DOUBLE, DOUBLE

A play by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Joe, Frank, Charlie: Young men.

Jo, Charli, Astrid: Young women.

Delivery Guy 1, Delivery Guy 2: Either.

SETTING

All the action takes place in the living room of Joe and Frank's house. Doors lead outside, to the kitchen, to the bathroom, and to the bedrooms.

Note: The main prop will be a large box, like a telephone booth with opaque sides and numbered switches on the side. It must have a second door on the back so characters can enter and leave it without being seen by the audience. At the beginning of the play it is enclosed in either a packing crate or wrapping paper.

SYNOPSIS

The unexpected delivery of a strange machine leads to bizarre consequences for a young man and his friends.
SCENE 1: EARLY EVENING

F/X: Knock on the outside door.
*(Joe enters from the opposite side of the stage.)*

Joe: Coming!
*(Joe crosses to the door, then opens it.)*

Delivery Guy 1: Tachyon Express. I got a delivery here for a Mister Josif Knighte.

Joe: That's me. Come on in.

*(Delivery Guy 1 and Delivery Guy 2 enter, lugging a huge box, about the size of a telephone booth, wrapped in wrapping paper.)*

Delivery Guy 2: Where do you want it, Bud?

Joe: Over there, I guess.
*(Joe points toward the back wall.)*

Joe: I don't remember ordering anything...
*(The Delivery Guys set the box down.)*

Delivery Guy 1: Look. It says right here. "Josif Knighte. 344 Clinton Street."
*(He shows Joe the paperwork.)*


Delivery Guy 2: Look, Bud, we're just delivery guys, not humanities professors. We're not paid to do spell checking; we're paid to deliver. "Tachyon Express -- When it absolutely, positively has to be there yesterday." That's our motto.

Joe: Yeah, but that's not how I spell my name.
*(Delivery Guy 1 grabs the paperwork out of Joe's hand.)*

Delivery Guy 1: This form says it's paid for; we got paid to deliver it. You don't like it, take it up with the company.
*(He stuffs the paperwork back into Joe's hand.)*

Delivery Guy 1 (Cont’d): We gotta go. Our next delivery's Jupiter.

Joe: Jupiter? In Florida?
(The Delivery Guys leave.)
(Frank enters through the bedroom door.)

Frank: Hey, roomie, what's this?

Joe: Oh. Hi, Frank.
(Joe leafs through the papers.)

Joe: (Cont’d): Beats the heck out of me. It says here it comes from "Clone-O-Mat AB. Malmo, Sverige."


Joe: I guess that explains why they spelled my name phonetically. And those delivery guys were pretty strange, too. They said they were from "Tachyon Express -- When it absolutely, positively has to be there yesterday." Well, let's take a look.

Joe and Frank remove the wrappings on the box, revealing something that looks like an opaque telephone booth, with its door facing out into the room and some numbered switches on the outside. They open the door and peer in.

Frank: Nothing inside but a place to sit. It's from Sweden; maybe it's some kind of sauna? Well, I gotta go. Let me know if you find out anything.

Joe: OK. See you later.
(Frank leaves through the outside door.)
(Joe looks around the outside of the machine, then flips Switch 1.)

F/X: The machine starts to hum.

Joe: Well that's interesting.
(Joe opens the door and steps in. The door closes behind him.)

F/X: The hum rises to a peak, then abruptly cuts off.
(Joe opens the door and steps out, holding a booklet.)

Joe: Well, at least I found this manual. Too bad it's in Swedish.
(Joe looks at his watch.)

Joe: Whoops, don't wanna be late for a first date.
(Joe sets down the manual, picks up his light jacket and puts it on, and then leaves through the outside door.)

F/X: The machine starts to hum. It rises to a peak, then abruptly cuts off.
(Joe opens the door and steps out of the machine. He looks at his watch.)
Joe: Whoops, don't wanna be late for a first date.
(Joe sees the booklet and picks it up.)

Joe: Where did this come from?
(Joe sets the booklet down and looks around.)

Joe: And where’s my jacket? Oh well.
(Joe leaves through the outside door.)
SCENE 2: THE NEXT MORNING

(Frank enters from his bedroom. He yawns and stretches.)

