

AND FLY FLY AWAY

A play in one act

by

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CAST OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

NARRATOR: **Male, twenty-eight**

STUART: **Male, twenty-eight**

HALLIE: **Female, thirty**

There are many other people that the main characters interact with. These should be played by relatively few actors with many costume changes. Perhaps only three or four men and women each, playing all the characters, though I would think a minimum of nine would be necessary to achieve the heft needed in certain crowded happenings (but what do I know, I'm just a playwright).

TIME: **July 1994**

PLACE: **Two Bars in Manhattan**
Peter McManus Tavern
Hogs and Heifers Road House

SET:

The locations of the play should be achieved with the least amount of props, scenery, etc. preferring intimation over detail. Just a few stools, a table, some mugs and bottles. There are the basic bar equipment on the stage as the play begins. A wooden bar, jukebox, pinball machine, some beer lights on the walls. The rest—chairs, tables, bottles, mugs, etc.—are brought on by the actors as the play is going. As the action switches bars, the equipment is moved to the opposite side of stage to illustrate the change.

(NARRATOR: walks down to stage center on a completely dark set and looks around as if reminiscing affectionately. Then he begins to speak with an evident sense of joy. He talks directly to the audience throughout the play except where noted)

NARRATOR: Some people can just live like heroes. Gladiators, conquerors. They take from life. For them, it's about what life owes them, and they feel a *mortal* imperative to take what is owed. They live without cares, they live without fears, confident of their expectations. Comfortable in the knowledge that it's their day.—Others, the vast majority of us, we take what's given. What is allocated, what is allowed. Living on the in-betweens, planning, adjusting. Hoping for the best, expecting the worst. Preparing to make do with whatever comes our way. We try to stay one step ahead for fear of falling two steps behind.

But some moments, some wondrous anomalies in time and place, these factions stray from their anointed roles. Lines cross, natures reverse. Our gladiators become mere recipients of sad fate, unwitting acceptors of what's here and what's to come. And sometimes, on those rare mysterious magical nights, we others forget who we are and strike out for what we could be. And if we pull hard enough, with just the right touch, we can draw Excalibur from the rock and with it, forever change life's passage.—Some have been named Arthur. Others John or Frank. My name is Stuart.

(the lights come up on the bar and the appurtenances of the bar are brought on stage by the other cast: Stools and tables, mugs and bottles. There is a bustle of activity which NARRATOR: who moves to the corner of the stage, needs to talk over and around)

NARRATOR: This frivolous pretext for a fairy tale (and poor excuse for a play) takes place in the scalding summer of 1994, in the legendary city of New York on the numinous Isle of Manhattan. I was unemployed after graduate school. Now this is no terrible disgrace if you've just gotten your advanced degree in scarce Etruscan art or archaic Slavic languages— *(to someone who carries something perilously near the jukebox)* Watch the uh, uh!—Yeah, it's only rented....Okay. Cool. *(to Audience)* But I was a recent matriculate of a business school. A good one! In Finance, no less. I'd been an AVP at a major brokerage house on Wall Street. I had experience and education. I had expensive Italian suits!—Nobody saw this coming. Nobody expected it to happen, least of all me. It wasn't supposed to happen this way.

(a GUY helping to set up the set, breaks off and comes up to NARRATOR: with a beer)

GUY: Excuse me, beer?

NARRATOR: Oh yes. Thank you. Abasement always makes me thirsty.

(NARRATOR: takes a sip)

NARRATOR: Nevertheless, there I was! Without a job, heavily in debt and very depressed about both. I owed more money than I care to mention. To banks, the government. I owed a considerable amount to my family which I'd've rather been owed to the Mafia. I'd trade pain for shame any day.

(HALLE: and her retinue, BRUCE: and some other customers take their places)

NARRATOR: If you're of a conscientious nature, the planning kind, your mind becomes your worst enemy in these situations. Every dollar spent is painful. Every expense another psychic paper cut in your soul. I found that leaving my apartment was equivalent to spending because I never left it without spending something. Banana, hot dog, Slim Jims, Country Times, the four basic groups. So I took to never leaving the apartment. Faced with adversity, I try to remain vigilant.

GUY: We're ready.

NARRATOR: What? Oh okay, right.

(NARRATOR: moves to a table)

NARRATOR: But it was Saturday night. Too depressing to stay in. I'd spent the first half of the Giants - Steelers pre-season game drinking *Keystone* beer in my apartment. Right, yeah, so I'm sure you can understand the depths of deprivation we're talking about here. For the second half, I decided to go to McManus.

(NARRATOR: indicates that behind him is McManus and everyone begins moving about in the bar as he takes a seat. STUART: enters, comes face to face with HALLIE:, who is standing near the door. He halts the briefest of moments as they glance deeply into each

other's eyes, then walks to a stool, sits, drops a twenty on the bar and situates himself with a perfect view of the television)

NARRATOR: I'd stumbled upon an unwritten rule for regulars here. After you spent \$15, they stopped charging you. It wasn't an official decree or anything recorded on tablets, but it was a firm understanding and seemingly quite sacrosanct. I ate chili and drank Bud there about every Friday and Saturday night.

(NARRATOR: indicates towards STUART:)

NARRATOR: That guy there, who came in just now—that's me. We're the same person. I figure it's my story, I might as well get a few writerly *embellishments* out of it. *(he turns to STUART:)* As you can see I'm a little taller. A *little* better looking. And it seems I exercise a bit?

(another actor at the bar indicates to STUART: that the question is for him)

STUART: Huh, wha? Oh! About three times a week.

NARRATOR: Really? Good for me. *(to behind the Audience)* Excellent casting Mr. Director!

DIRECTOR: *(offstage)* Thank you.

NARRATOR: When you write *your* fairy tale, do whatever the hell you want. Hell, it's not like I'm Tennessee Williams casting Brando or Paul Newman in a role about himself.—I don't know if you noticed, I hope you did, but as *I* walked into the bar, a tall stunning girl met my gaze. Now I run about six feet tall, well *now*—about six one?

(NARRATOR: turns to STUART: who slowly realizes he is being talked to)

STUART: Yeah, about.

NARRATOR: You're getting the hang of this. *(to the Audience)* And on those infrequent occasions when I stand-up straight and wear my work boots....

(NARRATOR: intimates with his hand and STUART: sticks out his boots)

NARRATOR: A good inch or two more. Not overly towering, but still, even with today's women wearing these big-heeled platform, chunky things, there aren't many women I stand eye to eye with.

(BRUCE: comes up to STUART: with a beer and they shake hands)

BRUCE: Hey.

STUART: Hey, how are ya?

BRUCE: Can't complain.

STUART: Good.

B: Nobody wants to hear it.

(BRUCE: grabs the money on the bar and cashes it at the register)

NARRATOR: Bruce, a trusty American Irish career bartender I'd gotten to know pretty well during this period. He almost new my name.

(BRUCE: returns with some singles in the change)

BRUCE: Chili?

STUART: What else.

BRUCE: No onions.

STUART: I appreciate the optimism but I don't think I'll be kissing anyone.

BRUCE: No—we're out of onions.

NARRATOR: That's how life was going.

(STUART: grabs two singles, moves to the jukebox and looks for songs. HALLIE: moves from the door to directly under the T.V.)

NARRATOR: I always play the same ones. “Salt of the Earth” by the Stones, “Watching the Wheels” by John Lennon, “One More Time” by Joe Jackson for Vanessa, that bitch who stole my heart and my Sartre. Let’s see uh—Procul Harem, “Salty Dog,” “Bring It on Home To Me,” by the incomparable Sam Cooke and one random selection. *(to STUART: who is quickly trying to find the songs)* It’s okay, you don’t have to. We’re kind of compressing this time-wise.

STUART: *(indicating toward his stool)* Should I uh....

NARRATOR: Yeah, uh huh.

STUART: Oh, okay.

(STUART: retakes his seat and positions himself to watch the game)

NARRATOR: What we get in splendor, we lose in I.Q.

(the girls laugh. NARRATOR: looks at the girls, surprised. STUART: looks towards HALLE: more carefully)

LILLY: He just rolls over one morning and says, “Hey, you wanna get married?”

SALLY: That’s awful.

MALLORY: That asshole.

LILLY: I know. I was so pissed at him.

SALLY: You should be.

MALLORY: You should *still* be.

FANNY: Should've shot his ass.

LILLY: I only said "yes" so I could string him up by his balls the rest of his life.

SALLY: Serves him right!

MALLORY: Yes it does!

FANNY: That a girl. Waste your life doing it!

NARRATOR: I hadn't seen them on my way in. Which says more about my situation than my balance sheet ever could. It also says a lot about the tall stunning girl at the door. *(NARRATOR: turns to look at HALLIE:)* Finally I realized that she was Hallie Stills.

(BRUCE: gives him another beer and puts a shot glass on the money)

STUART: Is that really Hallie Stills?

BRUCE: Yeah, she grew up with Lilly. You know Lilly, the one on the right?

STUART: I've seen her in here, but I don't know her.

BRUCE: She's getting married. This's her bachelorette party.

STUART: How classy.

BRUCE: Yeah right. The Rockefellers have fallen and can't get up.

(STUART: and BRUCE: look towards the television intently. HALLIE: notices their staring, turns briefly to look at the television above her head, then back towards them)

NARRATOR: I *had* often seen Lilly in there. She was attractive in a certain chubby-cheeked, Elizabeth McGovern in "Ordinary People" sorta way. But nothing compared to her friend.

