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Verticals & Horizontals

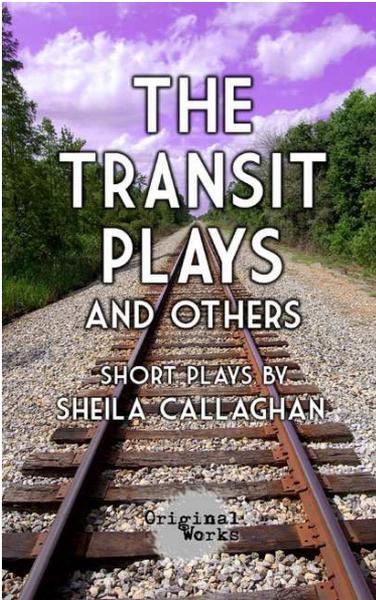
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Trade Edition, 2013

Printed in U.S.A.

ISBN 978-1-934962-88-6

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VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS

A Collection of Ten-Minute Plays
By Gary Garrison

For Tim Maculan,

because of your unwavering belief in me as a writer.

And for Kate Snodgrass,

**because so much of what I am as a writer, artist and
teacher is thanks to you.**

INTRODUCTION

As I write this, four of my ten-minute plays are being fully produced in different parts of the country. As I also write this, I don't have a single full-length play in production anywhere on the face of this planet. Hmm.

For years I resisted writing a ten-minute play because – in my naiveté – I didn't see their value as an artist. It's only when I began producing them in the playwriting program at NYU as a means of giving production opportunities to our students that I began to understand how truly difficult it was to write – not to mention, produce – ten-minute plays. Writing any play is hard, but writing a ten-minute play is *really* hard – particularly if you want to give the audience a satisfying experience in the theatre. Like everyone else, I'd always thought: "How hard could it be? It's ten pages, max. Should be a piece of cake. Should be easy. Should be – if nothing else – quick."

Boy, was I wrong.

When I began writing the form I made all the classic mistakes: some were sketches (not plays), while others were just long scenes. Still others were full-length plays chopped down to size. Some of the early plays I wrote were fifteen-to twenty-minute plays masquerading as ten-minute plays. I wrote plays with a ridiculous number of characters, complicated settings, overly complex plots, underwritten characterizations, theme-driven, gimmick heavy with overwrought, underwhelming dramatic theatrics.

In short, I wrote bad plays . . . and a lot of them.

After I'd been rejected by Actors Theatre of Louisville and the Humana Festival's Ten Minute Play contest for the one-thousandth time, I finally had my "ah-ha" moment. It's not particularly profound, but it changed my whole approach to writing the short form: write a good play that fits in the vessel of ten-minutes. That means compelling, complex characters, idiosyncratic dialogue, simple storytelling with large, resonant ideas. I must have stumbled on something right in that thinking because since I've done that, I've rarely written a ten-minute play that hasn't been produced five or six times.

This anthology is a collection of some of the better plays I've written (or, at least those that have been tested and refined in production). When I look back over the work as a whole, I'm keenly aware of several things: how deeply connected I am to what often explodes into public consciousness on the nightly news (*Gawk*, *Marc-Us*, *Storm on Storm* were all written after I'd seen something on the news that profoundly moved me), how I continue to grapple with what it means to be a gay man (*Game On*, *The Sweep*, *Verticals and Horizontals – Bradley's Story*) in this day and age and how illness can make you run away from someone (*Dump*), when you should be running towards them (*Caught*, *Without Candy*).

Finally, you'll notice there are two versions of the short play, *Verticals and Horizontals – Bradley's Story* and *Sonya's Story*. I wrote the male/male version first as the dance men often perform around each other when they're on the prowl. I then wondered what that same dance might look like in a female/male story; I wrote *Sonya's Story* to find out, which really evidences itself in the last third of the play.

This anthology bears the title *Verticals and Horizontals*, because it's my observation that you're either one or the other, and at some interesting point in life there's an intersection of values, beliefs, truths or life situations when you encounter someone on the opposite emotional end of the spectrum as you. What happens then? I hope you enjoy the plays, and that you discover if you're a vertical or a horizontal. Let me know.

Gary Garrison
Westport, Connecticut
October 2013

Special thanks to Jason Aaron Goldberg and Original Works Publishing for making this all so easy, to Tari Stratton for her expert editorial eye and Michel Wallerstein for so much support and encouragement through the time these plays were written.

Verticals and Horizontals was assembled as an evening of theatre for Playwrights Playground at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City in April, 2012, with the following cast:

Storm on Storm

Chicky Kate Levy
Norton Tim Maculan

Dump

Pauley Brooke Haney
Corrina Erin Mallon

The Sweep

Frank Tom Bozell
Johnson Tim Maculan

Verticals and Horizontals – Sonya’s Story

Sonya Brooke Haney
Nolan Tom Bozell

Gawk

Winnapeg Marjorie Johnson
Joyce Craine Kate Levy

Marc-us

Cordy Erin Mallon
Michael Tim Maculan
Adelphia Marjorie Johnson

Game On

Donnie Gary Garrison
Ted Tim Maculan

Caught, Without Candy

Amanda Brooke Haney
Donna Kate Levy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STORM ON STORM	11
DUMP	22
GAME ON.	34
GAWK	46
THE SWEEP.	58
CAUGHT, WITHOUT CANDY.	69
MARC-US.	80
VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS - SONYA'S STORY.	91
VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS - BRADLEY'S STORY.	103

STORM ON STORM

Storm on Storm received its world premiere at Stage-works/Hudson, New York in May, 2006, as part of their *Play by Play Festival*, under the direction of Laura Margolis, with this cast:

Norton Joe Quant

Chicky Eileen Schulyer

Subsequent productions include the 9th Annual Boston Theatre Marathon (2007); as part of *An Eclectic Evening of Shorts* for Artistic New Directions in New York City; as part of the *Summer Shorts Festival* at City Theatre in Miami, Florida; as part of *The Short Attention Span Festival* at The Barn Theatre in Key West, Florida; as part of *An Evening of Shorts: One-Act Plays for Theater-Loving People* at The Arts Center of the Capital Region, Troy, New York; and was a finalist for the Heideman Award at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

CHARACTERS:

NORTON—M. 49. Has been struck by lightning twice.

CHICKY—F. 48. Has quietly suffered through her husband being struck by lightning twice.

TIME:

Right now, minutes after a summer deluge of rain.

PLACE:

Norton and Chicky's backyard garden in Summit, New Jersey.

STORM ON STORM

(Norton sits on a bench under a dome-shaped trellis covered with ivy that's interwoven with a wide variety of white and lavender ribbons, bows, and flowers: it's clearly over-decorated for a wedding. At his feet is a large bouquet of white roses tied at the stems with a lavender ribbon, resting upside down with the stems in the air.)

Lights pop up to reveal Chicky, standing off to Norton's side, facing him, stiffly holding an open umbrella.)

CHICKY: *(Fed up.)* Alright, let's get it allllllllll out, Norton, can we? All the feelings, all the thoughts, all the heartache and headache. Everything! Let's leave no stone unturned, leave nothing unsaid.

NORTON: Have you ever left anything unsaid? I don't think so, Chicky.

CHICKY: *(Forging ahead.)* Yes, I admit it. It's hard to live with a man that's been struck by lightning . . . TWICE! Yes, I'm frightened to be close to you when we're outside and there's a storm on the horizon, as there is now. And no, I don't understand -- in fact NO ONE understands -- why you seem to bring bad weather with you everywhere you go.

NORTON: Not everywhere. That's an exaggeration.

CHICKY: Everywhere, Norton! For three years thunder, lightning, rain, sleet and snow -- not to mention the occasional hurricane force winds -- have followed you around like a puppy at your heels. You're banned from traveling in forty-three states. The Weather Channel has its own on-screen icon of you to let people know exactly where in the world you are so everyone else can

make travel plans. And while the scholars, scientists, meteorologists, universities, newspapers and fifth grade science clubs all try to figure out why Norton Templer, Lawn Furniture Salesman from Summit, New Jersey is "weather provoking" -- a term I still find uncomfortable, quite frankly -- I spend my days trying to love you as if nothing has happened. But you, my sweet but troubled husband, refuse to let that happen.

