

"Close to Home "

By Eric G. Westerlund

Time: Friday evening

Setting: Apartment living/dinning/kitchen space. Door to the outside, hallway to the bath and bedrooms offstage. Nicely decorated. Pier 1 imports style. Against one wall is a large antique roll top desk.

At rise: The place is a mess. Clothes strewn on the couch, the floor. Shoes. Piles of papers and files. Unopened mail.

On the dining room table is a large gift basket of bath and beauty products, still cellophane wrapped, topped by an oversized card reading "good luck' Cheryl! We'll miss you. Love, the entire office."

(Cheryl can be heard on the phone before she enters from the hallway. She is 29 and professionally dressed. As she talks she tidies rapidly, with the energy of a squirrel stowing nuts for winter. During the call Cheryl sometimes walks offstage with clothes and shoes, reentering empty handed. The pile on the desk grows as she tides)

(She looks worried by the content of the phone call.)

Cheryl: Missing? Have you looked in the top drawer?...the other top drawer?...you're sure.....which ones?...from grandma? OH, mother don't worry I have them.well, it wasn't her, it was me. So you can....mother ...mother it wasn't Marcy..... That right. NO she's fine, I talked to her yesterday. You are not supposed to be worrying so much.

(She takes a plain white piece of paper and marker, sits at the dining room table and letters a sign.)

Cheryl: did you take your medicine?Good. Go for a walk?...
(Exasperated) Mom... Were all busy. You need to listen to dr.

cooper. ...okay, then listen to me. I don't ever want to be that scared again. Okay. ...see you soon. Bye ... wait Mom! Don't run any lights, okay? Even if you are late. Bye.

(Cheryl hangs up, momentarily looking concerned. She untapped the cellophane on the gift basket, extracts the GOOD LUCK sign and replaces it with "HAPPY 50TH BIRTHDAY MOTHER. We love you. Cheryl and Marcy." Cheryl picks up the "GOOD luck" card. There is a SOUND of a key in the door. Cheryl looks for a place to stash the office card, then simply conceals it as she dashes to the door. As Cheryl approaches the doorknob RATTLES but does not turn.)

Marcy: (offstage) Cheryl it's me, open up, my keys not working.

(Cheryl opens the door to reveal MARCY, 24. Hot pink hair spiked. Her boots are not only unripped garment.)

Marcy: Have you lost weight?

(She jangles as she enters, carrying a large plastic bag from below a buck, which she sets on the dining table. Cheryl stashes the card in the desk and shuts it.)

Cheryl: (suspicious) Not that I know of.

Marcy: Well, you look good. And the place looks great. (Of the basket) Nice!

Cheryl: You look like a troll.

Marcy: I got some stuff too. (Showing ach) One of these egg-beaty things, electro proof toast tongs and ...raisins! (Off Cheryl's look.) I know, but Mom loves raisins. What?

Cheryl: I told you I'd take care of the gift.

Marcy: I even got you....

(She pulls out a windy toy.)

Marcy (continued): duck-on-bike! With wind-up funny action!

(She holds out the gift. Cheryl makes no move to take it from her. Marcy shrugs and sets the duck-on-bike on the table. She starts to wind it up.)

Cheryl: Marcy, Mom said she was missing a necklace, ring and earrings that were Grandma's. It wasn't me, and she wasn't robbed.

(Marcy releases the Duck-on-Bike which pedals in a circle on the table.)

Marcy: I love that. Wind up funny action.

Cheryl: It'll be funny later. Now, I need you to go back and get the jewelry.

(Marcy goes to the closet and starts to empty boxes and outwear onto the floor. Cheryl follows.)

Cheryl (continued): I just got the place presentable. Marcy, go back and get Mom's jewelry.

(Marcy ignores her and gets wrapping paper out. Cheryl repacks the closet. Marcy sets the paper on the table and continues into the kitchen. Cheryl follows.)

Cheryl (continued): (emphatic) I'll wrap them. Just go get the stuff.

(Marcy gets scotch tape and scissors from the drawer and turns to find Cheryl in her face. Cheryl grabs the scissors out of her hand.)

