

MANHATTAN CASANOVA

by Jenny Lyn Bader

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MANHATTAN CASANOVA

ACT I

Scene 1. The bedroom. CHARLOTTE wears a bathrobe. She is on the phone. She holds a bottle of sleeping pills. On her nightstand is a glass of wine. She seems upset.

CHARLOTTE

It's tomorrow. November 20th. What? 2pm.

(listens, nods)

Yes I realize I'm the worst kind of Scorpio there is. Can you tell me how I'd get along with someone whose birthday is October 29th? No, I don't know the time. Can't you approximate? Of course I know it's important to be specific. I'm a scientist.

(listens, answers:)

Psychiatrist. What? I know, but astrology isn't really an exact science either, is it? Well, can you check the general planetary chart or something? Hmmm? Yes I realize he's a Scorpio too. Is that bad? So how do you think I would get along with him?

Miserably? We'd get along miserably? Are you sure? In a permanent sense? No hope?

(listens, nods)

Doomed. You only see doom. Great. Thanks.

(hangs up, takes a pill,
considers the whole bottle,
rolls on the bed,
experimenting with hanging
herself with her sheet,
scrolls phone, dials again:)

Hi. How are you? Good! Good. I'm fine. Fine. Yeah.

(listens)

No, don't worry, I'm not going to kill myself, I'm just calling to... ask about a friend. He's feeling suicidal, and I don't know what to say to him. What do you say to people?

(listens)

What? I don't see that it's any of your business. Why would you want my address? It's not like I'm ordering in.

(listens)

No, he's not holding a gun to his head, I'm just calling to discuss the possibility of his death. Can't we keep it open? Why is everything always so final with you people? What? No, I've never called you before. I just meant, why are people in general so final. Why do they cut themselves off from possibility. Why do I say "they"?

(nods)

Of course I'm a person too. Yes, I mean why do we cut ourselves off from possibility. I cut myself off too, yes. Look, are you a trained professional, or did you just take a three-hour crash course somewhere?

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE (CONTINUED)

(amazed:)

Yes, I am one. How did you know that?

(listens)

Really? Every psychiatrist who calls asks about your training? Do a lot of psychiatrists call? Second only to artists? When you say artists do you mean painters or the whole artist community?

(listens, alarmed)

Sorry? Why is my friend so upset? How he got this way? I don't want to get into it.

(to the audience:)

It gets me upset just thinking about it. How he... we... I. Got this way. I guess it all started a few weeks ago, with a poem...

(Music, light shift as CHARLOTTE takes her glass, pulls off her robe, puts on heels, and now looks extremely put together in a skirt and soft blouse. And it's three weeks earlier, at a café with PAM over glasses of wine. CHARLOTTE leans in, warm and charming:)

CHARLOTTE

So?

PAM

So?

CHARLOTTE

How was the date?

(PAM puts her head in her hands.)

That bad, huh?

PAM

No! It was unbelievable. He is unbelievable.

CHARLOTTE

What did he do?

PAM

He recited a poem.

CHARLOTTE

A poem? What's so great about that?

PAM

In French. He recited a poem in French.

CHARLOTTE

Huh. That's impressive. It's a trick, but it's impressive.

PAM

What?

CHARLOTTE

Just be careful. *Il pourrait avoir un repertoire limité.*

PAM

Excuse me?

CHARLOTTE

He might have a limited repertoire.

PAM

(Dreamy) Oh. Is that what you said? It sounded like Baudelaire or something.

CHARLOTTE

(concerned:)

Listen. I see people in this condition all the time. (Realizing:) Actually more and more, lately.

PAM

What condition?

CHARLOTTE

When you melt because a guy quotes Shakespeare or Schopenhauer - or Rimbaud is very hot right now.

PAM

Haven't you ever heard of love at first sight?

CHARLOTTE

That's not love at first sight, honey! It's love at first citation. -You're a textbook case. Sweaty palms. Glistening eyes. A weakness for anything said in French. *Il y a rouille sur le blé.*

PAM

Yes. Oh God yes.

CHARLOTTE

That means, the corn is wet.

PAM

(Melting:) So... what...!

CHARLOTTE

I saw a case last week. Mid-30's. Anthropologist. Attractive, competent. But she was wearing Victorian lace-up boots. A give-away. She'd fainted when a man recited an Apollinaire poem to her. Turns out he had smelling salts in his apartment!

