

Chatter

by

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CHARACTERS

WAITRESS: A career waitress in a coffee shop.

JOHN: A shy, slightly nerdish guy, anywhere from late 20's to 40's.

HUMPHREY: A noire looking guy, perhaps in a raincoat and a Fedora.

FIONA: An ebullient, flowery romance novelist who dresses as an aging hippy.

BOSS: A frenetic, harried person who's a spitter, especially when pronouncing "S."

WILLOW: A big, tough woman.

CORKY: A gruff, surly, angry waiter who speaks in a monotone when he's not grunting or growling.

NAOMI: An attractive woman with a somewhat annoying nasal voice.

REGINALD: A distinguished looking gentlemen who speaks flawless English and may even have a royal English accent.

NOTE

HUMPHREY, FIONA and REGINALD's lines that appear in quotes indicate that they are being typed by the respective characters as they say them. Lines that do not have quotes are straight dialog.

SCENES

1. Diner
2. Office
3. Subway
4. Restaurant
5. JOHN's apartment

AT RISE

A diner. WAITRESS behind the counter. JOHN enters and sits at a table.

WAITRESS

Coffee, hon?

JOHN

Yes, thank you.

(John looks out a window. After a beat, HUMPHREY enters, carrying a notebook PC. He sits next to JOHN, who does not acknowledge him. WAITRESS returns with a cup of coffee, which she places in front of JOHN.)

WAITRESS

What else I get you, hon?

JOHN

Two eggs, scrambled, and ...

(HUMPHREY looks at him momentarily, then starts writing.)

No, make that overeasy ...

(WAITRESS crosses out.)

WAITRESS

Mmm hmm.

JOHN

Better yet, poached.

(WAITRESS and HUMPHREY both cross out, then continue writing.)

And a toasted bagel, dry.

WAITRESS

(Talking while writing.)

Toast ... ed ... bagel ... dry, will be another fifty cents.

(Beat as WAITRESS and HUMPHREY await JOHN'S answer.)

JOHN

That's ... that's fine.

(WAITRESS and HUMPHREY resume writing.)

WAITRESS

Thanks, hon. Back in a few.

HUMPHREY

"Yet again, he forgot to ask for water. He would now have to face the embarrassment of calling out for--"

JOHN

Umm, excuse me?

HUMPHREY

"Suddenly, he was centerstage, where the glare was at its harshest."

(WAITRESS looks at JOHN.)

JOHN

(Sheepishly, embarrassed.)

Just ... If you could, a little water, please?

WAITRESS

Right up.

(JOHN slinks down and stares at his coffee.)

HUMPHREY

"Millions of eyes bored into him as he--"

JOHN

(Sotto voce, to himself.)

Shut up. Just ... shut up.

WAITRESS

(Returning with water.)
What?

JOHN

Nothing, nothing.

WAITRESS

(Shrugs.)
Eggs'll be right up.
(Exits. Both men watch.)

HUMPHREY

"She was from the old school of waitressing: ergonomically built, sensibly shoed, with an old-couch-comfortable collection of 'hon's' and 'right up's.'

JOHN

(Sotto voce, to himself.)
Can't I just eat a simple breakfast without--

WAITRESS

(Returning with the food.)
You say something, hon?

JOHN

No, I'm ...

WAITRESS

(Shrugs as she walks away.)
Call if you need anything.

HUMPHREY

"She shrugged her way back to the counter, having seen her share of mumbling whackos."

(JOHN sighs loudly. Beat.)

"The runny eggs, the greasy potatoes, bits of eggshells; it all reminded him of a childhood tainted with the slime of—"

JOHN

(Sotto voce, to himself.)
My childhood was fine.

HUMPHREY

"He lapsed into a stony silence, brooding over the inedible mess that bore little resemblance to anything organic."

JOHN

(Sotto voce, angrily to himself.)
The eggs are fine!

WAITRESS

(Returning onstage with a coffee pot, assuming the last comment was addressed to her.)
Good, hon. Freshen that up?

JOHN

(Startled, by her appearance.)
Oh ... um, yes, please.
(She pours coffee.)
Thank you.

WAITRESS

Mmm hmm.

(She exits. He goes to sip.)

HUMPHREY

"Maybe, if it was hot enough, it would cauterize the memories of a lonely life soiled with--"

JOHN

(Sotto voce, muttering to himself.)
Nothing wrong with my life, other than ...
(He picks up his fork and resumes eating.)

HUMPHREY

(Looking around the stage, including the audience.)
"This place was a noire movie waiting to happen..."
(Neither man notices the FIONA who slips into the booth across from them. She pulls out a laptop and prepares to write.)
"All it would take is the eye of a writer ..."

JOHN

(Muttering to himself.)
Just a diner.

HUMPHREY

"This was a place where--"

FIONA

(Speaking as she types.)
"And so it continued, the lugubrious, loveless lamentations--"

HUMPHREY

What the?--

FIONA

"That tormented him."

