

A CHAT WITH HIM AND HER

a play by

Mark Steven Jensen

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### FIRST READING

HIM: & HER: (Previous title, A CHAT WITH HIM AND HER) was given a public reading on Nov. 19, 2001. The performance was part of the Monday Night Reading Series at the Playwrights' Center of Minneapolis. The reading had the following cast:

Her                      Buffy Sedlachek\*

Him                     Bard Goodrich\*

Stage directions      Peter Moore\*

The reading was directed by Peter Moore.

### SECOND READING

On March 22, 2002, HIM: & HER: (Previous title, A CHAT WITH HIM AND HER) was performed as part of 2002 HotHouse Festival. Produced by the Playwrights' Center of Minneapolis, the festival is an opportunity for playwrights to work with professional dramaturgs, directors, and actors.

Her                      Corinne Sher

Him                     Tom Sherohman\*

The reading was directed by Amy Seham. The dramaturg was Melanie Marnich.

### THIRD READING

HIM: & HER: (Previous title, A CHAT WITH HIM AND HER) was given a third public reading by Abingdon Theatre in New York City. The reading was held on May 22, 2003. Pamela Paul, artistic director at Abingdon Theatre, organized the reading.

Her                      Lolita Foster

Him                     Ben Mauser

\* Actor's Equity Association member.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

HIM -- A person, 25-65 years old.

HER -- A person, 25-65 years old.

### TIME AND PLACE

The present or near future. Two apartments; Spartan furnishings in each. Doors into unseen rooms. Windows. There is a computer inside each apartment.

### PERFORMANCE NOTE

The characters primarily communicate through a small wireless headset that lets them move freely. The headset has an unobtrusive miniature screen near one eye.

Although the characters cannot see or hear each other, they convey emotions with each other through text emoticons like :- ) (emote happy) and :-( (emote sad).

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1.

(AT RISE: HIM is at his computer. As he speaks, he types. HER wears a wireless headset with a microphone and an eye-sized video display. She doesn't type, so she is free to move around room.)

HIM

But is it secure?

HER

It's secure.

HIM

Because I don't--

HER

It's secure. Tight. Jar tight.

HIM

I was having this pleasant conversation in one of these chat rooms and this person typed... obscenities into our room, he ruined it! Emote frown.

HER

It is secure. Emote smile.

(Some words will indicate web shorthand emoticons like :- ) emote smile or ;- ) emote wink.)

HIM

We tried to keep it pleasant, happy. But after that--

(Doesn't type.)

-- asshole--

(Types.)

--jerk interrupted us... she changed her screen name. Lost forever on this information superhighway.

HER

I earn my living from computers. How about you?

(He studies the screen, then--)

HIM

I don't want to get to know you.

HER

Then why are we here?

HIM

(Doesn't type.)

Ramp up slowly this time. She's the eighth one.

(Types.)

Some ground rules. Let's not spend our time explaining our jobs and our families and our favorite foods and our--

(Doesn't type.)

God, I hope she does not want to vent about this.

(Types.)

Past, painful, awful relationships. Emote anger.

HER

Mode Voice, off. Lovely. What does this one want?

HIM

(Doesn't type.)

The angry emoticon was too much. Idiot. Slowly.

HER

You are doing this to yourself again, aren't you? You promised yourself that you wouldn't. But here you are. Here you are again.

HIM(CONT.)

(Types.)

Are you there? I just want our conversations to be pleasant. And positive. That's all. Hello? Hello?

HIM(CONT.)

(Doesn't type.)

Stay. Please.

HER

I don't want to get to know you. I just want to fill in the blank with you online. Always the way. Why can't I meet someone who is... Even keel, don't spiral down. Even keel, that's it. Mode Voice, on. You're a sicko, aren't you?

HIM

No, I'm just cautious--

HER

Go prowling on somebody else.

HIM  
--and I'm scared.

(HER, at her computer, finger on the Delete button, stops.)

HER  
So am I.

(Silence as they stare at their computer screens.)

