

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE SKY?

a contemporary play in two acts

by Drew Moyer

<http://offthewallplays.com>

Caution: This script is provided for reading purposes only. Professionals and amateurs are hereby advised that it is subject to royalty. It is fully protected under the laws of the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including but not limited to professional, amateur, film, radio, and all other media (including use on the worldwide web) and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved; and any unauthorized use of the material may subject the user to any and all applicable civil and criminal penalties. For any information about royalties or to apply for a performance license please click the following link:

<http://offthewallplays.com/royalties-and-licensing-of-plays-sold-by-off-the-wall-plays/>

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE SKY?

a contemporary play in two acts

by Drew Moyer

© June 2016

Drew Moyer

All Rights Reserved

CHARACTERS

JONATHAN, 29.

A pop songwriter. Anxious and neurotic. Paranoid on the brink of therapy.

MADELINE, 31.

His wife, a photographer. Spiritual, a bit pretentious. A “true artist.”

BRETT, 34.

Jonathan’s publisher. Handsome, wolfish. A New York implant from Liverpool, his English accent adds to his charm.

SETTING

Present. A hot summer night in Park Slope, Brooklyn, just after midnight on a Saturday. The interior of Jonathan and Madeline’s one bedroom apartment; specifically the living room, and half of a kitchenette, which is separated from the playing space by a high countertop. A couch and easy chair split center stage, with a matching coffee and end table set. A small lamp sits on one of the end tables. To the side, a portable bar, fully stocked with multiple liquors and rocks glasses. There is a medium-sized, decorative fountain in one corner of the room that is turned off. Many framed photographs are tastefully dispersed throughout the wall space, complimenting a large, prominently placed, classic analog clock.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT ONE

Just after midnight on a Saturday in Brooklyn. The living room of Jonathan and Madeline’s apartment.

ACT TWO

Around 1:00 a.m. in the same place.

Act I

(The stage is dark, except for perhaps some very low, residual light from the windows. A slow, ominous ticking sound begins to fade in. It reaches full volume as footsteps are heard from off.)

(The sound of jingling keys and the sound of the front door (offstage) unlocking, then opening. Voices fade in while the ticking dies down.)

MADELINE (off)

Fine, Jonathan! I'm excited!

JONATHAN (off)

Oh, gi—if that's excited, then I must be *thrilled* right now, since we seem to be, just, tossing words around!

MADELINE

(Off, overlapping.)

Oh, for Christ's *sake*!

(MADELINE blows in, wearing a stylish and sexy black dress. JONATHAN enters behind her, in a fitted black suit and black tie. JONATHAN flicks on the light (cue lights up). It should be apparent that MADELINE has been drinking.)

MADELINE

I didn't want him to come back here, all right? I'm allowed to be a little annoyed.

(MADELINE flings her shoes into the middle of the floor and collapses on the couch.)

JONATHAN

I just—I don't know what you want from me. You're always saying how boring our lives are, how we don't ever have any *guests*.

MADELINE

Friends, I'm always saying; *friends*. I want to have people over that we can be *ourselves* around, for God's sake.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

How do you think people become "friends," Maddy—they start out as guests... It's like...

MADELINE (overlapping)

This is someone that we have to *impress*, in our own apartment. That's worse than a guest, that's... I don't even know. An audience.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

I don't know... Evolution 101—An audience? God, you are dramatic.

MADELINE (overlapping)

That's what it is, Jona—You know, I seem to remember a particular time, when I had a certain "guest" come over...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Oh, don't start with th—I *knew* you were gonna bring that up. That was completely different. Brett is not...

MADELINE (overlapping)

I wasn't *gonna* say that!

JONATHAN (overlapping)

...my boss! Well I don't know why you're making me say it, then!

MADELINE (overlapping)

No one's making you say it; you're jumping down my throat!

JONATHAN (overlapping)

You're implying some similarity between Kathleen and Brett; they couldn't be more different! Kathleen *was* your boss.

MADELINE

Kathleen was a bitch, and *you* invited her back.

JONATHAN

I was being polite! And I didn't hear you putting up any kind of objection to Brett coming over.

MADELINE

I was being polite! Because I could tell in about thirty minutes how badly *you* wanted him to come over!

JONATHAN

He said he wants to *talk* to me about something!

MADELINE

(A pause.)

Really?

JONATHAN

Yeah.

MADELINE

He wants to talk to you about something?

JONATHAN

That's what he said.

MADELINE

(Nailing it down.)

You're *sure*.

JONATHAN

Yeah, I'm *sure*. What, you think I made it up?

MADELINE

I just don't know what he'd wanna talk to you about, *now*.

JONATHAN

Well, *I* don't know. Maybe it's about one of my holds; maybe it's about my cut with Paula...

MADELINE (overlapping)

That couldn't wait till Monday?

JONATHAN

I don't think he's *here* Monday, honey; I think...

MADELINE (overlapping)

Or that he could do over the phone?

JONATHAN

(Calmly, asserting his patience.)

Would you let me talk?

MADELINE

I'm sorry, it's just...

(A quick beat change; she concedes.)

I'm sorry. Go ahead.

JONATHAN

(Calmly, as if divulging a secret.)

You're asking me all these questions; the truth is, I don't know. I'm not the one who called the meeting. *But*—and not to get ahead of ourselves, here, but... you know what I'm thinking it is, right? That *thing* we've both been thinking about, but I'm too afraid to jinx it by saying it out loud? You know what I'm talking about?

MADELINE

What, resigning you?

JONATHAN (cringing)

Shh! Jesus Christ!

MADELINE (overlapping)

Oh, for God's sake—I don't know, Jonathan; it *could* be. Yeah.

(JONATHAN sighs, shakes his head in disappointment,
looks for ways to straighten up the apartment.)

MADELINE

What?

JONATHAN

Nothing, just... Fuck *me*, I guess. Right? I guess it *is* bad news.

MADELINE

Jesus, Jonathan. It just doesn't add *up*, is all I'm saying.

JONATHAN

(Quite genuine.)

Should I tell him not to come?

MADELINE

Are you serious? God, everything with you is so—No, you should *not* call him...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

I don't know, honey; I don't think I can handle any bad news right now...

MADELINE (overlapping)

...Black and white—that's all it ever *is* with you!

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Well, you know, honey? Here *I* am—this was the plan all along, might I remind you, to get him back here...

MADELINE (overlapping)

Whoa, whoa, hey. You said you were interested to see if he would come back. You made it sound like, if he invited himself, you wouldn't object.

JONATHAN

(Overlapping, raising his voice, yet maintaining the same,
rational tone.)

And here *he* is, here *he*—Doesn't matter, doesn't matter—And here *he* is, going on and on about how he wants to *talk* to me about something, practically *begging* me to invite him back...

MADELINE (overlapping)
 Begging. Really—that's what it was? It was begging?