HUMPHREY

Tormented?--

FIONA

"Making his life a continuous cacophony of--"

HUMPHREY

What are you doing?

FIONA

What does it look like?

But he's a guy.

HUMPHREY

He needs a woman's perspective.

FIONA

(Deeper, extra macho voice.)
Hey, he's all man.

HUMPHREY

Good, then he won't be threatened by a warmer, enlightened view.

(JOHN puts his fork down, holds his head and sighs.)

HUMPHREY

Look, I'd love to chat, but I've got to ...
(He starts typing.)
"He wished he could stay in this clammy, cozy cocoon of a coffee shop for his collection of days..."

FIONA

"But the hapless hum-drum--"

HUMPHREY

Hey!--

FIONA

"Of his empty existence loomed."

HUMPHREY

Stop messing with my narrative!

JOHN

(Shakes his head, sighs, and signals for WAITRESS.)
Check, please.

HUMPHREY

"He was forced to leave this well worn womb--"

FIONA

"For the tenacious tentacles of mediocrity would not release him--"

HUMPHREY

"Even for a meager mug of mud."

FIONA

Mud? Who calls it mud anymore?

HUMPHREY

Look who's talking, with that "tentacles" cliche.

FIONA

It fits perfectly with--

JOHN

Just a moment of peace. That's all I--

(He walks to the counter to pay his bill. HUMPHREY and FIONA follow him.)

WAITRESS

(Addressing first man.)
Everything all right, hon?

JOHN

(Absentmindedly responding to Waitress.)
Mmm.

HUMPHREY

"For him, peace was a curve ball to a blind man."

FIONA

"Ever sought, never attained"

HUMPHREY

Stop stealing my simile!

FIONA

It's mine, too.

HUMPHREY

No it's not—

(They continue arguing as the three walk out. WAITRESS shakes her head as lights fade.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE

(JOHN's office. He is at his desk, reading a document. HUMPHREY and FIONA are sitting on the floor or on the side of the desk, observing everything and ready to type.)

HUMPHREY

(Looking at a desk paperweight.)
"One could only wonder at the requirements for being a paperweight."

(JOHN studies the paperweight.)

"Is it merely a weight issue? Then what precludes your basic rock from joining this lofty club?"

(JOHN puts down the paperweight assertively and resumes working. But his attention returns to the paperweight. He picks it up.)

"Is it an aesthetic requirement? Then why this repulsive assortment of tscakkas?"

(JOHN again puts down the paperweight assertively.)

JOHN

(To himself.)
Concentrate!
(He resumes working.)

HUMPHREY

"Perhaps it is the sentimental value that--"

FIONA

"Once again, inane thoughts shackled his mind--"

HUMPHREY

Inane?? People have won Pulitzer Prizes for this insightful--

FIONA

..Right: Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Paperweight."

JOHN

(Chuckling to himself while looking at the paperweight. Then shaking his head and saying to himself.)

Stop screwing around!

(Beat.)

HUMPHREY

"It was a job that used to come easy."

FIONA

"As did focus."

HUMPHREY

Till you came along.

FIONA

I'm not the one rambling about paperweights.

JOHN

(Holding his head, then to himself.)

Come on!

(HUMPHREY and FIONA peek over his shoulder to see what he is reading. As they begin writing, JOHN begins daydreaming.)

FIONA

"How courageously he faced his fate."

HUMPHREY

"Boldly enduring the ennui of 'Sale, Sale, Sale!' flyers."

FIONA

"Waiting faithfully for that beatific idea."

HUMPHREY

"That inspires a bestseller."

FIONA

"That lets him buy this agency."

HUMPHREY

"And fire the sibilant spitter who relegates him to writing fly--"

BOSS

(Entering brusquely and spitting heavily.)
Flyerssss! Where are they?

HUMPHREY

"Enter, the AntiChrist of creativity."

JOHN

(Dodging the spit.)
Just -- Just about done with the first one.

BOSS

The *firsst* one??

FIONA

"The rainman on the creative parade."

BOSS

You ssshould be done with all sssix!

JOHN

(Wincing from the spit.)
I'm moving as fast as I can--

BOSS

Thisss isss not your bessst sssseller. It'sss sssales sssheets, plain and sssimple.

HUMPHREY

"The wet blanket on artistry."

JOHN

I am trying to craft--

BOSS

Craft? Ssseven "sssaves" and sssix "sssales" with sssome sssizzle on the ssside.

JOHN

I'll be done in--

BOSS

You ssshould be done now. You've done this job long enough to--

JOHN

(Sotto voce.)
That's for sure.

BOSS

What?

FIONA

"If he had the courage, he would tell him what he really thought."

JOHN

I said ...

HUMPHREY
"But, of course, he and courage ..."

JOHN
(Sickeningly sweet.)
Six sales sheets, coming right up!