HIM  
(Doesn't type.)  
She hasn't left.

HER  
If you want me to stay in this chat room, you've got three minutes to convince me why I should.

HIM  
(Types.)  
Three minutes. What?

HER  
Three minutes or I'm gone. Ready set go.

HIM  
What can I say to convince you?

HER  
Tick, tick, tick.

HIM  
I'm a decent guy. I pay taxes, work as hard as I can and I floss my teeth. What do you want me to say? Emote frustration.

(Doesn't type.)

She'll leave. They all leave. Damn it, the eighth one. Forget her and forget her now.

(HIM backs away from his machine. Silence.)

HER  
Don't quit.

(Silence.)

Okay, tell me this. Why did you want me to create a private chat room? Honestly.

HIM  
(Slowly returns. Types.)  
Because of what you said in the jazz discussion.

HER

That impressed you?

HIM

Jazz is the language of conversation. You sounded very...

(Doesn't type.)

What's the word I want? Find the right word. Something jazzy. Together. With it. Oh, I got it!

(Types.)

Jive!

HER

What? Jive?

HIM

(Doesn't type.)

Oo, bad, wrong.

(Types.)

Interesting! You sounded interesting.

HER

So did you. At least, I enjoyed the compliments you sent me. You have a minute left. What are you looking for?

HIM

Conversation. Intelligence. Miles Davis, Dave Brubeck. What are you looking for?

HER

A man with passion above his waist. Emote frown.

HIM

I have a passion for jazz. Like you. Emote grin. And I have a passion for philosophy. Plato, my main interest. But I won't talk philosophy if it makes you uncomfortable. And if my saying that Plato comment made you uncomfortable I apologize for making you uncomfortable because I was just trying to impress you. That's about as honest as I can do. My three minutes are up. Are you logging out?

HER

(Considers, then--)

Do you have any jazz playing right now?

HIM

No.

HER

Point your browser to the Internet Radio site. One of my favorite jazz stations is in Italy. A little acid, a little smooth, they play it all.

HIM

Radio site. Where is it?

HER

Under the Bookmarks slash Media sub menu.

HIM

(Does not type this.)

Bookmarks slash media. Where is that? Oh there. Yes!

HER

How is it coming?

HIM

(Types.)

I found it. Finally. Emote wink.

HER

You must type your messages.

HIM

Italy, did you say?

HER

Italy, yes, that's the one. Emote smile.

HIM

What do you mean? Don't you type your messages?

HER

My chat is voice activated. From my mouth to your screen. Which leaves my hands free for my Irish Creme mocha.

HIM

Voice activated software. I haven't taken that leap yet. Too bad I can't hear your voice.

(Jazz music from his side.)

It's on.

HER

Good.

(Jazz music from her side.)

So is mine.



HIM

Jazz is the language of conversation.

HER

And joy.

HIM

What?

HER

You're paraphrasing me. Jazz is the language of conversation and joy. That's what I said, get it right.

HIM

It was the conversation part that intrigued me.

HER

Listen to that saxophone.

HIM

Yes. Emote smile. Emote wink.

(HER dances.)

HIM(CONT.)

(Doesn't type this in.)

She loves jazz. It's kismet. This will work out. It has to work out.

(Types.)

When did you discover jazz?

HER

I'm dancing. Are you dancing?

HIM

I don't wear a cybernetic voice implant, so I'm chained to my keyboard.

HER

L-O-L. ("Laughing Out Loud")

(Music plays.)

I don't want to get to know you either.

HIM

Good.

HER

Jazz is all I need.

(Music plays.)

HIM

We have an opportunity here.

HER

Do we now? This opportunity better not involve swapping pictures at bound and gagged dot com, or I am gone.

HIM

(Doesn't type.)

She's been around the web.

(Types.)

We have an opportunity to create...

(Doesn't type.)

Do I tell her this?

HER

Create what?

HIM

This is when they all run away.

HER

Create what? Emote frustration.

HIM

Be brave. Here goes.

(Types.)

Create a perfect relationship.

