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Dramatic Publishing

THE VELOCITY OF GARY (NOT HIS REAL NAME)

by
JAMES STILL



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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THE VELOCITY OF GARY
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Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-778-7

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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For Anne O'Sullivan
and Tim Raphael

Author's Notes

THE VELOCITY OF GARY (NOT HIS REAL NAME) was originally produced at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York. I am indebted to Tim Raphael and Anne O'Sullivan who co-directed me in this OctoberFest performance.

Subsequently, *THE VELOCITY OF GARY (NOT HIS REAL NAME)* was produced by Illusion Theater, Minneapolis, Minn., Michael Robins and Bonnie Morris, producing directors.

Saxophone music by Gerald Glickman

THE VELOCITY OF GARY (NOT HIS REAL NAME) has been performed for an audience of one in a hotel room, for college students in a restroom lounge, in classrooms, in 1000-seat proscenium theaters, in tiny black box theaters, in concert halls, in art centers—just about any place where people would stop and listen. The play has been performed with 85 light cues and 30 sound cues, and with equal success has been performed with no sound under fluorescents. Trust the story. Usually I performed it with a desk and chair, a three-legged stool, and a bench. These simple pieces of furniture provided separate acting areas. A few carefully chosen props—a blanket, a necklace made of candy, a leather jacket, a lighter—were all I needed to tell the story. I started developing this as a theater piece at a time when I was hungry to make another kind of contact with my audience. I wanted to push myself past any kind of form that I was familiar with and romp on any kind of rules that strangle me as a writer. And as a writer performing his own material for the first time, I wanted to be able to look out at faces instead of backs of heads; I wanted to look out at friends and strangers and see who was looking back. Mostly, I wanted to give voice to some people who feel rarely heard, who make a family against all odds, and who live on a tiny island called Manhattan. This is their story.

THE VELOCITY OF GARY (NOT HIS REAL NAME)

A Play for One Actor

- I. Anything Can Happen**
- II. Vampires, Greek Gods and Ponce de Leon**
- III. No Dreams**
- IV. Cream of Wheat and Infinity**
- V. The Death of Patsy Cline**
- VI. Secrets**
- VII. Cinderella**
- VIII. Thanksgiving**

The play takes place in the past, the present,
and in the infinity of Gary's mind.

THE VELOCITY OF GARY (NOT HIS REAL NAME)

I. ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN

Gary (not his real name) has a beat-up leather jacket that he likes to wear when he wants to pretend to be somebody else.

Something happens when he wears the leather jacket. Something happens that he can't explain but strangers seem to understand intuitively. Intimacy is packed with doubts and Gary (not his real name) wants to be sure about something. He wants to believe in something. He wants to believe in anything. This jacket is the best of religion. It's ritual. (*He puts on leather jacket and sunglasses.*)

It begins with him taking off his clothes. Gary (not his real name) thinks it's a good idea to start naked because that's the way we're born. But standing alone naked is a high price to pay when he's feeling like a piece of shit. He stands there humiliated by his own private audience for as long as he can bear it and when he can no longer breathe and feels his heart dribbling like a basketball, he lunges for the leather jacket. It feels like heaven.

Wearing the jacket (like saying a prayer before dinner) he feels confident again. Anything can happen. He repeats this

to himself several times like the Lord's Prayer ("Anything can happen. Anything can happen. Anything can happen...")

He wears bikini underwear with a leopard print—a present that he assumed was a joke. Unfortunately, they had been given to him with the sincere hopes that Gary (not his real name) would dance erotically to an early Barbra Streisand album. When Gary (not his real name) laughed, the mood was broken. It wasn't the first time he had confused sincerity with bad taste. But what pissed him off the most was that he never got to do that dance. Maybe tonight. He's wearing leopard underwear. Anything can happen.

