

The Porch Room presents

X/Y

**A trio of comedies by
Pete Barry and J. Michael DeAngelis**

The Porch Room
335 S. 12th St, #1B
Philadelphia, PA 19107
www.porchroom.com

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

I. Sex with a Mathematician

Nicolai (Him)

Sarah (Her)

Justine, a waitress (The Other Woman)

II. Dog People

Benedict (Him)

Ginny (Her)

III. Fan Fiction

Russell (Him)

Maxine (Her)

Roommate (The Other Woman)

X/Y was originally produced at the Philadelphia Live Arts & Fringe Festival, September 10-18, 2011. It was directed by J. Michael DeAngelis. The cast:

HIM.....J. Michael DeAngelis

HER.....Kate Davis

THE OTHER WOAMN.....Paige Hoke

“Sex with a Mathematician” was originally produced at the Pittsburgh New Works Festival.

SEX WITH A MATHEMATICIAN

CHARACTERS

SARA, also AYDENN - 22, earrings, nose rings, piercings
galore.

NIKOLAI, also PITCHBLACK - 32, shirt with cufflinks.

JUSTINE - 20s, a friendly server.

A restaurant table.

SARA, also AYDENN - earrings, nose rings, piercings galore.

NIKOLAI, also PITCHBLACK - shirt with cufflinks.

They stare over their water glasses at each other.

Silence.

Simultaneously:

SARA
Call it off?

NIKOLAI
Should we order?

Silence.

SARA
Drinks first?

NIKOLAI
Maybe let's...

Silence.

SARA
Let's fuck and get
it over with.

NIKOLAI
Forget it.

Silence.

Seriously?

NIKOLAI

Now interest blooms.

SARA

You don't even look.

NIKOLAI

Say it.

SARA

No, I was-

NIKOLAI

Legal.

SARA

NIKOLAI
That's not what I was going to say.

SARA
I'm twenty-two. Everything else about me is illegal.

NIKOLAI

I guess you don't frequent airports. Homeland Security would catch you on radar.

SARA

Does the hardware turn you off?

NIKOLAI

No, it's not...You must keep the smelting industry alive.

SARA

Why PITCHBLACK?

NIKOLAI

It's just a screen name.

SARA

What does it mean? Why call yourself PITCHBLACK?

NIKOLAI

It's my favorite sci-fi movie.

SARA

NO IT'S NOT.

NIKOLAI

Yours too?

SARA

That piece of plot-depleted scientifically illiterate waste of celluloid?

NIKOLAI

This is not going well.

SARA

What's your favorite book, Potty Training with Elmo?

NIKOLAI

Well, what's AYDENN, then?

SARA

It's a name.

NIKOLAI

Oh, it's a name? First of all, it's a BOY'S name. Secondly, you spelled it like a Hooked on Phonics dropout. Thirdly-

SARA

If you thought it was a boy's name, why did you agree to this date?

NIKOLAI

I. Assumed. Your profile said female. Right?

SARA
It's OK to be gay.

NIKOLAI
I'm not gay.

SARA
You can tell me.

NIKOLAI
I'm NOT GAY.

SARA
OK, Mister Homophobe.

NIKOLAI
I have a clean-cut picture posted. Nice shirt. THIS shirt, I think. I'm wearing exactly the same outfit in my profile picture.

SARA
Is it the only shirt you own?

NIKOLAI
I was totally open and honest. You get what you deserve for accepting this date.

SARA
The computer said it was a good match. I thought the shirt was some kind of office S and M thing.

NIKOLAI
Yeah, that's it. See all those people on the street out there and the suits and ties? They're not leaving the office. They're all headed to vast cubicle orgies.

SARA
I don't care where those people go. They're not my kind of people.

NIKOLAI
Employed?

SARA
I have a job.

NIKOLAI
Wait, let me guess. Pirate.

SARA
I have a job.

NIKOLAI
Senator.

SARA

I work in a think tank.

Absolute convulsing laughter from
Nikolai.

SARA

I'll prove it.

NIKOLAI

Wait, I thought you said "think tank." Maybe you said "drunk
tank."

SARA

Test me.

NIKOLAI

Maybe you said "dunk tank." Are you the Little Mermaid?

SARA

Give me a math problem.

He stops laughing.

NIKOLAI

I'm an actuary, you know.

SARA

Balls.

Pause.

NIKOLAI

In a medical study, twenty-eight out of fifty-four patients
are given drug A, twelve are given drugs B and C, five are
given all three, two get only C, none only B. How many
patients don't receive medication?

SARA

Seventeen.

Pause.

SARA

Am I right?

NIKOLAI

I don't even remember what numbers I used.

SARA

Twenty-eight, fifty-four, twelve, five, two, and zero.

NIKOLAI

I'd need a pen and paper.

SARA
They teach you how to draw at actuary school?

Pause. A young, attractive waitress approaches. Her name tag reads Justine.

JUSTINE
OK, are we ready to order?

NIKOLAI
Are we?

SARA
I'll bite.

They each pick up menus and quickly study them.

JUSTINE
A little more time?

SARA
No.

JUSTINE
Ma'am?

SARA
I'll have the steak and fries. Raw as it comes.

Nikolai chuckles.

JUSTINE
Sir?

NIKOLAI
I'll have the salmon platter, steamed vegetables, mashed potatoes.

JUSTINE
Salad, sir?

NIKOLAI
Sure. Red wine vinaigrette.

SARA
Classy.

NIKOLAI
Thank you. May I borrow your pencil?

JUSTINE
Um. Oh. Sure. I'll get another.

Justine hands over the pencil, collects the menus and goes. Nikolai withdraws a slip of paper from his pocket and draws circles.

SARA

Twenty eight.

NIKOLAI

I got it.

Pause.

NIKOLAI

I get twelve.

SARA

You double-counted the five in the middle.

NIKOLAI

What?

SARA

You said twelve receive B and C. Did you mean to say, "Twelve receive ONLY B and C"?

NIKOLAI

I was making it up as I went along.

Sara sniffs.

NIKOLAI

OK. I see what you did.

SARA

No. You see what you said.

Pause. Nikolai extends his hand.

NIKOLAI

Start over?

Sara takes his hand, formally.

SARA

Sure.

They sit staring at each other.

NIKOLAI

All right. Since this isn't going exactly according to the set rules of etiquette.

SARA

You're the expert, Nice Shirt Guy.

NIKOLAI

If I recall correctly, one of your first reactions was not to throw in the towel, despite all appearances that this date was a bust from minute one. I believe your exact words were...

SARA

Go ahead. You can say it.

NIKOLAI

"Let's fuck and get it over with."

SARA

I may have said something like that.

NIKOLAI

It's not a statement one easily forgets.

SARA

Is there a point to this?

NIKOLAI

I suppose. The question is. Did you mean that?

SARA

I would like to get this over with, yes.

NIKOLAI

And do you see this ending in. Well. Fucking?

SARA

Do you have a problem with that?

NIKOLAI

Most women I know consider compatibility an important factor in choosing their bedfellows.

SARA

You're just full of good words. Gold star.

NIKOLAI

It's usually the other way around.

SARA

Listen, Shirty. It seems, unsurprisingly, that you travel in very bland company. We're just mammals. I came out here for a specific reason - to get laid. Of course I have friends who moan and complain about how Mr. Right never shows up. Guess what? Mr. Right never does show up.

(Indicates Nikolai.)

Case in point.

NIKOLAI

Thanks.

SARA

De nada. So let's be open about it. We're a bad match. The computer screwed up. The date sucks. Let's skip the torture and jump right to the pleasure.

(Sizes him up.)

In whatever quantities we can get it.

NIKOLAI

That's pretty mercenary.

SARA

Don't get all Victorian on me. You're titillated. Just accept it.

NIKOLAI

Well, I guess if there's nothing I can do to stop the inevitable...

SARA

Not really. You're carrying, right?

NIKOLAI

Carrying? What, a gun?

SARA

No, idiot. You know.

NIKOLAI

I don't.

SARA

Well. When a man and a woman intend to have relations, the man will provide an object which facilitates the activity and protects the participants.

NIKOLAI

What, a condom?

Sara touches her nose.

NIKOLAI

Oh, and I'm the stick-in-the-mud.

SARA

What?

NIKOLAI

You say "we're only mammals" but won't do it without a condom?

SARA

I'm not stupid. I'm not getting what you have.

NIKOLAI

Oh come on. You're clearly brainwashed.

SARA

Brainwashed about what?

NIKOLAI

Of whatever you're afraid of. Pregnancy.

SARA

How about AIDS?

NIKOLAI

I don't have AIDS.

SARA

How do I know that?

NIKOLAI

How likely is it that I have AIDS? Or any STD?

SARA

Extremely. These are numbers I work with daily.

NIKOLAI

Why, what do you do, daily?

SARA

I use hierarchical Bayesian models to predict voter behavior. Sophisticated profiles of the human animal. Extreme statistics.

NIKOLAI

So profile me. How likely is it that I have an STD?

SARA

You know it doesn't work that way, you...actuary. It's backwards, bad math.

NIKOLAI

Come on. You know you do it. Everybody does it. Humans make judgements based on hair, clothes, skin color. We're just better at it because we know the categories, how to break people down, the telltale behavior. So do it. Take everything you know about me - I went to Wabash College, I -

SARA

How would I know you went to Wabash?

NIKOLAI

It was on my profile. Online. You read it, right?

SARA

I may have.