FIONA
" ... inhabit different strata."

HUMPHREY
(Boss leaves. Beat. Then, as the following is spoken, JOHN's face alights with hope.)
"It was time to end this – quote – *writing* job and really write! Time to "put up or--"

FIONA
(As the following is delivered, JOHN becomes sad.)
"Shut up. Ah yes, the puerile male fantasy of leaving the day job for the nonexistent writing career."

BOSS
(Popping his head in.)
You finisssh the sssecond?

JOHN
I'm, uhh...

BOSS
Sssheessh!
(He exits. JOHN puts his hands over his face.)

HUMPHREY
"Screenplay idea: while at work, he loaded his uzi and—"

(Frustrated, JOHN dons headphones. Jazz or classical music is heard onstage. JOHN bears down and writes.)

HUMPHREY
There, you satisfied?

FIONA
He's drowning out *your* inane drivel--

HUMPHREY
How dare you call--

(JOHN turns up his walkman to drown out the argument. Lights, and music, fade.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE

(A subway car. JOHN, HUMPHREY and FIONA enter, standing close together and shuffling in unison. JOHN takes a strap handle, with HUMPHREY and FIONA standing slightly behind him. The train is crowded. The three stand closely next to WILLOW. Muffled P.A. Announcement can be heard. Train's doors close and impression is that the train starts moving. Beat.)

HUMPHREY

"It was a day like this that made him think of Sartre."

FIONA

Oh boy--

HUMPHREY

"Drowning in a sea of sales sheets. What's the point of--"

FIONA

"Yet again, he sung his dirge-like 'woe-is-me' tune."

HUMPHREY

And where are your riveting observations?

FIONA

(Looking around.)

Right here on this train. We need to break out of this cocoon and reach out to--

HUMPHREY

Great, get us arrested for assault.

FIONA

No touching; just looking.

HUMPHREY

At the people here? You're crazy.

FIONA

Hemingway ran from the bulls in Pamplona.

HUMPHREY

That's safer.

FIONA

Of course, if you're scared of human warmth and interaction--

HUMPHREY

I'm not scared of anything.

FIONA

Then let's plant the seeds.

(JOHN furtively glances at WILLOW. He then stares at her. After a moment, tough FIONA notices JOHN looking at her and glares back.)

HUMPHREY

(Sotto voce, to FIONA.)

Now what?

FIONA

Write the emotion!

HUMPHREY

"She had glassy, dead eyes that offered to escort him into the realm of the unliving.

FIONA

(Perplexed at the direction this is going.)

Well, at least you're writing.

(JOHN looks at WILLOW'S hands.)

HUMPHREY

"They were not hands that pecked daintily at a keyboard. They were built for bludgeoning."

FIONA

(Being won over.)

Colorful, cynical, acceptable!

(WILLOW notices JOHN looking at her hands. WILLOW then cracks her knuckles and glares at JOHN, who turns away.)

FIONA

No! Don't leave her world!

HUMPHREY

I don't think we have a choice.

FIONA

There's warmth below that frigid exterior.

(She types.)

"Perhaps the menacing glare was a front, so necessary in today's frigid, loveless world."

(JOHN tentatively smiles at her.)

WILLOW

The hell you smilin' at?

HUMPHREY

"Or perhaps she was just one hard--"

JOHN

I was just noticing--

WILLOW

Better wipe that lecherous smirk off your--

JOHN

Just a friendly gesture--

WILLOW

You giving me gestures?

JOHN

All I did was--

WILLOW

Lucky I don't kick your--

Let her! FIONA

What? HUMPHREY

Her anger is fresh! FIONA

So is his blood. HUMPHREY

You think I'm playing with you? WILLOW

"Her passion raged." FIONA

No, don't!— HUMPHREY

I'm telling you-- WILLOW

(She moves menacingly towards JOHN, who is too dazed to react.)

"Her rage is a mask hiding a desperate, lonely soul." FIONA

(Nonplussed by JOHN's lack of reaction, WILLOW hesitates, then drops her fists and chuckles.)

Man is whacked. Got to be whacked. WILLOW

No. Don't lose the connection. FIONA

What do you want him to-- HUMPHREY

Stoke her anger! Record this touching experience. FIONA

This isn't the kind of "touching" he's looking for. HUMPHREY

"He refused to let this budding relationship wither."
(HUMPHREY groans.) FIONA

All I am trying to do is establish a bond-- JOHN

You just don't know when to shut up. WILLOW

FIONA
"Her passion raged into an inferno."

JOHN
Why must I shut up when I am merely responding to--

(WILLOW pushes JOHN to the floor.)

FIONA
I'm seeing Pullitzer!

HUMPHREY
He's seeing stars!

WILLOW
Should've quit while you was ahead.

HUMPHREY
All right, you want to play?
(He types.)
"From the depths of the subway floor began a transformation."

