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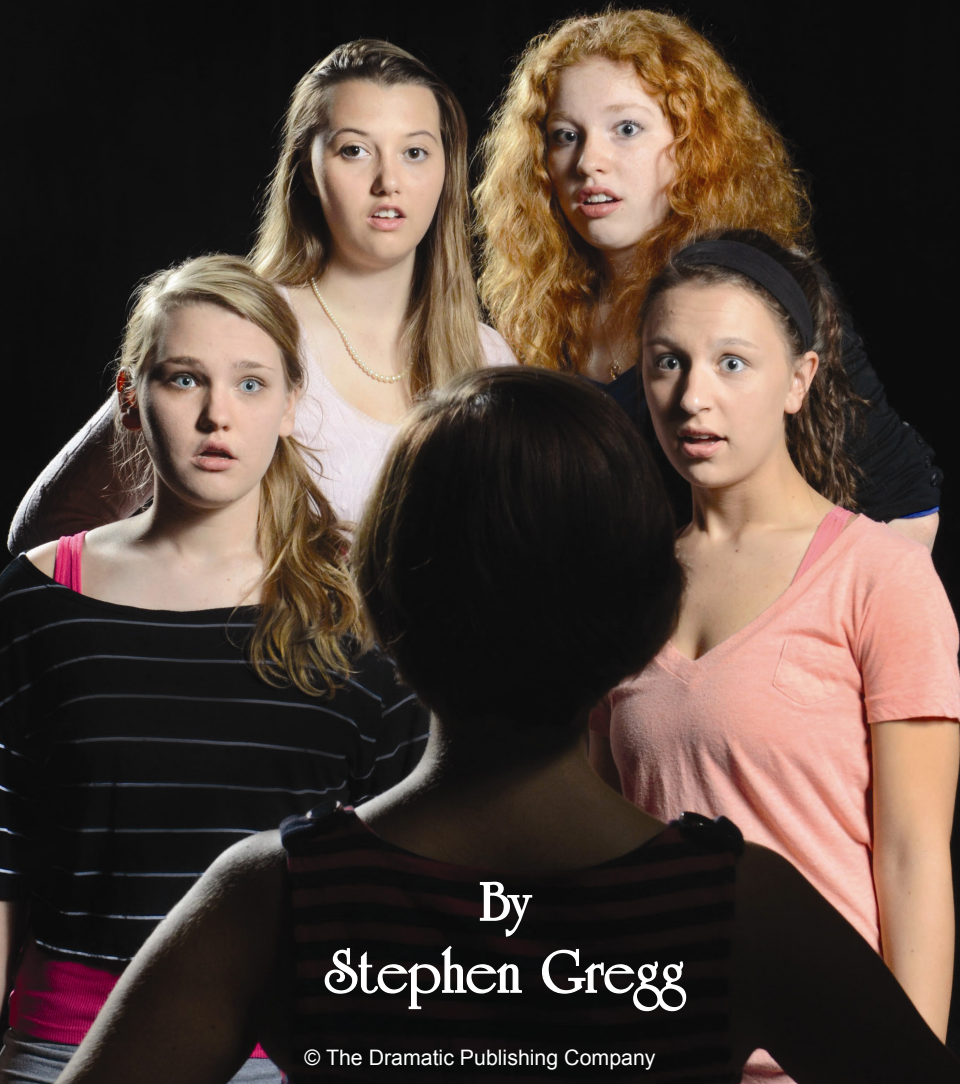
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Dramatic Publishing

The New Margo



By
Stephen Gregg

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“The arrival of any new Stephen Gregg play is cause for celebration in school theatre circles. Long known for his pitch-perfect young adult comedies, in *The New Margo* Gregg demonstrates his mastery of the mystery-thriller genre with a short play that will keep audiences guessing—and not just whodunnit but whattheheckdidtheydo—until the last tense moment.” —Don Corathers, editor, *Dramatics*

