

# *From Above*

A short play by Jake Lewis

First draft: 12/21/23

**Characters:**

The Matchmaker - any age, any gender identity, a host of sorts

Alma - female-identifying - pleasant-looking, forward

Oliver - male-identifying - somewhat nerdy, harmless

Joe/Joey - male-identifying - as Joe: cocky, suave; as Joey, gentle, kind

Stephanie/Steff - female identifying - as Stephanie: flirtatious; as Steff, anxious

CHARACTER NOTE: While all characters age during the show, their appearance should remain the same. (i.e. no makeup, wigs, etc to show age difference)

**Setting:**

Alma and Oliver's adult life

Present Day and Near Future

SETTING NOTE: The play should be performed as minimally as possible in terms of sets, props, etc. Clothing should not appear futuristic in the later part of the play, or old-fashioned in the earlier parts. The time is irrelevant. Most action and use of props should be pantomimed.

*"It's so easy from above  
You can really see it all,  
People who belong together,  
Lost and sad and small.*

*But there's nothing to be done for them.  
It doesn't work that way.  
Sure we all have soulmates but we walk  
Past them every day."*

*- Ben Folds, "From Above"*

*THE MATCHMAKER (MM) appears in a spotlight center stage.*

MM: As of tonight, there are more than 7 billion people in the world, and that number is growing every second. With a number that big, it can seem like a losing proposition to think you will ever find your soulmate. Doesn't it?

*Lights rise on ALMA, in a spotlight, stage right.*

MM: This is Alma.

*ALMA smiles and waves.*

MM: And this is Oliver.

*Lights rise on OLIVER, in a spotlight, stage left.*

MM: They're each other's soulmates.

*They wave at each other.*

MM: But they will never be together.

*ALMA and OLIVER stop waving and smiling, and return to facing the audience, slightly saddened.*

MM: Well, that's not entirely true.

*ALMA and OLIVER look hopeful.*

MM: They have been together. Many times, in fact.

*ALMA and OLIVER look confused again.*

MM: Once, they met at the grocery store.

*MM steps back as ALMA and OLIVER pantomime a shopping cart and looking for groceries, crossing to the center where they do an awkward dance of trying to get around each other with their carts. There is a little chucking, and they eventually cross to where the other had been previously standing.*

MM: Another time, they met at the movies. The 7:40 showing of "A Star Is Born."

*The following business should play out like a silent movie:*

*ALMA and OLIVER retrieve a chair from their respective side of the stage, and then bring them to the center (MM can move or look over them, like a projectionist). His chair is slightly behind hers and to the right, as though he is in the row behind her. They both look slightly above the audience's head at the imagined movie screen, improvising eating popcorn or drinking from their soda. After a moment or two, ALMA begins to cry at what she sees on the screen and desperately looks around her for a tissue or napkin. Oliver leans forward and gives her one. She nods in thanks, wipes her eyes, and both resume watching the movie, although perhaps casting a sideways glance at the other when one isn't looking.*

MM: And, another encounter was when they were both on their first date.

*ALMA and OLIVER look at the MM with a mix of confusion and hope.*

MM: Oh! Sorry, not with each other.

*ALMA and OLIVER disappointingly rise from their "movie theater tableau" and cross back to the original side they started from with their chair. They place the chair at the proscenium of the stage and sit in them, as though they are sitting at a table facing their dates, but also facing each other across the stage. The MM becomes their date, first sitting across from ALMA.*

MM: So tell me about yourself, Alma.

ALMA: Well, I am from Michigan—

MM: Ah, the midwest!

ALMA: Actually, I was just going to say that I never saw it that way, but people out here do.

MM: Can I kiss you, please?

ALMA: What? Oh, well, I don't kiss on the first date. But you can hold my hand if you want.

MM: Please excuse me for a moment.

*MM goes to OLIVER'S table and sits down across from him.*

OLIVER: So yeah, I was born here in Boston, but I went to college in Michigan.

MM: I've never been to the Midwest.

OLIVER: Well, it's not really the Midwest. But I liked it out there. Life is a bit slower and gentler.

MM: In what way?

OLIVER: My friends always tease me for not kissing on the first date. Say I'm old-fashioned.

MM: I'll be right back.

*MM moves offstage, leaving ALMA and OLIVER to see each other. They smile, nod, maybe faint recognition, but nothing more.*

*After a few moments, MM returns.*

MM: We all do this. Pass people in everyday life, sometimes several times, who would be our perfect match. They might be your coworkers, the guy pumping your gas, or the waiter who brings you your food. But we don't ever say anything. Why? Well, because we may be shy, or not want to look like a creep.

ALMA: I wouldn't think you're a creep if you said hello.

OLIVER: That's good....because I'm not a creep.

ALMA: But wouldn't a creep say he's not a creep?

OLIVER: You don't seem very shy to me.

ALMA: Oh, if we were talking in any other circumstance, I would be. You know, instead of this meta-conversation where we are breaking the fourth wall.

