

tick, tick...BOOM!

Screenplay by
Steven Levenson

Music and Lyrics by
Jonathan Larson

Directed by
Lin-Manuel Miranda

Based on the musical by
Jonathan Larson

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992 - VIDEO

Grainy VHS footage of a darkened stage against a bare brick wall. JON (32) emerges from the wings, striding confidently to a microphone stand at the lip of the stage, met by a smattering of APPLAUSE.

JON

Hi. I'm Jon. I am a musical theater writer, one of the last of my species.

Some LAUGHTER from the Audience. Jon frowns.

JON (CONT'D)

Lately, I've been hearing this... sound. Everywhere I go. Like a... tick. Tick. Tick.

We begin to hear it with him: TICK, TICK, TICK.

JON (CONT'D)

Like a time bomb in some cheesy B-movie or Saturday morning cartoon. The fuse has been lit.

The TICKING grows louder.

JON (CONT'D)

The clock counts down the seconds as the flame gets closer, and closer, and closer, until all at once --

SMASH TO:

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990 - VHS

More grainy footage from a shaky, handheld camcorder. Jon appears behind the counter of the diner, carrying a tray with an elaborate breakfast spread, a flower in his mouth, trumpeting his arrival -- making a complete idiot of himself for the amusement of SUSAN (30), seated at the counter, laughing, deeply in love.

Over the home video, we begin to hear her VOICE.

SUSAN (V.O.)

This is Jonathan Larson's story.

She pulls the flower from his mouth and kisses him.

As we continue to hear her voice, a series of QUICK CUTS to archival footage --

- A CROWD wrapped around the block outside New York Theatre Workshop in 1996.

SUSAN (V.O.)
Before the Tony Awards.

- CLOSE ON a flyer affixed to the door of the theater: "All performances of *Rent* through the March 31 extension are SOLD OUT!"

SUSAN (V.O.)
Before the Pulitzer Prize. Before...

The CUTS come faster --

- Another, larger CROWD wrapped around the block outside of the Nederlander Theatre in 1996, *Rent* emblazoned on the marquee.

- Adam Pascal and Daphne Rubin-Vega on the cover of *Newsweek*.

- On the stage of the Nederlander Theatre, ANTHONY RAPP, costumed as Mark Cohen, addresses the audience.

ANTHONY RAPP
*We dedicate this opening night and
every performance to our friend,
Jonathan Larson...*

- JULIE and AL LARSON stand and applaud, overcome by emotion, at the Tony Awards.

SUSAN (V.O.)
... we lost him.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990 - VHS

Back to the diner, where Jon pops open a bottle of champagne.

SUSAN (V.O.)
Everything you're about to see is
true. Except for the parts Jonathan
made up.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon grabs the microphone, crosses to a grand piano. He sits at the piano bench. A small BAND and two vocalists, KARESSA and ROGER (both early 30s), are arrayed behind him.

JON
The date is January 26th, 1990.

NOTE: Throughout the film, we move back and forth between Jon in 1992, performing the show, and the events he is narrating as they occur in 1990.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - DAY - 1990

Jon, at the keyboard, begins to find and play a CHORD PROGRESSION, out-of-time at first, slowly beginning to take shape, the CHORDS of 30/90.

JON (V.O.)

The setting: the barren, unfashionable no-man's land between SoHo and Greenwich Village.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - MORNING - 1990

Jon bikes down the sidewalk outside of the Moondance Diner.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon plays the same CHORD PROGRESSION on the grand piano.

JON (V.O.)

I have two keyboards...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - 1990

FLASH TO a boxy computer on a surprisingly well-organized desk.

JON (V.O.)

...a Macintosh computer...

FLASH TO Finster perched on the sofa.

JON (V.O.)

... a cat...

FLASH TO his copious music library.

JON (V.O.)

... an impressive collection of compact discs, cassettes, and records of other people's music...

FLASH TO his precariously overstuffed bookshelves.

JON (V.O.)

... bookshelves sagging under the weight of plays and novels I didn't write.

FLASH TO a type-written manuscript of *Superbia*.

JON (V.O.)
 I have an original dystopian rock
 musical that I have spent the last
 eight years of my life writing...

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - DAY - 1990

Jon sits on his bed, keyboard on his lap, completely,
 unbearably stuck.

JON (V.O.)
 ... and rewriting.
 (a beat)
 And rewriting.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Back to Jon at the piano.

JON (V.O.)
 I have rejection letters from every
 major -- and minor -- producer,
 theater company, record label and film
 studio in existence. And in just over
 a week... I will be thirty years old.

As the CHORD PROGRESSION begins to pick up speed --

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1990

FLASH TO the cover of the *West Side Story* cast recording LP.

JON (V.O.)
 Older than Stephen Sondheim when he
 had his first Broadway show.

FLASH TO the cassette cover of The Beatles' *Let It Be*.

JON (V.O.)
 Older than Paul McCartney when he
 wrote his *last* song with John Lennon.

FLASH TO an old home movie of little JON and JULIE.

JON (V.O.)
 By the time my parents were thirty,
 they already had two kids. They had
 careers with steady paychecks. A
 mortgage.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Back to Jon at the keyboard.

JON

In eight days, my youth will be over
forever. And what exactly do I have to
show for myself?

He STOPS playing. He takes a breath in the silence.

JON (CONT'D)

Happy Birthday.

He SLAMS his fingers back on the keys -- resuming the chord
progression, as he begins to sing.

JON (CONT'D)

STOP THE CLOCK -- TAKE TIME OUT
TIME TO REGROUP BEFORE YOU LOSE THE
BOUT

The Band comes in behind him, as the song picks up energy.

JON (CONT'D)

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 RIPTIDE'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 WANNA LAY DOWN AND CRY
NOT JUST ANOTHER BIRTHDAY, IT'S 30/90
WHY CAN'T YOU STAY 29?
HELL, YOU STILL FEEL LIKE YOU'RE 22
TURN THIRTY 1990
BANG! YOU'RE DEAD
WHAT CAN YOU DO?
WHAT CAN YOU DO?
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

As the Band continues to UNDERSCORE --

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

Lunch at the diner, bustling with patrons, Jon behind the
counter. MICHAEL (30) hurries through the door.

MICHAEL

I made ten copies.

He hands Jon a thick stack of photocopies, as Jon hands him a cup of coffee and a bag of take-out in exchange. Jon glances through the stack: sheet music and scripts for *Superbia*.

JON

You are an angel on earth.

MICHAEL

This is the last time. Seriously.

Michael reaches for his wallet. Jon shuts it down fast.

JON

No, thank you. No, no, no. I got you.

MICHAEL

I'm going to pay...

JON

You're not going to pay. I don't want you to pay.

CAROLYN (33) comes by, carrying a tray full of dirty dishes, wrinkling her nose at the smell.

CAROLYN

Somebody needs to take out this trash.

FREDDY (25) comes over to Michael, carrying his own tray of dirty dishes, as Jon goes to handle the trash.

FREDDY

I heard you're moving out of Jon's place. End of an era.

(sotto)

We hear him sobbing in the fridge most mornings. It's very sad.

JON

(to Carolyn)

You're coming next Friday, right?

CAROLYN

(feigning ignorance)

What's next Friday?

Before Jon can answer --

MICHAEL AND FREDDY

The *Superbia* workshop.

MICHAEL

I'm surprised he hasn't mentioned it.

FREDDY

It sounds vaguely familiar...

JON

(defensive)

This is the biggest break I've ever had. This is *that* moment. It's the first time people are going to see the show that aren't just us.

FREDDY

Well, it's good that you're not putting too much pressure on it or anything...

Carolyn and Michael laugh.

JON

No, but it's true, though. You get to a certain age and you stop being a writer that waits tables and you become... a waiter with a hobby.

MICHAEL

Boo Boo. You need to ask yourself: in this moment, are you letting yourself be led by fear or by love?

As Jon considers the question, he hefts the trash bag out of its bin. The bottom rips, sending some kind of unidentifiable liquid all over his shoes.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Roger launches into the next verse of the song.

ROGER

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 CLEAN UP BATTER
ON A TEAM THAT AIN'T A WINNER.

ROGER

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

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - DAY - 1990

Matching Jon and Roger in the concert, Jon and Michael sing together, as Jon helps stack boxes with Michael.

JON
THEY'RE SINGING, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY"

JON (CONT'D)	MICHAEL
YOU JUST WISH YOU COULD RUN AWAY	YOU JUST WISH YOU COULD RUN AWAY

JON (CONT'D)
WHO CARES ABOUT A BIRTHDAY? BUT --

JON (CONT'D)	MICHAEL
30/90, HEY	30/90, HEY

JON (CONT'D)
CAN'T YOU BE OPTIMISTIC?

JON (CONT'D)	MICHAEL
YOU'RE NO LONGER THE INGENUE TURN THIRTY, 1990	YOU'RE NO LONGER THE INGENUE TURN THIRTY, 1990

JON (CONT'D)
BOOM! YOU'RE PASSÉ

JON (CONT'D)	MICHAEL
WHAT CAN YOU DO?	WHAT CAN YOU DO?
WHAT CAN YOU DO?	OOH
WHAT CAN YOU DO?	

As the Band continues to UNDERSCORE --

INT. STRAND BOOK STORE - DAY - 1990

Jon walks beside Susan through the dusty stacks, Susan staring at him in disbelief.

SUSAN
You just *quit*?

JON
I didn't *quit* quit. I gave my notice.

SUSAN
That's exactly -- it's the same thing.

JON
No. I still have two weeks left.

Jon spies a beautiful book of expensive music manuscript paper. He picks it up.

JON (CONT'D)

I'm allowing myself to be led by love.

SUSAN

(perplexed)
What?

JON

Rosa has another client -- remember
Craig Carnelia?

SUSAN

This is Rosa, your agent who hasn't
returned your calls in a year?

JON

That's the one. She invited the entire
theater industry to a workshop of
Craig's musical last year. By
intermission, some producer had
already written him a check for ten
thousand dollars.

SUSAN

I wish you didn't have to think like
that.

JON

It's expensive to make art.

SUSAN

No, it's expensive to make art *here*.

JON

But worth every penny...

Susan nods to the book of manuscript paper.

SUSAN

How are you going to pay for that?

Susan gently takes the book out of his hands. As Jon follows
her down the aisle, the PATRONS around them join in singing.

JON

PETER PAN AND TINKERBELL AH
WHICH WAY TO NEVER NEVER LAND? AH
EMERALD CITY'S GONE TO HELL
SINCE THE WIZARD

SUSAN AND PATRONS

JON, SUSAN, AND PATRONS
BLEW OFF HIS COMMAND

JON (V.O.)

30/90
30/90

FLASH TO:

INT. SUBWAY - DAY - 1990 - MOS

Jon scribbles notes to himself in a small spiral notebook.

ROGER AND KARESSA (V.O.)

30/90
30/90
30, 30/90

BACK TO:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

The song builds to a thunderous CRESCENDO.

JON

WHAT CAN I DO?

ROGER AND KARESSA

30/90
30, 30/90

ALL

WHAT CAN I DO?

APPLAUSE as the song ends.

JON

Ladies and gentlemen, please give it
up for our band, and for my very,
very, very dear friends, Roger and
Karessa, on vocals.
(then)
Friday night...

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING - 1990

Streamers and balloons fill the apartment as Michael stands by the answering machine, scrolling through messages, suitcase at his feet. After a BEEP --

DEBORAH (V.O.)

Hi Jonathan, it's Deborah. Susan just
dropped off your music for tonight's
dance recital --

Michael fast-forwards through the message, his impatience betraying some anxiety. Deborah's voice returns.

DEBORAH (V.O.)
 -- but I can't get the speakers to
 work --

Jon enters, grocery bags in hand. Michael stops the message.

JON
 How was Philly?

MICHAEL
 I went from the airport to a
 conference room and then back to the
 airport three hours later.

JON
 That sounds amazing.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon speaks at the microphone at the front of the stage.

JON
 Michael was an amazing actor. He was
 the lead in every play in high school,
 college. Then we moved to New York...

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT - FLASHBACK - 1988

Michael, frustrated, vents to Jon as they stand together,
 passing a joint.

MICHAEL
 I am sick of waking up at five to get
 in line outside the Equity building
 and wait all day -- praying that the
 director actually agrees to even see
 anyone that's non-union. And then when
 I finally do get in the room, I sing
 six measures if I'm lucky before they
 cut me off and call me the wrong name -
 - Juan, Pedro, Carlos, *lo que sea*...

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon, back at the microphone.

JON
 A week later, he got a job at a fancy
 advertising company, making high-five
 figures. Health care. Dental. He never
 looked back.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING - 1990

Back to the apartment. Jon pulls some top-shelf liquor from the bags, sets it on the table beside a vase of bodega flowers.

MICHAEL

You know, for someone who's broke, you could probably spend a little bit less on party planning.

JON

What's the point of having money if you can't spend it on the people you love?

MICHAEL

(laughing)
Yeah, except you don't *have* any money.

JON

Oh, *right*...

Michael sees a Con Edison bill on the table, picks it up.

MICHAEL

This has been sitting here for a week.

JON

I'm on it.

MICHAEL

Yes, you seem very on it.

Michael grabs his suitcase, takes it to his room to unpack.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Pretty soon you won't have me around to remind you to pay bills on time.

JON

(facetious)
How will I ever survive?

MICHAEL

That's actually a very real question. Have you found a new roommate yet?

