

*"I know exactly how far I can go and exactly when I need to stop,  
and this time we were nowhere close."*

# PECULIARITIES

## NCMO

By Eric Samuelsen



ALL IMAGES ARE FROM THE FILM PECULIARITIES

### CHARACTERS

KIM . . . BYU co-ed, early-twenties, single  
TRENT . . . BYU student, returned missionary,  
early twenties, single

### 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 "NCMO" portion was:

KIM . . . Susanna Florence  
TRENT . . . Jesse Harward

EDITOR'S NOTE: "NCMO" is the fourth segment from Eric Samuelsen's play, *Peculiarities*, which SUNSTONE has been running serially. The other installments, "Tahoe," "Temps," and "Pizza and TV," were published in the December 2005, April 2006, and November 2006 SUNSTONE issues. Samuelsen wrote *Peculiarities* as an exploration of LDS attitudes toward sexuality, in particular situations in which moral rigidity and sexuality collide in Mormon culture.

An early cut of the film version of *Peculiarities* was screened at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium and is scheduled to be shown at the 2007 Sunstone West Symposium in San

Francisco on 21 April. The film is also currently being submitted to film festivals. Watch for announcements about the film at [WWW.SUN-STONEONLINE.COM](http://WWW.SUN-STONEONLINE.COM) and in magazine issues.

### NOTE ON SCRIPT

A mention 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 a BYU-approved housing apartment in Provo, Utah.

ERIC SAMUELSEN 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.



## I get these . . . feelings, and I want you to come over, and I want you. And then I don't. For weeks.

### SCENE ONE

*(Lights up on KIM and TRENT, who are on a sofa making out. TRENT moves away.)*

TRENT: Okay. Okay. *(KIM tries to nuzzle his neck.)*  
 I think we'd better—. *(KIM kisses him again, hand on his thigh.)* Kim, I mean it.  
 KIM: Don't quit on me.  
 TRENT: Not a good idea.  
 KIM: Come on. *(She kisses him again.)*  
 TRENT: I'm serious. *(He stands. She's clinging to him, hits the floor.)*  
 KIM: *(On the floor. Furious, but controlled.)* All right.  
 TRENT: I'm sorry.  
 KIM: Fine.  
 TRENT: It was starting to get too—.  
 KIM: I was fine.  
 TRENT: Dangerous. It was getting dangerous.  
 KIM: Not for me.  
 TRENT: Well, it was for me.  
 KIM: *(A pause. Venomously.)* Coward.  
 TRENT: There's no need for—.  
 KIM: Wuss. Pansy.  
 TRENT: Just a second here—.  
 KIM: Fag.  
 TRENT: I think I proved that I'm not a—.  
 KIM: I know *exactly* how far I can go and *exactly* when I need to stop, and this time we were nowhere close.  
 TRENT: Yeah, well, I guess I don't have your fine-tuned sense of—.  
 KIM: I draw the boundaries in this relationship.  
 TRENT: Do you?  
 KIM: Yes. I do.  
 TRENT: Well, maybe it's time to redraw some boundaries.  
*(Heads for the door.)*  
 KIM: You go out that door, and you will never see me again.  
 TRENT: Break my heart. *(But he doesn't exit, stands by the door.)*  
 KIM: You know me well enough to know that I am stating

nothing less than the exact truth. You know me well enough, Trent.

TRENT: So what?  
 KIM: I really don't kid around. Leave, and you're history.  
 TRENT: Fine. *(But he doesn't leave.)*  
 KIM: Trent? *(He does not answer, still stands by the door, torn.)*  
 Honey. *(He fidgets by the door.)* Come back.  
 TRENT: No.  
 KIM: Look, I'm sorry. Come back.  
 TRENT: No.  
 KIM: I don't want to end it. Not like this.  
 TRENT: Yeah.  
 KIM: Look, I'm sorry.  
 TRENT: Whatever.  
 KIM: Really. I am.  
 TRENT: I'm not sure it's . . . enough for you to—.  
 KIM: You have to understand. I just . . . I had plans for tonight, and I was looking forward to . . . you know.  
 TRENT: Yeah.  
 KIM: You cut me off. Too soon, sooner than I . . . . Anyway. You see?  
 TRENT: All right.  
 KIM: Come back here. Okay? Come here. We'll play Truth or Dare.  
 TRENT: *(A long pause.)* Truth or Dare? I don't think so.  
 KIM: Don't get all pissy. Hormones talking, that's all.  
 TRENT: Call me a—.  
 KIM: I know, I didn't mean it.  
 TRENT: Okay. . . .  
 KIM: Chalk it up to, you know, frustration. Please? Come here? *(He crosses back to the sofa, sits, not looking at her.)*  
 TRENT: I was gonna start pushing things, see? I mean, that's why I . . . I was really gonna start pushing things.  
 KIM: I understand. See, but maybe that's what I wanted.  
 TRENT: What do you mean?  
 KIM: Maybe I wanted you to start pushing things.  
 TRENT: I didn't know if I could stop.  
 KIM: Of course you could stop.



