

# *In the MeanTime*

A Ten-Minute play

by Sharon E. Cooper

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## CHARACTERS

Stephanie Mullins, 31 F.

Daycare worker, quirky, likes to think out loud, enjoys a good magazine, aware of her biological clock

Paul Alexander, 37 M.

Accountant, always irons his button-down shirts, well-read, usually moves slowly into relationships

## SETTING

A studio apartment, New York City.

## TIME

Winter--the part of winter that never seems to end. The present

Notes:

“In the MeanTime” was originally workshopped and produced by the Milk Can Theatre Company as part of the “Receipt Plays” at the Sande Shurin Theatre. All playwrights randomly chose a receipt and wrote a short play inspired by that receipt. My receipt had items on it that are referenced in the play as well as the location that is referred to in the play. This is my most produced short play with productions in the Netherlands, England and across the U.S.

The timer used in the play can be done in real time.

STEPHANIE, 31, in a cramped studio apartment, has done her best to make their small studio apartment feel like “home.” She sits with hard copies of receipts all around her. PAUL, 37, has had enough.

PAUL

Put the receipts down!

STEPHANIE

Why is it that we always order Chinese food?

PAUL

There’s really no point in all of this, is there?

STEPHANIE (overlapping and switching receipts)

Do you remember when we drove to Framingham, Massachusetts? And we went to A.C. Moore on One Wuster Road.

PAUL (overlapping)

I think I should go.

STEPHANIE

Look. Receipt #25. I wonder if they restart the receipt numbers every hour. Or day. Or--

PAUL

Maybe you should go. I live here

STEPHANIE

And I bought ten purple pens to brighten up this apartment.

PAUL

Pens do not brighten up an apartment!

STEPHANIE

They can—if you write sweet notes with them!

PAUL

You can keep all the pens, all the receipts. You can keep anything—

STEPHANIE

You know, the sales tax in Framingham is only 5%.

PAUL

There’s a reason for that.

STEPHANIE

And it's over 8% here.

PAUL

There's a reason for that, too.

STEPHANIE

(Looking at the receipt) Forty ounces of cleaner spray, \$4.75. No wonder we bought that there. Maybe if we lived there, it would have worked out. More space. And less sales tax.

PAUL

We're not breaking up because of the sales tax. Or because we live in a studio apartment.

STEPHANIE (overlapping)

Then why are we?

PAUL

This was impulsive.

STEPHANIE

That's not why people break up.

PAUL

In our case, it is. We moved in together right away; we cut our rent in half. And our bills.

STEPHANIE

We moved in together because you wanted less on your receipts?

PAUL

And that hasn't worked out at all. You buy all of these ridiculous things that no one needs.

STEPHANIE

That's not true.

He pulls a receipt out of her hand.

PAUL

Kaleidoscope Birthstone Stationary. A denim pencil case. Tweety bird.

STEPHANIE

All of those things have made this place more homey. Besides, I bought them on our anniversary trip to Framingham.

PAUL

Yes, our one-month anniversary trip to Framingham.

STEPHANIE

Things happen quickly in this city! People walk fast, talk fast, eat fast, and it's been so goddamned cold this winter. Last week, I went to the gynecologist—

PAUL

I really don't need to know—

STEPHANIE

Look, we are having the break up conversation. You are breaking up with me. That means I can talk about whatever I want. Those are the rules. So shut the fuck up and listen to whatever I have to say.

PAUL

I'll give you six minutes. That seems about right for a three-month relationship.

STEPHANIE

Fine. So I'm in the gynecologist office—

PAUL

Wait a minute—

He picks up his phone.

STEPHANIE

What are you doing?

PAUL

I'm setting the timer.

He sets the timer on his phone for six minutes.

STEPHANIE

You're such an asshole. No wonder I'm breaking up with you.

PAUL (overlapping)

I'm breaking up with you!

STEPHANIE (overlapping)

Well, first of all, the room where they —check you out—

PAUL

Check you out?

STEPHANIE

I was trying not to say “give you a pap smear.” They weigh me with all my clothes on, including my boots. I weigh myself again when all I’m wearing is this hideous hospital gown. Four pounds. All day long, I’m wearing four pounds of clothes. I feel so weighed down. I feel--

PAUL (overlapping)

I’m not fond of winter either. But you’ve been here your whole life. I’m the one from California. I’m the one--

STEPHANIE (overlapping)

Hey—this isn’t about you. I only have six minutes.

He looks down at the timer.

PAUL

Five.

STEPHANIE

So there’s no space, nowhere to put your clothes—I hide my bra and underwear between my long johns and my long sleeved shirt, because you don’t want this woman, the ob-gyn, to have to see your underwear even though she’s going to put this silver prong up your--

PAUL (overlapping)

Aaahh---

STEPHANIE (continuous)

I was worried because I had to have a cyst removed from my ovary when I was 18; it was the size of a softball--

PAUL

You never told me that.

STEPHANIE

She didn’t feel a cyst, which was a relief. I asked her if I should stop taking my birth control pills.

PAUL

Why would you do that when—

STEPHANIE

Because I want to get pregnant.

PAUL

Woah, Woah, What? Are you--Have you not been—

STEPHANIE (overlapping)

Don't panic, commitment phobe—I didn't mean I wanted to get pregnant with *you*. It has nothing to do with *you*.

PAUL (overlapping)

Of course it has nothing to do with me. I'm just the person you're having sex with.

STEPHANIE (overlapping)

I want to get pregnant. Me. ME! I was asking if it was a problem that I've been on the pill since I was 15 and I'm now 31. That's half my life.

PAUL

It's actually more than—

STEPHANIE

Shut up, you fucking accountant. So (composing herself) I asked, does that affect my chances of--

PAUL

Does it?