The New Margo

By Stephen Gregg. *Cast: 5w.* It's only four days until the classes of their freshman year begin, and Margo didn't come back to the dorm last night. But, of the five friends who went off to college together, only Delta seems worried about it. Finally, Margo arrives, and she makes quite an entrance. She's been made over: stylish new glasses, a new hairstyle and a whole new attitude. She looks fantastic! There's just one problem: Margo isn't Margo. She's a different person, and only Delta seems to realize it. As Delta frantically tries to convince her friends that this Margo is a fake, she finds herself locked in a battle of wits with the imposter. Delta knows that something terrible has happened to the real Margo, and she desperately needs to outsmart the new Margo in order to keep the same thing from happening to her. Get ready for a jaw-dropper of an ending! *Unit set. Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: N84.*

Cover: (clockwise from far left) Lauren Odioso, Nikki Hoffman, Lynn Schutte, Holly Rack and Celina Junker, members of the Thespian Society troupe at McAuley High School in Cincinnati.

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For Margo Rodgers, the one and only.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

One of the emotions that a thriller is meant to induce is paranoia. The protagonist doesn't know the extent of the forces arrayed against her.

Like their characters, playwrights are prone to paranoia, but it's of a different sort. The playwright fears that his play won't be produced—and that he won't know why.

The result is a temptation to try to use author's notes to remove every possible obstacle to staging the play.

Many of the thrillers that I read as research are guilty of that. The authors imagine a production in which the director lacks either the resources or the imagination to recreate a Broadway success, and so they lay out detailed scenarios for how to stage the play minus a key prop or set piece.

Just like their protagonists, these playwrights trust no one.

But I'll limit myself to mentioning two elements of the script that you're welcome to mess with if you produce it:

- 1) The device needn't be an iPad. Any device that can be written on and password protected will do.
- 2) Feel free to match the description of the made-over Margo to the description of your actor.

Both of those notes are so obvious that a confident director wouldn't hesitate to make the change without permission.

And a confident playwright wouldn't hesitate to trust the confident director.

I tried not to write the notes, but I couldn't help myself—I got paranoid.

The New Margo was commissioned by *Dramatics* magazine on behalf of the Educational Theatre Association and developed in a workshop at the 2012 Thespian Festival.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The New Margo wouldn't exist if *Dramatics* magazine hadn't commissioned it. It's always good to have a deadline, even better to have a group who you know is rooting for you. I'm especially grateful to Julie York Coppens, Jim Palmarini and Don Corathers.

A huge thanks to the actors who helped develop this play.

The first reading, at the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Md., featured Lexi Butler, Meagan Carr, Polly Feldman, Katie Kirk, Sarah Lossing and Morgan McNair. My favorite memory of that reading, which was cold (I'd finished it on the plane), was how shocked Feldman was to discover at the end of the play that she was the murderer.

The performance at the International Thespian Festival in Lincoln, Neb., featured Amelia Corrada, Phenix Johnson, Briana Taylor, Tori Thomas and Cristina Vazquez.

And thank you to the actors from my writer's group, Lab Twenty6, but especially Jessica Goldapple, Kari Lee Cartwright and Maria McCann-Glover.

The New Margo

CHARACTERS

(The characters are four days away from starting their freshman year of college.)

DELTA

MARGO

DANALYNN

SAYRE

IRIS

CHARACTER NOTES

Let's start with what these young women are on a normal day: they're smart, kind and funny. One of the things that bonds them is that they amuse one another—loudly and quietly. They're ambitious for themselves and each other.

On a normal day, Delta is the person you want to greet you in a new place. She hunts for the good in you, finds it, and relaxes you by enjoying you.

Margo's not herself today, but Margo is the star. She's the kind of person who seems to make time to move differently, to expand and slow down, so that her list of accomplishments seems endless: piano, soccer, fiction writer, honor roll and on and on.

Danalynn, or Dani (pronounced as “Danna-lynn” or “Dan-ny”), is a jock. It shows in her walk and allows her to be physically intimidating, if need be.