LILLY: *(to NARRATOR:)* At least I don't need a better looking stand-in.

NARRATOR: Touché. *(to the Audience)* As you can see, this is gonna be a bit of a free-wheeling affair tonight. So I sit watching the football game intently.

BRUCE: You even watching the game?

STUART: Is there a game on?

BRUCE: I thought so.

(they chuckle to themselves a moment)

BRUCE: She's beautiful.

STUART: Yes she is.

BRUCE: A real vision.

STUART: And so out of place here at this dungheap.

BRUCE: A real vision

STUART: Offense intended.

BRUCE: Yeah, got that.

NARRATOR: Sitting there under a benched LT and Phil Simms, the third quarter of an early pre-season game. All the big name players had long since been taken out. I thought about Hallie and the similarity there.

BRUCE: You remember those old—

STUART: Yeah.—Yeah I remember.

BRUCE: Mmph. Goddamn.

STUART: Almost.

BRUCE: *Yeah! Right!*

(BRUCE: smiles at the retort)

NARRATOR: A word on Hallie Stills, though I doubt one is needed.

LILLY: A long word.

NARRATOR: Shush. It's a common enough American tale nowadays. In early 1980, a beautiful nymphet caused a stir with a series of provocative cigarette ads. The ads were simple: A plain white background darkening in the distance as if looking down a long hallway. Hallie sat mid-way, close enough to make out, but too far away to see clearly how young she was. She wore this short flaming red dress and was reaching for her toes in a supple, Kathy Rigby pose. Unlit cigarette sticking out of her mouth. A coy smile, certain come-hither look and the caption above her head—

BRUCE: *"Light Me Up or Leave Me Alone."*

STUART: Canterbury Lights.

BRUCE: Mmph, goddamn!

STUART: Easy boy.

NARRATOR: Billboards and postcards followed. And those annoying magazine subscription slips that fall into your lap. I was fifteen at the time and the effect was pretty intense. Not only on me, but the entire country. Cries of foul came from everywhere. The Religious Right howled about child pornography, the Liberal Left shrieked about big business selling cancer to children. But us, the fifteen year old boys—we just plaintively moaned alone in the dark of our rooms.

STUART: I was fifteen.

BRUCE: I wasn't!

STUART: You too, huh?

BRUCE: I remember debating whether the jail time'd be worth it!

STUART: What was your conclusion?

BRUCE: Bring on Rocko, the weightlifting sodomite!

NARRATOR: Everyone bought Canterbury Lights, they sold in droves. Everyone carried them around as a *badge* of cool. And Hallie was everywhere. On Johnny and Merv. On the Dick Susskind Show! There she was with Bob Hope, waiting for the canned laughs on his Christmas College Football Spectacular. There she was at the inauguration of the new President, dancing with the post "*Urban Cowboy*" John Travolta. In the fall of that year, she graced the cover of *Time* magazine under the headline, *The New Decade Girl*. Today, these coronations are common place. Each year a new one is bethroned. But in 1980—Hallie Stills was the first.

BRUCE: What happened to her?

STUART: What always happens.

BRUCE: It's a shame.

STUART: Is it?

BRUCE: Don't you think?

STUART: Why, because she's here tonight?

BRUCE: No.—Maybe.

NARRATOR: Like all those exalted in America, a downfall is not far behind. The mid-80's were tough on her as America began the process of loving to hate who we used to love. Nothing breeds certain failure here like blistering success and Hallie's flame out was as great as her flame. The movies bombed and she was panned and held

accountable. The Comedy/Variety half hour made Bob Hope seemed spontaneous and risqué. In two years she was declining, in five she was finished. A remembered name, a recognized face, beautiful as it still was, but a career—terminal. Sure, she was a celebrity. A name who appeared occasionally at a second rate event: Save the Children, Save the Whales, Save the Emus. But that was all. A commodity plied, traded and then discarded. All by the age of twenty-three.

BRUCE: It's distracting.

STUART: It's very distracting!

BRUCE: There's a game on!

STUART: I know!

NARRATOR: And now, fourteen years later, there she was, sitting under the Giants pre-season game at McManus.

BRUCE: She's ruining the game.

STUART: Tell her she's gotta move.

BRUCE: Tell her yourself.

STUART: I'm gonna!

BRUCE: You do and I'll kill ya!

(BRUCE: gets a crock of chili)

NARRATOR: Now you have to understand, I have no interest in stars and starlets. It's always been my custom to ignore these situations. I mean really, "Who the fuck are they?" Famous for being beautiful takes as much talent as being famous for being Tiny Tim. A fortuitous roll of genetic dice.

LILLY: Jealous.

NARRATOR: *Absolutely.*

BRUCE: Here you go.

STUART: Yes sir!

(BRUCE: places it down in front of STUART:, who grabs the spoon and begins to reach for the bowl)

NARRATOR: The chili came, the chili was eaten. The chili was taken away.

(BRUCE: swipes the crock of chili away just before STUART: gets to it)

STUART: *Aw c'mon!*

NARRATOR: There's nothing even in the thing!

STUART: I didn't get anything backstage!

NARRATOR: Whose fault is that?!

(STUART:'s body slackens as he flicks an angry spoon on the bar)

NARRATOR: Thank you.

STUART: *(to BRUCE:)* I was close this time.

BRUCE: Better than last night.

(a rumble of a cheer erupts from the other patrons and everybody turns to the television)

NARRATOR: Some Giant linebacker cut three days later, tackled the Pittsburgh quarterback in the end zone for a safety. This made the score 23-17. A perfect Giants score. Just enough lead to be confident of memorable last minute loss.

(SALLY: stumbles over to STUART:)

NARRATOR: Meet Sally. Perky. Nosy. Annoying. She's something of my nemesis throughout the story. A little *too* returning of a character.

SALLY: Speak for yourself asshole. My mother's in the audience tonight. Hi Mom! A clothed speaking part this time!.

NARRATOR: I took an immediate dislike to her.

SALLY: Excuse me. Can you recommend a place for us to go down here?

STUART: What're you looking for?

SALLY: It's a bachelorette party.

STUART: I repeat, what're you looking for?

SALLY: Some place wild. But safe.

NARRATOR: Should've said, "I don't know."

STUART: How 'bout Hogs and Heifers?

SALLY: Oh that's great! That's great!

(SALLY: turns to LILLY: STUART: looks back to the game)

SALLY: How 'bout Hogs and Heifers?!

LILLY: Oh that's perfect.

SALLY: Yes, that's what I thought!

LILLY: We'll go there now. Go tell everybody.

SALLY: Okay! *(to STUART:)* We're going there!

STUART: I'm so happy for you.

SALLY: *Yes!*

(LILLY: talks to BRUCE: as SALLY: goes to tell all the girls where they are going)

NARRATOR: I was satisfied. I wasn't invited to come but at least I was directing their movements. It was a small consolation.

SALLY: It'll be dirty!

MALLORY: I like it dirty!

FANNY: You like it anyway tramp.

MALLORY: Yes!

(all go offstage)

NARRATOR: Bathroom run. Hair, makeup, flush 'n blush. You know the routine

(HALLIE: moves to talk to LILLY: and sits down at the stool next to STUART:)

LILLY: We're going to Hogs and Heifers. Have you been?

HALLIE: No, I've never heard of it.

LILLY: It's fun. You'll be okay there.

HALLIE: I'm not worried.

NARRATOR: Why would she've heard of it? It's where drunk twenty somethings go when they're loaded and feel like losing their head in a hillbilly Honky Tonk. One of the few in New York City.

LILLY: Thank you again for being here.

HALLIE: C'mon. I wouldn't miss it.

LILLY: But what you did....

(LILLY gives HALLIE: a kiss)

LILLY: I'll be back.

HALLIE: Okay.

NARRATOR: There was no need for Hallie to join them. What good would it serve.

(LILLY: moves offstage leaving HALLIE: and STUART: to watch the game. HALLIE: pulls her stool out slightly to get a better view of the game. They watch for a very long moment, neither taking their eyes from the screen)

NARRATOR: Down and out, incomplete....Run up the middle for six yards....
Completed down and out to the other side. There was no fucking way I was turning. I wouldn't've turned to her if my life depended on it.

(we hear the opening chord progression of "Dirty Boulevard" by Lou Reed)

NARRATOR: But Lou conspired against us. "Dirty Boulevard" by Lou Reed, my random choice. It's such a simple song, one-four-five. Three chords repeated over and over again. One high than lower, then lower again, then back to the second note. Infectious. Of insidious intent.

(STUART: 's foot begins tapping away and his head begins to bob. HALLIE: also begins moving slightly as they listen)

NARRATOR: Fuck her! Fuck her, fuck Bob Hope and Johnny and the Hollywood Squares! Fuck my debt and my rent and my \$1.50 Slim Jims!

(STUART: allows himself a peek downward at HALLIE:'s feet and sees them moving. He looks out the corner of his eye and catches her whispering the words)

NARRATOR: But Lou had us. He's doing that talk-singing thing he does and he has us all the way. Cause it's there. The last line of the last verse, right before the last chorus. After the line "*He's found a book of magic in the garbage can.*" There's another line there I can never remember, but then, after that, where against all odds—Lou begins to sing. Lou Reed—sings.

(the song plays a moment and then both sing in almost full voices)

STUART: and HALLIE: "*And fly fly away. I want to fly. Fly fly away.*"

(both laugh sheepishly)

STUART: Yeah.

HALLIE: Yeah.

NARRATOR: And it was done.

STUART: It's a great song.

