

COMMUNITY PROPERTY

by

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Cast:

Harold .....Male, 25-35. A clownfish.

Emma .....Female, 25-35. A clownfish. Harold's wife.

Chris .....Male or Female, (gender ambiguous), 20-40. A starfish.

Place:

The interior of a Reef Ball, underwater.

Time:

The present

This play is based on the Reef Ball, manufactured by the Reef Ball Foundation (2005 Tech Museum of San Jose Environmental Award Laureate).

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(Lights up on a coral dome underwater. Harold and Emma enter from left, dressed as clowns. Emma's eyes are closed.)

EMMA

Are we there yet?

HAROLD

Just a little bit farther.

EMMA

Harold, I really don't have time for this, I...

HAROLD

Okay, open your eyes.

EMMA

Oh, wow...it's a dome.

HAROLD

Exactly! Isn't it cool?

EMMA

It's nice. Why are we here?

HAROLD

We live here.

EMMA

Excuse me?

HAROLD

You said you've been wanting to settle down. So I found this place and signed the lease yesterday. This is our new home!

EMMA

Yesterday? You rented this place and you didn't tell me?

HAROLD

Well, um...I wanted it to be a surprise.

EMMA

You can't just go off renting a home without telling me.

HAROLD

But you love surprises!

EMMA

No, you love surprises. I like to create five-year budgets. And how did you lease it anyway? Don't I need to sign something?

HAROLD

No. The housing people said that because of community property laws, only one spouse needs to sign.

EMMA

Marvelous.

HAROLD

Isn't it beautiful?

EMMA

It's very sparse.

HAROLD

It's made out of a special concrete. And it's brand new!

EMMA

And it's a dome.

HAROLD

Yes!

EMMA

With holes in the wall. And the ceiling.

HAROLD

It came with them.

EMMA

Very... ultra-modern.

HAROLD

I know!

EMMA

I need to talk to you about something.

HAROLD

It sort of reminds you of the '70s, doesn't it?

Harold... EMMA

It's everything that we need! HAROLD

Isn't it missing something? EMMA

Like what? HAROLD

Never mind. EMMA

I'm just kidding. I've kept the best surprise for last! HAROLD

No more surprises! EMMA

But... HAROLD

I'd like a trial separation, Harold. EMMA

A what? HAROLD

A trial separation. There, I said it. EMMA

A trial separation? HAROLD

Yes. EMMA

You're joking, right? HAROLD

No. EMMA

HAROLD

No? What are you talking about? Why do you want a divorce?

EMMA

Not a divorce. I think we should try living apart for a while.

HAROLD

This doesn't make any sense! Why?

EMMA

It's because of stuff like this! I love you Harold, but renting a house without telling me? Especially a house like this!?!

HAROLD

If you don't want the house, we don't need to stay.

EMMA

But it's just that...you do stuff like this! And it drives me crazy! You're so unreliable!

HAROLD

But we can't separate! We mate for life!

EMMA

Sometimes you have to break the rules.

HAROLD

It's not about the rules. It's about biology.

(Chris enters from left, covered in stars)

CHRIS

Hey, dudes!

HAROLD

Oh my God.

CHRIS

Welcome to the neighborhood!

EMMA

Thanks. Who are you?

HAROLD

What are you doing in our home?

EMMA

Your home. I'm not staying.

Nice place!

CHRIS

You need to leave.

HAROLD

You don't eat fish, do you?

EMMA

Oh, no ma'am. Mussels. Crabs. But no fish. Yuck.

CHRIS

Good for you. Now...

HAROLD

In that case, dear, we shouldn't be rude.

EMMA

Emma...

HAROLD

I'm Chris! Nice to meet you.

CHRIS

I'm Emma, and this is my husband, Harold.

EMMA

This is one of those new concrete dome houses!

CHRIS

Yes, it is. Now Chris, I—

HAROLD

It's shark-proof! That's very important.

CHRIS

Yes—

HAROLD

It's so hard to find a shark-proof home these days.

CHRIS

So true.

EMMA

HAROLD

Look, my wife and I were having a conversation, and...

CHRIS

I just wanted to stop by. Say hi. I think you'll like living around here.

EMMA

We're not going to stay.

HAROLD

Of course we're going to stay.

EMMA

My husband just rented this place, and we're trying to find out if we're going to keep it.

HAROLD

You can't just break a lease.

EMMA

Why not? Housing is so scarce, I'm sure the landlord will find another renter.

CHRIS

Maybe I should come back.

EMMA

Stay right there, Chris.