NIKOLAI

I'm a graduate of a small liberal arts men's-only college, white, thirty plus, actuary. Never married. The chances that I have any communicable disease whatsoever are about one in five hundred. The chances that you're ovulating right now-

SARA

Don't let's talk about my ovulation.

NIKOLAI

-the chances that one random encounter will impregnate you are about one in sixty. Given that those are independent events, the total chance of anything happening to you without a condom are...

SARA

A little less than two percent.

NIKOLAI

You have a better chance of getting killed in a car accident this year. I, on the other hand, have to take my chances. Going to bed with a promiscuous woman-

SARA

Who says I'm promiscuous?

NIKOLAI

Oh, please. The data don't lie. The model fits. Just because you don't like it, doesn't mean you can change the numbers.

Pause.

SARA

What an utter display of inadequacy.

NIKOLAI

You're calling my model inadequate?

SARA

Listen, you little snake. I don't know how many dippy chicks that anti-condom routine has worked on, but hear me now: I'm a fucking mathematician. Wabash? There's no "men's-only college" demographic used in any actuarial table or study you can name! So go sweet-talk some bimbo at the bar. Don't feed me a line of bad stats.

NIKOLAI

I'm telling you the truth.

SARA

Bullshit! You isolated yourself in the data and created bias. And you know it. Every peer-review publication in the world would back a finding that says a certain type of man doesn't have STDs. Men print the journals! You are just some number-cruncher with a master's degree pick-up line. I wonder how many bastards you've sired with this crap.

NIKOLAI

You're totally off base. But if you feel that strongly about it, fine. We'll pick up a condom.

SARA

I'm not sure I like you enough any more.

NIKOLAI

You're insane.

SARA

No. When I model human behavior, I'm right. I don't need your flimsy insurance company math. I deal with curves in hundreds of axes. My science is robust. You're just a geek who needed a steady job.

NIKOLAI

Don't get ugly.

SARA

You want a profile? Sure. You love playing with numbers and hate management, hate dealing with real people. You have to be shallow, because you can't analyze the way people die all day and not be affected. You just play with numbers while the people on the other end of your model choke to death or drink paint thinner. You're a hollow shell.

NIKOLAI

You don't know anything about me.

SARA

Real actuaries commit suicide.

NIKOLAI

Fine. Fuck you. I'm leaving. Have your model of me, and I'll have mine of you. I'll just live with the satisfaction of knowing which one is bullshit.

SARA

The bullshit model was the computer program that set up this date, thinking we were meant for each other!

Justine arrives with a salad.

JUSTINE

OK, sir, here's your salad. Your steak will be just a few minutes, ma'am.

Silence.

SARA

You better stay. I'm not paying for that.

JUSTINE

OK, then, bon appetit.

NIKOLAI

Justine?

JUSTINE

Mm hm?

NIKOLAI

You get a lot of regulars in here?

JUSTINE

Oh sure.

NIKOLAI

Tonight?

JUSTINE

Yeah. A few.

NIKOLAI

Would you help me with a little experiment?

JUSTINE

Ooh. Like, science class?

NIKOLAI

Something like that.

SARA

What now?

NIKOLAI

Care to put your money where your mouth is?

SARA

I don't have any money.

NIKOLAI

So we're not going Dutch, then?

SARA

I wasn't planning on it.

NIKOLAI

Let's see how good your model is.

SARA

Fine.

NIKOLAI

The winner pays the check.

SARA

I don't. Have. Any. Money.

NIKOLAI

Are you serious?

SARA

Fine. The winner gets to decide how this date ends.

Pause.

NIKOLAI

Agreed.

SARA

Justine?

JUSTINE

Yees?

SARA

What customers do you know well?

JUSTINE

Ah. This couple right here. But I really shouldn't say anything about the people I serve-

SARA

She's a librarian. He's in sales. Fortune 500. He's worried that something he's into isn't quite legal. She wants a baby. He's resistant. How am I doing?

Justine stares at her, astonished.

JUSTINE

You're a psychic! Oh my god! That's unbelievable. I mean, I don't know about the illegal activity part, but I know that he always seems nervous talking about work. I'd certainly believe it.

NIKOLAI

Pick someone for me.

JUSTINE

Are you psychic too?

NIKOLAI
We're gonna find out.

JUSTINE
Mmmmmmm. Ohoho. Him.

NIKOLAI
His date stood him up.

JUSTINE
Yeah. He's in bad shape.

SARA
Sh.

NIKOLAI
He works in retail. He's got a nice car and he's late on the payment. He tips low.

JUSTINE
Tell me about it.

SARA
You do anything but money tricks?

NIKOLAI
He smokes. Likes gin and tonics. He's ordered an appetizer for a meal. He was a skateboarder as kid but he gave it up.

JUSTINE
You two are hilarious. You need to get an act going. I don't know if he gave it up, but he definitely talks about skating.

SARA
Give us another. Someone you know a lot about.

JUSTINE
All right. Try her. She's in here all the time and never shuts up about herself.

SARA
She's in real estate.

NIKOLAI
Here in the city.

SARA
Ritzy stuff.

NIKOLAI
Without question.

Sara and Nikolai are checking out the woman, but also each other. They become increasingly competitive, but as the competition grows, so does mutual interest.

SARA
Conservative Democrat. Catholic.

NIKOLAI
Doesn't drink, doesn't smoke.

SARA
(slight pause)
Top tax bracket. Got there within the last two years.

Silence. Justine is grinning maniacally, nodding her head.

NIKOLAI
She ran last year's New York Marathon.

JUSTINE
Oh, my god, he's absolutely right! How do you do that?

Pause.

SARA
She came back from a vacation last week. From the south.
(pause as Justine bites a nail)
Missouri.

JUSTINE
That is uncanny! Missouri's hard to beat, my friend. What have you got?

NIKOLAI
Wore braces when she was a kid.

SARA
Studied two languages in school: French and German.

NIKOLAI
Her husband's cheating on her.

JUSTINE
That, I can't confirm.

SARA
I can. I'll accept it.

NIKOLAI
Thanks.

SARA

She has a tattoo on her lower back.

NIKOLAI

She's a slight hypochondriac.

SARA

She loves the woods and hates the snow.

NIKOLAI

Her kids were all C-sections.

SARA

She's terrified of airplanes but rides them anyway.

NIKOLAI

Her employees hate her.

SARA

Her customers love her.

NIKOLAI

She'll die within twenty years.

SARA

But she'll leave her husband before she does.

JUSTINE

Uh, OK, now, if we're going to start predicting the future, I can't really help you anymore.

Short silence.

SARA

That's all right, Justine. Thanks for being the referee.

JUSTINE

Hey, that was fantastic. I'll be back with your meals. That was really great. Don't go anywhere.

Justine goes. Sara and Nikolai stare at each other.

NIKOLAI

Well, I guess that didn't solve anything.

SARA

Not really. I guess your model isn't as inadequate as I thought.

NIKOLAI

Not bad yourself.

So. Next?

SARA

Pause. Nikolai sizes her up, playfully now.

NIKOLAI

You've had sex within one year.

SARA

Wrong.

NIKOLAI

No lying, now.

SARA

No lying. You've had sex with between five and eight women.

NIKOLAI

Wrong.

SARA

Hm.

NIKOLAI

Why set an upper and lower bound? That wasn't smart.

SARA

We're professionals, junior. We're not fucking around here, are we? Are we?

NIKOLAI

You had problems with your father.

SARA

No. Actually, my father is great.

NIKOLAI

Your mother, then.

SARA

Come on. Everyone has problems with one parent or the other. Your first pick was wrong.

NIKOLAI

Fair enough.

SARA

You play tennis.

NIKOLAI

Tennis? No. You hate vegetables.

SARA
I love green beans and brussel sprouts.

NIKOLAI
What? Brussel sprouts?

SARA
You pledged a fraternity.

NIKOLAI
Never. You're pro-choice.

SARA
Nope.

NIKOLAI
Born again Christian.

SARA
Atheist Jew.

NIKOLAI
Come on!

SARA
What?

NIKOLAI
You're lying!

SARA
I have a National Right to Life Membership card. Wanna see?

NIKOLAI
No. Maybe should put some money in your wallet instead.

SARA
Maybe you should lay off the coffee.

NIKOLAI
I don't drink coffee!

SARA
You drink coffee.

NIKOLAI
No!

SARA
Tea.

NIKOLAI
No!

SARA
You smoke.

NIKOLAI
NO!

SARA
You have yellow teeth. You must do one of those things.

NIKOLAI
I DON'T HAVE YELLOW TEETH!

SARA
They're not exactly pearly white.

NIKOLAI
I'm thirty two! You'll learn that, when you grow up, your teeth are not as blemish free as they once were!

SARA
You're not thirty two.

NIKOLAI
OH MY GOD.

SARA
It's your turn, anyway.

NIKOLAI
I don't even know where to start with you anymore. You've never had sex with a woman.

SARA
I have.

NIKOLAI
You've travelled outside the US at least once.

SARA
Never.

NIKOLAI
You like female musicians!

SARA
Nope.

NIKOLAI
One female musician!

SARA
Not a single one.

NIKOLAI
Christina Aguilera! Dido! Janis Joplin!

SARA
They all suck.

NIKOLAI
You're lying!

SARA
Stop calling me a liar. It's really angering.

NIKOLAI
You know what? Yes. Let me see your right to life membership card.

SARA
Fine.

