

WHAT A MAN WEIGHS

c. Sherry Kramer
skramer@bennington.edu
417-766-1627

He who makes a beast of himself, gets rid of the pain of being a man.

-Samuel Johnson

CHARACTERS

JOAN

Joan is 35. That age when the young truths stop making sense. Joan has a great love of heights. If this were a different play, she might be a mountain climber or a balloonist...but since it isn't, she's a book conservationist. A good one.

RUTH

Ruth has been Joan's best friend since they were kids. Ruth needs a great love of heights like she needs a hole in her head. If this were another play...well, anyway, she's also a book conservationist. She's good at what she does too, but she has to work longer and harder at it.

HASELTINE

(Pronounced Haz-el-teen, stress on the Haz)

He is around 40--no one happens to ask him his age in the play, but if they did he'd probably lie about it.

Haseltine is a man who never apologizes: Does the lion send a condolence card to the family of the antelope? No. He does what he does because he has to. It's his nature. He's not conventionally handsome. Instead, he has the kind of charisma that makes every woman he meets believe she is the only woman in the world who is aware of his devastating secret attractiveness.

Not a snake...not a sleaze...he's a man with a great big heart.
And a great big hardon.

THE DEBBIE

There are five Debbies, all played by the same actress. Sometimes The Debbie is 19, sometimes 35, and sometimes 55. She should probably be played by one of those 40 year old actresses who often pass for 15.

SETTING

A tall staircase rises up as high as it can go. It branches off, a few feet above the floor, into two other staircases. These lead to two major areas--Joan's apartment, and a multi-purpose landing. If fly space permits, there are other small landings, placed higher up the staircase as well, which are used as well.

At the bottom of the staircase, wrapped around it or to one side, is the book conservation lab of a large university. The lab is a basement room--conservation labs are almost always given the least desirable spaces available in a library. The space is small, functional, and filled with books and artifacts in various stages of repair. Work tables, large, almost medieval looking equipment, racks of simple, elegant tools. Very orderly. Clearly a place where things are made by hand, where people work side by side, and love what they do.

On one wall of the lab, a large, beautifully hand-made dart board. This is not a regulation size board--it's at least twice normal size. The numbers in the sections of the board are elaborate, done like those capital letters at the beginnings of paragraphs in illuminated manuscripts.

Most important feature of the dart board--that the sound the darts make when they hit is a loud, clear punctuation.

In many ways, the entire play takes place on the staircase. A set which places too much weight on the realistic representation of objects will not serve the play.

PROLOGUE

JOAN

(Spot on Joan, as she places her foot on the first step of the tallest set of stairs--or perhaps the first words are said in darkness, before the spot hits her, already in position.)

I climb the stairs.

(She begins to climb.)

I climb the stairs, and I think--oh yes, he'll be there, he'll be there, and I'll walk through him into another world, and none of the things that make me frightened will ever touch me again, and everything that was ever ugly about me will drop away from me like water. I will be free of it all.

I want to fall down on my knees, I'm so goddamn grateful, as I climb the stairs, at the thought of being free, and so I do, in my mind, I fall down on my knees in my mind as I climb the stairs. He is there, and he has freed me from ugliness forever, from the lines around my eyes, the folds beneath my breasts, he has freed me from my thighs, he has freed me from it all. And the longing bucks inside me, and the heat has just kicked in, and I am climbing the stairs, and I am on my knees, and I am so goddamn beautiful, but it's the heat, in the end, that makes me know. That this is true.

Everything else could betray me. Everything else I could just kick aside. But not that heat. That heat doesn't lie, it has never lied, it is my truth, my own, and it does not lie.

(She is at the very top of the stairs, past the landings leading anywhere.)

I have climbed the stairs. And I'm filled with him.

(She faces the audience.)

I love this daydream.

And I hate myself for dreaming it.

I have climbed the stairs. And I am filled with him.

(Beat. She smiles.)

And he isn't there.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(The workshop of the book conservation department. Work tables, large, almost medieval looking equipment, racks of beautiful elegant tools. A place where fine things are made by hand, and where people work side by side, and love what they do.)