JONATHAN (overlapping)
 You know? And it's like, we're never in town at the same time. I mean, like, literally, never; it's like he does it on purpose. And I've got this *one* get-together, this company get-together, and he wants to talk to me? So much so that he wants to come back to my apartment? How am I supposed to take that, other than that it's a good thing?

(MADELINE shrugs, nods. JONATHAN shrugs too, as if to say "Right?" It should seem for a moment as though both are in agreement.)

JONATHAN
 But then, there's my wife...

MADELINE
 (More or less to herself.)
 Oh, good Lord.

JONATHAN (overlapping)
 My beautiful, lovely—and I love you, honey; you know I do—but she's telling me, just... this little seed of doubt she's planting; just this little seed, right in the side of my head, just...

MADELINE (overlapping)
 I just didn't want you to get your hopes up! I'll never speak again!

JONATHAN (overlapping)
 And so I *can't* get excited about something for one minute; it's gotta be... you know. Back down to the dumps.

MADELINE (overlapping)
 All *right*, Jonathan; all right. You wanna know what it is? Honestly?

(JONATHAN nods, rationally, welcoming her to continue.)

MADELINE
 (Slowly and calmly.)

I just... I wanted to make sure, that you didn't *want* him to say it, so badly that you...

(She invites him to fill in the blank.)

you know.

JONATHAN

(After a pause, surprised, not angry.)

Maddy. Give me a little credit, here!

MADELINE

I'm just making sure.

JONATHAN

(Overlapping, smiling.)

No, no, no, no; you're making sure... what? That I'm not... hearing things?

(He laughs. MADELINE smiles, but is still slightly worried.)

MADELINE

Hey, come on, I'm just...

JONATHAN

(Overlapping, chuckling)

I've still got a couple marbles rolling around up here, right? I'm *pretty* sure.

(He playfully knocks on his head.)

MADELINE (laughs)

You might.

(He approaches her, warmly.)

JONATHAN

It's cute that you're so worried about me.

MADELINE

That's my job.

JONATHAN

What, to worry about me, or be cute?

(She laughs as JONATHAN hugs her softly; she reciprocates. The moment evolves into a very slow swaying over the next few lines.)

JONATHAN

So you think I'm gonna end up in the loony bin?

MADELINE

Oh, you've been in the loony bin. I just don't want you to end up in the ward.

JONATHAN (laughs)

If I'm there, you've been there for weeks.

MADELINE

Well then who's gonna bail us out?

JONATHAN

(A pause while he thinks.)

Your mother.

MADELINE

Pah!

(She laughs; JONATHAN smiles.)

JONATHAN

Yeah, you're right. She's probably the one who committed us.

MADELINE

Crazy woman.

(She breathes deeply, relishing the moment.)

Mm...

JONATHAN

(After a pause, seamlessly switching trains of thought.)

I mean, who *knows* what it could be about. But it's *gotta* be something good. It's *gotta*.

(JONATHAN stops the slow dance, looks at MADELINE.)

JONATHAN

Right?

MADELINE

(Caught off guard by the quick beat change.)

Yeah, it's... exciting.

JONATHAN (frowns)

You don't sound excited.

MADELINE

(Sweetly, trying to save the moment.)
I—I just said I was.

JONATHAN
(Giving up; walking away.)
You're not excited.

MADELINE
What—what does excited sound like, Jonathan; you want me to scream?

JONATHAN
You just said you *weren't* excited about him coming over!

MADELINE
I'm not thrilled about having a *guest* over, no; after midnight, after I've been drinking all night. But yeah, the fact that a man like Brett is coming over to talk to you, is pretty... you know—*remarkable*. I'm over the *moon*, how's that?

JONATHAN
(After a slight pause.)
Well. Don't get *too* crazy about it. I mean, he wants to talk to *me*, too. It's gonna be a two-sided conversation...

MADELINE
(Overlapping, slightly under her breath.)
Jesus...

JONATHAN (overlapping)
...You make it sound like he's God's gift to... he needs *me*, too, you know.

MADELINE (overlapping)
Yes, Jonathan. I know.

JONATHAN (overlapping)
Well, sometimes, it's like you *don't* know. Sometimes it's like, no matter how many times I tell you, you still think of him like he's...

MADELINE (overlapping)
All *right*, honey, he's not your boss. Whatever, y—you just need to relax, a little bit. Huh? You're gonna get yourself all amped up.

JONATHAN
Yeah I'm *amped*. Of course I'm amped! I'm amped, baby!

(JONATHAN searches for ways to straighten up the apartment.)

MADELINE

Well, stop. Drink some water or someth—*breathe*. Sit down, for God's sake—why aren't you sitting? We're home now.

(JONATHAN picks up her shoes, heads toward the bedroom, offstage.)

JONATHAN (distracted)

I wanna... clean up a little bit.

MADELINE

Are you taking my shoes?

JONATHAN

(He stops and turns to her, not understanding the problem.)

What?

MADELINE

Why are you taking my shoes?

JONATHAN

I'm just putting them in the bedroom.

(MADELINE shakes her head, as if exhausted from having the same argument too many times.)

JONATHAN

What?

MADELINE

What's wrong with where they were?

JONATHAN

They don't belong on the floor.

MADELINE

They belong near my feet.

JONATHAN

On your feet, maybe.

MADELINE

(Reaching her hand out.)

Well, I might wanna put them back on; can you just...?

(JONATHAN pauses, shakes his head. He then reluctantly hands them back to her.)

MADELINE

(Taking the shoes.)

Thank you.

(She tosses them on the floor by her feet. A brief moment while JONATHAN stares at the shoes, bothered by the untidiness. The ticking of the clock fades back in. MADELINE watches him stare, waiting for his next move. He holds his tongue until he can no longer stand it, scratching his head vigorously before speaking. The ticking sound shuts off as soon as he does.)

JONATHAN

Well, can you at least put them upright?

MADELINE (overlapping)

Oh, for God's sake.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

He'll be here soon!

MADELINE (overlapping)

And God forbid he ever thinks I take off my shoes, Jonathan!

(She puts the shoes upright, together, neatly, by the side of the couch.)

How's that?

JONATHAN

Well, that *looks* better. Thank you.

(JONATHAN starts looking around the living room for other ways to straighten up.)

MADELINE

You're welcome.

(A pause while she watches him buzz around. She frowns, worried.)

MADELINE

Jonathan, please stop. The place looks fine; just...

(She sighs.)

I love you, OK?

(JONATHAN is too preoccupied to respond.)

MADELINE (helpfully)
Why don't you make a drink?

JONATHAN (distantly)
I love you too.

MADELINE (confused)
What?

JONATHAN (looking up)
What?

MADELINE
I said, why you don't make a drink for yourself.

JONATHAN
(He waves it off, distracted.)
Oh, I don't... I don't wanna drink...

MADELINE (coaxing)
Come on.

JONATHAN
(Overlapping, not listening.)
...Wanna maintain *some* semblance of coherence in front of this guy...

MADELINE
Make me one, then.