PAM

Gosh.

CHARLOTTE

And I ask you, what is that man doing with smelling salts in his medicine cabinet? It's a little suspicious, as if...

PAM

As if?

CHARLOTTE

As if he wanted her to faint. Just so he could bring her back to life.

PAM

He sounds wonderful!

CHARLOTTE

Pam, you didn't... faint did you?

PAM

No. I felt a little dizzy maybe. But I was conscious throughout.

CHARLOTTE

Good. (Worried:) Will you tell me what happens with this guy? Keep me up to date?

PAM

Of course.

CHARLOTTE

Don't forget. Next there's psychedelia, and boom! Your best friend becomes the nearby river. Pam, you don't need this. I'm your best friend. You don't need a river.

PAM

So that's what this is about! You feel threatened by my poet.

CHARLOTTE

No! I...

PAM

Yes you do.

(realizes:)

Because your own love life is so miserable!

CHARLOTTE

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

PAM

Like the guy you got engaged to who never told you he was already married in another country.

CHARLOTTE

The bigamist guy.

PAM

Him.

CHARLOTTE

So I've had a few bad experiences.

PAM

Or what about the one with the eating disorder...

CHARLOTTE

But that's not why I'm saying this.

PAM

Or the one you keep meaning to break up with who-

CHARLOTTE

This is not about me. There's something going around. The city. Bright people getting seduced by poetry and other philological manipulations.

PAM

Did it ever occur to you that I might enjoy getting philologically manipulated? It's amazing, you've convinced yourself that discouraging your friends from falling in love is noble.

CHARLOTTE

You think what you do is noble... And you help birds.

PAM

I don't "help birds"! I save endangered species.

CHARLOTTE

Do you think the birds want to be saved? Do you think they realize they're endangered?

PAM

I think there's no love in your life so you've come to think of it as a sickness.

CHARLOTTE

Pam. Don't merge us.

PAM

I wasn't planning to. By the way, people don't merge. Banks merge!

CHARLOTTE

I'm just trying to help you-

PAM

No, you're trying to undercut me! (Realizing:) You probably just like having lunch with me so you can feel superior, and be the one to translate all the French soups. Well now I've met someone else with... how do you put it... a

(MORE)

PAM (CONTINUED)
 (thick French accent:)

Repertoire!

CHARLOTTE

Pam, you're acting like one of my patients. You're my friend! My best friend.

PAM

Well now I've found a new best friend, and I have a date with him tonight.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sure he's not as bad as he sounds. Can I meet him sometime?

PAM

You can meet him never.

CHARLOTTE

Don't do this, it's unhealthy.

PAM

No, what's unhealthy is how I feel compelled to tell you every one of my feelings and how you stomp all over them.

CHARLOTTE

I don't stomp.

PAM

You stomp. Good-bye, Charlotte. It's over.

CHARLOTTE

You can't just treat me like some guy, Pam. You can't just break up with me. We have a daily phone call! We have a weekly lunch!

PAM

Not anymore we don't. Charlotte, I hope one day you get over your attitude and meet someone special like I have.

CHARLOTTE

As I have.

PAM

You're doing it again!

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry! I am. If that's the way you feel about it, I hope you meet someone special too. Who sounds a little more emotionally available.

PAM

Au revoir!

(Pam storms off. As lights cross-fade, CHARLOTTE turns to the audience:)

CHARLOTTE

Sometimes when you try to help a friend, you can't. Because you're too close. Your friend gets defensive. It happens. I didn't think that much of it right then.

(Charlotte enters the office and talks to her phone.)

CHARLOTTE

Hey Siri.

SIRI

Uh huh?

CHARLOTTE

Open "Atomic Clock App."

SIRI

Okay, it's open.

(As Charlotte chooses a perfume she hits taps the phone:)

VOICE OF THE TIME

At the tone, the time will be: 4:54, and ten seconds.

CHARLOTTE

Oh I hate when it starts at ten seconds!
(She sprays herself with perfume. Not satisfied, she sprays herself with a second perfume. Hits the app button again:)

VOICE OF THE TIME

At the tone, the time will be: 4:54, and fifty seconds.

CHARLOTTE

Fifty is much better! Fifty is much closer to my favorite time which is...