NORTON: Because I'm miserable!

CHICKY: WE'RE ALL MISERABLE! Not the least of which is your young daughter who begged you for months to let her elope.

NORTON: I wanted my daughter to have a traditional wedding outside in our beautiful back yard. Why is that so hard for everyone to understand?

CHICKY: What you wanted was to prove to the world that your run of bad weather-luck was broken after visiting some feather-wearing, rattle-shaking, clay-pot-making Shaman from Santa Fe who sells gas on the weekends at an Exxon station to make ends meet.

NORTON: He had a gift!

CHICKY: He had an act! And it got you where, Norton? Nowhere. So now that you've managed to rain out the rehearsal for your daughter's wedding, as well as seemingly flood three local counties due south of here, your daughter would like you to leave and take the bad weather with you. If you want a wedding, she'll have a wedding. But she won't have a wedding that involves her father because that comes with a hundred percent chance of rain, sleet, snow, hail or coastal swelling.

(A huge sigh. Thunder rumbles in the distance, making them both very uneasy.)

NORTON: *(Quietly.)* I'm not going anywhere, Ms. Doom and Gloom. So go back in the house.

(Norton miserably stares out at something in the distance, then maybe for the first time, notices the paper plate with a pile of chicken wings in his lap. Maybe for the first time, we notice the whole left side of him appears to be paralyzed. He grabs a chicken wing with his right hand and chews voraciously.)

CHICKY: Wings, Norton?

NORTON: Don't start with me, Chicky.

CHICKY: Who's starting? I'm just looking at that pile of disassembled chicken in your lap and it gives one pause.

NORTON: "Gives one pause?" Who talks like that, Chicky? I don't talk like that. Do you talk like that? I don't recall you talking like that, but then again, the last three years have been a bit of a blur for me.

(He bites into a wing voraciously and chews.)

CHICKY: You've got a pile of fried chicken wings from the rehearsal dinner on your lap, Norton. You've been on a very strict diet for two years because of your health, and today, with a lap full of wings, it all goes to hell.

NORTON: It all went to hell wayyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy before the wings. Three years ago I began my slow, torturous descent into hell and today I finally sunk to the lowest of the low: the underbelly of Satan's ball-sack. That's how low, how deep in Hell I am.

CHICKY: Oh, for God's sake, "Satan's ball-sack," Norton? Where in the world did you get something like that?

NORTON: In the same store you bought "it gives one pause." You might know the store. It's right on the corner of "Who-Gives-A-Shit Street" and "Stop-Bustin'-My-Balls Avenue."

CHICKY: You know, things would be just a little bit easier, if . . .

NORTON: What? If what? If three years ago I hadn't been struck by lightning but miraculously lived to tell the story? If I hadn't, not a year later, almost to the date, been struck again by yet another bolt of lightning -- something that's been documented only twice in all of history -- but happens to me: Norton Templer, Lawn Furniture Salesman from Summit, New Jersey. Things would be so much easier if what, if that hadn't happened?

CHICKY: I was going to say things would be so much easier if you weren't so dramatic about everything.

NORTON: Oh, gosh. I'm sorry. Am I being dramatic? Hmmmm. Now why would that be? Could it be that my daughter decides at her wedding rehearsal that I should not walk her down the aisle to give her away, but in fact should stand approximately two hundred feet away from her -- a fun fact she Googled last night when she couldn't sleep: what is the safe radius from a lightning strike? Two hundred feet. That would put me in the street, Chicky, to watch my daughter's wedding. And now I learn she'd like me to not be here at all! Or is it that my wife, who's concerned about me

DUMP

Dump was originally conceived and had its world premiere as part of the *A-Train Plays* for the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York City and was anthologized by Playscripts, Inc., following that production in 2005. It was subsequently produced as part of the 10th Annual Boston Theatre Marathon.

CHARACTERS:

PAULEY—F. 25 or 35. Fading. Tired. Finds her happiness in the smallest of places.

CORRINA—F. 25 or 35. Pauley's best friend. Attractive, energetic, painfully aware.

TIME:

A fall day in Manhattan, late afternoon.

PLACE:

A New York City subway car.

DUMP

(We hear the sound of a subway train rushing through the tunnel to its stop. The chime that signals the doors of the subway car opening brings the lights up.)

Pauley and Corrina, young women in their late 20's, enter the subway car mid-conversation -- and sit.)

PAULEY: So, yeah, I walk in and he's got his pants stuffed down around his ankles. He's standing on one foot, and he's got the other foot high up in the sink. Water is shooting out of the faucet, full blast, spilling everywhere, and he's got shaving cream lathered on his legs from his feet, past his ankles, up to his knees, up past his thighs, all the way up to his you know, his, his... you know, there. *(Indicating his groin.)* And he's got shaving cream there around his, his, his thing, and then two dots of shaving cream -- one on each nipple.

CORRINA: *(A burst of laughter.)* Oh, no. Oh, God. On his nipples?

PAULEY: And so I say, "Dad?! DAD! What are you doing?" Which is a stupid question because I can clearly see that he's -- hello -- shaving. Big, long strokes from the ankle all the way up to his thing. I mean, he's shaving like a pro. Like he's been doing it for years. Like in a way I've never done myself. You've never seen shaving like this. And he just smiles at me . . . this sad, pathetic smile.

CORRINA: I just hate this. I really just . . . just hate it; for you, for him. It's tragic. It's just so . . . God, it's tragic, isn't it?

PAULEY: (*Overlapping the first "tragic."*) So the sink is full of water. Full! To the rim, almost. And just above it, I swear, perched on this narrow, narrow shelf is his portable television set. It's just hanging there, ready to tip over and fall in at any moment. But I don't want to say anything and scare him, right?

CORRINA: Right! Of course not. Jesus, the man would be toast.

PAULEY: Exactly. So he's staring at the television, and this cooking show is on. Someone's teaching the world how to sauté liver, of all things. So he's shaving and watching the liver, and shaving and watching the liver, but real intense like. And as God as my witness the man gets a full-on, straight-up, hard-as-a-rock erection.

CORRINA: (*Another burst of laughter.*) Shuuuut up! No way. Shut UP! Shit. And it's your father, which is totally, uhm, something. Ewwwww. Oh, my God, this is just so horrible.

PAULEY: And I'm, like, not looking, but looking, but not wanting to, but having to anyway and knowing this will be imprinted in my memory until the end of time. Not to mention I'll never, ever eat liver again.

CORINNA: He's done some weird shit over the last two years, Pauley, but this . . . this is . . . this is just messed up, doll.

PAULEY: So I'm looking at my father, who's looking at the cow liver with a raging hard-on, and I think, "You know, Pauley, that's it. There's no more structure. No more form. No more rules. Nothing. It's broken, or he's broken, because if he can sport an erection in front of his own daughter without even considering –"

GAME ON

Game On was first produced under the title *It Belongs On Stage and Not In My Bed* for the HOMOgenius Festival at Manhattan Theatre Source, New York City, in June, 2003, directed by Courtney Wendell with the following cast:

Donnie Craig Lenti

Ted Adam Hunter Perez

The play underwent a significant rewrite for the 13th Annual Boston Theatre Marathon (2011), and had its world premiere under the title, *Game On*, by the SpeakEasy Stage Company, directed by Scott Sinclair with this cast:

Donnie Connor Christiansen

Ted Grant MacDermott

This version was directed and produced by Israel Horovitz at Studio Theatre as part of its *10x10 – 2012 Series* in The Byre Theatre, St. Andrews, Ireland, in June, 2012.

This play has been produced with younger (in their 20's) and older men (in their 40's); each variation has its own special poignancy.

CHARACTERS:

DONNIE—M. 29 or 42. Good-hearted, sweet, innocent; can be a lion when provoked.

TED—M. 32 or 48. Not so innocent.

TIME:

The present.

PLACE:

Next door to where you live.