## Do you really want to try one of my dares?

TRENT: I don't know.  
 KIM: I mean, I know you. I trust you.  
 TRENT: I was getting pretty—  
 KIM: You could stop.  
 TRENT: Whatever.  
 KIM: You could have.  
 TRENT: Okay. But see—  
 KIM: No, see, that's not the issue. Whether you could stop. I trust you, but you kinda need to trust me too. One of us has to say no, and I kinda think that's my job.  
 TRENT: Both of us.  
 KIM: Well, sure.  
 TRENT: Both of us need to, you know, have that responsibility.  
 KIM: Okay, sure. Okay. But—  
 TRENT: That's so bogus, "It's the girl's responsibility to say—."  
 KIM: No, I'm not disagreeing—  
 TRENT: I mean, I stopped it tonight. Right? Earlier than you wanted, okay, but seriously, I was not up to pushing things any further.  
 KIM: Look, can I get you a Coke? Cool us both down. *(Gets up and moves toward kitchen)*  
 TRENT: Sure.  
 KIM: Ice?  
 TRENT: Yeah.  
 KIM: *(Pouring them both a Coke from a two-liter bottle.)* I hope it's not too flat. Katie always buys these two-liter things and then leaves the cap off.  
 TRENT: Gary does the same at my place.  
 KIM: It's undrinkable, flat pop.  
 TRENT: Totally.  
 KIM: Oh, it's got a nice head though.  
 TRENT: Good.  
 KIM: *(Reaches over the back of the sofa to hand Trent a glass. Spills a little.)* Oops. I'm still a little shaky, you know.  
 TRENT: Yeah.  
 KIM: You get going on the back of my neck like that.  
 TRENT: You like that?  
 KIM: You couldn't tell? *(Sits.)* I'm still shaky.

TRENT: No, we need to do this. Talk about things.  
 KIM: Totally. *(A pause.)* You know, until you stopped it, that was one good session.  
 TRENT: It was.  
 KIM: Oh yeah. *(They look at each other. Lights down on them.)*

### SCENE TWO

*(KIM and TRENT on the sofa. TRENT finishes off the soda.)*

TRENT: That hit the spot.  
 KIM: Okay, Truth or Dare.  
 TRENT: Do we have to do this?  
 KIM: Yes.  
 TRENT: It's a party game, right? For like ten people.  
 KIM: You can play it with two.  
 TRENT: I don't know.  
 KIM: Truth or Dare?  
 TRENT: Truth. I guess.  
 KIM: Okay, are you and Lisa engaged?  
 TRENT: Okay, I thought Lisa and Brad were off-limits.  
 KIM: Well, as in, "Do we tell 'em?"—of course we don't. But I'm curious.  
 TRENT: What if I don't want to say?  
 KIM: Truth or Dare—you gotta.  
 TRENT: I don't want to.  
 KIM: Trent, honey, you really wanna try one of my dares?  
 TRENT: *(Pause.)* Lisa and I are talking about getting married.  
 KIM: Okay.  
 TRENT: We are. We're not, you know, engaged.  
 KIM: I understand—  
 TRENT: But close. We're talking.  
 KIM: Sure.  
 TRENT: If she knew I was over here—  
 KIM: She's not going to find out that you were over here. Not from me.  
 TRENT: I'm gonna have to tell her.  
 KIM: Your call.  
 TRENT: I just don't think I can go into . . . you know, a—



## I will marry in the temple and be a virgin on my wedding night.

KIM: Okay, sure, fine—.