Work on the worktables is covered with large white pieces of paper, which are called blotters.

It is night, late at night. Ruth is at her workbench, firmly and delicately removing something that has been glued to an old manuscript. She pulls slowly, and evenly, almost too slowly to stand.

Joan is sitting on another high stool next to Ruth. She has a dart in her hand.)

RUTH

(Sighing)

Men.

JOAN

(Letting the dart fly at the dart board.)

Men.

RUTH

You can't live with 'em--

JOAN

And you can't get 'em to dress up in a skimpy cocktail dress, and dance the watusi no matter what you promise them, and no matter how hard you try.

(She cocks her head to one side.)

But why did we want them to? Why was it so important?

RUTH

God, we were stoned--we called up half the boys in the senior class, none of them would come over, so we decided to put on the skimpy dresses ourselves. I struggled into this lemon chiffon monstrosity, and you had dug up this red beaded spaghetti strap thing, but you wouldn't get dressed, you just stood there, staring at that red dress, and finally I came in and you were on your knees, with that dress spread out on the floor in front of you, and you were weeping, and no matter what I said to you, the only thing you would say was "The part of my brain that puts the dress on is gone. It's gone. It's gone. It's gone."

JOAN

No.

RUTH

No what.

JOAN

No, I don't remember that.

RUTH

Come on--

JOAN

That's wasn't me.

RUTH

It was too.

JOAN

No, it wasn't, it was Claudia Bently.

RUTH

SHIT.

JOAN

Shit.

dart the (And lets a dart fly. As always, it is not important where on the board the dart actually lands--there is a Zenness about the act of throw, and the sound, that is all that matters.)

RUTH

It wasn't you. It was Claudia Bently. SHIT. I wonder where she is now.

JOAN

Widbey Island, Washington. Mother of three. All have her hideous feet and their father's vacant stare.

(She says fast, canted, snapped:)

Happiness. Happiness. Happiness.

(And lets the dart fly. She cocks her head to one side.)

I'm working on that one. Tricky bastard.

RUTH

I'm still working on how I got you and Claudia Bently confused. Don't you think that's a little funny?

JOAN

Not really. A very little funny, I suppose. When you consider that Claudia looks like a ferret, talks like a duck, and has the brains of a trout raised on a fish farm. A very little funny--but not much, no.

RUTH

I get sick whenever I think of her. Just sick. Why should she be the one who's happy? Why, of the three of us, should she be the one who landed the perfect man?

JOAN

You think Rick's perfect?

RUTH

No, but she does.

JOAN

Well, that's why she's happy.

(She hands Ruth a dart.)

Men.

RUTH

(Throwing the dart.)

Men. Thank you. That helped put it all in perspective. We are all the authors of our happiness, is that it? Then how come I seem to have written mine in invisible ink?

JOAN

No such thing as invisible ink, Ruth. Rule number one:

RUTH/JOAN

Nothing you do to paper ever goes away.

JOAN

(She picks up a stiff piece of paper that is soaking in a bath.)
Especially if it's been laminated.

RUTH

Don't take it so personally. Some bubble headed conservator did not laminate that document thirty years ago just to torture you.

JOAN

How do you know?

RUTH

Look, Joan, if you didn't want to work on that project, why did you ask for it?

JOAN

I didn't ask for it.

RUTH

You did so. You always ask for the basket cases.

JOAN

Well, someone has to do them.

RUTH

Good point. Excellent point. All hail Saint Joan, the Mother Teresa of the ripped, torn, and laminated.

(Joan places a blotter over the Yeats letter, turns to go.)

RUTH

Where you going?

JOAN

Home. It's late. You ready?

RUTH

Well, not quite.

JOAN

What do you mean, not quite. How long does it take to unbind something, five minutes?

RUTH

More or less.

JOAN

So what's the problem?

RUTH

Rebinding takes a few minutes more...

JOAN

Ruth! We'll be here all night!

RUTH

You know I have to have this ready next week! I'm not as fast as you are. I have to be able to take my time--

JOAN

But it's a simple project.

RUTH

Not for me.