HALLIE: Yes. And a great album!

STUART: "*New York.*"

HALLIE: Lou Reed.

(HALLE: and STUART: smile, nod and look at each other a long moment, until STUART: turns away)

NARRATOR: It felt improper looking at her. Unseemly. She was the most beautiful thing I'd ever been that close to.—I didn't have an opening line.

HALLIE: You mind if I ask you a question?

STUART: Not at all.

HALLIE: (*pause*) If you were fighting with your girlfriend, what would you want her to do about it?

NARRATOR: *Great.*

STUART: Well—I don't think I'd like her to call me *drunk* from some bar during a bachelorette party.

HALLIE: No, that wouldn't be good.

STUART: If it was *me*—I'd want her to come over to my apartment, sit down and talk it out with me. Nobody solves anything apart.

NARRATOR: Now I was helping some long-haired actor prick get laid.

HALLIE: Yeah, that's what I would want.—Thank you.

STUART: No problem.

NARRATOR: So much for playing it cool. It was too much for a first answer. It showed all the enthusiasm I was trying to hide. But it didn't matter because with the next— (*to STUART:*) Don't, *don't!*—

STUART: Not to be too obsequious or anything, but your pictures don't do you justice. You're even more beautiful in person.

(*NARRATOR: reacts exaggeratedly to the line*)

HALLIE: Thank you. That's very kind. Actually, I'm afraid I look terrible. I've just flown in from Paris tonight for this party.

STUART: And boy are your arms tired!

NARRATOR: Eh-eh-eh.

HALLIE: Cute.

STUART: Sorry.

NARRATOR: God, I love that joke.

STUART: It's gotta be like three in the morning for you.

HALLIE: Four fifteen.

STUART: You're a good friend.

HALLIE: Lilly, the girl who was sitting here before, I grew up with her. I had to be here for this.

STUART: I grew up with you.

HALLIE: (*pause, sad*) Everybody tells me that.

STUART: It's true when they say it.

HALLIE: I know.—Sometimes I wonder who I grew up with.

STUART: Dean, Sammy and Frank.

HALLIE: I'm not *that* old.

STUART: No I guess not. But I imagine you're a lot older than you actually are.

HALLIE: Mmn, not exactly sure how you mean that.

STUART: Either do I. Forget it.

HALLIE: I'm thirty.

STUART: You're pretty quick with that.

HALLIE: My whole life's been public. You sorta get used to personal questions.

STUART: Like when you lost your virginity?

HALLIE: Yeah....like that.

NARRATOR: She let it hand there. Imagine, Nabakov's ultimate nymphet was two years older than me.

STUART: Do you regret that?

HALLIE: I've made some bad decisions. I was eighteen, what did I know?

STUART: We all make bad decisions when we're eighteen. I think that's what we're supposed to do. I'm glad mine weren't televised.

HALLIE: Consider yourself lucky.

STUART: I'm the norm. You're the exception.

(all the girls come back on stage in a corralled pack. SALLY: breaks off from her group and moves to HALLIE: to extricate her from what she is sure is an unpleasant situation.)

SALLY: Are you all right?

HALLIE: I'm fine.

(the two women talk privately)

NARRATOR: We were just talking! What was I gonna do, *bore* her to death.

SALLY: It's a great place, real fun.

HALLIE: Okay.

SALLY: Just like that place in Ft. Lauderdale. The Castle place, with the thing.

HALLIE: I remember.

NARRATOR: They seemed like close friends. Girls who'd roomed together in boarding school, had had their debutante balls in the same cotillion.

SALLY: I know, I know. Right!

HALLIE: Okay.

SALLY: Okay?!

(HALLIE: nods complaisantly)

NARRATOR: I couldn't quite reconcile the image I had of Hallie, her life, full of premieres and galas, and her friendship with someone like Sally.

SALLY: We're going in a few minutes.

(SALLY, with a wary look at STUART:, walks back to the other girls)

NARRATOR: It didn't seem to fit.

HALLIE: Hogs and Heifers. You know it?

STUART: I suggested it.

HALLIE: You did? Is it nice?

STUART: Nice? No. But it's perfect for a bachelorette party.

HALLIE: Cool.

NARRATOR: Set it up.

STUART: A real rowdy place.

HALLIE: That's what's called for.

STUART: Yeah. But you gotta promise me one thing.

HALLIE: What's that?

NARRATOR: Mmn hmm.

STUART: Well, there's this tradition there.

HALLIE: Uh huh?

STUART: You see, *women*, are aloud to dance on the bar there. If they feel like it.

HALLIE: Yeah....

STUART: And well uh—the women, who dance on the bar....

HALLIE: Go on.

STUART: When they get drunk enough, and are egged on enough, they uh....
theytakeofftheirshirtsandhangthebrasontheWallofFame.

(NARRATOR: raises his hands, "Touchdown!")

HALLIE: The Wall of Fame?

STUART: Mmn hm. They've got this hook there and it's got like four, five *hundred* bras on it.

HALLIE: Nice.

STUART: It's a tradition.

HALLIE: Of course.

STUART: And since you guys've decided to go there, and since *I* recommended the place—you have to promise me that if you dance on the bar, you'll let fly.

HALLIE: It's a deal. Absolutely. If I dance on the bar.

STUART: *If?*

HALLIE: If.

STUART: Understood.

NARRATOR: How fucking cool is that? *Man!* I had balls that night.

HALLIE: But tell me something.

STUART: What's that?

HALLIE: I'll be doing that there—and you'll be here. Don't you wanna see the show?

STUART: I've seen enough shows. It's enough to know I gave the boys a thrill.

HALLIE: Mmmn. How fraternal.

STUART: Yup, that's me. Downright brotherly.

NARRATOR: Brotherly like a Jesuit friar. We plant a seed never expecting to live to see the fruit of our labors. I chalked this machination up to this act of felicity.

(SALLY comes over and they talk momentarily)

HALLIE: Yeah, all right.

(HALLIE: gets off the stool as SALLY: moves towards where the girls have congregated)

HALLIE: Okay, well, we're going now.

STUART: Gear up.

HALLIE: Yeah. I'll have to.

STUART: And don't forget...

HALLIE: No, I promise.

STUART: Good.

HALLIE: *(pause)* It was nice talking to you.

STUART: And to you.

HALLIE: I hope your team wins.

STUART: They won't. But this game doesn't really matter.—Enjoy the night.

HALLIE: We will.—Good night.

STUART: Good night.

(HALLIE: moves towards the door where SALLY waits patiently for her assignment. They talk the briefest of moments then move out)

NARRATOR: And then she walked away. She walked away with my heart with her.—But then just before the door, just inside it, as I'm checking out her departing figure....

(at the apron of the door, HALLIE: turns back to STUART: and smiles seductively adding a subtle wave good-bye. STUART: nods in return as she leaves)

NARRATOR: Oh man.—Small consolation.

(STUART: turns back to the barback, lifelessly. The regulars begin moving slowly towards him at the bar)

NARRATOR: She took all the energy out the door with her, sucked it right out on her wings....The other patrons became the drunks they were. The other girls—the other girls became what they were.—Ordinary.

ADMIRAL: She's really not *that* pretty.

(everyone turns to him as if he's crazy. As STUART: turns away, ADMIRAL motions that he was saying it for STUART:'s benefit)

NARRATOR: The Admiral. Some *jackass* who always showed up in Officer whites though he was only a tug boat captain.

BRUCE: Yeah, she was never that much.

ADMIRAL: Not much at all.

CHET: Fuck no.

NARRATOR: Angry Chet. A retired cop who was always pissed off at something and someone.

BRUCE: But I remember those ads.

(they all nod and murmur appreciatively)

ADMIRAL: She couldn't act for shit.

CHET: Hell no!

BRUCE: Not a lick.

NARRATOR: They were loyal drunks. They'd seen me talking to her.

BRUCE: Phyllis Diller was in here once.

CHET: Oh yeah?!

ADMIRAL: Now there's a pretty woman!

BRUCE: And funny too!

ADMIRAL: Yeah!

NARRATOR: I knew this was for my benefit, but it didn't help.

BRUCE: There aren't any funny beautiful women anymore.

ADMIRAL: Donna Rice was a funny, beautiful woman.

CHET: You mean Donna Reed, idiot.

ADMIRAL: Who's Donna Reed?

BRUCE: She's who you're thinking of.

ADMIRAL: No, Donna Rice.

CHET: Donna Rice was the bimbo with Trump and Gary Hart.

ADMIRAL: Oh.—Who's Donna Reed?

BRUCE: Donna Reed was on the "Donna Reed Show." Dr. Alex Stone, Jeff and Little Mary.

CHET: Penny.

ADMIRAL: Oh yeah, that's right. Now she is funny and beautiful.

BRUCE: She's dead.

CHET: That's even funnier.

ADMIRAL: *(wistful)* And even more beautiful.

(everybody turns slowly to ADMIRAL repulsed)

ADMIRAL: Wha?

BRUCE: You gotta stop talking, man.

ADMIRAL: *What?!*

CHET: Forever!

(they all move away from him. STUART: shakes his head at the game)

NARRATOR: Pittsburgh returned a punt to the Giant 25. Here it comes.

BRUCE: *(as he moves near STUART:)* The beginning of the end.

STUART: Right on schedule.

ADMIRAL: No no, they're all right. Their defense'll stop 'em.

CHET: Are you nuts?

ADMIRAL: You watch. You'll see. I've been watching these guys.

BRUCE: I ain't betting on it.