TRENT: A committed . . . an engagem—.

KIM: Brad and I too.

TRENT: What?

KIM: I anticipated. Truth or Dare—I anticipated you'd ask me about Brad.

TRENT: Yeah, okay.

KIM: We're talking. Brad and I.

TRENT: About . . . about getting m—.

KIM: Yes. We are.

TRENT: Okay. . .

KIM: Or . . . maybe we're not.

TRENT: Truth or Dare—you can't do that, change your mind.

KIM: Maybe we are, maybe we're not. Maybe Brad and I are like you and Lisa. That's possible. Or maybe I just lied to you.

TRENT: What are you—?

KIM: Point is, you and Lisa, me and Brad. . . . What does any of that have to do with anything at all?

TRENT: It . . . it seems—.

KIM: We may never do this again. We may never see each other again. Or we might be back here tomorrow night, on this sofa, doing just what we were doing. We . . . it . . . we don't have a "relationship."

TRENT: Okay, there's a sense in which—.

KIM: NCMO. That's all this is about.

TRENT: You can't . . . just—.

KIM: Non-committal. Non-com—.

TRENT: I think we've got more going than—.

KIM: I don't.

TRENT: You can't just . . . play games about this kinda stuff, Kim. *(Gets up and heads for the door again.)*

KIM: Can't I? We have. For nearly a year now.

TRENT: I like you. I've thought of . . . even, like, dumping Lisa—.

KIM: Why would you do that?

TRENT: Because, you and me, we—.

KIM: You don't know anything about me.

TRENT: I . . . I—.

KIM: What's my major?

TRENT: Your major?

KIM: Yeah. What am I majoring in?

TRENT: Is this more Truth or Dare?

KIM: It seems like the kind of basic thing you should know about someone—.

TRENT: Okay. Communications.

KIM: No.

TRENT: Well, I thought it was.

KIM: No, you don't know, because I've never told you.

TRENT: So what are you major—?

KIM: I'm not going to tell you.

TRENT: You're . . . why n—?

KIM: Because I don't want you to know. Where am I from?

TRENT: Okay.

KIM: I'm not going to tell you. What does my dad do for a living?

TRENT: I get your poi—.

KIM: I'm not going to tell you.

TRENT: So we could do that. Share those sorts of—.

KIM: I don't want to. That's the point. That's where we are. I get these . . . feelings, and I want you to come over, and I want you . . . and then I don't. For weeks.

TRENT: Okay, I get it, I get your—.

KIM: Do you?

TRENT: Yeah. *(Pause.)* Me, too.

KIM: Right.

TRENT: No one makes me come over here. I could just . . . not.

KIM: Exactly.

TRENT: But I do. Every time.

KIM: But Brad. . . . Brad is a sociology major from San Diego; his father is a dentist. Lisa?

TRENT: And Lisa's majoring in Elementary Ed; she's from Lethbridge, Alberta, and her father died five years ago of cancer. He was a junior high school principal.

KIM: See?



**I am just . . . not worth someone like that. No way.**

TRENT: It just seems so—.  
 KIM: Seems. Sure.  
 TRENT: Empty. And—.  
 KIM: No, see that's just . . .  
 TRENT: Wrong.  
 KIM: So? So what?  
 TRENT: And I just feel like I need to—.  
 KIM: Go on. Go ahead.  
 TRENT: I might just—.  
 KIM: Tell the bishop, tell Lisa, I don't care. If you do, I'll find someone to replace you. If I decide that's what I need. Either way, I will marry in the temple and be a virgin on my wedding night. This isn't about—.  
 TRENT: What is it about?  
 KIM: It's about. . . . *(Pause.)* It's . . . about. . . you know what it's about, Trent, don't pretend you don't. *(Pause.)*  
 TRENT: I think I'd better just leave.  
 KIM: If you do, that's it. The end.  
 TRENT: Maybe that would be best.  
 KIM: Or maybe not. Your call. *(He stares at her. Blackout.)*