JOAN

What are you talking about, you're the best when it comes to this kind of work. Haseltine said so himself.

RUTH

He told you that? He really did? He really said I was the best?

JOAN

Yeah.

RUTH

When?

JOAN

I don't remember exactly, Ruth.

RUTH

He really said I was the best?

JOAN

Jesus Christ, no, of course he didn't say it. I made it up. You found me out. Of course your boss would never compliment you on your work. Of course he wouldn't say you were the best.

RUTH

Well, I'm not. I'm good--at some things, yes. But Haseltine is the best. You said so yourself.

JOAN

I never said he was the best. I said he was possessed.

RUTH

Well, so was Walt Whitman. Look at this.

(Ruth continues working, showing Joan as she goes.)

Safety pins. The man made his revisions and pinned them to the manuscript with safety pins. They're covered with rust. It's eating though the paper. The essential question is, what's more important--the paper, or the rust. To get rid of the rust, I have to get rid of the pins. And they're historical pins. Historical safety pins. Which makes the rust historical--or does it? I'm beginning to have dreams about rust. Ashes to ashes, rust to rust. They used to believe rust was an animal, did you know that?

JOAN

It is an animal. Just a very small one.

RUTH

And with a small regard for the works of Walt Whitman. And then there's the glue. What he didn't pin to it, he glued over. God, what they used to use for paste. I don't know what to do. Half the time I'm so sure--the integrity of the manuscript comes first, preserve it for future generations, fuck the rust. And then the rest of the time I--I don't know. You get so hung up on doing something wrong, you can't do anything. You get so scared if you end up doing it right it's just an accident.

JOAN

Why do you say things like that?

RUTH

Like what?

JOAN

Like you don't know what you're doing?

RUTH

Of course I know what I'm doing.

JOAN

Then why do you say things like that?

RUTH

You say things like that.

JOAN

I do not.

RUTH

You do so.

JOAN

Well, I don't mean them.

RUTH

Then why do you say them?

JOAN

Look, Ruth, all I'm saying is, when you do something right, it's not an accident. Not at work, anyway. When you do something right at work, it's because you're good at what you do.

Now in life, of course, it's a different story. In life nothing happens because you're good. Happiness itself, for instance, is something that just happens to you, period. Just like an accident.

RUTH

You never had an accident.

JOAN

Not here in the lab, but I've had them in life.

RUTH

You have not.

JOAN

What do you call Mark?
(Dart)

What do you call Larry?
(Dart)

What do you call--

RUTH

Not the same thing. Not at all.

JOAN

Accidents should happen to you when you're young. They're part of the adventure, they mold you, change you. All they do is make you wish you were young, when they happen to you when you're old.

RUTH

You don't know the first thing about accidents. You never had one.

JOAN

Well, that's not my fault, is it? A time comes in a woman's life when she needs to use the metaphor of an accident. Is it her fault she's never had a bonafide accident? Even the accident of happiness?

(Fast, as before, but anger there too.)

Happiness. Happiness. Happiness.

(Dart)

What the hell. It's too late for me to have an accident. I mean, I don't even have somebody's name to call out, you know? And you do need a man's name to call out. You do. Even if you're just imagining an accident. I don't have one goddamn name to call out in a dramatic operating room sequence where I bleed out, start to die, call out his name with my last breath, and then miraculously return to life.

RUTH

Do you carry a purse?

JOAN

What?

RUTH

Do you carry a purse?

JOAN

Of course I do, you know I carry a purse.

RUTH

Then you're all set. You don't need a man to call out for--all you need is your purse.

JOAN

What are you talking about?

RUTH

Remember when I had my accident?

JOAN

Of course.

RUTH

Well, I didn't call out for a man when I came to. The first thing I asked for was my purse. They told me in the hospital that's the first thing a woman always says after an accident. "Where's my purse."

That's very interesting.

JOAN

I thought so.

RUTH

You know what the last thing they say men in plane crashes say?

JOAN

What?

RUTH

They say "shit."
(She throws a dart.)

JOAN

How do they know?