Sayre is the leader, but effortlessly so. On a normal day, she leads the group so calmly and thoughtfully that it's impossible to resent her.

Iris's sense of humor is both ironic and dark. It's not easy to get to know her, but you'd be glad if you did.

This isn't a normal day.

The New Margo

SCENE 1

AT RISE: A CLAP OF THUNDER as lights bang up on DELTA, in her bedroom, mid-panic attack. She's never had a panic attack before, which makes it much worse since she's not exactly sure what's happening to her. She's trying to control her out-of-control, shallow breaths. She doubles over, goes almost to the floor. DELTA's got a largish bandage on her forehead.

The scene is in the living room and one bedroom of a three-bedroom dormitory suite. Exits lead out to the hallway and to the other two bedrooms.

Though we're not yet aware of it, the living room fourth wall contains a large window. The seating—a couch and a chair or two—is arranged to allow the occupants to see out of the window.

The five new occupants of the suite arrived yesterday, so while some unpacking and decorating has been accomplished, there are still boxes and packing detritus lying around. A pennant or some memorabilia shows us that at least one of these young women is a baseball fan. The bedroom we can see belongs to DELTA and a roommate who hasn't arrived yet.

DELTA struggles to calm herself as the outer door opens and SAYRE enters, using a walking stick to guide herself to the couch. SAYRE is blind.

SAYRE (*yells*). Hey, anyone here? HELLO?

(DELTA, still fighting her panic, doesn't answer. IRIS emerges into the living room from her bedroom.)

IRIS. Hey. You beat the storm.

SAYRE. Barely. You the only one here?

IRIS. I think so.

SAYRE. No word from Margo?

IRIS. Nothing. I called her about a hundred and eighty times.

SAYRE. Me too. And I had Dani email her.

IRIS. You did?

SAYRE. Yeah.

IRIS. Let me see if she checked it.

(IRIS enters DELTA's room.)

IRIS (*cont'd, startled*). Jesus!

DELTA. Sorry.

IRIS. I didn't think you were here. (*Sees the state DELTA's in.*)
Are you OK?

(DELTA nods.)

SAYRE. Is that Delta?

DELTA. Yeah.

SAYRE. What are you doing in there?

DELTA. Worrying.

SAYRE. Come in here.

(DELTA enters the living room. Meanwhile, IRIS looks around the bedroom for DELTA's iPad. She finds it and a flashlight in a desk drawer.)

DELTA. Hey.

SAYRE. Hi. One to 10—how worried are you?

DELTA. Eight.

SAYRE. Let's give her another hour.

DELTA. Why not just call her house?

SAYRE. Because. If I don't come home one night, I don't want any of you calling my parents.

(Another rumble of thunder makes them pause. We hear thunder occasionally throughout the scene as the storm approaches.)

DELTA. Does it seem like her not to come home?

SAYRE. College is different rules. You don't have to come home if you don't want to.

DELTA. Yeah, but her whole personality wouldn't just change overnight.

SAYRE. You don't know that. New place, new person.

IRIS *(emerging from DELTA's bedroom holding DELTA's iPad and a flashlight)*. She could have come home last night and left while we were still asleep.

DELTA. She didn't. I was out here waiting for her.

IRIS. All night?

DELTA. Yeah. I wanted to apologize.

SAYRE. You didn't sleep at all?

DELTA. No.

SAYRE. Let me feel your head.

(DELTA goes to SAYRE, leans over and guides SAYRE's hand to the bandage on her head. The bump is big.)

SAYRE *(cont'd)*. Oh!

DELTA. Yeah.

SAYRE. You have to go to a doctor.

DELTA. It's fine.

SAYRE. You don't know that for sure.

IRIS (*holding up the flashlight*). Can I borrow this if I go out later?

DELTA. It's not mine.

IRIS. It was in your drawer.

DELTA. No it wasn't.

IRIS. Yeah it was. Someone must've left it. (*Starts typing into DELTA's iPad.*)

DELTA. Is that my iPad?

IRIS. Yeah.

DELTA. How'd you know my password?