JONATHAN
You *definitely* don't need one.

MADELINE
Hey.

JONATHAN
(Looking up, innocent.)
What?

MADELINE
(Ignoring the dig; moving on.)
Please?

(JONATHAN sighs, then heads over to the bar.)

MADELINE (smiling)

I don't need to be decent.

JONATHAN

You want ice?

MADELINE

Yes, please.

(He grabs the ice bucket and heads into the kitchen to fill it.)

JONATHAN (suspicious)

Are you just trying to give me something to do?

MADELINE

No?

JONATHAN

OK. 'Cause, you know it doesn't really help, when it's just me doing something for the sake of doing something.

MADELINE

I just wanted a drink, honey; I promise.

JONATHAN

OK, but just so you know, if I can sense any kind of... condescension, in it, it makes me feel like I'm *not* your husband with a problem, but more like some *dependent*, whose mere presence is this giant...

(He has finished her drink and takes it across the living room, hands it to her.)

MADELINE

(Overlapping, genuine, as she takes the drink.)

Thank you.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

...inconvenience. Sure.

(After a pause, sighs, confessing.)

I'm sorry, all right? I'm a little nervous.

MADELINE

Don't be.

JONATHAN
I love you.

MADELINE
I love you too.

JONATHAN (modeling)
Jacket on, do you think?

MADELINE
Very handsome.

JONATHAN
Thanks honey.

MADELINE
Aren't you gonna be hot, though?

JONATHAN (remembering)
Oh, *shit!* The AC!

(He runs to the thermostat.)

MADELINE
What about it?

JONATHAN
It's *broken*, obviously!

MADELINE
Oh, Jona—it's fine. I'm sure he'll understand.

JONATHAN
(Pleading, to the thermostat.)
Oh, for Christ's sake, he's gonna roast!

MADELINE (helpfully)
He's been drinking.

JONATHAN
That'll make it worse!

MADELINE
No—well... maybe. But, his tie will already be loosened, he'll have his jacket off...

JONATHAN

It's fucking *hot*, Maddy.

MADELINE

It's summer.

JONATHAN

When was the last time you think he went to an apartment without AC? You think he *associates* with people with apartments without AC?

(He starts banging the thermostat.)

MADELINE

(After a pause, gently.)

Honey...

JONATHAN

Did you email the landlord?

MADELINE

Yeah. She didn't answer. I told you, remember?

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Did you email her *again*, though. After that.

MADELINE

No?

JONATHAN

(Shaking his head.)

Jesus, Maddy, I asked you to email her again.

MADELINE

No you didn't.

JONATHAN

I *did*. I did, I did—and why would I need to remind you about that? We haven't had cold air in here for fucking ten months; isn't that reminder enough?

MADELINE

She didn't answer, Jonathan! She doesn't give a shit.

JONATHAN

Well, she should give a shit. We pay our rent, don't we?

MADELINE

That's exactly why she doesn't give a shit.

(JONATHAN slams the thermostat one last time, then walks away in frustration.)

JONATHAN

Fuck!

MADELINE

She already has the money, why should she care?

JONATHAN

Are you, like, taking her side, or...?

MADELINE

No, I'm just... trying to get a common enemy—would you *relax*?

(The sound of creaking wood and banging comes in from above.)

JONATHAN

(Throwing his hands up.)

Oh great, and now the bowlers are home!

MADELINE

Honey.

JONATHAN

Tell me, dear, do you think they're going for three hundred tonight? Or are they just having the rest of their elephant family over for a slumber party?

MADELINE

It's not the neighbors' fault, Jonathan; you need to *chill*.

JONATHAN

I'm sorry, honey, it's just that things are a little *dire* for me at the moment. My publisher's coming over and it's hot as balls in this apartment!

MADELINE (overlapping)

That's not gonna affect...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

And my wife doesn't seem to understand the gravity of that!

MADELINE

Don't lump me in, here; I haven't done anything wrong!

JONATHAN

No, you're right, you haven't. But I know you don't want him back here, and I'm betting that there's a part of you, tonight, that hopes it doesn't go well. There is, isn't there?

MADELINE

(After a pause.)

I'm gonna let you rethink what you just said. I get that you're upset, and you're anxious, but don't you start taking it out on me, or I swear you will lose your best ally tonight. OK?

(A few seconds of standoff pass between the two of them. In the silence, the ticking of the clock fades back in, and JONATHAN becomes increasingly bothered by the sound. He scratches his head vigorously before snapping.)

JONATHAN

God, that fucking clock!

(He storms over to the wall, reaching to take it down.)

MADELINE

Jonathan. Jonathan.

JONATHAN

What? It's irritating!

MADELINE

It looks nice. Can you leave it, please?

JONATHAN

I'm just taking the battery out.

MADELINE

I like it. I like knowing what time it is, OK?

(He stops, exhales, scratches his head.)

MADELINE

Let me turn on the fountain.

(MADELINE heads to the corner, turns the fountain on. The ticking sound is dulled, then disappears. A moment passes while they take in the sound of the trickling water.)

MADELINE

Better?

JONATHAN

(Reluctantly, feeling bad for snapping.)

Yeah.

MADELINE

(After a pause, softly.)

Honey, they're gonna resign you.

JONATHAN (sighs)

I just don't know.

MADELINE

You're the best writer they've got. Best in the world. They'd be crazy.

JONATHAN

You know it's been over a year since my cut with Paula?

MADELINE

But you've got, like, what, five holds?

JONATHAN

Six, after Ruben last week.

MADELINE

Right; *six*. That's amazing.

JONATHAN

It's not anything.

MADELINE

Yes it is! Honey, some of the biggest stars in the country...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Who cares. Holds are bullshit. It's like, take my song and lock it in an ivory tower until it's too stale to be worth it.

MADELINE

I know.

JONATHAN

It's a damn crime, honestly.

MADELINE

Well, that's what I'm always saying, honey, that Brett should be going to bat for you. Isn't that what I'm always saying?

JONATHAN

Well, see, that's the *really* fucked up part. See, I'm starting to think he's doing it on purpose. He's keeping my balls on ice until my contract is up, because it's kind of like, we're within that threshold now, where if I cut something *now*, he'll *have* to keep me on because of all the paperwork and logistics and shit that would take *longer* than three months.

MADELINE

You're being paranoid.

JONATHAN

Of course I'm paranoid! I'm probably gonna be out on my ass!

MADELINE

Do you really think he'd be coming over tonight if he wasn't gonna resign you? *That'd* be fucked up.

JONATHAN

He doesn't know yet, is probably what it is.

MADELINE

Well, that's not so bad.

JONATHAN

How is that not *terrible*. They're debating whether or not I'm worth keeping—there shouldn't even *be* a debate!

MADELINE

OK, well if they really are debating, don't you think that Brett would be the one in your corner? I mean, it's not the guys upstairs; they don't even know you.

JONATHAN

Yeah. That's probably true.