Marcy: Jeez. You'll put an eye out.

Cheryl: I said I would wrap them! Go!

(Marcy doesn't move.)

Marcy: Stop yelling at me.

Cheryl: I'm trying to be heard above the loud hair, the chains and all the clay in your skull. I worked hard for tonight and you are going to ruin it.

(Marcy walks to the table and slowly starts collecting her gifts and putting them back in the bag.)

Cheryl (continued): Grow up.

Marcy: I try too, you know.

Cheryl: I'm sorry. I...have had a rough day.

(Marcy takes the gifts back out of the bag and starts wrapping one of them.)

Marcy: Why does Mom always tell you everything that I do?

Cheryl: she doesn't always.

Marcy: sure seems that way.

Cheryl: Well, since Dad died, I think she needs someone to talk to. She worries about you.

Marcy: I'm fine. I know she can't imagine it, but a person can find happiness outside of the suburbs.

Cheryl: I told her I had the jewelry.

Marcy: You what?

Cheryl: What was I supposed to say? Can you please just go get them? It's her birthday.

Marcy: she thinks I stole them, doesn't she.

Cheryl: No, she just asked.

Marcy: I'd hate to let her down. It's hard to live up to her high expectations, but I'm trying. I wonder what I'll steal next?

Cheryl: That's not a very constructive attitude, is it?

Marcy: she breeds it.

Cheryl: I don't want to hear you talk like that about our mother.

Marcy: If you didn't insist on butting in, you wouldn't have to.
(Marcy continues wrapping. Cheryl watches her for a beat. She can't let it rest.)

Cheryl: Was I butting in when I gave you rent money last month?

(No answer)

Cheryl: Fine. We'll see how well you manage on your own.

Marcy- Thank you

(Cheryl again waits. Again she cannot let it end there)

Cheryl- Oh come off it. The next you have an emergency you'll come running into me like you always do. Marcy, you're brilliant but you have absolutely no common sense. Don't be stupid. I'm willing to help, but I need you to step up to the plate once in a while.

Marcy- Well this time I can't.

Cheryl- It's always this time

Marcy- No, this time it is. Brett dropped the camera in the middle of shooting. When you've got a whole crew you just can't stop. I needed money. Cheryl, you have to believe me. I know my track record sucks, but I never would've done it if I saw any other way.

Cheryl- (afraid) done what?

(Marcy looks at her. The cat's already out of the bag)

Marcy- Brett knows this guy. He helps people out, in a pinch. It's this place on depot road.

Cheryl- You did not pawn grandma's jewelry.

Marcy- I was desperate. I told you. Please. Do you think I would have done a thing like that if I could figure out any other way?

(Cheryl just shakes her head)

Marcy- don't look at me like that I feel horrible enough

Cheryl- well you should. I can't believe it. We can't replace that stuff

Marcy- Please. I know.

Cheryl- (dripping with disgust) Oh, Marcy

(Marcy sits there clenched up, fighting back her emotions)

Cheryl- That's it, you have nothing to say?

Marcy- What can I say, Cheryl? Sometimes I think I'm making progress. I got my credit card paid off. I even managed to save two months in a row. Then... (a helpless shrug)... stuff comes up. I look in the mirror and there's the same old messed it up again me.

Cheryl- if you save for two months and then you spend it, you haven't saved.

Marcy- You aren't content until you hear me cry are you?

Cheryl- I'm trying to get you to hear me.

Marcy- I need you to love me. Please. You're a better sister than I deserve, Cheryl. I try to not mess it up. I try so hard. Please be patient. You're my anchor. I'd be lost.

Cheryl- I only tell you cause' I love you. Better?

Marcy- Thank you, (determined) I'm making a budget as soon as we finish shooting. And I'm gonna pay you back. For all of it I've kept track. I'm gonna get a job, I'm so sick of living this way.

Cheryl- I'll help you. With the budget I mean. I have a lot of experience

Marcy- We'd only fight. (Smiling playfully) Come on, you know it's true. I gotta do this on my own

(Marcy's smile fades. She takes a deep breath, as if gearing up to say something. Cheryl reads her and reacts instantly.)

