

Hello Hello

A Romantic Satire by Karen Hines



Hello ... Hello

Twilight in the Megalopolis

Soft, flattering lights come up on a tall, beautiful woman, the FEMALE CHORUS, wearing a stylish ensemble. She is exquisitely made-up – her lips red, her cheeks pale, her lashes thick. She looks like an angel in Calvin Klein. She speaks directly to the audience.

FEMALE CHORUS: In a sparkling city on a spinning green globe in the centre of the universe, it is nearly twilight. Office buildings, banks and a trillion gleaming billboards thrust high up into the sky. The streets are empty, as everyone is at work in this thriving megalopolis.

Lights up on a tall man, the MALE CHORUS, standing nearby. He is at least as beautiful as the Female Chorus. His outfit is possibly more stylish. He admires the woman for a moment, then speaks directly to the audience.

MALE CHORUS: Though the sun itself has slipped behind the jagged megalopolitan horizon, its reflections still hover in the mirrored windows of the highest office towers.

FEMALE CHORUS: And before night falls, the shimmering reproductions will lure a thousand sparrows and swallows toward pinker, more glimmering skies ...

MALE CHORUS: ... then surely and swiftly ...

BOTH: ... take their breath away.

The Chorus looks up.

sfx: small birds plummeting through the air.

The Chorus watches the fall. They look at each other, then both look at the audience. They sigh.

Music in: 'Megalopica,' a pulsing ur-urban theme. The Chorus clears to stage left and right as lights come up on BEN and CASSANDRA draped gorgeously across stairs. They are gazing at one another with open adoration.

BEN: Six o'clock.

CASSANDRA: Sharp.

Ben and Cassandra turn to the audience.

BEN: In a sparkling city on a spinning green globe, office workers, lawyers and switchboard operators spill from the buildings and onto the street, where they mill beneath the glowing sky.

Ben and Cassandra walk down toward the Chorus.

CASSANDRA: Sales clerks, executives and manicurists descend from the towers, rise up from the underground and join the swelling stream of humanity that fills the city streets with living motion.

BOY: The sophistication with which the people navigate their interweaving paths does little to obscure the untamed life force that gushes through their wild hearts and courses through their red and blue and pulsing veins.

All four performers form a line across centre stage, in the manner of Teatro en Atril. Though they remain centre stage as a group,

each performer begins to embody the characters he or she describes. They enjoy increasing contact with one another over the course of the scene. The musical pulse quickens. Performers' gestures are descriptive, economical. Their movements are precise.

MALE CHORUS: In the grand arched doorway of a thriving business firm, a cluster of telemarketers gathers and peers out at the beautiful sky.

BEN (AS TELEMARKETER 1): Look at the sky!

MALE CHORUS (AS TELEMARKETER 2): So blue!

CASSANDRA (AS TELEMARKETER 3): Look at the sky!

BEN (AS TELEMARKETER 1): So green!

MALE CHORUS (AS TELEMARKETER 2): Look at the sky!

CASSANDRA (AS TELEMARKETER 3): So blue!

MALE CHORUS (AS TELEMARKETER 2): So green!

ALL: It's both at once, it seems!

FEMALE CHORUS (AS TELEMARKETER 4): Has the sun set yet?

ALL: Not quite yet!

FEMALE CHORUS: The telemarketers spill onto the street, whirling and spinning beneath the blue-green sky.

BEN: Some of the people know each other.

MALE CHORUS (AS LENNY): Peggy!

FEMALE CHORUS (AS PEGGY): Lenny!

MALE CHORUS (AS LENNY): Nice to see you!

CASSANDRA: While others swirl around the gentle strangers who cross their paths.

The Female Chorus spins into Ben's arms. Their lips are very close together.

BEN (AS STRANGER 1): I beg your pardon!

FEMALE CHORUS (AS STRANGER 2): I'm all left feet!

BEN (AS STRANGER 1): Must be something in the air, it seems.

FEMALE CHORUS (AS STRANGER 2): Must be something in the breeze.

MALE CHORUS: In the darkened doorway of another thriving firm, a pride of CEOs gazes out at the beautiful sky.

CASSANDRA (AS CEO 1): Look at the sky!

FEMALE CHORUS (AS CEO 2): It's purple!

BEN (AS CEO 3): Look at the sky!

CASSANDRA (AS CEO 1): It's lime!

FEMALE CHORUS (AS CEO 2): Look at the sky!

BEN (AS CEO 3): Look at the sky!

ALL: It's both at the same time!

MALE CHORUS (AS CEO 4): Has the sun set?

