

Acting Edition

Origin Story

by Nathan Alan Davis

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ORIGIN STORY received its world premiere at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, (Blake Robison, Producing Artistic Director; Abby Marcus, Managing Director) on May 20, 2023. The production was directed by Joanie Schultz, with set design by Chelsea M. Warren, costume design by Izumi Inaba, lighting design by Heather Gilbert, and sound design & original music by T. Carlis Roberts. The stage manager was Andrea L. Shell. The cast was as follows:

MARGARET Amira Danan
VAL..... Betsy Hogg
ANITA Shonita Joshi
BOBBY.....Michael Lepore
DEX..... Josh Odor
ROXANNE..... Dwandra Nickole Lampkin
GARY Bill Timoney

ORIGIN STORY received a developmental workshop at DETOUR: A Festival of New Work at WaterTower Theatre in Addison, Texas, in 2018.

A workshop production of *ORIGIN STORY* was produced by the Department of Theatre Arts & Dance at Sonoma State University, directed by Delicia Turner Sonnenberg.

CHARACTERS

MARGARET – (W, 30s, ethnically ambiguous) Works at The Services Corporation during the day. Also works the graveyard shift at The Burg.

VAL – (W, 30s, white) Works at The Services Corporation with Margaret.

ANITA – (W, 20s, Tamil) Works at The Services Corporation in the HR department.

BOBBY – (M, 20s, white) Works the graveyard shift at The Burg with Margaret.

DEX – (M, 42) Val's lover on Mondays.

ROXANNE – (W, 40s–50s, black) A regular drive-thru customer at The Burg.

GARY – (M, 50s–60s, white) A Xerox repairman.

SETTING

An American city.

TIME

The present.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The people in this play might be described as weird, and much of what they do is very silly. That said, they don't think of themselves this way. They, generally, take themselves seriously. Resist the temptation to wink and nod (literally or metaphorically) at the comedy.

An ellipsis on its own line

...

represents a pause, a beat, or perhaps a physical action.

A slash / marks the beginning of an overlap.

SPECIAL THANKS

Joanie Shultz, for so deeply believing in this play and embracing all its silliness.

Delicia Turner-Sonnenberg, for your wisdom and advocacy.

Michael Castalez, for your *Star Wars Episode VII* analysis that became a provocation for this piece.

One

Monday morning, The Services Corporation.

(MARGARET and VAL stand around a water cooler. They hold tiny paper cups, which they sip from occasionally.)

(But mostly they stare at the water cooler. It's almost as if the water cooler is a campfire. But they are not at a campground. They are in an office building where they work.)

VAL. How was your weekend?

MARGARET. ...

...

You know it's like: I would love to be able to answer that question...

VAL. Right?

MARGARET. Yeah.

...

VAL. Life: what is it?

MARGARET. It's like I can't even go to the grocery store.

VAL. ...

Why can't you go to the grocery store?

MARGARET. The girl checking out my groceries?

VAL. Yeah?

MARGARET. She looks at me and she goes – she doesn't even say "hi," by the way. No "hi" no "did you find everything you needed" none of that.

She looks at me,

VAL. Yeah?

MARGARET. And she says,

"What are you?"

VAL. Ew.

MARGARET. Yeah.

VAL. Like,

MARGARET. Yeah.

VAL. Racially?

MARGARET. Yes.

VAL. Ew.

MARGARET. Yeah.

VAL. That's so –

MARGARET. I know –

VAL. Yuck.

MARGARET. Anyway.

VAL. White people: we're the worst.

MARGARET. This chick wasn't white!

VAL. No?

MARGARET. No.

VAL. ...

We do say that a lot, though. My people.

We say that shit all the time.

MARGARET. I know you do.

VAL. We think it even more than we say it.

MARGARET. Everyone thinks it.

VAL. We think it hard, though.

...

We try not to think it, but it's like...

MARGARET. ...

VAL. So.

...

What did you tell her?

MARGARET. Hm?

VAL. She said, "What are you?"

MARGARET. Uhuh.

VAL. And you said:

...

MARGARET. I don't know I said whatever I said and I took my groceries and got out of there.

VAL. ...

Margaret?

MARGARET. Yes, Val?

VAL. I feel uncomfortable about asking this question.

MARGARET. Uhuh.

VAL. 'Cause we've been working together for like, what three years?

MARGARET. Two-and-a-half.

VAL. Yeah, so you know...

I mean I consider you a friend. Right?

MARGARET. Definitely.

VAL. Yeah.

And like you generally

Know certain things.

About a person who is a friend.

MARGARET. ...

VAL. Like I've never met your parents, for example.

MARGARET. I don't actually know my ethnicity.

VAL. ...

What do you mean?

MARGARET. I mean I don't know.

I was adopted by very loving, very red-headed protestants.

I don't know who my birth parents were.

VAL. Oh.

MARGARET. ...

VAL. Cool.

...

I mean, not "cool" but like...

MARGARET. ...

VAL. Have you ever tried to find out?

You know there's...you can take one of those DNA tests.

MARGARET. Gross, no.

VAL. Why not?

MARGARET. Because gross. And because no.

VAL. It would be exciting!

MARGARET. Not for me.

VAL. It would be like an ultrasound when you find out the sex of the baby! I'd hold your hand and everything.

MARGARET. ...

I've always just thought of myself as human.

VAL. Oh.

Yeah definitely don't do it then.