FIONA
Wait. What are you--

HUMPHREY
"Fear turned to rage ..."

FIONA
Okay, let's not go overboard.

HUMPHREY
"And rage turned ... to action."

FIONA
I don't think you should--

JOHN
(Rising.)
Where do you get off--

(WILLOW pushes him back down to the floor.)

FIONA
"And rage turned to pain."

WILLOW
Man, the whackos you meet on the train.

(Lights down.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE

(Restaurant. JOHN is seated, with HUMPHREY and FIONA huddled by each shoulder.)

HUMPHREY

"As if a blind date were not taxing enough, he would now have to make witty banter while struggling with life threatening bruises."

FIONA

He doesn't have a mark on him.

HUMPHREY

"He had obviously encountered a Ninja, whose blows appeared harmless, but would actually destroy his organs in three days."

FIONA

"Or perhaps he just had a ridiculously low threshold for pain."

(CORKY appears. He pulls out a series of index cards and reads from the top one. Even though his lines are exuberant, he says them in a disdainful monotone.)

CORKY

A big Meat and Greet hello. My name is Corky, and I am thrilled to serve you at the place for great meats and great greets.

(CORKY reads from the next card.)

On our menu tonight, we have--

JOHN

Umm, my date hasn't ...

CORKY

(Annoyed and flustered to be thrown off rhythm. He reads from another card.)

Oh. Well then, while you are waiting, why not start your night right with a Meat and Greet Cocktail?

JOHN

Umm, rum and Coke, please?

(CORKY grunts and exits.)

HUMPHREY

"He wondered why he ordered a rum and Coke, since he hated anything tropical."

FIONA

"He also wondered why he confused insightful observations with nervous ramblings."

HUMPHREY

Damn it, I was on a role --

FIONA

Step out of yourself and look--

HUMPHREY

I was talking tropical. How much farther out can--

(An attractive woman with a grating voice and an assertive demeanor approaches the table. JOHN is too lost in thought to notice.)

John? NAOMI

JOHN
(Jumping at the mention of his name.)
Oh, um, I'm sorry, I didn't see--

NAOMI
(Sitting.)
So this is the face behind the e-mail

CORKY
(CORKY enters. He pulls out his index cards and reads.)
Hi, my name is Corky, and I'm proud to serve you at--

NAOMI
I would love a rum and Coke.
(CORKY snorts and exits. Then to JOHN.)
I love everything tropical.

JOHN
(Big fake smile.)
That's why I get them.

HUMPHREY
"This level of suck-up could cause internal hemorrhaging."

JOHN and NAOMI
(Together.)
So.
(Beat, then together again.)
What--
(They both chuckle in embarrassment.)

NAOMI
What do you ...?

HUMPHREY
"With pompous emphasis..."

JOHN
I'm ... *a writer*.

NAOMI
A *writer* ... hmm.

HUMPHREY
(Positively.)
"He got a "hmm."

FIONA
"Perhaps, he had finally met ..."

NAOMI
What do you write?

JOHN
Well, to pay the bills, it's sales sheets, but ...

HUMPHREY
"Would she bite?"

NAOMI
And when you're not paying the bills?

FIONA
"Love is in the air!"

JOHN
Oh, screenplay treatments, play outlines, a--

NAOMI
Anything I would've seen?

HUMPHREY
Here's where it gets tricky.

JOHN
Well, I haven't actually written anything, but I definitely have ideas ...

NAOMI
(Disappointed.)
Oh.

FIONA
"Just like his writings, a promising start, a terrible finish."

JOHN
And, um, what about you?

NAOMI
Oh, just a little financial thing.

HUMPHREY
"Read: secretary."

NAOMI
But what *you* do is much more--

HUMPHREY
Not so fast. Let's see how she likes being squeezed through the mediocrity ringer.

JOHN
Financial? In what area are--

NAOMI
I'm the director of financial services for Bored Sterns--

FIONA
Director?

HUMPHREY

"She had arrogantly played coy with her lofty position."

NAOMI

I mean, numbers are one thing. I make millions knowing numbers. But to have a creative mind? That's priceless.

HUMPHREY

"Yet another limo-riding, condo-owning bourgeois pining for the Bohemian life."

JOHN

I don't think it's a choice we make. I think it just is, or it isn't.

FIONA

"Suddenly, without warning, he had slipped into Lotus Grasshopper speak ..."

NAOMI

... Oh.

FIONA

"... and ended the conversation."

(Beat.)

NAOMI

Maybe we should just ...

(Signals for CORKY.)

Excuse me?

CORKY

(After a beat, CORKY appears. Reading from his index cards.)

Okay, Corky, your friendly Meat and Greeter is back. Are you happy people ready to--

NAOMI

How's your porterhouse?

CORKY

(Reading from another card.)

Ah yes, it's an ambitiously aged Arizona Angus, succulently seared in a sizzling sauté, supremely served with--

NAOMI

I'll take it medium rare.