MADELINE

I think you just need to relax. You're gonna have a nice time—it's just drinks. It's really not that big of a deal.

JONATHAN

In all seriousness, should I call and cancel? That would be stupid, right?

MADELINE

Are you kidding me right now?

JONATHAN

I know, I know.

MADELINE

You were just so excited. So excited—I, I just don't understand how you can go from one end of the spectrum to the other so quickly like that.

JONATHAN

I can't help it. I have a bad feeling.

MADELINE

You always have a bad feeling; Jonathan, your anxiety is...

JONATHAN

(Overlapping, waving it off with his hand.)

I know, I know.

MADELINE

And I think on Monday we should...

JONATHAN

(Overlapping, he again changes beats quickly and seamlessly.)

Yeah, yeah, I—I got it—Hey, quick question. Do you think you could flirt with him?

MADELINE (appalled)

What? No, Jonathan!

JONATHAN

Not *flirt*; whatever you wanna call it. Just do the... that sexy wife charm thing.

MADELINE

(A little hurt.)

Jonathan!

JONATHAN

(Not seeing the problem.)

Maddy. He's single, you're attractive, it's natu—he's straight. He was all into you at the party, can you just...? Please?

MADELINE (sighs)

What... what do you want me to *do*?

JONATHAN

Just do... you know. Your stuff. I'm not saying it's a bad thing; it's a really good thing. Just... you know—be *nice* to him, how's that?

MADELINE

Well that's good, that you cleared that up; I was thinking about being a raging bitch.

JONATHAN

Somewhere in between nice and flirting, OK? You know what I mean; just do, *that*.

(There is a knock on the door.)

JONATHAN

OK?

MADELINE

(Waving it off.)

Yeah, Jonathan, I—don't worry about me. Just remember to breathe. And try to have fun?

JONATHAN

I will.

MADELINE

I love you.

JONATHAN

I love you too.

(JONATHAN disappears to the front door. The sound of it opening.)

JONATHAN (off)

Hey...!

BRETT (off)

Almost didn't think you'd still be awake!

JONATHAN (off)

Oh, yeah—Come in, come in.

(The sound of the door closing.)

JONATHAN (off)

I apologize for the heat, umm... our AC—well, we've been trying to get in touch with the landlord...

(BRETT enters in a stylish brown jacket, white dress shirt, and tie. JONATHAN follows behind.)

BRETT (overlapping)

Madeline.

MADELINE

Hi!

BRETT (joking)

It's been a long time.

MADELINE (laughs)

Ha, yeah...

(He's already crossed to her, and gives her a slight hug and cheek kiss.)

MADELINE

Glad you could make it.

BRETT

(He takes a quick glance around.)

Glad you could have me. Beautiful place.

MADELINE

Thank you.

JONATHAN

Yeah, we've been here...

(Looking to MADELINE.)

...what, a little over a year?

MADELINE

Yeah, about that.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Yeah.

BRETT

(Noticing one of the framed photographs on the wall.)

This is...

JONATHAN

Oh, that's... actually one of Maddy's.

BRETT

(He studies it.)

Wow.

JONATHAN

Yeah, that's, uhh... pretty recent, actually—did I mention Maddy was a photographer?

BRETT

You know, I'm not sure. I think you did.

JONATHAN

Yeah, she's... very good at what she does.

MADELINE

Oh... well...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

You are, honey.

BRETT (to MADELINE)

This is *very* good.

MADELINE

Thank you. It's, uhh, part of a series I'm working on about... I don't know, portals, I'd guess you call them?

BRETT

Portals.

MADELINE

Or—well, not like, in space, or anything, just... places that lead to somewhere else, in nature. Clouds, umm... thickets; stuff like that.

BRETT

Very nice.

MADELINE

(Nearly overlapping.)

Mostly clouds. Umm... yeah, just... cool openings, I guess, that kind of make the viewer wonder what lies ahead.

BRETT

I see. Beautiful work, here; just lovely.

MADELINE

Thank you.

JONATHAN

(Motioning to the entire wall.)

Yeah, all of these are Maddy's, actually.

BRETT

(He looks around briefly.)

Are they? Hm. Well, they're *all* very nice.

MADELINE

Can we get you a drink?

BRETT

Oh, sure, why not.

JONATHAN

(He heads to the bar.)

Whiskey?

(Somewhere in the course of the next line or two, BRETT sits down, removing his jacket, pulling his keys from his back pocket and setting them on the coffee table. MADELINE sits soon after, on a separate piece of furniture.)

BRETT

That's great. You know, it's funny. There was an open bar tonight, so you'd think it'd be the perfect opportunity to... branch out, I don't know. Mingle with a different drink. But I still found myself sticking to the usual.

MADELINE

Which is?

BRETT

Whiskey sour.

MADELINE

Ooh, I love whiskey sours.

BRETT

(Joking, to JONATHAN.)

Hey, bartender, did you hear that?

JONATHAN

(From the bar.)

What's that?

BRETT

We'll have two whiskey sours, if you please.

JONATHAN

(Beginning to work.)

You got it.

BRETT

Oh, no, mate, we're only joking. A regular whiskey is fine.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

No, no, I can make those. Do you like it with egg white?

BRETT

Egg white? Is that an American thing?

JONATHAN

Not necessarily, no. Usually they'll only add it at the more pretentious places. Otherwise it's usually called a Boston Sour.

BRETT (to MADELINE)

He's still got it, hasn't he?

MADELINE

Oh yeah. Even after he signed with you, he insisted on getting this little portable bar.

JONATHAN

Just a little hobby of mine.

BRETT

Well, I think it's very cool. You know your shit.

JONATHAN

I'm just happy the knowledge didn't go to waste.

BRETT

Oh, absolutely not. You can make a killing in New York as a bartender.

JONATHAN

Oh, definitely.

BRETT (to MADELINE)

You know what some of these guys go home with at the end of the night?

(To JONATHAN.)

Well, I don't need to tell *you*. What were you pocketing at your old job?

JONATHAN

Oh, uhh... hundred, maybe one-fifty on a good night.

BRETT

(Not expecting that, but still polite.)

Oh. Well, that's still good.

JONATHAN

Well, with inflation and...

BRETT

(Overlapping, to MADELINE.)

This one guy I know pulls in about four *hundred* a night, on average.

MADELINE

Really?

BRETT

I shit you not. And it's *cash*.

(To JONATHAN.)

Makes you think we got it wrong, Jonathan!

JONATHAN

What do you mean?

BRETT

I mean, being in the music industry; I think we got it wrong.

JONATHAN

Ha. Yeah.

BRETT

No, I'm serious, man! You ever think about getting back into it? You're good.

JONATHAN

Oh, well, I mean... not really.

BRETT (overlapping)

No, you are! I can *tell* you are.

(To MADELINE.)

Is he not good?

MADELINE

Of course.

JONATHAN

Thank you. No, I just meant that...

BRETT (overlapping)

No, no, of course, I understand; I know you've got your songs. But *man*, four hundred a night!