STEPHANIE

No. She said that people worry about the pill suppressing ovulation. She said it used to be that women spent most of their lives pregnant or nursing, and therefore—not ovulating. And get this. I spent \$314 for six minutes of her time, so she could tell me what's not normal is to be 31 and *not already have children*. In New York City. Where no one has children--

PAUL

She just meant historically. Or because of your clock.

STEPHANIE

I started doing the math. I mean, I'm not old like you—

PAUL

I'm 37--

STEPHANIE

Exactly. And I want to have one child by the time I'm 35.

PAUL

You're only 31! And 37 is not old.

STEPHANIE

35. With one child. I want to be married two years before I have a child. 33. You're engaged a year. 32. You date for a year before that. 31. 31! This is the year I have to find the father of my child, and I can't believe I've wasted my time on you.

PAUL

*I'm breaking up with you.* You're supposed to take these (looking down) four minutes to convince *me* to stay with *you*. And you're doing a lousy job. And you forgot about the nine months of pregnancy. You should already be with your future husband. Oh well.

STEPHANIE

The opposite of love is not hate but indifference. I am currently indifferent towards you. And by the way, I'm not from New York. I'm from Framingham.

PAUL

No. That was a road trip. You said, "We'll pick a direction and see where we end up."

STEPHANIE

I wanted to see what it was like to have you in my hometown.

PAUL

And how was it?

STEPHANIE

Cold. Just like here.

PAUL

You're just saying that to be mean. When people break up, they have to say stuff they regret later. Those are part of the rules, too. How could you lie about where you're from?

STEPHANIE

How could you call my hometown Hickville?

PAUL

I didn't even know you were from there.

STEPHANIE

Exactly.

PAUL

Can I have the last three minutes?



STEPHANIE

No.

PAUL

I wasn't with you just so we could cut our receipts in half.

STEPHANIE

Neither was I . . . I also wanted someone to have sex with—

PAUL

Come on.

STEPHANIE

Isn't that what we're all doing? I mean—in the meantime--until we find the right one. Making a decision that it's better to share a bed than save space for someone who's not there. I want to be with someone who asks questions and really wants to know the answers, you know? It's like, all day long, we have these mundane conversations with each other that mean nothing. *How are you? Fine. How are you? Good. Cold weather, huh? Long winter? Yeah. How's work? Good. Where are you from?* But does anyone really care? Is anyone really listening?

PAUL

(a moment) Why do you keep all of these receipts?

STEPHANIE

We are breaking up—what do you care?

PAUL

I do.

STEPHANIE

My mother left my father when I was four. After she left, Dad didn't have the energy to pick me up, so he started using these old photo albums as step stools—they were everywhere—in the bathroom, by the sink, next to the refrigerator, by the doors. I keep receipts. When things don't work out, you just recycle.

PAUL

We've lived together for two months, and I didn't know any of that about you. And you don't know my father died when I was seventeen, and I had to put off going to college because my mother didn't want to be alone. And you don't know that I hate almond butter. I really fucking hate it.

STEPHANIE

I was trying to save us money by packing your lunch.

PAUL

I didn't move in with you for your lunch making skills.

STEPHANIE

Then why did you?

PAUL

You're pretty.

STEPHANIE

Gee, thanks.

PAUL

And you make me laugh. And when we walk into a room, people wish they were me.

STEPHANIE

Because I'm pretty.

PAUL

Because we're laughing.

STEPHANIE

But you don't love me.

PAUL

Stephanie, I don't really know you. Well, now I know where you're from. I know you went to the gynecologist. I know about the receipts, your mother. I know you feel weighed down in winter.

STEPHANIE

It's not just winter.

PAUL

Is there anything else I need to know?

STEPHANIE

What, before we break up?

PAUL

Yeah.

STEPHANIE

You need to know where you're moving. The lease is in my name.

PAUL

Stop trying to win me back.

STEPHANIE

You make me laugh, too. And you did my taxes this year—so it wasn't a total loss.

PAUL

It was easy. You saved the receipts. . . You think 37 is old?

STEPHANIE

Your sperm isn't getting any younger.

PAUL

Maybe I should be doing the math, too.

STEPHANIE

You want to have children?

PAUL

What if I told you I already do?

Some where in the next handful of lines, the timer goes off.

STEPHANIE

You're kidding.

PAUL

God, wouldn't it be crazy if I were like "behind this door, door number three are my kids" and they strolled out here and -

STEPHANIE

There aren't three doors—in a small apartment. So, do you—I mean, want them?

PAUL

I don't want to be fifty when they want to run around Central Park with a baseball. And sixty-five when they leave the house. I'd be retiring and celebrating their graduation at the same time.

STEPHANIE

No one retires at sixty-five anymore.

PAUL

Thanks for being so understanding.

He places the timer between them.

I guess we're out of time.

STEPHANIE

That was my time. My six minutes.

PAUL

I could set the timer again.

STEPHANIE

(a moment and then) Isn't it funny how—when you know it's ending—you start to—  
(looking at him) what was it like, when your dad died?

PAUL

I couldn't believe he wasn't coming back; I know that's what happens when people die—they don't come back.

STEPHANIE

He didn't have a choice.

PAUL

Your mother never came back, did she?

STEPHANIE

I'm really sorry. About the almond butter. I didn't know.

PAUL

Wait a second.

Paul looks through his phone.

STEPHANIE

You really don't want to talk about all of this, do you?

PAUL

No, I mean, yes, it's just—I'm starving. Can we order Indian food?

She looks through the receipts. A bright smile spreads across her face.

STEPHANIE

We've never done that before.

He smiles, too. He points the phone at her.

What are you doing?

PAUL

I'm taking your picture.

She ducks under Tweety Bird. He takes her picture.

***Blackout. End of Play.***

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