Sara sets her purse on the table. She first withdraws a book with a picture of a maniacal, grinning Bolshevik on the cover. Next she pulls out a rubber ball, and then a small bottle of dish soap. She finally digs out her wallet.

SARA
I can't believe I'm even showing you this-

NIKOLAI
You know what? I take it back. I believe you.

SARA
Why?

NIKOLAI
Why? YOU CARRY DISH SOAP IN YOUR PURSE.

SARA
It comes in handy.

NIKOLAI
You've got a book of - this guy. And a rubber ball? It comes in handy?

SARA
Occasionally.

NIKOLAI
Use all of these things. Right now.

Sara takes a brief look at the objects. She picks up the book and swats the ball at Nikolai. He dodges, and the ball flies past him.

NIKOLAI

Oh. Good. Good work. Well, you've lost one of your highly useful items, now.

While Nikolai follows the trajectory of the ball behind him, Sara deftly pops open the dish soap and pours some into his water glass. She returns it to the table before he notices.

NIKOLAI

And how about the dish soap?

SARA

I'll think of something.

NIKOLAI

This is wrong. This is all wrong. I don't know how two people could be more wrong for each other. I can tell anything about anybody in this room. But I can't tell anything about you. You look at me, and EVERYTHING YOU THINK IS WRONG.

SARA

You're too tense. I bet you're a Taurus.

NIKOLAI

PLEASE, JUST, STOP! Maybe we're demographic singularities. Maybe that's why the computer program thought that this nightmare was going to be my first step on my way to the altar.

SARA

Well, I don't know what kind of variables it used.

NIKOLAI

We filled out surveys, didn't we? Let's figure it out.

SARA

Fine.

She pulls an iPhone out of her purse. Nikolai pulls out his own Blackberry.

SARA

Blackberry? OK, Dad.

NIKOLAI

What? Oh, of course, an iPhone lover. This is unbelievable.

SARA
I've got my profile right here.

Sara touches her screen. An audible
BOING.

NIKOLAI
What was that?

SARA
Nothing.

NIKOLAI
That was the thumbs down sound, wasn't it? Are you giving me
a thumbs down WHILE WE'RE STILL ON THE DATE?

SARA
I'm not saying.

NIKOLAI
Fine.

Nikolai taps his screen twice. BOING
BOING. Sara taps hers repeatedly, and
Nikolai follows suit. BOING BOING
BOING BOING BOING BOING BOING.

NIKOLAI
What, I can't go any lower?

SARA
Minus ten's the bottom.

NIKOLAI
Well, I'm gonna write and complain.

Sara sulks. Nikolai softens a little.

NIKOLAI
Look.

Nikolai picks up his water and sips it.
He spits it out violently.

NIKOLAI
WHAT THE FUCK?

Justine stops by with the rubber ball.

JUSTINE
Did somebody. Um. Lose this?

Silently, Nikolai takes the ball from
her and hands it to Sara.

JUSTINE

OK. Just, uh. Try not to let your balls get away from you again, OK?

SARA

He's doing his best.

JUSTINE

Dinner will be just a few more minutes. Can I get you anything?

NIKOLAI

Another glass of water, please.

JUSTINE

Sure. Something wrong with this one?

NIKOLAI

Too much lemon.

JUSTINE

Gotcha. Right back. No lemon.

She goes. Silence.

NIKOLAI

How did we get here?

SARA

Because you hate me.

NIKOLAI

What?

SARA

Do you hate me?

NIKOLAI

Well. Yes. You dumped soap in my drinking water.

SARA

No. You hated me from the moment we met. You called me a pirate, among other things.

NIKOLAI

You seemed like the type who can take it.

SARA

See, that's the thing. As you've discovered, you have no idea who I am. Your first impression was completely wrong.

NIKOLAI

Well, you weren't exactly sugar and spice. You called me a stuffed shirt who read potty training books.

SARA

I never said stuffed shirt. You have a real disdain for details.

NIKOLAI

Anyone I worked with would find that statement laughably absurd. You know, all those management people you said I hate, who happen to be my best friends.

SARA

This isn't about what I said to you, or what you said to me. This is about the very first things we thought about each other. This was hate at first sight.

Silence.

NIKOLAI

What did you think about me when you first saw me?

SARA

Preppy. Professional. Conceited. Almost narcissistic, but covers it with false humility. Comes from comfortable wealth - upper middle class. Plays soft sports, tennis and golf, not football and baseball. Drinks adult drinks, weak beer and gin and tonics, not shots and bourbon. A pushover. Whiny. Fashionably neurotic. Orderly, but easily overwhelmed by clutter or wrong turns. Easy to frustrate. Smart but not creative. Marriage-oriented, not passionate. Traditional. Shallow. Treats holidays like chores. Goes through the motions of living, without thinking about his existence. You are the unexamined life. Boring, not in the particulars, but in the total sum of your history. A meaningless person.

Pause.

NIKOLAI

That's it?

SARA

That's about the size of it.

NIKOLAI

Here's you. Rebel. Liberal. Does shocking things just for the show of it. Mean. Doesn't give a fuck about anybody but herself. Hangs on to her sarcastic high school identity. Smokes. Drinks hard. Gets naked fast. Great in bed. Maybe overcompensates. Thinks religious people are idiots, but collects healing crystals and believes she was Joan of Ark in a past life. Dominant. Violently feminist. Anti-masculine. Seething with hatred. Full of contempt. Full of poison. Like a dangerous snake. No love in you anywhere, except maybe deep, deep down for yourself.

Silence.

SARA

It's astonishing how absolutely wrong you were on every single count.

NIKOLAI

Well, you were no better. It's almost beyond belief. This is what we do. We should have been as transparent to each other as that woman over there, with the cheating husband who loves the woods.

Justine comes back with the water, trying to be discreet.

SARA

Then at least we know how she feels. This is how everyone else in the world has to live: without any real knowledge of the person they're with. That's probably why he cheats on her. She doesn't see him for who he is. And he cheats, and she can't even see that.

JUSTINE

Is this, uh, this woman over here, that we're referring to?

NIKOLAI

Yes. You're right. She doesn't know a thing about her husband. She doesn't have the ability.

JUSTINE

Doesn't have the ability? Look, I can't say anything about the cheating husband, but if he is, it's not blindness on her part. She doesn't want to see it. I bet she doesn't even try.

SARA

Doesn't even try? That woman screams overachiever. Perfect career *and* perfect mother, wife, family.

NIKOLAI

She wants it all. She's definitely a believer in more and better quality time with the family after a day at the office.

JUSTINE

You're right, that's how she talks. But I don't trust her. See how she chews so mechanically?

Sara and Nikolai look.

SARA

I guess so.

JUSTINE

She says she wants to spend more time with her family. But she doesn't even want to spend more time with her food. She's not even tasting it. She's eating for nutrition. She doesn't savor the taste or the texture. She won't be able to remember what she had for dinner tomorrow. If that's the way you eat, then all you have time for is yourself. And on that note, your food should be right out, folks, just give me one more minute.

She leaves them in silence.

SARA

What do you think?

NIKOLAI

Go home. I'll pay for everything.

SARA

Thanks, PITCHBLACK.

NIKOLAI

You don't even know my name. I don't know yours.

SARA

What is it?

NIKOLAI

Guess.

Sara closes her eyes. Long pause. She opens them.

SARA

Nikolai.

Silence.

NIKOLAI

How did you do that?

SARA

I was right?

NIKOLAI

Yes.

SARA

I just tried to forget everything about you and picked the first name that came to mind.

NIKOLAI

Nikolai?

SARA

I thought. You look like a Russian king.

Pause.

SARA

Your turn.

Long pause. Nikolai tries Sara's technique.

NIKOLAI

Sara.

SARA

With, or without, an "H"?

NIKOLAI

Oh, you don't have an "H". No "H" for you.

SARA

My teachers couldn't even get that right. How did you do it?

NIKOLAI

I tried to clear my mind, but. I'll admit, "Jewish" did factor into my selection.

SARA

So, what just happened? Are we the worst match in history, or meant to be?

NIKOLAI

I don't believe in meant to be.

SARA

Neither do I.

NIKOLAI

Then that's something we have in common.

Pause.

SARA

Say something nice to me.

NIKOLAI

You don't want flattery. You want something real.

SARA

Then say something real and nice, or I'm going home with a handshake.

NIKOLAI

All right. You are the most surprising woman I've ever met.

Pause.

I'll take that.

SARA

Is it enough?

NIKOLAI

No.

SARA

Why not?

NIKOLAI

SARA
You're not surprising. Neither am I. We just don't know any facts about each other. Even if I can't predict anything you *are*, nothing you *do* surprises me.

NIKOLAI
But you're wrong again. I *am* a surprising guy. So let me surprise you.

SARA
Don't surprise me. Just be yourself, and prove me wrong.

Silence.

Nikolai takes the dish soap and pours it into both of their water glasses.

He dips his fork into his own water and stirs lightly. Then his finger.

He raises the fork from the water, pressing his index finger against the end of it. He raises the fork to his lips and blows through the tines.

Scores of enormous bubbles leap from the end of the fork across the table at Sara. She bursts into sudden, gleeful, almost childish laughter. Nikolai looks her over, beaming.

What?

SARA

NIKOLAI
I never would have expected you had a laugh like that in you.

He dips his fork again and produces more bubbles.

SARA
You're gonna get us thrown out.

NIKOLAI
How long do you think it will take?

SARA
Is this a bet?

NIKOLAI
Sure.