(An afterthought.)

I mean, even if you started out at one-fifty and worked your way up.

JONATHAN

(He hands BRETT his drink.)

Whiskey sour.

BRETT

That's great, man, thank you.

(MADELINE stands while JONATHAN hands her her drink, while he stands holding his own. BRETT then stands too, noticing the occasion for a toast.)

JONATHAN

Well, here; why don't we drink to...

MADELINE

Good company.

JONATHAN

(He raises his glass.)

Good company. Glad you could make it, Brett.

BRETT

(He raises his glass.)

Ah, screw it, guys. To friends.

JONATHAN

Yeah; friends—of course.

(They drink.)

BRETT

Delicious.

MADELINE

Mm, thanks, honey.

BRETT (To MADELINE)

You know I didn't even know he *worked* at that bar, when I picked him up?

MADELINE

Really?

BRETT

Well, I found out later, but I had no idea at the time. I thought it was just a gig; you know how it is.

MADELINE

Yeah, no, he'd been working there, for... probably three years at that point? Before we met.

JONATHAN

Yeah, about three years.

BRETT

How *did* you guys meet; I'd been meaning to ask that.

JONATHAN

Oh, we, uhh... we met at a wedding, actually; my buddy Travis's wedding.

BRETT

That's great. And Madeline, you were a friend of the bride?

JONATHAN

Actually, sh—well, they *are* friends now, but Maddy was the photographer.

BRETT

Get out.

JONATHAN

I know, it's crazy. We, uhh... yeah, well, I guess we just kind of got to talking and hit it off and... yeah. Got married about a year and a half ago.

BRETT

Well, you're very lucky.

(To MADELINE, an afterthought.)

Both of you.

MADELINE

Thank you.

JONATHAN

Are you seeing anybody, Brett?

BRETT

Oh, no. I'm not much of a dater.

JONATHAN

Really? I would've thought the ladies would be all over you.

BRETT

Well, it's just that I've never really found anyone to settle down with. Or—well... there are other circumstances.

JONATHAN

(A hair hesitant.)

Gotcha.

BRETT

But that's not for lack of trying. I can be persistent, when I want to be.

JONATHAN

Yeah, I know what you mean. I practically had to beg Maddy to give me her number.

MADELINE (playfully)

Oh, you didn't have to *beg*...

JONATHAN

I did! I basically had to get down on a kn—she stopped me, thankfully, before it got to that.

MADELINE

You were drunk.

JONATHAN (to BRETT)

And that was why she didn't wanna go out with me! She didn't take me seriously.

MADELINE

Well... a wedding, guys trying to pick up girls they don't know, and again, you were wasted.

JONATHAN

I knew what I wanted. The alcohol didn't have anything to do with it.

MADELINE

Anyway, he eventually snuck *me* a few drinks and... I don't know, I guess I was so desperate to have some fun at that point that I accepted it as chivalry.

BRETT

You weren't having a good time?

MADELINE

It was my first and last wedding gig, put it that way.

BRETT

Spoken like a true artist.

MADELINE

It's not that I'm above it, or anything like that. It just wasn't for me.

JONATHAN

She is a true artist, though. Maddy's the type of person, if she doesn't get her daily dose of culture once in a while...

BRETT

She takes it out on *you*, then?

JONATHAN

Yes!

MADELINE

Oh, no I don't.

JONATHAN

Yes you d—you *totally* do!

MADELINE

I live with you; you're at the receiving end of everything.

JONATHAN (to BRETT)

There was this one time, when I was in Nashville—you had me on a write with Bryce Benson, you remember him?

BRETT

Yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

I was in my room and I flipped on "The Walking Dead"—I don't know if you know that show, but... Anyway, so I called Maddy and I was like, honey, we've gotta watch this show. It's awesome. It's so addicting. So I got home, I put on an

episode, and she *hated* it. Absolutely hated it. And that's all well and good but, she was *actually* mad at me, for liking it!

MADELINE

Oh, I wasn't mad at *you*! The show was a fucking disaster; it disgusted me!

BRETT

Just the gore, or...?

MADELINE

(Passionate, but not angry.)

No, it's because it was a pitiful excuse! It was deplorable; it was like a hillbilly's idea of a good TV show—and I don't mean "good" in the sense of popularity, or ratings; I'm talking about an honest to God, good piece of film, where the writing and the acting and the directing, and cinematography are all executed to perfection. *This...* this was a surface level, shortcut, piece of crap, that, I—

(She briefly laughs.)

I honestly don't know how it got as far as it did. It's obvious to me people don't really give a shit anymore about what's good, or not good; as long as it sells.

BRETT (nodding)

Mm.

MADELINE (overlapping)

Like, *good* is all of a sudden synonymous with money.

BRETT

A true artist, then!

JONATHAN

(To BRETT, agreeing.)

Right? / I thought it was good. I mean, not the best show I've ever seen, but...

MADELINE

We've watched so many good shows together; how could you possibly think that was good?

JONATHAN

I don't know. I liked it. I thought it was entertaining. Not everything has to be weep-your-balls-off *art* to be—You know, maybe it's not that good is synonymous with money; maybe it can be synonymous with "entertaining."

BRETT

A valid point.

MADELINE

Maybe. But doesn't that bring a lot more things into the same realm? Sports?

JONATHAN

Yeah, sports are entertaining.

MADELINE

But they're not art.

JONATHAN

But again, not everything has to be art for it to be enjoyable.

MADELINE

Well, my point is that TV shows were once considered art, but slowly they're becoming *only* entertainment. They're digressing.

JONATHAN

What kind of TV show isn't trying to be entertaining? That *is* the main goal, yes?

MADELINE

I would *think* that the main goal is to be entertaining, *while* being true to their art. Hence my point about shortcuts.

BRETT

(To no one in particular.)

That's always a good question, what *is* art?

JONATHAN

(Still to MADELINE.)

My point is, though, that not everything has to be *considered* art. You can just take it for what it is, and if that's entertaining, then what's the harm in it?

MADELINE

The harm is that they're essentially shitting on all the great TV shows that came before it.

JONATHAN

So you're never gonna watch TV again, then, because "The Walking Dead" has soiled your impression of all who will ever set foot in the TV industry, right?

MADELINE

No, Jonathan, it's a shame, is all.

JONATHAN

Well, enjoying something doesn't have to be a shame.

MADELINE

If you enjoy it, great.

JONATHAN

Great.

BRETT

(After a pause, referring to his drink.)

This is great.

JONATHAN

You like it?

BRETT

Spectacular. I meant to ask, did you see Karen at the party?

JONATHAN

Oh, yeah; I did.

MADELINE

Who's that?

BRETT

She's the, uhh, executive VP—she's *my* boss.

(MADELINE and JONATHAN exchange a look.)

BRETT

But yeah, I was talking to her... and Jamie Garber's name came up—you know Jamie?

JONATHAN

Yeah, he's the, uhh... kid's writer, right?