IRIS. Same way I know Margo's email password—I watched you type it in.

DELTA. Really?

IRIS. Yeah.

DELTA. You're scary sometimes ...

IRIS. She hasn't checked email.

(DANALYNN enters. She's dressed for running and breathing hard.)

DANALYNN. Hi.

SAYRE. Hey there.

IRIS. Are you all right?

DANALYNN. Yeah, I took the stairs.

SAYRE. You walked up 17 flights?

DANALYNN. I *ran* up 17 flights. (*To DELTA.*) Where's the body?

DELTA. What do you mean?

DANALYNN. You look like you're at a funeral.

DELTA. I'm worried.

DANALYNN. No word from her?

DELTA. No.

DANALYNN. Should we call the police?

SAYRE. Let's give her a little more time.

DELTA (*sharply*). Why?

SAYRE. I told you why. Call if you want.

DELTA. But you think we should just wait.

SAYRE. Yeah. A little longer.

IRIS. We should play the Murder Game.

DELTA. I'm too on edge.

SAYRE. Me too.

DANALYNN (*still warm from her run*). I have to open a window.

(DANALYNN opens the window and reacts to the missing screen, which Delta and Iris see instantly, and Sayre feels as well.)

DANALYNN (*cont'd*). Whoa!

DELTA. What happened to the screen?

DANALYNN. Must've fallen.

IRIS. How? Look, it was attached. Someone unscrewed it.

SAYRE. Are you sure?

IRIS (*indicating the inside perimeter of the frame*). Yeah.

Even if it *had* fallen, it would've fallen in, not out. That's so weird ...

DANALYNN (*looking out*). There is still *no one* on this campus.

IRIS. No kidding.

SAYRE. I met an RA who was moving in on the second floor.

DANALYNN. And there's a light on in that dorm. (*Leans out the window too far to look.*)

DELTA. Careful!

IRIS (*low-key amusement*). You know, someone jumped once.

DELTA. No.

IRIS. Or maybe didn't jump. As it turned out, she wasn't getting along with her roommates.

DELTA. They think her roommates pushed her out?

IRIS. Threw her out. But they couldn't prove it.

(*SAYRE's phone rings.*)

SAYRE. Hello? HEY!!!! (*To the others, who are enormously relieved.*) It's Margo. (*Back to Margo.*) Where have you been? We've been worried sick. (*Beat.*) You did what? Well how fun! I can't wait. No, OK. I won't tell. But why didn't you at least call? (*A long pause.*) Yeah, Delta's here. Do you want to talk to her? (*Though she doesn't make a big deal of it, the answer is apparently "no."*) All right. Well, hurry. We'll see you soon. (*Hangs up.*) She's practically here.

IRIS. Perfect! Time for a quick round of Murder Game.

DANALYNN. Where's she been?

SAYRE. She said not to tell you but I'm gonna just tell you. She got a makeover.

IRIS (*to DELTA*). What was that look?

DELTA. Makeovers are creepy.

SAYRE. You're still mad at her.

DELTA. No, they're creepy.

SAYRE. Why?

DELTA. Change yourself from the outside in.

SAYRE. So?

DELTA. So that's not gonna work.

SAYRE. How *do* you change yourself?

DELTA. You don't.

SAYRE. You don't think people change?

DELTA. Not on purpose.

IRIS. Murder Game.

DANALYNN. All right. What are we playing to?

IRIS. First one to get two right wins. You start.

DANALYNN. OK. “Do you really believe in the perfect murder?”

(The point of the Murder Game is to answer as quickly as possible. All of them say or almost say it, but SAYRE gets it out the fastest ...)

SAYRE. *Dial M for Murder!*

IRIS. Winner—Sayre. One point. Too easy.

DANALYNN. I thought it was so easy it would be hard. Delta?

DELTA *(thinks a moment)*. “No! Please! Please, I’ll ... I’ll give you anything! Aaaahh!”

(This is so generic that it amuses all of them.)

SAYRE. That could be in anything.

DELTA. I know.