CORKY

(Swapping cue cards.)

Your order is my command. And for the Meat and Greet gentleman?

JOHN

The boiled vegetables, they're not prepared with butter?

CORKY

(Doing a double take, then swapping cards.)

They are pristinely purified with precise poaching, impeccably prepared with--

I'll have them. JOHN

(Disdainfully reading from another card.)
CORKY
A healthful and propitious choice, my prudent partner.

And ... JOHN

"Time to dazzle her with daring." HUMPHREY

You only live once ... French fries. JOHN

"Now he was living on the edge." HUMPHREY

(Again swapping cards.)
CORKY
Enjoy your meeting while I get your meat...
(Disdainfully at JOHN.)
and your vegetables.

HUMPHREY
"His felt this peasant's challenge down to his manhood. There would be payback, oh lowly lab animal."

NAOMI
There's something refreshingly ... *animal* about him.

(Together)
FIONA and JOHN
What??

JOHN
Well, the animal part, yes, but--

NAOMI
I wonder if he's an actor?

(Together.)
JOHN, HUMPHREY AND FIONA
An actor??

NAOMI
So many of these waiters are.

JOHN
Yes, but he--

(CORKY returns with salads.)

CORKY

(Reading from a cue card.)
Corky's back, hoping these particular meals meet your dining desires.

HUMPHREY

Dining desires? Sounds like something out of Debbie does--

CORKY

If I could make your Meat and Greet moments even more thrilling, please let me--

NAOMI

Are you an actor?

CORKY

And what does *that* mean?

FIONA

Uh oh.

NAOMI

Nothing. I was just--

CORKY

Just because I'm waiting tables and have an effusive personality, you assume I'm--

NAOMI

No, I--

CORKY

What I am is a broker who got ... like I was the only one skimming. You got a problem with--

NAOMI

No, no. It's just that my friend here is a writer and--

CORKY

A writer? What's he--

JOHN

Well ...

HUMPHREY

"He hoped to escape with a dose of writer babble."

JOHN

... I find myself delving into the subconscious realm of--

CORKY

You in Hollywood?

FIONA

No luck.

JOHN

Actually, I'm still in the treatment phase.

That means he hasn't written anything yet. NAOMI

So what are you bothering me for? CORKY

Um, well, I -- *she* was the one who-- JOHN

You know, a lot of people get discovered late -- like Chuck Norris. NAOMI

(Together.) JOHN, HUMPHREY and FIONA
Chuck Norris?

(A revelation.) CORKY
Chuck Norris. Now there's an actor.

Please don't let this go any further-- FIONA

The way he acts, you actually think he knows karate. CORKY

Actually, it's the acting that's new to him. NAOMI

Really? CORKY

That's what I read in People Magazine's Top Fifty Dressers issue. NAOMI

Huh. CORKY

"This date, like so much of his life, had escaped him." FIONA

You should have seen him in that jean tuxedo. NAOMI

How did Chuck-- CORKY

Waiter?-- OFFSTAGE VOICE

Get into acting? CORKY

Waiter?? OFFSTAGE VOICE

CORKY

(Glaring at the offstage voice.)

It's Corky.

(He then reads menacingly from another card.)

And I'm glad you called me, but I'm presently giving that great Meat and Greet service to your fellow diners.

(Sighing, begrudgingly to JOHN.)

I'll get you a head shot.

NAOMI

But I thought you weren't--

CORKY

They make me attach a picture to each check -- for an even friendier Meat and Greet experience next time.

HUMPHREY

As if there'd be a next time.

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Uhh, Corky?

CORKY

(Glares again at offstage interruption, then pulls out his card.)

Just one more moment till I meat and greet you again.

(Back to them.)

Better go see what those morons...

(Pulls out another card.)

In the mean time, just give a Meat and Greet shout if you need me.

(He exits.)

NAOMI

He could be a good character actor.

JOHN

Oh, he's certainly a character.

(CORKY returns with head shot.)

CORKY

Number's on the back.

JOHN

Thank you--

CORKY

I'll need final approval on all scripts.

HUMPHREY

Never acted, but already a master of the prima donna role.

CORKY

(Reading from card and awkwardly sweeping his free hand to display the salads.)

Time to greet your salads.

(He exits.)

Now you have a cast. NAOMI

Now he has an ulcer. FIONA

But I don't have a finished-- JOHN

Incentive. To get you moving. NAOMI

These things take time. JOHN

Everything takes time. You just have to move it along. Otherwise, it never gets done, and you'll be trapped with the voices in your head. NAOMI

Voices? FIONA

What is she-- HUMPHREY

(Conspiratorial whisper.) JOHN
You hear them, too?