SARA
Eight minutes.

NIKOLAI
I say fourteen.

SARA
You're on.

Sara dips her straw into the water and blows bubbles as well.

Justine hurries in, frantic.

JUSTINE
Uh, OK, guys. You can't do that. Uh, please stop. It's not really. Uh. You can't.

They ignore her. Her attention is caught by someone offstage.

JUSTINE
Yes, ma'am, I'm sorry, I'm trying, I can't.
(To Sara and Nikolai)
Sir? Ma'am? Please. I know we had some laughs, but, um. I'm going to have to get the manager.

SARA
Sounds good. Go get him.

JUSTINE
Um. Well, then. OK.

Justine flees. Sara and Nikolai laugh.

SARA
Eight minutes, tops.

NIKOLAI
Not if we won't go.

Sara laughs. She leans in to blows more bubbles. Nikolai leans towards her. They reach forward to kiss.

SARA

You're still gonna wear a condom.

NIKOLAI

I accept.

Blackout.

DQI 'RGQRNG

CHARACTERS

BENEDICT: effete, but with the confidence of mid-level management.

GINNY: ready-to-please, but with the confidence of total delusion.

PLACE

The office break room.

TIME

Present, after a party. Benedict might wear a festive cardboard party hat.

BENEDICT and GINNY clean up the remnants of a birthday party in the break room.

BENEDICT

I think I can safely say: this might be one of the best days at the office I've ever had.

GINNY

It'll be tough to beat.

BENEDICT

Thank you so much for all the work you put into this, Ginny. It really means a lot to me.

GINNY

Oh, it was my pleasure.

BENEDICT

You know, this was as good as any catered office party. Seriously. You could get a nice little side business going throwing birthday parties.

GINNY

Oh, come on.

BENEDICT

That fruit dish was incredible. The way you arranged every last piece of fruit - orange, apple, kiwi, orange, apple, kiwi - I couldn't believe you made it yourself. You have so many hidden talents.

They kiss. It is slightly awkward - should we do this at the office? - but she accepts and enjoys it.

GINNY

Well, thank you, Ben.

BENEDICT

Who knows? It's only five thirty. The day could get even better. I feel so good I feel like it was my birthday party.

GINNY

You ate enough cake.

BENEDICT

Where's the birthday girl?

GINNY

In the copy room. With her boyfriend.

BENEDICT

Oh! We should check on them. Make sure they're not being naughty.

GINNY

I'm sure they're behaving.

BENEDICT

I'm sure they're wound up. I know Dorothy is. The whole department came out. The presents, the cake, the drinks. I'm sure she doesn't know what hit her.

GINNY

You did a wonderful thing for her.

BENEDICT

She deserved every bit of it. Come on, let's see what they're up to.

GINNY

What if they're...?

BENEDICT

(amused at the possibility)

In the copy room? Then we'd better put a stop to it right away!

Benedict opens the door. Two (invisible) dogs burst into the room and rush to Benedict and Ginny. DOROTHY is a large Greyhound, and SAMSON is a tiny Pekingese.

Simultaneously:

BENEDICT

Who that? Who that?
Who's the party dog? It's
you! It's you the party
dog! Did you - did you
have a good time? Yes!
Yes you did! Yes you had
a good time! Yes you had
cake and threw up! Yes!
OK! OK yes! Oh you
had a very good time!

GINNY

Well hello! Hello! Were
you in there with
Dorothy? Oh! Very nice!
Did you like Dorothy's
party? You did? What
did you say to her? You
said happy birthday?
How nice! I love you too.
I had a nice time. All right,
go play!

The dogs run around the room. Benedict and Ginny speak to each other while occasionally following the actions of their dogs as the animals run across the room, chase each other, or perform their animal functions.

BENEDICT

Wow. Are they excited or what?

GINNY

By the way, Samson is very grateful that you let him come.

BENEDICT

Dorothy wouldn't have had it any other way.

GINNY

Did anybody mind his being there?

BENEDICT

Of course not. I wrote in the memo: all dogs are invited. RSVP if your dog will attend.

GINNY

That was very thoughtful.

BENEDICT

Not at all. Why shouldn't they come? If I'm going to have a party at the office for Dorothy - which considering my numbers, I think I have every right to organize - then other dogs should be allowed to attend. In some cases, I'd probably prefer the dogs to their owners.

GINNY

It's too bad no one else brought their dogs.

BENEDICT

It is. I was a little surprised.

GINNY

Well, it was the first time we've had dogs at the office. Maybe people weren't sure about the etiquette of the thing.

BENEDICT

Maybe nobody owns dogs.

GINNY

Sure they do. Donna has a Great Dane.

BENEDICT

Does she? I love Great Danes. So noble. I considered looking for a Dane before I found Dorothy.

GINNY

Really?

BENEDICT

(to Dorothy)

Yes. Yes. But now I can't imagine my life without a Greyhound. Can I?

(to Ginny)

I'd better put her back in the copy room before she tries to eat anything else.

GINNY

Samson will go with her.

They wrangle the dogs into the copy room.

BENEDICT

Yes, Danes are nice, but Greyhounds are just so striking and slim. But so strong at the same time. And I certainly couldn't leave her to get bought by some hooligan at a race track.

GINNY

But you loved her at first sight?

BENEDICT

I did. What about Samson?

GINNY

I've told you the story of how Samson and I found each other!

BENEDICT

I know, but I mean, did you imagine yourself with a Pekingese before he came along?

GINNY

Oh, yes. I love Pekingeses. I've always been fascinated by anything that has to do with China.

Brief, awkward pause.

GINNY

Warren has a pit bull, do you believe that?

BENEDICT

No. Are you sure?

GINNY

Yes. I've met him.

BENEDICT

Warren?

GINNY

Henry has a St. Bernard. Oh, and Shanelle has a beautiful mix - part Lab, part pointer - have you seen her pictures?

BENEDICT

She's never shown me.

GINNY

I notice people's family pictures on their desks. People have dogs. I know who they are.

BENEDICT

The only person who shows me their animal pictures is Kelli Pearson.

GINNY

What does she have?

BENEDICT
Cat.

GINNY
Eeh.

BENEDICT
But nobody brought their dogs.

GINNY
I guess not.

BENEDICT
I don't understand these people. They act like this is some kind of imposition.

GINNY
Did they?

BENEDICT
They gave me all these odd looks. When I sent out the memo. And then at the party. What's the problem? People just don't react well to things they haven't done before.

GINNY
They all brought presents.

BENEDICT
I made it clear in the memo that attendance was mandatory and presents were expected.

GINNY
That's true.

BENEDICT
And yet Gerald tried to take a vacation day.

GINNY
He didn't.

BENEDICT
I could tell he was lying about it, too. He put in for it not one week ago. I told him that wasn't enough notice even if it weren't Dorothy's party. I should consider myself lucky he didn't call in sick.

GINNY

The nerve.

BENEDICT

Hello? You work here? I'm your manager? My job is to delegate to you, and your job is to listen to me. And what I say is: if I have a birthday party for my dog, I expect everyone to be there.

GINNY

That's reasonable.

BENEDICT

And bring presents!

GINNY

Certainly.

BENEDICT

And be happy about it! And bring your dogs! You know, LIKE I WROTE IN THE MEMO. All these people had dogs and I didn't even know? They didn't mention that? Are their dogs too good for Dorothy?

GINNY

Oh, no.

BENEDICT

The only person who even responded to the "plus-one-animal" was Penelope Greiger who asked if she could bring in her daughter. And I don't see what that had to do with anything.

GINNY

Did you say she could?

BENEDICT

Why should I? She says she's nursing, it'd make her life easier, but she sends the kid to day care every day with a bottle, so how does bringing her daughter to work make anything easier for her?

GINNY

That's true.

BENEDICT

It's Dorothy's party, not a kiddie show. It's not about Penelope and her problems. Oh, forget Penelope, she thinks the world owes her a living. Always complaining about not having space to use her breast pump. I don't want to have to deal with that! That's her problem. You made the choice to have a kid, lady, you live with it.

GINNY

People just don't think about others.

BENEDICT

Why does everyone suddenly go berserk? Nobody would dream of behaving like this for a human being. Why the confusion when it's a dog? I mean, you understood, right?

GINNY

Of course.

BENEDICT

Am I being reasonable?

GINNY

I think you did a wonderful thing for Dorothy.

BENEDICT

Sometimes, Ginny, I think you're the only one who really understands me. Who accepts me for who I am, without judging me. And I want you to know how much I truly appreciate it.

Brief, happy moment.

GINNY

Well, you know, even if they had doubts, I think everyone came around.

BENEDICT

Not everyone.

GINNY

People said they had a good time.

BENEDICT

Not everyone.

GINNY

Who?

BENEDICT

Wayne Kussner.

GINNY

Oh, well he's just a grouch. He wouldn't even look at Samson. I think he tried to kick him once.

BENEDICT

I believe it. Do you know what he called them? Samson and Dorothy? Wolves.

GINNY

He didn't.

BENEDICT

We got into this whole weird conversation. He said that all dogs are wolves, really. It's just selected genetic engineering by humans, apparently, that makes the difference. And I said, well, by that logic, everything we eat should be *verboten*, because we've engineered all that though, what, landscaping, not landscaping-

GINNY

Agriculture?