GAME ON

(Shirley Bassey's "History Repeating" brings the house lights down. Donnie and Ted stand at Donnie's front door. It's the end of the evening of their first date.)

DONNIE: Well, thanks . . . and, you know, Ted, it was great. Really great. I mean, I've had, like, a hundred first dates so finally I meet someone who . . . wait. That didn't come out right. What I meant to say is that finally I meet someone who's not, like, a freak or living with his blind mother or a recovering crystal addict or - - wait. Not that there's anything wrong with recovery or blind mothers. I'm just trying to say, I had a great time and so thanks, a lot.

TED: Sure. It was fun.

DONNIE: Oh, and sorry about your shoe.

TED: No problem.

DONNIE: Boy, who knew? Salsa really stains, huh?

TED: Well, you know . . . suede and all.

DONNIE: I thought I spilled, like, just a tiny drop but half your shoe is covered! *(Brightly.)* But it came out of your shirt!

TED: *(Trying to be nice.)* Uh-huh. Almost.

DONNIE: Ted, if you want to step inside, I'm happy to, you know, spray something on it and wash it, dry it and I could even iron it for you. I excel in stain-removal. I mean, I have to: I live with me.

TED: Donnie, it's okay. Really. We had a great time, and it was nice to meet you, and soooooooooo, I think I'll just head out.

DONNIE: Oh. Okay, then. Okay, uhm. Well . . .

(Donnie leans in for his kiss good-night. Ted leans in, and at the last millisecond, whips around and gives him a side to side shoulder hug. It's really awkward for both of them. Ted tries to break the moment.)

TED: Nothing like a good ol' hug, huh? *(Faces him and pats him on both shoulders, finalizing the moment.)* Be good, guy. And I'll . . . I'll see you again.

(He starts to walk away. Donnie steps forward.)

DONNIE: We won't though, huh?

TED: Sorry?

DONNIE: We won't see each other again. Right? And that's okay, Ted. I mean, we're both pretty new to this, huh? So . . .

TED: You know, I should set that straight. I think, maybe, I exaggerated that a little. I'm not that new to it. I guess I was maybe thinking it just feels... new... with every new person. You know what I mean?

DONNIE: So have you dated a lot?

TED: Oh, no. Not a lot--a lot.

DONNIE: Like what? Five, six, seven guys?

TED: In what, what length of time are we talking here?

DONNIE: I was thinking in, you know, ALL time. See I thought . . . I remember you saying that you're . . . and your profile said "Almost a virgin," or was it "like a virgin," or . . .

TED: Oh, gosh, those profiles . . . they . . . They're just so hard to write, aren't they?

DONNIE: Well, I'm really new to this and I can use some straight-up answers here. I mean, did I do something wrong, besides the salsa spill? Oh, and the big burp. But I swear I don't know where that came from. I'm not in the habit of just releasing gas, just gushing forth...

TED: Donnie, look, don't worry about it, okay. It's really late and I should be going. I have a really big day tomorrow.

(Ted drifts away, leaving Donnie alone, hurt.)

TED: *(To himself.)* Shit. *(Turning to Donnie.)* You know what? You're right. You're absolutely right. We spent some time together, shared some chips and really good salsa, half of which is on my shoe right now, so I should just be honest and say . . . I should say . . . Hmmmm. I should just say, you know, you're . . . I mean, and we . . . we . . . you . . . Hmmmm. I-should-just-be honest . . . and say . . . *(Clears his throat.)* . . . Alright. Uh, okay. I'm totally punting here. What would you like to know?

DONNIE: Why didn't we spark? Ignite. Connect. Why didn't we, you know . . . why aren't we . . . why did you hug me like I was your brother or something?

TED: Well, you know, Donnie, I don't always...

DONNIE: Oh, don't even say you don't kiss on the first date. New at this -- I am. Born in another century -- I'm not.

(Ted looks at him. How does he answer that?)

TED: Wow, this is hard. This is really awkward and, uhm . . . not what you think's going to happen on a first date, or any date, but okay, you asked. You're . . . well, you're not really . . . *(Really searching.)* There's a lightness, a breezy-ness, a lighter than air kind of quality to, to, tooooooooooooooooooouuuuuur . . . soul, and that . . . that, that isn't, uhm, it's good, if you, you like . . .

DONNIE: Wind, I guess. You're saying I'm "breezy?" C'mon, just be straight with me.

TED: Okay, let's go about it this way. You know, my profile.

DONNIE: Right. "Almost a virgin."

TED: I said more things than just that, but right, that profile. That's the one. Well, you know, further down, it says . . . the "seeking" part.

DONNIE: "Seeking Mr. Right, or Mr. Right Now. Let the fates decide. Looking for body, heart and soul." Well, I think I have all of that.

TED: Keep reciting.

DONNIE: Uhm, "Body, heart and soul." Uhm, I think you said, "Tall would be good. Handsome would be good. Straight-acting a must."

TED: Right! Well, there it is.

DONNIE: Oh, c'mon. I told you I was five feet, nine inches tall and if that was going to be a problem, then...

TED: No, no, no. That's not a problem.

DONNIE: (*A beat.*) So you don't think I'm handsome? You said I looked like my picture and when I sent you my picture you said I was handsome.

TED: Cute. I think I said you were "cute."

DONNIE: No, if you said "cute," we wouldn't be having this date. You absolutely said handsome. Soooooooooooooo?

TED: C'mon, Donnie, this is crazy.

DONNIE: I fit the bill, at least according to your profile. Heart, body, soul, handsome, almost tall.

TED: Well, no. You . . . you left something out, didn't you?

(*Donnie whips it out and unfolds it. Scans down the column.*)

TED: This was a really, really bad idea. I thought I could help. I thought I could say something that would . . . but I think we're tanking here, so maybe I should go.

DONNIE: "Straight-acting?" Is that it? I'm not "straight-acting?"

TED: Well, I . . . wouldn't go quite . . . that far. (*Tired.*) Look, Donnie. You're a sweet guy. But sometimes it just doesn't work out for, you know, a hundred reasons and . . .

GAWK

Gawk was first produced at Pulse Ensemble Theatre in New York City in March, 1997. It was then significantly rewritten for the Turnip Theatre Festival in 1998 and had its world premiere production at StageWorks/Hudson for the *Black & White Festival* in summer, 2000, directed by Laura Margolis with the following cast:

Winnapeg Dunn Cheryl Turner

Joyce Craine Giulia Pagano

The play had subsequent productions at the Directors Company in New York City for the *Don't Blink Festival* in July, 2001 and for the *Quickies New Works Festival* at Actors Theatre in 2003.

CHARACTERS:

WINNAPEG DUNN—F. 62. African-American. Gentle by nature. Hard-working, loving, compassionate. Has lived in the Chicago ghetto far too long.

JOYCE CRAINE—F. 55. A school teacher in the Chicago system for 30 years. Seen a lot of change. A list maker. Needs order. Hapless.

TIME:

Today.

PLACE:

Winnapeg's tenement apartment on the south side of Chicago.

GAWK

(Winnapeg sits in her old, black-oak rocking chair comforting herself with a slow rock forward, a hesitation, then back. A wall clock makes an unusually loud tick-tock. Winnapeg checks the time on her watch, holds the watch to her ear, shakes her wrist, then winds her watch.

We see Joyce Craine, clutching her tan colored, patent-leather purse -- the center of her being -- enter the stage and check the imaginary apartment door numbers against an address on an envelope, all the while incessantly dabbing at the perspiration on her face with an embroidered handkerchief. She makes her way to Winnapeg's very real door.

Joyce's knock brings Winnapeg slowly to her feet. She makes her way to the door, straightening her sweater and skirt as she walks. Three dead-bolts later, she opens the door.)

JOYCE: Mrs. Dunn? Winnapeg Dunn?

WINNAPEG: Yes, ma'am. That would be me.

JOYCE: I'm Joyce Craine.

WINNAPEG: Well, nice to meet ya' Miss Craine, and real nice a ya' to come all this way, ma'am. Now, how 'bout comin' on in?