HER

Perfect... what do you mean?

HIM

Are you familiar with Plato's Forms?

HER

Plato's Forms, no. IRS forms, yes.

HIM

He believed that in heaven, there is a perfect state of everything that exists in the mortal world. A perfect circle, a perfect house, a perfect pig.

HER

A perfect pig?

HIM

A perfect everything.

HER

So when a perfect pig oinks, what does it sound like?

HIM

Emote grin. Here on earth, we have imperfect versions of these forms.

HER

So in heaven there is a perfect man and a perfect woman.

HIM

And a perfect relationship. Everything has its form. We could create a perfect relationship online.

HER

Mode Voice, off. An intellectual pervert. Dad would call him progress. Perfect relationship. Must be a psychologist. Maybe I could get free couch time. Mode Voice, on. Is your e-mail address located in heaven? Because there is no way to create a perfect relationship on earth.

HIM

I can't see you, hear you, I don't know your real name and I'll never meet you. So, we could turn ourselves into the people we want to be, not the people we have to be. Through words we could strip out all our faults and make ourselves clean. True. Perfect. That's what I want our relationship to be. If you're willing.

(Doesn't type.)

Now she knows. Will she stay or will she go?

HIM(CONT.)

(Types.)

I've had my turn, so you tell me what you want. Emote smile. Equality is part of perfection.

(There is a picture of a young man on HER's shelf. She picks up the picture and lightly touches its glass.)

(Doesn't type.)

HIM(CONT.)

She won't do it. Damn it. Here comes the log out.

HER

How do we make ourselves perfect?

HIM  
(Types.)

I thought you were leaving. Emote shock.

HER

How do we make ourselves perfect?

HIM  
(Doesn't type.)

Yes, how...

(Types.)

We can start by describing what we wish we looked like. Our ideal perfect body.

HER

Perfect body. R-O-F-L! ("Rolling on the floor, laughing")

HIM

I'll start. This won't be at all what I actually look like, but it is the "me" that I wish I looked like.

HER

Go right ahead.

HIM  
(Doesn't type.)

My perfect body. Okay.

(The actor playing HIM creates a description from the following pieces of dialogue. This description should not match the actor's appearance.)

## HIM(CONT.)

(Age)	(Hair)	(Look)	(Quirk)
I am 24 years old.	Blonde hair. Short haircut.	I am about 6 foot two, I lift weights, so I'm muscular.	A tattoo of a cloud is on my left shoulder.
38 years old.	Medium length, but very clean, hair.		
Fifty-two years old. White.	I have graying hair.	Intelligent eyes.	I run three miles every day.
In my early forties.	My black beard is trim, dark hair, and a large smile full of perfect teeth.	Muscular, but not in a bulky way.	Very fit due to my constant tennis sessions.
23 years old.		Great tan. Clean shaven. Very clear blue eyes. White, white teeth.	
I am a very thin 42 year old.	I have black hair with a very trim black mustache.		And I wear lots of gold, a gold cross my grandmother gave me and then a gold bracelet my father gave me when I turned eighteen.
25 years old. Well, okay, almost 26.		I am also quite tall, over six feet. Of Middle Eastern descent. And I am in very good, thin shape.	Full of energy.
I am in my late forties, but feel like a man in his twenties.	Red hair, green eyes, freckles everywhere.		
I've been a man in my twenties for many years. I am immortal.	I have short hair, curly, going white.	Broad shoulders, trim waist.	And I have attractive feet.
	I have kind've brownish, blond-ish hair, very thick.	I wear glasses, these little round spectacles which make me look smart. Of Asian background, my parents immigrated here from Taiwan.	Earrings and a nose ring, but I don't wear them often.
And let's see, I am 45, but I look 35.	I am very lucky, because my black hair always stays in place.		I love fast food, but it doesn't affect me, at least not yet.
I guess these days I am approaching sixty, but I don't feel it.	I keep my hair long, in a ponytail.		I am very smart, but I don't like to brag about it.
A very well-maintained 52.			