BENEDICT

Yes, exactly! Agriculture. High fructose corn syrup. That's not stopping you from guzzling three liters of Mountain Dew every day, is it, Wayne? So even if we've somehow engineered, what a rotten word, even if we've created, for ourselves, these wonderful creatures, even out of the raw stock of something as low as a wolf, then we've created, what, a work of art. A living breathing work of art.

GINNY

And what's wrong with wolves?

BENEDICT

Absolutely! A wolf is a work of nature. What, now nature has to live up to Wayne Kussner's criteria? We should slaughter millions of species because Wayne Kussner isn't a dog person. That makes perfect sense.

GINNY

What a crumb.

BENEDICT

My thoughts exactly.

GINNY

He'll probably die an unloved man.

BENEDICT

He'll probably die next week unless he stops drinking Mountain Dew.

GINNY

If you can't love a dog, you can't love a person. Every boyfriend I've ever had, believe me, I've made sure how that person felt about dogs before committing. The stronger the love of dogs, the stronger that relationship would turn out.

BENEDICT

Mm.

GINNY

My first boyfriend, my high school prom sweetheart, had the same breed of dog that my family did.

BENEDICT

What kind of dog?

GINNY

She was tiny. She was a beautiful white West Highland Terrier. Caledonia. I miss her so much. And the boy, Steve Perrion, oh boy, was he a looker. He was like a rock star, long hair, I thought, well, I'll never date him. But we were on the literary magazine together, and things just started, and when I went to his house, out ran this little West Highland Terrier!

BENEDICT

Amazing

GINNY

It was like a sign. The little guy was so excited, he jumped right up and peed all over me. And Steve was so embarrassed, and I said, no, it's OK, my dog does the same thing. His name was Spock, like Mister Spock, because of his ears. And I said, my dog is Caledonia, like, after Scotland, because she's Scottish. It was so weird. I told Steve we had to have our dogs meet, and that was it. It was meant to be. The love of my life.

BENEDICT

Well. The love of your life?

GINNY

Oh. Well. It ended badly. Spock fell in their swimming pool and drowned.

BENEDICT

Eeh.

GINNY

It was a terrible tragedy. Poor thing. But all the symbolism went out of the relationship. And Caledonia, of course, couldn't see Steve without wondering where Spock was. So that was it.

BENEDICT

And now you've got Samson.

GINNY

What? Oh, you mean, instead of Caledonia.

BENEDICT

Right.

GINNY

Not instead of Steve.

BENEDICT

Yes. You've got me instead of Steve.

GINNY

Of course.

BENEDICT

You've got me instead of Steve and Samson instead of Caledonia.

GINNY

Right.

BENEDICT

Yes. So. Um. About me. Instead of Steve.

GINNY

Yes?

BENEDICT

You're pretty happy about that, I guess? I mean, I don't mean to be presumptuous, or egotistical, or anything I mean. Are you happy with me? I mean, with us?

GINNY

With us? Yes. Yes, I'm happy.

BENEDICT

Fantastic. That means the world to me. To me and Dorothy, you know.

GINNY

I know. I do love Dorothy.

BENEDICT

She loves you. She loves Samson. Samson loves her. I love Samson. Samson loves me. Doesn't he?

GINNY

He does. There's a lot of love to go around.

BENEDICT

Wonderful. And. I love you.

(Ginny smiles, despite herself)

And. You...?

GINNY

Oh, Ben. I do love you.

BENEDICT

It's been a good year.

GINNY

It has been.

BENEDICT

We've grown together. Our families have grown together.

GINNY

Yes.

BENEDICT

So. I have to tell you something.

GINNY

Oh?

BENEDICT

I'm just going to say it. Ginny. I saw your transfer request.

GINNY

Oh.

BENEDICT

Donna sent me the first page by mistake.

GINNY

Oh, Ben. I'm so sorry, I was going to tell you.

BENEDICT

China, huh?

GINNY

I've told you how much I've always dreamed-

BENEDICT

And um. I saw the. The part. The "spouse transfer request" was checked.

Silence.

GINNY

Oh. Right.

BENEDICT

And I admit, I was a little, well, horrified, at the thought you might be married, but it didn't seem possible.

GINNY

It's not.

BENEDICT

I know, because then I looked up your I-9, and you didn't declare you were married-

GINNY

I'm not.

BENEDICT

And then I thought, well maybe that doesn't prove anything, so I checked some records, nothing too invasive, you know, public records, high school yearbooks-

GINNY

I'm sorry, Ben-

BENEDICT

But it all pretty much checked out. That. You weren't secretly married.

GINNY

I'm not married.

BENEDICT

You're not.

GINNY

That's right.

BENEDICT

Great. And. So. Um. Just so I'm not sticking my foot in my mouth, here. You're not seeing any one else?

GINNY

No. Only you.

BENEDICT

OK. Great. Then. Here goes.

Benedict withdraws a small velvet box from his pocket and gets down on one knee. Ginny gasps in shock.

BENEDICT

Ginny. If I have to go to China to hang onto you, I will. So. Will you marry me?

Long silence.

GINNY

Benedict. This is amazing and I really need to tell you something

BENEDICT

OK. Is that a "no"?

GINNY

It's not an answer. Why don't you sit for a moment?

Benedict does, tentatively.

GINNY

Now. I guess you didn't read the whole transfer request.

BENEDICT

Well. I could only access the first page.

GINNY

All right.

BENEDICT

With the "spouse" box checked.

GINNY

Right.

BENEDICT

But then it turned out you weren't married. So I. Presumed. That you were hoping something would happen.

GINNY

Ben. You need to know - they don't let dogs into China.

Shocked silence.

BENEDICT

What?

GINNY

China has very strict regulations about allowing dogs into the country. They are paranoid about disease, and they have all these weird beliefs-

BENEDICT

But they have dogs in China.

GINNY

Not immigrant dogs. They won't let them in.

BENEDICT

Not any dogs?

GINNY

No dogs.

BENEDICT

Police dogs? Seeing eye dogs?

GINNY

No exceptions.

BENEDICT

That's barbaric.

GINNY

Isn't it? They have no concept of the family as we know it in the West. The government controls every aspect of the family unit. I complained to the consulate. I said Samson is my family, and my responsibility, and I wouldn't accept the destruction of our familial bond.

BENEDICT

And?

GINNY

They laughed.

BENEDICT

Barbarians!

GINNY

I know!

BENEDICT

Brutes!

GINNY

It was terrible.

BENEDICT

Bullies, boors, backward, crass, cavemen, Neanderthals, Visigoths!

GINNY

Awful.

BENEDICT

Savages.

GINNY

Anyway.

So you can't go.

BENEDICT

Where?

GINNY

To China.

BENEDICT

Oh! I fixed them.

GINNY

How?

BENEDICT

I found a loophole.

GINNY

A loophole.

BENEDICT

You can't bring a dog. But you can bring a spouse.

GINNY

I don't see how that helps.

BENEDICT

Well. Ben. You've been so wonderful. And so understanding. You and I truly see eye-to-eye.

GINNY

I think so too.

BENEDICT

That's why I know you'll understand when I tell you: I'm marrying Samson.

GINNY

Silence.

BENEDICT

Samson.

GINNY

Yes.

BENEDICT

Samson the dog?

GINNY

Yes, Samson the dog, silly!

BENEDICT

What?

GINNY

And my heart is racing just telling you this but I know I have to and I'm sorry but of all people, I know, you'll understand this.

BENEDICT

But-

GINNY

Because you're the person who understands me the most.

BENEDICT

But-

GINNY

You accept me for who I am. Without judgement.

Tortuous silence.

BENEDICT

OK. You're right you're right. We can talk this out. This is fine. We'll work through this.

GINNY

OK.

BENEDICT

OK. Let's see. Where to start. Um. Can you. Legally. Is it. Is it.

GINNY

Is it what?

BENEDICT

I didn't think they'd let you do this sort of thing. Marry an animal.

GINNY

You have to go to Las Vegas.

BENEDICT

Uh huh.

GINNY

It's inconvenient, I know.

BENEDICT

I didn't think they were allowed to do that even in Las Vegas.

GINNY

Another loophole.

BENEDICT

Really?

GINNY

You'd be amazed at how many loopholes you can find in laws if you just look. Our whole legal code is like Swiss cheese.

BENEDICT

And would the two of you...be...happy?

GINNY

Why wouldn't we be?

Beat.

BENEDICT

Ginny, obviously you've given this some thought.

GINNY

I have.

BENEDICT

But I have to ask. Forget about my feelings. What about Dorothy?

GINNY

Oh, I know.

BENEDICT

I mean, Samson and Dorothy, they're the cutest couple.

GINNY

They were.

BENEDICT

When we walk them together, the other dogs stare! They're like the Brenda and Eddie of that Billy Joel song! Well wait that's a terrible example. But you can't break them up, can you?

GINNY

This is the really hard part, Ben, and I was hoping to spare Dorothy, but. I'll have to tell you. I caught Samson with another dog.

BENEDICT

You what?

GINNY

Two other dogs, actually.

BENEDICT

I don't believe it.

GINNY

And believe me I gave him an extremely stern talking to. I was so disappointed with him. I was in tears. But the more I got angry, the more he looked up at me, so lost, so confused. And I realized. That he was looking for something else. He was looking for a change. And I thought, well, there's that job opportunity, and it's in China! His land of origin! Maybe he could get back to his roots, find what he's looking for.

BENEDICT

But Dorothy-

GINNY

I know, and I feel so bad for poor Dorothy, who's been such a steadfast, sweet dog, but I think it's better for her not to live in ignorance, in a loveless relationship, with a dog whose heart will always go wandering.

