

tick, tick . . . BOOM!

The Complete Book and Lyrics

Book, Music, and Lyrics
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APPLAUSE
THEATRE & CINEMA BOOKS

An Imprint of Hal Leonard Corporation
New York

Characters

JON, twenty-nine

MICHAEL, thirty

SUSAN, late twenties

Other characters to be played by the actors playing Michael and Susan.

Scene 1

[In black.]

TICK . . . TICK . . . TICK . . . TICK . . . TICK . . .

JON

The sound you are hearing is not a technical problem. It is not a musical cue. It is not a joke. It is the sound of one man's mounting anxiety. I . . . am that man.

[Lights up.]

Hi. I'm Jon, and lately I keep hearing that sound, that ticking. It's not a big deal. It's actually kind of pleasant, like a watch.

In one week I'll be thirty. Three-zero. Older than my dad was when I was born. Older than Napoleon was when he . . . did something that was probably extremely impressive at the time—I'm not a historian. I'm a composer. Sorry, a "promising young composer." I should have kids of my own by now, a career, but instead I've been "promising" for so long I'm afraid I'm starting to break the fucking promise.

And I want to get some writing done, but I keep hearing those tick-ticks. And sometimes, after a couple of them, I'll hear something

else—a distant BOOM, like a bomb has gone off not too far away and the next one might be closer and I'd better look out.

TICK . . . TICK . . . BOOM!

[HE *bangs a crash on the piano.*]

So that's where we are. It's a Saturday night in January 1990 in my apartment on the edge of SoHo. I'm trying to work, trying to enjoy what remains of my extremely late twenties, and trying to ignore the tick-tick-booms.

1. 30/90

STOP THE CLOCK—TAKE TIME OUT
TIME TO REGROUP BEFORE YOU LOSE THE BOUT
FREEZE THE FRAME—BACK IT UP
TIME TO REFOCUS BEFORE THEY WRAP IT UP

YEARS ARE GETTING SHORTER
LINES ON YOUR FACE ARE GETTING LONGER
FEEL LIKE YOU'RE TREADING WATER
BUT THE RIP TIDE'S GETTING STRONGER
DON'T PANIC—DON'T JUMP SHIP
CAN'T FIGHT IT—LIKE TAXES
AT LEAST IT HAPPENS ONLY ONCE IN YOUR LIFE

THEY'RE SINGING HAPPY BIRTHDAY
YOU JUST WANT TO LAY DOWN AND CRY
NOT JUST ANOTHER BIRTHDAY
IT'S THIRTY NINETY

WHY CAN'T YOU STAY TWENTY-NINE, HELL
YOU STILL FEEL LIKE YOU'RE TWENTY-TWO
TURN THIRTY 1990—BANG, YOU'RE DEAD
WHAT CAN YOU DO?
WHAT CAN YOU DO?
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Hey, you know what? Forget it. It's no big deal. What's thirty? Just, you know, the end of youth.

MICHAEL

Jon, you've got to chill.

JON

Michael. My roommate, my oldest and dearest friend. We grew up together, moved to Manhattan, and were starving artists together. Were. Mike was a terrific actor, but he gave it up to become a big-time market research exec. Now, he's the proud owner of a brand-new BMW. Mike, you're thirty. Are you happy?

MICHAEL

Thirty's great. Thirty's like Newark Airport.

JON

Newark Airport?

MICHAEL

Hard to get to, but once you're here, fewer delays.

JON

Mike spends way too much time traveling on business.

MICHAEL

CLEAR THE RUNWAY—MAKE ANOTHER PASS
TRY ONE MORE APPROACH
BEFORE YOU'RE OUT OF GAS

JON

FRIENDS ARE GETTING FATTER
HAIRS ON YOUR HEAD ARE GETTING THINNER
FEEL LIKE A CLEANUP BATTER
ON A TEAM THAT AIN'T A WINNER?

MICHAEL

DON'T FREAK OUT—DON'T STRIKE OUT
CAN'T FIGHT IT—LIKE CITY HALL

JON

AT LEAST YOU'RE NOT ALONE
YOUR FRIENDS ARE THERE TOO—
THEY'RE SINGING HAPPY BIRTHDAY

JON and MICHAEL

YOU JUST WISH YOU COULD RUN AWAY

JON

WHO CARES ABOUT A BIRTHDAY?—BUT

JON and MICHAEL

THIRTY NINETY—HEY!

JON

CAN YOU BE OPTIMISTIC

JON and MICHAEL

YOU'RE NO LONGER THE INGENUE
TURN THIRTY 1990

JON

BOOM—YOU'RE PASSÉ

JON and MICHAEL

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

JON

WHAT CAN YOU DO?
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

OOH

MICHAEL**SUSAN**

Jon, breathe.

JON

Susan's here too, My girlfriend. We've been together two years, it's great, she's great, she's a dancer, but supports herself teaching ballet to wealthy and untalented children. She starts talking about the birthday party she's planning for next week.

SUSAN

You're gonna enjoy it, I promise. I sent out the invitations, the apartment will be full of friends, we'll have a great time.

JON

She's right. Goddamn it, I am looking forward to it!

SUSAN

And you'll play "Happy Birthday," we'll all sing . . .

JON

I have to play it?

SUSAN

Sure.

JON

I can't play "Happy Birthday" for myself.

SUSAN

Why not?

JON

I've forgotten it.

I realize I've forgotten how to play the piano completely. Holy shit, have I forgotten how to play the piano because I don't want to play "Happy Birthday" because I don't want to—Oh God—grow up?

JON**MICHAEL and SUSAN**

PETER PAN AND TINKER-BELL AH . . .
WHICH WAY TO NEVER-
NEVERLAND?
EMERALD CITY'S GONE TO HELL
SINCE THE WIZARD

ALL

BLEW OFF HIS COMMAND

JON

ON THE STREET YOU HEAR THE VOICES—
 LOST CHILDREN, CROCODILES
 YOU'RE NOT INTO
 MAKING CHOICES, WICKED WITCHES,
 POPPY FIELDS OR MEN BEHIND THE CURTAIN
 TIGER LILIES, RUBY SLIPPERS

ALL

CLOCK IS TICKING—THAT'S FOR CERTAIN

JON

THEY'RE SINGING HAPPY
 BIRTHDAY
 I JUST WISH IT ALL WERE A
 DREAM
 IT FEELS MUCH MORE LIKE
 DOOMSDAY
 FUCK

MICHAEL and SUSAN

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

ALL

THIRTY NINETY—

JON

SEEMS LIKE I'M IN FOR A
 TWISTER
 I DON'T SEE A RAINBOW—
 DO YOU?

MICHAEL and SUSAN

AH . . .

ALL

TURN THIRTY IN THE NINETIES

JON

INTO MY HANDS NOW—
 THE BALL IS PASSED
 I WANT THE SPOILS—
 BUT NOT TOO FAST
 WORLD IS CALLING—
 IT'S NOW OR NEVERLAND
 WHY CAN'T I STAY A CHILD

MICHAEL and SUSAN

AH . . .

AH . . .

AH . . .

THIRTY NINETY

JON**MICHAEL and SUSAN**

FOREVER
 AND THIRTY NINETY THIRTY THIRTY NINETY
 THIRTY NINETY THIRTY
 NINETY
 THIRTY NINETY

ALL

THIRTY THIRTY NINETY
 WHAT CAN I DO—?

MICHAEL and SUSAN

THIRTY NINETY
 THIRTY THIRTY NINETY, OOH

ALL
 WHAT CAN I DO?

Scene 2

MICHAEL

Hey, tomorrow night I want to show you the new place.

JON

Oh yeah. Michael's moving out. He's making so much money he
 bought an apartment with the bathtub in the bathroom.

TICK . . . TICK . . . TICK**MICHAEL**

And will you please let me set up an interview with my firm?

JON

Lately Mike's been worried my musical theatre career isn't going
 anywhere. And I'm not sure I blame him.

MICHAEL

You'll love it. You'll be promoted faster than I was.

JON

I haven't decided, Mike. I'm still enjoying my pre-midlife crisis.

MICHAEL

At least think it over.

JON

I'll think it over.

MICHAEL

All I'm asking. See you in the morning.

JON

You going to bed? It's early.

MICHAEL

I'm still on London time. 'Night.

SUSAN

'Night.

JON

Sleep well.

[MIKE exits.]

I need some air. I grab a joint and escape to the roof. It's cold. I hear a few tick-booms. I've spent the last five years writing a musical called *Superbia*, and we're doing a workshop this week. It's the other reason I'm freaking out. We're putting the show on its feet before an audience for the first time. I'm all hope and apprehension. It's the best thing I've ever done, and if the workshop goes well, and if I can get my so-called agent, Rosa Stevens, who hasn't returned my calls in over six months, to actually come and see it, the show might get some buzz. And if there's enough buzz, the show might be produced, and if the show is produced, it might be a hit—and if

it is, I won't have to take the marketing job and I can buy the BMW anyway, and I will have done it all before I'm thirty, or at least I can fudge the dates to make it sound that way in my *Sunday Times* Arts & Leisure profile.

I am not proud of this line of thinking.

But it's not my fault! It's hard for people born after 1960 to be idealistic or original. We know what happens to ideals. They're assassinated or corrupted or co-opted. It's 1990 for God's sake. It is not an exciting period. It is not a period of ferment. It's fucking stodgy is what it is—conservative, complacent, obtuse, and unimaginative. Or, to put it another way: George Bush is president of the United States.