JON

I've been a little busy. My workshop is next week.

MICHAEL

What workshop?

Jon is about to be offended, when he realizes.

JON

That was funny.

Jon reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out his small spiral-ring notebook and a pencil. He scribbles on a blank page: "Fear or love?" He underlines the words. Michael calls from the bedroom.

MICHAEL

What time's the show tonight?

JON

Curtain's at eight.

MICHAEL

I've heard the dancing is amazing but the music sucks...

As we PRE-LAP a propulsive dance score --

INT. DANCE THEATER - NIGHT - 1990

Jon sits in the audience beside Michael, watching the show, an athletic piece for eight female DANCERS, moving to the score that Jon wrote. Jon's eyes are riveted on Susan.

JON (V.O.)

Susan grew up in a small town in the Midwest, went to college to study biology. She thought she'd become a doctor -- maybe teach. But then she fell in love with modern dance instead -- every parents' dream, right? She moved to New York without knowing a soul. Four years later, she's already danced with every major choreographer in the city -- Paul, Trisha, Merce.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon stands with the microphone.

JON

1990. This was the year she was finally going to join a company. Not just go from job to job -- actually have a home, an artistic family. And she was ready. This was her year. She knew it. Then she fractured her ankle during a dress rehearsal. Six months of rehab later... she's dancing again. It's just...

(MORE)

JON (CONT'D)

whatever that moment was when she knew... all of a sudden, she doesn't know anymore.

(a beat)

Susan is a real artist. She doesn't care about seeing her name in the *New York Times*. It doesn't matter to her if she's dancing in front of five people or five thousand.

INT. DANCE THEATER - NIGHT - 1990

Seated in the audience, Jon hears the sudden sound of TICKING underneath the SCORE.

JON (V.O.)

And then there's the matter of us...

As the Dancers hit a final pose and the stage lights fade out, Jon joins the rest of the Audience in applauding -- the CLAPPING and CHEERS drowning out the TICKING altogether.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

A raucous cast party underway, the tiny living room jam-packed with FRIENDS. Wine and beer flow. Susan stands with Michael.

SUSAN

You know he can't afford any of this, right?

MICHAEL

Well, you know how much he loves making a fuss. Especially about you...

Susan smiles, something nagging at her.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - LATER - NIGHT - 1990

Jon huddles with Freddy and Carolyn.

FREDDY

After everything we've done for him, he walks away...

JON

I'm leaving you my mix tapes. You can play them in remembrance of me.

Michael comes by, carrying two glasses of wine, one of which he hands to Carolyn.

MICHAEL

Jonathan Larson's famous Moondance
Diner mix tapes. Who doesn't love show
tunes with their French Toast?

JON

Actually, it's not just show tunes.
It's a very eclectic mix.

CAROLYN

Someone's very touchy about the mix
tapes.

MICHAEL

Apparently.

FREDDY

I'm happy for you. I really am. I
mean, I'm also extremely bitter and
jealous and envious and hateful toward
you right now, but...
(he smiles)
You're getting out.

JON

And you're going to be next.

FREDDY

I got a callback last week.

JON

That's great.

FREDDY

For a cruise.

CAROLYN

What's wrong with a cruise?

FREDDY

Well it's an Arctic cruise. So pretty
much everything -- every single thing
is wrong...

JON

How are you feeling?

Freddy takes a breath, chooses his words carefully, doesn't
want to be overly optimistic.

FREDDY

It's been a really good week. T-Cell
count is good. My doctor feels...
cautiously optimistic.

JON
You look great.

FREDDY
Oh my God, thank you, I know.

They all laugh.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - LATER - 1990

The party has gotten louder, more packed, as Roger introduces Jon to SCOTT (27), a banker.

ROGER
(to Jon)
Scott and I used to sing madrigals together in high school.

SCOTT
I hated singing. I just did it for the pussy...

ROGER
I ran into Scott in SoHo. He really, really wanted to come with me.

SCOTT
I never get the chance to go to artist parties, you know? It sucks. The drugs there are always the best.

ROGER
Scott's in finance.

JON
Shocking.

SCOTT
What do you do?

JON
I'm the future of musical theater, Scott. Welcome. I'm going to grab another drink.

As Jon goes, Scott turns to Roger, laughs.

SCOTT
That guy's hilarious.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - LATER - 1990

The party has begun to thin out. Jon, drunker, stands with a small group of PALS -- scattered on the sagging sofas -- giving an impromptu performance of **BOHO DAYS**, a cappella, clapping along to the rhythm, as he directs his audience's attention to the various sections of the apartment.

JON

THIS IS THE LIFE, BO BO, BO BO BO
 THIS IS THE LIFE, BO BO, BO BO BO
 SHOWER'S IN THE KITCHEN
 THERE MIGHT BE SOME SOAP
 DISHES IN THE SINK
 BRUSH YOUR TEETH, IF YOU CAN COPE
 TOILET'S IN THE CLOSET
 YOU BETTER HOPE
 THERE'S A LIGHT BULB IN THERE

DONNA (early 30s) calls from the dark, dark bathroom.

DONNA

Not today!

JON

BO BO BO

As Jon calls out names, he points to the PEOPLE named. They cheer for themselves.

JON (CONT'D)

REVOLVING DOOR ROOMMATES
 PRICK UP YOUR EARS
 FOURTEEN PEOPLE IN JUST FOUR YEARS
 ANN AND MAX AND JONATHAN
 AND CAROLYN AND KERRI
 DAVID, TIM -- NO TIM WAS JUST A GUEST
 FROM JUNE TO JANUARY

MICHAEL

(laughs)
 I remember Tim...

JON

MARGARET, LISA, DAVID, SUSIE,
 STEPHEN, JOE AND SAM
 AND ELSA, THE BILL COLLECTOR'S DREAM
 WHO IS STILL ON THE LAM
 DON'T FORGET THE NEIGHBORS
 MICHELLE AND GAY

MICHELLE and GAY (middle-aged artists) take a little bow.

JON (CONT'D)

MORE LIKE A FAMILY
 THAN A FAMILY, HEY
 THE TIME IS FLYING
 AND EVERYTHING IS DYING
 I THOUGHT BY NOW
 I'D HAVE A DOG, A KID, AND WIFE
 THE SHIP IS SORT OF SINKING
 SO LET'S START DRINKING
 BEFORE WE START THINKING
 IS THIS A LIFE?
 THIS IS THE LIFE, BO BO, BO BO BO

Roger joins in harmony.

JON & ROGER

THIS IS THE LIFE, BO BO, BO BO BO

The room JOINS in.

ALL

THIS IS THE LIFE, BO BO, BO BO BO
 BOHEMIA

JON

BOHEMIA!

CHEERS and WHISTLES erupt.

SCOTT

That was freaking *amazing*. *Whooooo!*

EXT. ROOF - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Susan stands on the roof, lost in thought, staring at the water, wearing a coat. Jon comes out to find her.

JON

Hey. Everyone's leaving.

SUSAN

I just needed some fresh air.

JON

It's freezing up here.

SUSAN

Where's your coat?

JON

Somewhere at the bottom of a very
 large pile.

Jon looks out toward the flickering lights on the water.

JON (CONT'D)

Pretty.

SUSAN

That's the prison barge.

JON

(laughs, remembering)
Right...

SUSAN

You know, I heard Jacob's Pillow is hiring new teachers for their dance school...

JON

Oh yeah?

SUSAN

You work a couple hours a week and then the rest of the time is yours. Free studio space whenever you want.

JON

Hey, can we talk about how amazing you were tonight?

SUSAN

Thank you.

JON

No, but truly, though.

SUSAN

I was thinking of maybe applying. To the Jacob's Pillow job.
(off his confusion)
We went last summer, remember? We saw the new Mark Morris...

JON

The place in the Berkshires? You're going to move to the Berkshires?

SUSAN

And not have to work thirty hours a week doing word processing to pay the rent? Why not? I might actually be able to get back in shape...

JON

Okay. Great. Yeah. All right. Let's do it. Let's move.

SUSAN
I'm being serious.

JON
Hey, *I'm* being serious. We can live in a log cabin and gather acorns, hunt squirrels...

SUSAN
What are you even talking about? It's the Berkshires. People have vacation houses there. You've *been* there.

JON
(they laugh)
Can we go inside now? I'm just, I'm sorry, I'm scared I'm beginning to lose sensation in my extremities.

Susan laughs, takes off her coat, revealing the green velvet dress she's wearing underneath.

SUSAN
You are such a baby. Take this.

As Susan hands him the coat, he stops as he notices the dress.

JON
Hold on.

SUSAN
(feigns nonchalance)
Oh. You like it?

SUSAN (CONT'D)
I thought you were in such a hurry to get back...

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon slams on his clock radio and an R&B rendition of **GREEN GREEN DRESS** begins to play, as he and Susan fall into bed together, clothes beginning to come off.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - 1990

Michael, in the room next door, hears them through the thin walls, throws on a pair of headphones, tries to drown it out.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS - 1990

Jon and Susan entwined in bed, Jon sliding the green, green dress off.

SUSAN
That job in the Berkshires?

JON
(distracted)
It sounds amazing...

SUSAN
I already applied for it.

JON
Oh yeah?

SUSAN
I got it.

Now he's paying attention.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
It doesn't start until June.

JON
Oh. So it's just for the summer?

SUSAN
It's permanent.

He stares at her, agog.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Jon?

INT./EXT. MICHAEL'S BMW - DAY - 1990

Michael drives Jon in his BMW through traffic.

MICHAEL
Whoa. The Berkshires. That is... very far from Midtown.

JON
Why is she doing this now? And she wants me to come with her...

MICHAEL
What did you say?

JON
I said: "Oh." What was I supposed to say? I didn't know *what* to say. I mean, I can't leave New York...

MICHAEL
Tell her to move in with you.

JON
Move in where?

MICHAEL
You need a new roommate right? Two birds, one stone. You're welcome.

Jon changes the subject.

JON
What happened to that guy you were seeing? David? I thought you guys were great together.

Michael shrugs, pretending indifference.

MICHAEL
It didn't work out.
(moving on)
There's a focus group at the office this week, looking for a few more people. How about I sign you up?

JON
So you can lure me to the dark side...

MICHAEL
So I can introduce you to my colleagues and show them how brilliant you are.

JON
I don't want a job in advertising.

MICHAEL
I don't want you to have a job in advertising. But jingle-writing...

Jon is about to object, but Michael barrels over him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
You come up with jingles all the time for fun, Jon. You make up songs about the cereal we're eating. You could get paid for those.

JON
When *Superbia* gets produced, I'll get paid for my music anyway.

MICHAEL
(nods, equivocal)
That's true...

They pull into the courtyard of a luxury condo building.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And we are here. Home, sweet home.

Jon stares out the window at the gleaming glass high-rise.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon speaks into the microphone.

JON

Oh. My. God.

EXT. VICTORY TOWERS - DAY - 1990

Jon steps out, taking in the marble fountain in the center of the courtyard, as the MUSICAL INTRO to **NO MORE** begins.

JON (V.O.)

Michael tosses the keys to the parking attendant -- what apartment building has a *parking attendant*?

Michael hands Jon a moving box from the back seat, grabs another one, and shuts the door. As Jon follows him through the glass revolving doors...

INT. VICTORY TOWERS LOBBY - CONTINUOUS - 1990

A white lobby, austere like an art gallery. A heavy-set, mustachioed DOORMAN (40s) nods from his desk, as Michael leads Jon toward the elevators.

JON (V.O.)

Fresh flowers in the lobby. An old white lady with a tiny dog. Is this real life?

EXT. GREENWICH STREET - NIGHT - 1990

Michael and Jon trudge through snow, hefting massive sacks of laundry, as Michael sings to him.

MICHAEL

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

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - STAIRWELL - NIGHT - 1990

Laundry bags in hand, Jon schleps up the grimy, uneven steps behind Michael.

MICHAEL

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

Michael gestures to exposed wires dangling from the ceiling.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

NO MORE FAULTY WIRING
NO MORE CROOKED FLOORS
NO MORE SPITTING OUT MY ULTRA BRITE
ON TOP OF DIRTY DISHES
IN THE ONE AND ONLY SINK

As they reach their apartment, Michael turns the key and pushes open the door to --

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - DAY - 1990

Michael leads Jon into his gleaming new apartment.

MICHAEL

HELLO TO MY WALK IN CLOSETS
TIDY AS PARK AVENUE
HELLO, MY BUTCHER BLOCK TABLE
I COULD GET USED -- I COULD GET USED
I COULD GET USED TO YOU

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Michael and Jon inspect a SLEEPING STRANGER (20s), a man passed out on the floor of their apartment.

MICHAEL

NO MORE
CLIMBING OVER SLEEPING PEOPLE
BEFORE YOU GET OUT THE DOOR OF YOUR
OWN BUILDING

Michael and Jon share a look -- do you know who that is?
Neither has any idea.

Michael and Jon plop down on chairs in the living room, staring nervously at the glowing, unvented gas wall heater.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

JON

NO MORE

NO MORE

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

NOXIOUS FUMES FROM GAS HEATERS THAT
ARE ILLEGAL

JON
OR WILL BLOW UP WHILE YOU ARE SLEEPING

MICHAEL
NO MORE

They look up to see water dripping from the discolored ceiling.

JON
LEAKY CEILING

MICHAEL
NO MORE

They look down to see a disconcerting aperture in the floor.

