

ABSTRACT

Love, Jon

Andrew Ryan Nichols

Director: Sarah-Jane Murray, Ph.D.

Sometimes in life, there are stories born inside of us that we cannot shake. I was struck with such inspiration early in life and chose to ignore it. Recently, I was given a second chance at choosing a thesis topic and decided to give life to the story I had held inside. This is a story about a young musician named Jon who returns home to his mother's diner a failure. Once home, he must face the several choices. Will he rekindle his music career, or will he let his past define him? Will he profess his love for his childhood best friend, or will he keep the status quo? Most importantly, will he let his pride get in the way of laying his ghosts to rest and getting everything he's ever wanted?

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

Dr. Sarah-Jane Murray, Department of Great Texts

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: _____

LOVE, JON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors Program

By

Andrew Ryan Nichols

Waco, Texas

May 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	iii
Script.....	1
Bibliography	89

INTRODUCTION

Writing a creative thesis has been a long, arduous process. In what follows, I hope to give the reader a glimpse into that process. I consider this somewhat of an *apologia*, or defense, of the creative thesis process as one that holds an equal amount of enrichment as a traditional thesis. To give the reader insight into the creative process, I cover major areas of the development of my script: inspiration, the writing process, character development, and structure. Each of these sections will offer brief overviews of (and highlights from) the various stages of development. It is my hope that the reader sees this hard work reflected in the final script.

Inspiration

The writing process for this musical started about eight years ago. It started, as creative endeavors do, with the inspiration. Jon McLaughlin received an Academy Award nomination for his song “So Close,” and performed the song live during the 80th Academy Awards.

I was hooked. I went straight to iTunes, bought all his music – which, at the time, happened to be one album, *Indiana* – and told my brother how great it was. My fascination resulted in following his music and clinging to every word he could give. I even managed my parents to let me skip school one day to go to a concert of his with my older brother.

What I think drew me to Jon’s music was the story contained in most of his songs. It’s this idea that there’s someone out there that you love. She’s everything you could

ever need, and if you could only say the right words, if she only knew, then everything would be perfect. It was such a romantic notion, and one that filled my mind with possibilities. I imagined Jon as the lead in a movie or a play of my own design, chasing after the girl of his dreams, trying to say the right things.

Later in 2008, Jon came out with a new electropop album, *OK Now*. This album provided me with the inspiration for my character Jackie, as well as a feel for the kind of setting I wanted for my story. In the song “You Can Never Go Back,” there is a girl named Jackie, who works at “the corner restaurant” who would meet up with “Jamie McKay” after she got off work. I decided to include her as one of my satellite characters. The song encapsulated how I thought Sara and Jackie would feel about their small town lives. Sara would be itching to move forward, but Jackie would be stuck in her ways, hooking up with the same guy after work. Jackie’s satellite story in my script started out being centered on her romance with Jamie, but this was too cumbersome to the script. It didn’t contribute to the story in any meaningful way, and so it became simply a reference. For that reason I decided to cut Jamie out of the picture. I’m glad I did, because Jackie is now one of my favorite characters. She is a willful, sassy, funny woman who is fed up with her perpetual status as a waitress. While this still bears reference to Jackie who works at the corner restaurant, she has become someone different and something of my own, and I love that about her.

After the release of *OK Now*, the story started to shape in my mind. I sat down and started to write. Jon was a musician. He failed in the real world. Here he was now, back in his hometown, teaching literature at the school he used to attend. I got a few lines

in before I realized I didn't know where I was going, and I let the project fade into the background.

“So Close” didn't win the Oscar that year. Another song that would come to be of great meaning to me went home with the prize.

The summer after my freshman year of college I visited my best friend in New York. I was determined, as I am each time I visit the city, that I would see more shows than I did last time. Determined to see Tony-winning shows, my friend and I slept on the sidewalk outside the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre to get student rush tickets for *Once: A New Musical*. It was there that I heard the stage rendition (and reprise) of “Falling Slowly,” whose movie version beat out “So Close” for the 2007 Oscar. This moving song doesn't say what it means. Its lyrics dance around a feeling, not a point, and it means something different by the reprise, even though it's the same words and essentially the same music.

So how did this musical take a song and change its entire meaning through context? Story. As SJ Murray discusses in her San Antonio TED Talk, when someone tells a story, it makes neurons fire in your brain that are the same as if you are remembering something. Even though you've never lived that story, you are still engaging in the experience of the story. Realistic emotional experiences are the result of great storytelling. So when *Once* builds a captivating narrative and makes those neurons fire, it alters your brain in that moment. At the beginning of the show when Guy and Girl first meet, your “meet-cute” altered brain turns “Falling Slowly” into a happy song. However, by the end of the show, Guy and Girl must go their separate ways, and the

emotions you experience through story turn this song that was once hopeful into a melancholy goodbye.

I left the theatre thinking of my own story about my own suffering musician. I wanted to evoke the sort of emotion *Once* did. I wanted to make the audience laugh and cry, but I didn't know how. The thought was still too daunting.

