I *know*.

REECE, DENVER, and FINLEY: What you *think* you know.

SHARLA: I remember what he was wearing.

REECE, DENVER, and FINLEY: You think you know.

AUSTEN, KAI, and MACKENZIE: You don't know what you think you know.

SHARLA: The first time I saw him, he was wearing a sleeveless sweatshirt. Not a T-shirt. It was a sweatshirt. And he'd cut off – or *torn off* – the sleeves.

ALL: *(Except SHARLA. To audience.)* You don't know.

SHARLA: And he had really big arm muscles. Like giant biceps and triceps and whatever the forearm muscles are called.

ALL: *(Except SHARLA. To audience.)* You really don't know.

SHARLA: Maybe they're just called forearm muscles. Whatever they're called, he had them. And I noticed them.

ALL: *(Except SHARLA. To audience.)* When you *think* you know what you *think* you know, what you think you know *isn't* what you know.

SHARLA: His family was moving in across the street from my family. Like two days before the start of my senior year of high school. I wasn't happy about it. Not at first. There was enough change going on. I didn't need new people in the neighborhood.

Transition to AUSTEN and REECE. SHARLA'S lines are not part of their conversation and should not be acknowledged by AUSTEN or REECE.

AUSTEN: When things happen to people you know, you know—

REECE: You don't know.

AUSTEN: I know more than I want to.

REECE: (*Unequivocal.*) You don't know what happened.

AUSTEN: I know more than you do. Way more.

REECE: The bird doesn't know what's inside the birdhouse till it goes into the birdhouse, and you can't fit into the birdhouse, so you don't know!

AUSTEN: (*Perplexed.*) I don't know what happens in a birdhouse?

REECE: That's what I said.

AUSTEN: I'm not a bird. So, of course, I can't fit into a birdhouse.

REECE: Which is what I said.

AUSTEN: But what does that have to do with knowing what happened in the house next to mine.

REECE: Same principle. *Birds* don't even know what goes on in birdhouses.

AUSTEN: I don't think birds even *use* birdhouses. I think the whole *idea* of birdhouses is to make people think they're doing something good for birds, when it's really just an excuse to paint a tiny wooden house and pretend that a bird is going to use it.

REECE: (*Absolute certainty.*) Oh, they use 'em.

AUSTEN: (*Smugly, incredulous.*) Birds use birdhouses.

REECE: They absolutely do. For nesting – and when there's bad weather. And they use bird *baths*, too.

AUSTEN: And you get to know all that, but you don't think I can know what happened in the house right next to mine?

REECE: You think because you've seen her looking like a bird with a broken wing that means something's going on?

AUSTEN: And this is somehow connected to birdhouses, because you think she looked like a bird with a broken wing?

REECE: She did.

SHARLA: So, I decided that change can be a good thing. New people moving in across the street can be a positive change.

AUSTEN: She's not a bird. She had a broken *arm*, not a broken wing.

Why do you have to talk about her like she's a fragile little bird?

REECE: You don't think she's fragile?

AUSTEN: No, she's not.

REECE: Even with the broken arm?

AUSTEN: That's *injured*, not fragile.

SHARLA: So I watched the new neighbors move in.

REECE: Being injured doesn't make her fragile?

AUSTEN: It makes her *injured*.

REECE: If she wasn't fragile, she would've fought back.

AUSTEN: Fought back?

REECE: It's what you do – if you're not fragile.

AUSTEN: Why are those the only options? Be a fragile little bird or fight back?

SHARLA: I mean, it's not like I had a choice. They were moving in, whether I was happy about it or not.

Transition to MACKENZIE and FINLEY. SHARLA'S lines are not part of their conversation and should not be acknowledged by MACKENZIE or FINLEY.

MACKENZIE: A friend of mine has a cousin whose friend asked her out on a date in high school and she turned him down.

FINLEY: The woman who lives in the house down the street?