After a minute, Susan comes up from downstairs. She's wearing the dress we had made—a friend who works at the diner with me designed it. Everyone we know wants to do something else.

SUSAN

What do you think?

JON

[Smoking a joint.]

Looks good.

SUSAN

Are you okay?

JON

Sure. Just like the view. The river . . .

SUSAN

Are you really thinking about going to work with Mike?

JON

I've been waiting tables for four years, Suze. I always thought by the time I was thirty I'd either have a hit show or a really lucrative sell-out career, but I've got neither. Jesus. Has turning thirty always sucked? Or is our generation different because we've never grown up? Never had a real test. A depression. A world war, Vietnam—maybe that's what I need.

SUSAN

Good idea. I'll try to arrange that for you.

JON

Yeah? Thanks.

SUSAN

Anytime, honey.

JON

Susan takes my hand, warming up the whole roof. We look out over the river. The lights from the prison barge flicker in her eyes.

You really look beautiful.

SUSAN

Thanks.

JON

That dress looks incredible on you.

2. Green Green Dress

DEEP DARK VELVET
HUGS YOUR SILHOUETTE
BLACK SILK STOCKINGS
YOU'RE MY JULIET

SOFT BLOND HAIR, BABY
BABY BLUE EYES

COOL ME DOWN
BEFORE I JUMP INTO YOUR THIGHS

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS
TWENTY BUTTONS AND A STRAP
THE GREEN GREEN DRESS
WHAT A PLEASURE TO UNWRAP

GREEN GREEN DRESS
OH, WHAT IT CAN DO
OH, WHAT THE GREEN GREEN DRESS
DOES TO ME—ON YOU
ME—ON YOU

SUSAN

LET'S FIND A CHAIR
WHERE WE CAN SIT AND TALK
OR GET SOME FRESH AIR
MAYBE WE CAN TAKE A WALK

TELL ME WHAT YOU'RE THINKING
TALK ABOUT YOUR DAY
TELL ME WHAT TO DO
I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU SAY

BOTH

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS
TWENTY BUTTONS AND A STRAP
THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

JON

WHAT A PLEASURE TO UNWRAP

BOTH

GREEN DRESS
OH, WHAT IT CAN DO
OH, WHAT THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

JON

DOES TO ME—ON YOU
ME—ON YOU

SUSAN

OOOH
YOU

SUSAN

CAN I HEAR YOU LAUGH, BABE?
CAN YOU MAKE ME SMILE?
I'LL FORGET WHAT'S ON MY MIND
FOR A WHILE

JON

CAN I TIE YOU UP, LOVE
IF YOU TELL ME YES
I'LL UNBUTTON EVERY BUTTON
DOWN YOUR GREEN GREEN DRESS—OW!

BOTH

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS
TWENTY BUTTONS AND A STRAP
THE GREEN GREEN DRESS
WHAT A PLEASURE TO UNWRAP

GREEN DRESS
OH, WHAT IT CAN DO
OH, WHAT THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

JON

DOES TO ME—ON YOU
ME—ON YOU

SUSAN

OOOH
YOU

BOTH

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS
ME—ON YOU

JON

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

SUSAN

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

JON

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

SUSAN

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

BOTH

THE GREEN GREEN DRESS

Scene 3

JON

6 a.m. The sky glows. Somewhere a bird chirps. I want to shoot it.

SUSAN

Go back to sleep.

JON

I can't. I'm too wired. Sorry I woke you. I'll just—

SUSAN

No, stay, it's okay.

[Beat.]

Jon, you know what?

JON

What?

SUSAN

We could just get out of here.

JON

What do you mean?

SUSAN

Live somewhere else. Somewhere beautiful, near a beach . . .
Cape Cod . . .

JON

Leave New York?

SUSAN

Why not? I think the city just wears you down. Every time I cross the
Triboro I feel five years older.

JON

If I want to write shows, I have to be here. If you want to be a
dancer—

SUSAN

I am a dancer. I'd still be a dancer if I lived in New England, but I'd
have a dishwasher.

[Beat.]

At least think it over? For me?

JON

Ah. More to think over.

3. Johnny Can't Decide

BREAK OF DAY—THE DAWN IS HERE
JOHNNY'S UP AND PACING
COMPROMISE OR PERSEVERE?
HIS MIND IS RACING
JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE—JOHNNY WANTS TO HIDE
CAN HE MAKE A MARK—IF HE GIVES UP HIS SPARK?
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE

SUSAN

SUSAN LONGS TO LIVE BY THE SEA
SHE'S THROUGH WITH COMPETITION
SUSAN WANTS A FAMILY
JOHNNY'S GOT A TOUGH DECISION
JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE

SUSAN and JON

JOHNNY WANTS TO HIDE
CAN HE SETTLE DOWN—AND STILL NOT DROWN?
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE

MICHAEL

MICHAEL'S GONNA HAVE IT ALL
HIS LUCK WILL NEVER END
JOHNNY'S BACKED AGAINST THE WALL
CAN HE BEND HIS DREAMS JUST LIKE HIS FRIEND?

JON

JOHNNY SEES THAT

JON and SUSAN

SUSAN'S RIGHT

ALL

AMBITION EATS RIGHT THROUGH YOU
MICHAEL DOESN'T SEE WHY JOHNNY HOLDS ON TIGHT
TO THE THINGS THAT JOHNNY FEELS ARE TRUE
JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE—JOHNNY WANTS TO HIDE
HOW CAN YOU SOAR—IF YOU'RE NAILED TO THE FLOOR?
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE

JON

I want to write music. I want to sit down right now at my piano and
write a song that people will listen to and remember, and do the
same thing every morning for the rest of my life.

ALL

JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE—JOHNNY WANTS TO HIDE
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO LET GO?

JON

JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE
DECIDE DECIDE, DECIDE
DECIDE
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE

MICHAEL and SUSAN

JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE
DECIDE
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE
DECIDE
DECIDE DECIDE, DECIDE
OOH

JON

But right now I have to go to work.

Scene 4

[SFX of diner.]

#1 [MICHAEL]

Straight back and to your left.

#2 [SUSAN]

Pick up those fucking eggs!

#1

[Brrring-Bbbrrrrring.]

#2

We're out of milk!

#1

Who took my rye bread?

#2

Four waters to table seven!

#1

I'm sorry, we don't deliver on Sunday—I need table three for two,
yesterday—

#2

Is there a list?

#1

Harrington! Harrington??

#2

Kaplan—K-a-p-l-a-n—for seven.

JON

ORDER!

#1

No—I'm sorry—those people were here first. We don't have tables
for seven.

#2

Are we in Smoking?

JON

TENSION!

#1

I'll have the salad Nick-oyz and some holly bread.

JON

BALANCE!

#2

I SAID I wanted an omelet with no yolks! That's why you're just a
waiter!

JON

Brunch.

4. Sunday

SUNDAY
 IN THE BLUE
 SILVER CHROMIUM DINER
 ON THE GREEN
 PURPLE YELLOW RED STOOLS
 SIT THE FOOLS
 WHO SHOULD EAT AT HOME
 INSTEAD THEY PAY ON

ALL

SUNDAY

JON

FOR A COOL
 ORANGE JUICE OR A BAGEL
 ON THE SOFT
 GREEN CYLINDRICAL STOOLS
 SIT THE FOOLS
 DRINKING CINNAMON COFFEE
 OR DECAFFINATED TEA

ALL

FOREVER
 IN THE BLUE
 SILVER CHROMIUM DINER

JON

DRIPS THE GREEN
 ORANGE VIOLET DROOL

ALL

FROM THE FOOLS

JON

WHO'D PAY LESS AT HOME
 DRINKING COFFEE

ALL

LIGHT
 AND DARK

JON

AND CHOLESTEROL
 AND BUMS, BUMS, BUMS,
 BUMS, BUMS, BUMS, BUMS, BUMS, BUMS,

ALL

PEOPLE SCREAMING FOR THEIR TOAST
 IN A SMALL SOHO CAFE

JON

ON AN ISLAND IN

ALL

TWO RIVERS
 ON AN ORDINARY
 SUNDAY
 SUNDAY
 SUNDAY

JON

BRUNCH

Scene 5**JON**

I sink into a soft leather seat. Michael guns twelve fuel-injected
 Bavarian-engineered market-research-funded cylinders across
 Houston Street.

His new Beemer . . . is fucking awesome. The stereo.
 The sleekness . . .

MICHAEL

Check out the seat.

JON

The seat? . . . The seat is HEATED.

MICHAEL

And you can adjust it.

JON

This is a car that allows you to adjust the temperature of your ass.

Michael picked me up from the diner so we can check out his new apartment. We zhhhooom—past the inhabitants of SoHo, wearing black, black, black, black . . .

JON

Past the East Village kids with purple pink green blue spike-buzz cuts, jutting through deconstructed SILENCE = DEATH T-shirts . . .

Past the Windex, the squeegees, the outstretched palms, the Bowery Night Train philosophers. How can I possibly leave this behind?

In a flash, we're rolling into a circular driveway with a marble fountain in the center.

He tosses the keys to the parking attendant as we breeze in through the smoked-glass revolving doors. Stainless-steel kitchen. Polyurethaned wood floors. View of the 59th Street Bridge. It's still being remodeled—Remodeled! But my God . . .