JON
HOLES IN THE FLOOR

MICHAEL AND JON
NO MORE

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - 1990

Jon and Michael take in the claw-foot tub in the kitchen.

JON
TAKING A SHOWER IN THE KITCHEN
WHILE YOUR ROOMMATE'S EATING BREAKFAST

Michael and Jon stand in the tub together.

MICHAEL AND JON
AND YOU'RE GETTING WATER ON HIS
CORNFLAKES

They pull the shower curtain closed.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1990

They walk across the immaculate floors to the kitchen.

MICHAEL AND JON
HELLO, TO SHINY NEW PARQUET WOOD
FLOORS
AS WAXED AS A WEALTHY GIRL'S LEGS
HELLO, DEAR MISTER DISHWASHER

MICHAEL
I COULD GET USED

JON
I COULD GET USED

MICHAEL
I COULD GET USED

JON
I COULD GET USED

MICHAEL AND JON
I COULD GET USED TO YOU

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Jon pops open the fridge. An unidentifiable, mold-covered piece of once-food sits on the shelf.

JON
NO MORE EXOTIC

Michael slides the dead bolt into place on the door, as SIRENS sound from outside the apartment.

MICHAEL
NO MORE NEUROTIC

MICHAEL AND JON
NO MORE ANYTHING
BUT PLEASANTLY ROBOTIC

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michael flips a switch and all of the blinds in the apartment open at once, letting in a burst of mid-day sunshine.

MICHAEL
WE'RE MOVING ON UP

JON
WE'RE MOVING ON UP

MICHAEL
TO THE EAST SIDE

JON
TO THE EAST SIDE

MICHAEL AND JON
TO A DELUXE APARTMENT IN THE SKY

INT. VICTORY TOWERS LOBBY - DAY - 1990

Fully immersed in the fantasy, Michael and Jon, in tuxedos, stroll in, Michael handing the Doorman a \$20 bill with a wink.

MICHAEL AND JON
 HELLO, TO DEAR MISTER DOORMAN
 WHO LOOKS LIKE CAPTAIN KANGAROO
 HELLO DEAR FELLOW, AND HOW DO YOU DO?

A full party is underway in the lobby -- beautiful PEOPLE,
 SUPERMODELS male and female, dancing.

MICHAEL
 I COULD GET USED

JON
 I COULD GET USED

MICHAEL
 EVEN SEDUCED

JON
 EVEN SEDUCED

MICHAEL AND JON
 I COULD GET USED TO YOU, OH --

The beautiful people follow Michael and Jon to the elevator.

INT. VICTORY TOWERS - ELEVATORS - DAY - 1990

Michael and Jon stand in the packed elevator, surrounded by the
 beautiful people.

MICHAEL
 -- I COULD GET USED

JON
 I COULD GET USED

MICHAEL
 EVEN SEDUCED

JON
 EVEN SEDUCED

MICHAEL AND JON
 I COULD GET USED TO YOU

As the elevator doors shut with a DING --

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY - DAY - 1990

Jon stands in the same position, jammed into a PACKED subway
 car. He watches as the subway doors, sliding shut, are stopped
 by a would-be PASSENGER trying to squeeze onto the train.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Stand clear of the closing doors or
we're not going anywhere. I swear to
God. I'm talking to you in the back.

IRA (PRE-LAP)

You still don't have the song...

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon sits at a table across from IRA WEITZMAN, cups of coffee
and a script of *Superbia* between them.

JON

This has never happened to me before.
I usually write a song in a day. Last
week, I wrote a song about sugar in
three hours.

IRA

(puzzled)
A song about sugar?

Jon sings a bit of **SUGAR** a cappella.

JON

SUGAR, SHE'S REFINED
FOR A SMALL PRICE
SHE BLOWS MY MIND

IRA

Why would you do that?

JON

It was an exercise.

IRA

In what?

JON

I like to see if I can write a song
about anything.

IRA

Why don't you try to see if you can
write a song for your musical that's
being presented to an audience in six
days instead?

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Back to Jon on stage.

JON

Ira Weitzman. Head of Musical Theater at Playwrights Horizons. The first and, so far, *only* actual theater person to offer to put on a workshop of *Superbia*.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

Back to Jon and Ira at the Diner.

JON

I'm starting to think that maybe I don't need it...

IRA

You do.

JON

You know, you're the only person who's ever said that. Just so you know.

IRA

You're telling me, in the five years you've been writing this musical --

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon stands at the lip of the stage.

JON

Eight years, actually.

INT. LIFE CAFE - DAY - 1990

The scene RESUMES where it stopped, Ira in mid-sentence.

IRA

-- no one else has told you that you're missing a song for Elizabeth in the second act?

JON

No.

JON (V.O.)

Okay. I'm lying.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Back to Jon with the mic at the front of the stage.

JON
 One person did say that.
 (then)
 For years, I was part of this musical
 theater writing workshop...

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - NIGHT - 1988

A dozen aspiring musical WRITERS sit in rows of folding chairs,
 as Jon sits at a piano and sings a section of **LCD READOUT**.

JON
 LIQUID CRYSTAL DIGITAL READOUT
 FLOATING ON A SEA OF GRAY
 HELP ME FALL ASLEEP
 I'M TIRED
 IT'S NEARLY THE BREAK OF DAY

JON (V.O.)
 Once a week, we would gather -- the
 few surviving members of our dwindling
 tribe -- to watch one of us present
 what we were working on to a panel of,
 well, real writers...

JON
 LIQUID CRYSTAL DIGITAL READOUT
 DIVIDING THE DAY AWAY

JON (V.O.)
 The theater legends who'd created the
 Broadway shows we'd grown up dragging
 our parents into the city to see.

JON
 COUNTING SLOWLY, MEASURING MOMENTS
 IF YOU COULD TALK, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Seated on the other side of the room, we PAN slowly over WALTER
 BLOOM (50s), a successful musical theater writer, stone-faced,
 watching Jon perform.

JON (V.O.)
 The panel would change every week. The
 night I presented, people began to
 buzz as soon as we walked through the
 door -- "Is it really him?" It was.

PANNING past Bloom, we LAND on STEPHEN SONDHEIM (58).

JON (V.O.)
 Stephen. Sondheim.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - LATER - 1988

Four folding chairs are now arranged at the front of the room. Jon sits, on display, listening to Bloom critique his work.

WALTER BLOOM

Okay. I'll start: I'm lost. I don't know what the show is. Is it social commentary? Is it science fiction? And the music... it's the same thing. Is it rock? Is it Broadway? Is it both? Neither?

(turns to Sondheim)

Steve? What do you think?

SONDHEIM

I have to say, I disagree pretty strongly, Walter. I think this is a musical that knows exactly what it is.

WALTER BLOOM

Yes. Of course. Yes. Absolutely.

SONDHEIM

(to Jon)

The world you've created is really original. It's fascinating. The problem is that it's not terribly easy to follow the emotional thread. The details distract us from connecting with the characters. Does that make sense?

Walter nods, as though this is what he said, too.

WALTER BLOOM

Yes, we're on the same page here. That's exactly how I felt. We're saying the same thing. Just differently. But the music... I'm sorry, the music just wasn't there.

SONDHEIM

I actually thought the songs were swell.

WALTER BLOOM

As did I. The individual songs.

SONDHEIM

I particularly liked the one the young man sings at the end of the first act. First-rate lyric. And tune.

The aspiring composers in the room share stupefied glances.

JON (V.O.)
 "First-rate lyric. And tune."

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon beams at the audience.

JON
 Those five words were enough to keep
 me going for the next two years.

SONDHEIM (PRE-LAP)
 You're missing a song.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - LATER - NIGHT - 1988

At the end of class, the other writers finish clearing out, as
 Jon packs up his things. Sondheim approaches.

SONDHEIM
 (forgetting the name)
 For the young woman...

JON
 Elizabeth.

SONDHEIM
 Elizabeth. It's the turning point of
 the show. Your protagonist is either
 going in this direction or that
 direction. Somebody needs to wake him
 up, shake some sense into him.

WALTER BLOOM
 You know, it's funny.

We WIDEN to find Walter, seated, listening in on the
 conversation.

WALTER
 I was going to say the exact same
 thing.

JON (PRE-LAP)
 Can we talk about musicians?

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

Back to the Diner, as Ira frowns, not sure what he means.

JON

Because if it's only four, I need to figure out how to divide the bass parts --

IRA

Jon. This is a reading. You'll have a piano.

JON

I wrote a rock score. At the very least, I need drums, a synth, guitar --

IRA

A great song should sound great without any instruments.

JON

You're right. Let's do it a cappella. Or, you know what? Let's just skip the songs. We can get the audience in and out in half an hour.

Ira sighs -- things always escalate the same way with Jon.

IRA

I will look at the budget and try to dig up money for another musician.

JON

Two more *and* piano is the absolute bare minimum for this.

IRA

Have you spoken to Rosa?

As Jon takes in the question --

FLASH TO:

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK - 1990

Jon paces, on the phone.

JON

Hey Rosa. This is Jonathan Larson, your client. I've left multiple messages with your secretary --

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

Back to the Diner.

IRA
Rosa Stevens is still your agent,
right?

JON
Oh yeah, no, we talk constantly.

IRA
Has she sent out invites for the
presentation yet? We haven't gotten a
lot of RSVPs.

Jon's stomach sinks.

IRA (CONT'D)
It's fine. Nobody has more contacts in
the industry than Rosa. I'm sure
she'll get some good people there for
you...
(stands to go)
I'll see you Monday. First day of
rehearsal. And finish the song
already, please...

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990 - MONTAGE

- Jon stares at his computer screen. On it, a completely blank
Word document titled: "New Song."

- Jon stands in the kitchen, on the telephone.

JON (ON PHONE)
I'm calling to leave a message for Mr.
Sondheim. This is Jonathan Larson.

- Jon sits in front of the television -- Jesse Helms on the
evening news. He takes out his pad from his shirt pocket,
writes: "The boss is wrong as rain."

- Another phone call in the kitchen.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Hi there, this is a message for Joe
Papp.

- Another phone call in the kitchen.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Bernie Gersten.

- Another phone call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
The artistic director of the Shubert
Organization.

- Another phone call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
La MaMa.

- Another phone call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Larson. L-A-R-S-O-N.

- Another phone call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
No, not Parson.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
It's something that's never been done
before --

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
It's going to be quite the event.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
It has tremendous commercial
possibility.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
We're filling up fast, so I just
wanted to make sure you got your spot.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
I know that his time is limited...

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
It would be such a treat...

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Zero pressure.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
So can I count you in?

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
There will be a seat reserved for him.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Superbia at Playwrights Horizons.
10am.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Friday at 10am.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
I'm so excited about Friday.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
I wouldn't want you to miss it.

- Another call.

JON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
That's all the information I can give
you.

- He sits in the living room, staring at the still very much
blank document on the screen.

- Jon watches a VHS copy of *Sunday In The Park With George* with
Mandy Patinkin and Bernadette Peters, taped from PBS, Michael
next to him, Susan lying on his shoulder, watching.

MICHAEL
They should put every Sondheim musical
on PBS.

JON
Sunday's a pretty good start...

MICHAEL

I don't understand why he can't just tell her he loves her. Why can't he be an artist and love her?

JON

He does love her.

MICHAEL

Yeah but he can't express it.

JON

Well, that's his problem.

MICHAEL

Men.

(marvels)

Bernadette in that corset, though.

Jon stares at the screen, astonished by the stagecraft.

JON

How'd he do that?

- Jon goes through the mail -- bills and more bills (a few marked POST-DUE) and a Victoria's Secret catalogue.

MICHAEL

Did you crack it yet?

JON

I'm getting very close.

MICHAEL

Call me if you need inspiration.

JON

No. Don't go. Hang out. You can sleep in your old room.

MICHAEL

Write the song, Boo Boo.

- Jon, at the keyboard. Susan comes to kiss him goodnight.

SUSAN

They want my answer by Wednesday. On the job? So if we could maybe talk about it before then...

JON

Can we talk about it tomorrow? I just really need to finish this song. Okay?

SUSAN

Sure.

JON

Are you sure you're sure?

SUSAN

I'm sure.

JON

You don't seem sure...

SUSAN

Goodnight, Jonathan.

- Jon stares at the computer screen. On the "New Song" document, he's written "You're" and that's it. He changes it to "Your." He looks at it. He changes it back to "You're." He looks at it.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

The instrumental introduction of **JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE** begins. Jon sits at the piano, begins to sing.

JON

BREAK OF DAY, THE DAWN IS HERE

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAWN - 1990

Jon sits at the computer, head in his hands, the sun just beginning to rise in the window.

JON (V.O.)

JOHNNY'S UP AND PACING
COMPROMISE, OR PERSEVERE?
HIS MIND IS RACING

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sings from the piano.

JON

JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE - JOHNNY WANTS TO
HIDE
CAN HE MAKE A MARK, IF HE GIVES UP HIS
SPARK?
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY - 1990

Susan dances against a graffiti-tagged wall, as Jon watches, beaming.

JON (V.O.)
 SUSAN LONGS TO LIVE BY THE SEA,
 SHE'S THROUGH WITH COMPETITION
 SUSAN WANTS A LIFE WITH ME
 JOHNNY'S GOT A TOUGH DECISION

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sings from the piano.

JON
 JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE

Karessa joins.

JON AND KARESSA
 JOHNNY WANTS TO HIDE
 CAN HE SETTLE DOWN -- AND STILL NOT
 DROWN?

