

Push Up 1-3
by Roland Schimmelpfennig

American English translation by Melanie Dreyer
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Director: Cynthia Dillon
Stage Manager: Emily DePew
Set Designer: Nicholas R. Keslake
Lighting Designer: Todd Field

Characters:

HEINRICH	Brian Hotaling*
ANGELICA	Chris Campbell
SABINE	Thea McCartan
ROBERT	Leo Kittay*
PATRICIA	Tashya Valdevit
HANS	Ken Bolden*
FRANK	Steven Hess
MARIA	Cate Brewer

*Member Actors Equity Association

A.

HEINRICH: I work for a pretty big corporation. I sit downstairs, behind a glass window in the lobby, and everyone who works in the building walks by me. Our building is big, really big, sixteen stories, and next to me are monitors displaying images from the security cameras. We work in the central office in shifts, usually in pairs. During the night shift, we walk the building. During our nightly rounds, we check every room, we unlock and re-lock every single room. It takes time. The building is extensive, we have everything you could imagine: executive suites, conference rooms that always smell of cigarette smoke at night, an area for each department and sub-department, management offices, development offices, the artists' department, laboratories, and a giant computer room in the basement that stores data from all over the world: data from our branches in the US, South Africa, India. Next to the security monitors, I have my own little television set. Of course, that's not officially allowed, but no one says anything. Not even Kramer, who's with the woman who more or less owns the company. Kramer basically runs the place. I don't really know what she does. But when she comes by, I shut the TV off. Sometimes I even see the commercial for our firm on television— in this ad a man carries a woman over a huge puddle. Then there's a slogan and our logo. *(Pause.)* Seems odd to me. Like it's been stolen from something. In any case, the ad's been running for over a year now and it's time for a new one: maybe something completely different – somewhat more to do with me – or our products, I mean, I just don't get the connection. We usually work two to a shift. I'm often with Maria. Maria sees the ad completely differently. She likes it, but I'd rather have something with more action. I like action films. Or thrillers. Maria and I talk about a lot of the things that we see on TV during our shift. About lovers in a film, for example. I mean, in real life it's not at all like that. People don't just get together: it rarely happens that two people see each other and then bang they're in love, that never happens. Or like in our ad, a man in a park carries a woman over a huge puddle. When does that happen. Right? Isn't that right, I ask Maria, I mean, look at us. I'm not going to carry you over a puddle. And she laughs.

1.1.

An executive office. ANGELICA and SABINE sit across from one another.

ANGELICA: It's great that you're here. *(Short pause.)* I'm so glad. I was so curious how you – I'm so sorry that you had to wait ten minutes. This is really great.

SABINE: You don't have to reassure me. I'm not nervous.

ANGELICA: There's no reason to be nervous.

SABINE: Sure there is. But I'm not.

ANGELICA: No? I am a little.

SABINE: You?

ANGELICA: Yes, of course. *(Pause.)*

SABINE: You can save it.

ANGELICA: What?

SABINE: All the pleasantries. We don't need to make small talk here.

ANGELICA: Is that what I'm doing?

SABINE: We both know the conflict that's here in the room.

ANGELICA: Perhaps we see things differently.

SABINE: You say that you're glad that I'm here.

ANGELICA: Yes—

SABINE: You say that you're sorry that I had to wait outside in the lobby with your secretary. But that's not true. You're not sorry. To keep someone waiting longer than five minutes is clearly an act of passive aggression. And you know that. *(Pause.)*

ANGELICA: Okay. I hope my secretary made it clear why you had to wait, I had to—

SABINE: You're trying to fabricate a specific conversational climate here. You want to manufacture an atmosphere of friendliness, collegiality, and sensitivity that's totally inappropriate. You say you're nervous, although that probably isn't the case at all. You just say that to defuse the situation. But the situation doesn't need to be defused. It doesn't matter how you "see things." We obviously have conflicting interests here.

ANGELICA: Wait a minute. Hold it.

SABINE: No—

ANGELICA: Yes—

SABINE: It's absolutely—

ANGELICA: Stop.

SABINE: The course of this entire conversation up to now—

ANGELICA: Stop.

SABINE: *(Stands up, if she's still sitting.)* No—

ANGELICA: Sabine! *(Short pause.)* Can we begin to talk now? *(Short pause.)*

SABINE: If you like. Go ahead.

1.2.

ANGELICA: Throwing coffee in her face was a mistake. Loss of control. But she deserved it. That piece of shit really deserved it. She sat there and tried to distinguish herself with impertinence. Tried to simply outplay me. Wanted to show her strength. Self-confidence. A little forced, but not bad at all. In her stupid blue suit. She probably has four just like it in her closet. No taste, just pretension. And success. Sat there and didn't touch her coffee, all upset that she had to wait ten minutes. Basically, I already knew when she came through the door. I just wanted to see her again. She sat across from me and astonished me with her audacity. Her unbelievable audacity to even ask for this appointment. How does she do that. How did she win him over – the way she looks. With her pathetic aura of know-how and ambition.

1.3.

ANGELICA: You're twenty eight. That makes you the youngest department head in the entire company.

SABINE: I know.

ANGELICA: You have my complete confidence. Even though you've only been working for us for a year and a half. With no oversight from above.

SABINE: That's not true.

ANGELICA: No?

SABINE: No. Kramer regularly reconciles the productivity of my department against the standards, expectations, and requirements of the board. That results automatically in constant quality control.

ANGELICA: Yes. Right. The standards and requirements of the board of directors. How could I forget that. He does that. Kramer. Are you happy with this arrangement? It doesn't sound like it.

SABINE: Of course.

ANGELICA: Are you happy with Kramer?

SABINE: Yes. I—

ANGELICA: You can be completely open. The fact that Kramer and I are a couple shouldn't inhibit you in any way.

SABINE: My working relationship with Kramer is absolutely trouble-free.

ANGELICA: Trouble-free. Good.

SABINE: I'd like to talk now about your rejection—

ANGELICA: Wait, wait. I just want to be sure that we're coming from the same place. That there are no misunderstandings. We don't know one another at all.

SABINE: I highly doubt that there's a — *(Stops herself)*. Alright.

ANGELICA: You got your degree in the U.S. and following that worked for two companies in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Now you work for us supervising your own team of twenty people, some of whom are twice your age, and you produce the best numbers. Correct me if I say something that isn't true.

SABINE: No, no.

ANGELICA: You're a top employee. Kramer says you're efficient, reliable and innovative. Truly impressive. Truly.

SABINE: Yes. And that's why I don't understand why you—

ANGELICA: Yes, yes.

SABINE: What?

ANGELICA: Yes, I know — of course. Not so fast. Coffee?

SABINE: No, thanks.

ANGELICA: You don't want any coffee?

SABINE: No, thanks —

ANGELICA: Are you sure?

SABINE: No, thanks. *(Nevertheless, Angelica pours two cups. Sabine doesn't touch hers.)* Please — *(Pause.)*

ANGELICA: You think I simply do whatever I like here.

SABINE: And that's true.

ANGELICA: No. Forget that.

SABINE: I wouldn't know how.

ANGELICA: Stop.

SABINE: No—

ANGELICA: Forget about the power structure of the corporate system. Here we're flexible and unorthodox. Like you. Performance is what counts. Or is that not your sense of things? (*Short pause.*) That wouldn't be very fair.

SABINE: Why are you telling me this? How can you talk about the power structure of the corporate system and claim that it no longer exists? Of course it exists. When you offer me a cup of coffee. When you allege to have confidence in me, which is clearly not the case. I work for you. You determine what I do. So – let's not deceive ourselves.

ANGELICA: Exactly.

SABINE: What?

ANGELICA: I said: exactly. Let's not deceive ourselves. Good.

1.4.