ALL: Not quite yet!

CASSANDRA: They scatter and *jeté* down the street.

FEMALE CHORUS: High up on a scaffolding, two workers are busy erecting a billboard. Emerging from the scattered jigsaw of squares and ziggurats is a fractured image whose truth and beauty are known only to the workers, but whose mystery holds the attention of a thousand eyes for blocks around.

BEN (AS JOHN): (*softly, looking down*) Look at them, Mike. They want to see the picture.

MALE CHORUS (AS MIKE): Only so fast we can go, John.

JOHN: But look at them. Their faces tilted up like that. I can almost see their eyes!

MIKE: Their eyes?

JOHN: Their eyes ...

MIKE: (*gently*) Don't look down any more, John. It'll be all right.

JOHN: They long to be what dreams are made of ...

MIKE: Come on, John. Don't look down now. We've got work to do.

JOHN: Sorry, Mike. I don't know what's gotten into me.

MIKE: That's all right, John. You're only being human.

John goes back to work. Mike sneaks a look at their eyes.

BEN: In another darkened doorway, an anguish of accountants gathers. Pale fingers twitch furiously over phantom adding machines, working equations that yet tangle their minds.

CASSANDRA (AS ACCOUNTANT 1): Has the sun set yet?

FEMALE CHORUS, MALE CHORUS AND BEN (AS ACCOUNTANTS 2, 3 AND 4): Shhhh.

MALE CHORUS: There is a magical transformation of the light as the sunset turns to twilight.

Music swells. Lights shift.

ALL: Look at the sky!

FEMALE CHORUS (AS ACCOUNTANT 2): It's indigo!

MALE CHORUS (AS ACCOUNTANT 3): It's primrose!

CASSANDRA (AS ACCOUNTANT 1): It's chartreuse!

ALL: It's all of those!

FEMALE CHORUS: The accountants toss their visors to the wind and do a mad ecstatic dance, leaping wildly over moving cars and twirling on the lips of dumpsters – the savage twisting polka with which they greet the falling of the night.

All dance in place: a slow-motion ecstasy twist.

Music transition: trippy.

CASSANDRA: Now the cinemas throw open their doors to swallow the snaking queues that yearn to bathe their eyes with brilliant beauty and their minds with simple truths.

MALE CHORUS (AS TIMID MOVIEGOER): Are you in line?

CASSANDRA, BEN AND FEMALE CHORUS: (*in rapturous anticipation*)
Oh, yes!

BEN: The cocktail lounges turn on their neon signs, inviting the beautiful creatures into their pleasure dens, wherein strange scents and stranger music offer the promise of romantic transcendence.

CASSANDRA: In the shadows outside, a young newlywed couple stands locked in a delicate embrace. A psychic eddy threatens to furrow the bride's pale brow and to dim the sparkle in her beautiful eyes.

MALE CHORUS (AS NEWLYWED MAN): What's the matter, baby?

FEMALE CHORUS (AS NEWLYWED WOMAN): I don't know. I just feel so sad.

BEN: He turns her toward the gleaming plate glass window of the thriving banking institution in front of which they stand.

NEWLYWED MAN: Look in that window. What do you see?

NEWLYWED WOMAN: I see ... myself.

NEWLYWED MAN: No. Look further. Look through that window.

CASSANDRA: Through the gleaming bank window, there is an enormous poster in which a rosy-cheeked woman stands in a brilliant white kitchen, gazing out over a pie that is cooling on the windowsill. Beyond the windowsill lie an emerald-green field, a dog, a horse and a man.

NEWLYWED MAN: Now what do you see?

NEWLYWED WOMAN: I see a vista fathomless and vast ...

NEWLYWED MAN: Yes?

NEWLYWED WOMAN: I see possibility more vibrant than all my dreams ...

NEWLYWED MAN: Yes?

NEWLYWED WOMAN: I see the future. And it's bright, Tyley!

NEWLYWED MAN: Yes! Very bright!

They kiss.

BEN: From inside the bank, the financial services manager gazes out at the young newlyweds on the sidewalk and wipes a single tear from his cheek. He pulls out his cellphone and hits a key.

MALE CHORUS (AS MANAGER): (*into cellphone*) Hi there, precious. I'm on my way.

FEMALE CHORUS (AS WIFE): (*into phone*) Hurry home, love. Supper's on the stove.

CASSANDRA: (*leaning in toward Male Chorus's phone*) Through the cellphone receiver, we hear a horse's neigh, a dog's bark and the unmistakable sound of a pie sliding onto a windowsill.