Beat.

BENEDICT

So. Are our dogs breaking up?

GINNY

I'm afraid so.

BENEDICT

Are we breaking up, then?

GINNY

Oh, Ben, I didn't want you to find out like this. I wanted to do it the right way.

BENEDICT

I'm not sure there is a...I don't understand. I thought we loved each other.

GINNY

We do. But. Well. I don't want to be blunt.

BENEDICT

Be blunt.

GINNY

All right. If it's between you and Samson, I have to choose Samson.

BENEDICT

I actually understand that part.

GINNY

I knew you would.

BENEDICT

I just don't understand that you'd rather MARRY Samson than me.

GINNY

I know this is hard for you to accept.

BENEDICT

What does he have that I don't have?

GINNY

Ben, it's just that we've been together for so long. He was there first. I can't leave him.

BENEDICT

You shouldn't have to leave him. You should be able to have both of us.

GINNY

Oh, no, Ben! That would be bigamy!

BENEDICT

I don't mean MARRY both of us. I mean. To choose between the two of us. As husbands. And I can offer you things that he can't.

GINNY

Such as?

BENEDICT

Such as? Ah. Well. To be frank.

GINNY

Yes?

BENEDICT

There's. Physical. Pleasure?

GINNY

But Samson is a great cuddler.

BENEDICT

That's not what I mean.

GINNY

Oh! You mean smooching

BENEDICT

I really meant sex.

GINNY

Oh!

BENEDICT

I mean, if marriage is on the table.

GINNY

Oh.

BENEDICT

I mean, you'd never. You know. With Samson?

GINNY

Of course not!

BENEDICT

Thank God.

GINNY

But that's just how life goes. Don't you see?

BENEDICT

I'm trying

GINNY

I think of it like this: suppose I had fallen in love with a man with a physical handicap, or deformity. That prevented him from, let's say, fulfilling his husbandly duty. Someone paralyzed from the waist down. It wouldn't be fair to that man for me to turn him away, throw him out of my life, because we could never consummate our relationship physically. That would be a very shallow and heartless thing to do. Wouldn't it?

BENEDICT

I swear, Ginny, I was trying to listen, but what I heard was: you're in love with Samson.

GINNY

Did I say that?

BENEDICT

It was implied.

GINNY

Well then. I never admitted it to myself out loud. But there it is. Thank you, Benedict. You teased it out of me. I'm in love with my dog. My sweet Samson.

Pause.

BENEDICT

I make more money than he does.

GINNY

Oh, money means nothing to me.

BENEDICT

I'm impeccably neat.

GINNY

Samson sheds and it reminds me of pine needles on a forest floor.

BENEDICT

I cook, clean, do laundry, go grocery shopping with you while holding hands and never, ever, ever leave little presents on the floor.

GINNY

Samson loves to pick outfits. I lay three sweaters out on the floor each Saturday, and he steps on one. I live for Saturday and the park.

BENEDICT

I'd be so good for you.

GINNY

Samson nudges my ankle and shivers go through me.

BENEDICT

COME ON HE'S NOT HUMAN!

Cold silence.

BENEDICT

I'm sorry that just slipped out.

GINNY

Well.

BENEDICT

You know what I mean, though, right?

GINNY

I certainly do!

BENEDICT

No, Ginny-

GINNY

He's not human. You're right. He isn't mean or jealous. He doesn't lie. He doesn't argue or fight or swill beer. He doesn't oggle my body or belittle me. He's never started a war or built a concentration camp. He doesn't pollute the sky or own slaves or experiment on other animals. He'll never do any of those things. Or build great skyscrapers or write a novel. He's only twenty two inches long and covered with silky brown fur. His eyes are so open and so big. They're too big for his head. He was bred with cruel design. He'll get eye ulcers or his heart will fail because he was bred for Chinese emperors who wanted a dog that looked like a lion. Well HE'S MY LION. HE'S MY LITTLE LION AND I LOVE HIM AND HE LOVES ME AND WE'RE GETTING MARRIED AND MOVING TO CHINA. SO GET OUT OF MY WAY YOU...YOU... HUMAN BEING!

She moves for the door. Benedict steps up against it, blocking her.

BENEDICT

Wait! Ginny!

GINNY

Why should I?

BENEDICT

Well I don't own slaves. Wait!

Ginny advances, he stops her once more. She glowers at him.

He takes her hand.

BENEDICT

I could be your dog.

GINNY

What?

Benedict gets down on all fours.

BENEDICT

I could be your dog. Let me be your dog.

He barks. He nuzzles her. It is without sexual overtones, without subtext, without ulterior motives. He has only the desperation of a dog about to be put out of the house.

Ginny winces a little, but only out of indecision: she still considers it.

GINNY

I don't know, Ben.

BENEDICT

Benedict. It's a dog's name, isn't it?

GINNY

I've always thought it was.

BENEDICT

Benedict. Call me Benedict.

GINNY

Benedict.

She smiles a little, liking it. She strokes his hair.

BENEDICT

Isn't my fur smooth?

GINNY

It is.

BENEDICT

Once I stop shaving and getting haircuts it'll grow out more.

GINNY

That's true.

BENEDICT

I'd leap for joy when you came home from work. I'd sit by the door and whine until you came home.

GINNY

I can picture it.

BENEDICT

We'll go for long walks.

GINNY

Will you need a leash?

BENEDICT

If you want. Or I could run free.

GINNY

No, run free. That's better.

BENEDICT

I'd love you for letting me run free. I'd love every thing you did without question.

GINNY
I'd feed you.

BENEDICT
I'd eat from a bowl on the floor.

GINNY
Or out of my hand.

BENEDICT
We'd cuddle on the couch during rainstorms.

GINNY
I'd take care of you.

BENEDICT
I'd protect you.

GINNY
You'd never leave me.

BENEDICT
Marry me.

Beat.

GINNY
Oh. I'm sorry, Ben. I can't.

BENEDICT
Why not?

GINNY
You can't ask me to marry you. You want it too badly. No dog would ask for that.

BENEDICT
BUT THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT! No dog can ask you to marry him!

GINNY
Of course not. A dog doesn't ask for anything. You just know. You understand each other. Instinctively. Perfectly.

BENEDICT
I can't win.

GINNY

You can't help it. You weren't born a dog. You'll never be the dog that he is.

Ginny opens the door to the copy room.

GINNY

Come, Samson! Good boy! Good boy!

GINNY

Let's go let a marriage license!

She leads Samson out.

GINNY

Good bye, Ben. Good bye, sweet Dorothy! We'll always remember you!

They go. Benedict sulks.

BENEDICT

"Always remember us." Samson doesn't remember yesterday. He probably doesn't remember the cake he ate at the party.

Dorothy wanders in. She sniffs Benedict's hand.

BENEDICT

Mutt.

(then, immediately recanting:)

Oh, come here girl. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean that. No. Daddy wouldn't call you such a word. Hey! Whose birthday is it? It's your birthday! That's right! It's your birthday! Yes. Yes. Daddy loves you. You're Daddy's girl. Good girl. Good girl.

Fade to black.

FAN FICTION

CHARACTERS

RUSSELL

MAXINE, His date

A WOMAN, His roommate

PLACE

Russell's apartment

Lights up on the living room of a small two bedroom apartment. A table and chairs. A couch.

There are entrances to the bedrooms on stage left and right. The door to the apartment is center.

Through the main door comes MAXINE (Max), a stunning looking woman, a trench coat pulled tightly around her, as if she's just come in from a rain storm. She takes a few steps in and looks around, slightly unsure of what to do. This is clearly not her apartment.

From the stage left door comes another WOMAN, equally stunning and also dressed for a night on the town. Max is startled by her arrival.

WOMAN

Hello there.

MAX

Oh my goodness! Hello.

WOMAN

You must be here for the orgy.

MAX

The what?

WOMAN

The orgy.

MAX

I'm so sorry. I think I'm in the wrong apartment. Russell gave me his key, I thought this was 11-G

WOMAN

It is. You must be Maxine. Russell's date, right?

MAX

That's right.

WOMAN

I'm Russell's roommate.

MAX

He didn't mention...

WOMAN

Oh? That's odd. We're very close. We share everything. And I mean EVERYTHING.

MAX

Ok, well. Could you tell Russell I had to go. I'll see him on Monday. Maybe.

Max starts to leave in a hurry, but the woman stops her, laughing hysterically.

WOMAN

Come back, come back. I was just kidding. I'm sorry. It's just that Russell NEVER has someone over - I can't help but give him a hard time.

MAX

Typically, when you're giving someone a hard time, they're actually in the room with you.

WOMAN

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Please, come sit down. Can we start again?

MAX

Well. Ok.

They sit.

WOMAN

Where is Russ anyway?

MAX

It's pouring rain outside, so Russell dropped me off in front while he goes to park so I wouldn't get wet.

WOMAN

Russell. So formal. I always just call him Russ.

MAX

I've never heard anyone call him Russ. At work we all call him Russell - that's definitely what he goes by in the office anyway.

WOMAN

Weird. So, you work for the accounting firm? What's it called ..Cal Tech?

MAX

QualTech. I'm a senior analyst. And don't ask me what that means, because I've been doing it for five years and I don't quite know myself.

WOMAN

Sounds important.

MAX

(Faux modesty)

Well. Not really.

WOMAN

So what's a smart, pretty girl like you doing with Russ?

