

HEART THROB AND HIGH FLYER

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BY

Donald C. Drake

4809 Trinity Place, Phila., PA 19143
donalcdrake@gmail.com
215 726-5580

Time
The Present

Place
Living Room and Restaurant

CAST

JACK.....Timid Man, late 30s

JILL.....Weary Woman, late 30s

HEART THROB AND HIGH FLYER

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SCENE 1

SETTING: Combined living room/dining room/kitchen of a professional family in Philadelphia. Prominent in the otherwise conventional living room are two open laptop computers and a bust of Bobby Kennedy.

AT RISE: Set is black but for the glow of two computer screens. Then the lights come up to reveal Jack and Jill, both in their late 40s or early 50s. Jill is a sexy woman despite her messy appearance. Jack is about six-foot tall with slightly broad shoulders and the beginnings of a pot. He is reading the newspaper and she is reading a manuscript. For several seconds they say nothing.

JILL

(finally, not looking at him)

My novel is almost finished. Isn't that exciting?

He doesn't reply. She is not surprised. They've become accustomed to ignoring each other. Several seconds pass.

JACK

I scooped the hell out of the Trib today. On the triple homicide. My story led the paper.

JILL

I'm not sure I'm happy with my writing. Do you like the title?

JACK

A source in homicide tipped me off to the arrest.

JILL

It's important to have a good title.

JACK

Journalism doesn't get much better than this.

JILL

But all that counts these days is promotion. I wonder if I could get on the Winfrey show.

They fall into silence again. Jack looks at Jill reading her manuscript and shakes his head. He returns to his newspaper. Jill looks at Jack reading the newspaper and shakes her head.

JILL (CONT'D)

Our marriage is on automatic pilot. I don't like it. I don't like it one bit.

Jack doesn't look up from his newspaper.

JILL (CONT'D)

Jack.

JACK

That's nice, dear.

JILL

That company that developed computer programs for writing your own last will and testament has a new one for drawing up divorce papers. Maybe we should get it.

JACK

(without looking up)

That's nice.

Jill goes back to her manuscript in defeat. They both read for a bit when the alarms on both of their watches go off. They both jump up.

JILL

(to herself)
It's time.

JACK

(to himself)
Off to the internet.

The stage lighting switches to the cool blue colors of a video screen as the two march off to their computers and start typing, reading the words out loud as they write them.

HEART THROB

(to himself)
I wonder if my new buddy High Flyer will be on the net tonight.

HIGH FLYER

(to herself)
Thank God for the modem -- umbilical cord of the desperate and disengaged.

(typing)
Hello, Heart Throb, are you there? High Flyer here.

She pushes the send button. Because the recipient can't read the message until it's sent, there's a slight pause between the time the message is read aloud and the other person reacts. As the audience comes to accept this convention, the pauses get smaller until there are none and the actors abandon the computers altogether. Then they will move about the stage, talking to each other but never looking at each other directly.

HEART THROB

(to himself)
Ah, there he is. I think I'm going to like this dude. He's the type of guy you can bullshit with.

(typing)
I'm here, High Flyer. I'm glad you're there.
(he starts to push the send button, but stops)

I don't want to sound too eager. He might mistake it for affection. Oh, what the hell. Men can be affectionate with each other, if it's anonymous. But then, on second thought, it's safer to be manly.

(he retypes his message)

Yeah, buddy, what's up?

(he pushes the send button)

HIGH FLYER

(typing)

Hi.

(to herself)

Heart Throb is so sensitive and has such insight. I bet she is an astrologer.

HEART THROB

(to himself)

Male bonding is a subtle art, a careful balance between indifference and superiority.

(typing)

Yo, bro, what did you think of the Phillies last night?

HIGH FLYER

(typing)

I don't follow football.

HEART THROB

(to himself)

Football? What planet does this guy come from? Is it possible that he doesn't follow baseball? We did talk for more than five minutes yesterday and not once was a score mentioned.

(typing)

What sport do you like?

HIGH FLYER

I'm not a sports fan.

HEART THROB

(to himself)

Why have television if you don't like sports?

(suddenly an awful suspicion that High Flyer is gay)

Oh, my God.

HIGH FLYER

But I do like flowers a lot. And recycling.

HEART THROB

Oh, oh.

HIGH FLYER

(typing)

And working in my herb garden.

HEART THROB

(to himself)

School's out.

(typing)

It's been good talking to you, High Flyer, but I've got to go.

HIGH FLYER

My husband likes the Phillies.

HEART THROB

I'll be damned.

(typing)

You're a woman.

HIGH FLYER

(typing)

You couldn't tell?

They leave their computers, but continue talking to each other through the miracle of the internet.

HEART THROB

How could I tell?

HIGH FLYER

I just assumed you knew. Are you a woman?

HEART THROB

Of course not.

(to himself)

Don't tell me I sound like a woman.

(to her)

How old are you?

HIGH FLYER

(debates whether to tell the truth. Decides not to)
Thirties something. And you?

HEART THROB

Same thing. Are you married?

HIGH FLYER

(to herself)

Oh, dear, should I tell him? If I don't, it means I'm trying to make out with him. And that would be cheating on Jack. A little bit of cheating would be exciting. But it would be wrong. Shit.

(typing)

Yes. And I have two children. What about you?

HEART THROB

I'm married and also have two children. What business are you in?

HIGH FLYER

I'm a professional person. I'm a... I'm a pilot. I fly Concorde, those planes that fly very high. That's why I'm called High Flyer.

HEART THROB

I thought all those planes were grounded because they were unsafe.

HIGH FLYER

Grounded?

(recovering)

I work for a Mexican airline. Why are you called Heart Throb?

HEART THROB

I'm a very emotional sort of guy.

HIGH FLYER

What do you do for a living?

HEART THROB

(to himself)

What kind of man would be an emotional sort of guy?

(to her)

I'm a psychotherapist. How high do you fly?

HIGH FLYER

We fly high. Very, very high.

HEART THROB

How fast do you fly?

HIGH FLYER

We fly fast, very, very fast.

HEART THROB

Is your husband a pilot, too?

HIGH FLYER

My husband is a reporter.

HEART THROB

He must be a very interesting guy. What did you think of that triple murder?

HIGH FLYER

What triple murder?

HEART THROB

Surely you heard about it.

HIGH FLYER

It sounds vaguely familiar. What happened?

HEART THROB

Some drug dealer tried to wipe out the competition. Where do you live?

HIGH FLYER

Hawaii.

HEART THROB

I thought you flew for a Mexican airline.

HIGH FLYER

With a Hawaiian franchise. Mexicans like to vacation in Hawaii.

JACK

What's it like there?

It's warm. HIGH FLYER

How warm? HEART THROB

Very warm. HIGH FLYER

It's freezing here. HEART THROB

Where's here? HIGH FLYER

Alaska. HEART THROB

What time is it there? HIGH FLYER

Seven forty. What time is it there? HEART THROB

A little later. HIGH FLYER

You mean earlier, don't you? The sun goes from east to west. HEART THROB

That's what I mean. Earlier. Do you like Alaska? HIGH FLYER

Yes. I'm an outdoorsman. I like to hunt. HEART THROB

Killing animals is cruel. HIGH FLYER

(recovering) HEART THROB
With a camera. I hunt with a camera.

HIGH FLYER

What kind of animals do you like to hunt with your camera?

HEART THROB

(to himself)

This woman must be some kind of animal nut or watches a lot of public television.

(to her)

Bears. I like to hunt bears. Are you an expert on animals?

HIGH FLYER

No, but I like public television.

HEART THROB

(with reassurance)

Ah, yes, the Alaskan bear. A mighty, proud and sometimes, if you don't know what you're doing, dangerous beast. Many a wonderful afternoon I've spent by the streamside, waiting for a bear to come and fish for his or her dinner.

HIGH FLYER

What an exciting life you live.

HEART THROB

Isn't it exciting flying the Concord?

HIGH FLYER

It is at first, meeting the beautiful people and eating all over the world. Breakfast in Honolulu. Lunch in Singapore. Dinner in New Delhi. But you quickly settle into the routine of glamour, fame and excitement.

HEART THROB

The Concord flies to all of those places?

HIGH FLYER

On charter.

HEART THROB

Who charts Concords?

HIGH FLYER

Rich people in a hurry.

HEART THROB

(to himself)

I better not keep talking too long or she'll think desperate or worse needy.

(to High Flyer)

I have to sign off for tonight. It's dinner time for the bears and I want to get some more pictures. Same time tomorrow?

HIGH FLYER

(to herself)

Oh yes.

(typing)

Same time tomorrow.

Cool lighting is replaced with warm lighting. For several seconds they smile at their computers, lost in their private worlds. Jack picks up his newspaper and starts reading when he sees Jill smiling.

JACK

Who are you thinking about?

JILL

What makes you think I'm thinking about someone?

JACK

That funny smile on your face. It's been years since I've seen that smile. Thinking about me?

She gives him a don't-be-ridiculous smile

JILL

I just got a crazy idea. Let's talk to each other tonight.

JACK

What's wrong?

JILL

Must there be something wrong just because I want conversation?

JACK

(returning to his newspaper)

All right, we can talk if you want to.

