

MANHATTAN CASANOVA
a comedy in two acts
by Jenny Lyn Bader

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an excerpt from Act I

(Charlotte dials her speakerphone a woman's voice can be heard: the voice of the time.)

THE 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 hangs up and sprays herself with perfume. Then, not satisfied, sprays herself with a second perfume. She hits redial:)

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...

(She 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 speed-dial. A male voice is heard.)

VOICE OF THE WEATHER

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

(continued)

VOICE OF THE WEATHER (continued)

(Charlotte switches scarves and tries on two blazers at once, one on each arm, before settling on 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

Further updates at five o'clock...

(John enters Charlotte's office.
She turns off the speakerphone.)

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 radio. 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

Ah, you see yourself as an artist... 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 sites 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.

JOHN

Do you always make fun of depressed people seeking your help?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, now you're hurt?

(A beat.)

What's wrong? You've gone uncharacteristically quiet.

(A longer beat. She starts to worry.)

Alright. This is a little unusual. Your personality profile is usually not at a loss for words.

JOHN (with difficulty:)

I sometimes suspect that other people don't have blood. It makes me feel cold, so cold that I crave nothing more than connection.

CHARLOTTE

We all crave connection. That's what it means to be human.

JOHN

But I feel lost when I'm not seducing a stranger. I feel lost if I'm not meeting a woman's eyes or hearing her voice on the phone.

CHARLOTTE

So then, what do you do?

JOHN

I... I call the weather just to talk.

CHARLOTTE

You call the weather?

JOHN

Or the time. I love the woman who does the voice of the time.

CHARLOTTE

You do?

JOHN

I experience countless empty relationships--

CHARLOTTE

(transported) You call the weather.

JOHN

And yet I feel, in between those relationships, even emptier. Without an idea of who I am. The variety of women give me different aspects of myself.

CHARLOTTE

Variety is very important.

JOHN

Don't make fun of me.

CHARLOTTE

I'm not! You're talking about watching time move as you stay still.

JOHN

Yes!

CHARLOTTE

Underlying coldness with a veneer of relating. The pretense of human interaction. Friendship as a surface --

JOHN

With nothing underneath! Significant relationships as charades.

CHARLOTTE

Yourself as a blank slate, a person you don't know at all --

JOHN AND CHARLOTTE

Except when you're with other people!

CHARLOTTE

Chastising them. Mesmerizing them.

JOHN

Monopolizing them. Exactly. I get off-kilter when I'm not talking...

JOHN AND CHARLOTTE

Or listening!

JOHN

But you can't trust any of it!

CHARLOTTE

Mmm hmm. When you wake up and turn on the TV, the woman on Good Morning America seems to be lying to you.

JOHN

That woman does lie! It's not just her. Most people lie - because they hold one another in contempt.

CHARLOTTE

I don't hold you in contempt.

JOHN

You might find it contemptible that I'm meeting Eva this afternoon.

CHARLOTTE

Don't worry, I canceled that.

JOHN

What?

CHARLOTTE

She's not going to show up. I gave it to her as a mantra. "I will not show up. I will not show up." Eva loves mantras.

JOHN

So you canceled my appointment. Oh - the levels of you! You are so wonderfully "meta"!

CHARLOTTE

I am?

JOHN

It's a whole new thing with you.

CHARLOTTE

It's a whole new thing with all of them.

JOHN

No. You know this is different. (beat.) I was wrong. I shouldn't become your patient.

CHARLOTTE

You're not enjoying your consultation?

JOHN

I'm loving my consultation. But I think...the transference and-

JOHN AND CHARLOTTE

Counter-transference-

JOHN

-would be too intense for me to handle.

CHARLOTTE

I think so too.

(They fall into a passionate embrace and start kissing. Lights down.)

Scene 2. Lights up on Charlotte and John in her bed.

CHARLOTTE (out to the audience,
but basically to herself:)

So I guess that's how the whole thing - started. Uh oh.
He's waking up.

(to John:)

I want you to know I usually don't do this.

JOHN

Do what?

CHARLOTTE

Sleep with clients on the first session.

JOHN

Well, usually I try to avoid dating psychiatrists.

CHARLOTTE

I mean I don't usually sleep with clients at all.

JOHN

I guess this means I can't see you anymore. (beat.)
Professionally. As a therapist. If I'm seeing-you-dating-you.

CHARLOTTE

Are you seeing-me-dating-me?

JOHN

I'm not? What did you think was happening?

CHARLOTTE

I thought we had sex.

JOHN

And after sex, comes dating. Right? I mean... during dating,
comes sex. That's not what I meant either... I mean, you want
to go out again, right?

CHARLOTTE

Have we "gone out"?

JOHN
I mean you want to stay in again?... (Charlotte laughs)
That's not what I meant...

CHARLOTTE
Are you asking me out?

JOHN
God, you are such a...

CHARLOTTE
Yes?

JOHN
You are such a shrink!

CHARLOTTE
Is that good or bad?

JOHN
It's irresistible. Are you saying you won't go out with me?

CHARLOTTE
I'll go out with you.

JOHN
Great. How's Thursday?

CHARLOTTE
Fine.

JOHN
Done. So Charlotte. I think we're really onto something here.

CHARLOTTE
Meaning?

JOHN
Meaning... I...

CHARLOTTE
Yes?

JOHN
I... I have something important to tell you.

CHARLOTTE
So speak.

JOHN
It's difficult though.

CHARLOTTE
Apparentlyy.

JOHN

It's that... I... well, I just want you to know, that this connection I feel building between us is so unique that...

CHARLOTTE

You don't have to lie to me John. I'm a psychiatrist.

JOHN

I'm not lying.

CHARLOTTE

Relax. I don't need morning-after maintenance. I don't have to hear sweet nothings or... the L-word.

JOHN

Charlotte, please! I have a little more dignity than that! And I'm an experienced compulsive seducer!

CHARLOTTE

Sorry.

JOHN

What I'm trying to say is: I think I'm willing to give up the others.

CHARLOTTE

Oh.

JOHN

"Oh"?!

CHARLOTTE

You mean you want to stop seeing those other women? That's... perfectly nice. I guess I accept.

JOHN

You guess? I don't usually offer to give up all my lovers for people I've just met!

CHARLOTTE

Clearly chivalry is not dead.

JOHN

I thought you would be pleased.

CHARLOTTE

Of course I'm pleased! I think it's very nice!

JOHN

Nice? Nice?! I hate Nice!

CHARLOTTE

I mean, it's kind of you. It's lovely. Um... Does this mean I have to give up mine too?