VOICE OF THE TIME

At the tone, the time will be: 4:55...

(CHARLOTTE sets her watch triumphantly:)

VOICE OF THE TIME AND CHARLOTTE
(together)

Exactly!

CHARLOTTE

(To phone:) "Exactly" is a wonderful time, don't you think?

VOICE OF THE TIME

At the tone, the time will be, 4:56, and ten seconds.

CHARLOTTE

You don't think.

(She hangs up and presses
another app. A male voice
is heard:)

VOICE OF THE WEATHER

This is the National Weather Service of New York state Weather on Demand. For the New York City metropolitan area, press 1.

(she presses 1)

Here are the 4 o'clock conditions for New York City. It's 49 degrees, 23% relative humidity.

(CHARLOTTE switches scarves
and tries on two blazers
at once, one on each arm,
before picking an outfit.)

And a cold front is driving up the eastern seaboard, lows in the mid-to-upper 40's.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, the lows can come at any age.

VOICE OF THE WEATHER

We'll have further updates at five o'clock...

(ANNE, attractive, glamorous,
in a foreign-looking jacket,
bursts into the office.)

ANNE

Knock, knock!

CHARLOTTE

I don't believe it!

ANNE

Hi! I have returned to America.

CHARLOTTE

Welcome home! Come in, come in.

ANNE

Your office looks great.

CHARLOTTE

Thanks. So how are you?

ANNE

Good.

CHARLOTTE

Recovering.

ANNE

Sort of.

CHARLOTTE

Has Bjorn agreed to pay alimony yet?

ANNE

We're still... working on that.

CHARLOTTE

And you're unemployed?

ANNE

I'm in the process of starting a private investment firm.

CHARLOTTE

And in the meantime?

ANNE

I'm... uh, balancing the books for Shakespeare in the Park.

CHARLOTTE

I'm glad you're back. I'm glad you're back and I hate to say I told you so. But the first time I met him, I thought, he's a hitter. He hits.

ANNE

Actually he never hit me.

CHARLOTTE

Oh.

ANNE

He yelled a lot.

CHARLOTTE

So he hit you with words. They do that nowadays.

ANNE

Yes, I guess he hit me with words.

CHARLOTTE

A classic hitter. Probably from a long line of hitters. Probably the first to use words as his weapon. And I also -

ANNE

You also told me never date anyone you meet on the street, or just because you like his eyeglasses. You said don't have a child out of wedlock. You advised me not to marry him after the miscarriage. And you warned me not to move to Sweden.

CHARLOTTE

And?

ANNE

And you were right about everything. Especially Sweden. Are we going to have a normal conversation or are you going to start making me promise things?

CHARLOTTE

I never made you...

ANNE

What? You always make me promise things! Promise not to rush into a relationship... Promise to tell you if I do... Promise to go back into therapy if I don't. Charlotte. I'm sorry too that I spent five years with an emotionally abusive man in Skelleftealven... *but I'm not one of your patients!*

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. Anne I had no idea you felt this way...

ANNE

I didn't mean-

CHARLOTTE

I know I push a little hard. I just hate watching my friends commit emotional suicide. And I've missed you! After a while, it was always Bjorn-Bjorn-Bjorn, I probably resented that.

ANNE

I understand.

CHARLOTTE

But now, things will be better. You'll have some rehab time. We'll be here for each other.

ANNE

Definitely.

CHARLOTTE

And if there's anything I can do to help you, you know, get settled back into this country, just-

ANNE

Actually... Do you happen to know if there's a store around here that sells really thick red satin ribbon?

CHARLOTTE
Ribbon?

ANNE
You know, the kind you use to wrap oversized presents.

CHARLOTTE
"Oversized presents"?

ANNE
I don't like that tone.

CHARLOTTE
Is this "oversized present" for Bjorn?

ANNE
No, it's not for Bjorn! I'm looking for a store. I'm asking you a simple question...

CHARLOTTE
There's a gift store near here. And I will tell you where it is. But I'm asking you a simple question too.

ANNE
Alright. But don't get all judgmental on me.

CHARLOTTE
Of course not.

ANNE
I met someone.

CHARLOTTE
What?

ANNE
On the corner.

CHARLOTTE
On the corner?