JON
 DROWN

JON AND KARESSA
 JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY - 1990

Michael sits alone at his desk, phone to his ear, the consternation on his face belying the lyrics.

JON (V.O.)
 MICHAEL'S GONNA HAVE IT ALL
 HIS LUCK WILL NEVER END

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sings from the piano.

JON
 JOHNNY'S BACKED AGAINST THE WALL
 CAN HE BEND HIS DREAMS JUST LIKE HIS
 FRIEND?

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - DAY - 1990

Jon sits at the kitchen table, looking enviously at the listings in the Theater section of the *Times*.

JON (V.O.)
 JOHNNY SEES THAT SUSAN'S RIGHT

JON AND KARESSA (V.O.)
 AMBITION EATS RIGHT THROUGH YOU

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Roger joins back-up vocals.

JON AND ROGER
MICHAEL DOESN'T SEE WHY JOHNNY
HOLDS ON TIGHT
TO THE THINGS THAT

ALL
JOHNNY FEELS ARE TRUE

EXT. JON'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY - 1990

Jon unlocks his bike from a street sign.

ROGER AND KARESSA (V.O.)
JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE
JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE

Jon rides away.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

All three sing.

ALL (V.O.)
HOW CAN YOU SOAR
IF YOU'RE NAILED TO THE
FLOOR?

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY - 1990

Jon rides past Duarte Square Park. He stops at a red light,
peers in.

ALL (V.O.)
JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE
JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE
JOHNNY HAS NO GUIDE
JOHNNY WANTS TO HIDE
JOHNNY WANTS TO HIDE
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO LET
GO?

Jon's eyes land on some ACT UP posters wheat-pasted on a
plywood construction barrier: "Silence = Death." He takes out
his spiral notebook, writes: "Why does it take a disaster for
anything to change?"

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

The song becomes a round between the three vocalists.

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

Jon leans toward the microphone, takes a breath --

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY - 1990

Jon locks his bike to a street sign outside the Moondance Diner. He looks up, sees his own reflection in the glass door of the restaurant.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

The MUSIC cuts out. Jon sings alone, a cappella.

JON
 JOHNNY CAN'T DECIDE

CAROLYN (PRE-LAP)
 Freddy is in the emergency room.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

A handful of early bird customers eat breakfast. Behind the counter, Carolyn talks quietly to Jon, stressed, anxious.

JON
 What?

CAROLYN
 He woke up Saturday with a fever. He couldn't stop shivering...

JON
 He told me last week his T-cell count -
 - the doctors said it was exactly
 where they wanted it to be.

CAROLYN
 I guess it changed.

They sit there, taking this in, understanding what it means.

JON
 Shit.

A long beat.

JON (CONT'D)
 He's going to be fine.

CAROLYN

Yeah.

JON

I mean, you know how stubborn he is.
He's a pain in the ass.

CAROLYN

You're right.

JON

Frankly? We should be pissed at him.
For leaving us understaffed at Sunday
brunch.

CAROLYN

Right?

They both try to smile at this.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sits at the piano, speaking his inner monologue.

JON

Freddy -- shit. I should go to the
hospital. When am I going to go to the
hospital? I need to write. I need to
talk to Susan. I need to see Freddy. I
should call Susan.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

Jon stands at the counter, thoughts tumbling through his mind.

JON (V.O.)

Why can't I write this song? How can
you possibly think about your show
when your friend is in the hospital?
What am I doing here? I need to leave,
I need to turn around, walk out the
door and go.

Just as the bell on the door RINGS as a CUSTOMER enters --

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon hits a high-pitched piano key.

JON

But it's 9:30 on a Sunday morning at
the Moondance Diner. I'm not going
anywhere.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

The madness of Sunday brunch in full bloom. The diner is now PACKED, with a line of PATRONS waiting at the door, and the PHONE behind the counter RINGING and RINGING. A SERIES OF QUICK SCENES --

- Jon takes down an order at a two-top.

PATRON #1

Do you have that wonderful Jewish bread?

PATRON #2

Holly bread, dear. They call it holly bread.

- PHIL, a sweating cook, yells at Jon over the din.

PHIL

Someone needs to pick up those goddamn eggs...

- Jon reads a name from a pad to Patrons waiting at the door.

JON

Harrington.
(a beat)
Is there a Harrington?

- Jon finally picks up the RINGING telephone.

JON (CONT'D)

Moondance, what do you want?
(then)
That was a Ghostbusters reference.
(a beat)
Do we take reservations? No, we do not take reservations. We're a diner.

- Carolyn races into the kitchen, searching for the right plate under the hot lights.

CAROLYN

Where's my rye bread?

- An agonizingly slow-talking older man, RICHARD (70s, hard of hearing), talks to Jon, who jots down his information on a pad.

JON

Name please?

RICHARD

Richard.

JON
For how many?

RICHARD
Caplan.

JON
How many in your party?

RICHARD
With a C. "C" as in "cat."

JON
How many in your party -- ?

RICHARD
It's not a math test.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sits at the piano, his arm poised in the air to conduct the rest of the band.

JON
ORDER.

He conducts the KEYBOARDIST, who plays a series of notes.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

As Jon sets down his plate, a belligerent lawyer, JEREMY (40s), looks at it disgustedly, then up at Jon.

JON
Thank you for your patience.

JEREMY
I said an omelet with *no yolks*. This is why you're just a waiter.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon once more conducts the Keyboardist.

JON
TENSION.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1992

Carolyn, carrying a huge tray of plates, hurries out of the kitchen as a BUSBOY hurries in.

CAROLYN

Major vomit situation in the Ladies
Room.

Two already DRUNK WOMEN (30s) at the bar call over to Jon.

DRUNK WOMAN #1

Can we get two more mimosas please?

DRUNK WOMAN #2

She got a new job. So you need to put
some Baileys in this coffee or some
vodka in this orange juice...

DRUNK WOMAN #1

Something...

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon conducts.

JON

BALANCE.

The Keyboardist plays a new series of notes.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

Jon tallies up a check at the register, the clamor around him
unbearable, as the PHONE keeps RINGING and RINGING and
RINGING...

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon raises his arms to conduct the band. An intake of breath --

JON

Brunch.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - DAY - 1990

Everything suddenly FREEZES, except for Jon, who looks upon the
scene coolly, with a certain aesthetic distance, as though
gazing upon a blank canvas.

Carolyn, the Bus Boy, and Patrons, though frozen in place, all
join him in a hushed, reverent tone, singing **SUNDAY**. Jon moves
through the diner, observing the still scene.

ALL

SUNDAY

IN THE BLUE, SILVER CHROMIUM DINER
ON THE GREEN, PURPLE, YELLOW, RED
STOOLS

JON
 SIT THE FOOLS
 WHO SHOULD EAT AT HOME
 INSTEAD, THEY PAY ON

ALL
 SUNDAY

Jon continues to move through the diner, sculpting each person he passes into a pose, gradually forming a tableau vivant a la Seurat's pointillist masterpiece, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jette*. They are compliant clay in his hands.

ALL (CONT'D)
 FOR A COOL ORANGE JUICE OR A BAGEL
 ON THE SOFT, GREEN CYLINDRICAL STOOLS

JON
 SIT THE FOOLS
 DRINKING CINNAMON COFFEE
 OR DECAFFEINATED TEA

ALL
 FOREVER

The front wall of the diner slowly comes down.

ALL (CONT'D)
 IN THE BLUE, SILVER CHROMIUM DINER
 DRIPS THE GREEN, ORANGE, VIOLET DROOL
 FROM THE FOOLS
 WHO'D PAY LESS AT HOME
 DRINKING COFFEE
 LIGHT
 AND DARK

JON AND PHIL
 AND CHOLESTEROL

JON
 AND BUMS, BUMS, BUMS, BUMS, BUMS,
 BUMS, BUMS, BUMS, BUMS, BUMS

An ensemble of HOMELESS PEOPLE gathers outside, standing at attention, forming their own tableau.

HOMELESS PEOPLE
 PEOPLE SCREAMING FOR THEIR TOAST

CAROLYN
 IN A SMALL, SOHO CAFE

The LINE COOKS step out of the kitchen en masse.

LINE COOKS
ON AN ISLAND IN

Everyone now joins together, creating a soaring, multi-part harmony, as Jon finishes arranging them into *La Grand Jette*.

ALL
TWO RIVERS

One last finishing touch, as Jon pulls a healthy Freddy out of the kitchen and adds him to the tableau.

ALL (CONT'D)
ON AN ORDINARY
SUNDAY
SUNDAY
SUNDAY
SUNDAY

JON
BRUNCH

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon walks from the piano to the microphone at the lip of the stage. As he does, DRUMS come in underneath, a hip-hop BEAT.

JON
Monday morning. My first day of rehearsals for the *Superbia* workshop, which is still -- in case you'd forgotten -- missing its crucial Act Two musical number. I make my way there through the land of the dead: the Theater District.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY - 1990

Jon walks through a pre-Giuliani, pre-*Lion King* Times Square, past shuttered Broadway houses and seedy sex shops. Jon passes a beat-boxing BUSKER, with a pink baseball cap on the ground. Jon drops the change he has into the hat. As Jon continues on his way, the Busker launches into **PLAY GAME**.

BUSKER
WALK THROUGH TIMES SQUARE
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
UGLINESS WHERE ARCHITECTURE
USED TO BE
GLAMOUR AND STYLE
ARE REPLACED BY GAUD
LIKE THE SIXTY DOLLAR SPECTACLE
IT'S A FRAUD
THAT'S THE PLAY GAME
(MORE)

BUSKER (CONT'D)

WHY DO I WANT TO PLAY THE PLAY GAME
 THAT'S THE PLAY GAME
 MUST BE INSANE TO PLAY THE PLAY GAME

We FOLLOW the BUSKER through a sequence that plays like a hip-hop music video circa 1990. The Busker, rapping, sounds exactly the way that Jon imagines he sounds, rapping.

BUSKER (CONT'D)

EVEN OFF BROADWAY
 THERE'S NO GUARANTEE
 THAT SOME MBA
 WON'T DECIDE WHAT YOU SEE
 JUST LIKE AMERICA
 LACKING INNOVATION
 JUST GETTING BY
 ON GLITZ AND REPUTATION
 JUST LIKE AMERICA
 ON THE DECLINE
 UNCONCERNED WITH PRODUCT
 JUST THE BOTTOM LINE
 YOU WANNA WRITE A PLAY?
 ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?
 THAT'S LIKE TRYING TO DRIVE A MACK
 TRUCK
 IF YOU'RE BLIND
 WRITE FOR THE MOVIES
 WRITE FOR T.V.
 SO WHAT IF IT'S CRAP
 AT LEAST YOU WON'T WRITE FOR FREE
 MAKE THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS
 FOR A FIRST DRAFT
 AND YOUR LIFE WON'T DEPEND
 ON WHETHER FRANK RICH LAUGHED
 SO JUST FORGET SHAKESPEARE
 BECKETT, MOLIERE
 THAT'S THE PLAY GAME --

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon, wearing an identical pink hat turned to the side, raps with a mic, hopelessly Caucasian.

JON

THAT'S THE PLAY GAME
 WHY DO I WANT TO PLAY THE PLAY GAME
 THAT'S THE PLAY GAME
 MUST BE INSANE TO PLAY THE PLAY GAME

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO HALLWAY - DAY - 1990

Jon moves down a hallway filled with ACTORS, SINGERS, and DANCERS.

Without noticing him, Jon passes the Busker, who holds a headshot and resume and stands in a line of other Actors, waiting to check in with a CASTING DIRECTOR.

BUSKER
 THAT'S THE PLAY GAME
 THAT'S THE PLAY GAME
 THAT'S THE PLAY GAME
 WHY DO I CARE?

Finally, the Busker reaches the front of the line, nods to the Casting Director. On the door, a sign: *Cats*, National Tour.

BUSKER (CONT'D)
 I'll be reading for the role of Old Deuteronomy.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - MINUTES LATER - 1990

In a small rehearsal room, Jon stands in a circle with the large CAST of *Superbia* -- including Roger, Karessa, Cristin, and Gerard -- as Ira Weitzman says a brief word.

IRA
 On behalf of Playwrights Horizons, I just want to welcome everyone and thank you all for taking part in this very exciting new musical by a very exciting young writer, Jonathan Larson. He's not even *thirty*.

The Cast claps, amazed by this. Ira looks to Jon to say something. Jon steps forward, confident, at ease.

JON
 Thank you, Ira. This is the first real workshop that this musical has ever had. So, now you guys are part of the family. Does anyone have any questions before we get going?

A beat. One actress, LAUREN (20s), finally raises his hand, timidly.

LAUREN
 Can you, um... can you explain it, maybe?

JON
 Explain what?

LAUREN

Just... the musical. The story.
It's... a little bit confusing... in
certain places.

Others nod at the suggestion. Lauren clarifies.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Not in a bad way.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon stands at the microphone.

JON

Superbia. A satire set in the future
on a poisoned planet Earth, where the
vast majority of humanity spends their
lives staring at the screens of their
media transmitters, watching the tiny
elite of the rich and powerful who
film their own fabulous lives like TV
shows. A world where human emotion has
been outlawed. This will be the first
musical for the MTV generation, this
will be --

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

Back to Jon and the circle of actors.

GERARD

Is it supposed to be about aliens? I
didn't know if it was supposed to be
aliens...