RUTH

From black boxes, you know, that they recover from the wreck. Shit is almost always the last thing the pilots say. Oh, except that time in San Diego, remember that? I always cry when I think of it. They've got two seconds left, they all know they're going down, and some guy in the cockpit calls out "Ma, I love you." It always makes me cry.

RUTH

You're not crying now.

JOAN

No, I don't cry anymore. Even for things that always make me cry.

RUTH

If you had an accident, you could call out for your mother.

JOAN

Are you kidding? No way. A man calling out for his mother is one thing. But a grown woman calling out to hers?

RUTH

Yeah. You're much better off sticking with your purse.

JOAN

On the operating table? I'm going to call out for my purse on the table, Ruth? No, Ruth, I don't think so. Some rules are made. They are set in stone. Men call out for their mothers. But a woman cries out for--

RUTH/JOAN

--her man.

(Joan lets a dart fly on "man".

Lights down on lab area.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on The Debbie, and Haseltine, standing in the doorway on a landing, midway up the stairs.

The Debbie is wearing a slip, she is somewhat in disarray. She is screaming at Haseltine, who is less than half dressed, hitching up his pants, as he stumbles out of her apartment, trying to shield himself from his shoes, which The Debbie is throwing at him, as well as his shirt, jacket, and cap.

We hear the first line of this scene immediately after the last line of scene one.)

THE DEBBIE

YOU SON OF A BITCH! YOU GODDAMN FUCKING SON OF A BITCH! I EVER SEE YOU AGAIN, I'LL SCRATCH YOUR EYES OUT, YOU HEAR ME! YOU EVER SEE ME AGAIN, YOU RUN! I EVER GET YOU WITHIN RANGE AGAIN, I'M BITING IT OFF. YOU HEAR ME! I'M BITING THE DAMN THING OFF!

(She slams the door. Haseltine walks down the steps, and gets dressed the rest of the way. He ties his tie, and shifts his jacket squarely on his shoulders. He sits down on the bottom step, puts his socks on, then one shoe. He starts to put the other shoe on.

He holds a woman's shoe up to the light--a dark pump, something that might have passed, in the moment of Debbie's rage, for his shoe, but now is definitely not. He considers it all grimly.

He gets up, one shoe off, one shoe on, and climbs the stairway to her door. He knocks. The Debbie opens the door, and wraps her arms around him, sobbing. He doesn't return the embrace.)

THE DEBBIE

Thank God you came back. Thank God. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it. I--

(He gently, firmly pushes her away from him. He holds out the shoe. She backs away from him a step.)

Why?

(He shrugs.)

Why is it like this? It wasn't like this in the beginning. It wasn't like this at all. I try to hang on to it. I try--

HASELTINE

Debbie, please. Debbie, listen to me Debbie. I have to go.

(He holds out the shoe again.)

THE DEBBIE

(She nods, and disappears. She returns after a moment with his shoe.)

Help me. Please--I know I can't--I know you don't--I know you don't love me. I know that. But I can't believe it. Help me. Help me believe it.

(He holds out the shoe again.)

I hate you.

HASELTINE

Yes.

(He takes the shoe from her, hands her shoe back to her, turns his back on her, leans up against the doorway and puts it on.)

THE DEBBIE

I hate you and as soon as I believe I hate you, my whole body screams at me, no, he loves you. The things that other people need to have, to prove that someone loves them, you don't need them. You don't need them. Stop asking for them, stop it, stop it, you don't need them.

But you need him. You have to have him. He sees you--he is the only one who has ever seen you, he is the only one who will ever see you. Other people have to guess, but he knows. He is the only one who will ever know.

(He is ready. He starts down the stairs.)

Please save me.

Please save me.

(He is at the bottom of the stairs.)

God, please save me.

(He is walking away. He is gone.)

All right. Don't.

(Lights fade on The Debbie.)

SCENE THREE

(The next day, at the lab.)

Ruth enters, carrying some supplies. Joan is standing over Haseltine's workbench, about to take the blotter off his work. Joan turns quickly when she hears Ruth come in, but as soon as she sees that it's Ruth, she relaxes.)

