

**A FUNNY THING HAPPENED
ON THE WAY TO THE
GYNECOLOGIC ONCOLOGY
UNIT AT MEMORIAL SLOAN
KETTERING CANCER CENTER
OF NEW YORK CITY**

BY HALLEY FEIFFER



**DRAMATISTS
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A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE GYNECOLOGIC
ONCOLOGY UNIT AT MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER OF
NEW YORK CITY
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A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE GYNECOLOGIC ONCOLOGY UNIT AT MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER OF NEW YORK CITY was first presented by MCC Theater (Robert LuPone, Bernard Telsey, and William Cantler, Artistic Directors; Blake West, Executive Director), New York City, opening on May 19, 2016. It was directed by Trip Cullman; the scenic design was by Lauren Helpert; the costume design was by Kaye Voyce; the lighting design was by Matthew Richards; the sound design was by Darron L West; and the production stage manager was Samantha Watson. The cast was as follows:

KARLA Beth Behrs
MARCIE Lisa Emery
DON Erik Lochtefeld
GEENA Jacqueline Sydney

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This play would not be what it is without the inimitable mind of Trip Cullman—an artist I am grateful to call a dream collaborator and a true friend. I've learned so much from him, laughed so much with him, and also cried a fair amount—but in a good way.

I am so moved by the ferocious support I received from MCC Theater's fearless artistic directors: Will Cantler, Bernie Telsey and Bob LuPone. Their passion for this project—coupled with their collective kindness and ebullient spirit—have been invaluable to the evolution of this piece. And a massive thank you to Jessica Chase, Stephen Willems, Megan Ringeling, Beth Dembrow, Blake West and the rest of the MCC family, who gave so much to this play and helped convince me that hard work and fun need not be mutually exclusive.

I am profoundly grateful to the peerless cast of this play's world premiere: the incomparable Lisa Emery, Beth Behrs, Erik Lochtefeld and Jacqueline Sydney. Tirelessly devoted workers, inspired performers, beautiful souls. This play would be a shadow of its current self without them.

Thank you to the indispensable Lizi Latimer—my right hand while working on this play: a perfect assistant and comrade.

I am indebted to the artists and designers who lent their vision to this play's world premiere: Samantha Watson, Lauren Helpert, Kaye Voyce, Darron L West, Matt Richards, Susanna Wolk, Alex Hajjar and Zach Jenkins. Their talent astounds.

Thank you to Danielle Slavick, who helped shape this play enormously—and whose beautiful essence lifted it in ways that were vital. And to Jaime Castaneda and Kip Fagan, whose effect on this piece was profound.

A huge thank you to the people and institutions who have contributed to this play along the way: C.J. Wilson, Laura Esterman, Aaron C. Wright, Daniel and Addie Talbott, Angela Vitale, Michael Frederic,

Tom Oppenheim, Steve White, Don Williams, Johnny Yoder, Jessica Frey, Andrew Garman, Cristin Milioti, Aubrey Plaza, Jeremy Shamos, Moritz von Stuelpnagel, Travis Raeburn, MJ Bruder Munafo, Chad Beckim, Molly Pearson, Emily O'Donnell, Dr. Nadeem Abu-Rustum, Dr. Keith Brunckhorst, Kenneth Lonergan, Amber Tamblyn, David Berlin, James Adams, Olivier Sultan, Warren Leight, Dick Wolf, Peter Jankowski, Rising Phoenix Rep, Stella Adler Studio of Acting, Art of Acting Studio, Partial Comfort Productions, the Vineyard Playhouse, The Edgerton Foundation, The Laurents/Hatcher Foundation, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and Jenny Allen.

And, lastly, I doff my hat to my incredible team: David Berlin, James Adams, Howie Tanenbaum, Larry Shuman and the incomparable Di Glazer—I feel so lucky to have you in my corner, and in my life.

CHARACTERS

KARLA: A charismatic woman in her early thirties whose pretty face and somewhat childlike demeanor belie an incredibly dirty mouth and mind. Spunky, spirited, angry, wickedly funny. A stand-up comedian with a real penchant for dark humor which she uses to hide behind and distract herself from the pain of her mother's sickness.

DON: An unassuming man in his late forties. The kind of person you would never even notice on the subway or walking down the street—an “everyman” in the most boring sense of the word. Clearly has been through a lot of stress both in life-in-general and also more acutely quite recently. Employs a raging temper to mask the gaping wound left from his recent marital split and his mother's illness.