Frank: Ah...A nice, lazy, Saturday morning.

(Joe (without his jacket) stagers in through the outside door.)

Joe: Oh...my head.

Frank: You look like hell. Are you just getting home?

Joe: Yeah. First my date stood me up. Then I drank way too much. Then I fell asleep on the bus. I think I'm gonna be sick.

(Joe runs into the bathroom. Frank walks into the kitchen, then comes back with a glass of milk in his hand. Joe, looking fine and wearing his jacket, comes out of his bedroom.)

Frank: Wow, you made a quick recovery.

Joe: Huh?

Frank: A minute ago you looked terrible. I guess that's not so surprising considering what you did last night.

Joe: What I did? We just had dinner, then I walked her home. And then I came home to bed.

Frank: Huh? But you said...

Joe: I gotta go. Look, we're supposed to get together this morning. If she shows up, just ask her to wait. OK?

Frank: Uh, sure...

Joe: Do we need anything?

Frank: We're low on milk.

Joe: Got it. See you later.

(Joe heads out the outside door as Astrid passes him coming in.)

Frank: Hey, Astrid.

Astrid: Hi, Joe.

Astrid (to Frank): Hi, Hon.

(Astrid crosses to Frank. They kiss.)
Frank: How was your trip?

Astrid: Good, now that I'm back with you, Babe.

Frank: Ah...you know how to sweet-talk a guy. Hey, did Joe seem strange to you?

Astrid: Not that I noticed. Why?

Frank: He was talking crazy this morning. First he looks like hell and he tells me his date stood him up. A minute later he looks fine and he tells me he took her to dinner. It's almost like he's two different people. Anyway, he said she's supposed to meet him here this morning; I guess we can figure it out then.

Astrid: Sounds like a plan. Hey, what's that thing?

Frank: I don't know. Something that got delivered yesterday for Joe.

(Astrid and Frank look the machine over. Astrid flips Switch 5.)

F/X: The machine starts to hum softly.

(They watch it for a while.)

Frank: Huh. That's all it does? Want something to drink?

Astrid: Sure.

(They walk to the kitchen.)

F/X: The hum rises to a peak, then abruptly cuts off.

(The door of the machine opens and Jo steps out. She is wearing the same clothes as Joe. Astrid enters from the kitchen.)

Astrid: Who are you?


Astrid: Jo? Oh, right...

Jo: Look, I gotta go. If anyone shows up for me, just ask her to wait. OK?

Astrid: Uh, sure...

Jo: OK. Later.

(Jo walks out through the outside door.
Frank enters from the kitchen.)

Frank: Who were you talking to?
Astrid: Some girl named Jo. She says she knows me, but I don't remember her. She did look familiar, though.

Frank: She must be Joe's date from last night. He said she'd meet him here.

Astrid: But then why would she leave instead of waiting for him?

Frank: Maybe she had to get something. Huh. Joe. Jo. Funny coincidence about the names.

Astrid: Yeah. Funny. Ready to go?

Frank: Sure.

(They exit through the outside door.)
SCENE 3: LATER THAT MORNING

F/X: Knock on the outside door.

Charli (O.S.): Joe?
(Charli (Joe’s date from last night) opens the outside door and comes in.)

(Charli walks to the machine and looks it over. Then she opens the door and steps in. The door closes.)

F/X: The machine starts to hum. It builds to a peak, then abruptly cuts off.
(Charli opens the door and steps out. She looks at her watch.)

Charli: I guess I have some time ’til he gets back.
(Charli exits through the outside door.)

F/X: The machine starts to hum. It builds to a peak, then abruptly cuts off.
(Charlie opens the door of the machine and steps out. He is wearing the same clothes as Charli. He looks at his watch.)

Charlie: I guess I have some time 'til he gets back.
(Charlie exits through the outside door.)
SCENE 4: LATER THAT MORNING

(Joe comes in through the outside door, closing it behind himself. He is wearing his jacket. He goes into his bedroom and closes the door.
The other Joe (without the jacket) comes in through the outside door, leaving it open. He walks to the center of the room.
Charli comes to the door.)

Charli: Joe? Are you here?
(Charli steps in. Joe rounds on her.)