JILL

We got a letter from Zachary and Hannah. They're enjoying camp. Zach says he's sure he'll be inducted into the Council of Indian Chiefs tonight. One of his new friends is an Indian Chief.

JACK

Already the networking begins. He's only 12.

JILL

Thirteen. Hannah's the 11-year-old. I'm worried about my book. Would you read it and tell me what you think?

He's lost in his newspaper.

JILL

Jack.

JACK

What?

JILL

Would you read it?

JACK

Read what?

JILL

My book.

JACK

What's it about?

JILL

I've been working on this book for three years and you don't remember what it is about?

JACK

Refresh my memory.

JILL

It's a searing, compelling tale, written with unstoppable narrative power, about a modern American family that's gone awry. It's about affluence and hard work and people who have forgotten how to love.

He is engrossed in his newspaper again.

JILL

Would you stop reading that newspaper and talk to me?

He sighs and puts down the newspaper.

JACK

So it's a comedy.

JILL

It's an American tragedy. A novel, though it does have autobiographical elements.

JACK

You had to write about something sad?

JILL

Sad gives you a lot more to choose from.

JACK

There are more happy things to write about. Especially in this country.

JILL

That's not what the newspapers say. You reporters are always writing about murders, hurricanes and wars.

JACK

That's not all we write about.

JILL

Corruption, crime and crisis.

JACK

We write about other things.

JILL

Death, deceit and debauchery.

JACK

So. That's a lot of different stuff.

JILL

Name one uplifting story you've written in the last five years. One story, Jack.

JACK

One example?

JILL

One example.

JACK

(after much thinking)

The mother who stayed in the intensive care unit with her son for three straight months -- day and night -- throughout his agonizing death.

JILL

Oh, yeah, I forgot that uplifting story.

JACK

And the woman who married the serial killer on death row.

JILL

I guess that qualifies. The marriage didn't end in divorce.

JACK

What's the name of your book?

JILL

The Decline and Fall of Everything Nice.

JACK

Oh, Jesus, Jill.

JILL

It's a working title. Enjoy.

Jill hands him a thick manuscript. He turns to the last page.

JILL (CONT'D)

Don't you dare count pages. It makes me feel like reading my book is an obligation.

JACK

I was checking to see how many pages I could look forward to enjoying.

JILL

Six hundred and seventy-five.

JACK

That's a lot of pages.

She gives him a dirty look.

JACK

(continuing; hastily)

To enjoy. Boy, am I tired. Let's go to bed.

JILL

I'm too tense to go to sleep.

JACK

We don't have to sleep.

(no response)

Want a drink? A brandy would go real good. It will help you unwind. Yes, why don't you go upstairs and have a nice hot bath? I'll fix you a brandy. When you get out of the bath, I'll give you a nice, relaxing massage.

JILL

I just want to sit here for a bit. I'm feeling a little sad tonight. I guess it's the book.

JACK

The rewriting will go better tomorrow.

JILL

Who said anything about rewriting?

JACK

You always have to rewrite.

JILL

You don't rewrite.

JACK

I'm a newspaperman. Real newspapermen never rewrite. Buck up. You've got everything to live for. Let's go upstairs.

JILL

I'm not in the mood.

JACK

We don't have sex anymore.

Jill looks at him with pain and then sadness.

JILL

(finally)

I know.

JACK

We don't anticipate being intimate. Remember our first date? All through dinner I was anticipating how we'd go back to your apartment and lie down on your bed with the red velvet cover, waiting for you to come out of the bathroom with no clothes on.

JILL

A hand in bed, unannounced, reaching out in the dark. That's what our sex has become.

JACK

Apparently not even that. I'm going to bed.

He gets his laptop and starts to exit.

JILL

You're taking your computer to bed?

JACK

It's better than nothing.

He exits. Jill starts writing on her computer. Lights come up in the bedroom area as Jack enters. He boots up his computer.

JILL

Heart Throb, are you there?

(she waits)

High Flyer, here. Where oh where are you, Heart Throb?

(to herself)

Heart Throb is probably still photographing the bears.

JACK

High Flyer is probably already in bed asleep, but it's worth trying.

Jack starts typing.

JILL

(to herself)

I guess I'll log off and sit here a while until Jack falls asleep.

She starts to log off when Jack pushes the send button. The cool blue lights come up.

HEART THROB

High Flyer, I'm here. Are you there?

HIGH FLYER

Oh great, there he is. Yes, I'm here. I'm so glad you're there.

HEART THROB

And I'm so glad you're there. You're up awfully late.

HIGH FLYER

I thought you were going to photograph the bears.

HEART THROB

Bad snow storm here. Bears don't eat when it's snowing.

HIGH FLYER

I've been a little lonely today.

HEART THROB

What's wrong?

HIGH FLYER

I can't put my finger on it.

HEART THROB

Nothing's hurting, but nothing has any meaning either, is that how you're feeling?

HIGH FLYER

Yes, exactly.

HEART THROB

And nothing's worse than having people tell you to buck up and be happy because you have everything to live for.

HIGH FLYER

You've been there?

HEART THROB

I'm there right now.

HIGH FLYER

Is there anything I can do for you?

HEART THROB

No, but thanks for asking.

JILL

I feel like I'm suffocating. Talking to you is breathing again. I've just read a poem by Yevtushenko that I found very moving..

(reciting)

When your face appeared over my crumpled life, at first I understood only the poverty of what I have.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 2

The next night. Jill is working on her laptop in the living room and Jack is watching television. He shuts the TV off and looks with concern at Jill. Finally Jill becomes aware of him staring at her.

JILL

What's wrong?

JACK

Today I had lunch at that restaurant on City Line Avenue.

JILL

(with concern)

What restaurant?

JACK

T.G.I.F.

JILL

That's a coincidence. I had lunch there today. I'm surprised you didn't see me.

JACK

So then it was you I saw sitting at the table in the back of the restaurant.

JILL

I thought you hated T.G.I.F.

JACK

I didn't recognize the man you were with.

JILL

That was my old friend, Jim.

JACK

You told me he'd moved out of town.

JILL

He's moved back.

JACK

You should have introduced me.

JILL

I would have if you stopped by and said hello. I'll be damned. I believe you're jealous.

JACK

Don't be ridiculous.

JILL

That's nice.

JACK

What's nice?

JILL

You being jealous.

JACK

I'm not jealous. You're perfectly free to have an intimate lunch in a dark, supposedly romantic restaurant with whomever you want.

JILL

We used to go to restaurants like that.

JACK

We never went to places like T.G.I.F.

JILL

Remember that place in South Philly with the all-opera jukebox? Hosteria Da Elio. We don't do things like that anymore, Jack.

JACK

We have two kids.

JILL

They've been away at camp all summer and we haven't eaten out once.

JACK

That's what's nice about being married a long time. You don't have to talk all the time.

JILL

We used to talk all the time. Remember the two weeks we spent in that romantic, little Italian village, where the food was wonderful and the wine was even better. We spent hours talking, making love and drinking wine.

JACK

Wine never tasted so good. We thought it was made by the little local wine maker and it turned out he was almost world famous. What was it called?

JILL

Bartoli Mendali.

JACK

Bartoli Mendali, a connoisseur's wine. But that's not why it tasted so good to us. It was because we were in love.

JILL

The wine doesn't taste that good anymore.

JACK

It doesn't taste good at all. You look different tonight.

JILL

(hopefully)

Yes? Do you like it? The difference?

JACK

How can I tell if I don't know what it is?

JILL

It's my hair. I used to let it fall down my back.

JACK

I would have noticed it earlier, but I was very preoccupied tonight.

JILL

I cut it last week.

Oh. JACK

Jack, would you hold me? JILL

Before dinner? JACK

Oh, forget it. JILL

Hey, wait, I'll hold you if you want. JACK

It's all right. JILL

I want to hold you. JACK

Zach called tonight. JILL

Is something wrong? JACK

JILL
They didn't induct him into the Council of Indian Chiefs. He was pleading to come home, but I convinced him to stay. I wish you were there to talk to him.

I had a deadline. JACK

You always have a deadline. JILL

The poor kid. It's not easy growing up a boy. JACK

You think it's easier growing up a girl? JILL

JACK

Boys are constantly under the gun. Like when they choose up sides for a ball game. Will they pick you first or last? Will they even let you play? Can you hang out with the guys after the game?

JILL

I weighed too much when I went to camp. Big Butt. That's what they called me. God did I hate that camp, not to mention my big butt. I spent the whole summer at camp by myself, reading.

JACK

I was always on the outside looking in. That's probably why I became a reporter. I wanted everyone to like me, but I couldn't bring myself to do things just to make myself popular.

JILL

Zachary's just like you.

JACK

Then I made an important discovery. A few good friends is enough. It was like an epiphany, discovering that. It's better to be your own man, if you don't mind the loneliness.

JILL

Loneliness is awful.

JACK

Yeah, loneliness is awful. This friend of yours, Jim, does he like to talk?

JILL

Oh yes. I mean, we had a lot of catching up to do.

They become pensive. Warm lights are replaced by the cool blue of cyberspace.