### SCENE THREE

*(KIM and TRENT on the sofa.)*

TRENT: I just get so sick of these games.  
 KIM: It's all games, Trent-o.  
 TRENT: I also hate it when you call me that.  
 KIM: No kidding.  
 TRENT: I'm serious. The whole thing.  
 KIM: Okay, Truth or Dare.  
 TRENT: I don't want to play anymore.  
 KIM: Truth or Dare.  
 TRENT: Okay, Truth.  
 KIM: Have you lied to the bishop?  
 TRENT: What an absolutely . . . that's just the crappiest thing to ask someone.  
 KIM: Have you?  
 TRENT: You better not choose truth when it's your turn, that's

all I can say.  
 KIM: Have you? Lied to him.  
 TRENT: Yes.  
 KIM: Okay.  
 TRENT: It was just after he'd interviewed Lisa—about some stuff she and I had done, and I just thought I'd sound like a real jerk if I told him about you, too.  
 KIM: Are you ever going to tell him the truth?  
 TRENT: No, you don't get two questions, no way. My turn, Truth or Dare?  
 KIM: Truth.  
 TRENT: Have you—?  
 KIM: No.  
 TRENT: I didn't even ask the question.  
 KIM: I have never lied to the bishop. Not once.  
 TRENT: So he, like, knows about me?  
 KIM: If I didn't get a follow-up question, then neither do you. Truth or Dare.  
 TRENT: Truth.  
 KIM: Do you check out porn on the internet?  
 TRENT: Not anymore.  
 KIM: That's not an answer.  
 TRENT: It's all you're getting. Truth or Dare.  
 KIM: Truth.  
 TRENT: Have you ever kissed a girl?  
 KIM: For real? Yes, but I didn't like it. Truth or Dare?  
 TRENT: Truth.  
 KIM: You were a lousy missionary, right?  
 TRENT: *(Long pause.)* I was a district leader.  
 KIM: But you were bad. You didn't get the job done. You did stuff, and it got in the way. You sucked as a missionary. Am I right? *(He stares at her. Cannot answer. She nods.)* I knew it. *(Blackout.)*

### SCENE FOUR

*(KIM and TRENT sitting on the sofa, slightly apart from each other.)*

KIM: *(Softly.)* Come here.



## It's such a fine line. Between tickling and heaven.

TRENT: No.  
 KIM: Come here.  
 TRENT: I don't want to.  
 KIM: Yes, you do. *(She kisses him. He resists. She kisses him again. Blackout.)*

### SCENE FIVE

*(TRENT lies back on the sofa. KIM'S buttoning her shirt.)*

KIM: You want another Coke?  
 TRENT: Sure.  
 KIM: Ice?  
 TRENT: I think I need it.  
 KIM: *(She gets him another glass of pop. Brings it to him. Leans over the sofa. Kisses him.)* That was more like it.

### SCENE SIX

*(He's rubbing her feet.)*

KIM: Sometimes, your hands. . . .  
 TRENT: Quiet.  
 KIM: Oh, that feels great.  
 TRENT: Just relax.  
 KIM: But I want to say this. Sometimes your hands. . . .  
 TRENT: We don't need to talk about it.  
 KIM: But if there are things you do that I like—  
 TRENT: I already know.  
 KIM: Okay. *(Relaxes a bit.)* You found the spot.  
 TRENT: Good.  
 KIM: It's such a fine line. Between tickling and heaven.  
 TRENT: Be sure and tell me if I cross it.  
 KIM: Don't worry. *(Blackout.)*

### SCENE SEVEN

*(On the sofa. He's holding her.)*

KIM: Tell me about her.  
 TRENT: Lisa?  
 KIM: Yeah.  
 TRENT: What's to tell?