SABINE: I haven't had sex for two years. And I'm twenty-eight. I get up every morning at six. I take a cold shower and then eat breakfast. Usually fruit. In my bathrobe. With the television on. That's what I do every morning except Sunday. Every morning I watch television from 6:30 to 7:00. The programming isn't very good at that hour, but I sit in front of it and think about nothing. Then I get dressed. I never put on what I wore the day before. Never. Although many of my things looks alike. I have a lot of things. Clothes. I chose my apartment with that in mind. Closet space. There are two clothes closets in my current apartment. I have difficulty deciding what I should wear. It's a problem. I often change my entire outfit several times before I decide what I should wear. Until I finally make up my mind. It's not easy. It's agony. When I'm finally dressed, I style my hair and put on my makeup. My haircut's ok, there's not much I can do with my hair. Make-up is difficult, especially in winter when it's dark outside. Not too much. Only expensive brands. From Japan, for example. (*Short pause.*) When I'm done with my face, I take the elevator down to the garage. Now it's 8 o'clock. Halfway there I stop and turn around. I ride back up. Because I feel awful. I can't stand it. I can't stand it. I unlock the two safety locks on my apartment door and go to change my clothes. I no longer like what I have on. I usually wear blue. I don't really like blue, except for maybe jeans or a sweater, but I usually wear blue regardless. I grew into it, somehow, only wearing blue. Only buying blue when it came down to it. Everything that I buy is blue. So – color-wise, everything goes with everything else. Nevertheless, halfway down I turn around and then I change my clothes again. I change everything. My pantyhose, my panties, my bra. I feel ugly. I have to hurry, the clock is ticking, and I stand in front of the mirror in the hallway and think I look ugly. Finally, it's a little after eight thirty, it's high time, I really have to go. I take the elevator to the garage again. I get into the car. I can't turn around again. It would be absolutely impossible to turn around again. Look in the rearview mirror. My makeup is repulsive. I don't like my lipstick. I'm at least able to put on new lipstick during a traffic jam on the highway. I can do my eyes later at the office. Just don't want to look cheap. I arrive at work and I have the feeling that no one sees me. That's good. That's terrible. At nine fifteen, I meet with my team. None of the women at the table wear blue. Except for jeans or a sweater maybe, but we rarely see that here. In our meetings. Many of them are ordinary. Really ordinary. Most of them. No one wears blue. (*Short pause.*) I look into the faces around the table and ask myself who among them got laid last night, and how often. Or this morning. While I took my cold shower. While I was watching television thinking about nothing. All of them, I think. Everyone except me.

1.5.

ANGELICA: You've made quite a career here. And, of course, you'd like to continue pushing up. I understand perfectly. (*Short pause.*) That's how I was. You're like me. Right?

SABINE: Perhaps.

ANGELICA: Sure you are.

SABINE: If you think so.

ANGELICA: We could be friends. No. We couldn't.

SABINE: Aha.

ANGELICA: You could act like it at best. Because you'd have that power structure in your head the whole time, and how you want to reach the top.

SABINE: This isn't about whether or not we could be friends. This is about nothing more than my qualifications, which you refuse to recognize. This conversation is absurd.

ANGELICA: Qualifications. Yes. (*Short pause.*) Odd that we haven't run into one another more often in passing. Have you ever been up here on the sixteenth floor?

SABINE: A few times.

ANGELICA: That's it? (*Short pause.*) In Kramer's office, I would guess.

SABINE: Precisely.

ANGELICA: Do you like it up here?

SABINE: Sure. Are you making small talk again?

ANGELICA: Precisely. (*Pause.*) You applied for Delhi.

SABINE: And you've rejected my application.

ANGELICA: Yes.

SABINE: For no reason.

ANGELICA: For no written reason.

SABINE: For no reason. With no explanation. Conversation. Or phone call. Nothing. That's why I asked for this appointment.

ANGELICA: Of course you did. You are, after all, the one who wants something.

SABINE: Which means—

ANGELICA: I knew you'd come.

SABINE: But you haven't given me any answers.

ANGELICA: Yes, in a minute. First, I wanted to get better acquainted with you. (*Short pause.*) Our center in Delhi is the heart of our development department.

SABINE: I've provided some important initiatives for the development department. Decisive initiatives. You shouldn't do me any favors. You should put me where I can be most useful to the company. In Delhi.

ANGELICA: But I wouldn't dream of sending you to Delhi.

SABINE: Why not?

ANGELICA: This isn't about being useful to the firm. No one expects that. This is about personal advancement, Sabine. That's understandable. (*Short pause.*) What I don't like are your methods.

SABINE: My methods are extremely efficient, as you yourself said. The advantages for the company are clear.

ANGELICA: If I give you this job, it will mean I'm promoting you, short or long term, to the top of the company, to the executive level, because with the know-how that you could gather in Delhi, you'd become as good as irreplaceable to us.

SABINE: That would be true for anyone who got this job. That doesn't have anything to do with me personally. The way I see it, there are only two possible factors for your not trusting me: first my age, and second my gender. Didn't you just say that the internal power structure no longer exists?

ANGELICA: Yes, yes, sure. (*Short pause.*) But what if your own employees use this power structure?

SABINE: I don't understand what you mean.

ANGELICA: I mean exactly what I said: But what if your own employees use this power structure?

SABINE: Whom do you mean?

ANGELICA: You.

SABINE: Me?

ANGELICA: Yes, you.

SABINE: I have no idea what you're talking about.

ANGELICA: No?

SABINE: No.

ANGELICA: Kramer recommended that I send you to Delhi.

SABINE: Yes?

ANGELICA: Yes.

SABINE: Then give me the job.

ANGELICA: No.

SABINE: I'm clearly qualified.

ANGELICA: Could be.

SABINE: But—

ANGELICA: But you're not going to get the job.

SABINE: Why not?

ANGELICA: Because Kramer recommended it.

SABINE: I see—

ANGELICA: Yes.

Pause.

SABINE: You're married to Kramer. What's wrong with a recommendation from Kramer?

ANGELICA: (*Hesitating.*) Kramer.

SABINE: I want the job. You don't have anyone who would be better.

ANGELICA: Who says so?

SABINE: I say so. Kramer says so. Take a look at my resume.

ANGELICA: (*Laughs.*) I thought you said take a look at my lingerie.

SABINE: What?

ANGELICA: Nothing.

1.6.

ANGELICA: My husband doesn't sleep with me anymore. Kramer. I'm XX years old. I get up every morning at six. I take a cold shower and then eat breakfast. Usually fruit. At the kitchen counter. In my bathrobe. With a towel around my head and slippers on my feet. So that I won't freeze and catch a cold. The little television set that we put in the kitchen is on. That's what I do every morning except Sunday and sometimes Saturday. I watch TV from 6:30 to 7:00. The programming isn't very good at that hour, but I sit in front of it and think about nothing. It's great. Then I start to get dressed and put on my makeup. I never put on what I wore the day before. Never. It used to take a long time before I knew what I was going to wear. It was an agonizing process every morning, until I was dressed. It still takes a long time, but back then I had no idea what I should wear—I just go shopping more often these days. That doesn't fundamentally change the problem, but it helps. At least temporarily. If I no longer know what to wear, I go shopping. Or I order something. But usually I go shopping because I need someone to help me. A sales woman. Advice. I ask the sales woman what looks good on me or what she'd recommend. I let the sales woman dress me, as it were, and sometimes it goes really well. But not often. The good thing about expensive stores is that the sales women often have better taste than in the cheap ones. But not always. It isn't that I fail to notice that the sales woman has no taste. I don't know how I recognize it. Maybe the eyes. Or the hair. Or the teeth. Once I start shopping, I buy a lot. I never look for just one thing. When I shop, I look for an entire new wardrobe. Skirts. Blouses. Suits. Jeans, for which I'm usually too fat or only feel too fat as the sales woman insists. Dresses, shoes. Scarves. Belts. Ridiculous stuff. This shopping spree gives me a sense of security. The security that I can buy things, that I can have things I really need. Every two months, I take two sacks to the Red Cross center. Or I give the things to my neighbor's two daughters. But of course they don't fit. They only take them to be polite. These sacks often contain things I've never even worn. Things that I knew I'd never wear when I bought them. Sometimes. Things I'd hang in the closet in the evening planning to wear them the next morning, and that I no longer liked the next day. Because nothing went together. Light green sweater. Gold summer sandals, for which I suddenly couldn't find the right skirt. Double-breasted jackets with shoulder pads. Silver Lurex sweater for special occasions. These are slip-ups. A loss of control. These are critical lapses. But one only realizes that after the fact. Someone once recommended that I buy everything in one color. Because it would be easier to combine items. But which color is right for me? I can't begin to decide that. So I put something on that I'll end up giving to the Red Cross in a

maximum two months time. And then I style my hair and begin to put on my makeup. It's about eight. Kramer gets up and disappears into the shower in his own bathroom. My haircut's ok, there's not much I can do with my hair. Make-up is difficult. Especially when it's dark outside. Don't apply too much. Just what's necessary. Only expensive brands. From Japan, for example. (*Short pause.*) I get to work around nine, Kramer next to me, that's a requirement. Everyone looks at me. No one looks me in the eye, but everyone looks at me. I used to think it was all in my head. Kramer said as much. But it isn't. It's awful. I have my first meeting at nine thirty. In front of me sit a bunch of freshly shaved men. In suits that I've already seen. Very ordinary. Most of them. (*Short pause.*) I wonder if they ask themselves when I last got laid. I told that to Kramer. A while back. A few years ago, when things were different.