ANNE
I was sitting at the Café au Coin, reading a book in Swedish. And this beautiful man came over and recognized the book and started talking to me. We like all the same Swedish authors.

CHARLOTTE
Another Swede?

ANNE
No, he's just well-read. Geesh.

CHARLOTTE
When was this?

ANNE

Yesterday.

CHARLOTTE

And you're already buying him a present? What is it?

ANNE

Well, his birthday's tomorrow. And I thought I'd present myself to him wrapped in red ribbon.

CHARLOTTE

Okay. I'm not going to be judgmental. But you just got divorced and moved here – what, two weeks ago? You met a man yesterday.

ANNE

We had dinner, we kissed, we're crazy about each other.

CHARLOTTE

You met a man on the corner, you had dinner, and now you are going to give yourself to him as a birthday present.

ANNE

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

Wrapped in red ribbon.

ANNE

Correct.

CHARLOTTE

And you want me not to be judgmental about the fact that you are going to wrap yourself in red ribbon.

ANNE

It's my life! And for the record, I think I'd look pretty damn good wrapped in red ribbon.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't say you wouldn't. I just have one question. Why did you tell me not to judge you?

(A beat.)

ANNE

Maybe because I'm feeling guilty that I'm doing something wrong?

CHARLOTTE

Just think about that. The ribbon store is on seventy-first and Broadway.

ANNE

You know what? You could be a little more supportive.

CHARLOTTE

I'm supportive.

ANNE

No. You're negative. In fact, you're such a downer, I can't believe you lifted me out of my depression.

CHARLOTTE

And you're such a co-dependent, I can't believe you used to be my patient.

ANNE

I can't believe I used to be your patient either.

CHARLOTTE

You probably still should be.

ANNE

That's it, Charlotte! You and I are through. The psychiatric treatment didn't work, the friendship isn't working, and I'm tired of insult therapy.

CHARLOTTE

Confrontation therapy.

ANNE

Whatever.

CHARLOTTE

Anne, I find confrontation therapy is liberating – and much more active for my patients.

ANNE

But I'm not one now. So I don't want to be subjected to aggressive treatment anymore.

CHARLOTTE

Except by strange men.

ANNE

Except by strange men! So save it for your clients. I guess there are still people out there willing to pay a hundred dollars to get insulted.

CHARLOTTE

It's two hundred now. And you don't need me to insult you. With the red ribbon you can do it yourself.

(Anne exits, insulted.
CHARLOTTE addresses the
audience:)

CHARLOTTE

Here was another person storming out on me but that wasn't what I was thinking. What was I thinking? -That what Anne has never understood is that you never want to get too close too fast. Never.

(CHARLOTTE sits with a book in the café. "La Vie en Rose" plays loudly. She signals to the waitress, NICKI.)

CHARLOTTE

Excuse me, don't you think that music is a little much?

NICKI

Maybe a little much.

CHARLOTTE

Just turn it down. Or off is fine too.
(The music is turned down. CHARLOTTE settles into her book. JOHN, well-dressed, approaches her table.)

JOHN

I see you're reading 100 Years of Solitude.

CHARLOTTE

I read it whenever I want to be alone.

JOHN

Touché. I love the part in that book where Melquíades invents electromagnetism.

CHARLOTTE

I love the part where he dies.

JOHN

Your hostility is dazzling.

CHARLOTTE

Your approach is transparent.

JOHN

You're the first person to notice that.

CHARLOTTE

You must meet a lot of blind people.

JOHN

Are you always like this or do you particularly hate me?

CHARLOTTE

Don't flatter yourself. I'm always this hostile. I'm a shrink so I'm allowed.

JOHN

You're a psychiatrist?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, do you need a referral?

JOHN

No more than anyone else in this café.

CHARLOTTE

My professional opinion? A little more than anyone else in this café.

JOHN

I've already been on the couch.

CHARLOTTE

You're psychoanalyzed?

JOHN

Three times a week for seven years. I learned to ask for what I want. And if it's denied to me, to go for it anyway.

CHARLOTTE

And what do you want?

JOHN

I want you to put the book down.

CHARLOTTE

You're nuts. (She puts the book down.) What's that?

JOHN

What?

CHARLOTTE

That piece of red ribbon on your eyeglass rim.

JOHN

It's a piece of red ribbon.

CHARLOTTE

Where did you get it?