(Joyce steps quickly through the door, dabbing almost painfully at the perspiration on her brow, then the corners of her mouth. A long, quiet moment.)

WINNAPEG: You had no trouble gettin' here, did 'ya? Did you drive, or come by the L? I can't drive anymore 'cause my old shoulder hurts me . . . 'S somethin' the matter, Miss Craine?

JOYCE: (*Blurting out, rapidly.*) Why do you ask? Because I'm pale, or am I flushed? Well, not to worry, Mrs. Dunn. I go back and forth -- pale/flushed/pale/flushed all day long, hour to hour. It's annoying.

WINNAPEG: Uhm-hmmm.

JOYCE: See, I'm thin-skinned; practically translucent. It's from my father's side of the family. Certainly not from my mother's. They didn't have skin: they had hides. (*A big gulp of air.*) You're going to have to stop me, Mrs. Dunn, because I'm upset and I'm just babbling and I'll keep talking until you say something and maybe not even then.

WINNAPEG: Did you bring the letter, Miss Craine?

JOYCE: Oh, yes! Of course, the letter. I'm so sorry. Let me give you the letter. (*She doesn't.*) As I said on the phone, I knew you'd want this. I certainly would have wanted it if I were you. And no one saw it but me. You know, I was surprisingly calm, Mrs. Dunn. I've never seen, well, street violence like that. And I assure you, it's not like in the movies. It's all very quick, and very, very quiet.

WINNAPEG: S'that so?

JOYCE: That is, until the ambulance came. And those screeching police cars. Then the noise was just short of deafening. People began to gather and were pointing and talking and making it an event for horribly wrong reasons, and I just blurted out, "Don't gawk." "DON'T -- GAWK!" They ignored me, as you might expect, but I repeated it over and over: "Don't gawk!"

(*The sound of the clock grows louder, then fades.*)

JOYCE: Please know I never left Darren's side and Mrs. Dunn, you're going to have to reach in my purse and take this letter out because all I seem to be able to do is talk.

(Winnapeg reaches for her purse. Joyce moves it from her reach.)

WINNAPEG: Now, Miss Craine, I'm gonna take that letter, but first, you're gonna have to let me have it, honey.

JOYCE: *(Losing the battle.)* I'm sorry. I . . . I just had this picture of how all of this was going to be, and nothing is falling into its rightful place . . . You're so calm.

WINNAPEG: Calm! I'm not calm, Miss Craine.

JOYCE: Then strong, maybe. Of course, that's it. You're just being strong, Mrs. Dunn. And I envy that because clearly I'm not.

(The clock ticks louder, then fades.)

JOYCE: I'm the kind of person that doesn't do well with things I haven't planned for. I'm a fourth grade teacher which demands that I chart, construct and plan everything from when my kids pick their pencils up to when they put them down. And I like that -- that ability -- so you can imagine with something like this

WINNAPEG: Am I gonna get that letter, Miss Craine, or are you gonna talk a little more, sweetheart?

(The clock ticks louder, then fades.)

JOYCE: *(Opening purse.)* Mrs. Dunn, I brought the letter exactly the way I found it. I had thought to -- to clean it up -- but, as you'll see, there was no way to do that.

WINNAPEG: Miss Craine, I was used to Darren's filthy, trashy mouth. Lord, for a ten-year-old boy, he had more blue, loose language than a street drunk. So I'm sure there's nothing in that letter that would surprise me.

JOYCE: Oh, I didn't mean "clean up" what was inside. I meant . . . (*Her voice trails off. She carefully hands her the blood-soaked letter. A long, quiet moment.*) I was walking behind him -- on a sidewalk that is in such ill-repair, and we were both side-stepping and almost hopping over the cracks, and the car -- the one I told you about -- came by and the next thing I knew, Darren was laying on the ground. But I thought he had tripped, see, on the sidewalk. But, of course, he hadn't. And when he didn't get up, or move, I called to him and then I was right up on him, and saw that he'd been shot. (*Quietly dabbing at her neck.*) The letter was in his hand, and I thought, well, when people come they'll question everything, and who knows what will happen to this letter. And since it was addressed to you, I thought it best to slip the letter out of his hand before anyone saw it.

(*The clock ticks louder, then fades.*)

JOYCE: Just so you know, for the last week, I've had it pressed between the pages of my Bible. I thought that was proper.

WINNAPEG: (*Looking at letter.*) Uhm-hum, that's his handwriting, all right. The child *never* made his "p"s close all the way. Not that he didn't try. Lord, I drilled that boy one day from sun-up to sun-down just on his "p"s. And look, it didn't change a thing, God rest his sweet, little soul.

JOYCE: (*Over-consoling.*) Most of the kids in my class don't close their "p"s, Mrs. Dunn. But what can you do? We talk about completion, we talk about fulfilling a stroke, but the "p"s, the capital "B" and that ever-hateful "d" has always been a problem -- especially to Darren -- and he had a "D" in his name!

WINNAPEG: (*Interrupting.*) You taught Darren?

JOYCE: Excuse me?

WINNAPEG: You never said on the phone that you taught Darren.

JOYCE: Didn't I? Oh, well, I, I certainly did. I was his reading and writing teacher.

WINNAPEG: I'm surprised you never said that, Miss Craine. Yes, ma'am, I have to say, I'm really surprised.

JOYCE: May I have a glass of water?

WINNAPEG: It's been turned off. As you can see, I'm moving. No reason a woman my age should stay in this neighborhood any longer than she has to. I wouldn't have stayed this long, but Darren didn't want to change schools. That school was his anchor, Miss Craine. Besides me, that's all that little boy had. Why, he couldn't wait to get up in the mornin' and get his clothes on so he could run, not walk, to that school.

JOYCE: You must have been so proud.

WINNAPEG: (*Overlapping "proud."*) I was always surprised that Darren cared anything about that school 'cause there were a few teachers who just wore his little butt out with meanness.

THE SWEEP

The Sweep had its world premiere at the 11th Annual Boston Theatre Marathon, May, 2009, produced by the Zeitgeist Stage Company, directed by David J. Miller with the following cast:

Johnson Rick Park

Frank Michael Steven Costello

CHARACTERS:

FRANK—M. 45. A ladies man, or so he thinks. A good-time Charley. Doesn't slow down for much.

JOHNSON—M. 47 Frank's best friend for years. Gay, good-natured, a little emotional.

TIME:

Early evening in December.

PLACE:

A waiting room in a hospital.

THE SWEEP

(Lights pop up on a waiting room in a hospital. Stock waiting room furniture: chairs, a couple of end tables, magazines, newspapers strewn about.)

Frank, in a hospital gown, reading glasses, jeans under the gown, no shoes but one white sock, one red sock, perches on a chair, quietly and quickly ticking off and thinking through each item on a written list. The list is written on the bottom of a well-worn loafer.

Johnson practically bolts or bursts into the waiting room; he's run through miles of hospital hallways.)

JOHNSON: Are you kidding me? Are you fuckin' kidding me?

FRANK: *(Checking his watch.)* You made it! With time to spare in the visiting hours. That's my boy! How's it going, Johnson?

JOHNSON: *(Overlapping.)* Next time you call me and say "meet me in the waiting room at the hospital," you might want to start with -- oh, I don't know -- the name of the hospital. Yeah, that'd be good. Because this city has four. Or how about a wing of a certain hospital, because this particular hospital has eight. Eight wings, Frank. Eight fuckin' wings, Frank. The only wing I didn't run up and down twice looking for your silly ass was the maternity wing because unless I'm mistaken, you're not pregnant.

FRANK: Well, there's no way I could get pregnant. But, on the other hand, I could easily GET someone pregnant. In which case . . .

JOHNSON: Shut up, Frank. Because if I had thought of that, I would have run up and down another wing of this hospital.

FRANK: Hey, wait a minute. Where are your glasses, Johnson?

JOHNSON: Left them at home; was racing to get here -- like a madman, like an idiot -- and forgot them.

FRANK: Johnson, you know you can't see shit without your glasses.