HIGH FLYER

Hello, Heart Throb, are you there?

HEART THROB

I'm here, High Flyer.

HIGH FLYER

I've been thinking about you.

HEART THROB

And I've been thinking about you.

HIGH FLYER

This might sound a little silly, but I was wondering what color your hair is.

HEART THROB

What color do you think it is?

HIGH FLYER

Jet black.

HEART THROB

No, it's brown. What about your hair. I bet you have beautiful blond hair falling down to your shoulders. And your eyes are blue. Am I right?

HIGH FLYER

More or less.

HEART THROB

Where an I wrong?

HIGH FLYER

You're not wrong. You're right on every point. Do you have any distinguishing characteristics?

HEART THROB

I'm just your average, thirties-something guy.

HIGH FLYER

Do you have a pot? My husband has a pot.

HEART THROB

Well, I don't. Walking through the woods, looking for bears, keeps you trim.

HIGH FLYER

You're six-foot-one, have broad shoulders and wavy hair, curling around your ears.

HEART THROB

I'll be damned. That's amazing how you did that.

HIGH FLYER

That's how my husband looked when we first met. Actually he wasn't quite that tall and his shoulders weren't exactly broad and his hair wasn't wavy. But that's what I saw. He was magnificent.

HEART THROB

What's he look like now?

HIGH FLYER

I don't know. I bet you're a GQ kind of guy who likes leather, chrome and fast cars yet underneath you're warm and sensitive. Did I get it right?

HEART THROB

There was a time I fancied leather and chrome. What about you? I bet you're a delightfully feminine woman who loves flowers and sings and smiles a lot. My wife was very much like that. She's still pretty sexy. She used to have this wonderful smile that made you feel special.

HIGH FLYER

I used to smile a lot and wear flowers in my hair, but I stopped doing that.

HEART THROB

Why?

HIGH FLYER

I don't know.

HEART THROB

When did you stop?

HIGH FLYER

I didn't realize I'd stopped, until just now. I guess I got too busy.

HEART THROB

You got too busy to smile?

HIGH FLYER

That doesn't make sense, does it?

HEART THROB

Isn't it terrible how we're always letting our obligations displace what we love doing?

HIGH FLYER

One of the things my husband and I loved doing was taking long walks through the countryside, picking wild flowers.

HEART THROB

My wife and I used to love doing that, too.

HIGH FLYER

You don't do that any more?

HEART THROB

No.

HIGH FLYER

Why not?

HEART THROB

We just got too busy.

The cyberspace lights fade as the warm lights come up. Jack pulls in his pot and starts for the kitchen.

JACK

Some frozen yogurt?

JILL

(brushing back her hair with her hand)

That would be nice.

They study each other with new eyes. He leaves as she look at her hair in the mirror. He returns with one dish of yogurt, which he gives her.

JILL (CONT'D)

You're not having any?

JACK

On second thought, I decided not to. I've been thinking of joining the gym again.

JILL

I'm feeling awful stiff and tired. I think I'll go upstairs and take a shower.

JACK

I'll be up in a bit.

JILL

No need to hurry.

JACK

Heaven forbid.

As she is about to leave, she picks up a framed photograph of Zach and studies it.

JILL

Zach looks so young here. Next year he'll be in high school. The time is going so quickly. Life is so short. It's stupid to waste any of it being depressed.

She leaves. He picks up the manuscript and starts reading. He smiles. He starts laughing. He grows serious. He frowns. He gets angry and throws down the manuscript. He gets up, makes a drink and returns to the manuscript. This time he reads it with intensity, but it's too painful and he can do it for only a few seconds. He picks up Zach's picture and studies it fondly. He goes to his computer and starts typing.

JACK

Dear Zach, your mother told me what happened and how you decided to stay at camp, even though it hurts like hell. I'm proud of you, son. I want to tell you about something that happened to when I was very young. It was an epiphany. Epiphanies are very special. They don't happen very often. But when they do, you're never quite the same again.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 3

The next morning. A brilliant sun is streaming through the windows. Wearing a full bathrobe, Jill has let her hair down and is in an exceptionally good mood as she races about the house, filling it with flowers. Jack comes in from upstairs. He wears a leather bomber's jacket and a hat at a jaunty angle.

JACK

My God, what's happening with all these flowers?

JILL

It's a beautiful, beautiful day and I feel alive. It's a terrible waste, being in a bad mood all the time.

JACK

I'm feeling pretty good myself.

JILL

(seeing him for the first time)

Where on earth did you get that?

JACK

It's my old bomber jacket.

JILL

I thought you threw that out years ago.

(smelling a strange odor)

What do I smell?

(she smells the flowers and then Jack)

It's you. It's that cologne you used to wear. I thought you threw that out with the bomber's jacket.

JACK

(striking a macho pose)

Does this turn you on?

She laughs at such a ridiculous thought.

JACK (CONT'D)

It used to.

JILL

I used to be turned on, despite that silly jacket.

JACK

(with disappointment)

Oh.

JILL

You going to work wearing that thing?

JACK

I am. And I better get going. It's late.

(preparing to leave)

Don't forget Cosi Fan Tutte tonight. It starts at 8. Channel 12.

He exits. Getting more flowers, she happens to see her image in the mirror and smiles.

JILL

It's good talking to you, Heart Throb.

(more seductively)

It's good talking to you., Heart Throb.

Lights fade to black

Lights come up. It's dark outside. The final aria from Cosi Fan Tutte is heard on the television. Jill enters in a seductive dress, a little drunk with a half a glass of wine. She is unhappy. She shuts off the TV, goes to her computer and types.

JILL (CONT'D)

Hello, Heart Throb, are you there? I need to talk to you.

(She waits. Nothing. She shuts off the machine)

She pours more wine. Jack enters from the outside. He sees Jill in front of the TV.

JILL (CONT'D)

(continuing; looks at her watch)

It's almost 11. Where were you?

JACK

I got held up at work.

JILL

We were going to watch the opera tonight.

JACK

I'm sorry. I couldn't get away.

JILL

(with weary resignation)

I know. You're a reporter.

JACK

I called you a couple of times to say I was going to be late, but there was no answer. Where were you all afternoon?

JILL

I was working on my book in the garden. I didn't want to talk to anyone.

JACK

I felt silly today, walking in there with that God-damn bomber jacket. And I almost missed the deadline. I used to be the fastest writer in the city room. But these young guys can write so much faster than I do.

JILL

Young men can do everything faster.

JACK

I'm not that old.

(a beat)

That friend of yours -- Jim -- how old is he?

JILL

Thirties something.

JACK

He's just a kid. What does he do for a living?

JILL

He's an architect. He does interiors.

JACK

Oh, the kind who match colors and put in moody lighting? He doesn't have AIDS, does he? You can't be too careful.

JILL

You think I'm sleeping with him?

JACK

I don't know what you're doing with him.

JILL

We had lunch together a couple of times, that's all. It's not very becoming being so suspicious, you know.

JACK

Why shouldn't I be suspicious? You're doing a lot of suspicious things.

JILL

Like what?

JACK

Like letting your hair down like this.

JILL

I'm happy, Jack.

JACK

(accusation)
Why?

JILL

Is that wrong?

JACK

Of course not. It's just that you haven't been happy like this, for a long time.

JILL

(sadly)

I know. I just felt happy this morning. You seemed pretty happy yourself, wearing that bomber jacket.

JACK

I just had a crazy urge to wear that jacket. It hardly fits anymore. It just shows, you can never go back.

They turn away from each other and sadly contemplate the condition of their marriage. The warm lights fade and the cool, blue cyberspace lights come up.

HIGH FLYER

I've feeling very alone tonight.

HEART THROB

But you're not alone. I'm here.

HIGH FLYER

How was your day?

HEART THROB

Not so good. Actually it was terrible.

HIGH FLYER

Do you want to talk about it?

HEART THROB

Talking never helps.

HIGH FLYER

That's a funny thing for a psychotherapist to say.

HEART THROB

Of course talking helps.

High Flyer waits but he says nothing.

HIGH FLYER

(finally)

Then tell me.

HEART THROB

Things aren't going well at work. I missed my... I had a bunch of disappointing cases today. I've lost it, High Flyer. My work has no meaning for me anymore. I'm getting old.

HIGH FLYER

You're only 30s something.

HEART THROB

Actually, I just turned 50s something.

HIGH FLYER

Happy birthday. Or should I say birthdays?

HEART THROB

Psychotherapy is a young person's game. It's so hard competing with the young therapists out there. They can treat so much faster than the older guys.

HIGH FLYER

Isn't it more important to be reflective than fast? I bet you're a lot more thoughtful than they are.

HEART THROB

We live in a culture where only youth and speed matters.

HIGH FLYER

Not to mention tight and firm. You never see advertisements with 50s something couples standing on beaches in revealing bathing suits, with their fat legs and wide hips.

HEART THROB

Unless it's an advertisement for AARP.

HIGH FLYER

Not even then. I think they hire young models and make them up to look old.

HEART THROB

Getting old is a terrible thing to burden the elderly with. I'm beginning to hurt where I've never hurt before.

Damn it, High Flyer, I'm too young to be so old. My mind is clearer and sharper than it's ever been. I'm at the height of my creative abilities.