JOHN

It came on a gift I received yesterday.

CHARLOTTE

A gift from Anne Mallory?

JOHN

You know Anne?

CHARLOTTE

I helped her find the ribbon. My God you're Anne's Scandinavian!
And you're not even Scandinavian! You probably just learned Swedish
to meet women.

JOHN

It's hard to become fluent in a language unless there's strong
motivation.

CHARLOTTE

You picked up Anne here two days ago. I sense a trend. So. How
many women have you picked up here?

JOHN

In this café? Or at this table?

CHARLOTTE

The café.

JOHN

Um. Fourteen.

CHARLOTTE

Fourteen? Fourteen? Wait - do you know Pam Albers too?

JOHN

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

Luisa Magnani.

JOHN

Absolutely.

CHARLOTTE

Heather Peterson.

JOHN

Heather...?

CHARLOTTE

Victorian boots.

JOHN

(delighting in the memory)
Oh Heather. Yes.

CHARLOTTE

So you're the guy I've been hearing about.

JOHN

What have you heard?

CHARLOTTE

You do it in French and in Swedish, sometimes with gift wrapping. You recite poetry on voicemail messages, in bed, at this café. You stock smelling salts in your medicine cabinet.

JOHN

You know about my smelling salts!

CHARLOTTE

They're legendary. You've seduced two of my ex-friends and several of my current patients! The stories were starting to run together. But— I didn't realize until this moment that... there's only one of you.

JOHN

There's certainly only one of you.

CHARLOTTE

What did your shrink think about your Casanova complex?

JOHN

He encouraged me to see it as an exploration.

CHARLOTTE

Ha!

JOHN

You're different from the others. They needed more poetry. You have poetry. You need more life.

CHARLOTTE

Check please! Men with your personality profile commit 82% of violent crimes.

JOHN

Women with your personality profile self-destruct from their own negativity. And as a psychiatrist you impart that negativity to others at two hundred dollars a pop.

CHARLOTTE

How do you know what I charge?

JOHN

Several of them complained about it.

CHARLOTTE

It's worth it to undo the damage you do.

JOHN

I think I undo the damage you do. Without charging.

CHARLOTTE

By lying to all of them?

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE (CONTINUED)
(NICKI brings the check.
They both reach for it.)

JOHN
By saying what usually goes unsaid. By offering revelations.
(JOHN winks at Nicki, gives
her a tip, wins.)

CHARLOTTE
Wait! You can't pay my bill!

JOHN
I can and I did.

CHARLOTTE
Why did you pay my bill?!

JOHN
I wanted to see if you could handle it.

CHARLOTTE
I can handle it.

JOHN
It unraveled you.

CHARLOTTE
It did not! I'm... perfectly raveled. I'm fine. Thank you for
paying my bill. Thanks very much. And now I should be going.

JOHN
You are so different from the others, it's remarkable.

CHARLOTTE
Thank you.

JOHN
I don't know if I intended that as a compliment.

CHARLOTTE
Really. Well I know them, so I know you intended it as a
compliment. Goodbye.

(CHARLOTTE turns to go.
JOHN sees she left her
scarf. She returns.)
Oops. I forgot this.

JOHN
I wonder what that means.

CHARLOTTE
It doesn't mean anything! I just forgot it... What's your name?

JOHN

John Casey.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Casey. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

JOHN

And sometimes a pipe isn't one. But a scarf is always a scarf. At least to me.

CHARLOTTE

So if nothing else you can sustain an intimate relationship with fabric. I have to run.

JOHN

(getting the scarf's aroma)

Chanel No. 5. Opium. Two different perfumes. You couldn't decide?

CHARLOTTE

(grabs scarf)

Look who's talking. Mr. Commitmentphobic Neurotic.

JOHN

You shouldn't make too hasty an analysis.

CHARLOTTE

I never make too hasty an analysis.

(As CHARLOTTE exits, NICKI turns the music back up. "La Vie en Rose" swells as lights cross-fade to office.)

CHARLOTTE

(to the audience:)

This was unsettling. How had I not realized he was one man? I'm a scientist. I'm interested in patterns. Trends. Of course sometimes a trend can go on for a century without anybody noticing. Why? Here's why: The closer you are to a pattern, the less likely you are to see it. Yet another reason not to get too close... Right after I met him, I saw my favorite client.