Joe: You've got a lot of nerve coming here! After what happened last night.

Charli: What?

Joe: Oh, get lost.
(Joe heads into the bathroom.
Joe (the one with the jacket) comes out of the bedroom. Charli doesn't see him enter.)

Joe: Charli! When did you get here?

Charli: Huh?
(Joe crosses over to Charli and gives her a hug.)

Joe: It's good to see you. Say, would you like something to drink?

Charli: I guess.
(Joe goes into the kitchen.
The Joe without the jacket comes out of the bathroom.)

Joe: Are you still here?

Charli: I'm waiting for my drink.

Joe: Well, you'll have a long wait. I'm outta here.

(Joe leaves through the outside door.
The Joe with the jacket comes out of the kitchen with two glasses and a bottle.)

Joe: I found an open bottle of Pepsi in the fridge. None of that annoying fizz.

Charli: Thanks. What's going on?

Joe: What do you mean?
Charli: First you bite my head off, then you're happy to see me.

Joe: Why would I do that?

Charli: You claimed I did something to you last night.

Joe: Well...

*(Joe puts his arms around Charli.)*

Joe (Cont’d): ...you *did* kinda rock my world last night.

*(They kiss.)*

Charli: I know what you mean, but it sounded like you were really mad just before you went into the bathroom.

Joe: But, I haven't been to the bathroom since I got home just now. Look, I haven't even had time to take my jacket off yet.

Charli: But...

Joe: Let's just forget about it, OK? Ready to spend the day together?

Charli: Sure.

*(They leave by the outside door.)*
SCENE 5. STILL LATER THAT MORNING.

(Jo runs in from outside.)

Jo: Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go.
(Jo runs into the bathroom.)

Jo (O.S.): Aggghhh!
(Jo comes out of the bathroom looking shocked. She starts frantically feeling around her body.)

Jo: Where did these come from? Where did it go?
(Charlie comes to the door.)

Charlie: Joe? Are you home?

Jo: Uh, in here.
(Charlie enters.)

Charlie: Oh. I was looking for Joe. Who are you?

Jo: I'm Joe. I think.

Charlie: I meant the one who lives here.


Charlie: Oh, I see. I thought he was dating a girl named Astrid. Well, anyway, I'm Charli.
(They shake hands.)

Jo: Say, Charlie. You didn't happen to have a date with me -- I mean, with the other Joe last night, did you?

Charlie: I did. I was supposed to meet him here today.

Jo: Ahh...Say, Charlie, do you need to use the bathroom? It's right over there.

Charlie: As a matter of fact, I do. Thanks.
(Charlie walks into the bathroom.)

Charlie (O.S.): Aggghhh!
(Charlie comes out of the bathroom looking shocked. He starts frantically feeling around his body.)

Charlie: Where did they go? Where did this come from?
Jo: Just keep calm. Now, what I'm about to say is going to sound crazy. Charlie. When you went on your date with Joe last night, you were a woman, right?

Charlie: Well of course. I've been female all my life. I was born female, I was female last night. I was female when I came here earlier this morning...

Jo: And?

Charlie: And...now I'm male.

Jo: And I've been male all my life. I was male on my date last night. I was male when I got up this morning. But now...

Charlie: This is just weird. How could we both switch sex?

Jo: All right. Let's think back. We were both the right sex last night. We were both the right sex this morning. Right?

Charlie: I think I would have noticed when I took my morning shower.

Jo: Right. So you came over here this morning, looking for me. Was I here?

Charlie: No. I looked around a little, saw that nobody was here, and left. I figured I'd just come back later.

Jo: Did you do anything while you were here?

Charlie: I don't think so. Wait...I did look in that big box over there. What is it, anyway?

Jo: I don't know. It got delivered last night, but I never ordered anything like it.

(Frank and Astrid come to the door.)

Jo (Cont’d): Oh, Hi. Frank. Astrid.

(Frank and Astrid enter.)

Frank: Who are you two?

Jo: I'm Joe, of course. Your roommate.

Astrid: Roommate? Frank, is there something you want to tell me?

Frank: Uh...no. Look, Baby, I've never seen her before.

Astrid: But I have. She was here this morning.