BEN: The bank manager locks the door, leaps over a dumpster, bounds past the dancing accountants and somersaults through the open sunroof of his gleaming car.

MALE CHORUS: Two teenage girls wander slowly down the street. The thin fabric of their stylish ensembles clings to their youthful forms in a way that is alluring, though totally unconscious on their part.

FEMALE CHORUS (AS TEENAGE GIRL 1): What's the matter, Lauren?

CASSANDRA (AS TEENAGE GIRL 2): I don't know. I just feel funny.

TEENAGE GIRL 1: What kind of funny?

TEENAGE GIRL 2: I don't know. Must be something in the air. I'm restless in my body, and somehow I fear I'll fly away.

TEENAGE GIRL 1: Don't be frightened, Lauren. Look up there.

MALE CHORUS: High up on a scaffolding, the two billboard workers are still busy. Emerging now from the scattered jigsaw of squares and ziggurats is the fractured image of a beautiful woman in a gleaming white slip dress.

TEENAGE GIRL 1: What do you see?

TEENAGE GIRL 2: I see myself, somehow.

TEENAGE GIRL 1: Somestrangehow I see me too. Close your eyes and make a wish.

BEN: The girls close their thick-lashed eyes ...

MALE CHORUS: ... and dream of magic, love and the world's deepest mysteries of creation.

Lighting transition: twilight to cool night.

sfx: a chirping sparrow.

MALE CHORUS: High up in the office towers, glittering windows signal to the sky that on this pale night, as on all the other nights, the stars above need not shine.

FEMALE CHORUS: And on this beautiful night, each and every citizen moves inexplicably, inexorably and ingeniously away from the sucking void that cries out their name.

Cassandra breaks away and gazes out over the audience, en pose.

MALE CHORUS: That is, each and every citizen but one.

Snow

Music in: 'Snow Song.' Very sweet, very sad. Like a Disney lament. There is a moment of dispersal, as the other performers go left and right. They watch Cassandra. She sings.

CASSANDRA:

Seems the sky has fallen down,
Stars have tumbled to the ground.
I'd make a wish
'Cept I'm bidding wishing toodle-oo.
I've only got one wish,
And it's never coming true ... oo-oooh.

'Snow Song' continues under the following narration. At times, Cassandra hums along. She walks.

MALE CHORUS: A girl drifts along the street, gliding over the glimmering sewer grates with unseeing eyes. She swings a bouquet of sapphire-blue daisies by her side.

FEMALE CHORUS: A boy stands at the box office of a movie theatre with a hundred-dollar bill in his hand.

Ben embodies the movie-lineup boy.

FEMALE CHORUS: The bill is whisked away by a little gust of wind caused by a tiny vortex created by the motion of the girl.

sfx: pretty vortex.
Ben sees Cassandra.

CHORUS: The boy follows the bill.

Lighting grows cooler.

MALE CHORUS: Snow falls.

FEMALE CHORUS: The girl walks into a graveyard that has lots of graves in it.

MALE CHORUS: All the stones are engraved 'Rest in Peace.'

FEMALE CHORUS: Some do, some don't.

MALE CHORUS: The girl stares up at the pale green sky and extends her arms to catch the falling snow.

FEMALE CHORUS: In the blackness of the graveyard, a single star is visible in the sky.

Cassandra gasps.

MALE CHORUS: It falls.

CASSANDRA: *(disappointed)* Oh. *(She sings.)*
I'd wish the world's darkest mystery
Would come up clear:
Why it's the sparkling things
That always disappear.

FEMALE CHORUS: The girl stares at the snowflakes she has caught.

Cassandra brings her hands toward her face.

MALE CHORUS: They melt on her fingers.

CASSANDRA: (*very disappointed*) Oh!

But that'd be like wishing
That two and two made five.
That'd be like wishing
That you, my dear, were still alive.
My sweetie-pie.

CASSANDRA: Hello, pet. (*She kneels.*) I brought you some flowers. I don't think their colour is natural. I think it was done to them. But here. I'm dedicating them to you. (*She places the flowers on the ground.*)

I'm trying to carry on, love. Like you said. Trying to ... hang on. Some days, though, I just don't seem to have the heart for it. (*hushed*) Some days I guess I wish you'd left a drop for me.

She sings.

Only you will ever be my honey lamb.
Only you, but there you are and here I am.
And my wish will never come true,
So I'll keep one of my feet
In the grave with you,
My sweetie-pie.

She stands.

In the gra-a-ave
With yo-o-ou.

FEMALE CHORUS: The girl digs the sole of one shoe deep into the cold earth.

sfx: digging sole.