MACKENZIE: Yeah. He asked her out and she turned him down. And she had attitude.

SHARLA: I waved at them. While they moved in. (*A quick beat.*) They had a lot of furniture.

FINLEY: Your friend's cousin's friend?

MACKENZIE: Yeah.

SHARLA: I don't think they saw me waving at them. Nobody waved back, so that's a pretty good indication that they didn't see me waving at them.

FINLEY: When?

MACKENZIE: He asked her out in high school.

FINLEY: And she turned him down. In high school. Which had to have been like five or ten years ago.

MACKENZIE: It doesn't matter when it happened. It's *indicative*.

SHARLA: That's when I saw Jason in the sleeveless sweatshirt.

FINLEY: Indicative of what?

SHARLA: I like big arms. I find them... attractive. I was dating a guy who had really skinny arms. Like a *boy*. Not like Jason. He had big arms – *man* arms, not boy arms – and he liked to put them on display. Why else would he have cut off – or *torn* off – the sleeves of his sweatshirt? Whatever you want people to notice, you cut off the fabric that covers it. Or you buy things that don't have fabric there in the first place.

MACKENZIE: It means she has attitude.

FINLEY: Maybe she was already in a relationship. Or maybe your friend's cousin's friend wasn't her type. Or maybe he asked her out in a disgusting kind of way.

MACKENZIE: I doubt it.

FINLEY: You doubt that your friend's cousin's friend would ask somebody out in a disgusting way.

SHARLA: I don't think he saw me staring at his arms. If they didn't see me waving at them, I'm pretty sure he didn't see me staring at his arms.

MACKENZIE: I absolutely doubt it.

FINLEY: *You've* asked people out in a disgusting kind of way. So, how hard is it to believe that your friend's cousin's friend – whom you've never met – could ask somebody out in a disgusting kind of way.

MACKENZIE: When have I ever asked somebody out in a disgusting way?

FINLEY: You asked *me* out in a disgusting kind of way.

SHARLA: After they'd carried all the furniture and boxes and everything into the house, there was still a weight bench in the driveway.

MACKENZIE: And you went out with me.

SHARLA: Not in the garage. In the *driveway*. I figured they must have forgotten to take it inside. I mean, who leaves a weight bench sitting in the driveway. And, then, after it got dark, I heard this loud, *clanking* sound from across the street. I looked out my window and there he was, working out in the driveway. Bench pressing a lot of weight. And doing those curl things with barbells or dumbbells – whatever they're called – in each hand. And he was doing it in the

rain. Not a downpour or anything like that. But it was definitely raining. A light rain. A drizzle.

Transition to AUSTEN and REECE. SHARLA'S lines are not part of their conversation and should not be acknowledged by AUSTEN or REECE.

REECE: She wears very short skirts.

AUSTEN: What does that have to do with anything?

REECE: It sends a message.

AUSTEN: To her boyfriend? Or her husband? We don't even know whether they're married or not.

REECE: I heard they were married.

AUSTEN: From her? Did you hear it from her?

REECE: I heard it from a reliable source.

AUSTEN: If you say I can't know what happened in their house – which is right next to mine – then the only reliable source that's really reliable would be her.

SHARLA: We started dating about a week later. (*Clarifying.*) After I broke up with my boyfriend – the one with the really skinny arms. (*Making it absolutely clear.*) And it wasn't because he had skinny arms. It wasn't. It was just time. (*Remembering; smiling.*) He was nice. Really nice. And sweet. But he was a junior and I was a senior and there are a lot of logistics to deal with in those kind of situations. College plans. Priorities. That kind of stuff. I waited a whole week after I broke up with him, before I started dating Jason. I figured when some of my ex's friends started asking me out, it was like a sign that it was okay to start dating Jason.

REECE: Wearing short skirts – very short skirts – sends a message to her husband or her boyfriend, whichever he is – and it sends a message to everybody else.