HAROLD

Hon, if he wants to leave—

EMMA

No, by all means stay, Chris. We shouldn't argue in front of guests, dear.

CHRIS

Well...

EMMA

I insist you stay.

CHRIS

You mean that?

EMMA

Absolutely.

CHRIS

Oh, thanks! That's so great! Oh, thank you! You don't know what it's like being out there, unprotected. I'll stay for only a few days, I promise.

HAROLD

Excuse me?

CHRIS

I just got kicked out of my apartment.

HAROLD

What? She didn't mean you could stay here overnight!

EMMA

Of course you can stay here!

HAROLD

What?!?

CHRIS

Oh, thank you!

HAROLD

Could you please excuse us, for a moment?

CHRIS

Sure, dude. Say, mind if I try climbing on the roof?

EMMA

Please feel free!

HAROLD

Emma—

CHRIS

Thanks!

(Chris exits, right)

HAROLD

What the hell are you doing?

EMMA

Chris needs a place to stay, and we've certainly got space.

HAROLD

You're doing this just to annoy me, aren't you?

EMMA  
Whatever do you mean?

HAROLD  
Inviting in this—

EMMA  
Invertebrate?

HAROLD  
First of all—

EMMA  
You hate him because he's a starfish and doesn't have a backbone.

HAROLD  
I don't hate invertebrates. I like anemone, for example.

EMMA  
Of course you do! You're a clownfish. But when it comes to a perfectly nice starfish—

HAROLD  
First of all, the correct term is "sea star". *We* are fish. It is not. Second—

EMMA  
Oh, there you go. He is a he.

HAROLD  
Are you sure?

EMMA  
Yes. Maybe. I don't know. Does it matter?

HAROLD  
Second, this is our house. We can't take in as guests whoever wanders in.

EMMA  
We haven't moved in! If we're not here, why can't he use the space for a few days?

HAROLD  
Oh, a few days. Sure. Then it becomes a few weeks. Then a few months. Before you know it, he's got all his sea star friends over to reproduce.

EMMA  
Please.

HAROLD

They do that you know. You get a whole bunch of males, and a whole bunch of females, and...

EMMA

I'm sure he wouldn't do that without asking. Not that I would mind having a bunch of baby starfish running around.

HAROLD

Oh come on, you hate children.

EMMA

I don't hate children. In fact—

HAROLD

Of course you do.

EMMA

Actually, Harold, I—

HAROLD

You always have.

EMMA

Things have changed, I—

HAROLD

You made me promise, when we got married, that—

EMMA

Harold!

HAROLD

What?

EMMA

I'm pregnant.

HAROLD

What?

EMMA

My belly is filling with eggs. I can feel it.

HAROLD  
When did this happen?

EMMA  
It started a couple of days ago.

HAROLD  
I don't believe it. That's great!

EMMA  
You? But...you don't want kids. You hate kids!

HAROLD  
No I don't.

EMMA  
But you said you did.

HAROLD  
Well, you were so against the idea that I just sort of went along with it.

EMMA  
The point is, I can't stay here.

HAROLD  
Why not?

EMMA  
Harold! This place has no anemone! I won't raise my babies without an anemone to protect them.

HAROLD  
An anemone? But...

EMMA  
It's dangerous out there, what with the reefs dying and everything. I need to find a safe home.

HAROLD  
But I can get an anemone. In fact—

(Chris enters from left)  
CHRIS  
Cool roof, guys!

HAROLD

Chris, you could please wait—

CHRIS

Though I think I'll be spending most of my time indoors. You can't be too careful when it comes to sharks.

HAROLD

I don't think sharks eat sea stars.

CHRIS

Not to mention fishing nets! The sea can be dangerous if you're not careful.

HAROLD

Sure. Now, Chris, Emma and I have talked about this, and—

CHRIS

Speaking of which, did I tell you how I got kicked out of my apartment?

EMMA

No.

CHRIS

It has to do with a fishing net, actually. You see—

HAROLD

You don't need to explain, Chris.

CHRIS

—I got caught up in a fishing net. Can you believe it? One of the fisher-humans pulled me out of the water and, I guess, he doesn't like starfish.

HAROLD

Chris!

EMMA

Folks like that are just terrible, don't you think?

HAROLD

All right. Fine. So what happened?

CHRIS

She chopped me in half.

EMMA

What!?!

CHRIS

Well, more like two arms and three arms. It's hard to cut a starfish exactly in half.

HAROLD

Sure.

CHRIS

It's because we've got an odd number of arms. You have to cut very carefully and even then—

HAROLD

Yes. Indeed. So what happened?

CHRIS

So both of my halves made our way back to our apartment. We've spent the last couple of months regenerating.