JOHNSON: Right. Right. Yeah, well, there's that problem. And then there's the problem of you can't really drive a car without gas, which I found out the hard way because I didn't have my glasses on to read the fuel gauge. And then there's the problem of signing the chrome counter top twice because I couldn't see the lines on the credit card receipt so I just kept signing the chrome counter top and entertaining the long line of people behind me. But enough about me. How are you, Frank? And what brings us here together on this cold, grey day in December, which I'm not dressed for.

FRANK: (*Laughing.*) Oh, my God. You are such a fuckin' queen.

JOHNSON: Wha--Whoa! Whoooooooa. Everything I just said, everything from my appearance here forward, has nothing to do with me being a queen but everything to do with you being a selfish, narcissistic, often vague, often obtuse, often . . . You know what? Forget that. Let's talk about what we're not talking about.

FRANK: Like what?

JOHNSON: (*Flatly.*) Hmm. Hmmmmmm. What could it be? (*Leaning in.*) The hospital, you asshole. Why are you here? And why am I here?

(*Frank studies Johnson for a short while, then.*)

FRANK: I love you, man. I really love you, Johnson. And I'm just sorry that I couldn't . . . be, you know . . .

JOHNSON: Wait. Are you giving me the "I'm straight, you're gay, so I can't love you the way you want me to love you" talk? Because we had that talk, like, twenty years ago over bad nachos and imported Danish beer. So I'm cool with it, bro.

FRANK: Are you? Are you really?

JOHNSON: Yes, Franklin. And if I wasn't, I've had the last twenty years to get used to it, for Christ's sake. What's the matter with you? (*A beat.*) Oh, shit. You didn't get laid last night either, did you? That's why you're all vulnerable and shit. What happened?

(*Frank studies him a moment. How much should he say?.*)

FRANK: Okay, last night I'm getting ready for my date with Joanne. I get the fire going in the fireplace, but it's a little smoky in the room, so I crack the front door and stuff a rag in it. Then I go to the bedroom to make the bed and had to clear a path from the bedroom door to the bed. And, swear to God, there was, like, ten loads of laundry down there. Anyway, I'm making the bed and I'm thinking about how I'm really looking forward to seeing Joanne . . . and that's the last thing I remember. Next thing I know, I'm here. In the cardiac care unit. With, like, wires and shit hooked up to me and that annoying beep, beep, beep monitor thing that tells you that you're alive but not for how long.

JOHNSON: (*Now really concerned.*) What happened, Frank? Did you have a heart attack?

FRANK: I had an "episode." That's what they call it when they don't know what the hell it is: you've had a heart episode.

JOHNSON: (*Touching his arm.*) Frank, buddy, what's going on?

FRANK: I don't know. They don't know. So they're all about the tests. Tests, tests and more tests. I'm supposed to be in my room right now for another test. But I had to see you first -- alone -- and I'm sharing this room with an Egyptian guy that's chanting loudly . . . with a lot of high notes. So I needed some privacy. Anyway, here's the deal. Now, I think we can agree I don't have your propensity for drama, right?

JOHNSON: Yes, bitch, go ahead.

FRANK: But, my "episode" got me to thinking, what would have happened if I just dropped dead? I mean, I was making the bed and then, boom, I was here. So I'm a little freaked out, and I'm thinking, what if I had just died? The will's in order, yeah, and the papers that say cremate me and scatter me to the wind are signed and sealed. But who's going to go into my apartment and dig through my shit and pack it up? And do what with it?

JOHNSON: Okay. I'm beginning to understand.

FRANK: Well, not really. You think you do, but no, you don't. I mean, yes, I do want you to be a person that does a part of that, but not all of that.

JOHNSON: Okay, totally lost now.

FRANK: Right. See, I figure if I croak, my ex -- may she burn, burn, burn in the fiery, molten pits of Hell -- and my ultra-conservative mother and father, and my fucked up, conservative elementary school teacher sister will want to comb through my shit and take stuff. And I'm okay with that. (*Looking at him intently.*) But there is some stuff no one in your family should see, if you get my drift. (*Waits for a reaction.*) No one who remembers you as a cute little blonde boy with dimples that always wore denim shorts and striped t-shirts and red high tops should see what you don't want them to see because it would, like, alter their memory of you in a way that maybe you don't want. Or maybe your ex-wife will see something in your apartment that will give her shit to talk about you for decades with her bitter, jaded, nasty, bitchy, diet-addicted, man-eating girlfriends.

JOHNSON: Okay . . . okay . . . now I got it: you want me to take the porno out of your apartment?

FRANK: (*Almost hugging him.*) I knew you'd understand! See, because you're my best buddy, and because we've been friends forever, and because you're gay and you live and let live, I just think you're, like, the perfect person to do the sweep.

JOHNSON: The what?

FRANK: The sweep. You know, swoop in, sweep the apartment clean of . . . of the dirt and swoop out.

JOHNSON: "Swoop in -- sweep - swoop out?" You've really thought this through. Hmmm. Alright, but just tell me there's nothing weird, or nasty or I'll discover

CAUGHT, WITHOUT CANDY

Caught, Without Candy had its world premiere at the 14th Annual Boston Theatre Marathon, 2012, produced by the Orfeo Group and directed by Daniel Berger-Jones with this cast:

Amanda Amanda Collins

Donna Georgie Lyman

CHARACTERS:

AMANDA—F. 32. A little dry, practical, painter.

DONNA—F. 35. An excellent nurse; Amanda's wife.

SETTING:

Amanda and Donna's home, Westport, Connecticut

TIME:

At dusk on Halloween.

CAUGHT, WITHOUT CANDY

(Amanda and Donna sit rigidly apart perched on the sofa, ankles together, knees together, each holding a full bowl of Halloween candy.)

Amanda wears a clown wig and a red ball nose. From the neck down, she wears her paint clothes, dotted with bright colors. Donna is dressed like a nurse . . . because she is a nurse. A stethoscope hangs around her neck; a thermometer is clipped in her pocket.

Rage hangs in the air. Finally, Donna can't take it any longer. She bolts across the sofa, grabs Amanda's clown wig and throws it across the room.)

DONNA: At least get rid of that fuckin' wig!

AMANDA: Your costume is so much better? Oh, look, I'm a nurse! *(Rescuing her wig.)* Of course, all I did was leave the hospital, drive home, walk in the house, open the medicine cabinet and stick a thermometer in my pocket -- a rectal thermometer, I might add -- but I'm a nurse. Nurse Donna. Or should I call you, "Nurse-I'm-too-fuckin'-lazy-to-get-a-REAL-costume?"

DONNA: *(Raging.)* I brought home my stethoscope!

AMANDA: What?! That makes it a costume? A stethoscope?! Why didn't you stick a fuckin' loaf of Wonder Bread in your pocket and call yourself a baker? Why didn't you strap on one of those goddamn power tools you've got and call yourself a carpenter?

DONNA: And thank God I did bring home my stethoscope because when the Trick or Treaters see you in that horrible wig and sinister clown nose, and you frighten them and they shit their pants...

AMANDA: What are you going to do, see if their turd has a heartbeat with your *stethoscope*, Nurse Donna? And what, exactly, is a "sinister clown nose"? It's a red ball, for God's sake! It's not happy, it's not sad, it's not sinister, it's a fuckin' clown nose!

DONNA: Why do you do this? Why do you have to ruin every holiday?

AMANDA: Heeeeeerrrrre we go. Why are we here? Why did we ever move here?

DONNA: (*On "go."*) It doesn't matter if it's Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, New Year's . . .

AMANDA: I'm surprised, Donna, that somebody that works in a pediatric care unit in a hospital doesn't know that Halloween isn't a national holiday . . .

DONNA: (*Interjecting.*) I know it's not a holiday, Amanda.

AMANDA: . . . Which is even more surprising, since you hate children.

DONNA: I do NOT hate children.

AMANDA: What's even more surprising is that you wanted to move to a suburb full of what? -- Children! Everyone on this block knows you hate children.

DONNA: I do not -- hate -- children! Why do people think that?

AMANDA: Because you try to run them over with your car!

DONNA: One. One fat, loud-mouthed, bitchy kid named Becky . . .