AUSTEN: That she likes to wear short skirts?

REECE: Very short skirts.

AUSTEN: And *that's* the message? That she likes to wear very short skirts?

REECE: That she's the *kind of woman* that likes to wear very short skirts.

AUSTEN: And that gives her husband – or her boyfriend – permission to do what he did?

REECE: What you *think* he did.

Transition to KAI and DENVER. SHARLA'S lines are not part of their conversation and should not be acknowledged by KAI or DENVER.

KAI: I knew a guy like him in college.

DENVER: We *all* knew guys like him in college.

KAI: Maybe it was *him*. The guy I knew.

DENVER: Those kind of guys all look alike.

KAI: That's a pretty sweeping generalization.

DENVER: Which doesn't make it any less accurate.

KAI: The guy I knew in college was a jerk. But he wasn't a jerk about being a jerk.

SHARLA: He proposed on New Year's Eve, during our first year of college. We were both home from college and, even though we went to the same college, he waited till we were home to propose. It was at my parents' New Year's Eve party. They have one every year. Every New Year's Eve. And as everybody was doing the countdown to midnight... "ten... nine... eight... seven," Jason got down on one knee. I thought he'd dropped something. But just as everybody got to, "four... three... two," he yelled, "Will you marry me?" and everybody's jaws dropped way open. Everybody was ready to scream, "Happy New Year!" But, instead, they just screamed. I cried a little. I was still kind of in shock and processing it all, but I figured crying a little would be nice.

DENVER: She was an actress. When she was a kid.

KAI: She did a couple commercials.

DENVER: Which makes her an actress.

KAI: I guess, technically, yes.

DENVER: So, she liked attention.

KAI: Or not.

DENVER: If you're an actress, you like attention.

KAI: That's your theory, but it's not always true.

DENVER: So, maybe all this was for attention.

KAI: She let it happen to her for the attention?

DENVER: "She let it happen to her." See what you just admitted?

KAI: I didn't admit anything.

DENVER: You said, "she let it happen to her."

KAI: It was just the way I said it.

DENVER: I heard that she didn't even scream or yell.

SHARLA: I cried a little. Maybe more than a little. Sometimes, when you start crying, you cry more than you think you're going to. I could've screamed and yelled, like everybody else was doing, but like six people were recording it all on their phones, and I didn't want to end up in some viral video screaming like a crazy person.

KAI: Wouldn't somebody who wanted attention scream or yell? Especially in a situation like that?

DENVER: She wasn't afraid to scream and yell in other situations. That's for sure. She called him deranged. She yelled it. She yelled, "You're deranged!" at the top of her lungs. Right in front of the house. While he was getting into his car. No man wants to get yelled at – or called deranged – in front of his own house.

SHARLA: We went to Hawaii on our honeymoon. Technically, we went there for the wedding, too, since it was a destination wedding. And we stayed for a week after everybody else went home. I wouldn't ever have thought of having a destination wedding, but Jason was crazy that way. He'd just come up with a wild idea and, the next thing you knew, we were doing whatever the idea was. Like having a destination wedding and honeymoon in Hawaii. On Maui, to be specific. When we were looking at venues, it was between a hotel on Oahu and one on Maui. Jason liked the pictures of the gym at the hotel on Maui better, so that's where we had the wedding. (*Clarifying.*) At the hotel, not in the gym at the hotel.

Transition to MACKENZIE and FINLEY. SHARLA's lines are not part of their conversation and should not be acknowledged by MACKENZIE or FINLEY.

MACKENZIE: You know what happened.

FINLEY: That doesn't mean I can tell you

MACKENZIE: If you know, you can tell me.

FINLEY: That's not how it works.

MACKENZIE: I know you were working when they brought her in. So, I know you know.

FINLEY: There are privacy laws. To protect patients.

SHARLA: I had a diary. I used to write in it every day.

