

21st CENTURY ROMANCE

Ralph Tropf

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NOTE:

This play requires two specially rigged answering machines and extensive sound cues. The playwright will ship the machines and a CD of the sound cues to the theatre free of charge provided the theatre will ship them back at the end of the run.

CHARACTERS:

Bob Walker

Janet Stroud

Justice of the Peace (non-speaking)

SCENE:

The stage is dressed with two tables, each with an answering machine. One table looks masculine, the other looks feminine.

It is important that these two areas are as isolated as possible. The actors perform in spotlights. When one speaks, the audience's focus is mostly on the character receiving the answering machine message.

The fun of this play is in watching the actors react to the messages

AT RISE: BOB enters, gathers his courage, then picks up his phone and dials. JANET'S PHONE begins to ring. Her machine picks up.

JANET'S VOICE

Hi, this is Janet. I can't come to the phone, so leave a message.

LIGHTS FADE on Bob. **LIGHTS RISE** on Janet's area as JANET enters. She presses the button on her phone to listen to her messages. Bob speaks in darkness.

BOB

Janet, my name is Bob Walker. Your friend Ellen gave me your number. I've got two tickets to La Traviata Friday night. Ellen says you like opera, and I'd like the company if you'd like to go. Call me at 328-2767. Thanks.

Janet shrugs, picks up the phone and punches in the number. **LIGHTS FADE**

LIGHTS RISE on Bob. He punches in for his messages. Janet speaks in darkness.

JANET

Hi, Bob, this is Janet, Ellen's friend. Thanks for calling, and yes, I'd love to go to the opera. Why don't I meet you at the Music Center, say, 7:30? I'll be wearing a red dress.

Bob smiles, delighted he's made a date.
LIGHTS FADE.

Both Bob and Janet exit. MUSIC plays for a moment, then:

LIGHTS RISE on Janet's side. She re-enters, carrying a red dress in a dry cleaner's bag. Bob re-enters in darkness, picks up the phone and dials. Janet punches in for her messages and Bob speaks.

BOB

Hi, Janet. This is Bob Walker. I'm so sorry, but I have a crisis at work. I'm simply not going to make it tonight. But Ellen can meet you, and the tickets are at the box office under my name. I hope you enjoy the opera, it's on me, and I look forward to meeting you soon.

Janet looks disappointed, but not displeased.
LIGHTS FADE

Bob and Janet both exit. MUSIC plays for a moment, then:

LIGHTS RISE on Bob's area. He enters, looking tired. Janet enters in darkness and dials the phone.

Bob punches in for his messages.

JANET

Bob, thank you so much for the tickets. The opera was fantastic. I can't wait to meet you. Give me a call.

Bob picks up the phone. LIGHTS FADE on Bob.

LIGHTS UP on Janet. She beeps in for her messages.

BOB

Thanks, Janet. Not every girl would be so understanding about being stood up. You're really something special. How about I make it up by taking you to dinner Friday night? Call me.

Janet looks excited, checks her date book, then looks disappointed. But she gets an idea. She picks up her phone and dials.
LIGHTS FADE on Janet.

LIGHTS RISE on Bob. He beeps in for his messages.

JANET

Bob, I'm busy Friday night. But my office is having a picnic 2:00 Saturday in Griffith Park. If you want, you can stop by and say hello. Look for the big sign that says, "Biogen Company Picnic." Hope to see you there.

LIGHTS FADE. Bob and Janet exit.
SOUND PLAYS: Park Noises.

LIGHTS RISE on Janet's area. Bob enters in darkness and dials. Janet enters and checks her messages.

BOB

Janet, I came by the picnic but I never saw you. Everyone was wondering where you were. You've really turned into a woman of intrigue. That's okay, I love a good mystery. I have to meet you now, the suspense is killing me. Call me.

Janet picks up the phone. LIGHTS FADE on her, and RISE on Bob. He beeps in for his messages.

JANET

I'm so sorry I missed the picnic. My best friend's boyfriend dumped her and she needed me to come over. Everybody at the lab says you're really funny, and all the girls were raving about how cute you are. What don't you meet me tomorrow night in the Starbucks on Magnolia and Lankershim, Say 8:00?

LIGHTS FADE. Bob and Janet exit. The SOUND of heavy traffic rises for a moment, then fades.

LIGHTS RISE on Janet's side. Janet enters carrying a bouquet of flowers. Bob enters in darkness and dials her number.

Janet beeps in for her messages.

BOB

Janet, it's Bob. I don't know if you saw it on the news, but a semi overturned on the 101. I was stuck in traffic for over two hours. By the time I got to Starbucks, it was closed. I sent a little something as an apology. I hope you got it all right.

Janet looks at the flowers lovingly. She picks up the phone as the LIGHTS FADE

LIGHTS RISE on Bob. He beeps in.

JANET

The flowers were beautiful, Bob. Thank you so much, but the apology wasn't necessary. I was stuck in that same traffic jam. We might have been sitting in our cars, side by side and not known it. In a way, that's kind of romantic -- and you were so sweet to send the flowers. When I see you, I'm going to have to give you a big kiss.

LIGHTS FADE on Bob and come up on Janet

BOB

That's an offer I can't refuse. If your lips are as sweet as your voice, I'd want lots of your kisses. In fact, I could get drunk on them. When can we meet?

FADE on Janet, RISE on Bob

JANET

Bob, you are a romantic. First opera, then flowers and now poetry. I could fall in love with you. Call me.

Without hesitation, Bob dials her number as fast as he can. LIGHTS RISE on Janet, and remain full on both sides for the rest of the play.

Janet beeps in for her message.

BOB

It may sound strange, my dear Janet, because after all we have never met. But I've never known a woman as understanding and compassionate as you. I think I am falling in love with you. It's weird, it's wacky... but then, love isn't supposed to make sense. Is it?