MARCIE: Karla's mother. A painfully thin, pale, dyed-redhead in her fifties. Recovering from a hysterectomy that she had to treat Stage I endometrial cancer. Very dry wit, like Karla. In her case, her dark humor belies not only oceans of pain but also an abusive, selfish cruelty. Still, she is capable of deep love and moments of tender vulnerability.

GEENA: Don's mother. A heavyset woman in her sixties who hasn't paid attention to her personal appearance in about forty years. Has been battling ovarian cancer for seven years. Brave. Tired.

NOTES

A / indicates overlapping dialogue.

A ... does not necessarily indicate a pause. Rather, it connotes a sort of shift in thought—a momentary, often almost unrecognizable jump, snag, or tangle in communication.

Beats can be very quick—they need not linger, unless otherwise indicated.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE GYNECOLOGIC ONCOLOGY UNIT AT MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER OF NEW YORK CITY

Scene 1

A hospital room in New York City.

The decor makes every effort to be cheery: The walls are painted a pretty, soft pink, and there is a large and festive portrait of a somewhat yonic flower mounted over each of the two beds. Still, it is a hospital room, and the thick plastic blinds that hang in the windows and obscure the lovely late-afternoon sunlight—coupled with the occasional beeping emitted intermittently from the IV stands—remind us that this is a place where cheeriness is, for the most part, put on hold.

The room's two beds are separated by a thick, plastic, pea-green curtain. The door to the room is on the s. l. side. The door to the bathroom is on the s. r. side; it is currently open, and we can see that the bathroom is large and handicap-accessible, complete with a sit-down shower. Each side of the room is equipped with a pitcher of water and a stack of Dixie cups. A TV hangs in front of each bed. There is a window in between the two beds, exposing the New York City skyline.

In the s. l. bed lies Geena, a heavyset woman in her sixties who hasn't paid attention to her personal appearance in

about forty years. She is fast asleep; her face is scrunched up as if she has just tasted a lemon—like she is worrying and fretting even in a state of deep unconsciousness.

In the s.r. bed lies Marcie, a pale, painfully thin dyed-red-head in her late fifties. She is also fast asleep. Her skeletal arm hangs off the side of the bed. She looks so slack and relaxed that we fear she may fall out of bed at any moment.

Both women are hooked up to an IV drip, and both wear nasal cannulas to administer oxygen. Next to each bed is a bedstand and a not-very-comfortable-looking chair for visitors.

In the chair next to Marcie's bed sits Karla. She is a clearly intelligent, somewhat visibly neurotic and quite charming woman in her late twenties, who at this moment seems a bit keyed up. She wears skinny jeans and sneakers and a colorful ironic sweater. She sips water from a Dixie cup and taps a red pen on a marble notebook that sits in her lap, covered with messy scrawl.

Karla refers to her notes as she speaks to Marcie, despite Marcie's being dead asleep.

KARLA. "I've been single for so long? I've started having sexual fantasies about my vibrator."

Marcie's mouth hangs open; she snores. Some drool begins to seep out.

(*Re: the drool.*) Oh. Um.

Karla looks around, spots a box of tissues on the bedstand. She grabs a tissue and delicately wipes Marcie's mouth. Throws the tissue away.

Now what do you think works better, "sexual fantasies" or "sex dreams"? Or "wet dreams"?

Marcie emits a little groan in her sleep.

I know. I actually think "wet dreams" is the funniest option, but I'm worried it might not get a laugh because girls don't have wet dreams.

Considers this.

Per se...

Marcie emits a tiny, forceful snore.

Yeah, fuck it. Wet dreams? You're in.

Crosses something out and scribbles in her notebook.

And I have more stuff I could add on to it, too—like I could elaborate even more?

Marcie emits a sort of shuddering, four-part, near-violent snore.

Ummm...

Karla reaches out and gives her mom's arm a quick, somewhat awkward little rub. Then—she returns to her notes.

Like I could—oh Idunno this is all just *improv*, but like I could be like: “Instead of a strong, chiseled, oiled-up man throwing open my bedroom door and raping me? I just have visions of like, my vibrator standing in the archway, backlit by silvery moonlight, sometimes wearing a fedora (sometimes not), and lovingly fucking me 'til sunrise.”