What is *he*-- FIONA

Everyone hears them. Just have to make sure the one you listen to is your own. NAOMI

What kind of new age babble is-- HUMPHREY

(Waiter returns.) CORKY
Hello, I'm Corky--

We remember-- JOHN

Greeting you with a Meat and Greet medium rare steak. CORKY
(He puts down the steak, then says derisively.)
And a vegetable medley.
(He places the vegetables in front of JOHN.)
And don't be calling me about any vegetable-type roles. It's either a meaty Chuck Norris gig or nothing.

(Sarcastic.)
A star is born.

FIONA

You should give him your number.

NAOMI

Um, I really don't--

JOHN

Sure, a prima donna.

CORKY

No, it's just that--

JOHN

No skin off my back. This loser ain't going anywhere.
(Pulls out his index cards.)
Now it's time to Meat and Great your meals with a hearty appetite. And remember, my name is --

CORKY

Corky--

NAOMI

And I'm just a finger snap
(He snaps.)
away.
(He exits.)

CORKY

Look, with all due respect ... this writing thing; I mean, it's cute and everything, but ...

NAOMI

But?

JOHN

But when are you going to *write* something.

NAOMI

"Her stab was cold, penetrating and decisive."

HUMPHREY

I have ideas, treatments --

JOHN

Every gardener in L.A. has treatments.

NAOMI

She dares to compare his noble endeavors to the celluloid silliness of—

HUMPHREY

I don't write Hollywood.

JOHN

NAOMI

You don't write anything!

HUMPHREY

If she was only creative enough to see his genius insight, she'd--"

JOHN

(Snobbishly.)

People who aren't creative simply cannot understand--

HUMPHREY

Good shot!

NAOMI

Then maybe you should find someone in your creative league.

FIONA

Better return.

NAOMI

Corky? Could you wrap this up?

FIONA

Game, set and match.

JOHN

Wait, what--

CORKY

(Returning, pulling out his cue cards.)

Uh oh, could it be that the famous Meat and Greet service is not--

NAOMI

No, it's fine. I'm just not creative enough to enjoy it in the present company.

CORKY

(Looks disdainfully at JOHN, then back at NAOMI.)

Can't say I blame you.

(CORKY leaves with steak. NAOMI gets ready to leave.)

HUMPHREY

"What is the innate lizard trait that makes a man covet a woman most when she's walking out the door?"

FIONA

I think it's called male stupidity

JOHN

There's no reason to--

(She puts money on the table.)

NAOMI

This should cover me.

CORKY

(Returning with wrapped steak and another head shot.)
If you'd like to grab a real meal with a real man, my number's on the back.

FIONA

Who would ever buy such a cheap, tawdry pick-up line--

NAOMI

Here's my card.

(She hands it to him. He winks, clicks his tongue and points to her and exits.)

HUMPHREY

"Yet another incomprehensible moment in an incomprehensible life."

(She sighs, collects her things.)

FIONA

"Perhaps if he was less aloof, less creatively snobbish. Perhaps he--"

JOHN

Perhaps I--

NAOMI

Perhaps not. Good luck, Hemmingway

(She leaves. He stares at his fork. Beat.)

HUMPHREY

"And here it is, as it always was."

FIONA

Wait a second.

HUMPHREY

"Destined to be alone."

FIONA

This may be exactly what he needs.

HUMPHREY

"Futile to think it would ever be different—"

FIONA

A passionate story that's dying to be written!

HUMPHREY

What are you--

FIONA

Unrequited love! Man's eternal quest for what he can't have.

HUMPHREY

But--

FIONA

Now! Write while the wound is raw.

HUMPHREY

Wound? The guy's a little disappointed, but--

FIONA

The world's greatest love story is slipping away.

HUMPHREY

He's not a love story kind of guy. He just got jilted. Happens every week.

FIONA

And he's missed an opportunity every week. But not this time -- this time he's going to write it!

HUMPHREY

(Sighing. He then shrugs -- skeptical, but willing to give it a try.)

"Finally, a story that would write itself."

(JOHN looks up, reflective.)

FIONA

A writer is born!

HUMPHREY

"He couldn't wait to get back to his computer."

JOHN

"Corky? Check, please."

CORKY

(Offstage.)

This is Corky, your waiter, and I'm just a hop, skip and jump away from delivering the very reasonable check for your sumptuous Meat and Greet feast.

HUMPHREY

"But first, a little unfinished business."

JOHN

Uh, Corky? Could you send over ... the manager?

CORKY

(Offstage, angrily.)

Of course. Our Meat and Greet friendly facilitator loves to chat.

HUMPHREY

"Before he writes a masterpiece, he'd end a career."

(WILLOW enters, looking at her cue cards. JOHN is fiddling with his vegetables and does not at first notice her.)

WILLOW

Hello, I am Willow, your Meat and Greet friendly facilitator. I am thrilled to meet—

(They look up and recognize each.)

WILLOW and JOHN

(Together.)
You!

HUMPHREY

"Welcome to Hell."

WILLOW

You're stalking me.

