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# Lasso of Truth

By

CARSON KREITZER

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“*Lasso of Truth* was first produced in a rolling world premiere by Marin Theatre Company (California), Synchronicity Theatre (Georgia) and Unicorn Theatre (Missouri) as part of the National New Play Network’s Continued Life program.”

“Originally commissioned by Marin Theatre Company, Jason Minadakis, Artistic Director, Ryan Rilette, Producing Director. The commission was funded in part by a grant from the National New Play Network. Developed at The Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis, The Black Swan Lab at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and the Lark Play Development Center and New Dramatists in New York City.”

*Lasso of Truth* originally premiered with Marin Theatre Company in Mill Valley, Calif., on Feb. 20, 2014.

Cast:

The Amazon .....Liz Sklar  
The Inventor..... Nicholas Rose  
The Girl..... Lauren English  
The Guy ..... John Riedlinger  
The Wife.....Jessa Brie Moreno

Production Staff:

Director ..... Jasson Minadakis  
Scenic Designer ..... Annie Smart  
Lighting Designer .....Jim French  
Associate Lighting Designer..... Krista Smith  
Costume Designer..... Callie Floor  
Composer and Sound Designer.....Cliff Caruthers  
Video Designer..... Kwame Braun  
Graphic Designer ..... Jacob Stoltz  
Stage Manager ..... Melissa Jernigan  
Properties Artisan.....Seren Helday  
Casting Director ..... Meg Pearson  
Dramaturg ..... Margot Melcon  
Assistant Director..... Rob Lutfy

# Lasso of Truth

## CHARACTERS

**THE INVENTOR:** Compelling. The grandiosity and charisma of a young Orson Welles, suffused with a boyish innocence and idealism, in work and in love. Also plays ONE.

**THE WIFE:** Supremely rational. Capable. Good at what she does. Knows what she wants, until she discovers she doesn't always know. Also plays GLORIA and THREE.

**THE AMAZON:** Smile like the Mona Lisa. An air of mystery that keeps you leaning in. Strength like you wouldn't believe. Also plays FRIEND and TWO.

**THE GUY:** Comic book guy. Has this totally amazing graphic novel series he will never tell you about. Also plays JUDGE, VOICE and FIVE.

**THE GIRL:** Has a chip on her shoulder from a lifetime of being judged on her looks. Not above using her looks to get what she wants, but only because the world is unfair. Also plays FOUR.

“Not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, and power ... The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman.”

—William Marston, *The American Scholar*, 1943

“If we had all read more about Wonder Woman and less about Dick and Jane, we might have been a lot better off.”

—Gloria Steinem

## NOTES

The 1930s scenes are crisp, lively and somewhat formal, like a smart 1930s film—think *The Thin Man* or *The Philadelphia Story*—with the bold clarity of early comics.

The Guy/Girl scenes and accompanying comic panels begin with a bit of a film noir feel, an air of mystery at odds with the comic store setting. They should progress into a more down-to-earth, simple style as the characters become more real to one another.

In the “Darkness” sections, the stage should be plunged into complete darkness. The cast performs as numbered voices, not as their characters. The sound is on microphone: close, intimate, in your ear.

Title cards are projected, accompanied by a “ding” sound; scene titles are for reader orientation and should be felt as a shift.

Gloria Steinem “animation” can be done on video using a “rotoscope” effect.

A full set of comic panels, drawn by Jacob Stoltz, is available for license with the play. For examples of the various comic styles and licensing inquiries, go to [jacobstoltz.com/lasso](http://jacobstoltz.com/lasso).

*Lasso of Truth* was originally published in *Theatre Forum*.

Additional notes have been included in the back of the playbook.

Special thanks to Lynda Carter and Gloria Steinem, Jeremy Cohen, Jasson Minadakis for believing in this project from minute one, and Cliff Caruthers for vital sound dramaturgy on the Passage of Time sequence (p.122).



## ADDITIONAL NOTES

Ideally, for the darkness sections, the stage is plunged into complete darkness. But that doesn't really happen, given the light bleed from exit signs alone. The "close your eyes" title cards should help your audience create their own complete enveloping darkness. But you should help the skeptics along by not having any actors visible or moving at all. If they watch the first one and nothing happens, they may be seduced into surrendering to the full darkness experience the next time. These scenes must be performed live on mic; if it's recorded, it feels "canned" and flat. The actors must be able to adjust for audience reactions, which will shift from night to night, and keep these sections a living part of the performance. We always had microphones in a combination of offstage and hidden onstage positions (e.g., behind the couch to hide an actor or two.)