MICHAEL

Jon, welcome to Victory Towers.

5. No More

NO MORE—
WALKING UP SIX FLIGHTS OF STAIRS
OR THROWING DOWN THE KEY BECAUSE THERE IS NO BUZZER

NO MORE—
WALKING THIRTEEN BLOCKS WITH THIRTY POUNDS
OF LAUNDRY IN THE FUCKING DEAD OF WINTER

NO MORE—FAULTY WIRING
NO MORE—PAINTED FLOORS
NO MORE SPITTING OUT MY ULTRA BRITE
ON TOP OF DIRTY DISHES IN THE ONE AND ONLY SINK
HELLO TO MY WALK-IN CLOSETS
TIDY AS PARK AVENUE
HELLO, MY BUTCHER BLOCK TABLE

I COULD GET USED—I COULD GET USED

JON

Hello? [HE *checks out the echo in the walk-in closet.*]

MICHAEL

I COULD GET USED TO YOU

NO MORE—

CLIMBING OVER SLEEPING PEOPLE
BEFORE YOU GET OUT THE DOOR OF YOUR OWN BUILDING

BOTH

NO MORE—

MICHAEL

NOXIOUS FUMES—FROM GAS HEATERS THAT ARE ILLEGAL

JON

OR WILL BLOW UP WHILE YOU ARE SLEEPING

MICHAEL

NO MORE—

JON

LEAKY CEILINGS

MICHAEL

NO MORE—

JON

HOLES IN THE FLOOR

BOTH

NO MORE

JONTAKING A SHOWER IN THE KITCHEN
WHILE YOUR ROOMMATE'S EATING BREAKFAST**BOTH**

AND YOU'RE GETTING WATER ON HIS CORNFLAKES

HELLO TO SHINY NEW PARQUET WOOD FLOORS
AS WAXED AS A WEALTHY GIRL'S LEGS
HELLO, DEAR MR. DISHWASHER**MICHAEL**I COULD GET USED
I COULD GET USED
I COULD GET USED TO YOU**JON**I COULD GET USED
I COULD GET USED
TO YOU**BOTH**

NO MORE—

JON

EXOTIC

BOTH

NO MORE—

MICHAEL

NEUROTIC

BOTH

NO MORE—ANYTHING BUT PLEASANTLY ROBOTIC

MICHAELWE'RE MOVIN ON UP
TO THE EAST SIDE**JON**WE'RE MOVIN ON UP
TO THE EAST SIDE**BOTH**

TO A DELUXE APARTMENT IN THE SKY—

*[Dance break.]*HELLO TO DEAR MR. DOORMAN
WHO LOOKS LIKE CAPTAIN KANGAROO
HELLO, DEAR FELLOW—AND HOW DO YOU DO?**MICHAEL**I COULD GET USED
EVEN SEDUCED**JON**I COULD GET USED
EVEN SEDUCED**BOTH**

I COULD GET USED TO YOU!

Scene 6

MICHAEL

What do you think?

JONBack home in SoHo, Michael is trying on one of three new Gucci
belts he's just bought.**MICHAEL**

Well?

JONI don't know, Mike. I haven't owned three belts over the course of
my entire life.

MICHAEL

Try it. It's a good feeling.

JON

I feel relaxed, just hanging out with Mike on a Sunday night.

Mike and I met at Camp Shawanga, eight years old. During the first week, Mike was thick with Dion Capporimo, the kid who set fires in the outhouse and bombed the girls with M-80s. I hung with Jim Shanahan, volleyball team captain and every counselor's favorite camper. By week two, Mike and I had dumped our old new best friends and found each other. We ended up at the same high school, acting in shows together, best friends through it all.

MICHAEL

How's Susan?

JON

Okay.

MICHAEL

Just okay?

JON

She wants us to move to Cape Cod.

MICHAEL

I am so sorry.

JON

No, maybe I should really think about it.

MICHAEL

You're not a Cape Cod guy. Listen. I've got a better idea. I want you to come to the office tomorrow.

JON

Oh no.

MICHAEL

They're doing a brainstorming session for a new product. Real creative stuff. You'd be perfect for it. I told them all about you. Please? Just come in, no commitment, I promise. Just get your feet wet?

JON

Oh, what the hell. Sure, I'll do it.

MICHAEL

Excellent. You won't be sorry. I'm gonna go pack.

JON

You going away again?

MICHAEL

Tomorrow night. Meeting in Atlanta. Departing Newark 6 p.m. Drive me?

JON

Sure. Is David busy?

MICHAEL

I can't ask David right now.

JON

Why not?

MICHAEL

It's . . . complicated. We . . .

[The phone.]

JON

Whoops. Sorry, Mike. Hello?

DAD

HEL-lo.

JON

Hi, Dad.

My weekly call from White Plains.

DAD

How's it feel to be an old man?

JON

I'm not thirty yet, Dad.

DAD

Make good dough at brunch?

JON

Not bad.

DAD

Your sister just got a \$40,000 bonus from the law firm. And of course you heard the news about Chuck.

JON

My brother-in-law.

DAD

Sold another screenplay! The one he's been working on for a month.

JON

Arrrgggh.

DAD

Isn't that marvelous?

JON*[Call-waiting beep.]*

Hold on, Dad. I'm getting another call.

ROSA [SUSAN]

Jonathan? It's Rosa.

JON

Rosa? My God, it's Rosa Stevens, my agent! That bitch. She hasn't returned my calls for months. Why is she calling now, on a Sunday night? Is she cutting me loose?

ROSA

Are you excited?

JON

What?

ROSA

Are you excited about your workshop next week?

JON

She remembered the workshop!

ROSA

I made a few calls, we ought to have some interesting people there for you to meet.

JON

She made a few calls!

ROSA

I just wanted to say good luck, honey. See you soon.

JON

Good luck! Interesting people! Rosa, what an angel, she's a sweetheart, I love that woman, she—whoops. Sorry, Dad.

DAD

No problem. That's all the news anyway. Talk to you soon.

JON

Dad signs off the conversation, as always, with the old Bob and Ray line:

DAD

Write if you get work.

JON

And I reply, as always, with "Hang by your thumbs."

MOM [SUSAN]

Oh, and Jonnie?

JON

My mother has been on the line the entire time.

MOM

You know you can always move in with us for a while,

[DAD *grunts*.]

if you need to.

[DAD *grunts*.]

JON

Thanks, Ma.

For the first time in months I think I might not need to. I'm just sitting down to do some writing when . . .

[*Phone ring*.]

SUSAN

Jon?

JON

Susan. Hey.

SUSAN

Hey.

JON

You want to come over?

SUSAN

I guess I was hoping you'd come up here.

JON

Susan lives in an illegal sublet on 96th and York.

It's pretty late.

SUSAN

Come over. We'll watch HBO.

JON

She has pirated cable.

I'm supposed to go into Michael's office tomorrow.

SUSAN

Sleep here, you'll be closer in the morning anyway.

[*Beat*.]

Jon. Are you weighing whether the trip up here is worth the cable TV?

JON

No!

SUSAN

You are, aren't you?

JON

Of course not.

SUSAN

I mean, I would be in the apartment too.

JON

And I'd be here. It's just as easy for you to come down to SoHo.

SUSAN

But it's late and it's New York and you're a guy, and I'm already in pajamas.

JON

Suze, it's two subways and a bus.

SUSAN

Take a cab.

JON

I can't afford cabs.

SUSAN

Well, God, forget it if it's that much trouble.

JON

No, it's, I just, I was planning on doing some work tonight.

SUSAN

You're going to write the great American musical in the next six hours?

JON

Hey, stop it. You know I've had trouble working. I could use some encouragement. I'm not trying to avoid a commute.

SUSAN

That's not what I'm saying.

JON

That's what you're inferring.

SUSAN

No, you mean that's what I'm implying. And I'm not implying it, you inferred it.

JON

Wait, what?

SUSAN

I can't believe we're fighting about this. If we're going to argue, let's argue about something important. Let's argue about moving up to New England, not about who's going to take the subway—

JON

Hold it, we're on New England now?

SUSAN

Should we not be?

JON

Why should we be?

SUSAN

Are you saying we can't talk?

JON

Are you saying we're NOT talking?

SUSAN

What are you saying?