1.7.

ANGELICA: Do you think I'm attractive?

SABINE: Do you want an honest answer?

ANGELICA: (*Hesitates. Smiles.*) No.

SABINE: I think you're attractive.

ANGELICA: Do you think Kramer finds me attractive?

SABINE: I couldn't say.

ANGELICA: Do you find Kramer attractive?

SABINE: Kramer's good looking.

ANGELICA: I think so, too. (*Short pause.*) Does Kramer find you attractive?

SABINE: You'll have to ask Kramer.

ANGELICA: I don't think you're particularly attractive.

SABINE: Aha.

ANGELICA: But I don't think I'm particularly attractive either. As I said: we're a lot alike. Exceptional in our professional life, but other than that, totally ordinary. Alright, you're younger. If we were friends, Sabine, we'd only have to see each other in the mornings and then we'd smile. Because each of us would know how long the other stood in front of the mirror every morning, desperately trying to make something out of her boring face with a little bit of eye shadow. Like billions of other women. Like all the supermarket cashiers and administrative assistants. Strange, isn't it? Think about how much money is spent world wide – what a waste. If we were friends, we'd know these things. We could look into one another's made up eyes and laugh. At ourselves. At our desperate efforts every morning in front of the mirror. (*The two women at each other for a long, long time in silence.*)

SABINE: I don't get what you're driving at.

ANGELICA: But you know why you're here.

SABINE: Yes. I asked for this appointment. (*Short pause.*)

ANGELICA: And do you also know why you got this appointment?

SABINE: It's my right –

ANGELICA: Because Kramer recommended you.

SABINE: Yes, I know.

ANGELICA: He said the Indians are too fast for everyone else.

SABINE: I'm fast.

ANGELICA: I know. I know how fast you are. You have a keen, analytical mind. You recognize the gaps in the system.

SABINE: That's my job.

ANGELICA: Right. *(Short pause.)* And that's why you shouldn't fuck around with me.

SABINE: I'm not.

ANGELICA: Um hello, Sabine. And how. *(Pause.)* You got here a year and a half ago. Kramer wants to give you Delhi. Do you know what that means?

SABINE: Tell me.

ANGELICA: That means, Kramer fucked you, Sabine. *(Pause. Hatefully.)* He fucked you. And he's probably still fucking you. Is he still fucking you? *(Silence.)*

SABINE: Yes. *(Pause.)*

ANGELICA: I thought you would deny it.

SABINE: Really?

ANGELICA: And that's why he's sending you to Delhi. As a little thank-you for the fucking.

SABINE: I doubt it.

ANGELICA: When was the last time?

SABINE: What?

ANGELICA: When was the last time he fucked you? *(Short pause.)*

SABINE: About two hours ago. Downstairs in my office.

ANGELICA: Good. He fucked me yesterday evening. In our living room.

SABINE: *(Smiling.)* We seem to share a common fate. *(Short pause.)* Why don't you just throw me out?

ANGELICA: Actually, I was trying, indeed, to create a climate of friendly objectivity, collegiality, and professionalism. I tried. You didn't. I want you to understand something: The problem isn't that you're fucking my husband. The problem is that you had to. *(Suddenly.)* That you're not good enough. Who knows how you actually got this far – how many you blew in the elevator in where was that? Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Maybe that's where your talents lie. Maybe that's your true calling. It's a shame we can't use someone like that in Delhi – a woman who slowly and deliberately fucks her way to the top. *(She catches herself briefly.)* That a woman with your training, with your alleged qualifications, as you call them, believes she could move up like this, is just pathetic. But that you're doing it in my company with my husband, is truly offensive. How stupid do you think I am? It's not going to work, Sabine. But why am I telling you that. You know that already. You have that keen, analytical mind. And

that's why you'll ride the elevator to the fourth floor now and clean out your office. You stupid piece of shit. You stupid, stupid piece of shit. *(She throws the cup of coffee in her face.)*

1.8.

SABINE: Of course, I never was involved with her husband. Absolutely unthinkable. My relationship with Kramer was purely professional. He appreciated my work, but he wasn't interested in me or my tits. He never was. If he had been, I'd have gone to bed with him. Immediately. But it was great that she thought I'd fucked him. It was great how convinced she was. That she believed me. I went down the hall to the elevator with coffee in my face, in my hair, on the blue suit which is just like four others I have hanging in my closet. Petra, her secretary, looked at me stupidly. But she saw me. I left the office door open, which I never do. I waited for the elevator and felt the coffee run down my neck. I stared at the glowing button next to the elevator door and heard a sound coming from her office. I remembered things I'd heard on the television that morning. I could hear the announcer's voice. I could see her in front of me, in her suit. Kramer came out of his office and walked past me. No greeting. He probably didn't even see me. Surely not. Otherwise he would have asked – and then the elevator arrived.

ANGELICA: I stayed sitting behind my desk. She went out and left the door open. Cheap. I knew I'd never see her again. She'd go down to the fourth floor and clean out her things. And fuck off. I sat there and I couldn't concentrate. I remembered things I'd heard on the television that morning. I could hear the announcer's voice. I saw her in front of me, in her suit. Suddenly I felt like I had a hair in my throat. A long hair that went all the way down my esophagus. I tried to swallow it but it wouldn't go away. It almost made me vomit. I tried to take it out with my fingers but I couldn't reach it. I stuck almost my entire hand in my mouth and I still couldn't reach it. During this I made a retching sound that I tried to suppress because the door was still open. I felt the sweat run down my neck. Outside I heard steps, an elevator opened. Kramer stuck his head in the door and asked: Is everything alright, sweetheart? Yes, I said, yes, yes, sure, everything's fine.

B.

Indian music. Early morning: It's five forty five a.m. HEINRICH sets his bag down and opens his locker. He takes his coat off and hangs it up. He takes off his shoes, his sweater and his pants and puts them away carefully. Then he takes out his uniform and puts it on. Lastly, he puts on his shoes again and takes a couple of things that he'll need that day out of his bag. He still has time. As always, he'll replace his colleague from the night shift at five minutes to six.

2.1.

ROBERT and PATRICIA. In ROBERT's office. Both are early thirties. He sits behind his desk. She sits in front. He has a stack of papers in his hands and reads. A charged and prickly silence. Pause. He turns a page and continues to read. Finally:

ROBERT: This is no good. *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: What?

ROBERT: You heard me right: This is no good. *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: This—

ROBERT: You can forget it.

PATRICIA: I don't understand—

ROBERT: It's simple—

PATRICIA: Wait a minute, why—

ROBERT: This—

PATRICIA: I can—

ROBERT: Yes—

PATRICIA: I can not—

ROBERT: Yes you can—

PATRICIA: I certainly can not—

ROBERT: Yes you can—

PATRICIA: No—

ROBERT: You can forget it. Forget it. (*Short pause.*)

PATRICIA: What is that supposed to mean: - (*Short pause.*)

ROBERT: What is that supposed to mean?

PATRICIA: Yes –

ROBERT: What is that supposed to mean?

PATRICIA: That was the question, that was my question, yes –

ROBERT: It's completely clear: It means that you –

PATRICIA: Clear? Nothing is clear. It's not at all clear. Absolutely nothing, nothing here appears to be clear.