HIGH FLYER

Wisdom and caring is what makes a person beautiful. That only comes with age. Give me an older therapist any time.

HEART THROB

How old?

HIGH FLYER

Fifties something. Young therapists are much too quick. They don't know how to savor the nuances of a therapeutic relationship. Wham, bam, thank you m'am, and then on to the next case. I'd probably fall in love with an older therapist. Do you feel this way about your women patients? Do you prefer to treat older women?

HEART THROB

What do you call older?

HIGH FLYER

Like me, 50s something.

HEART THROB

I thought you were 30s something.

HIGH FLYER

I just had a bunch of birthdays, too.

HEART THROB

Fifties something is my favorite age.

HIGH FLYER

Have you met a lot of women this way, on the internet?

HEART THROB

I've met a few women.

HIGH FLYER

You're my first.

HEART THROB

Oh, come on, you're never cheated...chatted with anyone else?

HIGH FLYER

Not like this.

HEART THROB

I've never been this open on the Internet. I'm always afraid that I'll reveal myself to some man.

HIGH FLYER

Would that be so bad?

HEART THROB

I prefer flirting with women.

HIGH FLYER

Or people you think are women.

HEART THROB

That wasn't funny.

HIGH FLYER

Sorry.

HEART THROB

With all this sex harassment stuff, cyberspace is the only safe place to flirt.

HIGH FLYER

Have you been flirting with me?

HEART THROB

Can't you tell?

HIGH FLYER

Yes, I can tell. I wonder if it would be possible to have a love affair in cyberspace.

HEART THROB

It's the way of the future. Keyboards and screens will replace all personal contact. The revenge of the nerds.

HIGH FLYER

What a sad scene. Two young lovers -- she's sitting with her laptop in a cafe on the Left Bank in Paris, still pouting, of course, and he is in some bar in Manayunk, grinning.

HEART THROB

The tap, tap, tap of modern love. Where are you right now? What room of the house?

HIGH FLYER

The bedroom. I'm lying in bed. What about you? What room are you in?

HEART THROB

I'm in...the cellar.

HIGH FLYER

The cellar?

HEART THROB

That's where I have my exercise equipment. I just finished working out. And I can hear the wolves howling in the distance. We live on the edge of a forest, in a snow-covered field.

HIGH FLYER

I just had a shower, a warm shower with lots of soap bubbles. My muscles were tense from sitting in the cockpit all day. Long flight from New Delhi. I'm lying here under a ceiling fan, on a very low speed, letting the breeze dry me off.

HEART THROB

(becoming aroused)

I'm sitting here on a workout bench. I just finished pressing a few hundred pounds.

HIGH FLYER

Are you sitting there in sweat clothes?

HEART THROB

It's too hot for sweat pants. The potbelly stove keeps the place very warm. I'm in shorts. My chest is bare. The sweat is flowing down between my pecs. My chest is kind of glinting in the overhead light.

HIGH FLYER

The lighting in my bedroom is subdued. I'm just quietly lying here, being dried by the breeze from the overhead fan. We seem to be in such totally different places.

HEART THROB

But thinking about the same thing. Do you like poetry?

HIGH FLYER

Very much.

HEART THROB

What's your favorite poem?

HIGH FLYER

I don't want to say.

HEART THROB

Why?

HIGH FLYER

Because it's corny, it's so well known.

HEART THROB

Tell me anyway.

HIGH FLYER

You'll laugh.

HEART THROB

No, I won't.

HIGH FLYER

(reciting)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach, when feeling out of sight for the ends of being and ideal grace.

HEART THROB

(reciting)

I love thee freely, as men strive for right. I love thee purely, as they turn from praise. I love thee with the passion put to use in my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

(speaking)

I read that in college to the first and only girl I ever really loved.

HIGH FLYER

The only boy I've ever loved read that poem to me on our first date.

The cyberspace lights fade as the warm lights of reality come up. Jack looks at Jill, who is looking at her computer screen, smiling lustfully. Jill turns, sees him looking at her, and frowns.

JILL

What's wrong? Is your asthma bothering you?

JACK

Why do you think my asthma is bothering me?

JILL

You're breathing funny.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 4

A few days later. Lights come up on Jill, working at her computer. She is smiling at the screen at what she has just written. Jack studies her with concern.

JACK

You've been spending an awful lot of time at your computer.

JILL

(continuing to type)

Have I?

JACK

What are you doing?

JILL

Interactive crossword puzzle.

JACK

That's an awful lot of typing for a crossword puzzle.

JILL

New York Times crossword puzzle.

Jack gets up to look at the screen over her shoulder, but she shuts the lid of her laptop.

JILL

Well, enough of that.

JACK

Why'd you do that? Shut down your computer.

JILL

I finished the puzzle.

JACK

You finished a New York Times crossword puzzle?

JILL

What's with all these questions?

JACK

You never were so interested in computers before.

JILL

The Internet is a wonderful resource.

JACK

You've been spending all your free time typing away there.

JILL

Well, damnit, Jack, so have you.

He sits down. She opens her computer. Jack leans over to look at the screen, but before he can see anything, Jill hits the delete button.

JACK

Why'd you hit the delete button? You had it on resume, so why didn't you resume?

JILL

I told you, Jack, I was finished with the puzzle and now I want to surf the net. Is that all right?

JACK

Yes, of course it is. As a matter of fact, I feel like surfing the net myself.

JILL

So why have you been spending so much time on the computer.

JACK

I'm a reporter. That's how I make my living, working at the computer.

They both start typing, now lost in their separate worlds.

HEART THROB

I don't know what I'm going to do, High Flyer.

HIGH FLYER

Is something wrong?

HEART THROB

My wife is having an affair with someone on the Internet.

HIGH FLYER

(to herself)

What is this, an epidemic?

(to Heart Throb)

What makes you think so?

HEART THROB

She's been spending an awful lot of time on her computer.

HIGH FLYER

So have you.

HEART THROB

And what have I been doing? Flirting with you.

JILL

Maybe you should talk it out with her.

JACK

I don't have to. I know what she's doing. She's cheating on me with an old lover she used to have.

HIGH FLYER

I've just started seeing an old friend. And it's totally innocent. I bet it's that way with your wife.

HEART THROB

There are suspicious signs. She's happy.

HIGH FLYER

(to herself)

They're all alike. It must be some genetic thing, linked to the Y chromosome.

(to Heart Throb)

You should worry more about yourself than this guy.

HEART THROB

Are you suggesting I'm jealous?

HIGH FLYER

Aren't you? Maybe just a little bit?

HEART THROB

Just because I ask where she's going and when she's coming back doesn't mean I'm jealous.

HIGH FLYER

Women hate being interrogated like that.

HEART THROB

Do you ever wonder if your husband is cheating on you?

HIGH FLYER

He'd never cheat on me. He doesn't have that effect on women.

HEART THROB

That's a hell of a thing to say about your own husband.

HIGH FLYER

Some men have it and some don't. My husband doesn't. He has other qualities. At least he used to.

HEART THROB

Cheating...I mean real cheating, not like what we're doing, is a terrible thing to do to a marriage. And to think that's what my wife is doing to our marriage is driving me crazy.

HIGH FLYER

It's not good to keep something like that in, especially if it's not true. But even if it was true, it would be better to have it out in the open. Then you could find out what you're doing wrong to force her to do something like that.

HEART THROB

You think I'm doing something wrong?

HIGH FLYER

This kind of thing doesn't happen in a vacuum. Someone like you must know that.

HEART THROB

Why should someone like me know something like that?

HIGH FLYER

You're a therapist.

HEART THROB

Yes, of course, I'm a therapist.

HIGH FLYER

Maybe you need a therapist to help you sort this all out.

HEART THROB

Why do I need one, if I am one?

HIGH FLYER

The therapist who treats himself has a fool for a patient. If you were seeing a therapist, I'm sure she would tell you to be open with your wife.

HEART THROB

Damnit, you're right. I'm going to confront her on this.

HIGH FLYER

Not confront her. Discuss it with her, calmly.

HEART THROB

That's exactly how I plan to approach it. Calmly. Thoughtfully. With respect and consideration.

The blue cyberspace lights are replaced with the warm lights of the real world. Jack looks at Jill, his anger building.

JACK

(finally)
You're not fooling me.

JILL

Huh?

JACK

I know what you've been doing.

JILL

Huh?

JACK

I wasn't born yesterday.

JILL

I don't know what you're talking about.

JACK

You're having an affair.

JILL

That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I hardly ever leave the house.

JACK

On the Internet. You're having an affair with that friend of yours, on the Internet.

JILL

Have you gone out of your mind?

JACK

That's why you're always at that computer. Cyberspace sex.

JILL

(shocked)

Jack.

JACK

I can't believe you're cheating on me like this.

JILL

I'm not cheating on you.

JACK

Bullshit.

JILL

Stop swearing

JACK

I'll swear as much as I goddamn want.

JILL

Not if I'm here you won't.

JACK

You spend more time on the computer talking to that guy than you do talking to me.

JILL

You're the one who's stopped talking to me.

JACK

What's so interesting about him that you spend all this time with him on the net?

