

The Writer and the Talker

by Con Chapman

The stage is set with a bar, or a table of approximately the height of a typical bar. As the lights come up a woman is seen seated on one stool with a drink, a pack of cigarettes, a lighter and her purse on the bar in front of her. There is also a bowl of nuts on the bar. The woman has a self-possessed air about her, and sips from her glass occasionally. Her clothing betrays no desire to appear flirtatious. She should be dressed in dark colors, with a simple turtleneck or blouse visible to the audience above the bar.

A man approaches the bar from offstage and, after surveying the scene a bit, he takes the open seat next to the woman. His body language indicates that he is open to the possibility of a romantic encounter.



Bartender

Good evening sir. What can I get you?

Man

Hi. I'll have a light beer—whatever you've got on tap there.

Bartender

Very good.

The man looks at the woman, who looks straight ahead or down at her drink without expression.

Man

Hi there.

Woman

(Glances at him as if to determine whether he was speaking to her.) Hello.

Man

(beat) Nice little place here.

Woman

Yes.

Man

(beat, as he waits for her to say more.) Jay Fitzhugh's the name.

Woman

(beat) Oh.

Man

(beat, as he waits for her to speak.) What's yours?

Woman

Carol.

Man

Well, nice to meet you—Carol. (beat) Do you have a last name, or is it just “Carol” like “Prince” or “Cher”?



Woman

Yes.

Man

(Smiling, but beginning to display exasperation at the effort required to draw the woman out.) Yes what?

Woman

What?

Man

I mean, “Yes I have a last name” or “Yes I just have one name like Cher”?

Woman

Yes I have a last name.

Man

Great. Super. (beat) What is it?

Woman

McGilligan.

Man

Hey—you're Irish like me! Glad to meet you Carol McGilligan.



He sticks out his hand energetically. She looks at his hand, then at his face, then brings her hand up limply to shake his. He takes her hand gingerly, as if afraid he will crush it. After they shake, she withdraws her hand, then sips her drink as if unaffected by their touching.

Man

I really shouldn't be drinking. (beat) I've got a road race coming up next weekend. (beat, as he waits for her to respond.) A 10-K. They're great fun. You're out there in the sunshine and the fresh air, getting some exercise, and then when you're done, you go to a bar and get pounded with your buddies! (He laughs and waits for her to do likewise. When she doesn't, he continues.) What do you do for fun?



Woman

I write.

Man

You write?

Woman

Yes.

Man

You mean, like a writer?

Woman

Yes.

Man

I mean, not like—what do they call it—calligraphy? You know, wedding invitations and stuff like that?

Woman

No.

Man

Huh. So—you actually write?

Woman

Yes.

Man

Wow. What kind of stuff?



Woman

Novels.

Man

Really? Geez—I'm impressed. You know—I've always wanted to write a novel. Like—I don't know—"Catch-22," something off-beat like that. Something that would start by word-of-mouth, you know, and become an underground classic.

Woman

(Finishes taking a sip.) It'll never happen.

Man

What?

Woman

I said, it'll never happen.

Man

I'll never write an underground classic?

Woman

You'll never write a novel, period.



Man

How do you know?

Woman

Cause I can tell. I can see you piss all your talk away. Like beer.

Man

What, you mean my . . .

Woman

Bullshit.

Man

I was going to be polite and say "blarney." Well, so what? It's just words. I got plenty more where they came from.

Woman

No you don't. You think so little of your words you spray them around like a lawn sprinkler.

Man

Well, that's—just the way I am.

Woman

Apparently. And that's why you'll never write a novel.

Man

Now wait a minute. You don't know me . . .

Woman

Yes I do. I've seen your type before. By the pallet-load.



Man

And?

Woman

Let's just say you talk a good book.

Man

Hey—I can do anything I want if I just set my mind to it.

Woman

No you can't.

Man

Oh yeah—wanna bet?

Woman

Sure.

The man removes his wallet from his pocket and takes out a five dollar bill.

Man

Here—I'll tear this five dollar bill in half, and give you half, and we'll meet back here on the same day next year, and if I haven't written a novel by then, I'll give you the other half.

Woman

(she looks at the bill and then looks him over) Make it a fifty.

Man

What?

Woman

I said make it fifty.

Man

Why?

Woman

It's a sucker bet. Like taking candy from a baby.

Man

You're pretty cocky.

Woman

Let's just say I know what it takes to be a writer. And I know you haven't got what it takes.

Man

Now, how the hell can you tell after talking to me for—what, two minutes?—that I couldn't be a writer.

Woman

Because it's very lonely being a writer. You sit by yourself, all alone in a room, no distractions, putting one . . . little . . . word . . . in front of another. You couldn't stand it. I can tell—you've got to be talking all the time, doing something all the time, drinking, surrounded by your pals. You couldn't take it.

Man

Take what? Like you say, you're just putting words on a piece of paper.

Woman

Not that part. The act of writing isn't hard, no more than the act of painting a barn is hard. But painting a barn isn't the same as painting *Christina's World*.