JON

What are YOU saying? I'm saying—

6. Therapy

I FEEL BAD THAT
YOU FEEL BAD ABOUT
ME FEELING BAD ABOUT
YOU FEELING BAD ABOUT
WHAT I SAID ABOUT
WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT
ME NOT BEING ABLE TO SHARE A FEELING

SUSAN

IF I THOUGHT THAT
WHAT YOU THOUGHT WAS THAT
I HADN'T THOUGHT ABOUT
SHARING MY THOUGHTS THEN
MY REACTION TO

YOUR REACTION TO
MY REACTION
WOULD'VE BEEN MORE REVEALING

JON

I WAS AFRAID THAT
YOU'D BE AFRAID
IF I TOLD YOU
THAT I WAS AFRAID OF INTIMACY

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM
WITH MY PROBLEM,
MAYBE THE PROBLEM'S
SIMPLY CODEPENDENCY

SUSAN

YES, I KNOW THAT
NOW YOU KNOW THAT
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT
YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT WHEN
I SAID "NO" I MEANT
"YES, I KNOW" AND THAT
NOW I KNOW THAT YOU
KNEW THAT I KNEW YOU ADORED ME

JON

I WAS WRONG TO

SUSAN

SAY YOU WERE WRONG TO

JON

SAY I WAS WRONG ABOUT

SUSAN

YOU BEING WRONG

JON

WHEN YOU RANG TO SAY THAT

SUSAN

THE RING WAS THE WRONG THING TO BRING

JON

IF I MEANT WHAT I SAID
WHEN I SAID "RINGS BORED ME"

BOTH

I'M NOT MAD THAT
YOU GOT MAD WHEN
I GOT MAD WHEN YOU
SAID I SHOULD GO DROP DEAD

JON

IF I WERE YOU AND I'D
DONE WHAT I'D DONE I'D
DO WHAT YOU DID WHEN I
GAVE YOU THE RING HAVING
SAID WHAT I SAID

JON

I FEEL BAD THAT
YOU FEEL BAD ABOUT
ME FEELING BAD ABOUT
YOU FEELING BAD ABOUT
WHAT I SAID ABOUT
WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT
ME NOT BEING ABLE TO
SHARE A FEELING

SUSAN

I
FEEL
BADLY
ABOUT YOU
FEELING BADLY
ABOUT ME
FEELING BADLY
ABOUT YOU

I
THOUGHT
YOU
THOUGHT
I REACTED
SHALLOWLY
WHEN
I REACTED
TO YOU

I'M NOT MAD

YOU GOT MAD

GO DROP DEAD

IF I WERE YOU AND I'D
DONE WHAT I'D DONE I'D
DO WHAT YOU DID WHEN I
GAVE YOU THE RING HAVING
SAID WHAT I SAID

IF I THOUGHT THAT
WHAT YOU THOUGHT WAS
THAT
I HADN'T THOUGHT ABOUT
SHARING MY THOUGHTS
THEN
MY REACTION TO
YOUR REACTION TO
MY REACTION
WOULD'VE BEEN
MORE REVEALING

I'M NOT MAD THAT
YOU GOT MAD THAT
I GOT MAD WHEN YOU
SAID I SHOULD
GO DROP DEAD

IF I WERE YOU
BUT I'M NOT YOU

SAID WHAT YOU SAID

JON

BUT NOW IT'S OUT IN THE OPEN

SUSAN

NOW IT'S OFF OUR CHEST

BOTH

NOW IT'S FOUR A.M.
AND WE HAVE THERAPY TOMORROW,
IT'S TOO LATE TO SCREW
SO LET'S JUST GET SOME REST.

Scene 7

JON

Monday morning. The walk to Michael's office takes me through Times Square. The Theater District. Jesus, look at these theaters. Every show's from London and every ticket costs a jaw-dropping fifty bucks. I guess that's what they want—the tourists, the snoring businessmen, the busloads of sweet old ladies from Connecticut with their 90-decibel cellophane-wrapped hard candies—I want no part of it.

But let's face it: Broadway is still the place. This is Parnassus for the musical theater world and for years I've been hiking in the foothills. Presenting songs in countless workshops, cutting demo tapes, scrounging for grants . . .

Once, at a seminar, on a day I will never forget, I got to have my work picked apart—and praised, a little—by my idol, a composer-lyricist so legendary his name may not be uttered aloud by me, Ste—— Sond——.

But I write musicals with rock music. A contradiction in terms. Broadway's about sixty years behind anything you hear on the radio. You can't put rock onstage—real rock, not warmed-over easy-listening pop, not plastic imitation '50s bubblegum. Nevertheless, that's what I'm trying to do with *Superbia*.

Could my show end up here? Is it good enough for Broadway, that magical street of dreams? Is it too good for Broadway, that shameless commercial whore? It's that raging mix of envy and contempt that's so . . . healthy.

Scene 8

JON

Mike's office. Wow. Big cold lobby. Corporate America! Hundreds of people and they all look busy. Gray flannel execs.

EXEC [MICHAEL]

Tell the West Coast we need to liaise with corporate . . .

JON

Peacock-faced secretaries.

SECRETARY [SUSAN]

I'm sorry, he's in a meeting and can't possibly be reached.

JON

Temps in wrinkled khakis.

TEMP [MICHAEL]

Uh, I think the fax machine is jammed.

JON

And my favorite—the perfect women—the hard-driving, high-cheeked power haircut girls who cruise the avenues like sleek silver bullets.

JUDY [SUSAN]

Jonathan? Hi! Judy Wright. Michael's told me all about you. Come with me, I'll be leading the session. Help yourself to coffee . . .

JON

Tick . . . tick . . . tick . . .

JUDY

We are so glad you've come in! We love "creative" people. It's what we're all about!

JON

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Conference room. Faux-wood-grain table. Aqua Naugahyde chairs.

JUDY

Everybody, this is Jonathan. He's going to help us out today. He writes musicals. You know, like Andrew Lloyd Weber.

[JON *grimaces.*]

Okay, let's get started! Today we're embarking on a major endeavor. We're developing a name for a breakthrough new product. A chemical to be used in cooking as a fat replacement! It's tasteless, has no calories, no fat, no cholesterol. In fact, it can't be absorbed into your digestive tract. This is going to give Americans a whole new kind of freedom in the way they live and snack, and we need a name that will capture all of the—

[JON's *hand is up.*]

Yes?

JON

How about "Nutrafat"?

JUDY

[*Beat.*]

Jon, at this point in time we're really just idea-generating, okay? We're brainstorming, free-associating . . . It's a creative-process-unlocking session. We're not at the naming phase yet. Okay: concepts, people?

ALL

[*The band joins in. Slow, then faster.*]

STEPHEN [KEYBOARD]

Health.

MARKET RESEARCH GUY

Goodness.

KONRAD [BASS]

Freedom.

MATT [GUITAR]

Dawn.

STEPHEN

New Dawn.

JUDY

Hello!

[Beat.]

Free-Dawn.

STEPHEN*[Aside.]*

She's good.

*[Everyone's looking at JON.]***JON***[Hesitantly.]*

Hope.

MARKET RESEARCH GUY

Hm?

JON

Hope.

MARKET RESEARCH GUY

Dignity.

CLAYTON [DRUMS]

Freedom.

KONRAD

I said that already. America.

MATT

Destiny.

STEPHEN

Manifest Destiny.

JUDY

Inalienable rights.

JON

The right to be skinny

MARKET RESEARCH GUY*[Angrily, to JON.]*

The bill of rights.

JON*[Cowed.]*

What is your problem?

CLAYTON

The Founding Fathers.

KONRAD

The Pilgrims.

MATT

The first Thanksgiving.

STEPHEN

Family.

JUDY

Love.

MARKET RESEARCH GUY

Sex.

CLAYTON

Pleasure.

KONRAD

Desire.

MATT

Lust.

STEPHEN

Urge.

JUDY

Hot.

MARKET RESEARCH GUY

Touch me.

CLAYTON

Yes.

KONRAD

There.

MATT

Touch me again.

STEPHEN

Wow!

JUDY

Yummy!

JON

Where is this going?

JUDY

Okay, terrific! Now I want to move to phase two, turning these general concepts into specific "idea avenues" that will create a context for a process that will facilitate the development of a model that will . . .

[JON's hand is up. She sighs.]

Yes, Jon.

JON

I've got it.

JUDY

You've got what?

JON

I've got the name for the stuff.

JUDY

Jon, that's not where we're . . .

[Gives up.]

Oh, all right, what is it?

JON

"Chubstitute."

[*Beat.*]

Rather than call security, Judy allows me to leave the building under my own power.

Scene 9

[*The Beemer. JON and MICHAEL. JON driving.*]

JON

So much for my market research career.

MICHAEL

Damn it, Jon, I'm gonna hear about this.

JON

They told me to be creative. I was creative.

MICHAEL

Bullshit. You didn't even try.

JON

Hey, I tried.

MICHAEL

Chubstitute?

JON

Come on. How can you take that stuff seriously?

MICHAEL

Because they pay me to. Get over in that lane.

JON

What airline are you?

MICHAEL

Delta.

JON

I see it.

MICHAEL

This wasn't a joke, you know. I really had to push for you.

JON

I didn't belong there, Mike.

MICHAEL

Maybe not. But . . . Jon, for me this is it. It's not some show I can rewrite, or throw away if it's not working. It's real life.

[*Beat.*]

JON

Don't you ever miss acting?

MICHAEL

I don't miss starving.

JON

But you were really good.

MICHAEL

Not good enough. Right here is fine.

[*Beat.*]

JON

Mike. You all right?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

JON

You sure? You haven't had more than a couple of days at home for weeks.

MICHAEL

They get me the best hotels. I'm not complaining.

JON

I know. But you've really been going all-out lately.

MICHAEL

I like it. Keeps me distracted.

JON

From what?

MICHAEL

Nothing.

[Beat.]

I just—sometimes I wonder. The life you said Susan wants. It doesn't sound so bad. Some peace, you know? Love. A family . . . If the chance for those things is there, maybe you should grab it.

JON

Yeah?

MICHAEL

Sometimes I wish I could.

7. Real Life

SUNLIGHT
THROUGH THE WINDOW
ACROSS FROM YOUR BED
BEAUTY IS STILL
CAN YOU SEE IT?
WHAT MORE CAN YOU WANT?

IS THIS REAL LIFE?
IS THIS REAL LIFE?