ADMIRAL: Don't worry. I know it.

NARRATOR: God, do people like him have a way of attracting shit. It's a Darwinian adaptation. The next play.... *(everybody reacts)* Miami deep over the middle. Touch down. 24-23.

STUART: Shit.

A: Didn't see that coming.

BRUCE: *(to ADMIRAL:)* You can kill a buzz without half trying.

ADMIRAL: Wha?

CHET: For-ever!

ADMIRAL: *What?!*

NARRATOR: I appreciated the Giants practicing this in the pre-season. This way I was assured of this kind of crushing defeat midseason when my depression will've reached more suicidal levels.

(everybody moves away from STUART:)

ADMIRAL: You see it was the Coordinator's fault. Who sets them up in that defense this late in the game.

CHET: Yeah-yeah-yeah.

(STUART: looks around the bar growing even more despondent)

NARRATOR: McManus had a post-lost feel. I tried to remind myself it was only a pre-season game. Things don't really matter when they don't really count.

(STUART: stands, collects his money, leaving a five on the bar)

NARRATOR: But it wasn't the game. I was only trying to make believe it was.

STUART: Later Bruce.

BRUCE: *(walking towards STUART:)* Too much fun already?

STUART: Early night.

BRUCE: For you maybe. Hey—she didn't talk to anyone else.

STUART: Nobody else was watching the game.

BRUCE: *(pause)* Safe home Laddy.

STUART: Thanks Bruce.

BRUCE: Another satisfied customer.

NARRATOR: And McManus was done.

(NARRATOR: and STUART: move down stage facing the audience, on opposite ends. Behind them the actors rearrange the bar for the next scene. The sounds of traffic and garbled foreign languages are overheard)

NARRATOR: Outside, the night was hot and sticky. One of those debilitating humid summer evenings where you always feel gross. As I walked down 7th, I experienced all the familiar summer offerings.

(one of the cast breaks off from the set redesign and ambles over towards STUART:)

NARRATOR: The stench of rotting garbage. Blaring car horns followed by curses in foreign languages. A—

PANHANDLER: Hey Mister. Mister.

NARRATOR: For some change.

STUART: Sorry, man.

PANHANDLER: You have a good night.

STUART: You too.

NARRATOR: It struck me as we parted I could've asked him for the same. It all filled me with such dread. I was tired of New York. Tired of the whole struggling scene. It's a lousy place to be poor.

(PANHANDLER, moves towards NARRATOR: in the corner)

PANHANDLER: *(indicating towards the garbage can)* Could you....

NARRATOR: This isn't *Our Town* and I'm not the Stage Manager.

(NARRATOR: moves haughtily from in front of the can and an ACTOR: grabs it in the process of dragging it towards the other corner)

NARRATOR: But then it all—

ACTOR: *(stage whispered, overlapping)* Could've fooled me with all you've ripped off.

NARRATOR: What's that?

ACTOR: Excuse me?

NARRATOR: Did you say something?

ACTOR: I didn't say anything.

NARRATOR: Are you sure?

ACTOR: I don't have a speaking part here.

NARRATOR: Good, let's keep it that way.

(ACTOR: pulls the garbage can as NARRATOR: watches him)

STUART: Shit!

NARRATOR: But then it all came back to me. The talk, the song. That smile.

(STUART: and NARRATOR: past each other, exchanging ends of the stage as they talk)

STUART: Why'd she do it?

NARRATOR: I don't know. You think she meant anything by it?

STUART: *No!* She's an actress! She's Hollywood!

NARRATOR: Yes she is.

STUART: That smile's a business card!

NARRATOR: It's like a résumé for human beings.

STUART: You're *goddamn* right it is! Some affect they draw out whenever they need something from someone.

(STUART: moves to the far end of the stage and stops by the NYC garbage can now there. NARRATOR: watches him a moment)

NARRATOR: *(to the Audience)* My street corner.

STUART: I should turn in.

NARRATOR: Yes.

STUART: I don't have any money.

NARRATOR: No you don't.

STUART: I left a five for Bruce on the bar.

NARRATOR: I saw. Good man.

STUART: *(pause)* It was all in my head?

NARRATOR: That smile?

STUART: Yeah.

NARRATOR: Probably.

STUART: Goddamn.

NARRATOR: *(to the Audience)* But it was bullshit. I knew I was going. Even before I got to my corner. Even before that smile. Once I knew where they were going, I knew I was going.

(they move to exchange places again)

NARRATOR: All the way west on 13th street I reproached myself.

STUART: Look what I've come to? Some pitiful fucking voyeur who'd walk a mile to see a pair of famous breasts.

NARRATOR: The word that kept coming back to me was—

STUART: Pathetic! Can't get a job! Can't get a girl!

NARRATOR: Some pathetic drunk staggering off to a free peep show.

STUART: *Jesus!*

(STUART: and NARRATOR: come to a stop and stare out, contemplating)

NARRATOR: Moment of truth.

(STUART: acknowledges the point with a nod)

STUART: God hates a coward.

NARRATOR: And loves a hopeful fool.

(STUART: looks nastily at NARRATOR: who smiles ingratiatingly. With a nod and a deep breath, both turn around, entering Hogs and Heifers as we can tell by the cowboy and country music paraphernalia now on the walls. Some Southern Rock music blares the moment they turn, perhaps "Sweet Home Alabama" followed by howls from the crowd. The other actors kick into high gear, moving about the set. NARRATOR: moves to the side as STUART: makes a quick scan of the bar and moves to get a beer)

NARRATOR: It was already wild in Hogs when I walked in. The music was loud and it was getting packed. That's a lot in place as big as that. I know it doesn't seem that way, but you have to use your imagination. You cannot imagine what Equity would've cost us if we had like ten or twenty other people up here. Kraft service tables, transportation to and from for the actors. *Showers!* It's a crime. You there, you in the second row. You're not imagining. You're not playing along. You know we'd have to charge a whole lot more than ten bucks for this show to achieve that effect.

DIRECTOR: *(offstage)* Ah, excuse me. The price is already 15 dollars.

NARRATOR: For this? Really?...Please. Just pretend it's real crowded, okay?

(he points at the person in the second row. By this time, STUART: has gotten his beer and moved as far left as he can go. He is drinking hard and fast)

SALLY: And it was *so* icky.

HALLIE: Yes I'm sure.

SALLY: Oh my god.

NARRATOR: They were there all right. In the right corner near the pool table. From where I was, I could barely see them over the crowd. (*he looks disparagingly at the person in the second row*) And there was no way they could see me.

STUART: Good! This is pathetic!

NARRATOR: It is.

STUART: What'm I doing here?!

NARRATOR: Looking foolish.

STUART: I'll just finish my beer and go.

(*STUART: chugs again finishing the beer*)

NARRATOR: I remember looking up through the bottle as I chugged the last bit into my mouth. I was watching the meniscus drop. I saw the beer in the bottle, then I saw through the bottle to the longhorns on the wall.—Then I saw through me.

STUART: Okay, fine! I'll go over there. If she talks to me, super, then I'll talk to her.

NARRATOR: (*to Audience*) Less gutless than you thought.

STUART: Then I'll know if it was my imagination or not.

NARRATOR: What if you don't catch her eye?

STUART: Then that's it. This's *pathetic* enough!

(*STUART: moves to where HALLE: is talking to SALLY:*)

NARRATOR: I placed myself at her ten o'clock. Always a good time for me. It catches my unshaven face and unwashed hair so exquisitely.

STUART: (*to the bartendress*) Can I get a beer here?!

(HALLE: turns slightly on his calling out, but still doesn't see him. He shrugs to NARRATOR:, who motions to forge ahead. STUART: acts conspicuously, brushing his hands through his hair, stretching ostentatiously, but still doesn't get her attention)

STUART: Can you believe this?

NARRATOR: She's in the habit of being seen. Not the other way around.

STUART: I'll just say a little something.

NARRATOR: You just said you weren't gonna—

STUART: You want the play to end like this?!

(NARRATOR: shakes his head. STUART: pauses a moment to gain the courage, then leans in to speak to HALLIE:)

STUART: Did I miss the show?

(HALLE: turns slowly, focuses on his face for a dazed moment)

HALLIE: Hey! You came!

STUART: I did.

HALLIE: Wow, all the way.

STUART: I live in the neighborhood.

NARRATOR: *Relatively.*

HALLIE: I didn't think you would come.

STUART: And miss the show, not a chance.

HALLIE: Yeah, I saw the rack! Very impressive.

STUART: Only two of them are mine.

HALLIE: The D cups, I'm sure.

(STUART: replies by sticking out his breasts, doing a Price is Right swipe with his hand)

HALLIE: About as much as I got.

STUART: I'm all about the bustier.

HALLIE: Yeah.

STUART: Listen, I ordered a beer. You want one?

HALLIE: I don't drink beer—watching my weight. But if you wanna do a shot of Tequila....?

STUART: Uhhh, I'm not much of a Tequila guy.

NARRATOR: Coward.

HALLIE: Pussy.

NARRATOR: Better than mine.

STUART: *(somewhat towards NARRATOR:)* But I'll do vodka, if that's all right.

HALLIE: Make it two.

(THE BARTENDRESS comes back with STUART:'s beer and he turns all the way around to talk to the BARTENDRESS privately)

NARRATOR: The Cowgirl bartendress was pissed I hadn't ordered all my drinks at once. They built their reputations there on being bitchy.

BARTENDRESS Asshole.

NARRATOR: And when she realized I wasn't taking the beer, I nearly got my ass kicked. But there was nothing I could do, I couldn't afford both.