His sunglasses are vintage 1970s the way everything has become vintage 1970s. Gary (not his real name) slowly, slowly! puts on the sunglasses. (*He takes off the sunglasses.*) The lenses are mirrored glass. When people look at Gary (not his real name) wearing his sunglasses, they see themselves. He likes it that way. It's giving them what they want. If people could find a way to fuck themselves, they'd never leave the house. Gary (not his real name) finds his sunglasses subtle but accommodating.

Once, Gary (not his real name) went home with a nice man who had two Doberman pinschers in a studio apartment. He was wearing the leather jacket and sunglasses and was somebody else. The man asked him to take off his sunglasses. Gary (not his real name) didn't miss a beat. He looked square at the man (who was in love with his own reflection) and said, "They don't come off." The man immediately ejaculated and Gary (not his real name) left a

few minutes later. It was the easiest twenty-five bucks he ever made. He ducked in an all-night market and bought a bottle of beer for himself and some gourmet dog food for Rodney. On the street a woman was selling the home version of "The Price Is Right" and Gary (not his real name) could not resist the irony. He gave her the rest of his money, bummed a cigarette and rushed home to show Valentino—(*Saxophone music plays and fades out.*)

Tonight is different. Tonight, Gary (not his real name) is armed with the leopard underwear and his spirits are high. He stops in at The Arcade on Times Square and with every intention of playing every quarter in his pocket, he only musters two or three games of pinball before he knows he's being watched.

Outside, a man in a sports car stares at Gary (not his real name). The man is wearing a tight black T-shirt and wrap-around sunglasses that look like a mask. His car reminds Gary (not his real name) of the Batmobile.

Gary (not his real name) knows he looks sexy playing pinball and he doesn't waste a move. He pushes against the machine, seducing the pinball toward record scores. Colored lights flash against his face and the sounds of odd, recorded voices say things like, "Loser!" or "Get a job!" or "You play like a girl." He always liked that one because he knew it was true. And because he didn't care. Gary (not his real name) loves men but doesn't understand them. He understands women but doesn't love them. The one time he did fall in love—(*Saxophone music plays and fades out.*)

Gary (not his real name) is smart enough to understand that what gives someone pleasure has nothing to do with love. Sex always wins. Gary (not his real name) likes the idea of being a whore because it makes him feel connected to the beginning of time. And it's also the fastest way to save quarters for pinball. It's all connected, see: The beginning of time, fucking, money and pinball. If he can work in the leopard underwear it will all make sense. This makes Gary (not his real name) feel very, very lucky.

He can pretend for hours at a time. He knows what to expect. He doesn't even mind it unless they ask to be touched. Everyone has their limits. He never touches anybody. Not like he used to, not anymore. It's something he believes in. He lets them touch his leather jacket. He lets them stare at themselves in his mirrored sunglasses. He even lets them believe he's unbreakable. If they ask Gary (not his real name), "Hey! What's your name?"—he tells them. "Gary."

Playing pinball, Gary feels powerful. Batman stares. The game is over. Gary climbs into the Batmobile. He can feel the leopard underwear against his crotch. Anything can happen.

Batman drives fast and they don't say a word. Now they pull into the Bat Cave. They go up to Batman's apartment. Across the room, a red phone. Perfect. Batman asks Gary his name. Gary doesn't even have to think. "Robin," he says. Batman nods and puts on some music. Gary dances.

It works. Gary knows he's having impact. He's in control. He dances toward Batman. Batman motions toward the bed and Gary dances in that direction... "Holy Toledo." Without warning, Batman holds up a condom. Handling it like a newborn baby, he puts it on himself and offers one to Gary. "What are you doing, man?"

Batman looks surprised. He says, "Anything can happen."

II. VAMPIRES, GREEK GODS AND PONCE DE LEON

There was a long year when Gary believed he was a vampire. He would look in a mirror and not see anyone he recognized. This caused him enormous confusion until he came up with the vampire theory. Gary is always a man looking for a theory. During the vampire phase, Gary met a man who had traced the same path that Ponce de Leon had traveled. Swearing Gary to utter secrecy, Ponce claimed to have found the Fountain of Youth. It was typical at the end of the day (when the sun was coming up) for Ponce to have drunk several bottles of Scotch which he claimed to have been filled with waters from the Fountain of Youth. As long as Ponce was paying the rent, Gary didn't have the heart to tell the guy: Ponce was looking old.

