

UNDER THE LENS

By

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Draft 2.0

The current script was developed with the Drama Circle junior youth in Spring 2007. We had a lot of male participants at the time, so all the parts are written for males. The characters, however, are broad enough that with minor modifications to the script (name changes, personal pronouns, etc.), the play may be cast with a variety of male-to-female ratios.

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Under the Lens

The play takes place in the front of a garden shop called “From Seeds to Saplings,” which is owned by Mr. Gregory. It’s just before the shop opens, and a young employee, STEPHEN, is sitting at a table. He has a magnifying glass in his hand and is fully intent on trying to set a small piece of paper on fire with it. MR. GREGORY enters. At first, STEPHEN does not notice him.

MR. GREGORY

Boo.

STEPHEN

Oh! Hi, Mr. Gregory.

MR. GREGORY

Hello Stephen, what are you concentrating so hard on?

STEPHEN

I’m trying to catch this piece of paper on fire.

MR. GREGORY

Oh yeah? (*Getting out his keys, and humoring Stephen.*) And how will you do that?

STEPHEN

This magnifying glass is shaped so you can focus all the sun’s rays on one tiny point and that point will start to burn.

MR. GREGORY

Ah. So how is it working so far?

STEPHEN

It’s not. Not yet.

MR. GREGORY

When it does, be sure not to burn the place down.

STEPHEN *keeps at it.*

MR. GREGORY

Well, time to open shop—where’s your partner in crime?

STEPHEN *shrugs, and puts on his apron.*

MR. GREGORY

I’ve got a special job for you two—until then, why don’t you take these plants here in the shade and put them out on those pallets, so they can get some sun.

STEPHEN

Yes sir.

MR. GREGORY *exits and STEPHEN starts to work. After a moment, another young man, WALTER, enters.*

STEPHEN

Hi Wally.

WALTER

Is he here yet?

STEPHEN

Mr. Gregory? Yeah, he's just in there.

WALTER

Did you tell him I was here?

STEPHEN

What do you mean?

MR. GREGORY

There you are, Walter.

WALTER

I just want you to know, Mr. Gregory, that I'm not late. Look at my watch—the clock in my mom's car says the same exact time, and she sets it by what they say on the radio.

MR. GREGORY

It's okay—it's not so bad today.

WALTER

I just want you to know I'm not late.

MR. GREGORY

Okay, so go ahead and help Stephen bring those plants out here

WALTER

Just after I put my apron on.

MR. GREGORY

I'll be right back.

WALTER

(Checks his bag.) My mom must not have packed my apron again. Stephen, do you have an extra? *(Starts to dig through Stephen's bag.)*

STEPHEN

Not today.

WALTER

(Pulling out the magnifying glass.)

Hey, cool, where'd you get this? Cool, look at my fingers.

STEPHEN

Careful, my parents gave me that.

WALTER

My fingernails look really nasty with this.

STEPHEN

Are you going to help?

WALTER

Without an apron?! I bet my eye looks really cool. Let me see with you, do this.
(Extends magnifying glass in and out from his eye.)

MR. GREGORY *(Sticking his head in.)*

What are you two doing?

WALTER

Stephen didn't bring my apron.

MR. GREGORY *(Going off again.)*

There's one back behind the door.

WALTER

You heard him, go.

STEPHEN

I have an apron. I brought my apron with me.

WALTER

I, me, my, I, me, my... someone's really selfish today. *(Goes.)*

STEPHEN finishes with the pots on the one side and starts to fill in the table on the other side. Mr. GREGORY reenters, as if headed out.

MR. GREGORY

Okay now boys... Where's Walter now?

STEPHEN

Are you going somewhere?

WALTER *reenters with an apron.*

MR. GREGORY

Now boys, I'm leaving you too alone.

WALTER

What?

MR. GREGORY

For a very short while. I just have to go to the store.

WALTER *looks thrilled and tries to wink at STEPHEN.*

MR. GREGORY

While I'm gone... Are you paying attention?

WALTER

Yes sir.

MR. GREGORY

While I'm gone, I'm dividing up the store right down the middle, okay boys? So this side is Stephen's. This side is Walter's, got it? Which side is yours, Walter?

WALTER

Huh? Oh, this side.