BRETT

Teenagers; yeah.

JONATHAN

(Nearly overlapping.)

Yeah.

BRETT

Or—I should say, yes, he's been successful in that genre, but he's actually quite multifaceted. He's gonna be up for a Grammy this year.

JONATHAN (frowns)

How do you know that?

BRETT

Well, the official nomination's only a formality at this point in the year, but... yeah, the buzz, the radio plays...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

What, that... that, hitting the *town* song?

BRETT

Well, yeah.

(JONATHAN blows his lips, shakes his head.)

MADELINE (recalling)

Oh yeah; I know that song.

JONATHAN

That song is...

BRETT

Oh / know.

JONATHAN (overlapping)

It's a *joke!* He can't even go to clubs; he's *sixteen!*

BRETT

I know.

JONATHAN

That should be evidence enough to *convict* him, let alone... but sure, let's—let's give him a Grammy for his troubles; let's reward him for...

BRETT

(Overlapping, calmly.)

Jonathan. You can't get so heated about it, mate. People'll think you're jealous.

JONATHAN

I'm not—jealous of *him*? That's ridiculous!

BRETT (shrugs)

I'm just saying.

(JONATHAN exhales, scratches his head.)

MADELINE

I get it, honey; it *is* a shitty song.

BRETT

I think you're being a little hard on him, mate. Weren't you just saying how art can be... how it's *allowed* to be entertaining?

JONATHAN

That's different.

BRETT

How?

JONATHAN

He's getting rewarded for it. I would never give "The Walking Dead" a Grammy—or... an Emmy; whatever.

BRETT

Well... I mean, yeah; the masses are always gonna dictate things. That's how we get paid.

JONATHAN

It's bullshit.

BRETT

Eh. Hey—what's that old saying; if you can't beat 'em, join 'em?

JONATHAN

Yeah?

BRETT

Well—and this might not be what you want to hear, but I've got a friend who works with Jamie...

JONATHAN

Oh, I don't...no—Brett, come on.

BRETT

(Overlapping, talking over JONATHAN.)

And I was thinking, I could—well, why not? I mean, really; why not?

JONATHAN

'Cause I wanna maintain some level of self-*respect*; I don't... I don't wanna get down to that level.

BRETT

Up to that level.

JONATHAN

Oh, Jeez—I...

BRETT

What? It's true!

MADELINE

Maybe it's not such a bad idea, honey.

JONATHAN

(Shocked to hear it from her.)

What?

MADELINE

No, I'm serious. You change it up a little bit, change your style... who knows? You might find yourself hitting a whole new niche.

JONATHAN

This coming from the girl who doesn't do *weddings* anymore?

MADELINE

(A hair condescending, without meaning to be.)

Well, it's a little different for me.

JONATHAN

How?

MADELINE (to BRETT)

Maybe, just—help me understand what it is about his songs that doesn't sell.

JONATHAN (to himself)

Jesus Christ.

BRETT (overlapping)

Well—and forgive us, Jonathan; we're speaking candidly, here, but... he's gotta stop being so clever. It's not composers and geniuses who are gonna be hearing this stuff. That, and he's gotta start going after more feasible artists.

(Now to JONATHAN.)

Take Ruben, for example—he was a stretch, mate; he's a soulful, Hispanic dude. And I went along with the pitch because I knew how much you wanted to get him—and you *did* manage to get a hold, and that's really great, but... if we're being honest here, I really don't think it'll amount to anything. I'm sorry, but... it's like I've told you before, you're more geared for someone like a Sarah Giovanni; that female, brooding-type for girls fifteen to twenty-five—that's what you *are*. That's where your powerhouse needs to be; that's where one hundred percent of your songs need to be placed.

MADELINE (nodding)

Right; no, he can do that.

BRETT

And you don't have to take my advice; you can do whatever you want, but... I feel like I owe it to you to advise you in the best way possible, and after that... well, you can take it however you want.

JONATHAN

(Swallowing it, he manages to nod.)

OK.

MADELINE

He's not saying it like it's a bad thing, honey. Sarah Giovanni's huge.

BRETT

That's right.

JONATHAN

Yeah, I—I know.

BRETT

It's just part of the job, mate. Sometimes you've got to adapt—just a little bit. I still want that great talent you have, just... you know—tweaked.

(To MADELINE.)

Honestly, he could stand to watch some romantic comedies. Get in touch with his feminine side a little bit.

MADELINE (nodding)

Uh-huh; yeah. What about the Disney Channel, would that...?

BRETT

Sure.

JONATHAN

(With a chuckle, mostly to himself.)

I must be going nuts, here.

BRETT

(Reiterating, calmly.)

You can't attach your ego to it, mate. How old are you, twenty-five, twenty-six?

JONATHAN

Twenty-nine.

BRETT

Twenty-n—holy shit, are you serious?

MADELINE

I know; he looks young, doesn't he?

BRETT (to MADELINE)

How old are *you*?

MADELINE

Thirty-one.

BRETT

Thirty-one! My God, you're robbing the cradle!

MADELINE (laughs)

How old are *you*?

BRETT

(Smiles, toasting.)

Thirty-*something*. Welcome to the club.

MADELINE

(Laughs harder.)

No, come on, you have to tell me!

BRETT

(He flashes a wolfish grin.)

I will do no such thing. Now! Back on subject; *Jonathan*, has got that sweet, young innocence thing going on; it's riddled all over his music. Once we get him writing for that kind of an audience, he'll make a killing.

MADELINE (nodding)

Definitely! You hear that, honey?

JONATHAN

Yeah.

BRETT

Have we upset you, mate?

JONATHAN

(Overlapping, brushing it off.)

No, no, no; it's... easier said than done, that's all.

MADELINE

It won't be so bad, honey; you... you just need to write the way you normally do,
except maybe keep things more...

(To BRETT.)

...simplistic? I'm sorry, I don't mean to presume...

BRETT

No, no, you're absolutely right. Simple is better; that's true of all music.

JONATHAN

Right. No, I get what you're saying, it's just that it's gonna take some adjustment. I obviously don't think of my stuff as "complicated," it's just the way I naturally *write*.

MADELINE

I know, sweetheart, but maybe you can just think more about a younger audience when you're...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

It's easier said than done, Maddy, is all I'm saying. Think about if you had to cater to a particular audience when you're making your photographs.

BRETT (to JONATHAN)

Oh, is... photography all that different?

JONATHAN

Well, I imagine there's some politics involved, but for the most part, if music were like photography, then I could just write whatever I wanted and perform it, and make a killing that way.

MADELINE

Well, there is still a fair amount of politics invol...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Sure, but there's no middleman.

MADELINE

Well, my publicity agent acts kind of like...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Well, just in the sense of, you don't have to have a pretty face to sell a picture, right?

MADELINE

(To BRETT, joking, as if saying, "see what I have to deal with?")

Nice.

JONATHAN

Well, I didn't...