This was always a moral battleground for Gary because Gary could sniff out vulnerability like a vacuum cleaner. He could talk people into anything. For a while, that was his gift.

That gift led to the three months when Gary made Ponce read *Dracula* out loud while Gary ate Fruit Loops. Gary added red food coloring to the milk and pretended the Fruit Loops were soaked in blood. Gary chewed his fruit loops in 3/4 time and pretended to be waltzing with Dracula. Gary knew all about music because he had hung out in front of Carnegie Hall for a few weeks. During that time, a man took him home under the pretense that he was a famous conductor. Gary found out later he was a janitor at Carnegie Hall. But Gary didn't mind. In fact, he found the janitor sexier once he knew the truth about him. Truth can be as much an aphrodisiac as fantasy. Gary read that above a urinal in a bus station once. He took a piece of toilet paper and scribbled down the word "truth." He wanted to look that up in a dictionary to find out what it really meant. "Aphrodisiac" sounded French and Gary doesn't speak French. So he didn't write that one down.

Even when Ponce would begin to slur his words, Gary could tolerate it because he was lost in Transylvania. If Gary squinted his eyes and concentrated on the rhythm of chewing his Fruit Loops, Ponce's voice would begin to sound like a foreign language. Eventually, though, Ponce would pass out. His lips would fall open and hot, stale breath would bail out in a hurry. His arm might dangle lovingly from the sofa and so Gary would finish one last bowl of Fruit Loops with red milk and wipe his mouth with approval. Having *Dracula* read aloud to him in a foreign language while eating Fruit Loops meant that Gary had moved up in his life. It meant that he was making it as a vampire. That was Gary's theory. For a while, he was content to stay.

Gary started lifting weights that year. It was something else to do without any clothes on. He could give a shit about definition. As far as his body went, he never imagined himself any different or any older than he was yesterday. One day Gary was in the middle of his third rep of hammer curls for his biceps while Ponce blew smoke from his Newport cigarettes in mock patience. Ponce wanted Gary to take out the trash. Naked Gary put the plastic bag outside the door, straightened and...tingle! He was naked. Something like a lightning storm crossed Gary's mind.

A few days later he was naked when he went down for the mail. No one saw him (even though he took longer than usual) but addiction was in the air. Against Ponce's will, naked Gary started taking short jogs around the block. Gary knew it was serious when Ponce would offer to read *Dracula* out loud and Gary could resist. He didn't feel like a vampire anymore. He felt like a Greek god!

Life changed. Ponce was reading Greek mythology out loud and Gary ate gyros and baklava in between reps of ab crunches and pushups. In a tense, hateful voice Ponce called Gary fickle and even though Gary wasn't sure what fickle meant, he knew Ponce was making fun of him. Like a Greek god, naked Gary would lift more weights. Ponce paced. Gary lifted. Ponce drank several bottles from the Fountain of Youth and spat in Spanish about Gary's ugly, young body. Gary stared straight ahead, five reps of lateral raises (breathe, breathe, breathe ...). One thing for sure: this wasn't love.

One night Gary came home after sleeping with a priest named Bob and Ponce was very drunk. He had tried to fuck a pillow that had Gary's scent on it and when the pillow hadn't reciprocated, he had ripped the pillow apart with a knife. That night Gary slept for five minutes. Time to get out. Maybe he would DROP out and visit the Bermuda Triangle. Plymouth Rock. And learn Latin. The janitor at Carnegie Hall had told him Latin was a dead language and Gary immediately got a hard-on. He would learn Latin to speak to the dead. It was one of the sexiest plans he could imagine for the future. Maybe he could find someone who would read the Dead Sea scrolls aloud. Or someone could make a movie-of-the-week about his life. A little money would be nice. It's always such a bitch scrounging around for quarters to play pinball.