JON

No, not aliens. But...it is set in the
future. It's set in the future.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - LATER - 1990

Cristin and Roger stand around the piano. Jon, at the piano,
plays **SEXTET**. He cues Cristin to begin singing.

CRISTIN

THE COLOR-SCHEME FOR THE DAY
IS BLACK-RED-BLACK
THE DRUG, OF COURSE,
WILL BE THE KILOWATT
THE TREND TODAY IS TO SAY
THE ADJECTIVE "FUN" A LOT

JON
It's perfect. Keep going.

CRISTIN
STUDD STAR, YOU HAVE RECEIVED
TWO NOMINATIONS
"FACE OF THE YEAR"
AND "BEST HAIR"
PREPARE A SPEECH FOR YOUR PHOTO
OPPORTUNITY
YOUR AGENT TIM PURSENT WILL BE THERE

As the song continues to UNDERSCORE --

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - NIGHT - 1990

Jon huddles with Ira at the end of the day.

IRA
You told me you needed a drummer --

JON
No, I told you, I needed a band.

IRA
It's a hundred dollars for every extra
musician...

JON
And your annual operating budget is...
half a million dollars?

IRA
So far we're up to twelve RSVPs, Jon.
You don't need a band with an audience
of twelve people -- you'll outnumber
them.

(then)
If you want more musicians, you're
going to have to find the money for it
somewhere else. I'm sorry.

JON
Thank you for everything.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT - 1990

Jon and Carolyn sit, wearing surgical masks, beside Freddy --
asleep in his hospital bed, hooked up to a battery of machines.
Jon writes in his notepad, "Why aren't we fighting?"

JON (V.O.)
I went to three friends' funerals last
year. The oldest one was twenty-seven.
(MORE)

JON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Pam. Gordon. Allie. Freddy's not even... he turned twenty-five two weeks ago. And nobody is doing enough. I'm not doing enough. There's not enough time. Or maybe I'm just wasting my time...

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1990

Jon, wiped out, comes home to find Susan in bed. He crawls in next to her. She pulls him close.

JON (V.O.)

And what about Susan's time? When am I going to talk to Susan? What am I going to say? I don't know what to say. So Susan waits. And time keeps on ticking.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Jon sits in front of his computer.

JON (V.O.)

Tick, tick, tick. I have three days left until the workshop. Three days left to write this song. And if this song doesn't work, the show doesn't work, and then it's all been a waste of time -- who gives a *shit* about a song?

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - DAY - 1990

Jon stands in Michael's bedroom, empty, appearing even smaller without furniture. The apartment feels lonelier than ever.

JON (V.O.)

I miss Michael. I want to talk to Michael. I don't have time to talk to Michael.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

Jon, sitting behind the rehearsal Pianist, watches the Cast perform "Sextet."

JON

(whispers, to Pianist)
Make sure you're not speeding up.

The door opens and Jon turns to see Susan enter. He turns back to Pianist.

JON (CONT'D)

I'm missing the consonants here.

Susan approaches him, whispering.

SUSAN

It sounds great.

JON

Why didn't you tell me you were coming?

SUSAN

I guess, I thought it might be a nice surprise...

JON

No, yeah, it is.

SUSAN

It's Tuesday.

(off his blank look)

I have to give them my decision on the job by tomorrow. Do you have a break coming up so we can talk?

JON

The actors have a break. I don't have any breaks.

SUSAN

Well, I don't know what I'm going to do.

JON

Can you ask for an extension? I'm sorry, I just -- can we talk about it tonight?

(back to the Pianist)

Let's add this whole section to the work list. Add the whole song.

Jon turns back to finish the conversation, but Susan is already gone.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

Jon watches Cristin and Roger perform, scripts in hand.

CRISTIN

A NOMINATION

ROGER

A NOMINATION?

CRISTIN
NOMINATION FOR A FACE AWARD

ROGER
A FACE AWARD?

CRISTIN
LET'S PLUG IN

ROGER
DOES THIS MEAN THAT I'LL BE ON THE
AIR?

CRISTIN
YOU ALREADY WERE
LAST NIGHT, WHAT A SIGHT YOU WERE

ROGER
I WAS?

CRISTIN
YOU WERE
YOU PLAYED WITH MY LASER
YOU THOUGHT IT WAS A RAZOR
I'M POSITIVE THAT'S WHAT CAUSED
SUCH A SCENE

ROGER
WE CAN GET ON THE AIR
MY MUSIC BOX ON THE AIR
WHERE? WHO? WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

ROGER & CRISTIN
EVERYONE WHO EVER HAS, OR
EVER WILL BE ANYONE WILL BE THERE
THE SOPHISTICATED, EFFERVESCENT,
CHARISMATIC, INCANDESCENT, DEBONAIR
THE EVENT OF THE CENTURY
THE QUINTESSENTIAL SOCIAL ADVENTURE
WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LET YOU MISS YOUR
DEBUT
THE 31ST ANNUAL FACE AWARD
PRESENTATION CEREMONY
LIVE, VIA SATELLITE, IN COLOR
FROM THE MARVELOUS GLAMORAMA
EVERYONE WILL BE THERE

The chilly staccato PIANO part continues to UNDERSCORE as --

INT. STRAND BOOK STORE - DUSK - 1990

Jon stands at the counter, as a buyer, MOLLY (50s) goes through the milk crate of old books (Sontag, Neruda, Cage) and records (Dylan, Sex Pistols, *Carmina Burana*) that Jon has dumped there.

MOLLY

I can give you fifty for everything.

JON

You're going to sell it for five times that.

MOLLY

Fifty's the best I can do.

JON

(a beat, then)
Cash?

MOLLY

Great.

She hands him the money. He stands there, staring at his things, conflicted, then grabs the *Godspell* LP and goes.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Oh no. He's keeping the *Godspell*.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT / INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Jon, barely listening, talks on the phone to Michael as he scribbles and erases rewrites in his script. Michael sits in his half-furnished apartment, surrounded by moving boxes.

MICHAEL

I'd love to take you to lunch,
celebrate your birthday.

JON

I can't this week.

MICHAEL

I could really use your advice on some things...

Jon isn't listening at all.

JON

Can I call you back later? I'm right in the middle of something here...

MICHAEL

Oh, that focus group I mentioned. They're still looking for one more person to sign up. It's Thursday at eleven. I know money's tight for you right now...

Jon begins to pay attention.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You know what? Never mind --

JON

How much does it pay?

MICHAEL

It's only seventy-five bucks, but...

JON

I'll be there.

INT. YMCA POOL - NIGHT - 1990

Jon dives into the pool, the shock of cold water almost enough to stop his racing thoughts.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - NIGHT - 1990

Jon, his expression unreadable, watches the Cast perform "Sextet" full-out, with a SYNTH PLAYER now added to the Pianist and Drummer. Ira listens, in awe, blown away by how much better it sounds with the Synth.

FULL CAST

EVERYONE WHO EVER HAS, OR
EVER WILL BE ANYONE WILL BE THERE

Ira whispers to Jon.

IRA

You were right.

JON

I know.

FULL CAST

NEVER IN THE HISTORY OF ENTERTAINMENT
WILL THERE BE AN AFFAIR - QUITE LIKE
IT
THE EVENT OF THE CENTURY
THE QUINTESSENTIAL SOCIAL ADVENTURE
WE CANNOT AFFORD TO MISS THIS NIGHT OF
BLISS
THE 31ST ANNUAL FACE AWARD
PRESENTATION CEREMONY
LIVE, VIA SATELLITE, IN COLOR
IT'S AN 18 HOUR FUNCTION
WITH COMMERCIAL INTERRUPTION
FROM THE MARVELOUS, GLORIOUS, SLAM
BANG GLAMORAMA
EVERYONE WHO'S ANYONE KNOWS
EVERYONE WHO'S ANYONE KNOWS
EVERYONE WHO'S ANYONE KNOWS
(MORE)

FULL CAST (CONT'D)

EVERYONE WHO'S ANYONE KNOWS
 EVERYONE WHO'S ANYONE KNOWS
 EVERYONE WILL BE THERE!

As they hit the final note, they look to Jon for his reaction. He stands there for a moment, feeling the pressure, saying nothing.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - NIGHT - 1990

On a break, Jon sits with his head in his hands, as stressed as he's ever been. Karessa passes.

KARESSA

Can I hear it yet?
 (off his blank look)
 The new song...

JON

Any day now.

KARESSA

You're killing me, Larson...

As she goes, Jon's smile withers.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Jon sits at the keyboard, picking out various NOTES, searching for the right melody. The phone RINGS. He ignores it, picks at a sequence of NOTES on the keyboard -- G, B flat, A flat, G. The machine picks up with Jon's outgoing MESSAGE.

JON (V.O.)

Speak.

SUSAN

(on the machine)
 Hey, it's me. Just pick up the phone.
 (then)
 I know you're screening your calls.
 Every light is on in your apartment
 right now.

Jon stands, peers out the window, sees Susan at the pay phone across the street, looking up at him.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon lets Susan into the apartment.

JON

You could have called first.

SUSAN

I just did. It's great to see you,
too.

JON

I didn't mean it like that.

Susan takes in the apartment for the first time: dirty dishes,
take-out boxes, old drafts of scripts, overflowing litter box.

SUSAN

Jesus, Jonathan.

He says nothing.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I need you to talk to me.

JON

I'm writing, Susan.

SUSAN

You're going to write the great
American musical in the next ten
minutes?

JON

Thank you for being so supportive of
my work.

SUSAN

Oh, because you're such a champion of
mine.

JON

What is that supposed to mean?

SUSAN

What do you think it means?

As we PRE-LAP the sound of a drum ROLL...

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Karessa and Jon pull their stools to the lip of the stage.

JON

And now, ladies and gentlemen, we
present you with: scenes from a modern
romance. As told in song!

The CRASH of a cymbal, as the MUSIC for **THERAPY** creeps in, the
zippy, playful tone in stark contrast to Jon and Susan's
argument.

We INTERCUT throughout between the THEATER and the APARTMENT, the two in jagged juxtaposition.

- BACK TO APARTMENT

SUSAN

I'm sorry -- I'm not allowed to talk about my needs. What needs?

JON

Did I say that?

SUSAN

You didn't have to say it. It's implied.

JON

How is it implied?

SUSAN

You're the artist. I'm the girlfriend.

- BACK TO THEATER

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

- BACK TO APARTMENT

JON (CONT'D)

Can we talk about this later? Please?

SUSAN

When, Jonathan? When is later?

JON

Not tonight.

- BACK TO THEATER

KARESSA

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 HAVE BEEN MORE REVEALING

- BACK TO APARTMENT

JON

I have been rehearsing all day. I have been up since four this morning. I have been trying to write a song for a week and I am *nowhere*.

- BACK TO THEATER

JON (CONT'D)

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

- BACK TO APARTMENT

SUSAN

I've been telling you for months how
unhappy I am.

- BACK TO THEATER

JON

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH MY
PROBLEM
MAYBE THE PROBLEM IS SIMPLY CO-
DEPENDENCY

- BACK TO APARTMENT

JON (CONT'D)

Everyone is unhappy in New York.
That's what New York *is*.

- BACK TO THEATER

JON (CONT'D)

I WAS WRONG TO

KARESSA

SAY YOU WERE WRONG TO

JON

SAY I WAS WRONG ABOUT

KARESSA

YOU BEING WRONG

JON

WHEN YOU RANG TO SAY THAT

KARESSA

THE RING WAS THE WRONG THING TO BRING

JON
 IF I MEANT WHAT I SAID
 WHEN I SAID "RINGS BORE ME"

- BACK TO APARTMENT

SUSAN
 I don't know how to get through to you
 anymore. You keep shutting me out. You
 put up these fences --

JON
 I'm not shutting you out.

SUSAN
 You're a million miles away, all the
 time.

JON
 Actually, I'm right here.

SUSAN
 Are you, Jonathan? Actually?

- BACK TO THEATER

JON AND KARESSA
 I'M NOT MAD THAT YOU GOT MAD THAT 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

- BACK TO APARTMENT

JON (CONT'D)
 You're right, I've been distracted,
 but I promise, after the workshop -- I
 just have to get to after the
 workshop...

SUSAN
 Everything is *after the workshop*.
 (then)
 What if the workshop happens and
 nothing changes? No producer with a
 big check. You don't go straight to
 Broadway.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You're still a waiter, you're still
living in this apartment, you're still
broke. What then, Jonathan? And what
about me?

- BACK TO THEATER

<p>JON</p> <p>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</p>	<p>KARESSA</p> <p>I FEEL BADLY ABOUT YOU FEELING BADLY ABOUT ME FEEL BADLY ABOUT YOU</p>
---	--

- BACK TO APARTMENT

JON (CONT'D)

I can't move to the Berkshires. I
can't leave my career behind.

Susan looks at him, incredulous.

SUSAN

You think I don't know that?

JON

Then what are we even...? What do you
want?

She laughs, sadly.

SUSAN

I guess I just wanted you to tell me
not to go.

- BACK TO THEATER

<p>JON</p> <p>I THOUGHT YOU THOUGHT I REACTED SHALLOWLY WHEN I REACTED TO YOU</p>	<p>KARESSA</p> <p>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 HAVE BEEN MORE REVEALING</p>
---	--

- BACK TO APARTMENT

JON (CONT'D)

Of course I don't want you to go.

SUSAN
Really?

JON
Obviously.

SUSAN
Because this is the first time you've
said it.