JILL

I'm not talking to him.

JACK

Then who are you talking to?

JILL

What I do on my computer is my business.

JACK

I'm telling you, I want this to stop.

For several seconds they look daggers at each other. Finally, she stands and gets her coat.

JACK (CONT'D)

What do you think you're doing?

JILL

I'm going out.

JACK

You can't just walk out.

JILL

I'm not talking to you when you're in a crazy mood like this.

JACK

We have things to talk about.

JILL

I'm out of here.

JACK

Where are you going?

She opens the door.

JACK (CONT'D)

When are you coming back?

She exits

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 5

Several hours later. Jack has fallen asleep in a chair. Jill enters. Jack wakes up.

JACK

It's almost three o'clock in the morning. Where were you?

She hangs up her coat and heads for the door leading to the stairs.

JACK (CONT'D)

I'm talking to you. Why'd you walk out like that?

JILL

I needed time to think.

JACK

I called your mother. You weren't there.

She doesn't respond

JACK (CONT'D)

And you weren't at Valerie's.

JILL

That's true. Those are two of the places I wasn't at last night.

JACK

And you weren't at Veronica's either.

JILL

In the middle of the night, you woke all my friends? You must be a professional news gatherer.

JACK

Where were you all this time?

JILL

It's not important.

JACK
Yes, it is important. I was worried.

JILL
I'm sorry you were worried.

JACK
You were with Jim, weren't you?

JILL
You're really something, Jack.

JACK
Did you stay at Jim's?

JILL
Jim's my best friend.

JACK
Did you stay there? Did you sleep with him? Did you fuck him?

JILL
I shouldn't have come back.

JACK
Did you?

JILL
I was at Veronica's.

JACK
No you weren't. I called her and she said she hadn't seen you.

JILL
I told her not to tell you I was there.

JACK
Why?

JILL
Because I didn't know what to say to you. I was trying to think things out. I should have realized you would have been worried. I'm sorry.

JACK

Whatever you did is your business.

JILL

That's right, it is.

JACK

I don't want to fight with you any more. I want to work this out, calmly.

She doesn't respond.

JACK

You do want to work it out, don't you?

JILL

I wish we could.

JACK

(taking her in his arms)

Then we will.

(He hugs her for several seconds. She lets him but is not responsive.

He kisses her lightly.)

It feels so good, holding you close like this. Oh, Jill, Jill, Jill. Why do we have these arguments?

He kisses her deeply. She pulls away.

JILL

No.

JACK

What?

JILL

I'm not in the mood for that.

JACK

You're never in the mood anymore.

JILL

We've been fighting. You just can't go from yelling at me to making love.

She starts to leave.

JACK

Don't start leaving again. We have to talk this out.

JILL

I'm going to my mother's.

JACK

No, Jill, stay. You can't keep walking out like this whenever we have something serious to talk about.

JILL

I don't want to talk about it.

She heads for the door.

JACK

It's that guy you're seeing. That's what's wrong.

She moves from him. He goes after her.

JILL

Please, Jack.

JACK

(grabbing her)
I love you.

JILL

No.

She pulls away. He grabs her. She slaps him. He slaps her back.

JILL (CONT'D)

Get away from me.

JACK

Oh, God. I didn't mean to do that.

JILL

Leave me alone.

She starts sobbing uncontrollably. He goes to her and starts to put his arms around her.

JILL (CONT'D)

Don't touch me.

He does any how. She screams.

JILL (CONT'D)

No.

JACK

I won't. Look, I'm not touching you.

He backs off. She's bent over sobbing. He wants to respond, but is afraid to move towards her.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 6

A few days later. Jill and Jack are in the living room.

JILL

I prefer eating after six and before eight. Please make arrangements to have your meals before or after those times. I've put all your bathroom stuff in the first-floor bathroom. Your clothes are in the pantry closet. Now there's no need for you to go to the second floor.

JACK

You've been a busy little bee today, haven't you?

JILL

And finally, we will keep our conversation to a minimum. I realize that certain housekeeping talk is necessary, but anything more is not acceptable.

JACK

We just sit at the dinner table, not saying a word to each other?

JILL

We'll never be at the dinner table at the same time.

JACK

Don't you think this is a little extreme?

JILL

I'm afraid of you, Jack.

JACK

Oh, come on. I slapped you. Once. It's no big deal.

JILL

No big deal?

JACK

Maybe I shouldn't have done it, but...

JILL

Maybe?

JACK

Of course I shouldn't have done it. But you slapped me first.

JILL

Let me put this into terms that a man can understand. What would you do if one of your editors slugged you?

JACK

I'd hit the son of a bitch back.

JILL

What if he was much bigger and stronger than you? I don't think you'd stay working in a place where the son of a bitch could beat the hell out of you whenever he felt like it.

JACK

I didn't beat the hell out of you. Whatever you think I did to you...

JILL

Not think, Jack. I know what you did to me.

Jill takes a cigarette from her pocketbook and lights up.

JACK

You've started smoking again?

She defiantly takes a drag.

JACK

I wish you hadn't done that. It's very bad for you. Not just cancer, but heart disease and all sorts of other medical problems.

She takes another big puff.

JACK

And it wrinkles your skin.

She snuffs it out.

JACK

You have such lovely skin. Let's start over again. I know how badly you're feeling right now and I understand why you slapped me.

JILL

(outraged)

You understand why I slapped you?

JACK

You just lost control. I'm willing to forget it if you're willing to forget what I did.

JILL

You are a piece of work.

JACK

I'll say what you want me to say.

JILL

You think I want you to say something?

JACK

Yes.

JILL

All right. Say it.

JACK

(having difficulty saying it)

What I think you want to hear...about the other night...is...that...

(spits it out)

What I want to say, Jill, is that it was wrong and it won't happen again. Certainly not as far as I'm concerned.

JILL

This is what you think I wanted to hear?

JACK

Isn't it?

JILL

OK, you said it.

They both go to their computers. The cool blue lights of cyberspace come up.

HIGH FLYER

I'm having a terrible fight with my husband.

HEART THROB

I'm having a bitch of a battle with my wife, too.

HIGH FLYER

There was physical abuse. He hit me.

HEART THROB

He hit you? Why?

HIGH FLYER

For no reason. We were arguing, I slapped him and then he hit me.

HEART THROB

Did he hurt you?

HIGH FLYER

What hurt most was realizing that I don't know who this man really is.

HEART THROB

Has he ever done this before?

HIGH FLYER

No.

HEART THROB

It's wrong what he did. But it sounds like a reflex thing, like being bitten by a mosquito and slapping without thinking.

HIGH FLYER

I'm no mosquito.

HEART THROB

The day your husband hit you is probably the most awful day in his life. I know how it feels. I hit my wife once.

HIGH FLYER

I can't believe that someone like you could do something like that.

HEART THROB

It was a stupid thing to do. I feel terrible about it. I don't think my wife will ever forgive me.

HIGH FLYER

Surely she'd understand if you explained.

HEART THROB

She's very mad, just like you are.

HIGH FLYER

Don't let her anger frighten you.

HEART THROB

Lately I've been thinking about her a lot.

HIGH FLYER

(with disappointment)

Oh.

HEART THROB

I didn't realize how much my wife and I had lost, until you and I started talking. As the years passed, we became more and more comfortable with the silences until that's all there was. What should I do?

HIGH FLYER

Tell her what you're feeling.

HEART THROB

When I'm away from her, I think of all the things I want to say, but when we're together I can't. I don't know why. It's almost as though I'm embarrassed.

HIGH FLYER

Embarrassed?

HEART THROB

Or maybe afraid she won't respond.

HIGH FLYER

You must take the chance. You owe it to her. You owe it to yourself.

HEART THROB

I'll say something stupid and make her angrier, if that's possible.

HIGH FLYER

Practice on me. Pretend I'm your wife. Tell me what you can't tell her. I'll tell you when you're going wrong.

HEART THROB

I can't pretend you're my wife.

HIGH FLYER

You can. Now say it.

HEART THROB

What I want to tell my wife is that I...

HIGH FLYER

No, Heart Throb. Act it out. I'm your wife. Say it to me just as you would say it to her.

HEART THROB

What I want to tell you, my dearest, is that we've had a very good marriage. You've been a good wife. We're raising two very nice children. And I think we should do everything possible to maintain what I think is a very good relationship.

HIGH FLYER

This is what you want to say to your wife?

HEART THROB

Did I do it wrong?

HIGH FLYER

Tell her what you're feeling, not what you're thinking.

HEART THROB

I'm feeling very sad.

HIGH FLYER

Tell her why. Say it to me.

HEART THROB

I'm sad because I can't tell you how much I love you. Because I can't tell you how afraid I am that I will lose you.

HIGH FLYER

(finally, close to tears)

This is what she wants to hear.

HEART THROB

What makes you think so?

HIGH FLYER

Because that's what I want to hear from my husband, or I did before he slapped me.

HEART THROB

Give him another chance. This is the first time he ever hit you.

HIGH FLYER

If he did it once, he can do it again.

HEART THROB

One slap has set you off like this?

HIGH FLYER

The slap was the last straw. It made me realize how barren our relationship has become.