KIM: I've never met her. What's she like?  
 TRENT: Geez, I dunno. She's . . . I'm lousy at this.  
 KIM: Guys, I swear.  
 TRENT: She's cute. She . . . drives a Jetta. She likes dogs.  
 KIM: Is she tall?  
 TRENT: Medium height, maybe five six. She's an El Ed major; I said that. . . .  
 KIM: Come on, you haven't said anything. . . .  
 TRENT: What can I say? *(Pause.)* She's always changing her hair.  
 KIM: What do you mean?  
 TRENT: When I met her, she was blonde, had that sort of Mariah Carey big hair thing goin' on.  
 KIM: Right, I know the look.  
 TRENT: Anyway, since I've known her, she's had three other hairstyles. Red. Real black once. Now she wears it short and straight, dark blonde.  
 KIM: Like Tea Leoni?  
 TRENT: I don't know even know who that is.  
 KIM: Actor? She was in that end-of-the-world one . . . meteorite. Never mind.  
 TRENT: Anyway, Lisa. Always messing with her hair.  
 KIM: Okay.  
 TRENT: And she's always losing weight. She's *always* on a diet. Right now she's doing the whole Atkins thing.  
 KIM: So two years ago.  
 TRENT: Well, she's trying it. She'll go to McDonalds and order a quarter pounder and throw away the bread and just eat the meat. And somehow, all that fat, she loses weight.  
 KIM: I've heard it works; it's counterintuitive, but for some people. . . . Is she heavy?  
 TRENT: Of course not. But she thinks she is. She's always "I'm so fat."  
 KIM: What else?  
 TRENT: And she's really into backpacking, hiking. She does the Timp hike every year, and she wants to hike the Appalachian trail for our honeymoon.  
 KIM: Are you into that?  
 TRENT: Getting there. Anyway, what else? She's . . . she'll express an opinion, and then she'll, like, back down. "That's



## We don't need to talk about it.

what I think, anyway. For what it's worth." Like that. Or she'll say something, just joking around, friendly insult kind of thing, and then she has to say "just kidding," even though you know she's just kidding.

KIM: I'm starting to get her.

TRENT: And, like, roommates. She's always reading things into roommate relations. "I think she's mad at me 'cause I ate her broccoli by accident." Stuff like that. She's always so concerned that people are mad at her.

KIM: Absolutely.

TRENT: And they're having to have these apartment meetings to straighten things out.

KIM: Sure.

TRENT: Anyway. She loves really terrible puns. She's really close to her family; she calls her sister maybe three or four times a week. And she cries in testimony meeting and hardly any other time at all. And . . . that's Lisa.

KIM: I know her. At least getting a sense.

TRENT: And I am just . . . not worth someone like that. No way.

KIM: Trent. Take it from me. Self-pity is not attractive.

TRENT: So tell me about Brad.

KIM: No.

TRENT: I told.

KIM: What, you want equity? Not—.

TRENT: Fair's fair.

KIM: No. *(Pause.)* Suffice it to say that I don't deserve Brad any more than you deserve Lisa.

TRENT: Yeah.

KIM: Who we really deserve is each other.

TRENT: We'd last a week.

KIM: If that. We'd carve each other to pieces.

TRENT: And both of us deserve it. *(Gets up.)* I'm going.

KIM: Sure.

TRENT: Kim. Look. Don't call me anymore. Okay? I don't want to do this anymore.

KIM: Liar.

TRENT: I'm serious. Don't.

KIM: No. No, you're right.

TRENT: Okay. *(He leans over, kisses her.)* Goodbye, Kim.

KIM: Yeah. . . . Trent? *(He waits. She gets up, puts her arms around his neck.)* Not yet. *(She kisses him again. With increasing desperation. He responds. They fall together on the couch. She breaks the kiss. As he kisses her neck, breathlessly.)* Why do we have to . . . ?

TRENT: Hush.

KIM: *(She's crying.)* Why do we . . . why do we have to . . . ?

TRENT: I don't know.

KIM: Why do we have to. . . ? *(They continue kissing. Slow Blackout.)*



## WEEDING

This is how my father did it when I was young, fighting the weeds one by one, hours on his knees. I press my fingers in the soil beneath each weed and yank it from the dirt. In the house across the lawn I hear my three-year-old yelling at his mother "Don't you tell me" and "I'm the boss" from his room where she's sent him for time-out. Between his shouts I hear my teenage daughter slamming cupboard doors, banging pans, and wailing how unfair we are to make her work so hard. I pound weed roots against my knee, make them drop the soil they hold, and fling them away from me. I smile to see the ground I gain, the weedless dirt expanding inch by inch. I understand why my father stayed outside so long, sweat glistening on his smooth brown back, how sometimes distance is release.

—CECIL MORRIS