Jon throws his arms around her. He holds her. And for a moment,
it seems as if all the anger and resentment and hurt have
simply vanished. And then, Susan realizes, with horror --

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Oh my God.

- BACK TO THEATER

JON
BUT NOW IT'S OUT IN THE OPEN

- BACK TO APARTMENT

SUSAN
You're thinking about how to turn this
into a song, aren't you?

- BACK TO THEATER

KARESSA
NOW IT'S OFF OUR CHEST

- BACK TO APARTMENT

JON
(it's true)
No. What?

SUSAN
You know what, Jonathan? I'm done.

She goes to the door, Jon following lamely behind her.

JON
Susan. Susan, wait.

SUSAN
I hope you have an amazing workshop.

JON
Susan. Hold on, Susan.

- BACK TO THEATER

JON AND KARESSA
 NOW IT'S FOUR AM
 AND WE HAVE THERAPY TOMORROW

- BACK TO APARTMENT

Susan storms out, SLAMMING the door behind her.

- BACK TO THEATER

JON AND KARESSA (CONT'D)
 IT'S TOO LATE TO SCREW

- BACK TO APARTMENT

Jon lets out his frustration by yelling at the wall.

JON
Shit.

- BACK TO THEATER

JON AND KARESSA
 SO LET'S JUST GET SOME REST

The song BUTTONS and the Audience APPLAUDS wildly, a good time had by all.

INT. OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - 1990

A table in a sleek corporate conference room. Already assembled there, dressed in impeccable business attire and wearing name-tags are: PEGGY (20s), TODD (40s), and KIM (50s). At the front of the room, JUDY (30s), standing beside a large easel pad, checks the time.

JUDY
 We're just waiting on one more person...

Looking the worse for wear after a night without sleep and dressed in a hastily assembled outfit of jeans and a t-shirt, Jon appears at the door.

JON
 Hi, I'm Jonathan --

JUDY
 Yes. Mr. Larson. You're Michael's friend.

JON
 How are you?

JUDY

You're late.

JON

Okay, sorry about that.

She holds open the door, gesturing for him to take a seat. Jon nods to the others and sits. Kim smiles at him.

KIM

Welcome.

As Judy stands in front of the table beside a large easel pad, Jon leans over to Peggy, whispering.

JON

Did she say anything about when we get paid?

She ignores him, doesn't want to be associated with the late guy.

JUDY

So. Now that we're all here... why don't we begin with a quick brainstorming session? Just to get those creative juices flowing.

JON (V.O.)

Two hours of this.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon stands at the front of the stage at the mic.

JON

For one extra musician.

INT. OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - 1990

JUDY

So why don't we just start by throwing out some ideas that come to mind when I say the word "America"?

PEGGY

George Washington.

JUDY

Excellent.

Judy writes the ideas on the pad as they are called out.

TODD
Abraham Lincoln.

JON (V.O.)
(in his head)
Empire, racism, genocide, Vietnam...
(out loud)
Grover Cleveland.

A slight pause. Judy nods, writes this on the pad.

KIM
The Constitution?

JUDY
Yes.

JON
Magna Carta.

Another slight pause. Judy nods, writes down the suggestion.
Jon suddenly realizes that he's losing.

PEGGY
The Bill of Rights.

TODD
The right thing to do.

KIM
The right stuff.

JON
An open road at sunset. The wind in
your hair. Nothing in your way but the
horizon.

Judy turns to look at him. A beat. Unclear what she's thinking.
Finally --

JUDY
That is beautiful, Mr. Larson.

Jon can't help but swell with the compliment.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MINUTES LATER - 1990

A series of QUICK SHOTS of people at the table, one by one, as
they give rapid-fire answers.

PEGGY
The sun.

TODD

Sunrise.

JON

The dawn of a new day.

JUDY

That is incredible.

PEGGY

A window looking out on a field.

KIM

Aww. I think of cute little bunnies
and cute little squirrelys.

JON

The beating heart of the nation.

JUDY

(savoring this)
Mmm. Absolutely.

Jon watches as Judy picks up her clipboard, circles his name.

JON (V.O.)

I could get used to this.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon begins to daydream at the microphone.

JON

I could get *paid* for this. I could get
health care, a 401K, a BMW, a luxury
apartment on Central Park West -- no,
no, no -- *East*. I could actually be
rewarded for my creativity, instead of
rejected and ignored.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon smiles to himself, as Judy tears off the current sheet on
the easel pad, a new, blank sheet underneath.

JON (V.O.)

This could be the rest of my life.

JUDY

Now that we have all of those fabulous
ideas of yours in our heads, we are
going to turn to our real task.

(MORE)

JUDY (CONT'D)

We are here to develop the name for a revolutionary consumer product that is just about to hit your shelves.

KIM

Oh wow.

JUDY

This is where we're going to need that incredible imagination of yours, Mr. Larson.

(then)

The product we are looking at is a tasteless, odorless chemical compound that will be used as a fat substitute in cooking. It's been tested successfully on a number of mammals...

Jon begins to get a queasy feeling about this.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Now there are some side effects associated with the product that I've been instructed to tell you about...

Jon realizes with a shudder:

JON (V.O.)

This could be the rest of my life.

Judy finishes reading the long list of side effects.

JUDY

... and finally, in a small number of users, there were reports of toxic shock syndrome, resulting in brief hospitalization.

She plasters the wide smile back on.

JUDY (CONT'D)

There are no bad ideas.

Jon suddenly notices the large wall clock above her for the first time -- TICK, TICK, TICK. His breathing gets shallower.

PEGGY

Free Oil.

JUDY

Love it.

KIM

Oil Free.

JON
That's the same thing she just said.

KIM
(defensive)
I switched the words around, though.

JUDY
(a look to Jon)
That's perfectly fine, Kim, thank you.

Jon stares at the clock, as the ideas come furiously from everyone else. He seems to be able to feel brain cells dying.

PEGGY
The American Dream.

KIM
Dreams of Freedom.

TODD
Nutra Oil.

JUDY
That's not bad, Todd.

Finally, Jon interjects, loudly, enthusiastically.

JON
I've got it. I have it. I know exactly
what it should be.

Everyone looks to him expectantly. He emphasizes each syllable.

JON (CONT'D)
"Chubstitute."

EXT. MIDTOWN STREET - NIGHT - 1990

Michael and Jon walk down a busy sidewalk toward the subway, the street teeming with rush hour traffic, Michael furious.

MICHAEL
"Chubstitute."

JON
It was a joke.

MICHAEL
It's not funny.

JON
Maybe not to you...

MICHAEL

I recommended you, Jon. I put my name on the line for you.

JON

Tell them I had a stroke.

MICHAEL

(exploding)

It isn't *funny*.

Jon goes silent, surprised by his response, as Michael stops there on the sidewalk, turns to him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This is my life.

JON

It's not your life. It's advertising. It's figuring out how to trick people into buying shit they don't want.

MICHAEL

Actually, it's a lot more complicated than that.

JON

I don't understand how you can take any of this seriously.

MICHAEL

Because they pay me to.

JON

Money isn't everything.

MICHAEL

Well, it doesn't hurt.

JON

Are you sure about that?

MICHAEL

What are you doing with your life that's so noble?

JON

Making art.

MICHAEL

Oh, that's what the world needs. More *art*.

JON

Actually yes, and at least I'm not helping perpetuate a system that is destroying --

MICHAEL

Oh spare me the self-righteousness, Jon. You're writing musicals in your living room, not saving the rain forest.

JON

Wow. I wish I could be more like you and spend my life caring about driving the right car and wearing the right suits and living in a doorman building...

MICHAEL

Why shouldn't I care about those things? Not everyone has the *options* you do, Jon. All the things you take for granted.

JON

Like what?

MICHAEL

Like, a life with a person you love. Do you know what I would give to have that? And you turn your nose up at it.

JON

If that's what you want, what's stopping you?

MICHAEL

What's stopping me? How about Jesse Helms and the Moral Majority? How about the people that run this country? I can't get married. I can't have kids. Half of our friends are dying, and the other half are scared to death they're next. So, yes, I'm sorry for buying a nice car, Jon. I'm sorry for living in an apartment with central heating. I'm sorry for enjoying my life while I still have time.

(stops himself)

I have to go.

He heads off in the opposite direction.

JON
You're not taking the subway?

MICHAEL
I'd rather walk.

JON
Michael. Michael.

But Michael just keeps going. As Jon watches him disappear down the sidewalk, there it is again -- TICK, TICK, TICK.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Jon arrives home at the apartment to find the phone RINGING. He picks it up.

JON
Hello?

INT. ROSA STEVENS' OFFICE - NIGHT - 1990

ROSA STEVENS (50s, old school, salty) sits at her cluttered desk, smoking a cigarette, as she talks on the phone to him.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Jonny, darling, it's Rosa.

INTERCUT throughout between Jon and Rosa.

JON (ON PHONE)
(stunned)
Rosa Stevens?

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Are we excited for tomorrow?

JON (ON PHONE)
Tomorrow? The presentation? You remembered the presentation?

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Remembered it? I've got every producer in town coming. So it better be good.

Wonderful. More pressure.

JON (ON PHONE)
Yes, it's... it's going to be great.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Let's see if we can't get a bidding war started on this musical of yours, what do you say?

JON (ON PHONE)
That's... that would be... yes.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Okay, doll.
(shouts, to Assistant)
Let's get Hal Prince on the phone.

JON (ON PHONE)
Rosa?

She's gone. Jon hangs up the phone, takes a deep breath, feeling a new determination.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

A SERIES OF SHOTS as Jon prepares to get to work.

- Jon takes a garbage bag, goes through the apartment, picking up the debris.

- Jon empties Finster's litter box, shirt pulled over his nose to block the smell.

JON
(to Finster)
I'm so sorry.

- Jon vacuums.

- Jon pours fresh grounds into the coffee machine.

- Jon stands in the bathroom, considering the Victoria's Secret catalogue, when Finster pokes his head in the door. Jon guiltily sets down the catalogue, begins to exit.

JON (CONT'D)
Okay, I'm going, I'm going...

- Jon presses the switch and his Macintosh computer HUMS to life.

- Jon flicks on his keyboard.

- Jon pours himself a cup of steaming hot coffee.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - LATER - 1990

In the freshly cleaned living room, Jon sits at the keyboard. He takes a breath, focusing. His hands hover over the keys, ready to get to work, when all at once the LIGHTS cut out.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Standing in the dark, on the phone, Jon -- in a state -- pleads. A MAN'S VOICE comes through the receiver.

JON (ON PHONE)

Why wouldn't you have called to tell me that my payment was late *before* you cut off my power? How does that make sense?

MAN'S VOICE

Sir, as I explained before, you received a notice in the mail --

JON (ON PHONE)

You don't understand. I have a workshop -- a public presentation of my musical in twelve hours.

MAN'S VOICE

Sir --

JON (ON PHONE)

I can pay you over the phone right now. I have my credit card right here.

MAN'S VOICE

The billing office is closed for the night.

JON (ON PHONE)

(loses it)
What am I supposed to do?

MAN'S VOICE

(a beat)
Sir, like I said, call --

He hangs up. A beat. He dials another number. The phone RINGS twice, before Susan's roommate BETH answers. We hear her VOICE through the receiver.

BETH'S VOICE

Hello?

JON (ON PHONE)

(turning on the charm)
Hey, Beth. How are you? It's Jon.

BETH'S VOICE

(cold)
Hi, Jon.

JON (ON PHONE)
Is Susan there?

BETH'S VOICE
She doesn't want to talk to you, Jon.

He can't exactly blame her.

JON (ON PHONE)
Can you give her a message for me?

BETH'S VOICE
What is it?

JON (ON PHONE)
I wanted to remind her that tomorrow's my workshop and I know I don't have any right to ask this, but I just... I would really love her to be there.

BETH'S VOICE
(a beat)
I'll tell her you called.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

As the driving DRUM and jittery BASS intro of **SWIMMING** begins, Jon sits at the piano, on the microphone.

JON
Here I am. The musical to which I have given my youth is about to be put on public display for every producer in New York. I haven't written a single note or a single lyric of the most important song in the show. I have no electricity. My best friend is furious with me. My girlfriend isn't speaking to me. And there's only one thing I can think of to do: swim.

INT. YMCA LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT - 1990

Jon listens to a Walkman, as he changes in the dank, filthy locker room, surrounded by a half dozen other MEN in various states of undress, lost entirely in his own thoughts.

JON (V.O.)
I HATE THIS LOCKER ROOM
WHY WON'T SUSAN ANSWER MY CALLS?
SWEAT WET ECHOES
SMELL HELL RAP

He pulls off his shirt. A locker slams shut. He turns up the volume on the Walkman.

JON (V.O.)
PUMP UP THE VOLUME
HOT, WET, HOT, SWEAT

INT. YMCA POOL - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon stands by the edge of the pool, putting on his swim cap -- a few SWIMMERS doing laps.

JON (V.O.)
HOW'S THE WATER? STRETCH STRETCH
SPIT IN THE MASK

He spits in his goggles.

JON (V.O.)
CLOUDY VISION

He puts them on, dips his foot in the water.

JON (V.O.)
TEST THE WATER
CONTEMPLATE THE DIVE
THE SHOCK TO THE SKIN
ANTICIPATE THE PAIN THE PAIN THE PAIN
THE PAIN THE PAIN NOW

He DIVES in...

INT. YMCA POOL - MINUTES LATER - 1990

He swims laps at an aggressively fast pace.