JOHN

No, I'm ... I—

WILLOW

Why does my blatant femininity attract all the weirdos?

JOHN

I am just finishing a date and—

WILLOW

Where is she?

JOHN

She had to ... leave early.

WILLOW

Yeah, right. Look, don't make me smack you in my place of business.

JOHN

I certainly don't want—

WILLOW

Then what do you--

JOHN

It's about Corky.

WILLOW

Our bubbliest waiter.

JOHN

Well, actually ...

WILLOW

(Threatening.)
What?

HUMPHEY

"Revenge was a dish..."

JOHN

I just wanted to compliment him on his cheerful service.

FIONA

"... not served at all, apparently."

WILLOW

Damn straight. Now behave yourself ... or I'll be back.

JOHN

Of course. Thank you.

HUMPHREY

"This disaster of a restaurant tightened its hold on—"

FIONA

"Quick! Throw down a hundred!

HUMPHREY

What??--

FIONA

And walk out smiling.

HUMPHREY

You know his salary?

FIONA

It'll make a great story when he gets on Letterman.

HUMPHREY

(Relenting and sighing.)

"He would finally end this culinary catastrophe with his emergency \$100 dollar bill."

(JOHN pulls out a \$100 bill, then hesitates.)

"Because if this wasn't an emergency, what was?"

(JOHN slams the \$100 on the table and walks out assertively. After a beat, CORKY returns.)

CORKY

What the...?

(Throwing cards on the table, assuming JOHN skipped out on the check.)

Son of a ...

(Noticing the \$100, he picks it up.)

Huh. Moron probably thought it was a ten.

(Surreptitiously looking around, then acting like a karate expert.)

"The next Chuck Norris slipped the C-note into his pocket, then moved on to his next target."

(CORKY exits. A moment later, WILLOW enters, escorting BOSS.)

WILLOW

Here at Meat and Greet, you get more than great meat, you get great greets.

BOSS

Ssssplendid.

WILLOW

(Wincing from the spit.)

And right now, it's time to greet your meeting table.

BOSS

Ssssperb!

WILLOW

(Dodging the spit throughout.)
Your friendly Meat and Greet waiter, Corky, will be right along to start your dining delight with—

BOSS

Alliteration! Kudoss!

WILLOW

(Making a threatening fist.)
Look, if you're coming on to me, I'm going to—

BOSS

No no no. I'm just admiring your ssspeech.

WILLOW

Oh. Well. Sorry, it's just that I've had this loser stalking me all day because of my tender, fragile beauty.

BOSS

Although you're quite the attractive lasssss, I was sssimply admiring the fine writing.

WILLOW

Yeah, well, I try to make it a warm experience for my—

BOSS

You write it yourssself?

WILLOW

Well, not all of it, but most—

BOSS

Lisssten, would you be interessted in a writing job?

WILLOW

You *are* trying to pick me up.

BOSS

It'sss nothing like that! I sssimply have thissss lossser writing for me. Too busy talking to himssself to get anything done.

WILLOW

(Reflective.)
Well, I always did have a gift with the pen.

BOSS

Perhapssss we could disssscuss it ... over drinkssss?

WILLOW

But you're not trying to pick me up?

BOSS

No, I jusst want your writing talentsss.

WILLOW

Well ...

BOSS

Of course, I would have to be blind not to also notice your sssublime sssereneness...

WILLOW

Maybe one drink, and tell me about this job.

BOSS

I need a writer who knows the meaning of the word, "ssssale."

WILLOW

Just do me a favor and aim over there, will you?

BOSS

(Turning his head slightly.)
Sssure. Sssooo ...

(Conversation and lights fade.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE

JOHN's apartment.

(JOHN rushes in, frantically looking for his notebook PC. Behind him, HUMPHREY and FIONA argue. JOHN finally locates notebook PC.)

JOHN

Ah.
(He turns it on and waits for it to warm up.)
Come on, come on!

(JOHN gets primed to write, but freezes, waiting for the right thought.)

FIONA

Okay, so it's a laugh-till-you-cry guy-meets-girl story

HUMPHREY

No, it's a hard-boiled, guy-meets-then-loses-girl story.

FIONA

A heart-warming guy-meets-then-loses-then-gets-girl-again story.

HUMPHREY

But he didn't--

FIONA

E-lab-or-ation? Em-bell--

HUMPHREY

(Sighing, then typing. JOHN types in unison with HUMPHREY.)
"The first time he saw her, nothing."

Good

FIONA

"Then, from nothing, to hate; then--"

HUMPHREY

Hate? Hate's pretty strong for--

FIONA

(JOHN stops typing. His frustration will build over the following dialog.)

What would you call it?

HUMPHREY

Annoyance?

FIONA

What kind of drama is annoyance?

HUMPHREY

(JOHN puts his head in his hands.)

You have to have at least the potential of love.

FIONA

It's not about love. It's about a modern clash between the sexes.

HUMPHREY

That's played.