The vocal tone for these sections should land somewhere between childhood games and phone sex. These are not children's voices, but adults playing childhood games, returning to a place of innocence and discovery. Above all, do not play "childhood," play simplicity, innocence (in terms of non-judgment) and eroticism. It's probably sexier than you think; the more awful, maybe the more sexy.

Specific notes: In "darkness: child's play," when Three shifts to playing the "mother" role (her "children. children children children" line), this voice is tired, maternal, probably waking up from a valium nap on the couch. In "darkness: hollow," a tone of melancholy begins to creep in. In "darkness: tell me," Five is seductive and insistent. Two is playful and wise, holding back because she understands how difficult this is. It is very important that she is not overpowered or bullied by Five.

Please leave enough time and budget for video. It can be tricky to fit into a rehearsal schedule, with enough time for editing and animation treatment. The Gloria and Friend scenes do require some production value, to hold their own with the live action. If possible, get a video of your Guy actor (or someone else, only the hand is visible) sketching the Girl-as-Superheroine, so we can really see her come into being, and then get erased-through or crumpled up. If you need to do the Gloria and Friend scenes live, with additional actors, I suppose that would be possible, but you would miss the resonances in the double casting, and Friend, alone, would be left out of the end of the play, which feels imbalanced.

Space permitting, please include the Marston and Steinem quotes on page 6 and the Playwright's Note on page 8 in your program.

Finally, please do recorded voiceovers to go along with the comic panels with spoken text on pages 17, 18, 59 and 120. There is no voiceover for the comic on page 94.

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

These are fictional characters inspired by real people. Some names have been changed for poetic reasons: to indicate distance from their points of origin, and that I am making no claim to know the truth.

There's no objective truth anyway, right?

But this stuff is true.

This play is dedicated to my mother.

# Lasso of Truth

## PROLOGUE

*(AMAZON stands in a tight spotlight, darkness all around her.)*

AMAZON. I'm ready.

VOICE. You know, once the bracelets are on, you can't take them off.

AMAZON. I understand.

VOICE. You haven't asked how they would need to be removed.

AMAZON. They won't need to be removed.

VOICE. Good.

AMAZON. I'm ready.

VOICE. You're not even curious?

AMAZON. I'm not.

VOICE. Most people would want to know. If something was being attached to their body. Would want to know, at least in theory, what was involved in removing it.

AMAZON. I will never take them off.

VOICE. Good.

AMAZON. You can tell me. If you would like.

VOICE. I think I would.

I wouldn't feel right, asking this of you. Without your fully understanding  
the consequences.

*(The AMAZON bows her head, listening.)*

VOICE *(cont'd)*. Once I seal the bracelets, they will remain on your wrists. Waking, sleeping. Every moment of every day of your life.

*(Is her breathing more rapid?)*

VOICE *(cont'd)*. A constant reminder. Of your vows. To me. I will travel with you. always. everywhere. Next to your skin. touching. skin.

*(She's still looking down.)*

VOICE *(cont'd)*. If ever you wish to sever this connection the heat required to break these circlets is much higher than the heat we will use today

That heat will travel through the metal. It will blister your skin. Your flesh. Coming dangerously close to what even you cannot endure.

You will be free of the circlets, but your body will still carry the scar.

The eternal mark. Of the vows you take today.

AMAZON. I will never remove them.

I will see silver always at my wrists.

I will be buried in

your bracelets.

I am ready.

now.

*(She thrusts her wrists before her. Two silver cuffs, open and unconnected, shimmer on her wrists.)*

AMAZON (*cont'd*). GIVE.

*(Focus shifts to a series of comic panels, accompanied with sound:*

*The pop of an acetylene torch being lit.*

*The torch, with its blue flame, hissing.*

*The flame, approaching the bracelets, slightly open on her wrists.*

*The flame makes contact, sealing the metal.*

*Blackness.)*

# ACT I

## ONE

*(In darkness. A man's voice, authoritative.)*

INVENTOR. How can you tell when someone's lying to you?

*(Lights begin to rise and he becomes visible, but still shadowy.)*

INVENTOR *(cont'd)*. Is it in the eyes?

An uncertainty, a forced quality to the smile?

fluttering hands, fussing with the hair, the silverware,

unable to alight?

Or is it the systolic blood pressure.

*(Lights continue rising on him. He is on the larger side, wearing a serious suit.)*

INVENTOR *(cont'd)*. the scratch of steel needles on paper

bleeding spidery lines

is it

THE MACHINE?