IRIS. *Sorry, Wrong Number*. The movie, not the play.

DELTA. Still scary.

IRIS. Thank you.

DELTA. Your turn.

IRIS. “In this room, there’s pain.”

(It’s hard to tell if the slight chill that settles over the room is only due to the fact that no one knows the answer.)

SAYRE. “In this room, there’s pain”?

IRIS. Yeah. Nobody?

(Suddenly, there’s a slow, ominous banging on the outside door.)

SAYRE (*a little theatrical*). I think we have a guest! WHO IS IT?

MARGO (*from offstage*). You tell me.

SAYRE. Ladies and ladies. Please help me welcome ... the new Margo Rodgers!

(After a long moment, the door opens. No one's there. MARGO slides from the side, where she was waiting. She is apparently transformed from the last time they saw her—virtually unrecognizable, in a good way. She is strutting an attitude, wearing stylish clothes and glasses, and her hair is both a different color and cut from the last time they saw her. DANALYNN and IRIS exclaim over how fantastic she looks and MARGO thanks them. SAYRE remains seated. DELTA hangs back.)

SAYRE (*cont'd*). What are the main differences?

IRIS. Hair is brunette. And straightened. Glasses way funkier—narrow and this dark green that's great with her coloring.

SAYRE. Where'd you get all that done?

MARGO. This woman my mom knows. I just walked in and said, "transform me."

(MARGO and DELTA stare at each other for a long moment.)

MARGO (*cont'd*). Where's the body?

(SAYRE, DANI and IRIS react with amusement, which MARGO doesn't understand.)

MARGO (*cont'd*). What?

SAYRE. Dani said the same thing three minutes ago.

MARGO. You look like somebody died. I'm taking it as disapproval.

DELTA. It's not.

MARGO. So ... What do you think?

DELTA. Wow.

MARGO. Yeah?

DELTA. You look like a whole different person.

MARGO. That was the point.

DELTA. *So* different.

MARGO. It seems like that means bad.

DELTA. It doesn't. Just ... wow. You could walk right by me and I wouldn't know it was you.

MARGO. Do I get a hug?

(DELTA goes to MARGO, hesitantly. They hug. DELTA starts to have trouble breathing.)

DANALYNN. What's wrong?

IRIS. Are you OK?

(DELTA's breathing problems increase, a repeat of what we saw at the top of the play.)

SAYRE. Give me your hand.

(DELTA does.)

DANALYNN. Is she all right?

SAYRE. No.

DANALYNN. Should we call 911?

DELTA *(shaking her head "no")*. I'm just ...

SAYRE. To me, it seems like a panic attack. Sit down. Relax, if you can. *(Beat.)* Has this ever happened before?

DELTA. Yes.

IRIS. When?

DELTA *(getting her breathing under control)*. A long time ago.

MARGO. This answers my question. (*To DELTA.*) If you don't tell them, I will. (*Beat.*) Delta's having a panic attack because she forgot to tell you something.

SAYRE. What?

MARGO. This. (*Pulls up her sleeve. She has bruises on her arm.*)

IRIS. Oh.

DANALYNN. What happened?

SAYRE. What is it?

DANALYNN. Bruises.

MARGO. Delta hit me.

DANALYNN. What? SAYRE. You did?

DELTA. No I didn't.

IRIS. Out of the blue?

DELTA. Margo, what are you talking about?

SAYRE. Where did she hit you?

MARGO. The arm and the shoulder.

DELTA. That's ridiculous!

SAYRE. Hit you with her fists?

MARGO. No. With the flashlight.

DELTA. We didn't even have a flashlight.

IRIS (*pointing at the flashlight she set down somewhere*). That one?

MARGO. Yeah.

DELTA. I'd never seen that until 10 minutes ago.

IRIS. It was in your drawer.

DANALYNN. She hit you with that?

MARGO. Yes.

DELTA. No!

SAYRE. Margo, come here. Give me your arm. (*Feels the bruises.*) Any others?

MARGO. No.