MACKENZIE: That's so you don't tell TV stations and stuff like that.

FINLEY: It's for everything. It's for not telling anybody.

SHARLA: Jason didn't like that I had secrets.

MACKENZIE: It doesn't count for people you're in a relationship with.
Or related to. There are laws about that, too.

SHARLA: It didn't matter that the secrets were between me and the diary, not between me and any other people.

FINLEY: Last month, a nurse at work took a picture of a patient during surgery. And she got fired and lost her license.

MACKENZIE: I'm not asking you to take any pictures. (*Quick pause.*)
You didn't, did you? Did you take pictures of her?

FINLEY: No. No way. I wouldn't do that.

SHARLA: He figured out where I kept it. And he tore it up.

MACKENZIE: And, besides, she lost the right to privacy, when she screamed so loud I heard it all the way across the street.

SHARLA: With his bare hands. He just ripped the diary in half and then he ripped each of the halves in half. And he threw the ripped pages up into the air and they floated down all over the living room floor.

DENVER: (*To audience.*) She yelled, "You're deranged!" at the top of her lungs. Right in front of the house. While he was getting into his car. No man wants to get yelled at – or called deranged – in front of his own house.

SHARLA: He told me to pick up all the pieces and put them in the recycling. He said, "Recycling isn't trash. Some people don't know the difference."

KAI: (*To audience.*) That's a pretty sweeping generalization.

DENVER: (*To audience.*) Which doesn't make it any less accurate.

SHARLA: And he kind of smirked, and he looked right at me and said, "Some things are recycling. Some things are trash."

KAI: (*To audience.*) The guy I knew in college was a jerk. But he wasn't a jerk about being a jerk.

SHARLA: And I cried a little. Maybe a lot. I don't remember.

ALL: (*Except SHARLA. To audience.*) You don't know.

SHARLA: I know I didn't want to cry. It just happened.

Transition to KAI.

KAI: I was out with her, once. at one of those paint-a-picture-while-you-drink-wine kind of places. I wasn't out with her *alone*. I wasn't out with her at all, really. There was a bunch of us there. Somebody at work asked me to go. I don't know how she ended up there. I smiled at her from across the room. I kind of raised my glass and smiled, the way you do when you recognize someone but don't really have anything to say to them. I mean, we lived on the same street, but it's not like our lives were connected in any way other than where we lived. (*Choosing the perfect word.*) The *proximity* of our *houses*. The proximity of our *lives*. You get the picture. We didn't get to *paint a picture*, though – which is what I thought the whole premise of the place was. You know, come and paint a picture, but, really, just come and drink wine and have something to keep your hands busy while you talk about other people. Instead of pictures, we painted birdhouses. None of us have birds. But the owner said, "Well, now, you'll have pretty birdhouses and they'll attract pretty birds." I thought that was pretty stupid. I kept the little birdhouse. I didn't paint it, but I kept it. So, now, I have a tiny unpainted birdhouse that won't attract anything besides dust. About a half hour before we were supposed to be done painting and drinking, her husband or her boyfriend – whatever he is – showed up. He walked in, looked around, and cursed. Like that was his assessment of the whole painting-and-wine-drinking experience. Just that one word. I thought it was tacky. And it certainly changed the dynamic in the room. Especially when the person doing the walking in and cursing does it without a shirt on. Apparently, he didn't think, "No shirt, no shoes, no service" applied to him. And it was October. I thought about saying something. You know, something like, "Put on a shirt. We're painting birdhouses and drinking wine in here. And it's *October*." But I didn't. Because he walked over to her and grabbed her by the arm and practically dragged her out of the place. She left without her birdhouse. I mean, it wasn't by choice, but she did leave without her birdhouse. I took it with me, when I left, but I left it in my car. Because just showing up at her door with the birdhouse, when I couldn't remember her name would have been awkward. I mean, seriously, what would I have said? "Hey, *you*, I have your birdhouse.

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