(The BARTENDRESS goes off to make the shots. STUART: turns to HALLIE: who has turned and is talking to SALLY: again)

NARRATOR: *(indicating towards SALLY:)* See what I mean about Sally.

SALLY: *(to NARRATOR:)* Fuck off.

(HALLIE: turns to STUART:)

HALLIE: Sorry.

STUART: That's all right. I'm Stuart.

HALLIE: Hi.

STUART: And you are?

(they shake hands as HALLIE: smiles politely)

NARRATOR: I think that's funny. You see, she's this icon—

ENTIRE CAST: They get the joke!

NARRATOR: All right! Chill! *Geez.*

STUART: I thought you were going home to talk to the boyfriend you're fighting with.

HALLIE: Oh he's in Seattle.

STUART: Your boyfriend lives in Seattle? What is he, a rock star?

NARRATOR: It *is* 1994.

HALLIE: No. *Oh*, that wasn't for me.

STUART: It wasn't?

HALLIE: No, it was for one of the other girls.

STUART: I thought I was advising you.

HALLIE: Would that change the answer?

STUART: Nope, I still think it's the right thing to do. It's just a little tough to do when he's three thousand miles away.

HALLIE: Yeah, but I liked your answer. I told her so. That's what I would want a guy to do, if it was me.

STUART: And here I thought I had a new job as a *love adviser* to the stars.

HALLIE: There's certainly a big enough need there.

(THE BARTENDRESS returns with the shots. STUART:, again, turns completely around to pay, shielding HALLE: from seeing his empty wallet)

NARRATOR: The shots were four each. I gave her a dollar. That left me with exactly a buck in my wallet.

BARTENDRESS : *(waving the single, moving away)* Big tipper here!

ALL: Woah!

BARTENDRESS : Stay away from this one ladies.

STUART: Here we are.

HALLE: All right.

STUART: You ready.

(with a confident nod, they take the shots happily and make the attendant sounds of pain)

NARRATOR: Damn, it burned. I was trying not to show it, trying to be a “man.” Trying to be so cool, here drinking these shots with her as if it was natural, as if it was automatic.

STUART: You asked for it.

HALLIE: I asked for Tequila!

STUART: Like that’ve been better.

HALLIE: No, but I’m more used to it.

STUART: *Great.*

NARRATOR: But it struck me as if it wasn’t real. Not in the sense that it wasn’t happening or I was imagining it—but more how she was acting.

HALLIE: Drink the drink you drink.

STUART: Always good advice.

NARRATOR: It was if she didn’t know how to be real, but was imitating something in a movie she’d been in. She had all these lines and roles—but nothing genuine except sadness behind them.

STUART: I saw you on Conan a couple of weeks ago. Tough time there.

HALLIE: It was just that we were on different wavelengths that night.

STUART: You didn't seem to like him.

HALLIE: It's not that, it's not.—They expect you to act a certain way.—Sometimes you don't feel like playing their games for them.

STUART: Maybe you shouldn't've gone on then.

HALLIE: You can't really choose about those things.—Especially on the *down* cycle. Mr. Hope has a philosophy about it. He's a friend of mine. (*STUART: nods but NARRATOR: makes a face*) He always says "Suck it up and give the bastards what they want." I don't know, sometimes I can't do that.

STUART: Must be tough.

HALLIE: Sorry, I shouldn't complain.

STUART: It's okay.

HALLIE: I was talking to Woody Allen the other day. I'm sorry. He and I are close.

STUART: You don't have to apologize for who your friends are.

HALLIE: (*pause*) What?

STUART: I don't know—you seem to apologize every time you mention someone famous as if you've done something wrong. I don't think you're name dropping. I just assume that's your life. You're telling me about the people in it. Like Benn and Paul are in mine.

(*HALLIE: looks STUART: surprised, pleased*)

STUART: Tell you what. If it'll make it easier for you, I'll call you Dana. Dana from West Orange. You're an insurance rep with Prudential, specializing in autos. Okay?

HALLIE: I can do that.

STUART: I knows you can.

HALLIE: Dana. West Orange. Prudential. Got it.

STUART: Autos.

HALLIE: No sweat.

(they look confidentially at each other until ROBBIE: walks up to them. He is short, prematurely bald and wearing shorts and sneakers. Enough said)

NARRATOR: I was pissed off later I never found out what Woody said. He's a god—a demi-god of mine.

ROBBIE: You're Hallie Stills!

HALLIE: No, I'm Dana. From West Orange. You look like you could use some coverage on your car.

(ROBBIE: looks mystified at STUART: and HALLIE: as NARRATOR: laughs out loud)

NARRATOR: Problem! Not about whether he was right or not, there was no doubt about that. But why? He came back with the only response he had.

ROBBIE: Can I buy you a beer?

(HALLIE: shrugs her shoulders at STUART:)

HALLIE: I'm not drinking beer, thank you.

ROBERT: You're not drinking beer?

HALLIE: No. But my friend Stuart is and I'd really appreciate it if you'd buy him one.

ROBBIE: Okay!

NARRATOR: He'd've bought me a car if she asked!

ROBBIE: What kind?

STUART: It doesn't matter.

ROBBIE: Great!

(ROBBIE: moves away happily to get the drinks. A couple of out-of-towners pause to discuss whether to approach. After building their courage, they move towards HALLE:)

NARRATOR: Next came an out-of-town couple from somewhere in the South. Oklabraska or something, I don't remember. In the script I call these character's "Cracker and Cracker's Date." Their fantasies about New York were confirmed by this star sighting. All they needed next was to be mugged at gun point for their vacation to be complete.

CRACKER'S DATE: Hi.

HALLIE: Hi.

CRACKER: Can we take a picture with you?

(HALLIE: smiles reflexively, thinks momentarily and then putting an arm around STUART:'s shoulders)

HALLIE: Only if you take a picture of Stuart and I.

(the two make a befuddled look at each other)

NARRATOR: *(laughing)* Who the fuck is he?

CRACKER: *(to his date)* Okay?

CRACKER'S DATE: Okay?

BOTH *Okay!*

ROBBIE: Here.

(ROBBIE: returns with the beer and hands it up to HALLIE:)

HALLIE: Thank you. What's your name?

ROBBIE: Robbie.

HALLIE: Thank you, Robbie.

ROBBIE: You're welcome.

HALLIE: *(passing it to STUART:)* Lift it up for the picture.

(they smile for the picture. The flash bulb blinds them. After the flash, many people crowd around the group. HALLIE: handles the crowd nonchalantly, with a calm that only comes from years of practice. More bulbs flash and more beers are passed)

NARRATOR: Well-wishers and hand shakers, autograph seekers and tourist photographers. They came to be near her. To touch her, be in her penumbra.

WOMAN 1: I saw you on "The Lights for Lithuania" special. You were *so* wonderful.

HALLIE: Thank you. That's very kind.

MAN 1: And you dumped that poofer singer. Good choice.

HALLIE: He's very sweet actually.

WOMAN 1: Yeah but his hair.

MAN 2: I know!

NARRATOR: The whole city was for her taking. Whatever she needed, whatever she wanted to do. And by proxy, me. Everything was Stuart and I.

MAN 1: Do you want to play some pool?

WOMAN 2: Or go to this really exclusive bar, Freeze? I can get us in.

MAN 1: Me too.

WOMAN 2: I blew the guy at the door.

MAN 1: Me too!

NARRATOR: More shots came. We started giving the beers to the other people standing around us because we couldn't hold them all. Our hands needed to be free to accept new ones.

WOMAN 1: *(to MAN 1)* He must be someone. He's with *her*.

MAN 1: *(to WOMAN 1)* But I don't recognize him.

WOMAN 1: So how do you know her?

STUART: Uh....

HALLIE: Stuart and I are old friends. *(swooning)* My first love.

(they look at STUART: again, even more confused)

WOMAN 2: This was your first love?

NARRATOR: Was it *that* inexplicable?!

STUART: We had the same tutor when we were children. It was usually just the two of us in class together.

(STUART: getting cocky, nudges HALLIE: playfully with his shoulder)

STUART: Footsie under the table. A little “hide the comb.”

NARRATOR: Does anybody know what that means?

(gradually their faces change as they look at STUART:)

HALLIE: Yes, don't you remember Stuart? He was a big childhood star in commercials. You remember those old Ovaltine ads with the little kid. That was Stuart! Oh, he was great. Incredible. A real pro.

STUART: It's a gift.

HALLIE: Way better than that Oscar Meyer Bologna kid.

STUART: That *hack!* wasn't fit to carry my shoes.

HALLIE: I loved the way you delivered that line. So poetic. Such feeling.

STUART: Well, thank you. Julliard. Then the Actor's Studio.

HALLIE: How'd it go?

STUART: I uh—wha?

HALLIE: Your catch phrase, from the commercial. That line, how'd it go?

STUART: Uh well—it's been so long, I don't really think anybody wants—

HALLIE: Oh no, sure they do.

(everyone turns to STUART: as he pauses uncomfortably)

NARRATOR: Think boy, think.

STUART: *(to HALLIE:)* Enjoying yourself.

HALLIE: Mmm hmm.

STUART: I'm glad.

NARRATOR: What vodka shots, there were no vodka shots. You can do this.

STUART: *(pause)* I love Ovaltine Mom!

HALLIE: Oh yes! *Yes*, that's it! I love Ovaltine Mom! God! That was genius. You delivered that—*perfectly*.

ROBBIE: That was you! I remember you!