ROBERT: This proposal—

PATRICIA: this proposal is—

ROBERT: this proposal is not—

PATRICIA: this proposal is my—

ROBERT: this proposal is unacceptable.

PATRICIA: Unacceptable?

ROBERT: Un-ac-cept-a-ble. It's not any good. You can't submit this. Period.

PATRICIA: What?

ROBERT: Yes—

PATRICIA: You have got to be—

ROBERT: This proposal—

PATRICIA: This proposal—

ROBERT: This proposal is worthless. WORTHLESS. *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: It's worthless. *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: Yes.

PATRICIA: It's unacceptable.

ROBERT: It is. *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: Unacceptable.

ROBERT: Exactly. *(Pause.)*

PATRICIA: You're sick, Robert. *(Short pause.)* You're really sick. *(Short pause.)* You're not serious.

ROBERT: Dead serious.

PATRICIA: Bullshit. This is just your own interests—

ROBERT: I'm dead serious. This proposal is worthless. This proposal is out of the question.

PATRICIA: This proposal is my concept and I have no idea what there is to discuss with you under these circumstances.

ROBERT: I could care less. This thing isn't going beyond my desk, you can count on that 100%.

PATRICIA: This thing is my new concept and if you don't give it to Kramer—

ROBERT: Excuse me, excuse me—

PATRICIA: No, if you don't pass it on to Kramer, then I'll—

ROBERT: Did you just say "new"? "Your new concept?"

PATRICIA: Yes, this is my new concept -

ROBERT: But this concept isn't new, Patricia. *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: Pardon me?

ROBERT: This concept isn't new.

PATRICIA: What?

ROBERT: This concept is old, Patricia. Old. *(Short pause.)* This concept is old. Old, old, old.

2.2.

PATRICIA: It was the best sex I'd ever had. *(Short pause.)* Our eyes met and we both knew that it would happen. I could sense that he felt it and he could sense that I felt it. We looked at one another from across the room and we knew. Bang. A party on the sixteenth floor, executive suite. The party was in full swing. Kramer had given a speech. Corks were popping. Laughter in the room, soft music, muted light. Like in a film. I wear a short dress. He clinks his glass with another woman, but I know he's watching me. He's in his early thirties. I've heard a lot about him, but I've never met him. He's successful. A whiz kid, works closely with Kramer: What comes to Kramer passes his desk first. Ambitious, dedicated, you can see that. He can have anything: as long as he doesn't

disappoint Kramer, he's got a brilliant future in front of him. The sound of many voices, glasses clink, laughter, behind the windows, the city night lies under us. I get one more drink and without turning around, go slowly to the door. I walk down the hallway. Noiselessly, because my stilettos don't make a sound on the thick carpet. I have a glass of champagne in my left hand and I run my right index finger along the wall of the corridor. I try the door handles. Most of the offices are locked. Kramer's office is open.

2.3.

ROBERT and PATRICIA in ROBERT's office.

ROBERT: This concept is old.

PATRICIA: This concept is new.

ROBERT: That's absurd.

PATRICIA: Absurd?

ROBERT: Absurd, yes.

PATRICIA: That's not absurd— *(Short pause.)* This is the concept for my new ad.

ROBERT: Good, good, good. The concept is new. *(Pause.)* The concept is new *(Short pause)* but the ad is old. Right?

PATRICIA: Maybe you can't read. *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: This ad is the same as the last ad.

PATRICIA: Pardon me? *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: It's just as old as the last ad.

PATRICIA: I don't think I'm hearing correctly.

ROBERT:- and you know that better than anyone.

PATRICIA: I don't know what you mean.

ROBERT: *(He throws the proposal on the desk.)* Sure you do.

PATRICIA: Oh yeah?

ROBERT: You certainly know that. Of course you know that, Patricia.

PATRICIA: You're talking shit. I don't have the vaguest idea what you're talking about. *(Short pause.)* And you apparently don't either. *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: The concept is neither here nor there: Your new ad and your old ad are identical.

PATRICIA: That's bordering on lunacy.

ROBERT: The only difference is in the cost.

PATRICIA: First of all, it's clearly senseless to discuss this with you. Pure waste of time.

ROBERT: A twenty-fold cost increase for the same product – you must have missed that. In fact, we don't need to discuss it further. This is moronic. This is sick. Or just stupid. *(Pause.)* It's not good enough and I'm not passing it on to Kramer. Not with me, Patsy, forget it.

PATRICIA: Fuck you. Fuck you, Robert. *(Short pause.)* And don't call me Patsy.

2.4.

ROBERT: It was the best sex I'd ever had. *(Short pause.)* Kramer gave a party on the sixteenth floor. Everyone was there. Champagne corks popped. Boisterous mood. View through the windows of the city lights at night. Almost like in the movies. Everything went well. Light music in the background. Kramer was in a good mood. Despite that thing with India. *(Short pause.)* She looked absolutely enchanting, gorgeous. She wore a short, dark dress. Our eyes met when she entered the room. We looked at one another and we knew. She knew. I knew. It was clear. Of course, I'd already heard a lot about her. But we'd never been introduced. *(Short pause.)* The ad with the puddle was her idea. Her concept. And her victory. That puddle brought her to the top of the department within twelve months. *(Short pause.)* The puddle ad was a real breakthrough. It was a common term: the puddle. Patricia's ad with the puddle. Or: Patsy's ad with the puddle. Everyone calls her Patsy. *(Short pause.)* The puddle was almost legendary. *(Short pause.)* Kramer's wife is clinking her glass on mine, but I never let Patricia out of my sight for more than a few seconds. She stands at the other end of the room. I watch how she moves, how the light falls on her shoulders. I know she knows that I'm watching her while I talk to Kramer's wife—even though she doesn't look over at me. She gets herself another drink and goes to the door. Where is she going? She holds the glass in her left hand. *(Short pause.)* I give her a precise twenty second head start, then I excuse myself from Kramer's wife and follow her. I just see her as she disappears into Kramer's office. I walk down the corridor. My feet don't make a sound on the carpet. Kramer's office door is slightly ajar.

2.5.

In ROBERT's office. PATRICIA and ROBERT.

PATRICIA: Fuck you. Fuck you, Robert. *(Short pause.)* And don't call me Patsy.

ROBERT: What?

PATRICIA: Patsy. You just said Patsy. Instead of Patricia.

ROBERT: I see, could be.

PATRICIA: Changing a person's name demonstrates a more or less conscious intent to dominate them –

ROBERT: *(Disinterested.)* Aha –

PATRICIA: If you don't call me by my name, it means that you don't accept me as I am. But that you'd like me to be different: perhaps a little easier to handle, for example. *(Pause.)* But that won't get you anywhere, Robert. *(Pause.)* The problem isn't that the old and new ads are too similar. The problem is that you're too simple-minded to recognize the difference.

ROBERT: Right. Because there isn't any. *(Pause.)*

PATRICIA: The new ad takes place in Central Park. *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: And?

PATRICIA: And what? That's what it's about. *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: The new ad takes place in Central Park. The last ad took place in some park. What's different about Central Park? *(Pause.)*

PATRICIA: The light.

ROBERT: Oh.

PATRICIA: Central Park is in New York. In the United States of America.

ROBERT: I know that. America, New York, yes. Central Park is in New York.

PATRICIA: Well then—

ROBERT: Other than that? Park, grass, path. Puddle, man, woman. (*Short pause.*) Everything's identical. Identical.

PATRICIA: Park, grass, path. Puddle, man, woman. (*Short pause.*) Did I hear you right?

ROBERT: Absolutely right. (*Pause.*)

PATRICIA: You've forgotten something.

ROBERT: Park, grass, path. Puddle, man, woman. (*He thinks for a moment.*) Squirrel. The squirrel is new. (*Short pause.*)

PATRICIA: Wrong.

ROBERT: (*Laughs.*) Wrong? Aha. Good. Maybe I have actually overlooked a definitive detail.

PATRICIA: Fall. September. The trees. The skyline. You forgot the skyline.

ROBERT: The skyline – right, the skyline. That's also in your – (*Short pause.*) concept.

PATRICIA: The New York skyline.