MR. GREGORY

Okay, this is what I want you to do. Clean your side of the shop. Get up all the dirt. There's a couple of brooms and the mop. I want to be able to see my reflection in it when I get back, and I'll be right back. (*Leaving.*)

STEPHEN

Okay, Mr. Gregory.

WALTER

Bye! (*Quietly.*) This is so awesome, this is so awesome.

STEPHEN

Oh, Mr. Gregory, what if someone comes by?

MR. GREGORY

Be nice to them, answer their questions if you can, and if they want to buy something...

WALTER

Can we use the cash register, can we?

MR. GREGORY

...Tell them I'll be right back.

WALTER

Awww...

MR. GREGORY

But... if you do well this time, I'll see about giving you more responsibilities. (*He exits.*)

WALTER

I don't want more responsibility, I want to use the cash register!

WALTER *sits down.* STEPHEN *starts to sweep the floor.*

STEPHEN

You want a broom?

WALTER

No, you can use it. This is pretty cool though, like we're in charge. (*He gets up on a high stool.*) My parents never let me be in charge of anything, ever. They don't even let me brush my teeth without inspecting afterwards.

STEPHEN

Well, he's going to inspect the floor when he comes back.

WALTER

The floor's fine!

STEPHEN

Maybe you ought to look a little closer.

WALTER

That's a good idea. (*He goes to get the magnifying glass.*)

STEPHEN

You know you should ask before you take something that's not yours.

WALTER

(Looking at ground.) Cool... My parents never let me have anything cool like this.

STEPHEN

Maybe they don't trust you because you're not showing responsibility.

WALTER

Well maybe they never trusted me to start with, and that's why I never learned responsibility, did you ever think of that? (*Goes back to magnifying glass.*) Neat—

WALTER (Cont'd)

—two, four, six legs, plus two antennae—Hey, how much you wanna bet I can set him on fire?

STEPHEN

You're not setting him on fire. You're supposed to be concentrating here.

WALTER

This is the most concentration I've shown in a month!

STEPHEN

But you're concentrating on the wrong thing.

WALTER

Who's to say it's wrong?

STEPHEN

Mr. Gregory!

WALTER

But he's not God, is he? Cool, I think he's starting to smoke.

STEPHEN

Wally, give me back the magnifying glass.

WALTER

Why?

STEPHEN

I won't have you committing murder with my stuff.

WALTER

It's an ant!

STEPHEN

Give it.

WALTER

What if I don't want to?

STEPHEN

Wally...

WALTER

Stay on your side.

STEPHEN

He didn't say we had to stay on our side.

WALTER

Oh I think he did—and look, we have a customer. (*He puts the magnifying glass in his pocket, takes Stephen's broom and starts to sweep.*) Morning, ma'am.

A customer (MR. BENSON) has entered. He has a list of plants he's looking for.

MR. BENSON

Hello. Did you just call me 'Ma'am'?

WALTER

No, sir, I called you, uh, 'man'—If you have any questions, just ask... man.

MR. BENSON

Thank you. You're working hard, aren't you?

WALTER

Just trying to do my job. Stephen, why don't you sweep up this area here.

STEPHEN

I already swept my area, Wally. I'm ready to mop now.

WALTER

Yeah, well you missed a spot! (*He sweeps some of his own dirt on Stephen's side.*)

STEPHEN

I saw that.

WALTER

Saw what?

MR. BENSON (*To STEPHEN.*)

Excuse me, do you know what the name of this plant is?

STEPHEN

No, sir, I'm sorry I don't know. Does it have a tag?

MR. BENSON

I don't see one.

WALTER (*Coming over.*)

Oh, that's the um, crum-bum-berrius plant.

MR. BENSON

The what?

WALTER

Crumbumberrius.

MR. BENSON

Are you pulling my leg? I don't think there's such a thing as that.

WALTER

For real, my mother has them planted all around our house.

MR. BENSON

Is Mr. Gregory here?

STEPHEN

No, he'll be back soon though.

WALTER

He left us in charge.

STEPHEN

No he didn't.

WALTER

Me actually, in case you want to buy something, like the crumbumberrius plant.

STEPHEN (*Walking away.*)

I'm not staying for this.

MR. BENSON

Well I might come back a little later. (*He exits.*)

WALTER

We'll be here! Bye! (*To Stephen, offstage.*) Why did you act that way? We almost had a sale!

STEPHEN (*Off.*)

You're behaving very badly, Wally!