(CHARLOTTE sits with a client, EVA [pronounced Ava], who is in her 20's, lovely, quirky.)

EVA

So things aren't going very well at the store. I can't believe I ordered all those beige kulats. How was I supposed to know that everyone hates beige?

CHARLOTTE

Of course everyone hates beige. What did you expect? Beige is notoriously hated.

EVA

But Harper's Bazaar said beige would be the new "it" color for fall.

CHARLOTTE

You have to stop being so suggestible.

EVA

I know.

CHARLOTTE

Remind me how.

EVA

I have to stop believing everything I hear. Everything I'm told. And everything I read.

CHARLOTTE

Good.

EVA

But retail is all about trusting the word on the street. To run a boutique, you have to know rumors and trends. How can I stop believing everything? I won't have a business.

CHARLOTTE

Eva, in business, you may have to learn to trust others, but here, you have to learn to trust yourself. You got that?

EVA

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

And what have you noticed in our time together? (Beat.) Eva?

EVA

That you're always right.

CHARLOTTE

Excellent. So do you have anything else to tell me.

EVA

Not really. Oh... well, I did, I ... I met someone!

CHARLOTTE

You met someone? That's nice. Where?

EVA

I met him online.

(MORE)

EVA (CONTINUED)

(CHARLOTTE looks at EVA.)

Actually, we've been chatting for five months.

CHARLOTTE

Why haven't you mentioned this to me, Eva?

EVA

I don't know, I thought you might say it wasn't quite... real? Like that time you got mad at me for buying a consultation from that online astrologer from the Astrokarma center.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't get mad at you...

EVA

Though they gave me really excellent advice. The same advice that you gave me but they charge much less.

CHARLOTTE

Back to your online flirtation. How did you meet him exactly?

EVA

In a web forum for people who care about gardening, I was having trouble with my window box, and he was so helpful. And: We like all the same perennials.

CHARLOTTE

And what made you mention it today?

EVA

Do you know Paley Park, it's a perfect romantic spot on east 53rd?

CHARLOTTE

That little park with the uplit faux waterfall? Eeuch, yes.

EVA

This week we decided enough emailing and spoke on the phone... and today we're upgrading to life! I'm going to meet Hugo at Paley Park at 4:52, to beat the 5 o'clock rush. You know, how all the blind dates arrive on the hour...

CHARLOTTE

(Concerned) You're meeting him? You realize you don't know anything about him, what if he's an axe murderer?

EVA

Oh no, he's very cultured. It's not just flowers. Like last night we talked about how Kant refuted Hume, and whether reality is all experience. It was wonderful. He has a lot of warmth towards Hume! (Beat.) And he knows what the "slow fashion movement" is!

CHARLOTTE

And what if he's hideously ugly?

EVA
He's not. I could tell on the phone.

CHARLOTTE
How?

EVA
He spoke like a handsome person. —Almost as if he wanted to get away from me. That's how I knew.

CHARLOTTE
Eva, repeat after me.
(Eva brightens, hoping for a mantra.)
"I will not go to the waterfall."

EVA
(deflated)
"I will not go to the waterfall."

CHARLOTTE
Can you hold that thought until tomorrow?

EVA
Yes. "I will not go to the waterfall." "I will not go to the waterfall."

CHARLOTTE
And Eva?

EVA
Yes?

CHARLOTTE
Burgundy will be the new "it" color. Not beige.

EVA
Oh, thank you Dr. Kaplan!

CHARLOTTE
Anytime.

(EVA exits, mouthing the mantra. JOHN, walking in, notices her, then sees CHARLOTTE.)

JOHN
Dr. Kaplan?

CHARLOTTE
How the hell did you get in here?

JOHN

Your secretary was reading Elective Affinities, so we got to talking about Goethe and she let me in. Did you know she spent summers in Germany as a teenager?

CHARLOTTE

No. How did you find me?

JOHN

Oh, you're well-known, Dr. Charlotte Kaplan. At least among my circle.

CHARLOTTE

And that's quite a circle. Now why don't you get out of here before I call security and have you thrown out?

JOHN

I have an appointment. I want to be psychoanalyzed.

CHARLOTTE

I thought you were on the couch for seven years.

JOHN

Not on your couch.

CHARLOTTE

You think you can afford me?