Frank: This morning? I thought you said she was Joe's date from last night.
Astrid: No, that's who you said she was.

Charlie: You're both wrong. I was Joe's date last night. My name's Charli.

Frank: You're his date? I guess there are some things I never knew about him.

Jo: Look. It's very simple. I'm Joe. I've lived here with Frank for years. I met this girl named Charli, we had a date last night, and now somehow we've both switched sex. Got it? (Frank and Astrid look at each other, then both break into the theme song from The Twilight Zone.)

Frank and Astrid: Doo-doo doo-doo.

Frank: All right. Suppose this is true. How did it happen?

Charli: Beats me. But I think it has something to do with this machine.

Astrid: What is it?

Jo: I don't know. It showed up last night.

Frank: Hey, what's this? (Frank picks up the booklet that came with the machine and starts leafing through it.)

Frank: It's got pictures of the machine, but I can't make out the words. They're not in English. Say, Astrid, can you read Swedish?

Astrid: Sure. I used to spend summers with my grandparents in Gothenborg. (Frank hands her the booklet.)


Jo: 2212?

Astrid: Yeah. Let's see. (Astrid leafs through the manual.)

Astrid (Reading): "Need a break? Overwhelmed by your responsibilities? Or do you just want to try something new? The Clone-O-Mat 5000 is the latest in self-cloning technology."

Charlie: Self-cloning? It didn't do a very good job on the two of us!

Jo: Yeah. And does that mean the originals of us are still walking around?
Frank: I guess. Astrid, what else does it say?

Astrid: Hmmm...Here we go. You activate Switch 1 to start the cloning process. Then you step in. Wait a few seconds. Step out. A minute later your clone comes out. It says that their advanced technology duplicates all organic and inorganic matter.

Charlie: That explains why we didn't come out naked. But I seem to have gained a few parts, and lost some others.

Jo: So did I. You don't think that you got my...and I got...?

(Jo and Charlie look at each other for a few seconds.)

Charlie: Excuse us.

(They go into the bathroom for a short time, giggling erupts from the bathroom, then they come out again.)

Jo: Well, it didn't look familiar.

Charlie: I didn't recognize mine either.

Astrid: I think I found the answer. Remember when it said "want to try something new?" Well, it says here to flip Switch 5 if you want your clone to reverse gender.

Frank: Oh, well, that explains everything.

(Jo and Charlie stare at Frank.)

Frank (Cont’d): Isn't it obvious? The delivery guys said their motto was, "When it absolutely, positively has to be there yesterday." Clearly, by the year 2212 both instant cloning and time travel have been developed. They must have just delivered this machine to the wrong century.

Jo: I need to clear my head. I'm going for a walk around the block.

Charlie: May I Join you?

Jo: Sure. The more the merrier.

(Jo and Charlie leave by the outside door.)

Frank: I think we both need a drink.

(Frank and Astrid go into the kitchen.)
SCENE 6: AND YET LATER THAT MORNING

(Frank, Astrid, Joe (with jacket), and Charli enter.)

Joe: Time travel? Cloning? You expect us to believe all this?

Charli: It would explain why you seemed like two different people this morning -- you were!

Joe: Let's see if I have this straight. After I went and picked you up last night, I went to pick you up and you weren't there. And that's why I was mad. Wait. I mean...after I went and picked you up last night, the other me went to pick you up and you weren't there. So I thought you stood me up and I got mad. No. The other me thought you stood me up...No. Stood him up...Wait...

Frank: We get the picture. What do we do now?

Astrid: The manual has instructions on how to re-integrate the clone and the original. We just have to put one into the machine, press Switch 2, then put the other one in and press Switch 3.

Joe: Then I guess I'll just have to find the other me and explain it to him.

Astrid: You can't do that. It says in the manual that two clones of the same gender can't come within 10 meters of each other, or it will disrupt the space-time continuum.

Charli: Same gender?

Frank: Oh, yeah. We didn't get to tell you about Jo and Charlie.

Joe: Huh?

Astrid: The other Jo and Charlie. The female Jo and the male Charlie.

Jo: Female Jo?

Charli: Male Charlie?

Frank: Well, you see –

Astrid: Wait! I hear something.

