

Cyber Serenade by Mia McCullough ©1999

THE VOID

(over loudspeaker)

The cast and crew of **Cyber Serenade** ask that you please leave your cell phones and pagers on and operational throughout the performance. We realize the need for you to continually keep in touch with the world around you, and, because of the nature of this play, we would find it hypocritical to ask you to turn them off. So if you get a phone call, please, feel free to answer it. We'll just stop the performance and wait until you're done.

ACT I

SCENE 1

As the lights go down on the audience, a strange, electronic symphony begins. The instruments are phones dialing and ringing, beepers beeping, modems and faxes connecting, keyboard keys clacking. The "music" comes together in an odd, atonal rhythm that is somehow much too familiar.

The LIGHTS COME UP on THE VOID - a figure, neither distinctly male or female, dressed in black and adorned with a few glittering computer chips and electrical cords. Connected to THE VOID's costume, like guns in their holsters, are two telephone receivers. Throughout the play THE VOID often doubles as a prop phone.

In the background is a large screen in the shape of a computer monitor where images periodically appear. At the moment it reads; "STARTING UP."

THE VOID

Once upon a time there was a nuclear family. The suburban queen, also known as the workaholic mother...

LIGHTS COME UP ON ELLEN. She sits at a computer, typing away. She looks up at the audience.

ELLEN

Hi, I'm Ellen.

THE VOID

The king-of-his-castle workaholic father who is always off in far away lands on...business...

LIGHTS COME UP ON DAN. He sits at a table looking at a lap-top and talking on a cell phone. DAN holds the cell phone in the same hand at all times.

DAN

(into phone)

Can you hold on a sec?

(to audience)

Hi, I'm Dan.

(into phone)

Okay, I'm back.

THE VOID

And their obligatory child, *Princess* Arianna.

LIGHTS COME UP ON ARI, a teenage girl sitting on her bed, strumming her guitar.

ARI

It's Ari, okay? Ari. No one calls me Arianna.

THE VOID

The average American family. Not really any different from you people. Dan and Ellen met in grad school, fell in love, got married. Ellen had a child so she could prove that she can do it all...

ELLEN

And I can.

THE VOID

And then they got busy. Very, very busy.

ELLEN

We're not that busy.

ARI

Oh, please, when was the last time you went on a vacation?

ELLEN

It wasn't so long ago. We went to... well, that was mostly business. When did we last go on a vacation, Dan?

DAN

What? I'm on the phone, here.

THE VOID

Slowly the Arbunkels accumulated the technological trappings of every average, middle-class American family. First they got the fax machine and the voice-mail, then Internet access and an e-mail account. And then the portable technology - a lap-top and a cell phone - so that Dan could be in touch with his office and his family whenever he was out of town on business. A PDA so that Ellen could keep track of everyone's divergent and overlapping schedules. All very well-intentioned purchases, meant to keep the lines of communication open. But oftentimes things don't serve their purpose quite the way you thought they would. And every once in a while people become disconnected from one another even when they have five different methods of communication at their disposal. And so it came to pass that the Arbunkel family dissipated into three lonely individuals who didn't know how to talk to one another. And then the temptress from the far away land of California came along and cast a spell on the unsuspecting king.

LIGHTS COME UP ON CASS, a woman about the same age as DAN and ELLEN.

CASS

Don't talk about me like I'm some sort of villainess from the underworld. I am not the "evil other woman." I'm a person. With feelings. I'll tell you how it happened. I wasn't out on the prowl for married men. I was minding my own business. But, this woman I work with comes up to me one day. All excited.

THE VOID rushes up to CASS playing the part of the coworker in her story.

THE VOID

"Oh my God."

CASS

She says.

THE VOID

"You're not going to believe what I just did. I just found my best friend. From the third grade. On the Internet. Isn't that amazing?"

CASS

She says.

THE VOID

"Let me show you. Who do you want to find?"

THE VOID backs away from CASS as A PHONE NUMBER APPEARS ON THE SCREEN.

CASS

Before I had time to think about what I want, or ask myself if I really wanted to go down this path, my high school sweetheart's phone number was up on my computer screen.

IMAGE ON SCREEN: "CALL HIM."

CASS

Taunting me.

IMAGE ON SCREEN: "YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO."

CASS

It was too easy. Though, honestly, if I'd had time to think about it, I still might have looked him up. Don't you have people who you wonder where they are? What happened to them? I mean, we all have people out there that we've lost track of. So, what would you do if you were a single woman in her late forties who'd been through a million hideous relationships and suddenly you had the phone number of the only man who never hurt you? I didn't know he was married. I'm not trying to absolve myself, but it started innocently enough. See for yourself.

