

CROWDED HEART

By Patrick Gabridge

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****For contest purposes, costumes and sound effects aren't necessary. Props can easily be mimed.****

SCENE: The interior of FRANK'S heart. (If performed for contest, sound effects aren't necessary.)

(Darkness. The sound of a heartbeat, beating fast, fades as the scene progresses. Lights up to reveal JANET, sitting in a chair behind a desk, concentrating on a few sheets of paper. SHE wears a flowing dress that accentuates her feminine features.

(FRANK sits next to JANET, also studying the papers, his hand only millimeters from hers. Suddenly HE gets up and walks around the desk in a large circle, his eyes never leaving JANET. FRANK wears a business suit and a wedding ring.)

CAST: FRANK and JANET

FRANK: You don't belong here.

JANET: Then ask me to leave.

FRANK: I would like to...

JANET: But? Do it. It's YOUR heart. If you want me gone, just ask me to leave.

FRANK: Your presence excites me.

JANET: It's up to you.

FRANK: It's not so easy.

JANET: All you have to do is ask.

FRANK: Maybe I will.

JANET: There is nothing wrong with my presence.

FRANK: Easy for you to say. I'm the one suffering the torture.

JANET: Torture? You find me irresistible.

FRANK: Almost. I've kept from making contact. I've resisted the urge to blurt out my feelings.

JANET: And what have you gained from your control? Think about what you're missing.

FRANK: So seductive, aren't you? So sincere, so nice, so completely... uninterested. I've heard nothing from you but my own whispers of infatuation...whispers that turn civil conversation into love songs. I analyze every word for a possible double meaning, the slightest positive inclination... And sometimes, I fool myself.

JANET: Because you want me. You want to feel our lips pressed together. Physical desire is natural. Don't you think I see you stare?

FRANK: I try not to. But when you walk by, I'm drawn to you. It's not your body. If it were purely physical, you would have no more power than an image from a magazine. I want to *be* with you. To exist near you, to spend time with you. You are so dangerous.

JANET: Dangerous? Come here, I'll show you how safe I am.

(HE backs away, but returns, even closer.)

FRANK: Stay there. Stay there. What the hell am I doing? I'm married.

JANET: It's one of the first things you told me.

FRANK: Because I knew you appealed to me. Instantly. I knew if I told you about my wife, you'd never get too close.

JANET: You don't want me to feel for you? Liar. Stop looking so deeply into my eyes.

FRANK: What is in you that draws me?

JANET: It doesn't matter, you're not going to do anything about it.

FRANK: I still have The Guilt.

JANET: You haven't done anything.

FRANK: You're here, aren't you? When I close my eyes, I see you, not her. In the dark, when my wife and I make love, I try to push it away, but I still see your face. Once...I let myself...I conjured you...she was moving under me, but I felt you...I felt you.

JANET: You can. For real. She'll never know.

FRANK: She would sense it. I can't risk her knowing. I don't want to lose her.

JANET: If she's so important, why isn't she here?

FRANK: She's not far. Just in the next chamber. She could find out so easily.

JANET: The door is closed.

FRANK: If she tries to enter this chamber, she'll know. The door has been closed only once before, and I was lucky. I thought it was an isolated incident, but here you are, not even a year later. How often is this going to happen?

JANET: Maybe not often enough. You have to face—

FRANK: This is the eleventh time since I was twelve years old. Every time, it's the same breathlessness, same fluttering heart, same yearning for a signal to proceed. Longing. On number nine, the signal came loud and clear.

JANET: So you married her.

FRANK: And this sort of thing was supposed to stop happening.

JANET: A foolish expectation.

FRANK: I love my wife.

JANET: So?

FRANK: So I should be content. I am content. Happy. I swear. I don't want to be attracted to you.

JANET: Fine. I have behaved with complete innocence. Businesslike to the extreme.

FRANK: I know.

JANET: I don't have to take this from you. I deserve better.

(SHE starts to exit. HE blocks her way.)

FRANK: Where are you going?

JANET: I'm leaving.

FRANK: Don't.

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