



# CALL ME WALDO

A TRANSCENDENTAL ROMANCE

BY **ROB ACKERMAN**



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



CALL ME WALDO  
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CALL ME WALDO was produced in February 2012  
by The Working Theater, New York, NY  
(Mark Plesent, Producing Artistic Director).

The World Premiere of CALL ME WALDO was presented in January 2012  
by The Kitchen Theatre Company, Ithaca, NY  
(Rachel Lampert, Artistic Director).

Developed at the Lark Play Development Center, New York City.

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*This play is for Lizzi Ackerman,  
Carol Weston, and Theresa Rebeck,  
with love.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people helped to make this play. Carl Forsman, Dina Janis, Theresa Rebeck and the denizens of her Dorset Writers' Colony welcomed its very first pages. Actor Jennifer Dorr White believed in WALDO early, pushed for it later, and shone in it when it opened Off-Broadway. Director Tamilla Woodard worked on the script in classrooms, stage readings, and a workshop at the Lark Play Development Center. Lark Artistic Director John Clinton Eisner helped find the first production. Director Margaret Perry read it aloud with The Kitchen Theatre's Artistic Director, Rachel Lampert, who took a risk on a writer she'd never met. Managing Director, Stephen Nunley; Associate Producing Director, Lesley Green; Director of Audience Services, Rachel Burtram; Production Stage Manager, LaShawn Keyser and our gracious sponsors, Elissa Cogan and Barry Chester, hosted us warmly during a frozen month. Electricians, Robert Sparks and Andy Bird, offered invaluable advice and technical help. The Working Theater's Artistic Director, Mark Plesent, presented a reading, then chose to produce the piece, making this the third work of mine he's nurtured and brought to the boards. Thank you, Mark! Associate Artistic Director Laura Carbonell Smith took generous care of the company as we transferred from Ithaca to Manhattan. Actors Matthew Boston, Brian Dykstra, Rita Rehn, Alexis McGuinness, and Therese Barbato invested their love and talent in these characters in the most amazing ways. I'm grateful to Emily Kadish of Dramatists Play Service for artfully arranging the manuscript, and to Stephen Sultan for choosing to publish it. Last and most, I owe a huge bouquet to Peter Hagan of Abrams Artists Agency for taking such great care of my work for, oh, let's just call it "quite a few" years.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

For the maiden voyage of *CALL ME WALDO*, our director, Margaret Perry, and her designers, David Arsenaunt and Don Tindall, all worked hard to make the play look easy. The set was an assemblage of materials familiar to my construction worker characters: plywood, steel studs, conduits, work lights and the tailgate of a truck. The sound design incorporated the classic rock songs you'd hear on a boom box at a job site. And every design element kept the action moving. I hope you'll find a way to do the same.

When possible, transitions should flow without blackouts or help from stagehands. Make the shifts that do require time as interesting as possible by letting the actors manage the play's physical world. In our case, a tool box doubled as Gus's barbecue grill; a truck tailgate and rustic Murphy bed hinged out of set walls, and a rectangle of rolling scaffolding served as a platform, laundry table, hospital gurney, and cab of a pickup. Invent your own ingenious devices.

We also learned that this play is more of a romance than a raucous comedy. The audience wants to care about these characters, so avoid playing things just for laughs — let the painful revelations hurt. When Gus learns that he's been a jerk to his right-hand man, he's crushed. When Cynthia looks at her love life, she's despondent. When Sarah confronts Lee about feeling unloved, she thinks she might be losing her husband. And when Lee compares himself to Emerson, he hates what he sees. We found that the more pain the characters felt, the funnier the show became, thus confirming the Tide detergent theory of acting: with darker darks, you get brighter brights.

Finally, I ask you to believe. Sure, the events of this play are a bit implausible, as are many things you see every day. Trust the craziness, and the audience will trust it too.

CALL ME WALDO had its world premiere production at Kitchen Theatre Company (Rachel Lampert, Artistic Director) in Ithaca, New York, opening on January 18, 2012. It was directed by Margaret Perry; the set and lighting designs were by David Arsenault; the costume and props designs were by Hannah Kochman; the sound design was by Don Tindall; and the production stage manager was LaShawn Keyser. The cast was as follows:

LEE ..... Matthew Boston  
GUS ..... Brian Dykstra  
SARAH ..... Rita Rehn  
CYNTHIA ..... Jennifer Dorr White

CALL ME WALDO was produced Off-Broadway by The Working Theater (Mark Plesent, Producing Artistic Director), opening at the Abingdon Theatre Company's June Havoc Theatre on February 22, 2012. It was directed by Margaret Perry; the sound design was by Don Tindall; and the production stage manager was Trisha Henson. The cast was as follows:

LEE ..... Matthew Boston  
GUS ..... Brian Dykstra  
SARAH ..... Rita Rehn  
CYNTHIA ..... Jennifer Dorr White

CALL ME WALDO was developed at The Lark Play Development Center, New York City (John Clinton Eisner, Artistic Director).

