

My Relief Society president came by the other day, after you gave me a ride home. Someone saw your car there. So she had to come by. "Express concern."

PECULIARITIES

TEMPS

By Eric Samuelsen



FROM THE FILM PECULIARITIES CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION

CHARACTERS

ALEXIS . . . Mid-twenties, married
 JASON . . . Mid-twenties, single
 RITA . . . Mid-forties, office manager

CAST

Peculiarities was first presented at the Villa Theatre, Springville, Utah, mid-October 2002. It was directed by Tony Gunn. The original cast for the "Temps" portion was:

ALEXIS . . . Diane Rane
 JASON . . . Jeremy Selim

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Temps" is the second of five storylines from Eric Samuelsen's play, *Peculiarities*, that SUNSTONE has agreed to run serially. The first installment, "Tahoe," was published in the December 2005 issue.

In that issue, we also launched an effort to raise \$10,000 in order to create a film version of *Peculiarities*. We are pleased to announce the completion of that fundraising as several benefactors stepped forward as project patrons. Through their generosity as well as that of all the actors and crew members who are donating their time and talents, filming has begun, and at the time this issue is going to press, more than half of the storylines have been shot.

We are also pleased to announce that the film will premiere on Saturday, 12 August, at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium.

The following is the screenplay version of the "Temps" storyline, in which the action occurs in an office setting. In the play version, all the scenes took place in Jason's car, and the character, Rita, was never seen nor heard. In the film version, Rita makes brief appearances in this as well as another storyline about a Mormon bishop trying to have romantic evening at home, which was written specifically for the film.

ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., is head of playwriting and screenwriting at BYU, where he has been on the faculty since 1992. This is his fourth play published in SUNSTONE (Accommodations, June 1994; Gadianton, July 2001; Family, March 2005). Sixteen of his plays have been produced professionally.

NOTE ON SCRIPT

A note about notation. In this play, a dash (—) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (. . .) should suggest a pause, a line trailing off.

NOTE ON LOCATION

The play takes place inside an office building.

SCENE ONE

(JASON and ALEXIS are kneeling in front of a supply cupboard. They're pretending to look for paper for the copy machine, but their heads are together, and they're sharing a laugh.)

JASON: Okay, *Evil Dead*, right?

ALEXIS: You know how much I love the *Evil Dead* movies! Bruce Campbell. . .

JASON: The great Bruce Campbell. *(A sound. We hear someone walk by. Jason quickly dumps some paper clips on the floor. Big mess. ALEXIS quickly figures it out, plays along.)*

ALEXIS: Dang it, Jason! All over the floor!

JASON: Sorry, sorry. *(The shadow of RITA rests over them. They quickly pick up paper clips.)*

RITA: Wasting paper clips.

JASON: Sorry.

RITA: Get those picked up now. Office supplies don't grow on trees, you know.

JASON: We will. *(RITA leaves. ALEXIS giggles.)*

ALEXIS: *(Quietly.)* Actually, paper sort of *does* grow on trees.

JASON: Shhhh! *(They get the rest of the paper clips picked up. They look around.)*

JASON: I think she's gone.

ALEXIS: Better make sure. *(They look up. Look around. No one there. They sit down on the floor.)*

JASON: She's gone.

ALEXIS: Clocking someone's bathroom breaks.

JASON: She doesn't really.

ALEXIS: She totally *does*, and then she'll be all, like, "You were six minutes this morning, and nine this afternoon. . . ."

JASON: You've *got* to be kidding.

ALEXIS: Not even. Especially women; you think she's bad with men, you should see how she treats. . . .

JASON: Well, that motivates me. To, like, work. . . .

ALEXIS: That's what I'm saying! *(They look around again.)*

ALEXIS: Anyway, you said you had something to show me.

JASON: Well, like I said, I know you have this Bruce Campbell thing.

ALEXIS: Okay, sure.

JASON: Found a website. *Evil Dead* memorabilia—stills, posters, action figures.

ALEXIS: They didn't do action figures!