HEART THROB

Your marriage sounds exactly like mine.

HIGH FLYER

Most marriages are like ours. That's why 50 percent of them break up.

HEART THROB

It amazes me that 50 percent stay in tact.

HIGH FLYER

And even many of those aren't happy marriages.

HEART THROB

My wife is totally lost in her work, and the house, and the kids. When I come home from work, I want to talk about what I was working on, but she isn't interested.

HIGH FLYER

(shocked)

You talk about your patients?

HEART THROB

I mean on weekends when I'm photographing the bears. She never asks about my photographs. We have a right to expect excitement and passion in our marriages, all the way through to the end.

HIGH FLYER

Do you really believe that?

HEART THROB

I want to believe it.

HIGH FLYER

Are we doing something wrong? If it was our fault, then we could do something about it.

HEART THROB

I tried to reach out to her, but she didn't respond.

HIGH FLYER

How did you try?

HEART THROB

I told her I understood.

HIGH FLYER

Just exactly what did you say to her?

HEART THROB

I told her that I understood how she was feeling and why she'd acted so badly with me.

HIGH FLYER

She doesn't want you to understand. She wants you to acknowledge what you've done, admit that you'd done a bad thing, forsaking your marriage like that.

HEART THROB

I didn't forsake our marriage.

HIGH FLYER

You must say the three magic words. I. Am. Sorry.

HEART THROB

Sorry for what?

HIGH FLYER

For whatever is making her so angry.

HEART THROB

But I didn't do anything that was wrong.

HIGH FLYER

That doesn't matter.

HEART THROB

That's hypocritical.

HIGH FLYER

You're not sorry that she's unhappy and angry? You're not sorry that what she thinks you did caused her so much pain?

HEART THROB

Well, if you put it that way.

HIGH FLYER

That's the way it must be put.

HEART THROB

So much vigilance is required to keep an old marriage alive. When we were younger, we didn't have to work so hard. The passion was just there.

HIGH FLYER

When we were younger, we didn't have to work so hard to stay in shape. But now we're in the gym all the time.

HEART THROB

I want to do right by her.

HIGH FLYER

You're a good man, Heart Throb. It's a shame that she doesn't realize it.

HEART THROB

It's a shame your husband doesn't appreciate you. Why does marriage mess us up like this?

HIGH FLYER

We keep extending the limits with the people we love until we don't love them any more.

HEART THROB

When we get to know someone really well we take them for granted.

HIGH FLYER

They become us and we start treating them with the same disregard as we treat ourselves.

HEART THROB

Marriage is the obligation that breeds obligations. No sooner do we say I do than we say I must.

HIGH FLYER

I know two married people who didn't have any fun with each other until they got divorced and lived separately. What do you want most from your wife?

HEART THROB

I want her to show me that she still cares about me and my work.

HIGH FLYER

Maybe this is what I should do with my husband.

HEART THROB

And what do you want from your husband?

HIGH FLYER

I want him to relate to me on many different levels, not just as a sex object.

HEART THROB

Maybe I've been a little remiss on that score.

HIGH FLYER

I wish my husband was as understanding as you are. Are you just naturally this way or does part of it come from your training as a therapist?

HEART THROB

Of course my training helps. We are taught to reach out and understand the other person.

HIGH FLYER

Such training should be required for a marriage license. My husband is a reporter. They're trained in confrontation.

HEART THROB

I don't know about that. I'm sure a good journalist is compassionate, empathetic and loving.

HIGH FLYER

Obviously you haven't been reading the newspaper. I wonder if it'd be possible to save our marriages if we did all the things we've talked about. You're a psychotherapist. What do you think, Heart Throb?

HEART THROB

I don't know. I mean the research data is unclear. But damn it, High Flyer, it's a worth a try.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 7

The next day. Jill and Jack are together in the living room.

JILL

I read your story in the newspaper today. It was very good.

JACK

It was an obituary.

JILL

But a very nicely written obituary.

JACK

The obit writer was out sick.

JILL

It had a very nice narrative arch.

JACK

The old guy was born. He lived. He died.

JILL

I'm sure a lot of people are impressed by your story.

JACK

Maybe, if he has a big family. I started reading your manuscript last night. That family you write about is pretty screwed up. How'd you think them up?

(she smiles)

It's not an easy book to read.

JILL

Not if you identify with anyone in it.

(a beat)

So, what did you think?

He nods.

JILL

That nod. What does it mean?

JACK

It's a very disturbing book.

JILL

(expectantly)

Yes.

(a beat)

Did it hold your interest?

JACK

I stayed up most of the night with it.

JILL

And?

JACK

And what?

JILL

Jack, will you tell me? Is it any good?

JACK

Your writing has gotten very strong.

JILL

Damn it, Jack, stop being evasive. Do you think it is any good?

JACK

It is very good.

JILL

I'm surprised you agreed with what I said in the book.

JACK

I'm not saying I agreed with you.

JILL

What don't you agree with?

JACK

I could use a drink.

He starts to leave.

JILL

I thought you liked the book.

JACK

Some of the things you say are debatable.

JILL

Name one thing that's debatable. One thing.

JACK

The main character in the book. Jane Smith is not believable. And you could have come up with a more original name.

JILL

I call her that because she represents all womanhood.

JACK

I didn't see what her problem was.

JILL

The poor woman's a prisoner.

JACK

She's doing wonderfully. Her life is just like yours.

JILL

She's trapped in an empty, middle class existence, surrounded by electronic gadgets that keep blinking the number 12 at her.

JACK

She should be happy.

JILL

Shit.

JACK

But the book is beautifully written. I even like Jane Smith. In spite of everything, she seems like a very nice person, someone you could come to like, even though she is a little neurotic.

JILL

Jane Smith is not neurotic. She's a victim, god-damnit.

JACK

With a capital V. Jane Smith's husband seems like a bit of a problem. Were you modeling him on anyone I know?

JILL

(evasively)

A lot of men are like Jane's husband.

JACK

He certainly was blind to Jane's problems. And she was blind to his. It's going to be an important book. A cautionary tale for all those couples who think they have a good marriage, but really don't.

JILL

Then you do like it.

JACK

You can do better.

JILL

Oh, God, do I hate it when you say that. I'm sorry I asked you to read it.

JACK

(kissing her)

Yep, I sure do need a drink.

He exits

JILL

(calling after him)

Jane Smith is the prototypical, middle class woman in America. What could be more tragic than that?

JACK (O.S.)

Show me. Don't tell me.

JILL

(muttering to herself)

Men just don't get it. None of them do.

Jack enters with a drink and turns on the TV to sports. She shuts it off.

JACK

Hey.

JILL

Instead of football, why don't we watch a movie together? I even made some popcorn.

JACK

Watch a movie?

JILL

I got a DVD of that movie we both loved so much. Brief Encounter. You know the one, with Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard. Two married strangers who meet in a railroad station and find themselves drawn into a brief but poignant love affair.

JACK

You'd rather see one of those old black-and-white movies than the game?

(seeing her disapproving look)

Of course, you'd rather see that than the game.

She gets the popcorn from a sideboard, puts on the movie, dims the lights and sits in the couch. The movie begins.

JILL

Why don't you sit over here, besides me?

JACK

Is there enough room for us to stretch out?

JILL

I'm sure we'll manage.

JACK

Bitch of a day at work.

He moves over to the couch.

JILL

Popcorn?

JACK

I'm really not hungry.

JILL

These old, black and white movies are so romantic. Don't you think?

JACK

Yeah. I don't know if I can make it through a whole movie. Why don't we watch Ted Koppel and go to bed and see the movie tomorrow?

JILL

You were just about to watch a whole football game.

JACK

Just the beginning.

JILL

You've never watched just the beginning of a football game.

JACK

OK, we'll watch the movie.

She snuggles into him and watches the movie, eating popcorn.

JILL

She has a wonderful romance in the railroad station and then goes back to her husband. Doesn't that make you sad? Not that she goes back to her husband, but that she leaves her beloved?

Jack doesn't respond.

JILL

Or do you think it would have been better if they went off together?

Jack starts snoring.

JILL
Jack. Are you asleep?

He snores some more.

JILL
OK, forget it. Have it your own way.

She turns the TV on loud, and the sounds of the game fill the room. Jack bolts up right.

JACK
What?

JILL
Watch your goddamn game.

She goes to her computer and starts typing.

JACK
(shutting off the TV)
I told you I was exhausted.

They go to their computers and start typing. The warm lights are replaced with the blue light of cyberspace.

HIGH FLYER
The seduction plan didn't work. I put together a really romantic evening and he fell asleep even before it started.

HEART THROB
How could a guy be so insensitive?

HIGH FLYER
It's hopeless.

HEART THROB
I ended up fighting with my wife, too. I spent the night talking to her about her work and watching a movie with her and she starts yelling at me for no reason at all. I'm beginning to wonder if my wife still has feelings for me.

HIGH FLYER

Part of me wants to run away and find the passion that used to be there. But then I wonder if what I'm really looking for is my youth.

HEART THROB

You're thinking about leaving your husband?

HIGH FLYER

It crosses my mind, when I'm mad. But you can't walk away from a marriage that's been good for so many years just because you're bored.