BRETT (overlapping)

He doesn't mean you don't have a pretty face, love; if he did, he'd be crazy.

MADELINE

(To BRETT, but looking at JONATHAN.)

Thank you.

JONATHAN

(To BRETT, hesitantly, not making eye contact.)

Yes. Thank you.

(To MADELINE.)

I... totally lost my train of thought.

MADELINE (not upset)

It's fine, honey, I know what you...

JONATHAN

(Overlapping, remembering.)

No—OK, well, I'm a ghostwriter, right? So obviously, *I*, don't have a pretty face, in the spirit of what I said before. I can just sell my songs to someone *with* a pretty face and that's that. But you don't have to worry about that because the photographer isn't what sells; it's the photograph.

MADELINE

I know, honey; it's fine.

JONATHAN

Does that make sense, though?

MADELINE (rising)

Yes. Does anyone need a refill?

BRETT

Most definitely.

(She takes his glass, then JONATHAN's, then heads to the bar.)

JONATHAN (rising)

I'll get it, honey.

MADELINE

I got it.

JONATHAN

Do you know how to make a whiskey sour?

MADELINE

Is it something I can look up on my phone?

JONATHAN

Well, yeah, but...

BRETT (rising)

You know, I'm not entirely convinced I want another mixed drink. I think we should pull out the shot glasses.

JONATHAN

Shots?

BRETT

Fuck it, why not? We've already been drinking. It'll be an extension of the party.

JONATHAN (hesitant)

Umm...

(Looking to MADELINE.)

Well, I guess if...

MADELINE

Yeah, let's do it.

BRETT

Excellent!

JONATHAN (shrugs)

OK.

(MADELINE has already started, grabbing three shot glasses from the underneath storage, pouring whiskey into each.)

JONATHAN

I haven't done shots in a long time.

BRETT

All the more reason, then.

MADELINE

Here we go!

(MADELINE finishes pouring; they each grab a shot.)

BRETT

Cheers, everybody!

MADELINE

Cheers!

MADELINE and BRETT take theirs almost simultaneously, BRETT just a hair earlier. JONATHAN hesitates, waits till their shots are up, then quickly takes his.)

BRETT

Ahh!

(JONATHAN sputters, then starts a subdued coughing fit, trying his best to keep it contained.)

BRETT

Whoa, you all right there?

JONATHAN (coughing)

I'm fine. Wrong pipe.

BRETT

(Jokingly announcing.)

We've got a rookie in our midst, everyone! He can make 'em, but he can't take 'em!

(MADELINE laughs.)

BRETT

Only joking, Jonathan.

(He looks around the living room.)

Well now, what shall we do?

JONATHAN

That's it? Just the one?

BRETT

You want another one?

JONATHAN

What kind of party only has one shot?

BRETT

(A slight pause, to MADELINE.)

He's got us there!

MADELINE (shrugs)

Sure.

(She starts to pour.)

BRETT (to JONATHAN)

I'm only saying, I want to *savor* the party. As long as you don't go passing out on me!

JONATHAN

I'm good.

MADELINE (finishing)

All right.

(They each grab a shot. This time, JONATHAN throws it back quickly and deliberately, while the others take it slightly after, slightly slower, but still smooth and easy.)

JONATHAN

Woo!

BRETT

My, that is smooth.

(He glances at the bottle.)

Is that what I think it is?

JONATHAN (proudly)

Johnnie Walker Blue; yes sir.

BRETT

Holy shit! I wish I would've noticed; you didn't have to waste the good shit on me.

JONATHAN

It's our pleasure. We probably never would've opened that if it was just the two of us.

BRETT

Well, I'll replace that bottle for you. Next time we get together.

JONATHAN

Yeah; sounds great.

BRETT

Fuck, that is some good shit!

MADELINE

(She is feeling the buzz.)

Goes right through you.

BRETT (to JONATHAN)

Well, now, is that enough for you, Mr. High Roller?

JONATHAN

For now.

BRETT

Good. I think we should play a game.

JONATHAN

What game?

MADELINE (to BRETT)

Ooh, we have Cards Against Humanity!

BRETT

Oh, God, take me back, why don't you.

MADELINE (laughs)

Specifically reserved for parties!

BRETT

Well, we *are* having a party, aren't we. Where is it?

MADELINE

I'll get it.

(She heads off to grab the game. BRETT watches her go.)

BRETT

She's great, man; congratulations.

JONATHAN

Oh, well, uhh—thank you. Thanks.

BRETT

(After a slight pause, he snaps his attention back to the bar.)
Well, come on, then! We'll need drinks if we're going to play Cards Against Humanity!

JONATHAN

(He starts to work.)

Yeah, definitely. Whiskey sour, or...?

BRETT

Straight is good. Mixing that shit is a bit of blasphemy, don't you think?

JONATHAN

Well, yes and no. Great whiskey makes a great whiskey sour.

BRETT

Yeah, I suppose it does. To me, it's a little like bit fucking a gorgeous woman with her clothes on.

JONATHAN (laughs)

But you can still tell she's gorgeous even with her clothes on. You want ice?

BRETT

No thanks.

(Referring to putting ice in a drink.)

That's a little bit like sex with a condom.

JONATHAN

(He smiles, hands BRETT his drink.)

Ha.

BRETT

But, I'd suppose you'd say sex with a condom can still be good sex.

JONATHAN

That was what I was thinking, actually.

BRETT (laughs)

Good for you man. I love seeing a healthy marriage. Gives me hope.

JONATHAN

So you don't like dating much?

BRETT

Well, it's that I'm not much of a dat-er. I do *enjoy* it, but I'm not much built for longevity. I'm a bit of a cynic in that way.

JONATHAN

Are your parents together?

BRETT

Beg your pardon?

JONATHAN

Oh, I'm sorry.

BRETT

No, I just didn't understand what that has to do with anything.

JONATHAN

Well, they say that children whose parents are divorced have much less of a chance of a lasting marriage themselves.

BRETT (politely)

I'm afraid I haven't had nearly enough liquor to talk about my parents.

JONATHAN

Oh. Sorry.

BRETT

Quite all right, mate. Maybe a little later on you can tell me how you make it work. I don't quite understand how someone can stay with one person when there are so many beautiful women all over this city. *And* her, how does she do it, with so many men probably chomping at the bit? *I'm* envious.

JONATHAN

Well... wait, envious of what?

BRETT

(Ignoring the question; he now speaks with a difficult tone.)

Oh, and—hey, man, look. I'm sorry about putting you on the spot like that before.

JONATHAN

Oh, no, that's... just part of the job; I get it.

BRETT

Well, I'm glad you said that, Jonathan. I, umm... I didn't want to say this in front of Madeline, but, umm... it's rather important, that you take my advice on gearing toward that younger genre. You feel me on that?

JONATHAN (confused)

Uhh... yeah, I...

BRETT

I can't come right out and say it, but... you know your contract's expiring with us and, umm... well. I'm just trying to help you, mate.