JASON: From *Army of Darkness*. Ash, Sheila, Wiseman, Lord Arthur.

ALEXIS: No way! What's the URL?

JASON: Here, I wrote it down. Was gonna email it, but you know. . . .

ALEXIS: For sure, they totally monitor our email. Thanks, Jase,

you're a gem. *(She gets up, heads for her computer.)*

JASON: No problem. *(Watches her go longingly.)*

SCENE TWO

*(ALEXIS sits at her cubicle. She's staring at her computer—possibly at the *Evil Dead* memorabilia. JASON comes by, looks at her screen.)*

JASON: So what do you think?

ALEXIS: Man. Posters for every opening. Lobby cards.

JASON: Some great stuff.

ALEXIS: I love this website. Way better than eBay. *(She sighs, minimizes the screen.)*

ALEXIS: See, that's the thing about Steve. I mean, he likes movies and all, in a typical guy science geek sort of

JASON: He's into, what . . . Jackie Chan?

ALEXIS: *(She leans back.)* He prolly wouldn't know it was Jackie Chan. He'd be all, "Oh, yeah, with the kung fu?"

JASON: I totally underst. . . .

ALEXIS: But anything good? No. He wouldn't watch *Sean of the Dead* with me, said no to *Doom*, *Saw* and *Saw II*, *The Ring*.

JASON: The Japanese version is way

ALEXIS: Netflix was my salvation, before our DVD player broke. Like, you saw *Spawn* of course.

JASON: Duh.

ALEXIS: We were dating then, this nearly ended it, I came this close. Steve, get this, wanted to walk out. Of *Spawn*.

JASON: *(Leans over; a secret.)* Well, so did Todd McFarlane.

ALEXIS: *(Crowing.)* See! Steve wouldn't even get that! *(They laugh together.)*

ALEXIS: He doesn't . . . he just. . . .

JASON: Well, you know, he's—

ALEXIS: Oh, yeah, I know. I mean, the master's thesis and all. I love him and all, it's not that, it's. . . .

JASON: Rita. *(ALEXIS quickly opens a work-related screen. RITA looms.)*

JASON: *(Very seriously.)* So, the SS-10's are cross-filed with accounts receivable. . . .

ALEXIS: Accounts receivable, right, I think I get . . .

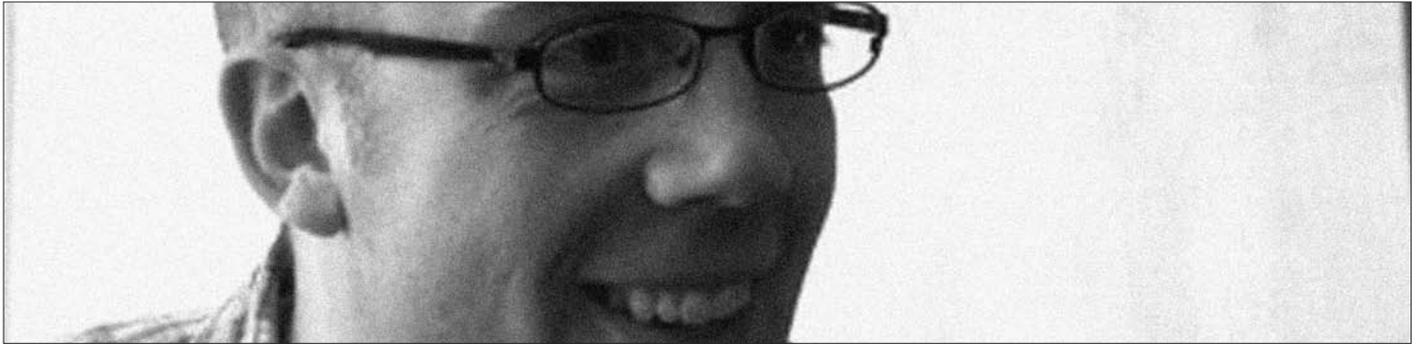
JASON: No, see, that's good, you're doing fine. *(RITA moves away from them. JASON gives her a quick glance.)*

JASON: *(A bit loudly.)* So if you need any more help with it.