JON (V.O.)
1, 2, 3 OH BITE THE AIR -- SEVEN

As he comes in and out of the water, vision blurry, he sees a WOMAN (30s) standing by the side of the pool.

JON (V.O.)
THERE'S THAT GIRL -- 1, 2, 3, OH BITE
THE AIR
SMOOTH SOFT SKIN -- 2, 3, OH BITE THE -
- 13
LONG LEGS, BROWN SKIN, AND WET HAIR
WHOA OH AND WET HAIR
HAS ROSA EVEN LISTENED TO MY TAPE?
KICK, STRETCH, WINDMILL ARMS
SEE THE HAND, POINT THE FEET
PULL -- WET HAIR -- RELAX,
THIS GUY'S TOO SLOW -- FIFTEEN
(MORE)

JON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 CAN I MAKE IT TO FORTY
 TOO SLOW

He's swimming as fast as he can now, driving his body to the brink of exhaustion. His vision becomes blurrier, and as he emerges from the water every few seconds to breathe, the Woman beside the pool seems to transform into Susan, then back to the Woman, then back to Susan, and so on, a trick of the light.

JON (V.O.)
 TOUCH HIS HEEL -- MOVE
 ANSWER MY CALLS!
 RED GREEN STRIPES -- 50 FEET -- 60
 FEET
 SHE LOOKS LIKE SUSAN
 DOES SHE KNOW I'M --
 LOOK AT THE CURVE OF --
 SUSAN'S BEAUTIFUL

Jon's pace becomes punishing.

JON (V.O.)
 1, 2, 3, OH BITE THE AIR - SEVENTEEN
 THERE SHE IS - 1, 2, 3, OH BITE THE
 AIR
 SMOOTH SOFT SKIN - 2, 3, OH BITE THE --
 TWENTY NINE
 LONG LEGS, BROWN SKIN AND
 WET HAIR
 WHOA OH
 AND WET HAIR
 OUT, DON'T THINK - OUT, OUT, LET IT
 OUT
 KEEP THE SHOULDER DOWN, DOWN
 EASY - NOT TOO HARD
 FIND THE MOVEMENT'S ORIGIN
 FINGERS - NO, HANDS - NO
 SHOULDER - NO, ELBOW - NO, NO
 THIRTY-SIX - FROM THE BACK, YES
 LOWER - THIRTY-NINE - FORTY
 CENTER, CENTER

As he hits forty laps, he stops, drained, empty. He lets go, allowing his body to sink. As he reaches the bottom, he begins to notice the lines on the tiles start to shift, blurring, unraveling, slowly rearranging themselves into a musical staff. Notes begin to spill across the staff. His song.

JON (V.O.)
 AHHHHHH

JON (V.O.)
 FORWARD MOTION
 THROUGH THE WATER

KARESSA (V.O.)
COME TO YOUR SENSES

JON (V.O.)
ESCAPE

ROGER (V.O.)
COME TO YOUR SENSES

KARESSA (V.O.)
COME TO YOUR SENSES

JON (V.O.)
I AM SOARING
I'M THE WATER

KARESSA (V.O.)
YOU AS THE KNIGHT

ROGER (V.O.)
YOU'RE ON THE AIR

JON (V.O.)
ESCAPE

ROGER (V.O.)
I'M UNDERGROUND

KARESSA (V.O.)
ME AS THE QUEEN

Jon comes to the surface, pulls himself out of the water, and walks quickly to the locker room. As the MUSIC continues --

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Jon sits in the dark, a flashlight on his desk the only illumination, scribbling on music manuscript paper.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

The rehearsal room has been set up for a reading -- folding chairs and music stands. Jon stands in the empty room, anxiously waiting, sheet music for his brand new song in hand.

JON (V.O.)
The show is about to begin. The room is completely empty. The show is about to begin and I am looking at sixty empty folding chairs.

Karessa walks in.

KARESSA
Hey, boy genius.

JON
I'm turning thirty on Sunday, you know?

KARESSA
Oh. Well, Happy Birthday.

JON
(unenthused)
Thank you.

KARESSA
Thirty is still young.

JON
No one's here.

KARESSA
It's not even nine. The presentation doesn't start until ten.

Jon laughs, realizing, relieved.

JON
Can you sight-read?

He hands her the sheet music.

JON (V.O.)
Slowly, miraculously, people start to show up.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - LATER - 1990

Jon hugs his mother, NAN, as his father, AL, holds her coat. A dozen or so Audience Members have already taken seats.

AL
This is just phenomenal. Look at this space. It's phenomenal.

JON
It's a rehearsal studio, Dad.

AL
It's a *Broadway* rehearsal studio. This is the real thing.

NAN
We're very excited for you, dear.

AL
 (lowers his voice)
 Are they paying you?

JON
 No.

NAN
 Next time.

Al spots a seat in the second row, a hand-made RESERVED sign on it. He goes to sit in it.

JON
 That's for someone else actually.

NAN
 (a look to Al)
 Do you like that?

Jon gestures to the empty room.

JON
 You can literally sit in *any other seat*.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - LATER - 1990

Half the seats are now taken, and the room is alive with CHATTER and anticipation, as Michael approaches Jon, some trepidation between them after the way they last left things.

MICHAEL
 Good turnout.

JON
 Yeah. It's mostly friends.

MICHAEL
 (sarcastic)
 What a nightmare.

JON
 (smiles, a beat)
 Thank you. For coming.

MICHAEL
 Wild horses, Jon. You know that...

As Michael takes a seat, Jon glances at the Reserved seat, still empty. He checks his watch.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - LATER - 1990

The room is now nearly full. Rosa Stevens enters. She looks around. Jon watches her approach a random man.

ROSA
Jonathan. How are you?

As the man turns around, confused, Jon races to save him.

JON
Rosa. Jon Larson...

ROSA
(plays it off)
There he is. Just the man I'm looking for. Are you nervous? Don't be nervous.

JON
I'm a little nervous.

ROSA
Of course you're nervous. The first presentation of your musical is like having a colonoscopy in the middle of Times Square. Only, with a colonoscopy, the worst thing that could happen is, you find out you have cancer. With a musical, you find out you're already dead.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - LATER - 1990

The room is now packed. Jon stands on the side of the room, glancing anxiously from the door to the still-empty seat with the Reserved sign. Ira approaches him.

IRA
We can't keep waiting. It's quarter past.

Jon finally nods. Ira puts a hand on his shoulder.

IRA (CONT'D)
Break a leg.

Ira takes the Reserved sign off the seat and sits. Jon finally accepts that Susan isn't coming. He looks around the packed room, steeling himself to say something.

JON
Hi. Good morning. Thank you. Welcome.
I'm Jonathan Larson.

Michael leads the applause. The rest of the room slowly joins.

JON (CONT'D)

That's, you really don't have to do that... That's very kind. Thank you. Okay. Thank you all so much for being here this morning --

The door OPENS and Jon turns, expecting to see Susan there. Instead, in walks Stephen Sondheim. He ducks into a seat in the back row. Jon takes a moment to recover from his shock.

JON (CONT'D)

Right. Like I was saying, thank you. This is my musical, *Superbia*. I've been working on it for... a little while now. I really hope you like it.

APPLAUSE as Jon finds a seat in the front row.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sits at the piano.

JON

And the next hour and a half are a blur.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

CLOSE ON Jon, watching the show. All we see is his face, stoic, unreadable.

JON (V.O.)

Then Karessa steps forward to sing the new song, not even twelve hours old.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sits at the piano, as Karessa approaches the microphone at the lip of the stage.

JON

I close my eyes. I brace myself. I don't dare take a breath.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

From behind, we see the figure of Karessa set her music stand at a microphone downstage, mirroring her movements from the concert in 1992.

JON (V.O.)
 But when I open my eyes, I don't see
 Karessa there.

Jon opens his eyes. REVERSE to find --

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT - 1990

Susan stands on the roof. Jon sits in a folding chair, watching
 as she sings **COME TO YOUR SENSES**.

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

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

Karessa sings in the reading.

KARESSA
 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

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT - 1990

Susan sings.

SUSAN
 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
 (MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)
 YOU DON'T NEED A MUSIC BOX MELODY
 TO KNOW WHAT I MEAN

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

Karessa sings.

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

Susan and Karessa sing in harmony, as we begin to INTERCUT between the Studio and the Roof.

KARESSA AND SUSAN
 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

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY - 1990

An explosion of APPLAUSE rings out and Jon looks to the front of the room, where Karessa now bows. Jon smiles at the raucous response to the song, but he cannot help but feel a pang of something else -- something like regret.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - LATER - 1990

Jon paces, staring at the phone, waiting for it to RING. Finally, it does. He answers immediately.

JON (ON PHONE)
 Hello?

INT. ROSA STEVENS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - 1990

Rosa sits at her desk, on the call.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
 Hi, honey, it's Rosa.

INTERCUT throughout between them. Jon sighs in relief.

JON (ON PHONE)
 Thank you so much for calling.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
 Well, you've already left six messages.

JON (ON PHONE)
Have you heard anything yet?

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Honey, I have heard *nothing but raves*.
I'm getting call after call after
call.

JON (ON PHONE)
Wow. Okay. That's great news.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Everybody is telling me the same
thing: "That Jonathan Larson -- I
can't wait to see what he does next."

JON (ON PHONE)
What do you mean what I do next? What
about *Superbia*?

Rosa acts like they have discussed this already, like she
didn't predict a bidding war fifteen hours ago.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
I always told you this was a tough
sell. It's too arty for Broadway --
tourists aren't going to shell out
fifty dollars to see a show about
spaceships and robots...

JON (ON PHONE)
Well, that's not what it's about.

ROSA (ON PHONE)
Well, of course *I* know that, Jonathan.
But these producers, they care about
one thing and one thing only...

JON (ON PHONE)
What about Off-Broadway?

ROSA (ON PHONE)
It's too expensive for Off. You've got
a cast of thousands, special
effects...

She puts her hand over the phone, calls to her Assistant.

ROSA (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Tell him I'll be on in a second.
(to Jon)
Listen, sweetie, I've got to run.
Congratulations on a terrific
presentation.

JON (ON PHONE)

But what am I supposed to do now?

Rosa frowns, confused by the question -- isn't it obvious?

ROSA (ON PHONE)

You start writing the next one. And after you finish that one, you start the next. And on and on. That's what it is to be a writer, honey. You just keep throwing them against the wall and hoping against hope that eventually something sticks.

(then)

Listen. A little advice from someone that's been in this business a long, long time? On the next one... maybe try writing about what you know.

Jon looks around at his tiny, dingy apartment, the world he knows.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY - 1990

Michael stands by his desk in a small-ish office, on the phone.

MICHAEL (ON PHONE)

I think let's give it a minute and see what happens next week...

Jon enters.

JON

I need a job. I'll apologize to the focus group lady. I'll never say anything bad about marketing research ever again, I swear to God.

MICHAEL (ON PHONE)

I'm going to call you right back.

He hangs up the phone.

JON

I want to do what you do. I want to have what you have. I want the BMW, I want the doorman, I want all of it.

MICHAEL

What is going on?

JON

I spent eight years killing myself on a musical that is never going to happen.

MICHAEL

I find that very hard to believe. It was incredible this morning...

JON

Well, not incredible enough.

(then)

I can't do it again, Mike. I can't stomach five more years of waiting tables, five more years of writing things that no one will ever see while Broadway just churns out mega-musicals without a hint of anything original or interesting or, God forbid, something to actually say about the world.

Michael allows him to go on, patiently. When he's finished, he calmly responds.

MICHAEL

Are you done?

JON

No, actually --

MICHAEL

(cutting him off)

The presentation was... Jon, it was amazing. It would be a tragedy to give up what you have.

JON

You did it.

MICHAEL

Please. I was a mediocre actor -- do you know how many mediocre actors there are in New York City? Do you know how many Jonathan Larsons there are? One.

JON

I can't keep wasting my time, Mike. I turn thirty in two days.

MICHAEL

And?

JON

Stephen Sondheim was twenty-seven when he had his first musical on Broadway.

MICHAEL

Well, guess what? You're not Stephen Sondheim. You're going to have to wait a little bit longer...

Jon begins to spiral.

JON

I can't keep waiting. This is my life.

MICHAEL

I understand.

JON

You don't understand. I'm running out of time.

MICHAEL

(scoffs)

You are not running out of time.

JON

You don't know anything about it.

MICHAEL

(quietly)

I'm HIV positive.

A long, terrible silence.

JON

What?

(Michael says nothing)

How long have you...?

MICHAEL

A few days.

(then)

Who knows? I might get lucky. People do. They live a year, longer even.

(a stoic smile)

Anyway. I think I might know a thing or two about running out of time.

Jon stands there, reeling, as the TICKING returns.

JON

Why didn't you tell me sooner?

Michael gives him a look. Jon realizes, with a sickened feeling.

JON (CONT'D)

You tried.

Michael's phone BUZZES. The voice of his ASSISTANT.

MICHAEL'S ASSISTANT

Jill Kramer, returning, on line 2.

Michael clears his throat.

MICHAEL

I have to take that.

JONATHAN

Michael --

MICHAEL

I can't talk about this now. Please.

Jon nods, weakly. Michael gathers himself, picks up the phone, as Jon turns and goes out the door...

INT. ELEVATOR - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon stands in a CROWDED elevator, surrounded by laughing, chit-chatting EMPLOYEES. The TICKING grows louder and louder.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon sits at the piano, silent, shocked. Finally --

JON

I think of the day I met Michael.