MAX

What do you mean? Russell - Russ - is great.

WOMAN

Well, he's not exactly Harrison Ford.

MAX

No. Well, I don't know - in his own way he is. I think he's very cute.

The woman laughs.

WOMAN

Sorry. I guess I'm just surprised. Happily. But can I ask...why?

MAX

Well...he's mysterious.. I was intrigued.

WOMAN

I'm intrigued by the guy on the corner with the sign that says "Help Me Score Weed for Jesus," but I don't ask him out.

MAX

Russell is cute and he makes me laugh.

WOMAN

I get it. You lost a bet and had to take him out.

MAX

No, seriously. He does make me laugh. He puts little jokes in his Excel spreadsheets. Do you know how charming that is?

To be staring at endless strings of numbers all day and then to suddenly see a joke? Or to zoom out and notice that the points on the graph form a picture? This quiet little guy who keeps to himself in his cubical - full of charming little surprises. (She starts to chuckle) One time...he managed to put an entire recipe for chocolate chip cookies in there! You'd really have to have been looking for it - but there it was. I think sometimes he does it just to see if anyone is looking at what we do.

The woman just waits for Maxine to stop laughing.

WOMAN

And so you asked him out over a spreadsheet. How romantic.

MAX

No, he asked me!

WOMAN

Get out. Russell? He barely has the courage to talk to people online.

MAX

I admit, I was a little surprised. Like I said, he's pretty quiet. Or he was, until this week. He came into this work in this suit I've never seen him in before. We're in our weekly conference and we're all arguing about the semantics of an upcoming audit and he just took charge. He cut through all petty babble and just started making decisions. Smart ones. And then after the meeting, the office manager corners me and starts harassing me that I haven't put in enough money for Hilary's baby shower present. I can't even get a word in edge-wise, he's just ranting and raving about how he always ends up putting in extra for these things. He got really nasty about it. And then, all of a sudden, Russel is there. He puts twenty bucks in the guy's hand and says "Allow me to add a little extra, on behalf of Maxine. And if you ever talk to her that way again, I might be forced to audit your petty cash fund and I don't think you'd like that." And then he turned to me and asked me out.

WOMAN

And you said yes.

MAX

And I said yes. We had a lovely dinner. I've been working with him almost four years and I think this was the most we've ever spoken. I liked it.

WOMAN

And you're ok with his..."thing"?

MAX

Hmm?

WOMAN

I mean, he must have told you if he likes you that much. He thinks it's a big bad secret, but I know all about it.

MAX

I don't know what you're talking about.

WOMAN

You know...the stuff he keeps on his laptop. The WEIRD stuff.

MAX

Seriously, what are you talking about?

WOMAN

Perhaps I've said too much.

MAX

I don't think you've said anything. What "weird" stuff is he hiding. Is it...pornography? Oh God. Is that weird Asian stuff with the tentacles?

WOMAN

Well -

Just then, RUSSELL enters. He is dressed in a stylish brown suit, with a heavy tan trench coat and a pair of brown half-rim glasses. [See note on costumes]

RUSSELL

Sorry, it took FOREVER to get a spot. Of course in this rain, even the garage was full. Oh, hey. I...I didn't expect you to be home.

WOMAN

It's okay, I was just leaving. It was lovely meeting your friend.

She gets up to go.

MAX

Oh, stay...

WOMAN

Max, it was super meeting you. I hope to see you again. Maybe in the morning.

RUSSELL

Don't you, uh, have a date?

WOMAN

I'm going, I'm going. Goodnight, Russ.

RUSSELL

Good night. Maxine, why don't I go get us a drink.

MAX

Well, uh...

He's already off.

MAX

Wait, wait. About that...thing

WOMAN

Forget I said anything. Seriously. It's nothing. You'll find out.

She exits. Maxine looks around the apartment, unsure again. Then her eyes fall to a laptop sitting on the table. Dare she?

MAX

Russell?

RUSSELL

(O.S.)

Yeah?

MAX

Could you maybe make me a cup of tea instead?

RUSSELL

Uh...sure. I'll see what I have.

Figuring she's bought some time, Maxine tentatively goes to the laptop and starts it up. It makes a bizarre "vworp vworp" noise. She quickly tries to muzzle it against her body.

MAX

Shh! Shh!

RUSSELL

(O.S.)

Did you say something?

MAX

No, I'm fine. Take your time.

Maxine begins examining the laptop.

MAX

I suppose it's too much to ask for a folder right on the desktop labeled "weird Asian tentacle porno."

Russel re-enters with a box of tea.

RUSSELL

All I have is Sleepy Time, is that ok.? What are you doing?

MAX

Uh...uh...I just need to check my work e-mail.

RUSSELL

You get your work mail on your phone.

MAX

Sure. Sure, I just...I hate that tiny little screen.

Russell takes back the laptop.

RUSSELL

I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but I'd rather you not touch my laptop. I'm sorry if that seems weird or possessive, but it's private.

MAX

No. No, Russell, you're right. I should have asked. I believe in privacy. I also believe in honesty. I was looking in your laptop because your roommate warned me you had stuff hidden on your laptop. Secret stuff.

RUSSELL

She told you?

MAX

Yes. Russell, I like you. I was starting to like you a lot. But this, I don't know, this changes things.

What you do in your private time is your business, I guess but I'm glad that I found out now and not down the road. I've been burned before by men who keep this sort of thing secret and then one night you go to find your vacation pictures on their computer and BOOM you find out they're into...into...

RUSSELL

Fan fiction.

MAX

Fan fiction. (beat) Wait. What?

RUSSELL

It's true. I post fan fiction to an online forum.

MAX

Fan fiction?

RUSSELL

You know, short stories based tv shows and movies and video games and stuff.

MAX

Not weird tentacle porn?

RUSSELL

What? No. Eww.

MAX

Oh my God, Russell. I am so sorry. I leapt to conclusions. I am the worst person ever. It's just that your roommate put this idea in my head and like I said, I dated this guy once who just had the most disgusting fetishes. Fan fiction. (Laughs) Oh my God, that's so cute.

RUSSELL

Let me, uh, go make your tea.

MAX

No, no. Russell, I want to hear about your stories.

RUSSELL

There's not much to hear.

MAX

Well...can I read one?

RUSSELL

Oh no. No. I mean, uh, oh damn it. Tonight was going so well. I didn't want you to find out about all this.

MAX

Why on Earth not?

RUSSELL

Because you're so beautiful. And you're smart and ambitious and successful. And the last kind of guy that you'd want to go out with is a guy who spends all his time in fantasy worlds.

MAX

Don't be so quick to judge me. Besides, tonight wasn't a fantasy.

RUSSELL

Yes it was.

MAX

What do you mean?

RUSSELL

None of this is real. This suit, these glasses, everything about the way I've been acting on our date, it's not me. It's....the Doctor.

MAX

Doctor who?

RUSSELL

Yes! You know him?

MAX

Who?

RUSSELL

The Doctor!

MAX

Doctor who?

RUSSELL

Yes! Doctor Who! That's what I specialize in. Doctor Who fan fiction. It's a British sci-fi show.

MAX

Wait a minute. The guy on PBS with the long scarf and the curly hair?

RUSSELL

Yes. Well, that was how he looked in the 70s and 80s. That was the fourth Doctor. I'm the tenth. This is his costume. I bought for a sci-fi convention. The moment I put it on, I just felt more confident - like I was the Doctor himself. I write about his adventures because he's everything I'd want to be: brave, just, loyal, funny...heroic.

MAX

Three days ago, you came to my rescue at work.

RUSSELL

The baby shower thing? That was nothing.

MAX

Not to me it wasn't. No, I don't exactly consider myself a damsel in distress, but I was taken off guard getting harassed like that. I'm not sure what I would have done if you had been so chivalrous and stepped in. That conference room was full of people, you were the only one who didn't ignore what was happening. That's bravery. And you're hysterically funny. Your e-mails at work - they crack me up. Everyone takes everything so seriously at QualTech, and you just pierce right through that with your dry humor. Sometimes I wonder if anybody else gets it.

RUSSELL

I didn't think ANYBODY got it.

MAX

You see, Russell, we're finding all sorts of things out about each other. The truth is, until tonight, we didn't know each other at all. For example, did you know I've already been married once?

RUSSELL

No. I never heard you mention that.

MAX

Well, I don't talk about it. It was right out of college. I thought I'd met the man of my dreams - smart, ambitious...and then, at our wedding reception, he decided to surprise me by doing the Curly Shuffle. You know, from the Three Stooges? He said "Baby doll, this is for you" and then he just dropped to the floor like a stone and started spinning in circles on his elbow. There I was, in this elegant gown at my dream reception and he's on the floor spinning around like some sort of over-sugared child.

RUSSELL

Maxine, that's terrible!

MAX

I figured it was just temporary insanity and that things would still work out great. Instead, I got a year of video games. Talk about someone lost in a fantasy world. At least you create your own. Every day from sun up to sundown he was playing one of those awful war simulators - spending hours on end in these virtual bloodbaths and arguing with twelve year olds over the internet until I would force him to sit down for dinner or come to bed. Finally, I decided I would see what would happen if I didn't make him stop playing.

RUSSELL

And what happened?

MAX

For all I know, he's still playing. I walked out and that was that. I guess it goes to prove - sometimes, you just really don't know people.

RUSSELL

I'm so sorry. (pause) You know - I hate video games.

Maxine laughs.