AMANDA: That you tried to run over!

DONNA: She called me a dyke!

AMANDA: YOU ARE A DYKE! I'M A DYKE!
WE'RE DYKES. Everyone knows we're dykes.

DONNA: That is not true.

AMANDA: Do you think the Neighborhood Association gives a Home Depot gift card to everybody that moves in here?

DONNA: That doesn't mean anything. A lot of people go to Home Depot.

AMANDA: Do a lot of people have a rainbow flag decal that stretches from one side of their SUBARU OUT-BACK to the other, blaring retro k.d. lang music as they screech up the street and try to run over the nearest child?

DONNA: Let's talk about your stereotyping, can we? Or better yet, let's not talk about it. Why don't you just paint it on one of your tortured canvases like every other topic you hide from?

AMANDA: Wait! I hide from topics? Me? Are you seriously suggesting that in this couple that I am the one that . . . did you say, "tortured?!"

DONNA: And for the record, I haven't listened to k.d. lang in forever.

AMANDA: If forever is a week, you're right. Because in the last week, you replaced retro k.d. lang with retro Melissa Etheridge.

DONNA: Your self-loathing is something I really think we should discuss.

AMANDA: Therapy, Donna? Really? You're going to give me an Oprah moment with this bowl of gluten-free, sugar-free, nut-free, citrus-free candy on my lap? Is it really the time?

DONNA: Did you leave the front door open with the screen door latched so we can hear the Trick or Treaters?

AMANDA: Yes, we can hear them as they walk -- past -- our house, here in our lovely suburban neighborhood. And I took down all the paintings, in case you didn't notice, of anything that looked remotely erotic, sexual, vaginal or clitoral.

DONNA: (*Jerking the bowl from her hands.*) You don't have to do this.

AMANDA: (*Jerking it back.*) Yes, I do!

DONNA: (*Jerking it back.*) No, you don't! If you don't want to hand out candy, then don't.

(*Amanda gets on her hands and knees and angrily picks up the loose candy that's fallen from the bowl.*)

AMANDA: There's not going to be anyone to hand out candy to because everyone knows you hate children and they're boycotting our house.

MARC-US

Marc-Us was originally written under the title *Padding the Wagon*, and premiered as part of *Unity Fest* for the 4th Unity Theatre Company in New York City, December, 2001. It was then produced at Primary Stages in New York City, March, 2002, as part of its *A Moment of Bliss Festival*. Significantly rewritten, it had its professional world premiere at Stageworks/Hudson as part of their *Play by Play Festival*, May, 2002, directed by Laura Margolis with the following cast:

Michael Kevin Craig West

Cordy Yvonee Perry

Adelphia Eileen Schuyler

After this production, the play was significantly rewritten under the title, *An Angel in the Early Bird Special* and produced at Manhattan Theatre Source as part of their *HOMOgenius Festival of Short Plays*, June, 2002, and the Boca Raton Theatre Guild in May, 2003. For this anthology, the play has been rewritten again, eliminating the character of Adelphia, and taking the title, *Marc-Us*.

CHARACTERS:

CORDY—F. 22. Southern, distracted and fast-talking -- until she can't be.

MICHAEL—M. 40. From San Francisco. Successful, content, happy -- until today.

TIME:

December 30, 2001

PLACE:

The viewing platform of the World Trade Center disaster.

MARC-US

(Lights bleed up on the viewing platform of the World Trade Center Disaster at Fulton Street and Broadway. It is December 30, 2001 -- the first day the platform is open to the public.)

Cordy stands with her back to us just upstage, head down, touching her face, her eyes. Michael steps onto the platform. He stares straight ahead, takes a deep breath, then slowly charges forward. Right when he reaches center, Cordy turns and charges forward. They collide.)

MICHAEL: Oohumpf.

CORDY: Oh, my Gawd! Oh, my Lord! Are you al-riiiiiight?

MICHAEL: Good. Fine. Everything's okay.

CORDY: Could you help me and just walk me over to a side or somethin', and get me the hell out of the way? I got a pair of contacts that are glued to the inside of my eyelids, so I can't see nuthin'.

MICHAEL: Uhhhh . . . well, yeah, sure.

(He gently takes her by the arm and walks her to the edge of the platform.)

CORDY: *(Trying to focus on Michael.)* Thank you, sir, that is so nice of you. I'm just as blind as an ol' goat and I got these contacts 'cause my glasses make me look about a hunnerd years old. So I got 'em for my trip here and I ain't seen half of New York 'cause they're just like frozen up there, or somethin'. Anyway, you don't need to know all that. But lissun, 'for you go,

do you see a girl that's tall, red hair, green eyes, bright yellor shirt with a picture of Paula Deen layin' on a platter with lettuce around her and an apple in her mouth like she's a, you know, big ol' stuffed pig?

MICHAEL: (*Earnestly looking around.*) Uhhh, no. I don't see anyone that fits that description.

CORDY: Well, no one should fit that description, but that's Darlene -- Gawd help me -- my sister. And she has a weak bladder which means goin' anywhere with her is, you know, major tripus interruptus. So I thank she left me stranded here while she's lookin' for a bathroom. And all I seem to be able to do is, well, 'mong other thangs, run into people and cause bodily injury. I'm really sorry.

MICHAEL: No problem . . . Well, I should get on my way.

CORDY: Okay, well, nice meetin' ya', and thanks again. And jus' so you know: I have found the people of New York City to be very, very sweet. Not at all like whatcha hear about.

MICHAEL: Thanks, but I'm not from here. I'm from San Francisco.

CORDY: Really?! Oh, I loooooove San Fran. It's just so pretty, and the people are just so sweet. And when I was there . . . (*Catching herself.*) You know what? You need to jus' go and get on, 'cause I'll sit here and talk ya' into a coma, 'cause that's what I do when I get nervous. (*Confiding.*) See, I don't really wantta see this, but I think I should 'cause it's the only way it's gonna make it really real for me, and I think you gotta know

this kinda horror first-hand or it just becomes bad story-tellin' to your kids. And this is too important to tell bad, made-up stories about. 'Sides, we come all this way from Houston to see it and I have this damn disposable camera . . . *(Rips it from her bag.)* . . . that my momma give me to take pictures, and do I want to take pictures? Hell, no! This isn't an attraction, for Gawd's sake, it's a tragedy. *(Shoots her hand straight up over her head with her camera and takes a series of random shots.)*

Gawd, I'm jus' miserable . . . Listen, thanks for listenin', but you need to go on.

MICHAEL: Well, frankly, I, uhm, I'm a having a little trouble looking myself. Which is really weird because I've waited so long just to get right here, right at this spot. And now that I'm here, it's not . . . it's just not easy like I thought it was going to be.

CORDY: 'Cause we have hearts, and we're looking right at all this destruction and that's not easy for anybody.

MICHAEL: It's a little more personal than that.

CORDY: Ohhhhh . . . because . . . ya' knew somebody in there?

MICHAEL: Yeah.

CORDY: Somebody close to ya'?

MICHAEL: Yeah.

CORDY: Oh, my goodness. Oh, I'm so sorry. That's got to be really sad for you.

MICHAEL: Yeah, pretty sad.

CORDY: Well, no wonder you can't look.

MICHAEL: I am going to look, I just have a thousand things rushing through my head and I can't seem to clear it all out to -- I don't know -- take in what I think I need to take in.

CORDY: Well, we have to do somethin', look or go, 'cause they only give us fifteen minutes up here. That's how long the ticket's good for. So maybe we should do it together or just . . . go. Would ya' rather just go?

MICHAEL: I can't. I had to fight too hard just to get here.

CORDY: (*Softly.*) I know. That's why I'm here.

MICHAEL: What do you mean?

CORDY: Don't listen to me. I'm just ramblin'. Okay, take my hand. (*He does.*) I'm Cordy, by the way.

MICHAEL: Michael.

CORDY: Hi, Michael. Okay, so we'll both look and then we'll go. And somewhere along the way I'll find Darlene and push her in front of a car for makin' me do this alone. Well, not alone, but ya' know what I mean. Ready?