NARRATOR: I knew I was glad he was hanging around.

WOMAN 1: Oh, cool.

MAN 1: Yeah, cool.

WOMAN 2: I *don't* remember that commercial.

ROBBIE: Oh sure you do. It ran all the time when we were kids. I remember you, I do.

NARRATOR: *(to the actors)* Is he in on the joke?

STUART: Especially if you watched Wonderama. I made a *killing* off Wonderama.

(the crowd nod happily in agreement)

HALLIE: Swift on your feet.

STUART: Hardly.

(HALLE: smiles with pride. A crowd engulfs HALLIE: As she shakes hands, STUART: gets bumped out of the way)

NARRATOR: They came en masse. Without respect for her privacy, without concern for her or me or even each other. They came for reasons they'd be embarrassed by in the morning.

MAN1: Would you sign me? No, really, sign me.

HALLIE: I don't have a pen.

WOMAN1: What's Cher really like?

HALLIE: I don't know her.

WOMAN 1: You don't?

MAN 2: What'd'ya make off those ads. Twenty-five? Fifty?

HALLIE: I, really uh....

WOMAN 2: Could you move please?!

NARRATOR: She had a public image to uphold. It seemed as if she'd decided to keep her image alive, one person at a time.

MAN 1: I've got a pen now!

HALLIE: Oh okay.

MAN 2: You probably got a lot more for the second ad? Right? Right?!

MAN 1: Can you sign my ass?

(HALLE: reaches her arm above the crowd for STUART:, who grabs her hand and pulls her close to him. They pull away to themselves and crowds lodge complaints)

NARRATOR: But after a while, as if sensing our distance, she'd move to me. I became her excuse, her attachment. A stop sign to comers-on.

HALLIE: *(to the crowd)* I'm sorry. I came here to be with Stuart.

STUART: You put up with this all the time?

HALLIE: You get used to it.

STUART: I don't think I would.

HALLIE: Most of them are really very sweet. They just want a picture or an autograph.—Some get out of hand.

STUART: These are the same people who'll bash you as soon as you turn away.

HALLIE: No. They're what it's about. Reaching them, being in touch.—You forget that on top.

STUART: Why is that?

HALLIE: *(pause)* Because it's all available. It's all there waiting for you and you don't know how to say "no," and they don't know how to say "no" to you.—Maybe you did once. Maybe you never knew. Soon enough you forget why you even should....No one deserves that, no one deserves that much.

STUART: No they don't.

HALLIE: *(pause)* The executives, the agencies, they're fast to push you up, but they'll let you fall even faster. If you don't have the people to support you, it can be real tough landing.

STUART: That's a hard bargain.

HALLIE: It can be.

STUART: I don't like people that much.

HALLIE: You like me.

STUART: Says who?

(she smiles at him and hits him playfully. Angry Chet enters upstage)

HALLIE: Oh look, there's that other guy from the last bar.

NARRATOR: Chet. I was never gonna live this down at McManus.

STUART: He must've overheard where you girls were going and followed you here.

HALLIE: That happens more than you would think.

STUART: Not really.

HALLIE: Why's that?

STUART: Another pathetic voyeur.

HALLIE: How do you mean?

STUART: He came here to see if there'd be a show!

HALLIE: Really?

STUART: Don't be so shocked, I'm no better.

HALLIE: No? *(STUART: shrugs)* Yes you are. I wanted you to come.

STUART: Aw shucks.

(she passes her arm through STUART: who looks over superciliously to NARRATOR:)

NARRATOR: I told you all long!

WASP MALE: Hey look!

WASP FEMALE: Wow, here.

WASP MALE: I know.

(another rush comes, a party of well-dressed gentlemen and their dates all wearing the same dress. They huddle around HALLE: and STUART: eventually gets bumped aside)

NARRATOR: Obviously after a Saturday night wedding. No mistaking the unwearable-again bridesmaid dresses. They smelled of Ivy League WASP. In my mind, they had all the jobs I wanted: Investment bankers, research analysts, CFOs. I looked to cut it short.

WASP MALE: I know Daniel Baldwin. He's a good friend of mine.

HALLIE: Really.

WASP FEMALE: He's the ugly Baldwin.

WASP MALE: *Honey.*

WASP FEMALE: Well he is!

STUART: Hallie dear, be a love and get me a beer?

HALLIE: Sure.

STUART: You need some cash?

HALLIE: I think I'll be all right.

(HALLIE: goes to the bar. The collective mouths drop as they look STUART: over)

NARRATOR: Time for a little abuse of power, eh-eh-eh.

WASP MALE 2: Are you her cousin?

STUART: Ah, no.

WASP FEMALE 2: A friend?

STUART: Mmn, well—you could say that.

NARRATOR: I'm a quick learner.

WASP MALE 2: She seems so normal and nice.

STUART: She is.

WASP FEMALE 2: Yeah, but who would've expected it with the life she's led.

WASP FEMALE 1: Can you imagine?

WASP FEMALE 2: When that guy dumped her?!

WASP FEMALE 1: It was all over the tabloids.

WASP FEMALE 2: I saw that tearful picture of her. Oh my god!

WASP FEMALE 1: I did too!

(they start to laugh)

NARRATOR: Fucking people.

WASP FEMALE 2: With the fan.

WASP FEMALE 1: In that awful caftan.

WASP FEMALE 1: Hiding her face.

WASP FEMALE 2: Oh my god!

WASP FEMALE 1: I know!

WASP FEMALE 2: And her shoulders heaving.

WASP FEMALE 1: The bobbing.

(they laugh uncontrollably)

STUART: You find other people's pain funny?

WASP FEMALE 2: I'm sorry?

WASP FEMALE 1: Wha?

STUART: You get a kick out of it?

WASP FEMALE 2: People like her, yes.

STUART: She's just like you and me. You people have to realize that. She has feelings and hopes and dreams. And pain.—They're no different.

NARRATOR: I couldn't believe the crap I was saying. I didn't know her well enough to know whether this was true or not. I didn't have a clue....Then a mischievous *wind* came over me.

(STUART: leans over to WASP FEMALE 2)

STUART: Let me tell you, the farts from this girl. Oh. My. God. Woah! Talk about fire in the hole. Like a Mexican race horse on bean feed. Flame on! Blow you right outcha room.

WOMAN 2: *(looking at him in horror)* Huh?

HALLIE: Stuart, can you get this?

(HALLIE: returns straining over the group to hand STUART: his beer. As STUART: grabs the bottle, HALLIE: doesn't release and STUART: pulls her through. HALLIE: comes to a standstill staring directly into the eyes of WASP FEMALE 2)

HALLIE: Hello.

WASP FEMALE 2: Uh—yeah.

(the girl frowns with obvious fear and hurries away and the others follow)

HALLIE: What was that about?

STUART: I told her you farted like a race horse.

HALLE: You wha?

STUART: She was saying—I was playing around.

HALLIE: And you told her that I... *(STUART: nods)* You're doing wonders for my career.

STUART: It's the least I can do.

(HALLE: looks towards the departing group as STUART: watches her tentatively)

NARRATOR: I wasn't sure if she was upset. I don't think she really knew herself.

(HALLIE: thinks, then eventually, she relents, her body language easing)

HALLIE: Remind me to invite her the next time I go to the bathroom.

STUART: Yes, you should do that.

HALLIE: Ask her to join me, that'd really scare the shit out of her.

STUART: Can you work one up?

HALLIE: Let me see.

(squishing her face costively)

STUART: Well?

HALLIE: Nah, nothing doing. I'll try later.

STUART: You're crazy.

HALLIE: Comes with the territory.

STUART: I bet.

HALLIE: You'd make a helluva star.

STUART: *Thanks.* They'd have to get me kicking and screaming.

HALLIE: Don't be so sure.

(STUART: studies her)

STUART: Would you give this up if you could?

HALLIE: What do you mean?

STUART: If you could just walk away.

HALLIE: I can't.

STUART: I know but—what if you met some special soul with mysterious *magical* powers and he said, “Do this for me. Give it up, agree to give all of this up, the crowds, the cameras, the money. Larry King, reservations at Lutece.—Give it all up and I’ll love you. I’ll love you without fame, without recognition, as no man has ever loved a woman before.”

HALLIE: (*pause, grave*) It can't be like that.

STUART: Yeah I *know*. I know, I’m aware of that.—But what if?

HALLIE: (*pause*) I don’t spend time thinking about things like that. I can’t go back and remake that choice.

STUART: I’m not asking you to go back—

HALLIE: It’s the only way to see that.

STUART: You’re being evasive.

HALLIE: I’m being realistic.—That choice’s been made and I live with it. What difference does it make what I would do in the “there” and “what if.”—It only matters what I do now.

STUART: Too easy.

HALLIE: What choices I make now.

STUART: Too easy.

HALLIE: Don’t be so sure. You’re here because of who I am.

STUART: Yes I’m here *now*, right now this moment, because of who you *are*—not who I thought you were.

HALLIE: Now?

STUART: Yes now.

HALLIE: Not originally?

STUART: No. Not originally.

HALLIE: Is there that big a difference?

STUART: To me, perhaps. Yes.

HALLIE: Better or worse.

STUART: Oh much.—Much much worse.

(she hits him playfully and they smile at each other)

HALLIE: You.

STUART: Me.

NARRATOR: Glad we finally got that cleared up

HALLIE: Some special soul with mysterious *magical* powers.

STUART: Magical powers that only exist in the theatre.

LEADER OF THE PACK: Holy shit.