ROBERT: The skyline – interesting. Man, woman, puddle, skyline. Respect. (*Short pause.*) Don't forget the squirrel, excuse me. The squirrel in autumn in front of the skyline. For that we're going to need – (*Short pause.*) A New York animal trainer.

PATRICIA: The New York skyline is definitive.

ROBERT: I don't give a damn about the New York skyline.

2.6.

PATRICIA: I glide into Kramer's office and leave the door ajar. In the darkness, I stand at the window of the strange office and look at the lights of the city. If Kramer comes in now, I'll probably be fired. Immediately. There's nothing in Kramer's office that I've lost or that I need. Behind me the door opens – I see the yellow stripe of light on the carpet – and it closes again, but I don't turn around. He doesn't turn the light on. He stands right behind me. I can feel his breath. I know it's him. I know it. He puts his hand on my waist. He turns me to him and we kiss. He presses me against the window and pushes my dress up. We have sex. Unbelievably violent sex. (*Short pause.*) And afterwards, we went back to the party – we didn't speak to one another again – we mingled with the other people. As though we'd planned it. But we hadn't planned it. (*Short pause.*) We hadn't planned it. I wanted to call him in his office the next day, but – (*Short pause.*) I didn't call. Not because I didn't want to call, of course I wanted to call, but I thought, it's better if he calls. I don't have a problem making the first move on principle – but – (*Short pause.*) not with work or with men. But – but this was about something different. This was about more. This was – (*Short pause.*) This was too important. (*Short pause.*) And that's why I couldn't call. It wouldn't have been right. It would have been a crucial mistake, I'm absolutely convinced of that now. I didn't want to give him the impression that I needed it. That now I needed it, basically – There was absolutely no reason to let him know he could have me.

That's what it was about, to make it clear to him that I'm just like him. Just like him, the same status, just in another field. Creative, efficient. Tough when I have to be: In my early thirties, I've reached a position that others won't achieve in their entire career. We're so similar – we simply belong together. And that's why I didn't call him. (*Short pause.*) But I tried to run into him more or less by chance. I was on the look-out for him – in the parking lot, in the lobby, near the elevators, in the cafeteria or after work in one of the little Italian restaurants nearby. Where everyone goes. (*Short pause.*) I tried to find out when he arrived at work and when he left, but I never ran into him. And he never called. (*Short pause.*) I was probably just a one-night stand to him. Maybe he does it all the time. It probably meant nothing to him. He probably never even gave it a second thought. (*Short pause.*) I became angry. (*Short pause.*) I became angry because he didn't realize who he was dealing with. He didn't call. I wasn't worth it to him. And that's why I wanted to punish him. No not just punish – ruin. I wanted to destroy him. Destroy. (*Short pause.*) And so I looked for him: in the lobby, in the parking garage, in the cafeteria, in the little Italian restaurants around the corner. But he wasn't there. (*Short pause.*) And then Kramer came up to me and said it was time for a new advertising spot: and asked if I'd met his top man: Robert – Kramer said, I should get in touch with Robert regarding the new ad. It would be interesting for both of us.

2.7.

ROBERT: Kramer's office is dark. She stands at the window with her back to me. I stand right behind her. She smells just like I'd imagined. If Kramer comes into his office now and finds us here, we'll both be fired. Immediately. I lay my hand on her waist and turn her to me. We kiss. I press her against the window and push her dress up. We have sex. Passionate, violent sex. (*Pause.*) Afterwards, we mingle with the other party guests and Kramer says: Robert, I've been looking for you – (*Short pause.*) Of course I thought about calling her the next day. But – (*Short pause.*) - but then I didn't. I wanted to – but I didn't. In my professional position, one usually makes the first move, that's alright, I don't have a problem with that – on principle. Not in business nor – (*Short pause.*) in my personal life. But – but this was, this was something different. This was about something big. This wasn't just a fling. This was about something more. This was big. This woman was important. This woman was sensational – (*Short pause.*) You can't just call a woman like that. It would be a mistake, I'm sure of that. I didn't want to leave the impression that I somehow needed to see her again. We were in the same league, we just worked in different fields: we both were competent, flexible, innovative and as hard on ourselves as we were on others. In our early thirties, we'd now reached a position that others would never achieve in their entire career. I wasn't inferior to her nor she to me. She was like me: I was like her, and I wanted her to know that. We – she and I – we belonged together. And that's why I couldn't call her. (*Short pause.*) But I tried to run into her. By chance. In the parking garage or in the lobby by the elevators. Or in the cafeteria or in one of the little Italian restaurants in the neighborhood. But I never saw her. I was on the look-out for her, I tried to find out when she came into the building in the morning and when she left, but it didn't work. (*Short pause.*) And she didn't call. She never got in touch. No phone call, no note. Maybe to her I was just a one-night stand in the boss' office. She wasn't interested in me. She never got in touch. Maybe she thought I wasn't worth it. I didn't matter to her. (*Short pause.*) Eventually I became angry. I became angry because she didn't call me. (*Short pause.*) I became angry because she didn't recognize who I was, what we could be together. I meant nothing to her and she would have to pay for that. One day I'd make her really pay for that. (*Short pause.*) And so I kept looking for her: in the parking garage, in the lobby by the elevators and the cafeteria and in the evenings after work in the little restaurants and bars nearby. And then Kramer came to me and said it was time for a new advertising spot. He asked if I'd met Patricia – And that I should get in touch with her. It would be interesting for both of us.

2.8.

In ROBERT's office.

PATRICIA: The repetition of the puddle in front of a different international background simultaneously connotes continuity and growth.

ROBERT: The repetition of the puddle connotes standstill and stagnation, regardless of the background. But the market is booming, Patricia. The market is booming. He who stands still will be left behind. The repetition of the puddle is lethal.

PATRICIA: We're not standing still. We're going to New York.

ROBERT: The New York version doesn't make the puddle better. *(Pause.)*

PATRICIA: Why didn't you call?

ROBERT: What? *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: Why didn't you call? *(Pause.)*

ROBERT: You can't be serious – Why would I do that? *(Pause.)*

PATRICIA: The success of the first puddle ad alone proves I'm right – the public wanted it. The public loved the first ad. *(Pause.)*

ROBERT: It's not about that. *(Short pause.)* Why didn't you call?

PATRICIA: It – *(Short pause.)* It –

ROBERT: I – *(Short pause.)* The public wants development. The public wants the future and not a copy of yesterday's idea.

PATRICIA: The puddle is not a copy.

ROBERT: This is about progress. Nothing else matters to the public. *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: Let's go somewhere –

ROBERT: What? *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: Let's go somewhere and have a drink –

ROBERT: Why -

PATRICIA: Let's go and get something to drink and I'll explain to you the difference between a copy and a quote. *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: Aha.

PATRICIA: And you can explain to me what you have against New York. *(Short pause.)*

ROBERT: We don't have to go anywhere for that. We can do that here. *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: That's right.

ROBERT: What?

PATRICIA: We can do that here. *(Pause.)* We should probably just fuck each other here and now. *(Short pause.)*
That might solve the biggest part of our problem. *(Pause. They look at one another. Finally:)*

ROBERT: Could be. *(Pause.)* But it won't make your ad better. *(Pause.)*

PATRICIA: Whatever you want.

ROBERT: That's how it is.

PATRICIA: Absolutely whatever you want. *(Pause.)*

ROBERT: You want to explain to me the difference between a copy and a quote? In some bar over a glass of wine? That's not necessary. You're quoting yourself, I already got that. *(Short pause.)* You're formulating a statement with your concept. You're formulating a statement for the firm. When you do the same thing as last year, you're implying a stand still. Apathy. And no one's interested in that. *(Short pause.)* It's not enough. I mean – don't forget: It doesn't matter where you hope to take your career: you won't make it if you can't perform. This puddle thing is probably the only idea you've ever had – *(Short pause.)*

PATRICIA: That's enough, careful –

ROBERT: Although – you know what wouldn't surprise me at all - : You probably stole the entire puddle idea from somewhere – can that be? *(Short pause.)* Is that true? Right? Did I guess right? *(Short pause. They look at one another.)*

PATRICIA: That was it. *(Short pause. She stands up.)* That was definitely it.