ALEXIS: Thanks! *(He moves away. Looks back. She's still absorbed in her computer.)*

SCENE THREE

(ALEXIS stands by the office printer. She waits for a document to print. JASON sees her, goes over to her. Sees RITA watching him. Stands by ALEXIS. She looks up, gives him a quick grin, but she can see RITA, too. Looks away. He watches her, standing behind her. She takes her paper from the printer, moves away, giving him a quick smile as she goes. He longingly watches her go.)



Any time you need to talk. Call it a Jason specialty.

SCENE FOUR

(JASON and ALEXIS sit together in the break room. They're both eating brown bag lunches.)

ALEXIS: Okay, my turn. Five non-*Star Wars* Mark Hamill movies.
 JASON: Oh, man, this is a hard one. Uh, *Corvette Summer*. (She rolls her eyes dismissively.)
 ALEXIS: Everyone gets that one.
 JASON: *The Big Red One*? With, like, Lee Marvin?
 ALEXIS: Good.
 JASON: Um. *The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia*?
 ALEXIS: I'm impressed.
 JASON: No, that's it.
 ALEXIS: Come on! *Slipstream*? *Mutronics*? *Black Magic Woman*?
 JASON: *Mutronics*? Seriously, do you ever see anything without, like, zombies?
 ALEXIS: *Mutronics* was great! I even know who directed it: Screaming Mad George.
 JASON: Well, we're all familiar with his *oeuvre*.
 ALEXIS: It's great! Not so much a zombie movie as a mutant movie. Big difference. (They both laugh at this; everything's funny now.)

SCENE FIVE

(JASON and ALEXIS are still in the break room, their lunch forgotten.)

ALEXIS: It's a giant rabbit, Jason!
 JASON: No, see, it's symbolic of everything Donnie's. . . .
 ALEXIS: It's a rabbit!
 JASON: Come on, Jake Gyllenhaal! And Patrick Swayze's great in it!
 ALEXIS: As a sexual predator, I can't believe it, you liked *Donnie Freaking Dar*. . . .
 JASON: Oh, this from the woman who LOVED *Aeon Flux*! (She hoots even louder. JASON looks at her laughing. At that moment, he'll forgive her anything, even not liking Donnie Darko.)

SCENE SIX

(ALEXIS sits at her desk. She's working. She leans back. JASON comes by.)

JASON: Ten to five.
 ALEXIS: Thanks. (She sits back, stretches. He perches on the edge of her desk.)
 JASON: You need a ride home?
 ALEXIS: No, Steve was gonna pick me up on his way home. (Checks her watch.) In like half an hour.
 JASON: You try to stay on the clock, Rita's gonna throw a fit.
 ALEXIS: I know. (She gestures to her computer.) Thought I'd go for my high score in Tetris. Get this: Rita said it was okay.
 JASON: What, she didn't try to get some work out of you off the clock? She must be slipping.
 ALEXIS: Seriously.
 JASON: I could keep you company.
 ALEXIS: Listen, that's not necessary. I'm fine, really.
 JASON: Okay. I could clock us both out. (She looks at him quizzically.)
 ALEXIS: Okay, thanks.

SCENE SEVEN

(ALEXIS and JASON sit in her cubicle. He's in an office chair he's scooted over by her desk. Shadows are falling; the office is getting darker.)

ALEXIS: And I just feel terrible about it. But what are we gonna do?
 JASON: No, it's a real dilemma.
 ALEXIS: We're just not making it. Steve's got that lab assistant job, but. Rent the first of the month. Groceries.
 JASON: Totally.
 ALEXIS: And so. You know? Just like we said we'd never do. Put the kid in daycare, and there I am.
 JASON: Do you have good. . . .
 ALEXIS: Pretty good I think. This lady from the ward. She's got like nine in there, and it's pretty small, but she seems to do okay. She has activities and stuff.
 JASON: That's good.