OLIVER: Fair.

MM: Stop! You two should not be talking to each other!

ALMA: Too late. *(She gets up and crosses to OLIVER on his side of the stage.)* Hi, I'm Alma.

OLIVER: I'm Oliver.

MM: Wait a minute. This is not how it's supposed to happen.

ALMA: How what is supposed to happen?

MM: This story! The point of the story was going to be how some people who belong together just don't end up together, even though they had opportunities if you look from above, like a bird's eye view.

ALMA: OK, I get that, but honestly, that sounds like a lousy story to me.

OLIVER: Yeah, same. Why would you want to tell that story? Or listen to one?

*MM indicates audience.*

ALMA & OLIVER: Ohhh.

MM: So can you just play along?

*ALMA and OLIVER grudgingly acquiesce.*

MM: Thank you. Now, Alma met Joe soon after.

*JOE emerges.*

MM: And Oliver met Stephanie around the same time.

*STEPHANIE emerges.*

MM: Both couples hit it off, dated, got engaged, and got married within a few years.

*During this, there is a quick procession of courtship (maybe holding hands), proposing (guys getting down on their knees), marriage (joining hands).*

MM: Ironically, they got married on the *same day!*

ALMA & OLIVER: March 15th!

MM: I guess they'd never read *Julius Ceasar*. And life went on as it tends to for several years. Mary went to work as a secretary in the office of a large legal firm...

*STEPHANIE moves to center stage and begins pantomiming typing on a computer.*

MM: And Joe moved up the ranks to become a partner at a large legal firm...

*JOE moves to center stage and begins massaging STEPHANIE'S shoulders.*

MM: You can predict the rest.

*JOE and STEPHANIE move offstage together.*

MM: Oliver and Alma both signed their divorce papers—

ALMA & OLIVER: On the same day?

MM: No, that'd be too bizarre.

ALMA & OLIVER: *(Ad-lib)* Oh. Yeah. I guess it would be.

MM: But in the same law office. *(Beat.)* Not Joe's.

*MM steps back. ALMA and OLIVER walk to center stage and face the audience. There is a cute moment as they both reach out to press an elevator button at the same time. Then some awkward silence as they wait, occasionally casting furtive glances at each other.*

ALMA & OLIVER: I'm sorry but—

ALMA: You first.

OLIVER: No, you can go first.

ALMA: I was just going to say—

OLIVER: You look familiar!

ALMA: Yes, that's what I was going to say!

OLIVER: No, I mean, you look familiar to me! Me too!

ALMA: Where do I know you from?

OLIVER: Do you know Pete?

ALMA: Pete Derrick?

OLIVER: Pete Washington.

ALMA: Who's Pete Washington?

OLIVER: Not Pete Derrick.

*They laugh nervously.*

*Elevator noise. They step forward and turn around with their backs to the audience.*

OLIVER: Floor?

ALMA: 23.

OLIVER: Me too!

ALMA: I'm getting divorced. Well, I technically am divorced. Just dropping off some papers.

OLIVER: Oh, I'm sorry to hear.

ALMA: No, no, I'm happy about it!

OLIVER: Oh. Then, Mazel Tov!

ALMA: Yeah. My husband – ex-husband now – slept with his secretary. I met her once. A real slut, so I shouldn't have been so surprised.



OLIVER: No kidding? My wife slept with her sleazeball boss. I always knew that guy was trouble. I feel sorry for his wife.

*Elevator noise.*

ALMA: Well, this is us.

*They exit to the same side of the stage. MM steps forward.*

MM: Even though they had this rom-com meet-cute, do they end up together?

*ALMA and OLIVER look hopeful.*

MM: No. They do not. I told you already, they don't end up together.

ALMA: I'm sorry, but if that's the case, then fine, but why bother with this whole charade? What's your point?

MM: It's about the bitter and the sweet—

OLIVER: I don't buy it. There are plenty of other stories that say the same thing. What's the reason for telling *this* story?

ALMA: She (*or "He" or "They" depending upon the casting/preferences of the actor playing MM*) is trying to challenge us.

MM: I am?

ALMA: She wants us to think the chances are impossible, but as a way to motivate us to defy the odds!

MM: I'm definitely not doing that.

OLIVER: Well, of course, you'd say that, wouldn't you?

MM: Trust me, I'd love this to be a happy ending. I'm a hopeless romantic, myself. But, being an omniscient narrator who can see all time at once, I can assure you this is no game I'm playing.

ALMA: So then what happens now?

MM: You both go about your lives. You both raise your children—

OLIVER: Whoa! When did we have children?

MM: When you were married. Did I not mention that?

ALMA: No, you did not.

MM: Well, you did.

*The actor who played JOE now comes out dressed/acting like OLIVER's child, JOEY. The actor who played STEPHANIE now comes out dressed/acting like ALMA's child, STEFF. Both ALMA and OLIVER pantomime playing with the kids while MM continues.*

MM: They ended up going to the same school.