ROBERT: This proposal is old and it's trash. *(He throws it in the wastebasket.)*

PATRICIA: We'll see about that.

2.9.

ROBERT: She left. *(Short pause.)* I gave myself some time. I didn't care whether she spoke with Kramer before I did – because I knew that was her plan. I was certain about my position, she didn't have a chance. I took the proposal out of the trashcan and read it through again. I sat back and waited. I looked out the window and counted slowly to one hundred. Maybe I hoped something would happen. Maybe she was right: Maybe Central Park was a good idea. *(Short pause.)* Then I took the proposal and went to the elevator to ride up to Kramer, but I decided to take the stairs instead. *(Short pause.)* I stood still for a moment in front of Kramer's door on the sixteenth floor. I stood there in the corridor and heard the light click of a keyboard in the anteroom and muted voices on the telephone. I love the sounds of the sixteenth floor, everything sounds different there, even the daylight there seems different. I felt nervous but confident at the same time. Whenever I'm on the sixteenth floor I get this feeling in my stomach – like: This is where I want to be. *(Short pause.)* I stood in front of Kramer's office, and I thought of all the people that never made it. That wanted to be here, just like I do, in the executive suite, and who one day simply stopped moving up. Who had made some mistake and for that reason were out of the running, while I moved by and continued on my way. *(Short pause.)* Maybe Kramer wasn't even there – maybe he was busy. *(Short pause.)* Kramer was a little surprised to see me. I thought she would have already been there, but she wasn't there yet. He read through the proposal, sitting on the edge of his desk where we – *(Short pause.)* I told him I didn't believe in the ad. That I thought it was a mistake to produce the puddle a second time. On financial but more importantly on conceptual grounds. The first puddle spot was a big success, yes, but the New York copy of the puddle would be a fiasco. The New York puddle would be an unmistakable sign of stagnation and thus clearly a foreseeable disaster. I told him Patricia apparently doesn't understand how things work here. What's at issue. And that I wasn't interested in collaborating with her further. *(Short pause.)* And I told him that she probably stole the entire puddle idea from somewhere *(Short pause.)* While I spoke, Kramer spent most of the time looking out the window, as he always did when he had to make a hard decision, but as I finished, he looked at me. He looked at me as though he'd never seen me before, he looked into my eyes, and although he didn't say anything, just nodded, I had the feeling that at that moment that something within him shattered. *(Short pause.)* As I left Kramer's office, she was walking down the corridor toward me. That was the last time I ever saw her.

PATRICIA: I left the office. I gave myself some time. I didn't care if he spoke with Kramer before I did, I knew that was his plan. But I was certain of my position, he didn't have a chance. I rode down to my office and printed the proposal again. I read it through once more. I sat behind my desk and waited. I looked out the window and counted slowly to one hundred. Maybe I hoped something would happen. Maybe he was right: Maybe Central Park wasn't a good idea. And then I picked up the phone and made an appointment with Kramer so that I could introduce him to my new concept. Come on up, he said, in about ten minutes. I felt nervous, but confident at the same time. Whenever I'm on the sixteenth floor I get this feeling in my stomach – like: This is where I want to be. It's probably a cliché, but I want to have my own desk in one of those offices some day. I want a big apartment – preferably in

New York, and I want to meet a good-looking man, who will carry me over a big puddle in Central Park on a totally rainy day, because sometimes there are simply moments in which one can't continue alone. I want a child, and I want to sleep in pajamas and the next morning, after a chaotic taxi ride, I want to climb into the elevator, in a perfect suit with a seemingly improvised but nevertheless terrific hair, and ride up here. I want to walk to my office across the quiet carpet and through the open doors of the anteroom hear the soft sound of keyboards. *(Short pause.)* Robert was just coming out of Kramer's office. That was the last time I ever saw him. *(Short pause.)* Kramer wasn't as surprised by the proposal as I'd expected – Robert had just shown it to him. But he found the idea of filming the puddle ad in New York terrific. Central Park. The light. The skyline. He was totally enthusiastic – he was delighted. He spoke of “expanding continuity”. He found the idea charming. Let's go to New York, he said. Patsy, let's go to New York.

C.

Indian music. MARIA in front of her locker. She unlocks it. Early morning: It's five fifty a.m. She sets her purse down. She takes off her winter boots, hangs her coat, blouse and skirt in the locker. She hurries – like she does every morning. She takes her uniform and comfortable shoes out of the locker and puts them on.

3.

HANS and FRANK across from one another. HANS sits behind a desk. HANS is around sixty, FRANK around thirty.

HANS: Delhi – *(Short pause.)* I mean: Delhi. That word alone. The name. And how palpable suddenly everything becomes. Doesn't it? *(Short pause.)* No? It's right there. Fantastic. Don't you think?

FRANK: Yes, yes.

HANS: Seriously: What – *(Short pause.)* What do you think about when you hear that name? Delhi. *(Short pause.)* You – you don't have to tell me if you don't want to. *(Short pause.)* You don't have to.

FRANK: What should I think about. *(Short pause.)* About India. About the city. *(Short pause.)* About our office.

HANS: Stop.

FRANK: Hm?

HANS: Stop. *(Short pause.)* Be honest. And precise.

FRANK: Why?

HANS: You don't think about our office. You think about the management of our office. *(Short pause.)*

FRANK: Well, yes.

HANS: I just wanted to clarify. *(Pause.)* I just wanted to clarify. *(Pause.)*

FRANK: Well what do you think about?

HANS: When?

FRANK: When you hear Delhi.

HANS: About Kramer. First, of course, I think about Kramer. *(Pause.)*

FRANK: Ok. And then?

HANS: And then – *(Short pause.)* Then I think about an airplane.

FRANK: Aha. – *(Short pause.)*

HANS: It's my experience that it's better to visualize things if you want them to come true. One must visualize it. *(Short pause.)* That's why I think about an airplane.

FRANK: Sure. *(Short pause.)* About an airplane. What kind of airplane?

HANS: I think about a big airplane. Because it's taking me there. About a Boeing.

FRANK: I surf a lot. I surf almost every night. *(Short pause.)*

HANS: Because an airplane is going to take me to Delhi. Far away from here. A big bird, takes me to Delhi: Carries me over the Indian subcontinent.

FRANK: And I keep getting heavier. I've gained twenty-two pounds in the last ten years. Especially since I've been working here, I keep getting fatter.

HANS: Eleven hours non-stop, landing in New Delhi, Indira Gandhi International Airport.

FRANK: Twenty-two pounds in ten years. That's forty-four pounds in twenty years and so on. Maybe it will increase exponentially – that would mean that when I'm forty I'd weigh 110 pounds more than I do now. And that I'll gain forty-four pounds between forty and fifty. And so on. I'll weigh 264 pounds when I'm sixty. 264 pounds. That's almost three hundred pounds. *(Pause.)*

HANS: Do you work out? *(Short pause.)*

FRANK: Why do you ask?

HANS: No, you don't work out. *(Short pause.)* Do you? *(Short pause.)* No answer. No. You should, though. It keeps your head clear. It's good for your power of visualization. Independent of the body. Of your body.

FRANK: I surf every night. I get a take-out pizza and a couple of beers on the way home from work, I get home and I turn on the computer. *(Short pause.)* I play a couple of rounds on the flight simulator and eat the pizza with one hand as it slowly gets cold. I had my last girlfriend when I was twenty-seven. Since she left, I've been more or less alone. About ten o'clock, I open the second beer and log onto the net.

HANS: At times, Delhi has 98 percent humidity. It gets hot there. Up to 120 degrees. The heat shimmers on the street. Let's say that you're there: Let's say you're working there: you've got to be in shape. You've got to have your body in top condition. Otherwise you won't last. Otherwise you'll be flown back after four weeks. It wouldn't be the first time.

FRANK: And you? Do you work out?

HANS: Every day. *(Short pause.)*

FRANK: On the net, one's sense of time changes, continues to change. Even now. *(Short pause.)* I'd never pay for pictures off the internet. There are plenty of sites with free pictures. Thousands of free pictures. *(Pause.)* Whenever I'm on the net, I get hungry.