IMAGE ON SCREEN: RECONNECTING....

THE VOID comes up behind CASS and holds the phone receiver in front of her. CASS picks it up and dials anxiously. DAN's phone rings.

DAN

Hello?

CASS

Dan?

DAN

Yes?

CASS

Dan Arbunkel?

DAN

Yes.

From Woodfield High School. CASS

Yes? DAN

It's Cass. CASS

.....Cass. (stunned) DAN

Hi. CASS

Oh my God. DAN

I found you on the Internet. CASS

I didn't know I was on the Internet. DAN

I think we all are, now. Did you not want to be found? CASS

No, no. Cass. How are you? DAN

I'm all right. CASS

Where are you? DAN

San Francisco. CASS

San Francisco? You live in San Francisco? DAN

CASS

Is that surprising?

DAN

No, well, it's just.... I'm there on business all the time. I'll be there on Thursday.

CASS

Thursday?

DAN

Yeah. You wanna meet for lunch?

THE VOID slips the phone out of CASS' hand as she returns her attention to the audience.

CASS

By the time I found out about the wife and the kid, we were holding hands in a little bistro and I was feeling things that I had tucked away someplace years ago. Back when I was under the impression that you could lose a person in this world. But I guess that's not true anymore. I knew there was a possibility that I might fall in love with him again, but it never occurred to me that I was *still* in love with him. So, you see I'm not the other woman. I'm the first woman.

THE VOID

So, Dan and Cass began a long-distance liaison.

DAN

It was an accident, really.

CASS

You're calling us an accident?

DAN

Accidental. Like you said, we didn't intend for it to happen. You called me out of the blue and I thought, "Wouldn't it be great to see Cass again," not, "wouldn't it be great to cheat on my wife." I don't think I realized how much Ellen and I had drifted apart until I saw Cass.

THE VOID

And then, of course, they drifted further apart. And Ellen got even more lonely. And, well, she could hardly throw herself into her work much more than she already had, so she too, found someone else.

ARI

Yeah, she did. And I guess, in a way, I'm partly to blame. You know, if I'd had a little foresight, I would have discouraged her more. If I'd given it any thought, I would have seen the potential for problems, but I don't like to think about my parents, so I didn't.

ELLEN appears at ARI's bedroom door.

ELLEN

Ari, how do you get into a chat room?

ARI

Why would you want to get into a chat room?

ELLEN

So I can converse with people. Discuss. Chat.

ARI

Only weirdos use chat rooms, Mom.

ELLEN

Millions of people use the Internet, Ari. They can't all be weird.

ARI regards her mother with an "Oh Yeah?," look.

ELLEN CONT'D

You're the one who said I should be more Internet savvy.

ARI

Fine. What do you want to chat about?

ELLEN

Can I pick anything?

ARI

Pretty much.

ELLEN

I want to talk to someone on the other side of the world.

ARI

I'll see what I can do.

ELLEN goes back to her computer.

ARI

(to audience)

So, it seemed harmless enough, you know. Showing my mother how to get into a chat room. I figured she'd find what I found. A bunch of losers with way too much time on their hands talking about nothing. But no, my mother-the-over-achiever has to find intrigue and romance. She finds Prince Charming. Or at least that's her perception of him. I think he's a predator. I mean, what kind of person goes around seducing people's mothers on the Internet?

LIGHTS COME UP ON GLENN, a man in his early 40's sitting at a computer, wearing boxer shorts, a T-shirt, and a flannel robe that is not tied closed. He has a mild case of bed-head.

GLENN

(to audience)

I'm not a predator. I'm just not that good at meeting people.

THE VOID

Yes, the poor timid hermit, sitting in his basement office, typing away on his mail-order PC, reaching out to humankind through his DSL connection, never leaving the security of his little cave, with only the faint glow of the monitor to light his pallid, sad, unshaven face.

GLENN

What am I supposed to do? Go to a bar? Have you seen the women who go to bars? For starters, they're all twenty-three. Anyway, I can't talk to total strangers. I just, I'm not good with people I don't know. I don't know what to say. And I can't very well date the women at the office — I'm a marriage counselor and I work out of my house. So I talk to people on-line. It's very non-threatening. I wasn't trying to seduce anyone, I was just looking for a little companionship.

THE LIGHTS GO DIM ON EVERYONE EXCEPT
GLENN AND ELLEN.

IMAGE ON SCREEN: CONNECTING...