One final ingredient had been missing from the amorphous story forming in my head: a leading lady. In 2014, Sara Bareilles was nominated for the Best Album of the Year Grammy Award. Though she was the underdog, what I knew of her past singles caught my attention enough that I decided to give this album a try. From that album, I went to every other one of her albums. She was brilliant. She spoke the truth, maybe not absolute but at least her own. Every emotion born in her music is raw, yet poetic. Furthermore, she had the singer/songwriter/pop sensibility that I loved. Her music complimented Jon McLaughlin's (It should; they recorded a music video together in 2012 for one of Jon's songs "Summer is over"), and her spirit complimented that of my leading man. My love for Sara further clarified my vision for the story I wanted to write.

That being said, it was still a large undertaking, and I didn't have the required skillset to perform it. I also didn't have the time. I needed to write my thesis, take my business classes, and finish my accounting degree. At the time, I was working on an accounting related thesis with Dr. Charles Davis, husband to Elizabeth Davis, Baylor's Executive Vice President and Provost. Through no fault of his, I wasn't enthused by my topic, Generally Accepted Accounting Standards for small and medium sized entities. However, I viewed it as an unpleasant task I had to get out of the way in completion of my degree. When Elizabeth Davis was offered a position as president of Furman

University in South Carolina, he decided to go with her, and I was left with a decision to make: Continue the thesis with another professor, or start a new thesis.

After weeks of soul searching regarding what I wanted to do and literal searching regarding my new thesis mentor, I decided that I wanted to write my musical. If I was to pursue a thesis in accounting, it may or may not have been relevant to the field I would one day work in. It would soon become obsolete because of changes in standards. Moreover, I found it tedious work. I wanted to leave Baylor with something to my name that I was proud of, or at the very least something my family could read and understand. This is not to mention the fact that it had been too long since I had engaged my creative side.

I asked around the theatre department, and was told that creative theses of this sort were not done anymore, that it wasn't feasible. No one would take me on. Luckily, I had a distant connection to Dr. Murray through my brother, so as a final attempt I sent her an email pitching my story idea. It would be a jukebox musical using music by Jon McLaughlin and Sara Bareilles. Jon would be a struggling musician who returned to his hometown to work at his mom's diner, and who had to face his feelings for his old friend Sara.

SJ replied within thirty minutes, which I should have recognized at the time was a sign this was meant to be. She loved the idea, but the jukebox element had to be dropped for copyright reasons. I had a hard time letting go of the music I held so dear. Including the songs provided me with specific vignettes to build my story around, which gave my story more substance and structure in its preliminary phases. This method of writing, however, was starting at the wrong end of the writing process. I first had to develop the

characters and story spine in order to write my musical, rather than trying to reverse engineer a story in between musical moments. As the story developed, the specific songs fell by the wayside. They were still there for me, informing the emotional journey of my characters and providing me with the emotional support I needed, but as I developed my own story, they became unnecessary to the structure of the story. I no longer needed that crutch, and the freedom provided by not relying on the songs allowed me to write a better musical.

The Writing Process

Writing my thesis was a difficult, nearly two year-long process. After my initial contact with SJ, there was some brainstorming over email, but not very much contact until we were able to meet in the fall semester of 2014. At that point, she had taken on three other students, two writing movies and another writing a play.

The level of dependence – on each other and on SJ – was much higher in that class of thesis students than when I got into the writing intensive part of the process in summer and fall 2015. SJ called them her “thesis pod,” an idea constructed to give her thesis students a group of people they could bounce their ideas off of, and a group for the next class of thesis students to glean all the info that SJ had already passed down.

This structure worked for the class of 2015 pod in that they got to externally process many of their ideas, get feedback from one another, and have a support system for when the writing process became strenuous. Along with this came a high level of interaction with SJ. While collaboration and brainstorming are important to the creative process and helpful in many cases, there is a certain point where it becomes

counterproductive to be dependent on other creatives. Toward the end of their thesis writing experience, some of the members of the thesis pod had to rush to complete their work, having spent so much time trying to perfect certain areas.

This year, since SJ had two thesis students, myself and Avery, she took a different approach. This meant being much more hands-off throughout the process, and while it was tough at times to understand the process, it forced me to become a better writer. We met as a team with SJ three times, I believe, from start to finish. All other interaction was through email – which could be frustrating at times, but also forced me to dig deep to find solutions to problems without having to go back-and-forth – or through class with SJ.

Dr. Murray requires you to take a class with her if you want to write a thesis with her, and I know I would not have finished my thesis had I not taken her class. Being in SJ's class allowed me to absorb the three act structure from her first hand and to pick up many of the writing tips she has learned from Richard Walters. One of the most important features of the class was peer reviewing our classmates' work. Over the sixteen weeks, twice a week, we would workshop scenes. This gave me constant feedback, which led to several major structural changes in my story. For example, I learned how to outline scenes and what questions to ask in order to determine if the elements of a good scene are present. Moreover it gave me a chance to learn how to write great scenes at a scene-by-scene level. This allowed me to see problems in other writers' work and fix the same mistakes in mine. It also allowed me to emulate the good writing that I saw.