## **CHARACTERS**

GUS, 40s, electrician and contractor.

LEE, 40s, works for Gus.

SARAH, 40s, emergency room nurse, married to Lee.

CYNTHIA, 40s, attending physician, works with Sarah.

## **PLACE**

Long Island.

## **TIME**

Now.

# CALL ME WALDO

## Scene 1

### Construction Site

*A stocky electrician in his 40s peeks into a bag of donuts. This is Gus. His assistant, a skinny guy named Lee, also in his 40s, sits on a cooler.*

GUS. Fuckin' Dunkin' Donuts. Look at this. I mean, yeah, okay, they make a good cup o' coffee, but these donuts are not donuts. Fuckin' pink icing and sprinkles. Fuck that. I want fuckin' fried dough, dude, pure and simple: cinnamon, glazed, maybe powdered sugar.

LEE. I like sprinkles.

GUS. Lee. What are you, a fuckin' toddler? Did you pick this pink donut?

LEE. I might have.

GUS. It's fuckin' plastic and petrochemicals.

LEE. It said strawberry. *(Gus licks the pink donut, tosses it in the garbage.)*

GUS. It's not strawberry.

LEE. *(Retrieving the donut.)* I like strawberry. *(Gus gets distracted by some offstage carpenters.)*

GUS. Yo, Donnie, what's up? Dave, my man. Larry, how's that fastball? *(Gus starts scraping coconut off a donut.)*

LEE. I did what I could, okay, I went to the service road, and tried to find pastries —

GUS. Sure you did.

LEE. *(Growing more annoyed.)* — And donuts is what I got, okay, 'cause it's not like you're gonna get a big selection of baked goods



at a stupid strip mall, but they had these, so I got these for you, boss, plus, y'know, coffee and sugar and half-and-half —

GUS. (*Taking a bite of donut, checking a text.*) Thank you, Lee.

LEE. I got your breakfast, and you're eatin' it, Gus —

GUS. I'm just sayin' —

LEE. But it's never gonna be good enough, is it?

GUS. What?

LEE. Anything. Ever. The egg sandwiches, my cold welding, the way I pack the Knaack Box, whatever I do, it's not right, it's wrong, and I've had it, I mean, I've really had it. I've had enough.

GUS. Yeah?

LEE. Things gotta change.

GUS. Okay. How?

LEE. Completely. (*Beat.*) 'Cause I know. I see now. There's a better way, a better way to live. It's like there's this one clear, true voice inside us that needs to be heard.

GUS. A voice?

LEE. Yeah.

GUS. Oh ... kay.

LEE. Look, we're good electricians, we're good at what we do, but it's not all we do. We're bigger than this. So it's wrong to go around sayin' you're just this one limited thing when you could have, like, a *genius* inside you. I believe that. Yeah, I do. I really do.

GUS. Genius.

LEE. Yeah.

GUS. Okay, genius, what kind o' fasteners you wanna use on that wall panel?

LEE. I give up.

GUS. I'm just askin'.

LEE. You're not listenin'.

GUS. 'Cause you're not makin' any fuckin' sense.

LEE. I'm not?

GUS. No, you're not. (*Now something happens that recurs in italics in this play. Lee becomes possessed by the spirit of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Lighting and music add some extra magic.*)

LEE. "*I went to her tomb.*"

GUS. What?

LEE. "*Today, on the anniversary of my wife's death, I went to her tomb and opened her coffin.*"

GUS. What the fuck are you talkin' about?

# CALL ME WALDO

a transcendental romance  
by Rob Ackerman

2M, 2W

Lee Fountain is an ordinary electrician: his boss doesn't appreciate him, his wife keeps correcting him, and his life seems to have lost all meaning. But when Lee starts channeling the spirit of Ralph Waldo Emerson, everyone wakes up. *CALL ME WALDO* shows us how one person's poetic yearnings can change everyone and everything — even our imperfect world.

*"A whimsical new comedy ... boisterously funny ... makes for an engaging 95 minutes."*  
—**The New York Post**

*"CALL ME WALDO is a great theatre experience, and as a bonus you'll walk away knowing more about Ralph Waldo Emerson."*  
—**NYTheatre.com**

*"Bruce Springsteen by way of Woody Allen, the play CALL ME WALDO makes philosophy pop."*  
—**The Ithaca Times**

*"Energetic, entertaining, and just provocative enough to have you dusting off your Emerson."*  
—**The Ithaca Journal**

*"A wildly entertaining Rob Ackerman creation."*  
—**The Cornell Daily Sun**

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