Cheryl- (furious) why do you do this! Why do I fall for it?

Marcy- It's just five hundred. I can pay you back as soon as Brett gets his check. Honest. Cheryl, we can't rent lights we can't shoot and everything I've done will be a waste. Please please please please, I heard everything you said, I swear this is the last time. I know I...

(Cheryl walks away from her sadly)

Marcy- Don't walk away. You have to believe me. This time I hear you. I know I always say that but this time you have to believe me. Cheryl, I need you. Families stick together. You always tell me that.

Cheryl- (sadly) yeah they do.

(Marcy looks at her sister with curiosity, as if she's never seen her before. Cheryl looks away.)

Marcy-(scared) what's wrong?

Cheryl- I'm no anchor

Marcy- you're too hard on yourself, you always were. Come on, smile. You drafted a suicide note over a B+

Cheryl- it was a B. Regular B. and Timmy Martindale showed the whole class

(Cheryl looks at her)

Cheryl- I can't help you this time.

(Marcy's face hardens)

Marcy- cant or wont

(Cheryl says nothing)

Marcy- well you know how to pick your moment. Do u enjoy humiliating me? Do you think you are teaching me a lesson? I get the lesson all right. All my sisters talk of unconditional love is a load of bull. Brett warned me, but I defended you. I cut you so much slack... (She starts packing up her gifts) Have a great time with mom tonight. Have a great time gloating over the important life lessons that I'm learning the hard way.

(Cheryl grabs the gifts and flings them on the couch)

Cheryl – I lost my job. I have no income. I don't know where my rent is coming from let alone yours

(She picks up the bag and sets in on the table. Fierce and determined, she wraps presents as if for military inspection)

Cheryl- and you are not running away like you always do. You are going to give Mother these gifts and have a Vanna White smile on your face. You owe me at least that much. You owe her you call yourself an actress well it's time to act. Because whatever is going on in my life and in yours I don't want her knowing about it, Okay? One heart failure is enough.

(Marcy stares, agape)

Cheryl- OKAY??

(Cheryl looks down at the end of the first package that has come out all wrong, emits a clench-teethed scream and tears the paper back off)

Marcy- (Pure Compaction) Oh, Cheryl

Cheryl- Don't oh Cheryl me.

Marcy- Oh Cheryl

(Cheryl makes a second attempt at wrapping the gift)

Marcy- you need a hug

Cheryl- a hug isn't gonna fix it

Marcy- No But you need one

(She watches helplessly. Cheryl goes on wrapping, almost mechanically.)

Cheryl- You didn't see her, lying on the bathroom floor. Her hands were clutching, like a baby's. She was helpless. As we waited for the ambulance all I could do was pray, God please forgive me, please forgive me, how could I not see this coming.

(Cheryl sets the first gift aside and picks up the raisins. Marcy gently takes the gift)

Marcy- Let me

(She slaps a bow on the top of the box and sets it down perfunctorily)

Marcy- Mom had a heart attack because she is overweight and eats poorly. She worked too much and never exercised. She still doesn't do what the doctor says and you can't make her. Cheryl, it's not your fault.

Cheryl- it's like a vice around my heart. There was always mom. Now every day I wonder.

Marcy- I know but the tighter you hold on the more it slips through your fingers

Cheryl- don't tell her about my job

Marcy- maybe she will be relieved to hear the truth.

Cheryl- I don't think so. Shoot, the time. I have to fix my makeup

Marcy- What are we gonna say about the jewelry?

Cheryl- I'll say I left it at work

(Marcy shakes her head)

Marcy- I thought you already told her you had it

Marcy- Cheryl, when I bullshit you does it put your mind at ease, or make you more upset?

Cheryl- No games, I'm too tired

Marcy- Answer me. Do you get reassured, or more worried?

Cheryl- You know the answer to that.

Marcy- so what do you think we are doing to mom?

(Cheryl looks at her, wavering and the scene blacks out.)