HEARTBEATS
OF YOUR CHILDREN
ASLEEP IN THE NEXT ROOM
TRUST SO STILL
CAN YOU HEAR IT?
WHAT MORE CAN YOU WANT?

MICHAEL

IS THIS REAL LIFE?
IS THIS REAL LIFE?

JON

REAL LIFE
IS THIS REAL, IS THIS
REAL LIFE?

MICHAEL

WHY DO WE SEEK OUT ECSTASY

MICHAEL and JON

IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES
WHY IS IT HARD TO SEE
THAT HEAVEN CAN HAVE SIMPLER FACES

MICHAEL

WARM BREATH
OF AN ANGEL

MICHAEL and SUSAN

AWAKE, NEXT TO YOU
 LOVE'S SO STILL
 CAN YOU FEEL IT?
 WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT?

MICHAEL

IS THIS REAL LIFE?
 IS THIS REAL LIFE?

IS THIS REAL LIFE?
 IS THIS REAL LIFE?

JON and SUSAN

REAL LIFE
 IS THIS REAL, IS THIS
 REAL LIFE?
 REAL LIFE
 IS THIS REAL, IS THIS
 REAL LIFE?

MICHAEL

IS THIS REAL LIFE?

I gotta go.

JON

Have a safe trip, okay?

MICHAEL

I'll see you in a couple of days. Don't wreck the car.

JON

Tick . . . tick . . . tick.

Scene 10

It takes me one and a half hours to get back to Manhattan and park the Beemer. I've got to go straight to a *Superbia* rehearsal. We're just running through the musical numbers in preparation for the workshop.

I need something fast. All that driving. All that talk about fat substitutes. On 9th Avenue I duck into a nondescript storefront. Only one thing can cure me now.

8. Sugar

SHE CAN BE WHITE,
 SHE CAN BE BROWN.
 SHE'S ALWAYS EASY
 GOIN' DOWN—GOIN' DOWN

SHE DON'T CARE—WHAT I LOOK LIKE
 HOW I DRESS.
 NEVER SAYS "NO."
 ALWAYS SAYS "YES."

OH—OH—OH, SUGAR, SHE'S REFINED.
 FOR A SMALL PRICE SHE BLOWS MY MIND.
 SUGAR—SHE'S GOT THE POWER
 SOOTHES MY SOUL FOR HALF AN HOUR,
 HALF AN HOUR—HALF AN HOUR—HALF AN HOUR

I grew up on Tony the Tiger and Cap'n Crunch, but unlike other Boomer Juniors haven't progressed to more socially accepted fixes, like Ben and Jerry's. I go for the original high-powered numb-busting goodness of the Hostess Twinkie snack cake.

The only problem is, it's humiliating to buy a Twinkie. I walk up to the counter feeling like I'm seventeen and buying condoms for the first time.

COUNTER GUY [MICHAEL]

Yeah?

JON

Hi, yeah, I'll just take these, uh, double-A batteries, and a pack of the Bic pens, and uh, a Wall Street Journal, and a Mademoiselle . . .

COUNTER GUY

And four packages of Twinkies.

JON

Right.

KARESSA [SUSAN]

Jon?

JON

Oh my God.

KARESSA

Jon, hi!

JON

It's Karessa Johnson! She's in the show. She's incredibly hot. That's not why I cast her; that would be wrong. She is talented and she's got a great voice, but let's face it, I've fantasized about her more than once and now here she is in line behind me and she's buying an Evian water and a package of rice cakes.

KARESSA

How's it going?

JON

Great! You?

KARESSA

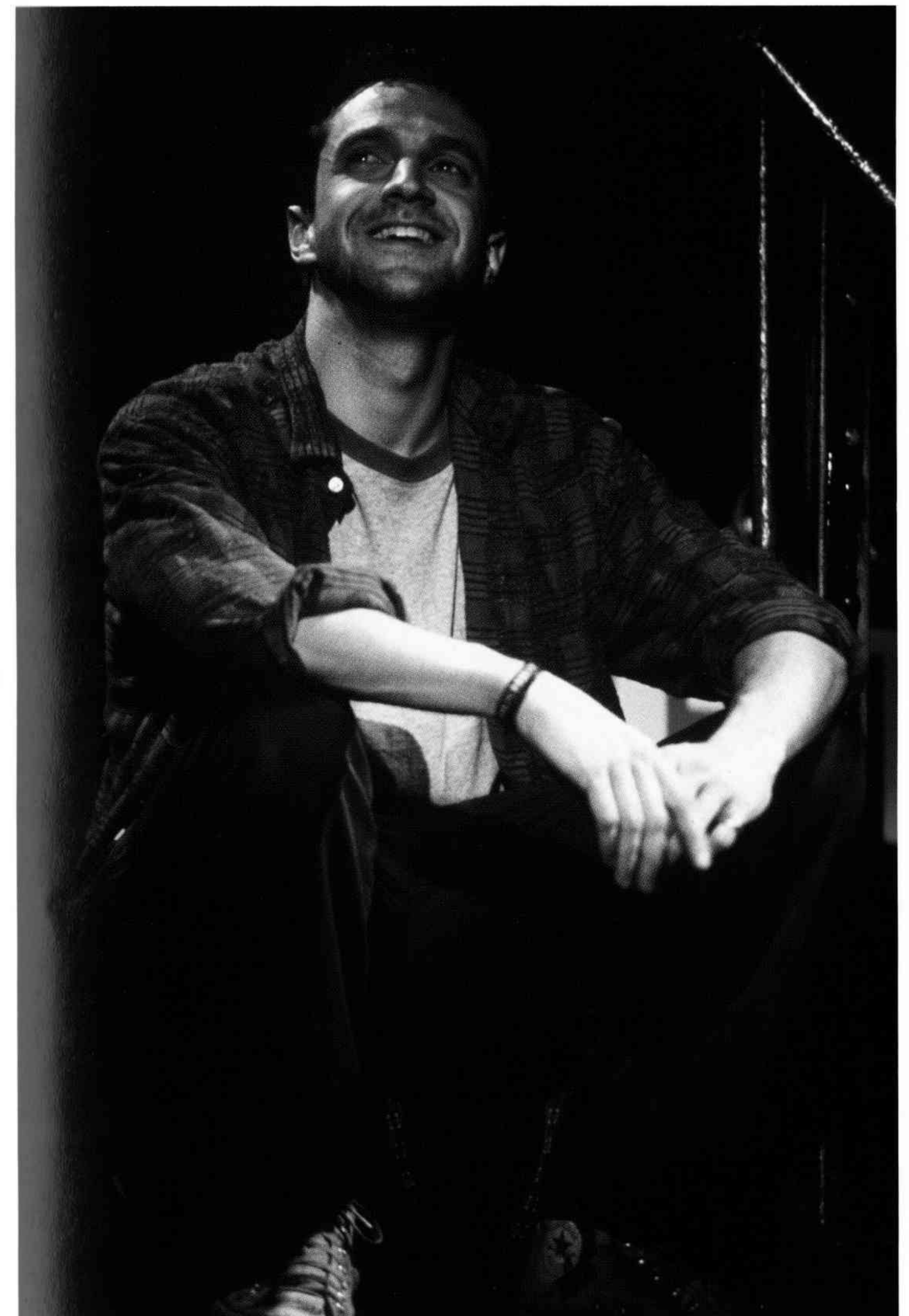
Great! I am so excited about the show, it is going to be so good, you are so gifted, I've been telling everyone . . .

JON

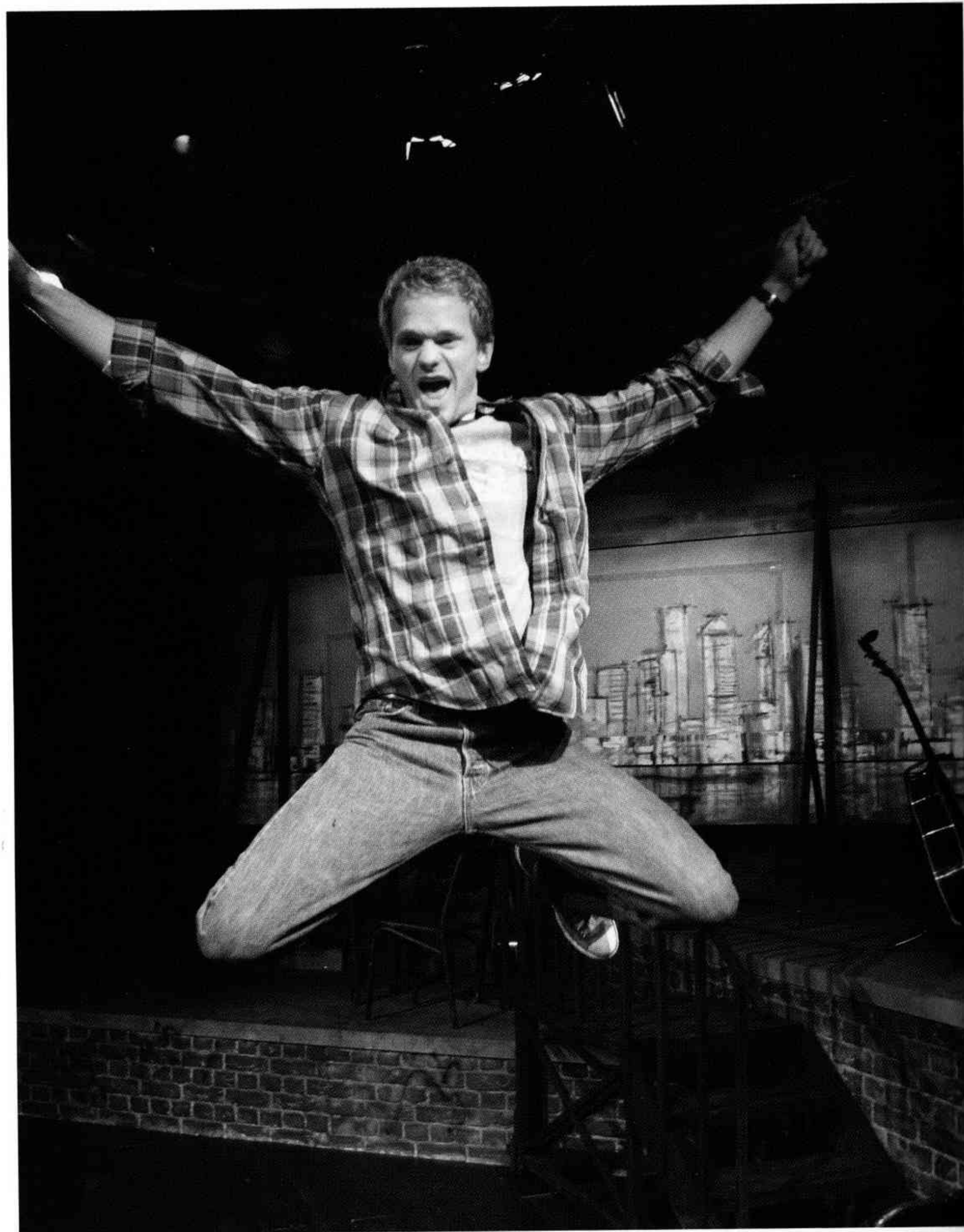
Really?