*(Light floods the small table he's standing next to. There it is. Glowing. A little sexy, a little creepy. Needles and paper and strange rubber tubing. The polygraph machine.)*

### **the girl**

*(She's not really a girl. Solidly in her 30s, maybe even beyond. But she lacks the trappings of adulthood—steady job, family—suggested by the appellation "woman." So we'll go with GIRL for now.)*

GIRL. When I was ten, I wanted to be Wonder Woman. Used to clomp around the house in my mom's knee-high red suede go-go boots. With a coil of twine at my belt. Her Magic Lasso. Able to compel anyone caught within its golden loop to obey. And tell the truth.

I would practice bullet-deflecting in the backyard.

The first betrayal I remember

(well, after the frog. the frog was bad.)

The first betrayal I remember was the second season of Wonder Woman.

The first season was amazing. Lynda Carter was strong and powerful and beautiful.

Major Steve Trevor crash-landed on her island, and she saved him. Pulled him out of the water, fell in love with him when he was still unconscious. Followed him back to his world to take care of him. Defeat the Nazis, and keep her man safe.

It was the best thing I had ever seen on television.

I couldn't wait for it to start again.

But then season two, and every week something would happen to Wonder Woman. She'd get gassed, or wind up with her magic bracelets shackled together, or something else would happen so she'd be powerless. Locked up in peril somewhere and Major Steve Trevor would have to come rescue her.

Major Steve Trevor, who wasn't a superhero, or an Amazon. He was just a guy. Coming to rescue Wonder Woman every week.

It was a rip-off.

Ten years old and I knew it was a rip-off.

Wondered what happened between seasons one and two.



Now I wonder how season one ever got on the air.

But it did.

And I wanted to be Her.

Strong. Powerful. Peace-loving. Generous. Bullet-stopping  
(*Beat.*)

I want to talk to you about Wonder Woman's origins.

*(A sudden shift. A burst of film noir music and dramatic lighting.)*

*Projection: a series of comic book panels, echoing this exchange. Their faces in shadow, mysterious. Heavy film noir feel.*

*First panel: A male silhouette.)*

GUY (*in shadow*). Her origin story? Which time? It's been rewritten every—

*(Panel: Close on the GIRL, face half shadowed.)*

GIRL. Not the story. Her origins.

Where she comes from.

I want to talk to you about

Him.

*(Panel: Split close-ups, their eyes.)*

GUY. You mean—

GIRL. Exactly.

*(Panel: Lightning bolts and a twin balloon with the word "MARSTON.")*

GUY & GIRL. MARSTON.

*(A thunderclap.*

*Light on the INVENTOR.)*

## TWO

INVENTOR. Allow me to introduce myself.

Professor William Moulton Marston.

Perhaps you are familiar with my DISC system of classifying personality?

Dominance, Influence, Submission, Compliance

Where do you fall? In the spectrum?

See me after, I'll administer the Quiz

let you know for sure.

Or perhaps you have heard whispers

of my Latest Work

in the field of ... Intelligence.

Since Time Immemorial, Man has Wondered—

How can you tell when someone is lying to you?

*(Light on a woman. We'll call her the AMAZON. Though you wouldn't know that, just to look at her.)*

INVENTOR *(cont'd)*. Is it in the eyes?

hiding behind the smile?

*(Another woman appears. We'll call her the WIFE. She walks up to the AMAZON.)*

INVENTOR *(cont'd)*. How do you know what happens in the house

when you're away?

*(The WIFE stands close to the AMAZON, then kisses her.)*

WIFE. Where were you this afternoon?

AMAZON. When?

WIFE. When I called and you didn't answer.

AMAZON. I must have been at the store. Why didn't you call back?

WIFE. I did.

INVENTOR. How can you tell?

AMAZON. Or maybe it was when I took the dog for a walk.

INVENTOR. Does the inflection in their voice change?

AMAZON. Why? Was it something important?

INVENTOR. That voice you know so well. Suddenly a half-tone higher, betraying a slight strain.

WIFE. What?

AMAZON. Whatever you were calling about.

WIFE. No.

AMAZON. What was it?

WIFE. Nothing.

AMAZON. Must have been something if you called.

*(Both are working hard not to betray anything. The strain is beginning to show.)*

WIFE. I was calling—

to see if you were going to stop by the Butcher. Get some chops.

AMAZON. I did.

WIFE. oh.