LEADER'S GAL: Fuck man. Fuck.

LEADER OF THE PACK: Holy shit!

(a biker crowd moves to them. Three of them in all; two men and a woman. Leather, long hair, multi tattoos, multi piercing)

NARRATOR: Yeah well, it is a biker bar. Vroom, vroom, Leader of the Pack.

(LEADER OF THE PACK turns to him threateningly which he acknowledges)

NARRATOR: *(to the Leader)* Sorry. *(to the Audience)* To be honest, I was only really afraid of the woman.

LEADER OF THE PACK: Hey. What's goin' on?

HALLIE: *(hopeful)* Not much. How about you?

LEADER OF THE PACK: Not much.

HALLIE: Great.

LEADER OF THE PACK: *Yeah!....* Yeah, okay. Listen—we're about to go outside 'n do some blow. Ya wanna come? It's on us. Great shit. I mean great.

HALLIE: No, thanks.—But thank you though.

LEADER OF THE PACK: You sure? *(HALLIE: nods)* Yeah, okay, I just figured you know. But if ya change ya mind, ya lemme know.

HALLIE: All right, I'll do that. Thank you anyway for asking.

LEADER OF THE PACK: Sure, no problem.

NARRATOR: Speaking of different worlds. Are cigarette ads a common denominator, a passport to communication between all?

LEADER'S GAL: *(to STUART:)* She's real nice, you know. Normal.

NARRATOR: There's an expert commentary for you.

STUART: Yes she is.

LEADER'S GAL: Approachable. Like a friend. You know what I mean?

STUART: I think I do.

LEADER'S GAL: Just like a real person.

STUART: Yes. Just like.

NARRATOR: Just like you *Milady*.

LEADER'S GAL: *(to NARRATOR:)* Watch it pal. Don't think I don't remember the Sally comments when I'm in this character and won't kick your *ass* for 'em.

NARRATOR: Yes ma'am. Sorry.

LEADER OF THE PACK: Okay, see ya.

HALLIE: Yes, you too.

LEADER OF THE PACK: And let me know if ya change your mind.

HALLIE: I certainly will. Thank you.

(as they move away, HALLIE:'s smile fades quickly and her whole expression changes. She looks to see if STUART: has overheard. When it is apparent he has, she looks away sadly embarrassed)

HALLIE: You want some. They'll give it to you if I ask.

STUART: No—Not my thing.

HALLIE: Mine either.

(HALLIE: remains standing there embarrassed, humiliated as STUART: studies her)

NARRATOR: It's a gift I guess. It's a kindness such as it is. It costs....

(HALLIE: breaks off lachrymose)

STUART: It's not you, you know. It's Hollywood. We don't know any better.

HALLIE: We're not all like that!

STUART: *(pause)* It's what we see in movies. It's what we hear on Entertainment Tonight.—We're led to believe this is what your lives are like.

HALLIE: Yes, so *fucking* glamorous.

STUART: *(pause)* It's just the news. That doesn't necessarily make something true though not too many people realize.

HALLIE: Tiring. So very tiring.

STUART: *(pause)* Hey—are we gonna to let a couple of biker dudes and their *vixen* ruin our night?

(HALLIE: thinks a moment, then bucks up, stares deeply into STUART:'s eyes, shakes her head)

STUART: Of course not. They're probably too embarrassed to be seen with us anyway. Look, you spilled something on your shirt.

HALLIE: Where?

(STUART: points to her shirt and as HALLIE: looks down to where he points, he lifts his finger into her nose)

HALLIE: *Oh!*

(she laughs at first in a burst, then it grows)

NARRATOR: It was a great laugh, full and deep. It was the most real thing she did all night. Real as real can be. We had gotten there. A circuitous route—but we had gotten there.

STUART: I got you good!

(HALLIE: takes a deep breath, collects herself, then stares tenderly into STUART: eyes)

STUART: Yeah, I got you good.

NARRATOR: God, at some point, this was gonna hurt. I hoped the fall wouldn't be too hard.

(a group of Jersey boys came calling, fraternity style with shouts of Hallie. They converge on HALLE:)

BOY 1: Hey!

BOY 2: Hey hey!

BOY 3: Hey!

BOY 1: Hey!

(STUART: drifts out of their way. They keep coming at her one after the other, stumbling on top of themselves, pushing and pulling to get closer, then circling back again when pushed aside. She takes the pounding, catching it full, backing only slightly from its weight, but never giving way. STUART: moves back and behind her, clearly out of her sight lines. ROBBIE: comes up to stand beside STUART: as he watches the scene)

BOY 1: Hey!

BOY 2: Hey hey!

BOY 3: Hey!

BOY 1: Hey!

NARRATOR: There were too many for me. I wasn't prepared for this kind of assault, this devouring force. *She* was the star. She *had* made her choice long ago. I was a celestial shadow. The light of a distant star momentarily illuminating some itinerant space dust as it passes by.

(STUART: watches passively as even ROBBIE shakes his head)

BOY 1: You're that chick!

BOY 2: That chick from the thing!

BOY 3: Yeah!

BOY 1: Fucking cool!

BOY 2: So fucking cool!

BOY 3: Yeah!

NARRATOR: She had trained for this. She was battle-tested. I was non-com.

ROBBIE: You known her a long time?

STUART: I just met her tonight.

ROBBIE: Are you serious?!

(STUART: remains motionless as ROBBIE: turns back to the scene)

ROBBIE: Fuck *me*!

BOY 1: I *loved* you in "Cakewalk" man! Especially the nudity!

BOY 2: Yeah! The nudity was cool!

BOY 3: Yeah, and the wrestling!

BOY 2: Yeah! The wrestling nudity was cool!

(one boy puts his arm around her for a picture. HALLIE: smiles graciously if glacially, then the next boy does the same)

ROBBIE: Why you?

STUART: I have no idea.

HALLIE: That wasn't me.

BOY 1: And the Jello!

BOY 2: The Jello!

BOY 3: Yeah!

ROBBIE: She's great, isn't she? Like a real person.

STUART: No—she's not.

*(ROBBIE: looks at STUART:, disturbed at what he perceives as ungratefulness.
STUART: never acknowledges his glance as he keeps watching HALLIE:)*

NARRATOR: He didn't understand, but he didn't say anything. He didn't have the guts....What is it like to have her life? The unspoken pact they make with us. We take from our stars. We use what we want and when we're finished, we throw away what remains, if anything does. They serve a purpose in our lives. They bring us entertainment, excitement, distraction from our day-to-day existence. They are conjurations, fantasies. For that, we pay them handsomely. Some with our love and our admiration. But most with only our money and our attention and then our mannered indifference at their passing, be it a failing career or something other. That's the deal, the economics of stardom: Take your shot, it's winner take all.

STUART: Look at her standing there—entertaining the populace.

HALLIE: Well I'm glad you liked it. It's not one of my personal favorites though.

BOY 1: It's my personal favorite!

BOY 2: It's up there with Porky's!

NARRATOR: Then she did the most astonishing thing....

(unhurriedly, HALLE: raises up high on the tips of her toes and scans the bar in front of her. She turns from far left, all the way right, a full 180 degrees. The crowd continues to talk, flash and scream in front of her)

NARRATOR: As soon as she went up, I knew what she was doing. But I didn't believe it.—No one ever would.

BOY 3: Fuck Porky's, it's better than that kidding boning a pie.

BOY 1: It's better than the Kama Sutra!

(again, HALLIE: turns right to left, searching)

STUART: Hallie Stills is searching the bar for me.

ROBBIE: *(pause)* Fuck me.

NARRATOR: I cannot tell you what it was like....

(pause)

STUART: Do me a favor? Go over there and tell her Stuart is directly behind her.—Tell her to give me a sign if she needs help.

(ROBBIE: goes. Slowly, HALLIE: leans down to hear him, gradually recognizing what he is saying. She nods, turns deliberately around and gives STUART: the finger.

NARRATOR: HA!

(both NARRATOR: and STUART: hoist their beers in salute. HALLIE: whispers something to ROBBIE, then turns back to the boys. ROBBIE: returns to STUART:)

BOY 2: Skinamax plays it all the time.

BOY 3: And Blowtime too. It's fucking awesome.

BOY 1: It *is* fucking awesome!

ROBBIE: She said she'll be over in a minute. Then she said "Tell him he's an asshole."

STUART: Ha!

BOY 1: Whatever happened to you?

BOY 2: You were the best.

BOY 3: You need to make a comeback.

(they go back to watching and shortly HALLIE: goes to the bar, is handed a beer)

NARRATOR: She didn't need to prove anything to me. I knew she didn't need any help. I knew even before I asked. Her job wasn't done yet. There was a little more the crowd wanted of her. There was a little more she needed to give.—And in a few minutes....

(HALLIE: moves to STUART:, handing him the beer)

HALLIE: *Thanks* for the help.

STUART: You're welcome.

(HALLIE: stares at him intensely as he drinks)

HALLIE: Thank you.

(STUART: smiles and nods in understanding. SALLY: comes, whispers in HALLIE:'s ear and nods towards the door. HALLIE:'s eyes moved there as they talk privately)

NARRATOR: I thought they had forgotten her. Maybe they were used to this routine, the crowds, the photos, how it went down and had somehow learned to turn it off. Maybe their night was too important to let anything interfere with it and knowing this, she moved away to make sure *she* wouldn't.—But now they were moving out. It was time to reclaim her as theirs. She was only on loan to me.

HALLIE: *(to SALLY:)* Give me a minute.