KARESSA

It has been so great working with you, I just think it's so incredible, you're so young but you're such a mature talent—



Raúl Esparza



Neil Patrick Harris in the 2005 Menier Chocolate Factory production in London

COUNTER GUY

You want me to bag these or you want to eat them here?

JON

Bag, please.

KARESSA

What are those?

JON

Nothing. They're snack cakes. They're not unlike rice cakes, only cylindrical and injected with cream.

KARESSA

Twinkies! Oh my God. I love them!

JON

You do?

KARESSA

SHE'S MY HONEY
SHE'S MY TART
I'M HER CREAM PUFF
SHE'S MY SWEETHEART

JON

KNOCKS ME OUT,
STRIPS ME BARE,

ALL

SUGAR—SUGAR—SUGAR

JON

I WON'T CARE.

COUNTER GUY

LATE AT NIGHT

COUNTER GUY and KARESSA
WHEN I'M SAD AND LONELY

ALL
ONE THING ONLY
CURES MY BLUES.

JON and COUNTER GUY
STRESSED OUT

KARESSA
BURNED OUT

ALL
HANGIN' BY A STRING
SUGAR—SUGAR—SUGAR,
I WON'T FEEL A THING
SUGAR SO SWEET

JON	KARESSA and COUNTER GUY
ONLY THING I KNOW IS THAT SHE MAKES MY LIFE SUCH A MESS	OH YES

SUGAR OH YEAH	SUGAR SUGAR OH YEAH
SUGAR OH YEAH	SUGAR SUGAR

ALL
SUGAR, OH YEAH—SUGAR, OH YEAH
S-U-G-A-R

Scene 11

JON
Rehearsal goes well. I think we're going to be ready for the performance on Thursday. I'm so excited I can barely sit still.

Maybe this is it. Maybe I really have written the show that will reinvent musicals for our generation—the *Hair* of the '90s—the cultural lightning rod that will energize the twenty-something generation, we “slackers,” raised on *The Brady Bunch* and Reaganomics, armed with nothing but credit cards, VCRs, and *Interview* magazine, blowing like tumbleweeds through the '90s, fighting off the savage arrows of apathy, illiteracy, innumeracy, exploding Visa bills, eating disorders, sexually transmitted diseases, political correctness . . .

KARESSA
Oh my God, that is all so true!

JON
Karessa's actually listening to my wired babbling. She walked me home. She's really nice.

When I get upstairs Susan's waiting for me.

SUSAN
Who were you walking home with?

JON
What?

SUSAN
I saw you from the window.

JON
She's in Superbia. We were discussing the show.

SUSAN
You kissed her.

JON
On the cheek. She's in the show! It's a cast thing.

SUSAN
Look, I don't care about that. I . . .

JON

Susan's holding a Medium Brown Bag. She's packing. I see a sweater, some underwear, her extra contact lens stuff. Her "things."

What's going on?

SUSAN

I got a job.

JON

That's great!

SUSAN

Teaching. Real dancers this time. With a company in Northampton. I'll be gone a couple of weeks.

JON

Well, if it's just a couple of weeks . . .

SUSAN

Or a month. And . . . it might lead to something else up there.

JON

Something else . . . permanently?

SUSAN

Maybe. Jon, don't look so surprised. It's not like we're getting anywhere.

JON

What do you mean?

SUSAN

I can feel us slipping apart.

JON

Look, I know you'd like to leave New York. I know you want to make a change. So do I. And after my birthday, after the workshop—

SUSAN

I wish everything didn't depend on what happens at the workshop. What if it doesn't go exactly the way you want? What if you turn thirty and nothing's changed? I'm worried you're setting yourself up for a big disappointment.

JON

Maybe you're right. Maybe you're right. I don't know . . .

SUSAN

I don't want to be disappointed either. It's not—

9. See Her Smile

JON

IT'S NOT YOU, SHE SAYS
IT'S JUST THAT LIFE'S SO HARD
WE ALL GET BLUE, I SAY
HANG ON TIGHT—I'LL BE YOUR BODYGUARD

SOMETHING'S BREAKING MY BABY'S HEART
SOMETHING'S BREAKING MY BABY'S HEART
SOMETHING'S BREAKING MY BABY'S HEART
OH—I JUST WANT TO SEE HER SMILE

IT'S SUCH A DRAG, SHE SAYS
WHEN THE WORLD'S SO MEAN
IT'S JUST A RED FLAG—I SAY
GOTTA LOOK FOR THE GREEN

OH OH OH
SOMETHING'S BREAKING MY BABY'S HEART
SOMETHING'S BREAKING MY BABY'S HEART
SOMETHING'S BREAKING MY BABY'S HEART

JON and MICHAEL

OH

JON

I JUST WANT TO SEE HER SMILE

SUSAN

I'm not leaving till next week. I'll see you at your party, okay?

JON

Hold on. Look, we're both tired. I've been impossible. I'm sorry. I've been hysterical . . .

SUSAN

It's not just you. I know I've been demanding . . .

JON

Stay here? We don't have to solve everything tonight. We'll order some dinner, go to bed early, just be together. Okay?

SUSAN

No. I want to go home.

JON

Stay. It's late. It's a long way. Two subways and a bus . . .

SUSAN

I'll take a cab.

JONCYNICAL TOWN
CAN BE TOUGH ON AN ANGEL**JON and MICHAEL**CLIP HER WINGS, BABY,
ONE TWO THREE**JON**

I'M HER CLOWN CAUSE

JON and MICHAELA LAUGHING ANGEL'S
RICHER THAN KINGS,**JON**OH, BABY—DON'T YOU SEE?
BABY—DON'T YOU AGREE?WISH I KNEW WHY, SHE SAYS
BUT ON A SUNNY DAY I FIND THE RAIN**JON or JON and MICHAEL**LET'S GIVE IT A TRY, I SAY
WE CAN DANCE RIGHT THROUGH THE PAIN**JON**SOMETHING'S BREAKING
MY BABY'S HEART
SOMETHING'S BREAKING
MY BABY'S HEART
SOMETHING'S BREAKING
MY BABY'S HEART**MICHAEL and SUSAN**OO—IS THIS REAL LIFE?

IS THIS REAL, IS THIS

REAL LIFE?**ALL**

OH OH OH OH OH

JON

I JUST WANT TO SEE HER SMILE

JUST WANT TO SEE HER SMILE
JUST WANT TO SEE HER SMILE
JUST WANT TO SEE HER
JUST WANT TO SEE HER . . .**SUSAN**

Don't worry about the workshop. I know it will be wonderful.

JON

Hey, Susan, don't go. Look, I'm sorry—

. . . SMILE.

She's gone.

Scene 12**JON**

The workshop. The show's about to start. The room is totally empty. The show's about to start and I'm staring at sixty empty folding chairs. No one's here. NO ONE HAS FUCKING SHOWED UP! Not Susan, not Michael, not even Rosa fucking Stevens!

KARESSA

Jon.

JON

Karessa! Hey!

KARESSA

Hey, boy genius.

JON

Where the fuck is everyone?

KARESSA

We don't start for over an hour, Jon. The house isn't open yet. Relax.

JON

She kisses me.

KARESSA

It's going to be great.

JON

The next fifty-five minutes are a blur. Michael comes in first.

MICHAEL

Hey, buddy.

JON

Mike! Thank God.

MICHAEL

Where should I sit?

JON

Anywhere. Thank you so much for coming.

MICHAEL

Are you kidding? Wild horses, Jon.