JONATHAN

Wait, so... am I...?

BRETT (overlapping)

No, no, no, of course not. You've still got your time with us; you can still—if you can *work* with me, here; if you can give me something I can work with, there's absolutely still a shot for you. I just felt like I owed it to you to...

JONATHAN

Yeah, no, I, uhh... I appreciate that.

BRETT

You know no one wants to see you do well more than me.

JONATHAN

Yeah; umm... well, thank you.

BRETT

(Nearly overlapping.)

Of course, of course. Umm...

JONATHAN

(After a slightly awkward pause.)

Was that what you wanted to talk to me about?

BRETT

W—yeah. In a nutshell, that was...

JONATHAN (overlapping)

Gotcha.

BRETT (overlapping)

Umm...

(A brief, uncomfortable silence passes before MADELINE returns with the game.)

BRETT

Ah, there she is!

MADELINE

(She notices the drinks, and delivers the following with an unconscious British accent.)

Are you making more, then?

(Laughs, shocked.)

Oh my God!

BRETT

No, no, that's all right!

MADELINE (overlapping)

I'm so sorry! That's—I don't even know what that was. I'm not making fun of you!

BRETT

Don't worry love; I know.

JONATHAN (smiling)

I think we've all had a little too much to drink.

BRETT

Oh, no, mate—code switching? Very common; has nothing to do with alcohol.

JONATHAN (skeptical)

Really?

BRETT

Oh yeah, it's quite unconscious, really. You can pick up on an accent, body language... *anything*, of someone else in order to make yourself fit in better. It's called the chameleon effect.

MADELINE (buzzed)

Oh my God, I'm so embarrassed.

BRETT

Don't be, love; it's perfectly normal.

JONATHAN

I wonder why you haven't picked up an American accent, then.

BRETT

(As if to say "good question," but wanting it to go no further.)

Hm.

MADELINE

(Pouty, to JONATHAN, referring to his drink.)

Don't I get one?

JONATHAN

("Are you sure that's a good idea?")

You want one?

MADELINE (pouty)

Yeah.

JONATHAN

All right, all right.

(He starts to work. Then, to BRETT.)

So, uhh... *have* you ever found yourself slipping into an American accent?

BRETT

No, I don't think so.

JONATHAN

I'm just wondering why this... chameleon effect doesn't work on you.

BRETT

(As if trying to politely handle a stupid question.)

I guess it's just rooted in me very deeply? I don't know.

MADELINE

(To BRETT, needy.)

When are we gonna play?

BRETT

(Coolly, demonstrates the couch.)

Right now, love.

(They head over to the couch, JONATHAN with both his and MADELINE's drinks. MADELINE sits first, in the middle, placing the game on the coffee table. JONATHAN sets the drinks down and begins pulling the chair over, angling it towards the coffee table. BRETT then sits next to MADELINE on the couch.)

JONATHAN (to BRETT)

Oh, sorry. I was pulling over the chair for you.

BRETT

(Not seeing a problem.)

Oh. Do you want me to move, then?

JONATHAN

(Feeling a little stupid.)

Umm—no, that's fine. I'll sit here.

(JONATHAN sits, grabs the box and starts to get the cards situated and dealt.)

BRETT (to MADELINE)

Talk about a blast from the past.

MADELINE

I know, I haven't played this since college, when I was *not* so well-behaved.

BRETT

I'm afraid I don't remember how to play.

MADELINE

Well, one of us will pick a question card, and the others try to submit a card that best answers it. And then the first person picks a winner.

BRETT

Right; that's it.

(To JONATHAN.)

You about ready, Mr. High Roller?

JONATHAN

Just about.

BRETT

Why don't you go first. Show us how it's done.

JONATHAN

(Finishing the set up, he draws a question card and reads.)

All right. Here we go. "I never truly understood blank until I encountered blank."

BRETT

(After a pause.)

So we submit a card that best answers...

JONATHAN

This one, you pick two cards.

BRETT

Right.

MADELINE (disappointed)

Wait, this is stupid with just three people.

BRETT

No, no, it'll be fantastic!

MADELINE

But we'll be able to tell whose everybody's cards are.

BRETT

Doesn't that pretty much happen anyway? I mean—well, you guys are the experts.

JONATHAN (shrugs)

We can just see how it goes.

BRETT

Great.

(He picks two cards, sure and deliberate, then puts them face down next to JONATHAN. MADELINE shrugs and picks two cards, submits them.)

JONATHAN

(He shuffles the two sets of cards, then reads.)

OK, so, I never truly understood, unfathomable stupidity, until I encountered, preteens.

(MADELINE laughs.)

JONATHAN

Ha, OK. Or, I never truly understood, pretending to care, until I encountered wearing underwear inside out to avoid doing laundry!

(JONATHAN laughs as MADELINE laughs even harder. BRETT smiles.)

JONATHAN

Oh, man. I gotta go with that one.

MADELINE

(She collects her card.)

Yes!

JONATHAN (to BRETT)

Preteens, huh? Can't say I encounter too many preteens these days, but maybe you have something you wanna share?

(MADELINE laughs. JONATHAN smiles. BRETT then laughs briefly.)

BRETT

No, can't say that I do. I thought that would resonate with you, because of the target audience for your songs!

JONATHAN

Right; umm...yeah, I almost forgot about that.

BRETT

(Jokingly announcing.)

He's going younger, Madeline; the question is, are you nervous?

MADELINE

(Waving it off, playfully.)

Oh, no.

BRETT

I would be. He's quite a catch for that younger generation!

(JONATHAN chuckles slightly, looks down, shakes his head.)

BRETT

Ah, see? *He* knows!

JONATHAN

(Politely, dismissing.)

No, no; it's... just funny, that's all.

BRETT

What is?

JONATHAN

It's just funny that you keep saying how young I am, when... what are you, like, four, five years older than me?

BRETT

(Not seeing the point.)

Something like that. Yeah.

JONATHAN

(After a pause, shaking his head, smiling.)

It's just funny, that's all.

(A slightly awkward pause between all three.)

MADELINE

My turn?

BRETT

I'll go next.

(He draws a card.)

Oh, perfect timing. "What gets better with age?"

MADELINE

Ooh.

BRETT

Honestly, I could think of about a thousand answers for this one.

MADELINE

I could think of a thousand answers for what gets *worse* with age. My arms, my crow's feet...

BRETT

Oh, please; no one notices any of that.

MADELINE

(Smiling, modestly.)

Well... not true, but...

(JONATHAN tosses his card in. MADELINE ponders a moment longer, then submits. BRETT shuffles the two cards.)

BRETT

(Picking the cards and reading.)

So, what gets better with age... Sexual tension. Yes, that certainly is true. Or, we have... Viagra. Hm.

MADELINE

(Confused, tipsy.)

What?

BRETT

Well, it's gotta be sexual tension.

MADELINE

(Collecting her card.)

Oh yeah; that's me again!