What are you doing? RUTH

What does it look like I'm doing? I work here. JOAN

That's Haseltine's desk. RUTH

So? JOAN

So be careful. You know he doesn't like people looking at his work--what if he comes back in-- RUTH

He's giving a lecture at some conference, some junior college somewhere, left before lunch. Won't be back till late tonight. JOAN

Yeah? RUTH

Yeah. JOAN

(Ruth goes over to Haseltine's workbench too.)
You're sure? RUTH

JOAN

Positive. He took the Kerouac napkin with him. You know what that means.

RUTH

No, I don't, and neither do you.

JOAN

Sure I do. It means he won't be back for a long, long time.

HASELTINE

(Lights up on Haseltine, at a lectern, giving a speech.)

The area should be isolated from the lab area in such a way that

blackouts are not necessary, so that both areas in the scene can work together without fighting for focus.)

You must never do something permanent. You must never do something that can't be reversed. If you take a piece of paper, write on it with a pencil, then erase it till the marks are gone, you've still changed that piece of paper forever. The place where you've rubbed away the fibers to remove the lead would always show.

Paper remembers everything that happens to it. Paper remembers it all. So the first thing you do, when you sit down to work, is figure out how you're going to trick that piece of paper. You've got to trick it into letting you work in ways that won't change it, forever. In ways that can be erased so they don't show.

RUTH

(They are carefully turning the pages of the Blake manuscript on Haseltine's work area.)

God, it's beautiful. I'd be scared to touch it.

JOAN

You're touching it now.

RUTH

I mean work on it.

JOAN

Come on, you'd love to work on a William Blake--anybody would--

RUTH

Look at how he's done the endpapers he had to replace--he's matched them to the old ones perfectly, except on the new ones there's a shine--see--

JOAN

The same color, the exact same shade, weight--

RUTH

God, he's good. He really is. I mean, any other difference you'd spot immediately--it'd stick out like a sore thumb. But this shine--

JOAN

How the hell does he do this, you can't get this stuff to shine. He's definitely using one of his strange little concoctions to do this--you know, the little unmarked bottles he hides in the back--

(Rummaging around Haseltine's workbench.)

--probably filled with eyelash of spinster librarian, denatured bookworm bile, heart of remedial reading level virgin--which he is probably out procuring, right now--

(Ruth is turning a few more pages.)

RUTH

Joan--look--there--

JOAN

I don't see anything--

RUTH

There was a big tear, right there--

JOAN

Ruth, there couldn't be---

RUTH

I saw it yesterday, I saw it when I came over to borrow a couple sheets of mending tissue, it was right here--

JOAN

But--

RUTH

He must have filled it in.

JOAN

Ruth, don't be ridiculous.

RUTH

He did!

JOAN

You're sure it was this page?
(Ruth nods.)

You're sure the rip was here?
(Ruth nods again.)

RUTH

It was an inch and a half, two inches long.

JOAN

Ruth, it would look filled in, it would feel filled in. Nobody can repair a two inch rip so it doesn't show.

RUTH

He did.

JOAN

He's good. We both know he's good--but nobody's that good.

RUTH

How do you know?

JOAN

Okay then, fine. He's that good. He filled it in. So?

RUTH

So you can't do this sort of thing.

JOAN

Is there something here I'm missing, Ruth, or isn't that what I've been saying all along?

HASELTINE

You must know the strength of the work, and you must not make a repair that is stronger. You must know your materials. If you mend a binding or a page, and use materials that are stronger, the repair itself can stress and damage the work. You must always make a repair just exactly this much--

(He puts his thumb and forefinger together, so there is barely any space between them.)

--weaker than the work itself.

JOAN

It's a probably a new tear, Ruth. A brand new tear. There isn't anything so terribly wrong with repairing something that's not part of the history, you know-

RUTH

How do you know it's new?

JOAN

If it weren't new, Haseltine would have repaired it so we could see it.

RUTH

How do you know?

JOAN

I know Haseltine. Look--maybe he ripped it himself. By accident.

RUTH

Haseltine! Come on.

JOAN

It's possible.

RUTH

Never. Haseltine never did anything wrong to a book in his life.