JON

There's an elegant older lady with a cigarette holder. She looks familiar.

ROSA

Hello, darling.

JON

Rosa Stevens! It's been so long since I've actually had personal contact with my agent I didn't recognize her.

ROSA

It's going to go marvelously, don't you worry.

JON

To my surprise, she hugs me.

ROSA

You're perspiring a bit heavily, dear. Before they start you might want to go and towel off.

JON

She glides away, I wipe my face . . .

DAD

HEL-lo.

JON

Hi, Dad.

DAD

Pretty good crowd.

JON

Not bad, right?

DAD

Are they paying?

JON

Not technically, no.

DAD

Next time. I'm proud of you. Write if you get work.

JON

Hang by your thumbs.

Suddenly the room is full of friends and the interesting people Rosa promised, and the band is tuning up, and just before the lights go down there is a stir and a latecomer darts for his seat—Is it? It's—YES! IT'S HIM!! He's HERE!! My guru of the musical theatre, the most interesting person of all. Ste—— Sond——.

JON

And my fear . . . my fear gathers itself into a ball in my stomach and rises, pulsing, into my throat; it moves on into my skull, where it takes up residence, hissing and shuddering . . . and then, miraculously, it keeps going: floating up, higher, out of my head entirely, dissolving into the air as it leaves my body—and what remains behind is pure excitement and hope.

Hi, I'm Jon. Thanks for coming. Today you're gonna see a new musical called *Superbia* . . . written by me. . . . Thank you . . . I don't really have anything to say except thanks for coming, and I already said that . . . so now I'd better just get the hell off so these people can do their work. Enjoy the show . . .

[The band plays part of the *Superbia* overture.]

And after that it's a blur again . . .
At least until Karessa begins her solo.

10. Come to Your Senses

KARESSA

YOU'RE ON THE AIR
I'M UNDERGROUND
SIGNAL'S FADING
CAN'T BE FOUND
I FINALLY OPEN UP
FOR YOU I WOULD DO ANYTHING
BUT YOU'VE TURNED OFF THE VOLUME
JUST WHEN I'VE BEGUN TO SING

COME TO YOUR SENSES
DEFENSES ARE NOT THE WAY TO GO
AND YOU KNOW
OR AT LEAST YOU KNEW

EVERYTHING'S STRANGE,
YOU'VE CHANGED AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO
TO GET THROUGH
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

I HAVE TO LAUGH
WE SURE PUT ON A SHOW
LOVE IS PASSÉ IN THIS DAY AND AGE
HOW CAN WE EXPECT IT TO GROW?

YOU AS THE KNIGHT
ME AS THE QUEEN
ALL I'VE GOT TONIGHT
IS STATIC ON A SCREEN

COME TO YOUR SENSES
THE FENCES INSIDE ARE NOT FOR REAL
IF WE FEEL AS WE DID AND I DO

CAN'T YOU RECALL
WHEN THIS ALL BEGAN
IT WAS ONLY YOU AND ME
IT WAS ONLY ME AND YOU

BUT NOW THE AIR IS FILLED WITH CONFUSION
WE'VE REPLACED CARE WITH ILLUSION

IT'S COOL TO BE COLD
NOTHING LASTS ANYMORE
LOVE BECOMES DISPOSABLE
THIS IS THE SHAPE OF THINGS
WE CANNOT IGNORE

COME TO YOUR SENSES
SUSPENSE IS FINE
IF YOU'RE JUST AN EMPTY IMAGE
EMANATING OUT OF A SCREEN

BABY, BE REAL,
YOU CAN FEEL AGAIN
YOU DON'T NEED A MUSIC BOX MELODY
TO KNOW WHAT I MEAN

DEEP IN MY EYES
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
DEEP IN MY SIGHS
LISTEN TO ME

LET THE MUSIC COMMENCE FROM INSIDE
NOT ONLY ONE SENSE, BUT USE ALL FIVE

COME TO YOUR SENSES
COME TO YOUR SENSES
COME TO YOUR SENSES
BABY, COME BACK ALIVE

Scene 13

ROSA [MICHAEL]

Jon? It's Rosa calling. I just wanted to say congratulations.

JON

Rosa! Thank you so much for calling.

ROSA

Well, you left eleven messages this morning, dear.

JON

Oh, right.

ROSA

I think you should be very proud. Everything went beautifully.

JON

Really? Thanks! The cast was good, I think, and the audience seemed into it—did you see Ste—— Sond——?

ROSA

Stevie? Oh yes, I wanted to chat but he must have snuck out early. But everyone had fun. Congratulations, honey. We'll talk soon.

JON

Rosa, uh, wait—Do you think . . . what do you think will happen? I mean, does anyone want to move it to the next step, or . . . I mean, the interesting people, did anybody say anything?

ROSA

Well, Jon, I think everyone was just so intrigued by your talent, and they can't wait to see what happens next.

JON

What happens next.

ROSA

Yes, be sure to keep me up to date on what you're working on.

JON

Nothing? No nibbles? Nothing?

ROSA

Honey, we always knew it's a little quirky for Broadway, and the cast is awfully big for Off-, and the futuristic thing means sets are expensive, and musical theatre is Newark Airport and you're snowed in at Buffalo—and now, having plucked out your heart and eaten it like a piece of ripe fruit, I'll leave you to sweep up the fragments of your shattered dreams, bye-bye, honey! Happy birthday!

JON

I get three other calls from friends in the business and they're all like that.

Scene 14

MICHAEL

Jon?

JON

I go to Michael's office.

[Beat.]

I can't do this, Mike.

MICHAEL

Uh?

JON

The theatre, the music. I gave it my shot. I think I've given it an honest try, with all the talent and effort I've got. And it hasn't worked. I'm not sorry I tried. I'm proud of it, but now it's time to take a hard look at my situation and not be egotistical, not delude myself, just admit it's time to move on. I've been stuck. Everyone else, you and Susan, have kept moving. I'm the only one still here

banging my head against the wall. My head hurts. I'm going to stop for a while. The thing is, I can always come back to it, if I want, when I'm older, when I'm smarter, when I've figured out a little more clearly what it is I want to do.

[Beat.]

I feel better. Just hearing myself say it, I already feel better.

[Beat.]

MICHAEL

You're right. I think your heart is telling you something, and I think what you're saying takes courage. I think it takes courage to let all that stuff go. I'm proud of you.

JON

You are?

MICHAEL

No, of course not, you fucking idiot. What is the matter with you?

JON

I can't keep doing this! The show—

MICHAEL

Listen, Jon, the show was very good. You should be proud of it. Everyone loved it.

JON

My friends loved it.

MICHAEL

What's wrong with that?

JON

No one wants to produce it.

MICHAEL

It's a workshop. You'll keep working, keep developing it. Or you'll start something else.

JON

Spend another five years on a show that doesn't go anywhere? I swear to God I'll explode. By then I'll be thirty-five—

MICHAEL

Thirty-five, thirty, who cares? It's meaningless! Focus on something important! Do your work!

JON

That's easy for you to say! You've got a job, an apartment, a fucking BMW.

MICHAEL

Hold on. We both made choices.

JON

I don't want to sell out.

MICHAEL

You mean like me.

JON

You said it, I didn't.

MICHAEL

If it's the car and apartment that's bothering you, I'm sorry. Why shouldn't I enjoy those things while I have the chance?

JON

That's not what I'm—

MICHAEL

Jon. Listen to me. All of this—this is just your fear talking. You have to take control of it. You have to thank your brain for sharing that fear, then ignore it and go on. Fear is like Newark Airport—

JON

SCREW NEWARK AIRPORT! WHAT THE HELL DO YOU KNOW ABOUT FEAR? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ANYTHING?

MICHAEL

I know I'm sick, Jon, and I'm not going to get any better.

[Beat.]

JON

When did you . . . How long have . . . ?

MICHAEL

Two weeks. I wanted to tell you earlier, but I couldn't.

[Beat.]

Look, if you don't mind, it's the middle of the day, and I have a lot of work to do. Close the door when you go, okay?

Scene 15

JON

In the elevator I think of sleepaway camp. How Michael bribed Jim Shanahan with M&M's to switch bunks so we could whisper in the night.

I remember being teenagers, when our families rented houses in Hyannis and we'd walk down the beach, hop the fence, and swim for hours together up and down the shore.

I think of our first summer back from college, when we reunited for a joint on the Kennedy breakwater, and Mike told me he was gay.

The sun is fighting off the January clouds as it sinks behind the park. I run from 53rd and Fifth to East Drive, past the Zoo, the Dairy. A pay phone! I jam in a quarter, dial Mike—his machine picks

up—I try again—same thing—goddamn it!—slam the phone down and keep running. I'm running. Past the skaters, past the Carousel, the statue of Shakespeare.

The Sheep's Meadow is empty. I hop the fence and run to the middle of the field. Rain begins falling and I spin myself in circles and stagger around like a wino.

The TICK-BOOM, TICK-BOOM is so loud I can't hear the rain on the grass. I can't hear the wind.

I'm about to scream when I realize I'm not alone. Watching me from the hill in front of me are hundreds of seagulls. I sprint right into them, waving my arms like a castaway on a desert island spotting a rescue plane.