MICHAEL: Wait a minute. You can't see, can you? Your contacts?

CORDY: Oh, Michael, don't think bad about me but that was a total lie. I don't wear contacts, but Darlene thinks I do. I made the whole thang up in case she was still around watchin' me, which she does a lot. Just

watches me. Says I'm like watchin' bad t.v. See, I wasn't sure I could look in front of her, so I made the contact thing up in case I couldn't. My whole family's just nuts. If you knew Alfie and Bernard -- that's my parents, you understand. Alfie and Bernard, "A" and "B", I'm Cordy, and that's "C" and my sister, "Darlene," makes "D." A-B-C-D. My parents just loved the basics.

MICHAEL: Thanks, Cordy, for making this . . . well, if nothing else, just talking me through it.

CORDY: That's what I'm here for. Ready?

(They look at one another, then at the ground in front of them. Slowly they turn outward and see the destruction. Michael looks frozen, almost lifeless.)

CORDY: You okay, Michael?

MICHAEL: No. *(Blurts out in front of him:)* MARC! MARCUS?! I'M . . . I'M HERE, BABY! I'M RIGHT HERE.

(Cordy slowly brings an arm up and lays it on Michael's shoulders. Michael lands back in reality. He never takes his eyes off the disaster sight.)

MICHAEL: He's still there. I can feel him.

CORDY: Can you? That's good, Michael. He's been waitin' for you.

MICHAEL: *(A long look out, then to her.)* Marc was my partner for fourteen pretty incredible years. It was a really special kind of love. Something I didn't even know existed. I know people say this about other peo-

VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS

SONYA'S STORY

Originally written under the title *Rug Store Cowboy* for Michael Wright's book, *Master Class in Playwriting*, this play was originally written as a play between two men. For its first production, a significant rewrite was written changing the younger man character to a young woman, and thematic ideas were shifted. This version had its world premiere at Stagemworks/Hudson in 2003 for their *Play by Play Festival* in New York and directed by Laura Margolis, with this cast:

Sonya Amy LeBlanc

Nolan David Sitler

This version was subsequently produced in the same year for the Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Short Play Festival.

CHARACTERS:

SONYA—F. 25. Trying too hard to be a good employee.
Easily flustered. Attractive, but hidden.

NOLAN—M. 45. Southern through and through.
Wealthy, raucous, loud, confident . . . kind.

TIME:

Early afternoon.

PLACE:

A rug store, mid-town Manhattan.

VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS
SONYA'S STORY

(The stage is empty save one large rolled up Persian rug off to stage right. Sonya enters with a slip of paper in her hand. She looks around the empty space, looks off to both sides of the stage, and then timidly:)

SONYA: Mr. Fisher? *(Walks towards the carpet.)* MR. FISHER?

(Slowly the carpet begins unrolling without Sonya noticing. When it hits Sonya's feet, she yelps and steps over it. Nolan Fisher, smiling from ear to ear, rolls out the end of the carpet.)

NOLAN: Lord have mercy, it was hot in there! Almost passed out twice and thought I was gunna puke! Wouldn't that have been a helluva mess to discover? You came just in the nick of time, Ms. Sonya, 'cuz I was waitin' and sweatin' and dry heavin' and waitin' and . . .

SONYA: *(Caught off guard; rambling.)* I was checking on the price for you, Mr. Fisher, because you said you wanted to know the price and these rugs just came off the truck and I didn't know the price so I thought I'd check the price for you because OH MY GOD WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN THE RUG, MR. FISHER? *(Quickly catching herself.)* You know what? It doesn't matter. I mean, maybe that's your way of, you know, feeling the rug. We encourage that. At least, my boss does. *(In some foreign accent.)* "Encourage customer to feel and fondle. Feel and fondle. Do you understand, Sonya?" And even though I said I did, I really, really, really didn't. But maybe I do now.

NOLAN: Honest to Gawd, I thought I was about to take my last heavin' breath rolled up in there.

SONYA: Well, you could have just unrolled yourself, Mr. Fisher.

NOLAN: I coulda dun a lot of things, like not roll myself up in the damn rug in the first place, but I was a bettin' that's somethin' you ain't never seen before. Am I right, Ms. Sonya?

SONYA: It's just "Sonya." My first name is Son-- . . .

NOLAN: (*Overlapping.*) . . . I don't care how long you've worked here, has anybody ever rolled themselves up, top to toe, in a carpet to your memory?

SONYA: (*Completely flustered.*) This is only my third day, Mr. Fisher.

NOLAN: You don't say? Third day on the job and some wild, southern lunatic rolls himself up in a carpet whilst you're doin' your price check thang, and then unrolls himself and lays at your feet like an old hound dog. And the whole time you're a thankin',"What in the hell is he doin'?" 'Cuz it's a little unusual, don'tcha thank?

(*A long awkward pause. Nolan stretches out on the carpet. Sonya looks over her shoulder, then off to the other side.*)

SONYA: Mr. Fisher . . .

NOLAN: Nolan.

SONYA: Mr. Fisher -- this is a little awkward for me -- but, uhm, are you going to stay down there long?

NOLAN: You mean, on the floor?

SONYA: Exactly.

NOLAN: Well, I could stand . . .

SONYA: (*Quickly.*) . . . Good . . .

NOLAN: . . . But I'd rather just lay here like a big, sloppy hog.

SONYA: I think I'd rather you stand.

NOLAN: And I think I'm buyin' a carpet from you -- an expensive carpet if I know my Persians, Sonya, and in my house, I lay around a lot . . . especially on the carpet. (*Rolling on his side.*) So what's the damage gonna be for the carpet? And don't bullshit me, Sonya. Tom's an old friend of mine, so I usually get the "I'm A Friend of Tom's" discount.

SONYA: Sure. Yes, of course. So with the list figure and then Tom's generous discount . . .

NOLAN: Sonya, why don't you come down here?

SONYA: (*Alarmed.*) Why?

NOLAN: 'Cause I'm down here.

SONYA: I don't think that's a very good idea, Mr. Fisher.

NOLAN: Why not? We're making a deal here. We're gettin' down to the bottom line figures. I'm thinking, "Should I pay cash or use a credit card," and you're thinking, "Holy shit! This is my first big sale. Maybe this job doesn't suck after all."

SONYA: But couldn't we think that standing up?

NOLAN: Absolutely. Or sittin' down.

(A long moment. Nolan smiles at Sonya. Sonya finally realizes something.)

SONYA: *(Working her therapy.)* You know, I'm not really comfortable with that.

NOLAN: S'that so?

(A stand-off. Neither move or speak. Finally:)

SONYA: Oh. Oh, wait. I get it. People say I'm naive, being from Minnesota and all, but I think I get what's going on here: is this, like, a power thing for you? Because I can almost get past the "Ms. Sonyas," and "hons," and "gals" -- but if it's a power thing for you...

NOLAN: Sonya, you thankin' way too hard, hon, it's this simple: there are verticals, and there are horizontals. You're a vertical. I'm a horizontal . . . every chance I get. To me, it makes bein' vertical worthwhile.

SONYA: *(Instantly defensive.)* Excuse me, I'm not just a vertical. I get horizontal. Plenty of times. Just not in a rug store, thank you. And certainly not in my place of business. And quite frankly, I don't think this is an appropriate conversation to have with a stranger, so if you want to buy the rug, it's fifteen-thousand, less Tom's discount, which would bring it to thirteen . . .

NOLAN: . . . And with tax, that'll bring it back up around fifteen thousand. *(Standing up.)* No, thanks, Sonya. Tom's being a cheap son-of-a-bitch and he knows it. But thank you for your time.

VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS

BRADLEY'S STORY

Originally written under the title *Rug Store Cowboy* for Michael Wright's book, *Master Class in Playwriting*, this play version had its world premiere for *Unity Fest* and the 4th Unity Theatre Company, December 2001, and was subsequently produced at Manhattan Theatre Source as part of the *HOMOgenius Festival*, June, 2003.

CHARACTERS:

BRADLEY—M. 25. Trying too hard to be a good employee. Easily flustered. Handsome, but hidden.