JOAN

Come on. It could happen. You know no one ever talks about their mistakes.

RUTH

That still doesn't explain how he was able to fill it in like this.

JOAN

Oh, Jesus, Ruth, then ask him when he gets back, just ask him.

RUTH

I can't.

JOAN

Well then you'll have to accept the fact that he just places his hands over the fibers, and wills them to grow.

HASELTINE

You cannot let the beauty, or value, or historical significance of the work get in your way. Unlike a work of art, a book must function. The pages must flex. The folds, the bindings, the cuts must operate. Unlike a work of art, the things you work on were meant to live in the world with us, and it is your job to preserve even the accidents that have happened to it along the way.

RUTH

I think we should call someone at the institute about this.

JOAN

I think you should go home and get some rest. Working on the Whitman has obviously affected your mind.

RUTH

I saw it. It was there.

JOAN

Then where is it now?

RUTH

That's not the point.

JOAN

But it is, don't you see that, it is. He's so good he can fix something and we can't even tell how he did it. He's so much better than we are, Ruth. He is. Maybe if we were as good as he is, we'd look at the whole thing differently. You have to look at things differently, with Haseltine.

RUTH

Oh. You mean, if I were good enough, it would be okay for me to break the rules too?

JOAN

Okay, Ruth. Enough. Just stop it.

RUTH

Why? Why should I stop it?

JOAN

Come on, Ruth. You adore Haseltine. It's not like you to be jealous.

RUTH

You think that's what this is? You think I'm jealous of Haseltine?

JOAN

Yes.

RUTH

But you're not.

JOAN

No.

RUTH

Why not?

JOAN

Why should I be jealous of Haseltine? What's the point?

RUTH

Because he's better than you are, and it's human nature to be jealous of people who can do things you want to do and can't. Unless, of course, you like it this way. Haseltine, King of Conservation. You, Jane.

JOAN

I'm not jealous of you.

RUTH

Of course not! I'm not better than you are. I'm not even as good.

JOAN

Yes you are.

RUTH

Well, at some things--

JOAN

But I still wouldn't be jealous of you unless--well, I admit it, there is one thing I'd be jealous of, if you were good enough to do it.

RUTH

What.

JOAN

I'd be jealous if you could find a way to get through that damn laminate.

RUTH

Oh, no, not the laminate.

JOAN

It's a Yeats' love letter, Ruth, it'd be worth being jealous about. It'd be worth it, to rescue it before the acid in the cheap cardboard it's laminated to eats it away. Because the sad thing is, the acid is not just destroying the letter in patches, a word here, a phrase there, it's systematically going after the consonants.

RUTH

It is not, and this is not what we're talking about.

JOAN

It's what I'm talking about.

RUTH

I know what you're doing, Joan. Don't.

JOAN

I can't help it, Ruth, it's true. And it's tragic. With the consonants gone, all that's left are the vowels, and what good do a bunch of vowels do you?

(She has gone over to her workbench, and comes back to Ruth holding a laminated piece of paper.)

Here, I'll read you a sample sentence from the great pen of William Butler Yeats:

"I like caulk rings around your head." That's one possible variation.

Here's another: "I lick tall kings around your bed." Or maybe you prefer this one:

"I hike small things around you naked."

(Looks up, sees Ruth trying to repress a smile.)

That was a smile.

RUTH

No it wasn't.

JOAN

Yes it was.

RUTH

It doesn't count, you don't play fair.

JOAN

Of course I don't play fair. Playing fair is your department. You've got tenure, and there's no room for advancement.

RUTH

I hate it when you do this to me.

JOAN

No you don't.

(She puts her arm around Ruth, brings her back to Haseltine's workbench.)

Come on, help me put everything back exactly the way it was so he won't know we were looking at it.

RUTH

(Helping her put everything back.)

He'll know anyway.

JOAN

Yes, he always does, but it's worth a try.
(Lights fade gradually on the lab area.)

HASELTINE

And the most important thing, and the hardest thing to remember is this:
That the work may not ever be perfect, because perfect is forgery.
Everything you do must have your name on it. Every repair you make must
stand out clearly as a repair.