Man

What's that?

Woman

It's a painting by Andrew Wyeth. It has a barn in it.

Man

Oh, say that reminds me of a joke. The Pope hires Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel and he decides to drop by one day to see how it's going. So the Pope comes in around 5 o'clock and sees Michelangelo cleaning his brushes and washing his hands and says "Hey Mike—how's it going?" And Michelangelo, he's drying his hands, and he looks around the Sistine Chapel and says "Pretty good—I just gotta finish the ceiling."

I love that joke.



Woman

So I gather.

Man

So you think it's like that huh? There's painting, and then there's *painting*. There's *talking*, and then there's *writing*.

Woman

On the nosey.

Man

Hmm.

Woman

You know what they call writers in Ireland?

Man

No, what?

Woman

Failed talkers.

Man

Failed talkers?

Woman

Right. Meaning the ones who become writers are the ones who are no good at talking. Too shy, or they stutter, or they feel intimidated, or they don't suffer fools gladly, or they just plain don't like people. Those are the ones who end up being writers. And the reason is, they've got all these words running around inside their heads, and they don't let 'em out. They *can't* let 'em out. So they put them down on paper. When they're all by themselves.

Man

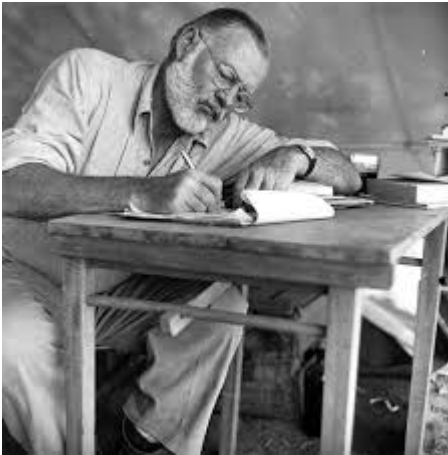
I never thought of it that way. But I guess you're right. Most writers *are* pretty quiet. Except for sportswriters.

Woman

I don't think that counts.

Man

How about Hemingway? He spent a lot of time in bars. Probably talked up a storm.



Woman

Mostly bragging.

Man

Still . . .

Woman

Or trying to get women into bed with him.

Man

Nothing wrong with that.

Woman

No, but it's not really talking. You're trying to show somebody up in the first case, and in the second you're trying to get somebody to *do* something. It's more of a sales pitch. Anyway, you know what happened to him.

Man

What?

Woman

Blew his brains out. (Takes a sip of her drink.)

Man

Oh. Right. I'm sure writing's a tough business. Most of your famous writers don't make any real money until they're dead. Hey, maybe that's why he shot himself!

Woman

Good career move.

Man

Well, anyway he was a talker. And you're talking to me . . .

Woman

(With a snort) Just barely.

Man

I know what it is. You think I'm not smart enough to be a writer. Just cause I read the sports pages, and have friends, and like to go out and have a good time, and talk too much sometimes, you think that means I'm *dumb*. I mean, do I have the word "stupid" written across my forehead?

The woman turns and looks at him closely, examining his forehead with care, as if the question is not a rhetorical one.

Woman

Nope. Not that I can see.

Man

You need to loosen up. Gotta have a *little* fun now and then. Take a break from your writing.

Woman

Oh, I do.

Man

There you go! That's the spirit! You can't write all the time . . .

Woman

(Interrupts him) I touch myself . . .

Man

Where?

Woman

Down there.



Man

Oh.

Woman

For "fun."

Man

Oh. And you prefer that to . . .

Woman

Talking to some idiot in a bar to get laid.

Man

I see. Well, that's no way to meet people.

Woman

That's sort of the point.

Man

(Irritated.) Well, if you don't want to meet people, why are you drinking in a bar?

Woman

(nonplussed, for the first time)

I bought a bottle of wine at a package store. I can hardly drink it on the street. I just stopped in here for a little something to relax me for the train ride home.

Man

Oh. Okay. Fine. Didn't mean to disturb you.

Woman

Not a problem. (She takes a last sip and collects her things. She picks up a paper bag holding a bottle of wine from the floor next to

her and slips a purse over her shoulder.) Well (beat, then facetiously)
. . . it was nice—"talking" to you.

Man

(Glumly) Sure. Same here.

Woman

Bye.

Man

Bye.

The woman walks off stage, leaving the man alone. After a moment, another woman walks on stage and takes the empty seat. She is dressed more fashionably, and by her aspect indicates that she would be receptive to an overture from the man.

Second Woman

(Suggestively) Hello . . .

Man

Hi.

He looks at her glumly, then stares straight ahead. After several moments he pushes the bowl of nuts towards her indifferently.

Man

Want some nuts?

Curtain

The Writer and the Talker was performed as part of the Theatre Collaborative's 2005 Ritalin Readings. It is included in "A Guy Walks Into a Bar . . .", a trilogy of plays about drinking published by JAC Publishing.