HEART THROB

It hurts when your wife turns away from you like mine did.

HIGH FLYER

That's a terrible thing to do to someone you love.

HEART THROB

My wife doesn't even want to be in the same room with me. She insists that we live on separate floors.

HIGH FLYER

That's wrong.

HEART THROB

You're damn right it's wrong. It's making me madder than hell. And I'm going to do something about it.

HIGH FLYER

Good for you.

HEART THROB

I'm not going to stand for this nonsense any more.

HIGH FLYER

You show her, Heart Throb.

HEART THROB

Enough is enough.

JILL

You can say that again.

Enough is enough.

JACK

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 8

It's the next day. Warm lights come up on the living room. Jill is working on her computer. Jack comes in with his arms loaded down with his clothes. He heads for the door to the upstairs.

JILL

Just what do you think you're doing?

JACK

What does it look like I'm doing? I've stopped being Mr. Nice Guy. I'm moving back to my own bedroom where I belong.

JILL

Oh no you're not.

JACK

It's my house. I pay the mortgage. If you don't like it, you can leave.

JILL

We agreed that you'd live down here.

JACK

I've changed my mind.

JILL

Then I'm leaving.

JACK

You can't leave.

JILL

The hell I can't.

JACK

You don't have any money.

JILL

What?

JACK

I had to do it. I didn't want to, but you left me no choice.

JILL

What do you mean, I don't have any money?

JACK

I transferred everything from our joint account to my private account.

JILL

That's both our money.

JACK

You have to stop running away. We have to work things out.

JILL

I earned that money, just as much as you did. I want you to transfer that money back to the joint account, now. Do you hear me?

JACK

I'll transfer it back after we talk.

JILL

You son of a bitch.

JACK

One day you'll thank me for this this.

JILL

I'm not going to let you get away with this, Jack.

She gets a phone book and starts tearing through the pages.

JACK

Painful as it is, we're going to stay here and talk this thing out.

She finds the number and dials.

JACK

If you don't want to sleep in the same bed with me, you're free to sleep down here on the couch.

JILL

(on the phone)

Hello, is this the shelter for battered women?

JACK

Oh, Jill, stop the melodrama.

JILL

(on the phone)

I understand that you provide temporary shelter for battered women.

JACK

Jill, you're not a battered woman.

JILL

(on phone)

My husband beat me up and he refuses to leave the house. I need a place to stay tonight. I'm afraid he'll get violent again.

JACK

Jesus Christ, Jill, hang up that fucking phone.

JILL

(on the phone)

I think you can hear him swearing in the background. Can I come right over? Thank you.

She hangs up

JACK

Who do you think you're kidding?

JILL

I don't think I'm kidding anyone.

JACK

You don't have to do this. You could stay at a friend's house. You're just trying to make a point.

JILL

Yes, I am.

JACK
Well, I'm not impressed.

She goes upstairs. He goes to the doorway and yells after her.

JACK
Now what are you doing?

JILL (O.S.)
I'm packing.

JACK
You'll probably get beat up and raped in the shelter. Tough bunch of women in that place.

He goes to the door and locks it.

JILL (O.S.)
I'd rather be there.

He get's Jill's pocketbook and takes the front-door key.

JACK
God knows what will happen to you.

Jill enters, carrying her bag.

JILL
I'll be a lot better off there than here.

She gets her handbag and goes to the door. She discovers that it is locked.

JILL
Where's the key?

JACK
After we talk, I'll give you the key and transfer the money back. I don't like doing these things, but I'm desperate. I'm desperate to save our marriage.

All right.

JILL

She looks for the key in her pocketbook and can't find it.

I have your key.

JACK

You are a stupid son of a bitch.

JILL

I know why you are so insistent on leaving. You're not going to a shelter. You're going back to that bastard.

JACK

She moves to the phone and Jack grabs it from her. She sits down furious.

We're going to talk.

JACK

Jill walks over to the bust of Bobby Kennedy.

I think we'll both be relieved to get some of this stuff out in the open and try to...

JACK

Jill screams, holding the Kennedy bust over her head.

What the hell are you doing with my award?

JACK (CONT'D)

I'm going to throw this fucking thing through the window and yell for the cops if you don't let me out of here.

JILL

You've gone crazy.

JACK

JILL

Let me out of here.

JACK

I don't want you to go to that horrible shelter.

JILL

OK, I'm throwing it.

JACK

Wait.

JILL

Here goes.

JACK

No. You win. You just won't listen to reason, will you? Here.

He offers her the keys.

JILL

Put them on the table and move back.

JACK

Jill, I ...

JILL

On the table.

He does so.

JILL

Take one of them and open the door.

He does so.

JACK

Jill, there's no...

JILL

Now.

He does so, but stands in front of the open doorway.

JILL

Get out of the way.

JACK

I didn't really transfer the money.

Jill puts down the bust and starts sobbing. Jack goes to her.

JILL

No. Stay back.

He pulls back immediately. She sits down and cries uncontrollably as Jack waits, wanting to do something, but afraid to move. Finally Jill gets up and exits, going upstairs. Jack collapses in the easy chair and starts sobbing.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 9

A few days later. The blue lights of cyberspace are up. Heart Throb and High Flyer are on the computer.

HIGH FLYER

I just can't take it anymore, Heart Throb. I want to run away. It's so awful I don't want to talk about it.

HEART THROB

I wish you were here so I could take you in my arms.

HIGH FLYER

I wish I was there, too.

HEART THROB

And hug you and kiss you.

HIGH FLYER

And?

HEART THROB

And make you realize that you are not alone. That you are loved. .

HIGH FLYER

You're quite a guy, Heart Thob.

HEART THROB

You're quite a woman.

HIGH FLYER

If there was the slightest spark that my husband still had love for me, I'd do everything I could to make it work. But there's nothing there.

HEART THROB

That's exactly how I feel about my wife. The slightest spark.

HIGH FLYER

Chatting with you every night has become so important to me.

HEART THROB

Have you ever wanted it to be more than just a chat?

(she doesn't respond)

Have you?

HIGH FLYER

Yes.

HEART THROB

If only we could meet just once, so that as we chat over the years we can see each other in our minds.

HIGH FLYER

Are you suggesting that we actually meet each other?

HEART THROB

Yes.

HIGH FLYER

In person?

HEART THROB

Yes.

HIGH FLYER

Face to face?

HEART THROB

Face to face.

HIGH FLYER

That's so scary.

HEART THROB

It's so exciting. Let's meet for a drink.

HIGH FLYER

I never expected to actually meet you.

HEART THROB

Haven't you been curious?

HIGH FLYER

Oh, yes.

HEART THROB

What harm can it do?

HIGH FLYER

I don't want to cheat on my husband.

HEART THROB

I won't cheat on my wife either. But what harm can come from meeting just one time?

HIGH FLYER

This is how love affairs begin and marriages end.

HEART THROB

We live half a world apart. Even if we wanted it to be more -- and we don't -- nothing could come from this little meeting.

HIGH FLYER

That's right. But since you do live in Alaska and I live in Hawaii, where could we meet?

HEART THROB

Being in the airline business, geography shouldn't matter to you. You can fly anywhere.

HIGH FLYER

It would be easier if it was somewhere on the East Coast...because that's where we're based.

HEART THROB

We could meet in Philadelphia.

HIGH FLYER

That would be perfect.

(on second thought)

Why Philadelphia?

HEART THROB

(making it up as he goes along)

I'm going to Philadelphia. For a meeting. A convention. A convention of psychologists.

HIGH FLYER

OK. You fly down from Alaska, I'll fly over from Hawaii and we'll meet for a drink in Philadelphia.

HEART THROB

That's an awful lot of flying for one little drink. Maybe we should make a weekend of it.

HIGH FLYER

A weekend?

HEART THROB

This will be our first and only time together. We'll need something more than a few drinks to remember each other over the years.

HIGH FLYER

If we spent a weekend together, sex could possibly become an issue.

HEART THROB

I'm not suggesting that we have sex.

HIGH FLYER

You're not?

HEART THROB

We might lie together in bed, maybe even with our nude bodies pressing into each other. But I am not for a minute suggesting that we go any further. We're married.

HIGH FLYER

Going further would certainly be considered cheating.

HEART THROB

But only a prude would say there is anything wrong with two good friends snuggling in the most innocent way.

HIGH FLYER

But there's another reason why a weekend together might be a problem.
What if we don't like each other?

HEART THROB

That's not possible.

HIGH FLYER

We really know so little about each other. We might not find the other
person attractive.

HEART THROB

You mean physically attractive?

HIGH FLYER

Yes.

HEART THROB

That's not important to me. Is it important to you?

HIGH FLYER

No.

(to herself)

Especially if it's not important to you.

HEART THROB

If it's making you nervous, we'll keep it at one drink. And if the vibes are
good, we'll go further.

HIGH FLYER

We'll order dinner.

HEART THROB

And if the dinner goes well, we can get to know each other even more.

HIGH FLYER

But nothing more than snuggling together.

HEART THROB

Agreed. Absolutely nothing more than snuggling together and pressing our
nude bodies into each other.