JOHN

My credit is good.

CHARLOTTE

Oh really? What is it that you do for a living?

JOHN

I sell air.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't realize air had to be bought.

JOHN

Air time. On television and the internet. I sell the pauses between things. I fill the blank spaces.

CHARLOTTE

You mean commercials.

JOHN

No, I mean air. Pure air. Sure, an advertiser might use it for commercials. But ideally, it's a realm where limitless artistic expression is possible.

CHARLOTTE

And how much does air go for these days?

JOHN

It's very expensive.

CHARLOTTE

Why does that not surprise me?

JOHN

Frankly I don't see how it's any different from what you do.

CHARLOTTE

I'm a psychiatrist! You sell air! It's completely different.

JOHN

You sell advice, I sell air.

CHARLOTTE

I don't "sell advice"! I offer expertise! While you... specialize in the invisible. Vending air. Flirting online.

JOHN

What do you mean? I'm not on any dating apps right now.

CHARLOTTE

Why would you be when you can find a nice nurturing girl in an internet gardening forum. Yes, she's a patient. Kant and Hume? Please! That's older than the hills!

JOHN

How did you know that was me? I was using my screenname.

CHARLOTTE

But you left your unmistakable signature anyway, "Hugo." You didn't really make an appointment, did you?

JOHN

Ask your secretary if you don't believe me.

CHARLOTTE

(Picks up phone, buzzes secretary) Melissa? What did you tell Mr. Casey? Mm hm. Mm. I'll let him know. (Hangs up) It seems you're my 2 o'clock. And... she hopes you call soon.

JOHN

I always call soon.

CHARLOTTE

Okay, I'll give you a consultation. We'll talk, I'll recommend a doctor who's right for you.

JOHN

I'd prefer to see you on a regular basis.

CHARLOTTE

Why?

JOHN

Because you seem to understand me on a deep level. Which is so rare.

CHARLOTTE

No. You want to talk to me, because I resist your pick-up lines. Which makes you believe you have feelings for me.

JOHN

What if I do have feelings for you?

CHARLOTTE

I don't only resist them, I find them ridiculous.

JOHN

I find you amazingly therapeutic.

CHARLOTTE

That's my job. So. Did you want to discuss your compulsive seductive behavior?

JOHN

I don't think that's my big issue.

CHARLOTTE

(surprised)

You've got a bigger one? What's that?

JOHN

God... I carry a burden with me everywhere I go.

CHARLOTTE

A burden.

JOHN

Of underlying unhappiness.

CHARLOTTE

What have you got to be unhappy about? You should be thrilled.

JOHN

I should?

CHARLOTTE

Sure. Phallic narcissists are the happiest people I know. People believe your act. They love your forceful communication techniques. Which by the way strike me as a touch psychopathic.

JOHN

And how do they feel about your indirect communications and blaming language? Which by the way strike me as a little bit masochistic and overly oral.

CHARLOTTE

How do they feel? They resist my initial analysis but always thank me later.

JOHN

I'm thanking you already! So back to my unhappiness. Please.

CHARLOTTE

Oh yes. I know you guys. You tell stories about darkness, you eat French poems for breakfast, and ultimately you want to be a foreign correspondent...

JOHN

How can you —

CHARLOTTE

...So you can travel from lover to lover and finally die in a brawl in a bar, all the while wearing a leather jacket. Meanwhile you're stuck in Manhattan, flirting in cafés.

JOHN

Yes — I am!

CHARLOTTE

Your adolescence was fraught with rejections, resulting in a deep sense of anxiety and a tendency to idealize women, especially women with large breasts covered by armor plating. You may also have read The Hobbit one too many times.

JOHN

How did you know I've read The Hobbit?

CHARLOTTE

You all have. It's classic! Typical commitmentphobe behavior.

JOHN

But Dr. Kaplan. The "typical" commitmentphobe has an inability to take relationships seriously. Whereas I take them very seriously!

CHARLOTTE

Sure you do. For about two weeks. At first a woman seems perfect to you. But she doesn't quell your anxieties. You have disturbing visions —

JOHN

How would you...

CHARLOTTE

You yearn to escape into the wilderness. But there's no wilderness in New York so you end up keeping a windowbox and wandering through Central Park at dawn. You actually enjoy the feeling that you're about to be mugged.