

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE SKY?

a contemporary play in two acts

by Drew Moyer

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CHARACTERS

JONATHAN, 29. A pop songwriter. Cautious, anxious, needing to be in control. Paranoid on the brink of therapy.

MADELINE, 31. His wife, a photographer. Free-spirited, spiritual, a bit pretentious. A “true artist.”

BRETT, 34. Jonathan’s publisher. Handsome, wolfish. A New York implant from Liverpool, his English accent adds to his charm.

SETTING

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

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT ONE.

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

ACT TWO.

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

ACT ONE.

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

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

MADELINE (*off*). Fine, Jonathan! I'm excited!

JONATHAN (*off*). Oh, don't ev—if that's excited, then I must be *thrilled* right now, since we seem to be, just, tossing words around.

Madeline blows in, wearing a hip, yet stylish and sexy black dress. Jonathan enters behind her, in a fitted black suit and black tie. It should be apparent that both of them have been drinking.

MADELINE (*overlapping, after "tossing"*). Oh, Jesus...

He flicks on the lamp (cue lights up) while Madeline flings her shoes into the middle of the floor and collapses on the couch.

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

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

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

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). How do you think people become "friends", Maddy—they start *out* as guests...

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

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). ...Evolution 101... An audience? God, you are dramatic.

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

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

MADELINE (*overlapping*). I wasn't *gonna* say that!

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). ...my boss! Well I don't know why you're making me say it, then!

MADELINE (*overlapping*). No one's making you say it; you're jumping down my throat!

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

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

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

MADELINE. *I* was being polite! Because I could tell about thirty minutes into the night how badly *you* wanted him to come over!

JONATHAN. That's because it was the *plan*, Maddy. The plan was to get him back here.

MADELINE. You said you were interested to see if he would come back. You made it sound like, if he invited himself, you wouldn't object. That's different.

JONATHAN. He's only in town for the weekend!

MADELINE. He comes in all the time!

JONATHAN. Not while I'm here. I'm always in Nashville, it seems like—*conveniently*. I was supposed to be in Nashville *this* weekend.

MADELINE. Were you?

JONATHAN (*dismissive*). That guy he wanted me to—he bailed.

MADELINE. Oh.

JONATHAN. It doesn't matter; the guy's an idiot. The point is that *tonight*, is a golden opportunity. He said he wanted to *talk* to me about something. I think it has something to do with one of the holds I just got.

MADELINE. That's exciting.

JONATHAN. You don't sound excited.

MADELINE. I *am*—I just said I was.

JONATHAN. You're not excited.

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

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

MADELINE. I'm not thrilled about having a *guest* over, no, after midnight, after we've been drinking all night. But yes, the fact that a man like Brett is coming over to talk to you, is pretty remarkable—it's great.

JONATHAN. Well, he wants to talk to *me*, too. I mean, it's gonna be a two-sided conversation.

MADELINE. Yeah, that's what I said.

JONATHAN. It's not like he's... he needs *me*, too, you know.

MADELINE (*sighs*). Yes. I know.

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

MADELINE. Fine, Jonathan; he's not your boss.

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). It's like, it's gotta be a good fit for me, too. I gotta like the notes he gives *me* too, the people he hooks me up with—it's not *just* that he's gotta like my songs.

MADELINE (*resigning*). OK, Jonathan.

JONATHAN. It's like, I *could* go somewhere else.

MADELINE. You wouldn't go anywhere.

JONATHAN. Well, obviously I don't want to, but I may have to. Or, I *might* want to.

MADELINE (*overlapping*). All right, all right, *fine*. He's not your boss, you could go somewhere else; whatever, y—you just need to *relax*, a little bit. Huh? You're gonna get yourself all amped up.

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

MADELINE. Well, stop. Just breathe, drink some water. Sit down, for God's sake—why aren't you sitting? We're home now.

JONATHAN (*picking up her shoes, heads toward the bedroom offstage*). I wanna clean up.

MADELINE. Are you putting those in the bedroom?

JONATHAN. Why?

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

JONATHAN (*pauses, shakes his head, handing them back to her*). Why?

MADELINE (*taking them, and tossing them on the floor by her feet*). Just... it's fine.

A brief moment while Jonathan stares at the shoes on the floor. He's bothered by the untidiness, but tries to hold his tongue until he can no longer stand it.

JONATHAN. Well, can you at least put them upright?

MADELINE (*overlapping*). Oh, for God's sake.

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). He'll be here soon!

MADELINE (*overlapping*). And God forbid he ever thinks I take off my shoes, Jonathan! Fine, here.

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

JONATHAN. Well, that *looks* better. Thank you.

MADELINE. You're welcome.

Jonathan starts looking around the living room for other ways to straighten up.

MADELINE (*worried*). I love you, OK?

He is too preoccupied to respond.

MADELINE (*trying to be helpful*). Why don't you make a drink?

JONATHAN (*distantly*). I love you too.

MADELINE. What?

JONATHAN (*looking up*). What?

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

JONATHAN (*waving it off*). Oh, I don't need a drink.

MADELINE. Well, I know you don't *need* one...

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). Got wasted enough at that damn party.

MADELINE (*cute*). Make me one, then.

JONATHAN. You *definitely* don't need one.

MADELINE. Pretty please?

He sighs, then heads over to the bar.

MADELINE (*smiling, joking*). I don't need to be decent.