NOLAN—M. 45. Southern through and through. Wealthy, raucous, loud, confident . . . kind.

TIME:

Early afternoon.

PLACE:

A rug store, mid-town Manhattan.

VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS
BRADLEY'S STORY

(The stage is empty save one large rolled up Persian rug off to stage right. Bradley enters with a slip of paper in his hand. He looks around the empty space, looks off to both sides of the stage, and then timidly:)

BRADLEY: Mr. Fisher? *(Walks towards the carpet.)*

MR. FISHER?

(Slowly the carpet begins unrolling without Bradley noticing. When it hits Bradley's feet, he yelps and steps over it. Nolan Fisher, smiling from ear to ear, rolls out the end of the carpet.)

NOLAN: Lord have mercy, it was hot in there! Almost passed out twice and thought I was gunna puke! Wouldn't that have been a helluva mess to discover? You came just in the nick of time, Bradley, 'cuz I was waitin' and sweatin' and dry heavin' and waitin' and . . .

BRADLEY: *(Caught off guard; rambling.)* I was checking on the price of the rug for you, Mr. Fisher, because you said you wanted to know the price and these rugs just came off the truck and I didn't know the price so I thought I'd check the price for you and what the hell were you doing in that rug, Mr. Fisher? *(Quickly catching himself.)* You know what? It doesn't matter, sir. I mean, maybe that's your way of, you know, feeling the rug. The management encourages that. At least, my boss does. *(In some foreign accent.)* "Encourage customer to feel and fondle. Feel and fondle. Do you understand, Braddddleeeeee?" And even though I said I did, I really, really, really didn't. But maybe I do now.

NOLAN: Honest to Gawd, I thought I was about to take my last heavin' breath rolled up in there.

BRADLEY: Well, you could have just unrolled yourself, sir.

NOLAN: I coulda' dun a lot of things, like not roll myself up in the damn rug in the first place, but I was a bettin' that's somethin' you ain't never seen before. Am I right, Mr. Bradley?

BRADLEY: . . . It's just "Bradley." My first name is Brad-- . . .

NOLAN: (*Overlapping.*) . . . I don't care how long you've worked here, has anybody ever rolled themselves up, top to toe, in a carpet to your memory?

BRADLEY: This is only my third day.

NOLAN: You don't say? Third day on the job and some wild, southern lunatic rolls himself up in a carpet whilst you're doin' your price check thang, and then unrolls himself and lays at your feet like an old hound dog. And the whole time you're a thankin', "What in the Hell is he doin'?" 'Cuz it's a little unusual, don'tcha thank?

(A long awkward pause. Nolan stretches out on the carpet. Bradley looks over his shoulder, then off to the other side.)

BRADLEY: Mr. Fisher . . .

NOLAN: Nolan.

BRADLEY: Alright. "Nolan." This is a little awkward for me -- but, uhm, are you -- you staying down there long?

NOLAN: You mean, on the floor?

BRADLEY: Exactly.

NOLAN: Well, I could stand.

BRADLEY: (*Quickly.*) Good.

NOLAN: But I'd rather just lay here like a big, sloppy hog.

BRADLEY: Wouldn't you rather you stand, Mr. Fisher? Uhhm, Nolan?

NOLAN: I'm buyin' a carpet from you -- an expensive carpet if I know my Persians, Bradley, and in my house, I lay around a lot . . . especially on the carpet. (*Rolling on his side.*) So what's the damage gonna be for the carpet? And don't bullshit me, Bradley. Tom's an old friend of mine, so I usually get the "I'm A Friend of Tom's" discount.

BRADLEY: Sure. Yes, of course. So with the list figure and then Tom's "generous" discount . . .

NOLAN: Bradley, why don't you come down here?

BRADLEY: (*Alarmed.*) Why?

NOLAN: 'Cause I'm down here.

BRADLEY: I don't think that's a very good idea.

NOLAN: Why not? We're making a deal here. We're gettin' down to the bottom line figures. I'm thinking, "Should I pay cash or use a credit card," and you're thinking, "Holy shit! This is my first big sale. Maybe this job doesn't suck after all."

BRADLEY: Couldn't we think that standing up?

NOLAN: Absolutely. Or sittin' down.

(A long moment. Nolan smiles at Bradley. Bradley finally realizes something.)

BRADLEY: *(Working his therapy.)* I'm not sure how comfortable I am with that.

NOLAN: S'that so.

(A stand-off. Neither move or speak. Finally:)

BRADLEY: Oh. Oh, wait. I get it. People say I'm naive, being from Minnesota and all, but I think I get what's going on here: is this, like, a power thing for you? Because I can almost get past the "Mr. Bradley" and "son," and "cowboy" -- but if this is a power thing for you, you know, mano e mano . . .

NOLAN: Bradley, you thankin' way too hard, son, it's this simple: there are verticals, and there are horizontals. You're a vertical. I'm a horizontal . . . every chance I get. To me, it makes bein' vertical worthwhile.

BRADLEY: *(Instantly defensive.)* Excuse me, I'm not just a vertical. I get horizontal. Plenty of times. Just not in a rug store, thank you very much. And certainly not in my place of business. And really, I don't think this is an appropriate conversation to have with a stranger.

NOLAN: S'that right? I hate that word: "stranger."

BRADLEY: (*Pushing on.*) So if you want to buy the rug, it's fifteen-thousand, less Tom's discount, which would bring it to thirteen . . .

NOLAN: . . . and with tax, that'll bring it back up around fifteen thousand. (*Standing up.*) No, thanks, Bradley. Tom's being a cheap son-of-a-bitch and he knows it. But thank you for your time.

(*Nolan exits almost off stage.*)

BRADLEY: (*Afraid of losing the sale.*) Well, maybe you could talk to him, Mr. Fisher - Nolan.

NOLAN: Naw, that won't work 'cause of Ricardo -- that guy over there with the black hair. See, when I get up to the cash register to pay for this thing, he's gonna wink at me and stare at the hair on my chest. Jonquel, the girl standin' right beside him, will get mad at Ricardo for looking at me 'cause she's always had a crush on Ricardo and pines for him no matter how many times everyone tells her the boy is way gay. When she sees me walking to the counter, jealousy's gonna eat her up, and she'll grab a Newport out of her crumpled package and take a cigarette break, slamming the front door when she goes out. David will step out of his office and ask who just slammed the door, then he'll see that Jonquel's gone, that Ricardo's still looking at the hair on my chest and put two and two together. He'll come and shake my hand, ask me how long I'm in the city for, and say something about how I look better and better every time he sees me. Then he'll hike his pants up so they snug his butt cheeks, then find an excuse to come around the counter so he can give me a clear eye shot of what he thinks is his best feature. Then my friend Tom -- who ordinarily would give me a BIG dis-

count -- will walk out of the office, see David playing the same old games that sent them to couples therapy five years ago, then walk back into his office to look at his insurance policy to see if he's met his deductible, so he can go to back to his personal therapy to vent the anger that didn't come out in couples therapy. So that just leaves you. And I'm waiting to see where you fit into all of that.

BRADLEY: I just want to sell you a rug.

NOLAN: And I just want to buy one. But not from a "stranger." I already got too many strangers in my life. Hell, we all do. For some of us, that's all we got in our lives. Just one stranger. . . (*Quietly.*) . . . after another. And frankly, I don't need to add to the collection. See, if the talk is right, it only takes a minute for strangers to dissolve into something else. Sorry about that, cowboy, but that's just the way I am.

(A stare-off. What next? Slowly, Bradley awkwardly lowers one knee, then the other to the ground, and sits on his heels.)

BRADLEY: So, you really know these guys well, huh?

NOLAN: (*Lowering himself to the rug.*) Well, my ex-wife and I used to come here scoutin' for carpet that "matched." We'd paint the living room "Honeysuckle Rose" with "Morning Glory Highlights" and "Pretty Pearl" accents and she couldn't wait to get here so she could "match" everything. (*A beat.*) That's enough about me. What about you?

BRADLEY: Oh, I'm not . . . very good at . . . talking about . . . Can we stand now?