HANS: I keep getting thinner. I continue to lose weight. I'm in my early sixties. A few years ago I was really big. Heavy. Too much yellow fat on my hips. I never watched my weight. I just ate too much – all the time, early in the morning, then another breakfast in the cafeteria. Two big meals a day, lunch and dinner. And snacks in between while at work. Chocolate. Nuts. Chips. Beer and wine in the evening. No exercise. Every ten years, twenty or so pounds heavier. At thirty 150 pounds, at forty 175, at fifty 200. More and more. But now – I get regular checkups. I'm ok. My doctor's happy with me. My daughter isn't. If this keeps up, Papa, she says, I'll take that thing away

from you. She gave me “that thing” herself – a year and a half ago. Because I wasn’t getting enough exercise – before my heart gave out. That thing is a home trainer. One of these bicycles that you can put in a room and ride in place.

FRANK: Whenever I’m on the net, I get hungry. That’s the problem.

HANS: The home trainer sits in the living room, right about where the loveseat used to sit. While I work out, I either look through the big windows into the garden, or at the television and stereo. My wife used to take care of the garden, it’s slowly going to seed. Slowly becoming overgrown. Doesn’t matter. Bugs the neighbors – yeah and so what.

FRANK: Chocolate. Nuts. Chips.

HANS: My daughter and I took the loveseat down to the basement. I don’t get many visitors any more. When I come home, I’ve already eaten. I eat somewhere along the way, in the city. A salad. Not much. Something with tofu. It rarely happens that I’ll go shopping and cook at home. Or that I go out to eat. I wouldn’t know with whom. I come home and change my clothes. I make a cup of tea. And then I climb onto the home trainer and start my work out. During the week my daily work out lasts about four hours. I couldn’t always do so much. I’ve gotten better. I start relatively slowly and then gradually increase the tempo. I had trouble with my knees at first, but that went away. I cover between fifty and sixty miles in one evening. Next to the home trainer is a road map with mileage information, so that I can see what I’ve ridden. (*Short pause.*) Or I put tapes in the VCR of different stages of the Tour de France. I’ve ridden the bike through an entire stage - of course, not in the evening, you couldn’t do it – but on the weekend. Of course I can’t keep up – but I’m in good form nevertheless -, for my age. There are a lot of young guys that I would outdistance. I just turned sixty – I could still have twenty or thirty more years in front of me. Twenty or thirty years: a lot of time. A whole lot of time. (*Pause.*) The only question is, what comes next. (*Short pause.*) That’s why I work out. That’s really why I do it. (*Short pause.*)

FRANK: I’m only interested in the hard stuff. Teenagers don’t interest me. I especially like the Italian, Hungarian, and French Free-Pix sites. Megasalope alone has hundreds of pictures. Hundreds of women. The photos are real, they’re genuine, the women in those photos really do it, but they don’t have names, they only have numbers. But I give them names anyway. And while I look at the photos of Natasha, Suzie or Julia, I forget the code, the numbers, the program architecture. I stop thinking about it. (*Short pause.*) I sit in front of the computer and ask myself where Susie on Megasalope is from. Where these pictures originated: France or Hungary or America? Or Germany, Italy or Russia? Where did they undress for the camera? Maybe she lives here around the corner. Who’s the man who made the photos with her? Who’s the photographer? Does she always do this? Or did she do it just this once? How much did she get, if she got anything for it? How old is the photo? Where is she now? Where is she now while I’m here? What is she doing right now as I look at her photograph? Is she thinking about it? Is she thinking about how someone might be looking at her right now? Or Natasha, for example – one evening her photos just simply disappeared, the entire page suddenly has another face. An update. Natasha is gone. Maybe there are more pictures of her somewhere else on the net – but where? I search the server for her at night, but I don’t find her. I’ve never found the same woman on two different sites. The photos are interchangeable, but none of them is Natasha. Maybe she doesn’t exist anymore. I search the entire net and don’t find her, and all of this takes a really long time. (*Pause.*) Finally, around one, I turn the computer off. I sit there with an open mouth, and feel the air dropping into my lungs. There’s nothing in my head for a moment. (*Music.*) And then the numbers return, the code, the programming steps, and I consider how one could make all of that, the information highways, the servers, the processors, the programs, faster, more complex and better. (*Short pause.*) And that’s why I’m the right man for Delhi. (*Pause.*)

HANS: I know that you’ve applied for Delhi.

FRANK: I see. (*Pause.*)

HANS: And you of course know that I’ve applied. Of course you know that. I mean – you work for me after all.

FRANK: Is that right?

HANS: For me, yes. Or for my team. Or for my department. Or for the firm. For Kramer. Doesn't matter. At least you do that for now. (*Short pause.*) Now what does that mean? I mean – suppose you get the job in Delhi – and I don't. You'll board a plane for India while I stay here? So that I can be ~~absorbed~~ laid off with the next wave of reorganization in the fall: after 25 years? (*Short pause.*) Because I don't believe you intend to take me with you to Delhi. Am I right? You're not stupid. But can you really see that? Me in early retirement? (*Short pause.*) I can't. I mean, I can't see it – except that it would improve your chances. (*Short pause.*) But it's great that you're going to try anyway. Very sportsmanlike. Doesn't fit you at all. (*Short pause.*) Nevertheless, I think we should clarify some fundamental things here.

FRANK: Aha.

HANS: Yes. (*Short pause.*) I believe you haven't yet understood a crucial point.

FRANK: Yes?

HANS: The power of visualization.

FRANK: Right. The power of visualization. Your theme.

HANS: Right. Pictorial and spatial power of visualization.

FRANK: And?

HANS: And what?

FRANK: You said I hadn't understood a crucial point. I'd be interested to know what that point might be. (*Short pause.*) Honestly.

HANS: O, yes, right: You – (*Short pause.*) How far away from you is the wall behind me, would you say? (*Short pause.*)

FRANK: The wall –

HANS: Yes, the wall. How far from you is it? (*Pause. Frank shrugs his shoulders.*) Actually, a very simple question, isn't it? You see the desk, me, behind me the bookcase and the wall. The wall interrupts your view after how many feet would you say?

FRANK: No idea.

HANS: (*Hotly.*) Why doesn't that interest you, why are you so imprecise?

FRANK: Okay, after ten feet.

HANS: Ten feet? Eight and a half. Tops.

FRANK: Good, eight and a half, so?

HANS: Eight and a half feet to the wall. That's your field of vision. (*Short pause.*) And now try to imagine what I see. (*Short pause.*) My perspective is quite different. (*Short pause.*) I don't see the wall at all. I see the front edge of my desk, behind that you, behind that, maybe thirteen feet away, the door to my office.

FRANK: And?

HANS: You see: They're completely different – I mean – we're in the same room, but we see things completely differently. We don't share the same picture.

FRANK: I don't care. Maybe eventually you'll get to the point.

HANS: Maybe you'd like to see it for yourself? Come over here. We'll change places for a minute.

FRANK: Thanks, that's not necessary.

HANS: Not necessary. Then you mean that you can imagine it. (*Short pause.*) How – this here - appears from my perspective. (*Short pause.*) Possible. Maybe. (*Short pause.*) I doubt it. I don't think you have the necessary imagination. The vision.

FRANK: I get by, don't worry.

HANS: And that's why you don't have the necessary drive. (*Short pause.*)

FRANK: Depends on what for, I'd say.

HANS: What for? (*Short pause.*) For Delhi. I mean the necessary drive for Delhi. What did you think? (*Short pause.*) I mean, what if I get the job. And you don't. Could happen. What'll you do then? I can hardly take you with me when you wouldn't have taken me.

FRANK: I assumed that when I applied, I'd get the job. That simple. (*Pause.*)

HANS: Yes, yes. How long have you been with us?

FRANK: You know that better than I do.

HANS: Aha. Good. (*Short pause.*) I thought we were having a conversation.

FRANK: I wouldn't know what about.

HANS: It's very simple: I ask a question, you give an answer. I ask how long you've been here, and you say, for example: six years. And then I say: The time goes so fast. I brought you here six years ago, you've been my protégé for six years and now you want to take my job away from me. But that's not going to happen. (*Short pause.*)

FRANK: Yes it will—

HANS: Are you sure? Six years and you keep getting fatter. (*Short pause.*) Don't you?