JONATHAN. You want ice?

MADELINE. Yes, please.

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

JONATHAN (*from the kitchen*). Are you just trying to give me something to do?

MADELINE. No. I wanted a drink.

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

MADELINE. I wanted a drink, Jonathan; that's all it was.

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

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

MADELINE (*overlapping*). Thank you.

JONATHAN (*overlapping*).inconvenience. Sure. (*After a pause*) I'm sorry, all right? I'm a little nervous.

MADELINE. Don't be.

JONATHAN. I love you.

MADELINE. I love you too.

JONATHAN (*modeling*). Jacket on, do you think?

MADELINE (*sweetly*). Very handsome.

JONATHAN (*genuine*). Thanks honey.

MADELINE. Aren't you hot, though?

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

He runs to the thermostat.

MADELINE. What about it?

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

MADELINE (*helpful*). He's been drinking.

JONATHAN. That'll make it worse!

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

JONATHAN. It's fucking *hot*, Maddy.

MADELINE. It's summer.

JONATHAN. So? When was the last time you think he went to an apartment without AC?

He starts banging the thermostat.

MADELINE. Honey...

JONATHAN. Did you email the landlord?

MADELINE. Yeah; she didn't answer. I told you, remember?

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

MADLINE. No?

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

MADLINE. No you didn't.

JONATHAN. I *did*. I *did* ask you. And why would I need to remind you about that? We haven't had cold air in here for fucking ten months!

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

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

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

Jonathan slams the thermostat one last time, then walks away in frustration.

JONATHAN. Fuck!

MADLINE. She already has the money, why should she care?

JONATHAN. What are you, like, taking her side?

MADLINE. No, I'm just... stating the nature of the capitalism we've come to know in our lifetime—would you *relax*?

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

JONATHAN. Oh—great, and the bowlers are home!

MADLINE. Honey.

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

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

JONATHAN (*pointed*). I'm sorry, honey, it's just that things are a little *dire* for me, at the moment. My publisher's coming over to *talk* to me about something, and it's fucking hot!

MADLINE (*overlapping*). That's not gonna impact...

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). And my wife doesn't seem to understand the gravity of that!

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

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

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

A few seconds pass. In the silence, the ticking of the clock becomes more prominent, and Jonathan becomes increasingly bothered by the sound.

JONATHAN. God, that fucking clock!

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

MADELINE. Jonathan. Jonathan.

JONATHAN. What? It's fucking irritating!

MADELINE. It looks nice. Can you leave it, please?

JONATHAN. I'll take the battery out.

MADELINE. I like it. I like knowing what time it is.

He stops, exhales, scratches his head.

MADELINE. Let me turn on the fountain.

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

MADELINE. Is that better?

JONATHAN. Yeah.

MADELINE (*after a pause*). Honey, they're gonna resign you.

JONATHAN (*sighing*). I just don't know.

MADELINE. You're the best writer they've got. They'd be crazy.

JONATHAN. It's been over a year since my cut with Paula Tobin.

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

JONATHAN. Six, with Ruben last week.

MADELINE. Six holds. That's pretty amazing.

JONATHAN. It's not anything.

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

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). Who cares. Holds are nothing.

MADELINE. They're not nothing.

JONATHAN. They are, though. They're like, polygamy in the music world—they've got my shit on lockdown! But I can't *do* anything about it, because it would upset the delicate balance of bullshit and ass kiss-ery—does it sound fucked up to you? 'Cause it's fucked up.

MADELINE. Yeah.

JONATHAN. It doesn't exist anywhere else but in music.

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

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

MADELINE. You're being paranoid.

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

MADELINE. No you're not. Do you really think he'd be coming over tonight if he wasn't gonna resign you? *That'd* be fucked up.

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

MADELINE. Well, that's not so bad.

JONATHAN. Yeah. It is. Normally they do it within *six* months, or more. If they have to think about it, if they've had to think about it for at least three months, it doesn't exactly bode well for me.

MADLINE. OK, but if there is some debate going on about whether or not to keep you, don't you think that Brett would be the one in your corner? I mean, that makes sense to me. It's not the guys upstairs. They don't even know you.

JONATHAN. Maybe, maybe.

MADLINE. I think you just need to relax. When he gets here, just have a few drinks, talk shop, whatever; you'll have a nice time, and then he'll go home, and that'll be that.

JONATHAN. Do you think I should call and cancel? That would be stupid, right?

MADLINE. *Now?*

JONATHAN. I know, I know. It's just, I have a really bad feeling about tonight.

MADLINE. You always have a bad feeling.

JONATHAN. This one feels worse.

MADLINE. It always feels worse; Jonathan, your anxiety has...

JONATHAN (*overlapping, dismissing*). I know.

MADLINE. I think on Monday we should.

JONATHAN (*overlapping*). I know, I know; I got it. Are you gonna flirt with him?

MADLINE. What? No, Jonathan!

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

MADLINE. Jonathan!

JONATHAN. Maddy. He's single, you're attractive, it's natu—he's straight. It's gonna help, can you just...? Please?

MADLINE. What do you want me to do?

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

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

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

There is a knock on the door.

JONATHAN. OK?

MADELINE. Yeah, Jonathan, I—don't worry about me, just remember to breathe. Don't get internal.

JONATHAN. I won't.

MADELINE. I love you.

JONATHAN. I love you too.