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I think Jason is very special.

ALEXIS: But.

JASON: Oh sure.

ALEXIS: You have no idea. I mean, little Bryony: “Don’t go, Mommy.” Clingy. I’m in tears before I get out the door.

JASON: That must be hard.

ALEXIS: You have no idea. You have no idea. *(She stares out the window. JASON looks at her face, mostly in shadow by now.)*

ALEXIS: I really gotta go, he said five thirty and it’s already. . . .

JASON: I understand.

ALEXIS: What time is it now, five twenty-five?

JASON: Five twenty-three.

ALEXIS: I really gotta go. *(She looks away from him, leans back in her chair. He can’t get enough of her, the line of her neck, just a tiny bead of sweat.)*

SCENE EIGHT

(ALEXIS and JASON sit by her desk.)

ALEXIS: Okay, so, we’re temps. I mean, that’s true, we’re temps. That doesn’t mean, she doesn’t have to treat us like we’re nothing. You know?

JASON: I totally know what you’re saying. *(She crosses to the office window.)*

JASON: You okay?

ALEXIS: Just seeing if Steve’s car’s there.

JASON: Can you see it from here?

ALEXIS: Usually, yeah, he always parks in the same place. *(He looks at her by the window, framed in it.)*

ALEXIS: My Relief Society president came by yesterday.

JASON: Okay. . . .

ALEXIS: The other day, when you gave me a ride home. Someone saw your car there. So she had to come by. “Express concern.”

JASON: I was there for, like, two minutes.

ALEXIS: I know. *(She moves away from the window.)*

ALEXIS: I don’t see him.

JASON: You okay? I mean, the Relief Society stopping by. . . .

ALEXIS: I’m fine. Ward gossip, you know how it goes. *(She sits by her desk again.)*

JASON: He said five-thirty?

ALEXIS: Sometime before six.

JASON: So is he gonna call, or. . . .

ALEXIS: His cell is on the fritz. Again. I said I’d keep an eye out.

JASON: Do you want to, you know, wait, outside?

ALEXIS: If I’m a little late, he’s always got a book, research. For the thesis. *(Pause. She looks pensively out the window.)*

JASON: So. Wanna race? *(She stares back at him, surprised.)*

SCENE NINE

(They scoot on office chairs past the water cooler. She’s a little ahead. They’re both giggling.)

SCENE TEN

(ALEXIS is sitting in RITA’s office. She sits in RITA’s chair, twirls it around. JASON sits on one of the other chairs.)

ALEXIS: I can’t believe we’re in Rita’s office.

JASON: Her private sanctum.

ALEXIS: This is, like, so empowering. *I rule the universe!*

JASON: And I am your slave. *(She laughs briefly. Twirls again. She looks away from him.)*

JASON: You okay? *(She nods. Abruptly.)*

ALEXIS: You know, we don’t even have a TV.

JASON: Really?

ALEXIS: We had one, my sister gave me hers when she moved. But Bryony was having a tantrum and kicked it and it hasn’t worked since.

(She looks straight ahead, close to tears.)

ALEXIS: Steve and I, we have dinner. And then he’s straight into the bedroom and working on the computer. The thesis. And I have to keep her quiet or it wrecks his concentration. So no radio, or CDs. I can’t even read, because then Bryony goes just nuts, wants attention. I mean, evenings, I sit and count the minutes. I’m staring at the clock counting the minutes. Watching time pass.

JASON: That’s awful.

ALEXIS: And, like, everything costs so much money, a movie or . . . anything. And that’s my life.

JASON: That’s so wrong.

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Don't. Just . . . stay here.

ALEXIS: I mean, I actually love my job. In comparison. Lousy temp job working for Rita, and it's so much better than . . . that little living-room prison.

(JASON sits there staring at her in shadow, trying to think of something he could say.)

ALEXIS: And you and me, Jason. You get who Bruce Campbell is. We like the same movies and we can sit and. . .