FRANK: You—

HANS: Could it be? Could it be that year after year you'll just keep getting fatter? I mean: if things keeps progressing as they are: not a pretty picture. (*Short pause.*) And that's why we're going to go and get something to eat now. (*Short pause.*) Do you know that little Italian restaurant around the corner? Or would you rather go somewhere else? Doesn't matter to me as long as the wine is good. For our farewell.

FRANK: What farewell?

HANS: I knew that would make you curious. Our farewell dinner. Finally something that interests you.

FRANK: What farewell are you talking about? (*Short pause.*)

HANS: I have reliable information that I'm at the top of Kramer's list.

FRANK: What list?

HANS: The list – *(Short pause.)* Oh come on, Frank, you can figure it out.

FRANK: No, I have no idea, what list do you mean? *(Pause.)*

HANS: The list. The list for Delhi. I'm supposed to take over the supervision of Delhi. *(Pause.)*

FRANK: Ah -

HANS: Yes – and I think we should celebrate, don't you? *(Short pause.)*

FRANK: Where did you get that?

HANS: What?

FRANK: That you're at the top of the list, where did you get that? You certainly didn't get it from Kramer -

HANS: Why – no, I got it from someone close to Kramer. *(Short pause.)*

FRANK: Aha.

HANS: The information is one hundred percent correct, absolutely reliable, don't worry about that. I expect Kramer's phone call any minute. *(Pause.)* I can clearly picture it: the two of us in the restaurant. Despite everything. I don't carry a grudge. After a conversation in the elevator, down to the lobby, it's been a long day, and then straight to Maurizio, a great little Italian restaurant nearby. I reserved the table for 8:30. Not a table up front, but in back, where it's more quiet. No mineral water today, just champagne, Maurizio already knows, oysters, and then a very simple minestrone, antipasto, spaghetti with eggplant, tomatoes and pine nuts, and an ostrich filet for the final course, then flan for dessert. And to go with it, a marvelous Barolo – how long has it been since I've had a good bottle of wine. How long has it been since I've eaten that well. No one will mention that we're not really properly dressed, they're very discreet, and I'm a good customer – or at least I was at one time – when my wife was still here. When we were celebrating something. Like today. And so the evening flies by – we both laugh at the stories we tell each other: about our weight, our work out techniques. About the Tour de France.

FRANK: Sometimes I wish I could talk to Natasha. I mean really, really talk to her. *(Short pause.)*

HANS: A little after twelve, it's getting time to leave, one more espresso, today's exceptional, and Grappa on the house. What a wonderful evening. *(Pause.)*

FRANK: The problem is, Hans, your information is wrong. What you were told isn't correct.

HANS: Is that right?

FRANK: Yes. *(Short pause.)* You're not taking over Delhi. *(Pause.)* I'm taking over Delhi. *(Pause.)* I'm going to smell like saffron as I leave the research center and stroll down the sunny streets to my house. Everything blooming violet and white. Colorful birds and little monkeys live in the trees. An elephant grazes in the yard. I sit at my desk on the first floor of my house and look out. I don't surf as much as I used to, but I've found Natasha again – on a Czech site. Of course I'm not absolutely certain. One never is.

HANS: Who said that?

FRANK: Kramer said that.

HANS: Kramer – *(Short pause.)*

FRANK: Kramer's given the supervision of Delhi to me.

HANS: That can't be.

FRANK: Yes. *(Pause.)*

HANS: How long have you known this? *(Short pause.)*

FRANK: For three days. *(Short pause.)*

HANS: For three days – *(Short pause.)* Why didn't you say something before? Why didn't Kramer share that with me? *(Pause.)* Why didn't Kramer tell me? *(Short pause.)* I just saw him yesterday. *(Pause. FRANK is particularly quiet.)*

FRANK: Of course we'll go eat. I don't know who else I would go with. We'll celebrate. But it's my treat. We'll go to that Thai restaurant Benjarong. Sometimes I get take-out from Benjarong, I like the service at the counter. We'll sit at the window and look at the street. He eats a vegetable soup, I get wonton soup, with a side of spring rolls to share, that he won't touch. Afterwards, beef with peanuts and rice for me and fried tofu for him.

HANS: The Indians burn their dead on the side of the road. When a man dies, supposedly the widow also meets her death. But it doesn't happen the other way around. The men remain.

FRANK: And we'll talk. About the net. About our weight. About working out. About Indians.

HANS: My daughter thinks I should make more of my evenings and weekends. Get out and see people. She says, otherwise, she's going to take my trainer away. *(Laughs a little. Short pause.)* When I've finished my work out, I peek into the kitchen to see if I've turned off the stove, then I turn out the lights in the kitchen and the living room. I check to see if I locked the front door, turn out the light in the downstairs hallway, go up the stairs to the second floor, shut off the stairway light, take a short shower, brush my teeth, and lie down in bed in what used to be our bedroom. The house is too big for me alone, but I'm not ready to give everything up yet. I lie in bed. It's one in the morning. I feel the air drop into my lungs. I think about my home trainer. If I should have someone check it. *(Short pause.)* And then I wonder if I turned the stove off – downstairs in the kitchen. *(Pause.)* I get up again. I turn on the stairway light and go down. And I check the stove. It was off. I check the front door again. I go back into the kitchen to see if I turned the light out again after I checked the stove – and then I take another quick look at the burner. Off. Then I go back up the stairs, but turn around again half way up, go down and check the front door knob once again. Locked. The outside light is off. The hallway light is off. The living room light is off. The stove is off. *(Short pause.)* Isn't it? *(Short pause.)* And what about the basement light? Wasn't I in the basement a little while ago? Was that today? The light in the basement is off. The basement door is locked. I go back up and lie down in bed. Light off. Is the stairway light off? I get up again and look to see whether I turned off the stairway light. It's off. – Everything's locked. Everything's off.

FRANK: Are you ok? *(Short pause.)*

HANS: Do you have a girlfriend? How nice for you. What's her name? *(Short pause.)* That's nice. Sounds Russian. What a pretty and unusual name.

FRANK: A big bird takes me to Delhi:
Takes me to Madras, to Bangalore,
Carries me east, to the morning, in the night,
Carries me to the Indian subcontinent.

D.

MARIA: I work for a big corporation. In the so-called mother building, the headquarters of the firm – it's a high-rise building. I work downstairs, off of the lobby, in the central office. Everyone who comes in or out of the building walks by us. The people look funny as they hurry by us in the morning. Especially the women when they come in a little after nine and are really in a hurry. My shift starts three hours earlier, at six. I'm one of the people who sit in the train at 5:40 in the morning. In spite of that, I like the early shift best. The night shift is the worst. During the night shift, we have to walk the building and it scares me. We have to look in all of the rooms and offices, and I

always think that one night, we might find someone who has hung himself after work. It could happen. Some old guy. A couple years away from retirement. It's happened before. When I arrive for the morning shift, my colleague Heinrich is usually already there. He's already put on his uniform, unpacked his breakfast. And he's already turned on his little TV that he secretly sets next to the other monitors. There's not much going on between six and seven, just the cleaning staff slowly leaving the building – and that's why Heinrich and I usually watch TV together then. Our firm even has its own advertising spot. Heinrich doesn't like the ad very much but I do. I don't understand what it has to do with our company, but I don't care. Now there's a new ad, although it's basically like the old one – but the new ad takes place in New York, in Central Park. You can see the skyline. A woman stands in front of a big puddle in Central Park. She can't go any further in her heels and then a good-looking guy helps her. He just carries her, he takes her and carries over the puddle – like a bride over the threshold. Heinrich doesn't like it. Heinrich wants more action – but I think it's great. I think it's romantic. Sure – the whole thing was stolen from that film with Michelle Pfeiffer and George Clooney, but – who cares. I mean, it doesn't really matter. Heinrich always says but that's not how it is, that would never happen in real life. And then he looks at me and says, isn't that right, isn't that right, Maria, look at the two of us? I'm not going to carry you over a puddle. And then I imagine how it would look for Heinrich to carry me over a puddle and I laugh. Always. Almost every morning.