*Both kids play together like on a playground. ALMA and OLIVER sit nearby on a bench. She is reading a book, he's on his phone. OLIVER begins staring at her like he's trying to place who she is, but she eventually looks up, somewhat creeped out.*

ALMA: Can I...help you?

OLIVER: Sorry, I'm not a creep, I promise.

ALMA: That's exactly what a creep would say.

OLIVER: But I feel like I know you from somewhere.

ALMA: Does this line work on most single moms?

OLIVER: Do you know Pete?

ALMA: Pete Derrick?

OLIVER: No, Pete Washington.

ALMA: Wait a second! The law office! Getting divorced because your wife slept with her boss!

OLIVER: Right! And your hubby had an affair with his secretary! See? I knew I knew you! Come here often?

ALMA: Now that was definitely a line. (*Pointing to STEFF.*) That one there is mine.

*STEFF waves.*

OLIVER: Looks like she and my boy are hitting it off.

*JOEY waves.*

ALMA: Remember when it was that easy to just make friends? Just walk right up to them and start talking?

OLIVER: I know, right? Nowadays, you could get arrested for looking at someone the wrong way.

ALMA: Like women at the playground.

OLIVER: Exactly. (*A few beats.*) Hey, you know, this is the second time we've run into each other, it's almost like...like...

ALMA: A sign?

*MM is whispering something to the kids who run up to their parents, whining, and ad-libbing to leave, pulling at them to go. They pantomime their goodbyes and regrets and move to opposite sides of the stage. Kids go off.*

OLIVER: (*To MM*) That was a dirty trick.

MM: It's not me. It's fate. I swear.

ALMA: I don't believe in fate.

MM: It believes in you.

OLIVER: Just get on with the story.

MM: There's not much more to tell.

ALMA: Seriously? So, what, we just live the rest of our lives, alone and never crossing paths again?

MM: Well, Oliver gets remarried.

OLIVER: Oh. Hopefully, it turns out better than the first one.

MM: If by better you mean she doesn't cheat on you and it lasts longer, than yes. It did.

OLIVER: But?

MM: She died.

ALMA: I'm so sorry, Oliver.

OLIVER: Thanks, but...I don't even know her yet. But I'm sure I'll appreciate it then.

ALMA: What about me? Do I fall in love again?

MM: *(To OLIVIA.)* No. You go through a Tinder phase, some short-term relationships, but nothing sticks. You remain single until your dying day.

ALMA: When is that?

*Beat.*

MM: Now. *(She claps and ALMA's light goes out. She slowly moves upstage where there is a platform or some way to be slightly elevated so she is above the following action..)*

OLIVER: And when do I—

MM: *(Looks at watch.)* Right. About....Now. *(She claps again and OLIVER'S light goes out. He also slowly moves upstage to the platform. MM moves to the side to observe.)*

*Lights come up in the spots where ALMA and MARY had been previously standing. JOEY and STEFF enter the light and look down. JOEY begins to cry quietly. STEFF offers a tissue.*

STEFF: *(Looking into JOEY's light.)* Your dad?

JOEY *nods*.

STEFF: (*Indicating the area in front of her.*) My mom.

JOEY: I'm sorry.

STEFF: Thanks. I'm sorry, too. For you, I mean.

JOEY: Thanks. (*Beat.*) Mary, right?

STEFF: Yeah. You're Joey.

JOEY: We were in school together.

STEFF: Yeah. I thought so. I think we played together in elementary school.

JOEY: I always wondered if my dad had a thing for your mom.

STEFF: Really? That would've been weird. Imagine if they ended up together! We'd be step-siblings!

JOEY: You ever wonder if our parents are looking down on us? You know, like from above?

STEFF: I hope so. Gosh, my mom was such a cool lady.

JOEY: I'd love to hear about her.

STEFF: Only if you tell me about your dad.

JOEY: Deal. I bet he'd like you.

STEFF: (*As she exits with JOE.*) So funny we bump into each other again....it's like...

JOEY: Fate. (*Exits.*)

OLIVER: I see what you did.

MM: What do you mean? I didn't do anything. I just told your story.

ALMA: It wasn't about us.

MM: No?

OLIVER: No. It was about our kids. Their meeting. Maybe forming a life together. The life we didn't get to have.

MM: Who's to say what fate is thinking? But I never lied to you. You don't end up together.

ALMA: You're wrong about that.

MM: *(Smirking, as though she's glad she's wrong.)* I am?

OLIVER: We're both...here. Wherever "here" is.

ALMA: We're soulmates after all.

MM: It's so easy from above, you can really see it all.<sup>1</sup>

*MM exits, job accomplished. OLIVER and ALMA hold hands and exit.*

*Lights fade to black.*

THE END

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<sup>1</sup> Lyric by Nick Hornby from the song "From Above" by Ben Folds