Beat.

What do you think of that? That was just *improv*.

Marcie starts to snore lightly, almost rhythmically. Karla begins to chew her cuticles, absently, as she peruses her notes.

Maybe the rape part was a bit much.

Karla continues to chew her cuticles as she starts to scribble in her notebook.

Don enters, quietly. He is an unassuming man in his late forties. His face is drawn, gray, pursed; he looks like he has been through the wringer both in life-in-general and also more acutely quite recently. He wears a corduroy jacket with big holes in both elbows and a pair of extremely depressing sweatpants.

He slips in silently and sits down next to Geena's bed. Looks at Geena. His face fills with sadness. He reaches out and takes her hand, gives it a squeeze. Then, he leans back in his

chair, reaches into his jacket pocket and removes a copy of the New Yorker. He reads.

On the other side of the curtain, Karla starts to talk again, oblivious.

I don't know, I kinda don't think there's anything funnier than rape.

Don reacts, with horror.

A loud snore from Marcie.

Okay, well what if I just said something like... *(Reading from notes.)*
"I'm in bed, dripping wet, waiting for my vibrator to come fuck me"?

On the other side of the curtain, Don is becoming increasingly aghast.

Maybe that's like—does that kinda take the teeth out of it, though? Am I being a pussy? Arghhh, I can never tell if I'm just resorting to being a big, gaping-wide pussy.

On the other side of the curtain, Don thinks he is perhaps hallucinating.

Karla scribbles in her notebook, then gets another idea.

Or I could even work the rape element *into* it, but in like a different way—like I could say something like: "I love getting fucked by my vibrator 'cause I know it'll never rape me."

Thinks.

Or something like that.

On the other side of the curtain, Don has put his New Yorker down and is listening to Karla with silent horror and fury.

Karla continues, oblivious, to chew her cuticles, scribble, think, improvise. She laughs at something she just wrote down.

How about—ha ha—how about: "I only rape myself with my vibrator when I'm *really* angry at myself"?

Marcie snores.

Too much?

Karla chews a cuticle and scribbles.

Don's face is, at this point, nearly crimson. He is shaking.

Okay here's a compromise: "I only play out my rape fantasies with

my vibrator, 'cause I know it will always respect my safe word.”

Thinks.

It's still maybe too vague...

Scribbles.

“It's so fun to get raped by your vibrator, 'cause—”

DON. (*Quiet, but forceful.*) I'm sorry—I'm sorry?

Karla's eyes go wide. She panics. She had no idea Don was there. She chews her cuticles, fiercely.

A long, long, deadly beat. Then—

KARLA. (*At a loss.*) ...yes...?

DON. (*Trying very hard to convey a tone of equanimity.*) Could you keep it down? Over there? / Could you—

KARLA. (*Earnestly.*) I didn't realize someone else was in here.

Don doesn't say anything. He just rubs his temples, hard. Inhales, sharply. Then—

His cell phone suddenly vibrates, loudly. He takes it out of his pocket, reads something on it that is obviously displeasing to him, then puts the phone back in his pocket.

(*Really softly.*) I'll be more quiet. Sorry.

Karla returns to her notes, and Marcie.

(*A whisper.*) “It's so fun to get raped by your vibrator, 'cause you don't have to go to the police after, you can just—”

Thinks.

No...

Scribbles; thinks.

“It's so fun to get raped by your vibr—”

DON. (*A harsh whisper.*) I'm sorry?!

The rest of their conversation is spoken in low tones—often heated—but still, always relatively measured whispers, so as not to wake Geena and Marcie.

I'm SORRY—what / are you—

KARLA. I'm being *quiet*.

DON. That's not...the *point!*

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Gynecologic Oncology Unit at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center of New York City

by Halley Feiffer

1M, 3W

A foul-mouthed twenty-something comedian and a middle-aged man embroiled in a nasty divorce are brought together unexpectedly when their cancer-stricken mothers become roommates in the hospital. Together, this unlikely duo must negotiate some of life's biggest challenges...while making some of the world's most inappropriate jokes. Can these two very lost people learn to laugh through their pain and lean on each other, when all they really want to do is run away?

"...a play that is as deeply felt as its name is long. ...[an] exposed nerve of a script..."
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HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND THEN
KILL THEM
I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

ISBN 978-0-8222-3608-5



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