(Astrid runs to the outside door and peeks out.)

Astrid (Whispering): It's Joe! Coming up the walk!

Joe: Which one?
Astrid: The other male Joe. Quick! Get in the box.

Charli: And I'd better hide. He's still mad at me.
*(Joe gets into the machine as Charli dashes into the kitchen. Frank presses Switch 2.)*

F/X: The machine starts to hum. It builds to a peak, then abruptly cuts off.
*(Joe (without the jacket) comes in from outside.)*

Joe: What's going on? What was that sound?

Frank: Uh, we were just fiddling with the machine. I think we have it figured out.

Joe: Oh? What does it do?

Astrid: It's a little hard to explain. Look inside and you'll see.
*(Joe goes to the machine, opens the door, and looks in.)*

Joe: Hey! Who are you?
*(Frank and Astrid shove Joe into the machine and slam the door. Frank leans back against the door.)*

Frank: Switch 3! Quick!
*(Astrid presses Switch 3.)*

F/X: The machine starts to hum. It builds to a peak, then abruptly cuts off.
*(Joe steps out of the machine, wearing his jacket.)*

Frank: Did it work?

Joe: I think so. Charli! You can come back in now!
*(Charli enters from the kitchen.)*

Charli: Joe! Are you all right?

Joe: Yeah. But it's the strangest thing. I can remember our date from last night. And I can remember your standing me up, too.

Charli: Just so long as you're back in one piece. And you're not mad at me any more.

Joe: I'm not mad. C'mere.
*(Joe and Charli embrace.)*

Frank: I guess that's that. When the other Jo and Charlie get back from their walk, we can re-integrate them too. Anybody want lunch while we wait?
*(They all walk into the kitchen.
Delivery Guy 1 peeks in through the outside door.*)
Delivery Guy 1: The coast's clear. Come on.  
(Delivery Guy and Delivery Guy 2 come in and start packing up the machine.)

Delivery Guy 2: This is another fine mess you've gotten us into. We wouldn't have to do this if you had set the controls right on the time machine.

Delivery Guy 1: Look. I told you. I was out late last night partying with these two hot Venusians. My head feels like a supernova.

Delivery Guy 2: You're dating two Venusians?

Delivery Guy 1: They're twins! You know, they say you should never try to come between twins, but in this case...

Delivery Guy 2: Spare me the details. Let's go.  
(The two Delivery Guys haul the machine out the door. On the way out, one of them picks up the instruction manual and leaves another piece of paper. A short time later, Jo and Charlie enter from outside. Then Frank, Astrid, Joe, and Charli enter from the kitchen.)

(Joe, Jo, Charli, and Charlie circle around looking at each other.)

Astrid: We'd better get you all re-integrated before something else goes wrong. I'll get the manual. You four get ready to enter the machine.

Jo: The machine. Where did you move it?

Frank: It's right where we left...Uh oh. Houston, we have a problem.

Astrid: I'll say. The instruction manual's gone. And here's a note. "Sorry for the inconvenience. Tachyon Express -- When it absolutely, positively, has to be there yesterday."

Charli: So how are we going to merge with our clones without the machine?

Charlie: Uh. About that. Jo, honey, do you want to tell them?

Jo: Sure. Uh, you see, after we thought about it for a while, we both decided we like it this way.  
(Jo and Charlie shyly join hands.)

Charlie: So, if it's all the same to you, we'll be on our way.

Joe: But...But...How are you going to support yourselves? You can't have our jobs.
Jo: Oh, we thought we might take up couples counseling.

Charlie: Who else can understand the other point-of-view better than we could? Well, 'bye.  
(*Jo and Charlie exit through the outside door.*)

Joe: It's funny. Now I know that one of my descendants will still be living here in 200 years, 
even if he does spell his name differently. Well, Charli, this will make quite a story to tell 
our grandchildren.

Charli: Grandchildren? We've only had one date.

Joe: I know. But I've got a feeling that this is the start of a beautiful relationship. Dessert, 
anyone?  
(*Joe, Charli, Frank, and Astrid leave through the kitchen door.*)

END OF PLAY

This play is dedicated to the memory of Damon Knight and Cyril M. Kornbluth.