AMAZON. Got a roast, though, not chops. Thought it would make a nice change.

WIFE (*dark, scary*). What would?

AMAZON (*startled*). What?

WIFE. I've seen the way he looks at you.

AMAZON (*faint*). What?

WIFE. The Butcher. I've seen—

AMAZON. Don't be ridiculous.

WIFE. There's blood on your skirt.

AMAZON. What?

WIFE. There's blood on your skirt.

Is that from where he took you into the cold back room,  
pressed you up against some hanging carcass—

*(In an instant, the AMAZON pins the WIFE's arms behind her. The AMAZON, though small, is stronger than she looks.)*

AMAZON. Do you want me to tell you what he did to me?

WIFE. Yes.

AMAZON. And then you want me to do it to you?

WIFE (*barely audible*). yes.

*(Title card: "WAIT, HOW DID WE GET HERE?"*

*A projection of a series of comic panels, Lichtenstein-style: The INVENTOR and the WIFE. Illuminated panel by panel, as by a flashlight under bed-covers. [text is voiceover, accompanied by sounds of a 1930s/40s radio soap opera.]*

*First projection: WIFE. "Oh, William, did you get fired again?" INVENTOR. "Yes."*

*Second: WIFE. "Did they ... find out?" INVENTOR. "Yes."*

*Third: WIFE. "Can't you be more ... discreet?" INVENTOR. "I'll try. What will we do?"*

*Fourth: WIFE. "My job at the Insurance Company is secure. We've gotten through these rough patches before. You'll find another job."*

*Fifth: INVENTOR. "Darling. You're a Wonder. How did I ever find a woman like you?" WIFE. "We're lucky."*

*Sixth: Big romance-comics kiss*

*Projections over: Lights up on INVENTOR.)*

INVENTOR. Let me now praise the beauty of Strong Women.  
Their thighs. Their strong backs.  
Their greater ability to withstand pain.  
Awe-inspiring, truly. What man could survive Childbirth?  
and yet we continue to insist on perceiving their sex as the  
weaker one  
when it is merely  
more compact.  
Oh the beauty of strong women and their  
strong  
desires.  
my friends  
to love a strong woman  
is to acquaint yourself with the delicious chaos  
of uncertainty.

*(AMAZON steps forward out of previous scene.)*

AMAZON. Pretty words.

INVENTOR. Pretty. And true.

*(Lights on WIFE.)*

*Title card: "IT'S HARD TO BE AHEAD OF YOUR TIME.")*

WIFE. behind every great extra-marital affair  
is a woman  
who keeps the household running, keeps showing up at her  
job, keeps the bills paid  
loves a man  
who is a dreamy wanderer  
and gets  
what she paid for  
a home  
a family  
a sanctuary  
away from the chattering nonsense that is  
so much of the world  
but not here  
here  
it is quiet  
one can think.  
I have no fears  
of walking in the man's world  
progressing up the corporate ladder  
under the noses of  
and despite the shocked surprise of  
my so-called Superiors  
—every one of them inferior to me in every way—  
I rather enjoy  
the wrangle and the jab, the competition  
the being damn good at what I do

I am damn good at what I do.  
But I must have some quiet when I get home  
I must have a man  
who is not afraid  
of me  
a man who lets me stand  
my full height  
in my own home, I need  
to let all this go  
he can do what he likes  
(so long as he's respectful of me,  
discreet)  
I'm not  
so interested in all that  
he can do what he likes  
as long as he is here with me  
in our quiet home  
where I can come home after a long, hard day at the office  
kick off my shoes  
and have him curl up at my feet  
head in my lap  
tell me what he's dreaming today  
he will do something extraordinary  
I know.  
something he would never have been able to do  
without  
this.  
our home.

our life.  
no one else  
has to understand.  
it's enough  
that we do.

### **the girl**

GIRL (*speaking to the audience*).

What about you?

Do you have a personal relationship with Wonder Woman?

(Have you accepted Wonder Woman into your heart?)

What does she look like to you?

Pen and ink?

Lynda Carter?

Did you ever give a thought to where she came from?

Before the lunchbox clutched in your little fist?

*(Title card: "1927."*

*Title Card: "My Blue Heaven."*

*We hear "My Blue Heaven," or something similar, begin to play. [It should be a song performed by multiple musicians between the 1920s and 1950s. If a different song, omit the second title card.]*

### **BORED**

*(A comic panel: A feminine hand turning off the radio. Click. The song cuts out.)*

WIFE. Are you bored? With me?