HAROLD

Regenerating?

EMMA

That's right. You can do that.

HAROLD

Wait a minute, does that mean there are two of you?

CHRIS

Yeah. It was my other half that kicked me out. You see, I grew from the two-armed section. So Chris—the other Chris—had first dibs on the apartment.

HAROLD

He isn't going to move in as well?

CHRIS

Oh, no.

HAROLD

Thank God.

CHRIS

The other Chris has promised to visit, though.

HAROLD

Marvelous.

EMMA

This whole experience...it must have been terribly traumatic.

CHRIS

It's all right. I didn't really feel anything when I got cut in half. I don't have higher brain functions.

EMMA

That's good.

CHRIS

It does lead to all sorts of existentialist issues, though.

HAROLD

I imagine it would.

CHRIS

Like, who is the real me? Am I a whole starfish, or just part of one?

HAROLD

Chris—

CHRIS

And if we consider the concept of an eternal soul, do I have a whole soul, or just a piece?

HAROLD

Chris, we should talk about—

CHRIS

When I go to starfish heaven, will my soul be reunited with my other half, or will we continue to have separate existences?

HAROLD

Chris!

CHRIS

Yeah?

HAROLD

Yeah. Emma and I have discussed it, and I guess we won't be staying here.

CHRIS

Oh.

HAROLD

So you can use it for a few days, until I get the landlord to break the lease.

CHRIS

That's too bad, dude. You seem like a nice couple.

HAROLD

Thanks.

CHRIS

Okay. So I'll just go back to my old apartment and pick up a couple of things.

EMMA

That sounds good.

CHRIS

Though let me tell you, dividing up our stuff was pretty tough. But hey, I got the TV, forty percent of the movie collection, and one speaker! We should have a movie night.

HAROLD

Chris!

CHRIS

Okay. I'm going. But by the way, just so you know, breaking the least won't be a problem. There are other folks moving in already.

HAROLD

What?

CHRIS

Onto the outside.

EMMA

Someone's moving...onto the outside?

CHRIS

Yeah. The housing agency rents the outside separately. Didn't you know?

HAROLD

No!

CHRIS

Some folks have already moved onto the exterior. Don't worry, it's mostly immobile invertebrates...

HAROLD

Invertebrates?!?

CHRIS

Yeah. When I was scouting out the roof before, I found a couple of sponge larvae anchored down.

HAROLD

Sponges? On my house?

EMMA

That's all right. You like filtered water.

HAROLD

No, you like filtered water.

CHRIS

The sea anemone is moving in the day after tomorrow.

EMMA

An anemone?

CHRIS

Yeah. She's a real cutie. Her name's...uh...

HAROLD

Roberta.

CHRIS

Yeah. Roberta! You know her?

EMMA

An anemone? Moving in here?

CHRIS

Yeah.

EMMA

That's wonderful! When does she get here?

CHRIS

(Points offstage right)

Actually, she's behind that rock over there. She can only move about an inch per hour, so it'll take her a couple of days to get here.

EMMA

That's fantastic! We should go say hello. Thank you!

CHRIS

No problem. I didn't know you liked anemone so much.

EMMA

We're clownfish. We live in symbiosis with them.

CHRIS

In what?

EMMA

Symbiosis.

CHRIS

Symbi...huh?

HAROLD

Clownfish like to live with anemone. And they like to live with us.

CHRIS

Oh. Okay, dudes. Whatever floats your boat. I'm going to go get my stuff. I'll be back in a little while. Thanks again for putting me up!

(Chris exits, left)

EMMA

You knew about Roberta all along?

HAROLD

I wanted it to be a surprise.

(Beat)

So I take it you'll want to stay here?

EMMA

Absolutely! This is wonderful!

HAROLD

All right then. I'll leave you to it.

EMMA

Where are you going?

HAROLD

You said you wanted a separation.

EMMA

You don't need to go.

HAROLD

I don't?

EMMA

I thought you didn't want kids. So I assumed...well...

HAROLD

Oh, hon. You should have asked me.

EMMA

I'm sorry. I guess once the eggs started growing I sort of panicked.

HAROLD

It's all right. I should have told you about the house, and Roberta, right away.

EMMA

So you'll stay and be the father?

HAROLD

Absolutely.

EMMA

Even with the sponges?

HAROLD

Well, I guess I can live with them. I just hope they behave themselves. You know how out-of-control sponge parties can get. So...

EMMA

Yes?

HAROLD

How many do you think it will be?

EMMA

Children? Oh, I think only a few hundred.

(Lights down)

THE END