NARRATOR: Of course, it was Sally. This time I held no ill will.

(SALLY: throws STUART: a severe look at him to express how ridiculous any romantic thoughts would be, then moves to the door as HALLE: turns back to STUART:)

HALLIE: So okay. I gotta go.

STUART: God I had a great time.

HALLIE: Me too.

STUART: It's a night I'll always remember.

(HALLIE: nods, confused, not quite knowing what to do with this remark. They stand awkwardly together looking into each other's eyes)

NARRATOR: Now I'm no coward about this. I've asked out hundreds of girls. I've asked for phone numbers or business cards, or even just their last names and a street address. I've done it with boyfriends at the bar buying another round, I've done it with

parents waiting at the table for the credit card receipt. Each time, there's an awkward pause. For me, it's a signpost. I look for it. When the pause comes, I know it's time to act.—But she was Hallie Stills....

HALLIE: No, really, I've got to go.

NARRATOR: I could never've conceived of it.

STUART: Yeah, I know. It's alright.

NARRATOR: There were three of them in a row. The first came as it dawned on me. The second brought the realization of it all. And the third, well, the third contained just plain fear.

STUART: Ohhh?!.....OH!.....oh.

(STUART: stares at his feet for security and starts cautiously)

STUART: Listen, I uh—I don't know if you've got a boyfriend or something, but uh—if want to get together sometime, get a drink or something—I'd like that.

HALLIE: Well—I *am* kind of seeing someone right now. But it's not going well. Actually, he's an asshole.

STUART: Oh yeah.

NARRATOR: I will *always* regret saying this next line.

STUART: I think I read about that in *People*.

ENTIRE CAST: YOU SHOULD!

NARRATOR: I DO! I do.

HALLIE: But sure, I'd love to. Let me give you my number.

(STUART:, stunned, does a dazed numchuck search through his pockets, looking for anything resembling a writing instrument)

NARRATOR: I knew I didn't have one. I just wanted to look like I knew what I was doing. I needed a moment to get my heart out of my stomach.

STUART: Let me check the bar.

HALLIE: I'll come with you.

(STUART: heads to the bar with HALLE: following behind, motioning "one minute" to SALLY: and others wait anxiously at the door in disbelief)

SALLY: *Hallie....?*

NARRATOR: By now, it was after two. The bar was just beginning to hit its stride.

SALLY: Hallie!

HALLIE: One minute!

NARRATOR: It was the first glimpse of star attitude I'd seen her display. It moved me faster.

(BARTENDRESS is working feverishly to man the crowd at the bar hungry for drinks)

STUART: Can I borrow a pen?

(BARTENDRESS throws a pen to STUART:, who catches it and hands it to HALLE:)

HALLIE: Here, I'll write it on this.

(HALLIE: rips a page from a magazine sitting on the bar and starts to write, but the pen doesn't work. She scribbles harder, eventually racing across the page in broad strokes)

NARRATOR: No. *(HALLIE: scribbles furiously)* No no no.

HALLIE: It's not writing!

STUART: I KNOW!

(STUART: rips the pen from her hands, scribbles madly himself)

NARRATOR: No. No no. Fate is *not* gonna kick me like this!

SALLY: Hallie! Hallie were leaving!

HALLIE: One second! *(to STUART:)* Here, I'll write it on your hand.

STUART: NO! That never works!

NARRATOR: Well it never does!

(STUART: turns back at BARTENDRESS showing her the pen)

STUART: The pen doesn't work! Give me another!

BARTENDRESS Listen man, that ain't my fucking job!

NARRATOR: Then it came from me. As unnatural a sound as I have ever uttered.

STUART: Naaaauuuuuoooww!!!!

(BARTENDRESS looks towards STUART: He motions with open hands and outstretched arms towards HALLIE; his face sharpened into an anguished plea. NARRATOR: does exactly the same simultaneously)

NARRATOR: Look! Look what I'm doing! I'm getting Hallie Stills's number!

STUART: Give me something! Chalk, charcoal, spray paint!

(BARTENDRESS turns away from STUART: towards a customer in front of her)

BARTENDRESS What'd'ya need?

NARRATOR: Payback. (*STUART: reacts crestfallen*) I made a promise to never piss off bartenders again.

STUART: (*to BARTENDRESS*) Especially the bitchy ones!

(*BARTENDRESS gives STUART: the finger*)

NARRATOR: It was going around *a lot* that night.

HALLIE: I got it! It's working!

(*HALLIE: scribbles her number, tears the page, folds it and hands it to STUART:*)

HALLIE: Here. I'm in town for the next three weeks.

STUART: Okay, great.

HALLIE: Call me.

STUART: I will, sure.

(*HALLIE: pauses a moment reading his face*)

HALLIE: No really—call me.

(*everything slows to a still as STUART: stares at HALLIE: . The bar goes quiet. There is no noise heard, no rest of the world that exists*)

STUART: Do you really think there's a chance in the world I won't?

HALLIE: It's just that....

(HALLIE: begins to say something more, but never does. Instead she kisses him full on the lips, with more tenderness than sex. Immediately after, she whirls in the direction of the door, and goes out through it. STUART: looks down at the number for a moment, then refolds the paper, puts it in his pocket and drifts to look out the window)

NARRATOR: She eased into the back of the cab and slide to the middle seat. Sally got in after her, closed the door behind them, and immediately began jabbering. Hallie stared forward ignoring Sally as she went on. I could see her. She couldn't see me—but I could see her. She followed the bar with her eyes as the cab moved up Washington Street. I saw her turn her head back for a final view out the rear window.

(the remaining actors have begun departing from the stage, individually, irregularly, so that after the next few moments, all are gone. STUART: remains looking at the window)

NARRATOR: I was still unemployed. I was still broke. The Giants had still lost.

(STUART: turns to look at the bar a long moment)

NARRATOR: It was gone. The feeling, the fame. The *In!*—I couldn't even find Robbie....I thought about another beer, but then I realized couldn't afford it. I hadn't reached into my pocket in three hours. With Hallie I hadn't needed to.

(STUART: turns back to look out the front window)

NARRATOR: It didn't matter. I didn't want one. I wanted to get out of there.—I never really like Hogs and Heifers anyway.

(STUART: walks down stage. He stops for a moment then, after a meaningful look to NARRATOR:, walks off)

NARRATOR: I'm sure no one noticed.—I didn't look back to see.

(the lights fade down on NARRATOR: as he moves center stage)

NARRATOR: What a night....Across 13th, up 7th to 16th. A couple of gay guys I passed who were hand-in-hand, split to give me a wide berth. They were afraid of the drunk, giggling loon talking to himself.

(he strolls to the other end of the stage)

NARRATOR: At The Doughnut Pub on the corner of 14th and 7th, I bought a glazed doughnut with my one remaining dollar. It was wrapped in one of those waxed tissue paper squares. *(he squeezes the wrapper in his hand)* I squeezed the paper into a little ball as I munched the doughnut up to 15th Street.—I don't really remember tasting it.

(NARRATOR:, squeezing tightly on the tissue paper ball, moves to a NYC garbage can on the far left corner of the stage. When he nears it, he shoots the tissue paper ball into it, moves a few feet away and stands at the intersection a long moment, imbued, taking in the glorious night. The slight sound of late night traffic is heard)

NARRATOR: The night was dark and bright and beautiful. The barely restrained energy, still dangerous even at that hour.

(a faint sound of an IRT train goes by underground and STUART: looks down towards it)

NARRATOR: The One or the Nine....That was my life. Racing from stop to stop, flying at full speeds in between, then grinding to a halt at another station. I guess that's life in this town....A great New York City night. It reminds you how to feel.

(NARRATOR: reaches into his pocket, takes out the torn piece of magazine and looks down at it and smiles shyly to the Audience)

NARRATOR: 555-5343. Too simple. I'd probably remember it my whole life....These nights are made for heroes, and those lives—those lives are for full-time gladiators.—I was only Stuart.

(NARRATOR: crumbles up the piece of paper into a tiny ball and elaborately throws it towards the garbage can. He misses as shown by the shaking of his head and his sheepish grin)

NARRATOR: It couldn't've been more than two feet away. *(he turns in the direction of the piece of paper)* I watched the piece of paper as it drifted across 16th Street, up 7th Avenue, passed the first few windows of Barney's which was still there then. It got tangled up with some shredded newspapers and packaging materials and somewhere around the main door of the store, I lost sight of it.

(NARRATOR: watches the whole pile a moment longer, breathing deep to take it all in. He exhales and turns to the audience, smiling wistfully)

NARRATOR: Ah, but if wishes were wings....

(he nods knowingly, half-laughing, and moves center stage)

NARRATOR: Everything eventually turned out all right for me. In another month, I got a job and it was a great one. Everything I hoped for. It made all the investments, the time and the money, seem worthwhile. It even made the suffering I'd done those last four months seem *meaningful*.—There was a change in me.

(he looks in the direction of the jumbled papers one more time. He smiles happily)

NARRATOR: I stood there a long while that night. I didn't want it to end...I thought of the crowds and the drinks and the fun. I thought about Hallie....Then, when I finally walked towards my building, it came out of me. I didn't plan it, it just did. This time I remembered all the lines. *(quietly at first, then stronger. He sings as he walks off the stage)* "He's found a book on Magic in the garbage can. He looks at pictures and stares at the cracked ceiling. At the count of three, he says, I hope I can disappear. *And fly fly away! I want to fly. Fly fly away.*"

(the song comes up on the speaker system)

Fade to Black