MAX

So what DO you like, Russell? Other than Doctor Who. I mean, do you write other "fan fiction"? Star Trek? Star Wars? One of those other Star things?

RUSSELL

Well sure. I mean, who doesn't love Star Wars? I tried writing a Star Wars story once, but it just paled in comparison to some of the others on FanLit.

MAX

Fanlit?

RUSSELL

Oh, FanLit.net. That's the site where I post my fan fiction. There's thousands of stories posted there about all kinds of things. And the Star Wars ones, they're really popular. There's this one user, THX118, he writes the most amazing stuff. Most Star Wars fans like to write about Luke or Han Solo or Darth Vader, but he writes these incredible tales about Princess Leia. Just kicking ass and taking names. I always read his stuff when it gets posted. I mostly stick to Doctor Who and leave the Star Wars to THX.

MAX

Will you read me one of your stories? I'd really love to hear one.

RUSSELL

You wouldn't like them...they're so silly.

MAX

And so are your Excel spreadsheets and I love those. Read.

Russell reluctantly opens his laptop and begins to scroll through documents. After a moment, he cautiously settles on one.

RUSSELL

Ok. Ready?

MAX

Ready.

RUSSELL

“Doctor Who and the Columns of Doom” by Brainyspecs.

MAX

Brainyspecs?

RUSSELL

Oh. Yeah, that's my screen name. Brainyspecs.

He points to his glasses.

RUSSELL

It's what the Doctor calls his glasses. Brainy specs.

MAX

Cute.

RUSSELL

“Doctor Who and the Columns of Doom” by Brainyspecs. The TARDIS made its usual wheezing and groaning noises as the time rotor slid up and down through the center of the console. As the ship whirred through the vortex of time and space, the Doctor sat starring at his monitor. He was a man that didn't look a day over thirty-five, but he was almost four times that old - the last of the Time Lords. Though his eyes were bright, if you gazed into them they betrayed an old, lonely soul who had seen too much death in his life time.

MAX

Go on. It's good.

RUSSELL

The TARDIS landed with an unexpected thud, catching the Doctor off guard. He'd expected to be in flight for hours yet. He leaned into the monitor to see where he had landed and his eyes grew wide with horror. He had fought deadly, implacable enemies: the Daleks, the Cybermen, the Angels. He had been unspeakable places: Skaro, the Medusa Cascade, the Satan Pit. But this was the place he feared above all else. "No," he whispered, "it can't be." The Doctor had landed on the planet Qualtech.

Maxine erupts in laughter.

MAX

You named an evil planet after our accounting firm? Oh, Russell!

Maxine continues to laugh and Russell slams the laptop closed.

RUSSELL

I knew this was a mistake! I knew it. I am such a dork.

MAX

No, Russell...

RUSSELL

Oh God. Do you know what I love most about Doctor Who? More than anything else? He has the power to change his face. When he's in trouble that he can't get out of, he can regenerate. He becomes a whole new man. What I wouldn't give for that right now. To change. For you. I wish I could just explode in a ball of energy and come back someone worthy of you.

MAX

When at any point tonight did I ask you to change?

RUSSELL

You didn't. You don't have to. I just know it. You're the best, Maxine. A princess. And you deserve a prince. Not...this. This is who I am. I'm not the Doctor and I can't change.

MAX

But you ARE the Doctor! All of that energy and emotion is already inside you. Alright, so it took putting on a suit to bring it out - but what's so unusual about that? Think back to any Halloween when you were a kid. If you were a pirate or robot or Kermit the Frog, you couldn't help but BECOME those characters when you slipped on the costume.

Running around the house going “yarr” and waving your sword threateningly in exchange for candy.

RUSSELL

I was always a tube of toothpaste for Halloween.

MAX

Russell, look, there’s something I have to tell you.

RUSSELL

Yeah, I know. You’re not into all this geeky stuff. Just as bad as football and video games, right? It’s okay. Thanks for the lovely dinner and thank you for being so kind. It’s still early. I’m sure you want to go salvage your night.

MAX

Russell, I have no NO problem with fan fiction.

RUSSELL

You don’t?

MAX

I’m THX1138.

RUSSELL

What?

MAX

THX1138 is my handle on FanLit.net. I wrote all those Princess Leia stories.

RUSSELL

This really isn’t funny.

MAX

It’s no joke!

RUSSELL

You like Star Wars?

MAX

LOVE it.

RUSSELL

YOU? YOU? Star Wars?

MAX

Fanatical.

RUSSELL

You write fan fiction?

MAX

Go on, Brainy specs. Ask me anything about Star Wars you'd like. I'll prove it to you.

RUSSELL

What's Luke's aunt named?

MAX

Beru.

RUSSELL

Who shot first, Han or Greedo?

MAX

Don't insult me. Han shot first. Come on, Russell. This is baby stuff.

Max inches closer to Russell with each question.

RUSSELL

What's the make and model of the Millennium Falcon?

MAX

YT-1300 light freighter - modified.

RUSSELL

Who was Luke's best friend on Tatooine?

MAX

Biggs.

RUSSELL

Name an Ewok other than Wicket.

MAX

Alphabetically or by tribal seniority?

RUSSELL

What was the secret identity of Darth Sidious?

MAX

The Emperor and don't you dare make me sully my thoughts with the prequels again.

RUSSELL

Oh, THX1138, it is you! It is you!

Max pulls him in for a kiss. Russell is startled at first, but he quickly catches on. As they come up for air:

RUSSELL

I can't believe this. This is like a dream come true.

MAX

As good as one of your stories?

RUSSELL

Better.

MAX

As good as one of mine?

RUSSELL

Uh huh.

MAX

I'm glad to hear you say that. Because, Russell, you know how you like to dress up as the Doctor?

Russell nods his head eagerly in agreement - where is this going?

MAX

Well, I like to dress up too.

In one startling and swift move, Max unzips her dress and lets it fall to the floor, revealing that she is wearing "Slave Leia" costume from Return of the Jedi underneath.
[See costume note]

RUSSELL

Oh my giddy aunt.

MAX

The Princess has been a bad girl...

RUSSELL

Oh yes?

MAX

I went and got myself kidnapped by that evil, fat Jabba the Hutt.

RUSSELL

Oh dear.

MAX

He's holding me hostage on the evil planet Qualtech. Who will free me from all these evil accounting droids?

RUSSELL

Maybe you need a Jedi.

Max is very close once again, her arms around Russell's neck.

MAX

Maybe I need a Doctor.

They kiss.

MAX

Is that a light saber in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?

RUSSELL

Uhh..

Russell reaches in his pocket and pulls out a Doctor Who toy sonic screw driver.

RUSSELL

Sonic screwdriver.

MAX

Oh, how sexy.

Russell's sonic screwdriver suddenly extends to the full position. He seems embarrassed and clumsily shuts it.

RUSSELL

It's very handy. In the dark.

MAX

Why don't we go see how handy it is...Doctor.

She heads off into the bedroom.

RUSSELL

Yes, Princess.

He giddily follows her off.

A moment passes in silence and then WOMAN re-enters. However, she is no longer the glamorously dressed girl from the opening. She is almost dumpy looking. She wears a pair of plaid pajama pants and a Star Wars hoodie and thick glasses.

WOMAN

Russ? Russell?

RUSSELL

(Off)

Uhh...just a sec.

She sits - OUCH! - something pokes her.

WOMAN

What the?

She pulls two action figures out from behind a pillow - Doctor Who and Princess Leia.

WOMAN

God. Russell.

Russell re-enters. He too has changed. He is not in his Doctor costume - but a simple pair of gym shorts and a tee shirt.

RUSSELL

What are you doing back so soon? I thought you had a date.

WOMAN

Meh. The guy turned out to be a real nerfherder. Glad I didn't bother putting real pants on.

RUSSELL

Sorry to, uh, hear that. Could I just...

He quickly grabs his laptop.

WOMAN

Were you playing with my Slave Leia figure again?

RUSSELL

I just needed her for, uh, reference. I'm sorry your date went so badly.

WOMAN

Whatever, I'm probably better off.

RUSSELL

N-no...you deserve the best. I mean...you are the best. I mean...you should really be with a nice guy, Maxine.

WOMAN

Maxine? When did we get so formal, Russ? I don't think you've ever called me anything but Max.

RUSSELL

I think Maxine is a beautiful name. Fit for a princess.

WOMAN

What is with you? What did you do tonight?

RUSSELL

Oh. You know me. Stayed in. I was just writing some fan fiction.

WOMAN

That's cool. I'm in a terrible mood. I think I'll toss on Empire Strikes Back. Wanna watch with me?

RUSSELL

Special edition or original cut?

WOMAN

Pfft. Original cut. Like you even have to ask.

RUSSELL

I, uh, think I'll go an put the finishing touches on my story.

WOMAN

Another Doctor Who adventure?

RUSSELL

Yeah. Well, bit of a cross-over this time. There's some Star Wars in it too. It's about a princess.

WOMAN

Cool.

Russell starts to go off to the bedroom. He glances at his laptop and then, with sudden resolve:

RUSSELL

Maxine?

WOMAN

Yeah?

RUSSELL

Would you like to read it?

THE END

NOTE ON COSTUMES:

The script calls for Russell to wear a replica of the costume worn by the 10th incarnation of Doctor Who - but really, he could be wearing the costume of any of the modern Doctors (9, 10 or 11), as each of those outfits could still pass for contemporary street clothes. He can NOT dress like any of the previous Doctors, who wore outlandish outfits.