WALTER makes a face, then purposefully dumps some dirt on Stephen's side. He waits a moment for Stephen to enter, but he doesn't.

WALTER

Hey, Stephen, come on back here. Your floor is dirty.

STEPHEN (*Off.*)

My side was done!

WALTER

I don't know, ask that guy— Come on and take a look!

STEPHEN (*Off.*)

I'm not coming in there.

WALTER

Why not?

STEPHEN (*Off.*)

I'm not happy with you.

WALTER

I'll... kill an ant! I'll fry him with your magnifying glass. (*Gets the magnifying glass, narrating as he goes.*) I'm getting the magnifying glass. Hello, Mister Ant. Putting the glass over him. Boy, is it getting hot in here? So hot... Like my shell is going to catch on fire!

STEPHEN (*Entering.*)

Give me it.

WALTER

Must find shelter.

STEPHEN

Now!

WALTER

Burning to a crisp...

STEPHEN

Wally...

WALTER

Ha, ha! Tricked you!

STEPHEN

Give it to me.

WALTER *holds it up over his head and runs around, knocking over things.*

WALTER

Can't reach it! Too slow!

MR. GREGORY (*Entering*)

Boys—

WALTER *drops the magnifying glass and it breaks. A pause, STEPHEN picks it up.*

STEPHEN

It's broken, thank you very much.

WALTER

Mr. Gregory, listen to what happened.

MR. GREGORY

Boys—

WALTER *drops the magnifying glass and it breaks. A pause, STEPHEN picks it up.*

STEPHEN

It's broken, thank you very much.

WALTER

Mr. Gregory, listen to what happened.

MR. GREGORY

Stop right there, Walter, no talking. Both of you boys have a seat, right here on either side of me.

[Both boys sit. STEPHEN is looking down, and WALTER is trying to develop a story.]

MR. GREGORY

Now, I just met a customer of mine, Mr. Benson, and he told me you tried to sell him a crumbum-something...

WALTER

Mr. Gregory...

A VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE

Stop! Stop the scene right there.

The actor who played Mr. Benson walks up to the stage to address the audience.

STEPHEN (*Out of character*)

What are you doing, Sean? (*Uses actor's real name*)

MR. BENSON (*Out of character.*)

Now maybe you're wondering what happens next? Let me guess: Walter is going to come up with some zany explanation about the crum-bum-berrius plant and how he heard that name before and why couldn't it be called that since lots of plants have multiple names, and even if it was wrong, Stephen wasn't being helpful at all... That's about right, isn't it, Walter?

WALTER

Well, not in so many words.

MR. BENSON (*Out of character.*)

Close enough. The thing is when we find ourselves in this sort of situation—in the hot spot under the lens of scrutiny, if you will—this is the time for us not to make excuses and get ourselves into deeper trouble, but to take a moment to remember our principles and our virtues, and to act on them. So right now, I'm going to ask the actors to come up and we're going to recite some quotations about principles that are related to our scene. After that, it will be time for intermission where you can digest what you've seen and heard, and also ingest any snacks you might find out in the lobby.

All four actors come forward to speak the following:

STEPHEN (*Out of character.*)

The Baha'i Writings say the following about concentration: "So long as the thoughts of an individual are scattered, he will achieve no results, but if his thinking be concentrated on a single point wonderful will be the fruits thereof."

MR. GREGORY (*Out of character.*)

"One cannot obtain the full force of the sunlight when it is cast on a flat mirror, but once the sun shineth upon a concave mirror, or on a lens that is convex, all its heat will be concentrated on a single point, and that one point will burn the hottest. Thus is it necessary to focus one's thinking on a single point so that it will become an effective force."

WALTER (*Out of character.*)

The Baha'i Writings say the following about purity: "Endeavor thou, as far as thou canst, in order that thou mayest be like unto a chaste and clear mirror, cleansed and purified from every dust."

MR. BENSON (*Out of character.*)

"What is the dust which obscures the mirror? It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire; this is the dust which prevents reflection of the rays of the Sun of Reality in the mirror... But sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love for the believers of God will purify the mirror and make it radiant with reflected rays from the Sun of Truth."

WALTER

So what's in the bag?

MR. GREGORY

(*Retrieving a new magnifying glass.*)

A magnifying glass. I had a feeling you might need an extra one. (*Hands it to Stephen.*)

THE END