You know what perfection is, but you do not allow yourself to achieve it.
Give in to perfection, and you have failed.

(Lights fade slightly on Haseltine, as he walks away from the
lectern.)

THE DEBBIE

(A Debbie, this time much younger, comes up to him. She is
20 or so.)

Excuse me--Mr. Haseltine?

HASELTINE

(Turns to her.)

Yes?

THE DEBBIE

I just wanted you to know that I enjoyed your lecture. Very much.

HASELTINE

Thank you.

THE DEBBIE

I don't know that much about book restoration--I mean, conservation--

HASELTINE

They've been drumming that into your heads all day, haven't they? Use
restoration, if you like. I've always liked it. It always made me think of
that phrase, "restored to life."

Your name is Debbie, isn't it?

THE DEBBIE

How did you know?

HASELTINE

Sometimes, people look like what they are.

THE DEBBIE

You mean, they look like their name?

HASELTINE

Sometimes. Sometimes, they do.

THE DEBBIE

You think I look like a Debbie?

HASELTINE

Oh, yes. I do. I thought so the minute I saw you.

THE DEBBIE

Can you always tell a person's name like that?

HASELTINE

Me? No. As a matter of fact, Debbies are the only ones.

THE DEBBIE

I hate the name Debbie. I'm thinking of changing it. Which do you like better-

HASELTINE

I like Debbie better.

THE DEBBIE

But you haven't heard the choices yet.

HASELTINE

Still, I like Debbie the best.

I like you.

THE DEBBIE

(Some instinct, probably stilled up until now by the fact that Haseltine is old enough to be her father, and the basic trust a young girl has for authority figures, flares to life.)

Well--it's been awfully nice meeting you, I really enjoyed your lecture, and--

HASELTINE

Please don't go--

THE DEBBIE

I really should get going--

HASELTINE

Do you have to?

THE DEBBIE

Well I--yes. I do. Thank you. But--

HASELTINE

You're sure? Because it would just take a half an hour. That's all it would take.

THE DEBBIE

What would?

HASELTINE

For you to help me with some research--but if you have to go--

THE DEBBIE

You're working on something?

HASELTINE

Yes.

THE DEBBIE

Right now? Right here?

HASELTINE

Yes--well, actually, in--

(He looks around.)

--in that bar.

(He points. And waits, looking at her innocently.)

THE DEBBIE

That bar? But--

(It is clear no research could ever be conducted in a bar. Still, she wants to believe.)

Mr. Haseltine? It's a bar.

HASELTINE

(As if it just suddenly dawns on him too what the problem could be.)

Oh, no, I didn't mean--of course not, here, look--

(He opens a small flat case he is carrying, and takes out a cocktail napkin, with something written on it.)

See? It's a passage Jack Kerouac wrote on a bar napkin.

THE DEBBIE

Jack Kerouac! Really?

HASELTINE

Yes. It's not a particularly important Kerouac artifact--but it's a Kerouac all the same. See that ring?

THE DEBBIE

Yes. Oh, I get it--he wrote this in a bar--and that is where his drink left a ring, and--

HASELTINE

Yes. Very good.

You're pretty, you know that? You're very pretty when you smile.

THE DEBBIE

It would only take a half an hour?

HASELTINE

That's all.

THE DEBBIE

To find out--what are we going to find out?

HASELTINE

What do you think?

THE DEBBIE

To find out--what kind of glass made the ring.

HASELTINE

Very good!

THE DEBBIE

But I don't understand--what difference does it make--either the ring is hurting the napkin, and so you remove it, or it isn't, and you let it stay. Why does it matter what kind of glass made it?

HASELTINE

You really were listening to the lectures, weren't you? Well, let's just say that it wouldn't matter to most people, but that it matters to me.

THE DEBBIE

Your lecture was different too. The others were good, but I liked yours the best.

HASELTINE

Why's that, do you think?

(They have stopped, in front of a door. Haseltine opens it, stands aside for her to go in.)

THE DEBBIE

I can only stay a half an hour.

HASELTINE

I know.

(They go in. Fade to BLACKOUT)