MARGARET. Thanks, I won't.

VAL. Yeah, 'cause I did mine? Did I tell you this?

MARGARET. No.

VAL. Yeah, I did mine and I'm like,

Not 100% human.

MARGARET. I don't think that's...

VAL. I'm part Neanderthal.

As are a lot of people actually.

MARGARET. Really?

VAL. Yeah, I'm not kidding.

MARGARET. Okay.

But that's like...

VAL. ...

MARGARET. That's still human.

VAL. Is it?

MARGARET. I mean it kind of has to be. Right?

VAL. I guess.

MARGARET. ...

VAL. Do you think of me differently now?

MARGARET. No.

VAL. You totally do.

MARGARET. Of course I don't!

VAL. Okay, well, how about to you I'm Val. And you won't worry what percentage Neanderthal I am.

And to me, you're Margaret.

And we'll just agree to always look at each other that way no matter what.

MARGARET. Works for me.

VAL. Alright, cheers.

(MARGARET and VAL drink from their cups.)

(MARGARET begins to exit.)

Where you off to?

MARGARET. My cubicle.

VAL. What're you planning on getting done today?

MARGARET. I mean probably not a whole lot, until someone inevitably asks me to help them with the copier.

(ANITA enters and walks straight to the water cooler. She stands near VAL and MARGARET and drinks. She's wearing headphones.)

VAL. Yeah, so hang out.

MARGARET. My chair is over there.

VAL. Bring it over here.

MARGARET. ...

We can't bring our chairs over here.

VAL. Who says?

MARGARET. ...

VAL. What're they gonna do?

Fire us?

ANITA. They might.

VAL. ...

Oh, I'm sorry, were you part of this conversation?

ANITA. ...

VAL. We don't know you.

ANITA. Hi, I'm Anita.

VAL. Are you listening to anything on those headphones?

ANITA. Uhuh.

VAL. What department are you in?

ANITA. Human Resources.

VAL. Oh. Okay.

Trying to scare us back to work?

Is that what's happening?

ANITA. ...

VAL. HR bitch. I'm talking to you.

ANITA. Anita.

VAL. Anita. How long have you been working here?

ANITA. Today's my first official day.

VAL. Well let me tell you something: Margaret and I: You don't scare us.

ANITA. Good.

VAL. You're not scaring us back to our desks.

ANITA. I'm not trying to.

VAL. Don't you guys have your own wing or whatever?

ANITA. I wouldn't call it a wing.

VAL. I know all about the HR wing.

ANITA. Yeah I'd call it maybe a section.

VAL. Oh, does wing feel too –

ANITA. It feels a little fancy –

VAL. I see –

ANITA. It's just a section of the building. Like any other section –

VAL. 'Cause the last time I went to HR... you know here's something you should know:

You guys make it a real *thing*.

It's a real *process* to talk with HR about something.

ANITA. Oh. I wouldn't know.

VAL. Do you know what department I work in?

ANITA. Today's my first day.

VAL. Uhuh, well I'm in marketing – which is distinct from sales by the way, I hope they told you that – And I haven't actually had any assignments for the past eighteen months, at least, because we're apparently in a "client acquisition cycle." What the hell is that?

And if I'm in marketing, and we need new clients, why am I not helping? Shouldn't that be my job?

I mean, I'm getting paid to sit around and do nothing.

And, Anita, if you or your bosses have a problem with that: Great.

I'd love to actually contribute something. And not feel useless.

ANITA. ...

Interesting.

MARGARET. Welcome, Anita.

Don't take it personally, Val just has a very dramatic way of asking for things.

VAL. ...

MARGARET. I'm sure you'll make this a better place.

VAL. Doubtful.

ANITA. (*To MARGARET.*) Thank you.

...

MARGARET. You're welcome.

ANITA. By any chance do you work at The Burg?

MARGARET. ...

Yeah.

ANITA. Yeah I saw you –

VAL. The Burg?!

MARGARET. It's not a big deal, it's just short for burger –

VAL. I know what The Burg is – you *work* there?

MARGARET. It's just a nighttime thing.

ANITA. Yeah I saw you in the drive-thru window. I was across the street / at Wendy's.

MARGARET. Across the street at Wendy's? Yeah, Wendy's is probably the safer choice.

ANITA. I remember thinking,

What's up with that girl in the drive-thru?

MARGARET. ...

ANITA. She's way too glam for fast food.

MARGARET. It's an easy job.

ANITA. ...

I'm gonna go back to my wing, now.

VAL. Tell your bosses they can suck it.

ANITA. Okay, I will.

VAL. Tell Sheila and Bob that they can both SUCK IT!

ANITA. I'll make sure they get the message.

VAL. I'm gonna have sex tonight. I don't know about you, but yeah it's Monday and I have this Monday thing going with this Monday guy and he and I have some real chemistry – I mean it's quite extraordinary, probably better than anything you've ever experienced in your life.

(ANITA gives VAL a thumbs up.)

ANITA. Bye, Margaret.

MARGARET. Bye.

(ANITA exits.)

VAL. (“That was a little intimate, wasn't it?”) Bye?

MARGARET. ...

VAL. What was going on there?

MARGARET. ...

VAL. I can't believe you work at The Burg. That place is a hellhole.

(MARGARET and VAL refill their cups.)

MARGARET. It's easy money.

VAL. How many nights a week?

MARGARET. Monday through Friday.