MALE CHORUS: A hundred-dollar bill skitters across the grave.

sfx: skittering bill.

The girl looks up and into the shining eyes of the movie-lineup boy.

Music out.

FEMALE CHORUS: They just stay like that for a minute.

Pause.

BEN: Hello.

Pause.

CASSANDRA: Hello ...

FEMALE CHORUS: The girl instinctively reaches for her key, as a weapon, but drops it –

CASSANDRA: Oh!

FEMALE CHORUS: – and stares, unseeing, into the snow.

CASSANDRA: Oh, dear. I dropped my key. I was reaching for it as ... as a ... a ... (*She makes a little stabbing motion.*)

BEN: Weapon?

CASSANDRA: Yes! But then I dropped it in the snow.

BEN: I'll help you find it.

CASSANDRA: No!

BEN: You don't have to be afraid of me.

CASSANDRA: (*genuinely*) That's what they all say.

BEN: (*even more genuinely*) I'm sorry.

Pause.

BEN: Do you mind my asking what you're doing here? In the graveyard? So late at night?

CASSANDRA: Well, yes! Unless you own this graveyard, I don't think that's any of your ... your ... (*She acts out a financial transaction of some sort.*)

BEN: ... business?

CASSANDRA: Yes!

BEN: Forgive me.

Little pause.

FEMALE CHORUS: She does.

Pause.

CASSANDRA: I was ... (*She searches.*)

BEN: ... grieving?

CASSANDRA: Yes. Yes, I was weeping over someone I once ... (*She touches her heart.*)

BEN: ... loved?

CASSANDRA: (*softly, wide-eyed, wondering how he could know*)
Why ... yes.

BEN: Well, I can understand that.

CASSANDRA: Can you?

BEN: Oh yes.

MALE CHORUS: They pause. They watch each other breathe for a moment.

Pause.

CASSANDRA: Do you mind my asking what you're doing here? In this graveyard? So late at night?

BEN: I've been coming here since my girl died.

CASSANDRA: Your daughter?

BEN: No, no. I mean my ...

CASSANDRA: ... girlfriend.

BEN: (*wondering how she could know*) Yes. We were to have been married. But she ...

CASSANDRA: (*very delicately*) ... died.

MALE CHORUS: The boy just stares at the girl as though she is Einstein.

BEN: So I guess you could say I've done a fair bit of grieving here myself.

CASSANDRA: Well, I can understand that.

BEN: Can you?

CASSANDRA: Oh yes.

Pause.

FEMALE CHORUS: The boy spies the key at the girl's feet and plucks it from the snow.

BEN: Here. Your key.

CASSANDRA: Thank you.

There is a moment of stillness as, in the passing of the key, their hands touch. Their hands part.

BEN: Is this your husband?

CASSANDRA: Yes. Well, no. I mean ... We never actually ... We were ... *(She searches, then makes a little diving motion.)*

BEN: Engaged?

CASSANDRA: Yes. Yes, we had a few glorious years of the most outrageous joy. But now I will never know joy again. Never again will I see my companion in this life. Which is to say ...

BOTH: ... never.

Cassandra's jaw drops, delicately. She turns toward Ben.

CASSANDRA: Say! How come we seem to know exactly what the other one's going to say even before we –

BEN: – say it?

CASSANDRA: Yes!

BEN: Because we're the same, you and me.

CASSANDRA: Yes, I can see that. And somehow, that makes me feel
just a little –

BEN: – better?

CASSANDRA: Yes.

Music in: 'The Shiny Ball Song.' A bright little number. Cassandra and Ben sing. Each time one finishes the other's sentence, both are thrilled and delighted.

CASSANDRA:

Under every rock there is a ... a ...

BEN:

Ladybug.

They smile.

BEN:

Inside every can of worms there lies ...

CASSANDRA:

A pearl.

In the midst of any mess there is a
Shi –

BEN:

– ny

BOTH:

Ball!

I'm so glad that you're the same as me.

Cassandra and Ben dance a little soft-shoe number on the graves.

BEN:

Deep in every kettle of fish there is a –

CASSANDRA:

Pie!

In the middle of any nasty jam there's –

BEN:

Kittens.

CASSANDRA:

Purrrr!

BOTH:

In the midst of any mess there is a
Shi-i-i-ny ba-a-all!

BEN:

I'm so glad that you're the same as –

CASSANDRA:

I'm so glad that you're the same as –

BOTH:

I'm so glad that you're the same as –
Me-e-e-e-e.

*Ben and Cassandra dance a little more, then twirl into one another.
Music out.*