HIGH FLYER

The line between pressing our nude bodies into each other and cheating is such a fine one that perhaps we shouldn't be thinking of going quite that far.

HEART THROB

Good point. We'll absolutely do nothing more than snuggling nude together. I must have your promise on that.

HIGH FLYER

You have my promise. Where should we meet?

HEART THROB

Hosteria Da Elio.

HIGH FLYER

(shocked that it's her favorite restaurant)

Elio's?

HEART THROB

You've heard of it?

HIGH FLYER

No. No. I just happened to have a friend named Elio. How come you're so familiar with the restaurants in Philadelphia?

HEART THROB

Eh...eh...The convention bureau. Of the psychology association. They sent information on the best restaurants. The literature says this place has a jukebox with only opera. Do you like opera?

HIGH FLYER

I love opera.

HEART THROB

Let's meet next week. That's when the convention is being held.

HIGH FLYER

So soon?|

HEART THROB

I won't be getting to the East Coast again for quite a while.

HIGH FLYER

All right. Next week.

HEART THROB

We'll meet at seven, Saturday night, at Hosteria Da Elio. Let me look for the address.

(reciting from memory)

Ah, here it is -- 615 South Third Street.

HIGH FLYER

Let me write that down.

(she doesn't)

Six fifteen, south third street. Next Saturday night. I'm so excited.

HEART THROB

But how will we recognize each other?

HIGH FLYER

I know exactly how you look. You're six-foot-one, have broad shoulders and wavy hair, curling around your ears.

HEART THROB

Actually, I'm a little shorter than that, and my shoulders really aren't that broad and my hair...well there's not much of it.

HIGH FLYER

Oh. Maybe we should have some way of indicating who we are. I'll wear a flower in my hair, a red rose.

HEART THROB

I'll have a copy of the New Yorker Magazine and New York Review of Books folded up under my arm.

HIGH FLYER

What a strange coincidence. Those are my husband's favorite magazines.

HEART THROB

And my wife used to love wearing a flower in her hair, at least she did when we were first dating. What's your favorite drink? I want to have it waiting for you when you arrive.

JILL

(firmly)

I don't want to interfere with your work.

JACK

It won't interfere.

JILL

Actually I was planning to go to my sister's this weekend.

JACK

OK, I'll call you there.

JILL

You can't. I mean, we'll be...white-water rafting, where there're no cell phone towers.

JACK

I didn't know you liked that sort of stuff.

JILL

It's a new thing my sister has gotten involved with. Actually, she is a little scared, and wanted me to go with her. She just called me today. I was going to tell you after we got off the Internet. I can call you.

JACK

You said there were no cell phone towers.

JILL

I'll call at night, from the campsites. I'm sure they'll have phones there.

JACK

You don't have to do that.

JILL

No problem.

JACK

No!

JILL

No?

JACK

I mean there's no reception where I'm going. I'll be on the top of a mountain. In an observatory. I'm doing a story on astrophysics. The black hole. Phones aren't allowed on top of the mountain. Interferes with the telescopes.

JILL

White water. And black holes. What an exciting weekend we're both going to have.

JACK

Yes. Very exciting.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 10

A few days later. A table and chairs, suggesting an intimate restaurant. The sound of opera music from a jukebox is heard. Jack is sitting at the table, trying to drink a glass of wine while awkwardly clutching a folded up New York Review of Books and the New Yorker under his arm. On the table, opposite him, is a martini, straight up.

JACK

(to unseen waiter)

No need for menus. We'll just be having drinks. Thank you.

He keeps checking the time, nervous but happy. Jill enters with a rose in her hair. She is radiant, excited, a big smile on her face. Jack sees her, but not the rose, and reacts with a mixture of shock and terror. He tries to hide. She scans the room, looking for Heart Throb, when she sees Jack.

JILL

Jack! What are you doing here? You're supposed to be on a mountain top.

JACK

You're supposed to be on a river.

JILL

You lied to me.

JACK

I didn't lie to you. I...I...The story fell through. Too many clouds to see the black holes. But you lied to me.

JILL

I did not. I...we...It was too dangerous to go rafting on such a cloudy day. You're having a tryst.

JACK

I am not. But you are. You came here to meet your friend, Jim.

JILL

You came here to meet some woman.

JACK

I did not.

Jack takes the publications from under his arm and puts them down on the table. Jill sees them.

JILL

Oh, my God.

She quickly takes the rose from her hair. Jack sees it.

JACK

Oh, my God.

JILL

You're Heart Throb.

JACK

You're High Flyer. This is why you've been spending so much time at your computer. Interactive crossword puzzles, my ass.

JILL

(seeing the martini)

What's this?

JACK

High Flyer likes martinis, straight up.

JILL

I don't feel like a martini.

JACK

Then don't drink it.

JILL

So all these months you've been using the Internet to cheat on me.

JACK

How can I be cheating on you when I've been cheating with you?

JILL

It's cheating if you didn't think it was me.

JACK

If I knew it was you, then I would have been cheating on High Flyer.

JILL

Maybe I will have a little sip.

(she downs half the glass in one gulp)

You didn't know High Flyer was me, did you?

JACK

No, but she did remind me of the woman I fell in love with twenty-five years ago.

JILL

That's what I thought about Heart Throb.

JACK

(breaking up laughing)

So you fly Concords, very, very high and very, very fast.

JILL

And you hunt bears with cameras and work out in the cellar, with sweat pouring down between your pecs.

JACK

Did that turn you on?

JILL

Yes.

JACK

Thinking of you lying under that fan turned me on.

JILL

A lot of the things Heart Throb said to me turned me on. He reminded me of you many years ago.

JACK

And you, I mean High Flyer, reminded me of you many years ago. That's why I liked her so much.

JILL

Why can't Jack say those things to Jill?

JACK

He did, on the Internet.

JILL

No, it was Heart Throb and he way saying those things to High Flyer.

JACK

And you were loving Heart Throb.

JILL

Before chatting with Heart Throb and falling a little bit in love, I was so happy to discover that I could still have those feelings.

JILL

Then I felt sad because I wasn't having those feelings for you or at least I didn't realize I was having those feelings for you.

JACK

Loving High Flyer made me realize how I'd put all those feelings for you on the back burner. I've never fallen out of love with you, Jill.

JILL

You haven't?

JACK

No.

JILL

I'd forgotten how handsome you are.

JACK

I'd forgotten how beautiful you are and what a good life we've had together. So many of the dreams we had back then have come true.

JILL

You were going to be a foreign correspondent and then write the great American novel.

JACK

You're the one who got three books published.

JILL

Three very thin books, of poetry.

JACK

But I did cover two wars. We were going to have two children. A boy and a girl.

JILL

Zachary and Hannah.

JACK

These past months have been so hard.

JILL

Yes.

JACK

I was reading in the newspaper a story about a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania who...

JILL

Do you really want to talk about this now?

JACK

This psychologist said shame is the most difficult emotion to bear. Human beings will do anything to avoid shame, he said. They will substitute any emotion for it. I haven't done many shameful things in my life, one of the advantages of not being in management. But I did something recently that was so shameful that I couldn't admit it, not even to myself. Instead I pretended what I had done wasn't that bad. I pretended I had swatted a mosquito.

JILL
Why are you telling me this, now?

JACK
I'm telling you this because I want to say...
(he can't say it)

JILL
What did you want to say?

JACK
It's only three words, but I'm having so much trouble saying them.

JILL
What three little words?

JACK
I am sorry. I am sorry for that night when I slapped you.

JILL
(moved by the apology)
I shouldn't have slapped you.

JACK
Let's start all over again.

JILL
Is it possible, having been Heart Throb and High Flyer?

JACK
Heart Throb and High Flyer spent most of their time talking about their marriages.

JILL
And their spouses.

JACK
That should mean something.

JILL
It meant that they still cared.

JACK
That the spark was still there.

JILL

Even though Jack and Jill thought it was gone.

JACK

But thanks to Heart Throb and High Flyer, we know the sparks are still there. I want to make our marriage work, High Flyer.

JILL

So do I. But what must we do?

JACK

We must shut off the automatic pilot. Stop escaping into cyberspace.

JILL

And start talking to each other over dinner. And maybe even in bed. Every night we'll go to sleep at the same time.

JACK

Holding each other.

JILL

Like we used to. And when we wake up in the morning, we'll snuggle before getting up. Remember how we used to spoon?

JACK

Can we keep doing all these things?

JILL

We can try.

JACK

It will be fun trying.

They lean over the table and give each other a little kiss.

JILL

This is so crazy. An old couple discovering each other on the Internet.

JACK

We're not so old. This will. Wouldn't this make a wonderful feature story for the paper?

JILL

It would make a better novelette.

JACK

Hey, are you thinking of stealing my story?

JILL

It's my story, too.

JACK

Since you write books and I write newspaper stories, let's meet halfway and write a play together.

JILL

A romantic comedy.

JACK

We need a title. Let's call it...

JILL

Heart Throb.

JACK

And High Flyer.

JILL

Heart Throb and High Flyer.

They laugh and joyously hug each other.

JACK

(motioning to the waiter)

Waiter. We'll be having dinner after all.

CURTAIN