INT. ELEVATOR - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon stands there, listening to the TICKING.

JON (V.O.)

It was the first day at sleep-away camp twenty-two years ago. We were eight. I think of high school. All the shows we did together.

Jon begins to hear something else --

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK - 1990

Days earlier, Michael stands, staring out the window, reeling. He holds the phone away from his ear, struggling to process the news he has just heard. He sings **REAL LIFE**.

MICHAEL
IS THIS REAL LIFE?

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon at the mic.

JON
I think of the summer our families
decided to stay in the same town in
Cape Cod, a mile away from each other.
We'd meet at the beach every night.
We'd sit there, talking until three in
the morning. About our plans.
How some day we would move to the city
together, find a cheap apartment, and
be discovered, and change the world...

EXT. MIDTOWN PHONE BOOTH - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon stands in a phone booth, receiver to his ear, listening as
an answering machine picks up on the other end.

SUSAN'S VOICE
(from phone)
Hey, you've reached Susan, Beth,
Gordon, and Monique.

EXT. MIDTOWN STREET - CONTINUOUS - 1990

Jon trudges down 5th Avenue, the sky growing darker, day
turning to night.

JON (V.O.)
I think of the first summer back from
college. We smoked a bowl on the
Kennedy breakwater and Michael told me
he was gay.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
IS THIS REAL LIFE?
IS THIS REAL LIFE?
IS THIS REAL LIFE?

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon is in the Park now, walking faster, the TICKING becoming
unbearable.

JON (V.O.)
I think of our friends. So many. I
think of their funerals.

FLASH TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT - FLASHBACK - 1990

As Jon sits in the hallway, two MEN (20s) stand outside of a hospital room, one of them trying to comfort the other, who is weeping uncontrollably.

JON (V.O.)

I think of their parents, not even fifty, saying the Kaddish over their children.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

IS THIS REAL LIFE?
IS THIS REAL LIFE?

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - EVENING - 1990

Jon walks faster and faster.

JON (V.O.)

I think of them and I think of Michael and, before I understand what's happening, I start running...

Jon breaks into a run, the Park nearly empty now.

EXT. GREAT LAWN - MINUTES LATER - 1990

Jon reaches the Great Lawn, still at a run.

JON (V.O.)

Past the pond, past the Carousel...

MICHAEL (V.O.)

IS THIS REAL LIFE?

The TICKING grows faster and louder, relentless, implacable, as Jon runs through the vast, empty field, tears streaming down his face, Michael's singing constant now.

JON (V.O.)

The ticking is so loud now, I can't hear anything. My heartbeat is pounding in my throat. The wind is shrieking through the trees. The sky is darkening. I want it to stop. I want it all to stop.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

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

Jon suddenly sees something out of the corner of his eye. He stops. The singing stops.

Dozens of SEAGULLS perch on a nearby hill, seemingly watching him. He stands there, looking at them.

The birds take to the air en masse, flying away. Jon follows the birds with his eyes -- to the Delacorte, an exquisite outdoor theater, a hundred yards away.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - MINUTES LATER - NIGHT - 1990

Jon stands outside the theater, the TICKING unabated. He peers in through the chain-link fence and sees a rehearsal piano, covered by a tarp. He begins to climb the fence.

EXT. DELACORTE THEATER - MOMENTS LATER - 1990

Jon looks around, sees that he is alone. He delicately pulls the tarp from the piano. He sits at the bench and puts his hands over the keys. All at once, the TICKING stops. The only thing he can hear is the sound of his own breathing. He begins to play **WHY**, tentatively at first, passion and intensity building with the song.

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

As Jon sings, we begin to INTERCUT with flashes to the past that he is remembering --

INT. YMCA BACKSTAGE AREA - DAY - FLASHBACK - 1969

YOUNG JON and YOUNG MICHAEL (both 9) practice a silly talent show number. Other KIDS practice nearby, a TEACHER supervising.

JON (V.O.)
 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

INT. YMCA STAGE - DAY - FLASHBACK - 1969

Young Jon and Young Michael bow with the other Kids.

JON (V.O.)
 WHEN WE EMERGED FROM THE YMCA
 THREE O'CLOCK SUN HAD MADE THE GRASS
 HAY
 I THOUGHT,
 HEY, WHAT A WAY TO SPEND A DAY
 HEY, WHAT A WAY TO SPEND A DAY
 (MORE)

JON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I MAKE A VOW, RIGHT HERE AND NOW
 I'M GONNA SPEND MY TIME THIS WAY

INT. DELACORTE THEATER - NIGHT - 1990

Jon plays the piano.

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

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY - FLASHBACK - 1976

TEENAGE JON and TEENAGE MICHAEL (both 16) rehearse *West Side Story* in costume with a group of fellow HIGH SCHOOLERS. Everyone is incredibly focused, earnest, and committed.

JON
 THREE O'CLOCK WENT TO REHEARSE IN THE
 GYM
 MIKE PLAYED "DOC," WHO DIDN'T SING --
 FINE WITH HIM
 WE SANG "GOTTA ROCKET IN YOUR POCKET"
 AND "THE JETS ARE GONNA HAVE THEIR
 DAY, TONIGHT"
 OVER AND OVER AND OVER
 TILL WE GOT IT RIGHT

EXT. DELACORTE THEATER - NIGHT - 1990

Jon at the piano.

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

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY - FLASHBACK - 1976

Teenage Jon and Teenage Michael join the rest of the company in rehearsing the curtain call.

JON
 I THOUGHT,
 HEY, WHAT A WAY TO SPEND A DAY
 HEY, WHAT A WAY TO SPEND A DAY

EXT. DELACORTE THEATER - NIGHT - 1990

Jon at the piano.

JON

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 WANNA 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, NY
 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 AND OVER AND
 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"
 HEY, WHAT A WAY TO SPEND A DAY
 HEY, WHAT A WAY TO SPEND A 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

As Jon finishes, the skies open and it begins to pour.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Michael opens the door to find Jon standing there, soaking wet.

JON

Whatever comes next... I'm here. I
 promise. There's a support group, it's
 called Friends In Deed. I just called
 them. They have a meeting tomorrow
 morning --

MICHAEL

You look like shit.

JON

(admitting)
 I'm so cold.

MICHAEL

(laughs, opens door)
 Come on.

Jon steps forward, folding his arms around him. They stand
 there, in the doorway, holding one another.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon at the piano.

JON

Sunday night. My thirtieth birthday.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1990

Jon, kneeling on the living room floor, arranges dozens of pieces of paper. It's unclear exactly what they are. The phone RINGS. The outgoing MESSAGE sounds.

JON (V.O.)

Speak.

SONDHEIM (V.O.)

Jon? Steve Sondheim here. Rosa gave me this number. I hope it's okay to call you...

(Jon freezes, stunned)

I didn't get a chance to speak with you after your reading, but I just wanted to say it was really good. Congratulations. I'd love to get together and talk to you about it, if you have any interest. No pressure.

Jon laughs -- as if he might not have interest in that.

SONDHEIM (V.O.)

The main thing, though, is that it's first-rate work and it has a future. And so do you. I'll call you later with some thoughts if that's okay. Meanwhile, be proud.

As Jon turns to go, we see that the papers on the floor are a dozen pages torn out from his small spiral notebook -- filled with questions: "Fear or love?" "Why do we follow leaders that don't lead?" Etc.

INT. MOONDANCE DINER - NIGHT - 1990

A CLOSED sign hangs on the door of the Moondance, filled with a dozen or so FRIENDS of Jon's. Jon huddles with Carolyn.

CAROLYN

There was a small, very, very small, part of me that was... the teensiest bit happy to hear you're not leaving.

JON

Well, I would have been sad not to see you every Sunday morning.

CAROLYN

I told Freddy. He's pissed off at your agent.

JON

How is he?

CAROLYN

He should be going home soon.

Jon looks to the locked front door, sees Susan there. She offers a smile. He returns it.

EXT. MOONDANCE DINER - MOMENTS LATER - 1990

Jon unlocks the door and joins Susan outside.

JON

I didn't know that you were --

SUSAN

I wasn't sure whether you would want me here.

JON

I'm happy you came.

SUSAN

How was the reading?

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Did anyone...?

He shakes his head.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

He shrugs -- what can you do?

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I wanted to be there, I just...

JON

I know.

SUSAN

What are you going to do now?

JON
Start the next one, I guess.

SUSAN
(a beat)
I decided to take the job.

JON
I'm happy for you.

A long beat. Before it can get emotional, she hands him a present.

SUSAN
Happy Birthday.

He looks at it -- the beautiful book of manuscript paper he wanted to buy at the Strand days earlier. She smiles.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
For the next one. Do you have any ideas?

JON
(shakes his head)
Just questions.

SUSAN
That seems like a really good place to start.
(then)
Goodbye, Jonathan.

Susan turns and goes. Jon stands there, looking after her. As he does, we hear her VOICE.

SUSAN (V.O.)
The next one was *tick, tick...boom!*
After that, he went back to a project he'd started and put away, called *Rent*. It ran on Broadway for twelve years. It changed the definition of what a musical could be. What it could sound like. The kinds of stories that it could tell. Jonathan never got to see it. The night of the show's final dress rehearsal, he died from a sudden aortic aneurysm. He was thirty-five years old...

EXT. NEW YORK THEATER WORKSHOP - NIGHT - 1992

Before the show. Some last-minute STRAGGLERS make their way into the theater.

As we follow them in, we linger on a flyer Scotch-taped there:
"tick, tick...BOOM! A rock monologue by Jonathan Larson.
 December 14, 1992. One night-only."

SUSAN (V.O.)

He still had so many questions.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon begins to play **LOUDER THAN WORDS** at the piano. Over the course of the song we see his audience for the first time.

JON

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

JON AND ROGER

ALTHOUGH WE KNOW

ROGER

THE BOSS IS WRONG AS RAIN?

Jon looks out past the lights and sees Judy, the leader of the focus group, vibing to the music next to former madrigals singer Scott.

JON

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

Jon sees Ira Weitzman.

JON AND KARESSA

SO INVITING?

Jon sees Al and Nan, holding hands, bursting with pride.

KARESSA
HOW, AS WE TRAVEL, CAN WE --

JON AND KARESSA
-- SEE THE DISMAY
AND KEEP FROM FIGHTING?

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

ROGER AND KARESSA
CAGES OR WINGS
AH

Jon sees Michael, almost as proud as his parents, healthy, well, holding hands with DAVID (30s), his boyfriend.

JON, ROGER, AND KARESSA
FEAR OR LOVE, BABY
DON'T SAY THE ANSWER

JON
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

ROGER AND KARESSA
LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN

We see more of the audience. Freddy. Carolyn. Stephen Sondheim. Cristin, Gerard, Danya, and Lauren from the *Superbia* workshop. Even Rosa is there.

JON (CONT'D)
WHAT DOES IT TAKE
TO WAKE UP A GENERATION?

JON, ROGER, AND KARESSA
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

JON (CONT'D)
WHY

ROGER AND KARESSA
WHY

Jon looks out, finds a sign on an empty seat: "Reserved for Susan Wilson." She isn't coming. He takes this in.

KARESSA
WHY DO WE STAY WITH LOVERS
WHO WE KNOW, DOWN DEEP
JUST AREN'T RIGHT?
WHY WOULD WE RATHER

JON, ROGER, AND KARESSA
PUT OURSELVES THROUGH HELL
THAN SLEEP ALONE AT NIGHT?

JON
WHY DO WE FOLLOW LEADERS WHO NEVER
LEAD?

ROGER
WHY DOES IT TAKE CATASTROPHE TO START
A REVOLUTION

ROGER AND KARESSA
IF WE'RE SO FREE
TELL ME WHY

JON
SOMEONE TELL ME WHY
SO MANY PEOPLE BLEED

<p>JON (CONT'D) CAGES OR WINGS WHICH DO YOU PREFER? ASK THE BIRDS</p>	<p>ROGER AND KARESSA CAGES OR WINGS AH</p>
---	--

JON, ROGER, AND KARESSA
FEAR OR LOVE, BABY
DON'T SAY THE ANSWER

<p>JON ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS</p>	<p>ROGER AND KARESSA LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN</p>
--	---

The band CUTS OUT and Jon, Roger, and Karessa sing a cappella.

ALL
CAGES OR WINGS
WHICH DO YOU PREFER?

JON
ASK THE BIRDS

In the very back of the theater, unseen by Jon, Susan stands, watching, rapt, feeling a million different things at once.

ALL
AH
FEAR OR LOVE, BABY
DON'T SAY THE ANSWER

JON
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

ALL
LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN, AH

JON
THEY SPEAK LOUDER

ALL
LOUDER THAN, LOUDER THAN, AH

JON
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN

INT. DINER - LATER - 1990

The LIGHTS go out. Jon stands in the center of the room, as Michael comes, bearing a beautiful birthday cake. Donna stands, her VHS camcorder pointed at Jon.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon plays a very simple, one-handed rendition of "Happy Birthday" on the piano.

INT. DINER - MOMENTS LATER - 1990

Michael and the cake are right before Jon's eyes.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - 1992

Jon finishes the melody on the piano, but omits the last note, leaving the phrase unresolved.

INT. DINER - MOMENTS LATER - 1990

Silence. Michael smiles at Jon through the flickering of birthday candles.

MICHAEL
Make a wish.

Jon considers for a moment. He inhales as we --

SMASH TO BLACK.

THE END