JASON: We're friends.

ALEXIS: Well, yeah.

JASON: Good friends.

ALEXIS: I mean, don't get me wrong. I love Steve. I love my daughter.

JASON: Oh, of course. That goes without say. . .

ALEXIS: I mean when I kneeled across from him in the temple. It was the single most important moment of my, you know, life.

JASON: This too will pass.

ALEXIS: What? *(She looks at him like she's finally seeing him for the first time. But his expression is carefully bland. She relaxes.)*

ALEXIS: Oh, sure.

JASON: This too will pass. For me, it's like church.

ALEXIS: How?

JASON: Boring meetings. Stretching into eternity?

ALEXIS: *Totally.* They'll be a talk and they'll be droning on. And I'll start wishing, like, that Freddie Krueger or zombies or, like, the alien from the *Alien* movies could burst in the door. Take out the bishop, the deacons, big bloodbath.

JASON: Like the scene in the gym in *Carrie*.

ALEXIS: Yeah! Wouldn't that be awesome? Blood everywhere, and Sissy Spacek all drenched. And I'd think, hey, something interesting!

(JASON laughs. They laugh together. Then she's serious.)

ALEXIS: But, but see—that's only one day. This is my life. Every day.

JASON: No, I understand that.

ALEXIS: And I just think; it's going to be my life. Bryony will grow up, and the other kids, if we have 'em. And still. Nights in a living room with nothing to talk about.

JASON: But you *will* have a TV. *(She stares at him. He's trying to be funny again, and that mood's passed.)*

ALEXIS: *(Drily.)* Yeah, there's that.

SCENE ELEVEN

(ALEXIS and JASON sit in RITA's office. ALEXIS's face is half-mottled in the shadows. Her eyes are closed. A quiet love song plays on the computer.)

ALEXIS: I love this. What is it?

JASON: *(Modestly.)* Well. . .

ALEXIS: Wait a minute. This isn't your band, is it?

JASON: Uh. . . *(She sits up, excited.)*

ALEXIS: It is!

JASON: Well, that's me on bass. *(She looks at him, eyes shining.)*

ALEXIS: This is awesome.

JASON: Well. We're not that great.

ALEXIS: I remember you said you were in a band. You guys are great. This is so mellow. *(She listens, eyes closed. The song ends.)*

ALEXIS: That was great.

JASON: Okay, this next song is one I wrote.

ALEXIS: You write the songs!

JASON: Some. Our singer writes some, too. *(She lies back again. Listens.)*

ALEXIS: I love this. Sometimes, you want stuff you can just listen to, lie back. Close your eyes. And just . . . float.

JASON: That's why I wrote it. *(ALEXIS has her eyes closed. Her hand is very close to JASON's. He looks at it. He wants to take her hand, hold it. He knows he can't. He closes his eyes, too.)*

JASON: Let Rita melt away.

ALEXIS: And Steve and his thesis. Bryony and her tantrums. *(He reaches over and very gently nudges his hand against hers. She lets him. He tries to take her hand. She quietly pulls it away, just a little.)*

JASON: Just float away. Listen to the music. *(She keeps her eyes closed, completely absorbed.)*

SCENE TWELVE

(ALEXIS and JASON. Her head is on the desk, her cheek resting on her hand. His hands reach towards her hair. She slowly pulls away, but smiles apologetically as she does.)

