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Dramatic Publishing

Shady Meadows

Comedy by Lisa Dillman



Commissioned by the Chicago Humanities Festival

Shady Meadows

Comedy. By Lisa Dillman. *Cast: 2 to 3m, 2 to 3w.* Neil and Melanie have just bought their dream “starter” home in Shady Meadows, a brand-new subdivision built over a wetland. At first they think they’ve discovered a paradise—green lawns, friendly neighbors, less crowded schools, nationally rated golf courses, and plenty of shopping malls. But when they first hear the ominous croaking, they begin to feel the first flickers of doubt. And during a Friday night cookout with their neighbors, the Clotts, Melanie and Neil find out that all is not as it should be in their new home. The threats suddenly seem endless. Frogs. Mold. Confused waterbirds. The works. As the wetland tries to find its way back, the newest residents of Shady Meadows prepare for all-out war. *Shady Meadows* is a cautionary comedy about the human desire to control the environment—and the potential devastation of not giving nature its due. *Bare stage with props. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: SN5.*

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Dramatic Publishing

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SHADY MEADOWS

A Short Play
by
LISA DILLMAN



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Shady Meadows was originally presented as part of the Chicago Humanities Festival's Acts of Concern, October 2007, at the Next Theatre, Evanston, Illinois. The play was directed by Tara Mallen and featured the following cast:

Melanie Nicole Wiesner
Neil. Ben Viccellio
Garson/Larry Keith Kupferer
Macie/Gwen Meighan Gerachis

SHADY MEADOWS

CHARACTERS

NEIL	25-30
MELANIE	25-30
GARSON/LARRY	40-50
MACIE/GWEN	40-50

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Shady Meadows, a housing development outside a large Midwestern city. This is signified by four lawn chairs and a Weber grill.

SHADY MEADOWS

(In the darkness we hear a rising symphony of natural sound: the croaking of frogs, the chattering of squirrels and the whistling and chirping of various birds calling to one another. This goes on for several moments. Then it cuts out abruptly as lights rise on MELANIE and NEIL.)

MELANIE. Neil and I have just bought our dream home.

NEIL. Dream *starter* home.

MELANIE. That doesn't mean we have a *starter dream*. It just means it's what we can afford. And it's real cute. Even though it's small.

NEIL. It's not that small.

MELANIE. We got to pick out the window treatments, the countertops and cabinets, even the foliage. Each home gets two small conifers or three deciduous shrubs in front, two sapling shade trees in back, and a choice of several flowering plants as well as a selection of rustic or modern-style window boxes.

NEIL. And talk about location! It's in an exclusive one-of-a-kind red-hot housing development called Shady Meadows.

MELANIE. Beautifully priced homes built over the lush backdrop of a converted swamp.

NEIL. Honey? Wetland. We wanted to be close to nature.

MELANIE. Oh, that's right. (*Confidentially to the audience.*) But sometimes it smells just the teensiest bit... *funky*. And sometimes... (*We hear the rather ominous croak of a nearby bullfrog; it's loud and slightly distorted.*) ...*sometimes* it sounds as if there's something *out there*.

NEIL. Everything here is brand new! We like things to be new. We don't want to inherit somebody else's troubles. So here we are. Not too far from the city.

MELANIE. Just far enough.

NEIL. Close to great malls and a pair of nationally rated golf courses.

MELANIE. And home to less crowded schools full of active, healthy young learners. That's important for down the road when we procreate.

NEIL. Great word! *Procreate*. Know what else I notice, honey? Lots of up-and-coming industries out this way.

MELANIE. That's really true. We've got the Pied Piper Paper Products plant just up the street. Their paper plates can go in the dishwasher up to sixty-five times!

NEIL. That saves a bundle on picnics. And then there's the Chem-for-Life industrial compound.

MELANIE. They manufacture yard products that make the grass green, green, green and the weeds dead, dead, dead.

NEIL. I *hate* weeds!

MELANIE. We both do!

NEIL. I love you!

MELANIE. I love *you*!

NEIL. And I love our life here.

MELANIE. It's perfect.

NEIL. We're gonna have some great years here before we chuck this place for something even more perfect.

MELANIE. Yeah!

(They pose together sweetly for a moment, then arrange the four lawn chairs as MACIE and GARSON enter with a rolling Weber grill and a tray of martini glasses. They each take a glass.)

MELANIE. Our neighbors down the way are the Clotts. They're super friendly. We like to cook out together on Friday nights.

NEIL. Hey, Macie! Hey, Garson!

GARSON. Hey, Melanie. Hey, Neil.

MACIE. Hey, Neil. Hey, Melanie.

MELANIE. Hi!

(They all look at her for a moment.)

GARSON. So! How are you kids liking Shady Meadows? You settling in okay?

NEIL. It's great. We love it.

MACIE. We love it too. Love it, love it, love it.

GARSON. How about you, Melanie? You love it?

MELANIE. I do!

MACIE. Sure she does. What's not to love?

MELANIE *(confidentially)*. Garson and Macie are a little older than us, and they don't have any children.