FIONA

And a love story isn't?

HUMPHREY

Love stories are timeless.

FIONA

So are comas. I don't want my audience falling into--

HUMPHREY

Your audience?

FIONA

(JOHN pulls his hair.)

You just got here.

HUMPHREY

I've always been here, watching this mediocrity.

FIONA

Who are you to--

HUMPHREY

(From his seat in the audience, REGINALD begins speaking as he types.)

REGINALD

"Even with the excitement of finally having a story to write,"

HUMPHREY and FIONA

(Together.)

What the?--

REGINALD

"The endless chatter in his head—"

FIONA

Chatter?

(JOHN hits himself in the head.)

REGINALD

"Turned passion to paralysis."

HUMPHREY

Who are--

REGINALD

"Inspiration to vacillation."

FIONA

I am handling this--

HUMPHREY

You're handling? I'm the one who's--

(JOHN pounds his computer.)

REGINALD

"The bickering babblers bemoaned their breach from--"

REGINALD, FIONA and JOHN

(In unison.)

Shut up!

FIONA

We don't need an outsider to--

REGINALD

I, too, have been here all along. Just waiting for the proper time to--

HUMPHREY

(Sarcastic.)

Sounds like her song.

FIONA

We were doing fine without you--

HUMPHREY

As evidenced by his prodigious pool of productivity.

(Screaming to himself.)
That's it! I've had it!

JOHN

There. See what you've done?

FIONA

Me? I am not the one who—

REGINALD

It was your—

HUMPHREY

No more ideas!

JOHN

“He rebelled against the rambunctious—“

HUMPHREY

No more observations!

JOHN

“A lifetime of unrequited love had--“

FIONA

No more tasteless food. Brainless bosses. Womenless existence!

JOHN

“He was driven by righteous rage—“

REGINALD

And no more voices!

JOHN

Again with the voices?

FIONA

Whatever does he mean?

REGINALD

Beats me.

HUMPHREY

I'm through!

JOHN

Don't tell me he's ...

HUMPHREY

(JOHN pulls a gun from his drawer.)

REGINALD

“Ah, the final solution.”

HUMPHREY

You see what happens when you two started—

FIONA

You've been with him longest.

HUMPHREY

While you clowns just poisoned him from the background.

(JOHN puts a bullet in the gun.)

JOHN

Ahhh, sweet silence.

HUMPHREY

"Before he found his final salvation, however, he would have to leave ... a note."

(JOHN gets ready to type on the notebook PC.)

"He prepared to type his—"

FIONA

He's going to *type* a suicide note?

HUMPHREY

Why not?

FIONA

It needs the poignant warmth of handwriting.

REGINALD

I concur.

HUMPHREY

Whatever.

(JOHN pulls out a pad and paper, and begins to write.)

"Dear world,"

REGINALD

No, no, no, entirely inappropriate.

(JOHN stops writing and shakes his head.)

HUMPHREY

What's wrong with—

REGINALD

If the world were "dear" to him, there would be no reason for this final solution.

HUMPHREY

All right, fine.

(JOHN throws out the piece of paper and rewrites.)

"World,"

FIONA

Where is the soul in that?

(JOHN sighs and puts his head in his hands.)

I'm just trying to— HUMPHREY

Where is the passion, the rage, the yearning? FIONA

Fine. So what do you— HUMPHREY

"Cold, cruel world," FIONA

(SECOND and THIRD GUY chuckle.)

(Condescending) REGINALD
Cliché alert.

(The three argue. JOHN shakes his head, gives a resigned smile and puts the gun back in the drawer.)

How about, "To whom it may concern?" FIONA

You have got to be kidding. HUMPHREY

How can you even— REGINALD

(They continue arguing. JOHN puts away his notepad and PC, then crosses the room.)

Wait a second. FIONA

What is he— REGINALD

(JOHN searches for ...)

Oh no! Not the— HUMPHREY

(... and finds, the TV remote control.)

Please, not that! FIONA
(JOHN turns on the TV.)

See what you've done? HUMPHREY

What? REGINALD

FIONA

(Points to the TV.)
The methadone of creativity.

REGINALD

Who can blame him, with you two--

(JOHN turns up the TV even louder.)

FIONA

(Closing her notebook PC.)
So much for the world's greatest love story—

HUMPHREY

(Closing her notebook PC.)
Good-bye, gritty street drama.

FIONA

Well if you didn't--

HUMPHREY

(Closing and taking REGINALD'S laptop.)
Can it, George Bernard Show-off.
(He heads offstage.)

REGINALD

(Chasing his notebook.)
But I wasn't finished--

FIONA

He is.

HUMPHREY

(Points to the TV.)
Can't compete with that.

REGINALD

I was on a roll.

HUMPHREY

We're always are.

FIONA

That's the problem.

REGINALD

But ...

(They exit; TV sound continues; lights fade.)

(END)