They fly up into the air en masse, only to land across the meadow, on another hill. I talk to them. MY FRIEND IS DYING. I'M LOST. I'M AFRAID. I run past the fountain, the waterfall, up through the woods, to the top of the Belvedere Castle. I look down into the empty Delacorte Theatre. I see an old rehearsal piano, sitting out under a tarp, below the trees. I climb down, hop another fence, and pull off the tarp.

11. Why

WHEN I WAS NINE
MICHAEL AND I
ENTERED A TALENT SHOW
DOWN AT THE Y

NINE A.M., WENT TO REHEARSE
BY SOME STAIRS
MIKE COULDN'T SING
BUT I SAID, "NO ONE CARES"

WE SANG "YELLOW BIRD"
AND "LET'S GO FLY A KITE"

OVER AND OVER AND OVER
TILL WE GOT IT RIGHT

WHEN WE EMERGED
FROM THE YMCA
THREE O'CLOCK SUN
HAD MADE THE GRASS HAY

I THOUGHT
HEY—WHAT A WAY TO SPEND THE DAY
HEY—WHAT A WAY TO SPEND THE DAY
I MAKE A VOW—RIGHT HERE AND NOW
I'M GONNA SPEND MY TIME THIS WAY

WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN
MICHAEL AND I
GOT PARTS IN *WEST SIDE*
AT WHITE PLAINS HIGH

THREE O'CLOCK, WENT TO REHEARSE
IN THE GYM
MIKE PLAYED "DOC"—WHO DIDN'T SING—
FINE WITH HIM

WE SANG "GOT A ROCKET IN YOUR POCKET"
AND "THE JETS ARE GONNA HAVE THEIR DAY—TONIGHT"
OVER AND OVER AND OVER
TILL WE GOT IT RIGHT

WHEN WE EMERGED—
WIPED OUT BY THE PLAY
NINE O'CLOCK STARS
AND MOON LIT THE WAY

I THOUGHT
HEY—WHAT A WAY TO SPEND THE DAY
HEY—WHAT A WAY TO SPEND THE DAY
I MADE A VOW—I WONDER NOW
AM I CUT OUT TO SPEND MY TIME THIS WAY?

WITH ONLY SO MUCH TIME TO SPEND
 DON'T WANT TO WASTE THE TIME I'M GIVEN
 "HAVE IT ALL—PLAY THE GAME" SOME RECOMMEND
 I'M AFRAID IT JUST MAY BE TIME TO GIVE IN

I'M TWENTY-NINE
 MICHAEL AND I
 LIVE ON THE WEST SIDE
 OF SOHO, N.Y.

NINE A.M.,
 I WRITE A LYRIC OR TWO
 MIKE SINGS HIS SONG
 NOW ON MAD AVENUE

I SING, "COME TO YOUR SENSES
 DEFENSES ARE NOT THE WAY TO GO"
 OVER AND OVER AND OVER
 TILL I GET IT RIGHT
 WHEN I EMERGE
 FROM B MINOR OR A
 FIVE O'CLOCK—DINER CALLS,
 "I'M ON MY WAY"

I THINK
 HEY—WHAT A WAY TO SPEND THE DAY
 HEY—WHAT A WAY TO SPEND THE DAY
 I MAKE A VOW—RIGHT HERE AND NOW
 I'M GONNA SPEND MY TIME THIS WAY
 I'M GONNA SPEND MY TIME THIS WAY

Scene 16

Saturday night. It's my thirtieth birthday. Thirty. Three-O. Hey, it's no big deal. Just three decades. What's thirty?

12. 30/90 (Reprise)

DON'T FREAK OUT—DON'T STRIKE OUT
 CAN'T FIGHT IT—LIKE CITY HALL
 AT LEAST YOU'RE NOT ALONE
 YOUR FRIENDS ARE THERE TOO—

The apartment is warm and noisy. I realize I don't want to escape to the roof, or fly to Cuba, or hide in the bathroom. I grab a beer and wade into the crowd.

INTO MY HANDS NOW—THE BALL IS PASSED
 I WANT THE SPOILS—BUT NOT TOO FAST
 THE WORLD IS CALLING—IT'S NOW OR NEVERLAND

THIRTY NINETY THIRTY NINETY
 THIRTY NINETY THIRTY NINETY . . .

I open gifts. Mostly gag stuff. Three Gumbys, two Silly Puttys, and a TV Themes CD. Susan's here. I don't know what to say. She doesn't either.

When are you leaving?

SUSAN

Tomorrow.

JON

I'll really miss you.

SUSAN

I'll miss you too.

JON

Will you write?

SUSAN

I will if you will.

JON

She hands me a large book. I open it. Blank music manuscript paper. A thousand sheets.

Thank you.

SUSAN

Happy birthday, Jon. Don't forget to breathe.

JON

She disappears into the crowd and suddenly Michael's beside me. He tosses me a box. I open it. Three belts.

Gucci?

MICHAEL

Not Gucci. You're not a Gucci guy. But it's life-affirming to own multiple accessories, and I want you experience that.

JON

Thanks, Mike.

MICHAEL

Sure thing. Happy birthday, buddy.

JON

I'm sorry about yesterday. I wish I had known. I don't know what to say. I'll be there. I promise.

MICHAEL

I know you will.

[Phone ring.]

JON

I let the machine pick up.

SONDHEIM (V.O.)

[Beep.]

Jon? Steve Sondheim. Rosa gave me your number. Sorry we couldn't talk after the show, I had to rush out. Just wanted to say terrific work. Really. I'd love to get together and talk about it. Give me a call—and congratulations. You're going to have a great future.

[Beep.]

JON

What do you know?

The dreaded moment arrives. I'm escorted by a gaggle of smiling faces into the next room. People whisper. The lights are turned off.

The darkness is pierced by a blinding glow.

[HE blows out the candles on the cake.]

They lead me over to the piano to play.

The tick-tick-booms are softer now. I can barely hear them, and I think if I play loud enough, I can drown them out completely.

13. Louder Than Words

WHY DO WE PLAY WITH FIRE?
WHY DO WE RUN OUR FINGER THROUGH THE FLAME?
WHY DO WE LEAVE OUR HAND ON THE STOVE—
ALTHOUGH WE KNOW WE'RE IN FOR SOME PAIN?

OH, WHY DO WE REFUSE TO HANG A LIGHT
WHEN THE STREETS ARE DANGEROUS?
WHY DOES IT TAKE AN ACCIDENT
BEFORE THE TRUTH GETS THROUGH TO US?

CAGES OR WINGS?
WHICH DO YOU PREFER?
ASK THE BIRDS

FEAR OR LOVE, BABY?
DON'T SAY THE ANSWER
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

MICHAEL

WHY SHOULD WE TRY TO BE OUR BEST
WHEN WE CAN JUST GET BY AND STILL GAIN?
WHY DO WE NOD OUR HEADS

MICHAEL and JON

ALTHOUGH WE KNOW

MICHAEL

THE BOSS IS WRONG AS RAIN?

JON

WHY SHOULD WE BLAZE A TRAIL
WHEN THE WELL-WORN PATH SEEMS SAFE AND

JON and SUSAN

SO INVITING?

SUSAN

HOW—AS WE TRAVEL CAN WE

SUSAN and JON

SEE THE DISMAY—
AND KEEP FROM FIGHTING?

JON

CAGES OR WINGS?
WHICH DO YOU PREFER?
ASK THE BIRDS

MICHAEL and SUSAN

CAGES OR WINGS

AH . . .

ALL

FEAR OR LOVE, BABY?
DON'T SAY THE ANSWER

JON

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER
THAN WORDS

MICHAEL and SUSAN

LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN

WHAT DOES IT TAKE—
TO WAKE UP A GENERATION?

ALL

HOW CAN YOU MAKE SOMEONE
TAKE OFF AND FLY?

JON

IF WE DON'T WAKE UP
AND SHAKE UP THE NATION
WE'LL EAT THE DUST OF
THE WORLD,
WONDERING WHY

MICHAEL and SUSAN

WHY

SUSAN

WHY DO WE STAY WITH LOVERS

SUSAN and JON

WHO WE KNOW, DOWN DEEP

SUSAN

JUST AREN'T RIGHT?

JON

WHY WOULD WE RATHER

ALL

PUT OURSELVES THROUGH HELL
THAN SLEEP ALONE AT NIGHT?

JON

WHY DO WE FOLLOW LEADERS WHO NEVER LEAD?

MICHAEL

WHY DOES IT TAKE CATASTROPHE TO START A REVOLUTION

MICHAEL and SUSAN

IF WE'RE SO FREE, TELL ME WHY?

JONSOMEONE TELL ME WHY
SO MANY PEOPLE BLEED?**JON**CAGES OR WINGS?
WHICH DO YOU PREFER?
ASK THE BIRDS**MICHAEL and SUSAN**

CAGES OR WINGS

AH . . .

ALLFEAR OR LOVE, BABY?
DON'T SAY THE ANSWER**JON**ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER
THAN**MICHAEL and SUSAN**

LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN

LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN

ALL*[A cappella.]*CAGES OR WINGS?
WHICH DO YOU PREFER?**JON**

ASK THE BIRDS

MICHAEL and SUSAN

AH . . .

ALLFEAR OR LOVE, BABY?
DON'T SAY THE ANSWER**JON**ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER
THAN
THEY SPEAK LOUDER
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER
THAN . . .**MICHAEL and SUSAN**LOUDER THAN, LOUDER
THAN, OOH
LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN
WORDS*[The music turns into "Happy Birthday."]*