MACIE. I read the other day that the average American male has less than half the sperm count his father had.

GARSON. I read that the average American woman waits until her eggs grow moss on them before she finally up and decides she needs to spawn.

MACIE (*sexy voice*). Hello-o-o, turkey baster.

GARSON. She's turning sixty-five and driving the kids to T-ball.

(GARSON and MACIE poke each other and laugh.)

MACIE. Meanwhile, Elderdad's checking out porn on the Internet. He's quite the connoisseur.

GARSON. Menopause Mom's out getting her mustache waxed.

MACIE. Dad's new Nautilus fitness center makes an excellent coat rack.

GARSON. Oops. Better get started on that beard while she's at it.

MACIE. Lucky for Dad he's decided to *love* his extra thirty pounds of useless flubber. *(MACIE laughs hoarsely and raises her glass toward GARSON.)*

GARSON. What's this? Is Mom snortling behind that rictus mask of Botox?

(GARSON and MACIE laugh harder and the poking turns into pinching, which gets a little out of control.)

MELANIE. Anyone want another drink?

(Smiling, GARSON and MACIE hold out their glasses.)

NEIL. These steaks are great!

GARSON. If you like them, I'll get you the catalog.

NEIL. You know what would be a terrific idea for the meat processing and packing industry? Flavored cattle.

GARSON. Huh. I'm intrigued. Tell me more, Neil.

NEIL. You raise them from calves by inserting subcutaneous plugs of various sauces such as teriyaki, honey barbecue, spicy *fajita*, or original recipe home-on-the-range. By the time the animal's ready for slaughter it's already got a naturally delicious built-in flavor.

MACIE. Sort of like a lifelong marinade...

GARSON. Home-on-the-range flavor. What d'you figure that's like?

NEIL. You know. Regular. Plain. Like this stuff we're eating right now. Only enhanced for maximum meat essence.

MACIE. *Yum.*

GARSON. You know that is not a half bad idea.

NEIL. You could do the same thing with poultry. In fact, with a little engineering, I betcha you could get hens to lay *huevos rancheros* or eggs benedict, hell, anything you want.

GARSON. It's a fascinating concept, Neil.

NEIL. I got a million more where that came from.

(The sound of a bullfrog croaking not far off. MELANIE stiffens.)

MELANIE. There's that strange sound again.

GARSON. Uh-oh.

NEIL. What? What's wrong?

MACIE. You hear that a lot?

MELANIE. We've heard it more lately.

NEIL. Why? What is it?

GARSON. Bullfrog. Not supposed to be here. Developers cleared them out at great expense to make room for this housing project. Sneaky little bastards though. Some of them survived. Found any in your tub or toilet bowl yet?

MELANIE & NEIL. Ewwwww! No!

GARSON. Happened to us. Unnerving as hell, no question.

Tell you who you need to call. Chem-for-Life.

NEIL. Chem-for-Life? We use their Gourmet Lawn Food.

MELANIE. And their Mold Retardant.

NEIL. And their Weed Annihilator.

MACIE. They also have a full line of natural cosmetics.

GARSON. And they're right down the street. Better call them up. Make an appointment. Oh, and be sure to mention that you were referred by Garson and Macie Clott. We'll get a free lawn spa package out of it come next spring.

(The CLOTTS roll the Weber off with them as they exit.)

MELANIE. That night I couldn't sleep. I kept picturing an enormous frog lounging in my toilet bowl on a lily pad it had fashioned out of bathroom tissue. Doing that horrible bubble thing with its neck and occasionally snagging a fly with its long sticky tongue.

(MELANIE shudders and throws up a little in her mouth. An eerie reverberated frog croak. LARRY the Chem-for-Life guy enters. Even when he's responding to MELANIE, he addresses himself only to NEIL.)

LARRY. As I understand it, you been having problems with a *Rana catesbeiana* infestation of unknown proportions.

MELANIE. Is that...do you mean frogs?

LARRY. That's right, ma'am. The *Rana catesbeiana* is any one of several large, quixotic, heavy-bodied frogs that chiefly inhabit this, the North American continent.

NEIL. Yes. We believe we do have a potential frog situation.

LARRY. Whereabouts have you seen them? Inside or just outside?

MELANIE. We haven't seen any yet.

LARRY. You haven't. Mm, mm, mm. That is *not* a good sign.

MELANIE. I'm not sure I *want* to see them.

LARRY. Well, ma'am, seeing them is the only way you can *quantify* them. *Not* seeing them...well...you just don't know, do you?

MELANIE. Don't know what?

LARRY. If there are two of them or two million.

NEIL. Maybe there's only the one.

LARRY. Not likely, sir. That's just not how it works.

MELANIE. If there were two million I'm sure we would have seen them by now.

LARRY. Maybe. Then again, maybe not. They're wily. Cunning and salacious. And don't forget: this used to be their stomping grounds. But now it's time for you to stomp back, folks, and I'm here to see to it. I'm going to need to take a good look at your drainpipes.

NEIL. You got it. Whatever it takes.