ALEXIS: He's gotta to be down there by now.
 JASON: It's nearly six.
 ALEXIS: Gotta get home. Dinner. I've got to cook dinner.
 JASON: That doesn't sound so bad.
 ALEXIS: I hated that when I was single, never was any good at it. Top Ramen and mac and cheese. *(She stands, straightens her clothing.)*
 JASON: Nothing wrong with mac and . . .
 ALEXIS: I'm *supposed* to cook. Because I'm the wife. And I never have a clue. I go shopping and I buy cans of mushroom soup because you're supposed to be able to make casseroles with it, only I don't know how to make any casseroles with it, so I've got all these cans of that crap in my pantry.
 JASON: I'll bring some recipes by next week. For things you can make with mushroom soup. *(She laughs.)*
 ALEXIS: In just about one minute, I've got to get downstairs, and out to my husband's car, and home so I can cook his dinner.
 JASON: Or not. *(He looks at her. Is he serious?)*
 ALEXIS: What do you mean?
 JASON: Maybe you don't. Have to. *(She starts to leave. He reaches out, puts his hand on her arm, stops her.)*
 JASON: Don't. Just . . . stay here. *(Their eyes meet. He tries to turn it into a joke.)*
 JASON: I'll make you dinner. Something Italian.
 ALEXIS: Well, that's tempting. I can boil spaghetti, you know.
 JASON: I'll cook you something better than that. *(Another long exchange of glances. She laughs shakily.)*
 ALEXIS: You're such a kidder.
 JASON: I am. *(She smiles back, heads for the door. He lets her go. She turns, leans back into the room.)*
 ALEXIS: Seriously. This was great.
 JASON: Say hi to Bryony for me.
 ALEXIS: I will.
 JASON: And Steve.
 ALEXIS: Yes.
 JASON: Any time you need to talk. Call it a Jason specialty.
 ALEXIS: I think Jason is very special. *(She reaches over to pat his hand. He takes her hand. She doesn't pull away. They look at each other for a long time.)*
 ALEXIS: Okay.
(But she still doesn't pull her hand back. She's looking at him intently. He can't let go.)
 ALEXIS: That dinner's not gonna cook itself. *(She does now pull her hand away. She looks at him strangely. Heads for the door. He follows.)*
 JASON: So. Do you need a ride again. Monday?
 ALEXIS: Yeah. Maybe so. *(He turns away. She makes a decision.)*
 Monday for sure. I'll need a ride, it's Steve's day for the car. *(JASON looks at her. She looks back at him. Their eyes lock.)*

SCENE THIRTEEN

(JASON and ALEXIS still holding their look.)
 JASON: Monday then. *(ALEXIS goes out the office door. He watches her go.)*



ENTRY DEADLINE FAST APPROACHING

THE 2006 BROOKIE & D.K. BROWN FICTION CONTEST

THE SUNSTONE EDUCATION FOUNDATION invites writers to enter its annual fiction contest, which is made possible by a grant from the Brookie and D. K. Brown family. All entries must relate to adult Latter-day Saint experience, theology, or worldview. All varieties of form are welcome. Stories, sans author identification, will be judged by noted Mormon authors and professors of literature. Winners will be announced in SUNSTONE and on the Foundation's website, WWW.SUNSTONEONLINE.COM; winners only will be notified by mail. After the announcement, all other entrants will be free to submit their stories elsewhere. Winning stories will be published in SUNSTONE magazine.

PRIZES will be awarded in two categories: short-short story—fewer than 1,500 words; short story—fewer than 6,000 words. Prize money varies (up to \$400 each) depending on the number of winners announced.

RULES: 1. Up to three entries may be submitted by any one author. Five copies of each entry must be delivered (or postmarked) to SUNSTONE by **30 JUNE 2006**. Entries will not be returned. A \$5 fee must accompany each entry. No email submissions will be accepted.

2. Each story must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of white paper and be stapled in the upper left corner. The author's name must not appear on any page of the manuscript.

3. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover letter that states the story's title and the author's name, address, telephone number, and email (if available). This cover letter must be signed by the author and attest that the entry is her or his own work, that it has not been previously published, that it is not being considered for publication elsewhere, and that it will not be submitted to other publishers until after the contest. If the entry wins, SUNSTONE magazine has one-time, first-publication rights. Cover letters must also grant permission for the manuscript to be filed in the SUNSTONE Collection at the Marriott Library of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The author retains all literary rights. SUNSTONE discourages the use of pseudonyms; if used, the author must identify the real and pen names and the reasons for writing under the pseudonym.

Failure to comply with rules will result in disqualification.