The class also gave me self-confidence when I would get good reviews from other students or when we would present our work in class. I think this was one of the most

crucial things I gained. One of the struggles of embarking on a creative endeavor is never knowing if what you're doing is worth doing, but the validation of making my classmates laugh with my writing helped me to know I was heading in the right direction.

During the 2014/2015 school year, I worked primarily on the structure of my story. I read books like *The Art of Dramatic Writing* and *Three Act What*. It was the planning phase for my thesis, which any writer should know is crucial. Here I got to present my initial ideas to SJ. She would critique them, urging me to enhance it and consider the importance of structure. I was told to elevate certain beats that were too flat, and to rethink elements that weren't working. This would happen when I found myself trying to develop storylines for my sidekick characters before I had even nailed down the spine of my story.

During the summer of 2015, at which point I needed to nail down my beats so I could start writing, that I changed the premise of what I wanted to write about. I reconfigured my story so that Sara, not Jon, was my main character. Sara was also a lesbian, fell in love with another girl, and had to face coming out of the closet in small town Indiana while Mark tried to win her back and Jon confessed his long-held feelings for her. This all came about from the presence of pro-equality themes in Sara's music and my desire to translate those sentiments to stage. In the end, however, it was a forced effort, and SJ told me to abandon it. Naturally, I worked on the idea some more and three tries later gave up.

It was an important part of the process for me to not acquiesce to whatever SJ said. As frustrating as that might have been for her, it was important to me because then, by the time I came around to doing things her way, it was because I had tried it the

wrong way and could now appreciate her point of view. I remember thinking to myself so many times, “If all I wanted was to pass this thesis and graduate, I could just give up on writing a thesis that I love and do what she says.” But I refused to let my thesis become a meaningless piece of work. I ended up doing things SJ’s way, but by the time I got around to doing them, it was my way too.

Character Development

In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, he cites plot as being the most important element of story. This is with the caveat that character is almost equally important, to the degree that the difference in importance between the two is negligible. Plot only wins out when one is forced to choose between the two.

It is difficult to write analyses of characters that I have written. I have grown so close to them over the course of this project that it feels like trying to write an online dating profile for a close friend. There’s too much to say, and not a good enough way to say it. What I will say to start off is that Jon and Sara are children of inspiration. Jon and Sara at their best are how I imagine their namesakes to be based on their music. Jon is serious, but deep, thoughtful, soulful, and sensitive. Sara is effervescent, determined, beautiful in all ways, yet delicate inside. I love them both.

One of the problems I had because I loved Jon so much was that he wasn’t flawed enough to make for an interesting or worthwhile story. He had issues: his love for Sara, his failing music career, his overbearing mother. What he didn’t have was a core flaw that drove the conflict in the story, a flaw that he would have to overcome in the end to get his happy ending. SJ pinpointed a flaw that was there, but needed to be amplified:

pride. I struggled against the idea, not wanting to make Jon unlikeable by making him more flawed. Like most of SJ's suggestions, I fought it until it made sense to me to follow it. I watched movies and TV shows, especially the Sandra Bullock rom-coms I grew up on, and realized that so many characters are flawed, yet we still love them. Grace Heart is prideful. Lucy Moderatz is insecure to the point of dishonesty. Jon needed to be equally loved and equally flawed.

Every great flaw needs to come from a ghost somewhere in the character's history. This ghost may not be expounded upon very much in the script or screenplay – in fact, details might be left out that inform the writer but aren't necessary for the audience to know – but it is the reason for the character's (usually poor) decision making. For Jon, I decided on his father. Somehow, I had always imagined Angie as a single mom, but it wasn't until late in the writing process that I decided whether she was divorced or widowed. I think her singleness was a result of a single parent home being easier to write (just look at Lane Kim's family in *Gilmore Girls*, with a father seldom mentioned and never pictured). However, when I needed a reason for Jon to act the way he did, his father's death seemed a good choice. Since Jon and Sara had been friends since childhood, I wanted to tie Sara into his ghost. This would give him extra reason to be prideful when it came to her. This manifested in Jon trying to commit suicide after the death of his father, who he was very close to, and Sara saving him.

I liked how this ghost mirrored the story I was telling. Jon let his life slip through his fingers, and Sara saved him. To end this cycle, Jon will have to face his father's death in a way he has not before. In the past he has pushed memories of his father away and

made them his enemy. If he wants to take his life and his music back, he has to make peace with his father and realize that his father is his ally.

Making Jon flawed helped to enhance my other characters. I knew I wanted Sara to be lovable, but until she had Jon's pride to play off of, it was hard to give her much depth. Now that Jon had a flaw, it was easy to make her lovable and easy to make her struggle. In the lighter moments, she is able to play off Jon's pride. For example, when she has an idea like the tip jar, she rambles because she's nervous he'll say "no." In her darkest moments, Jon's pride brings out Sara's insecurities about the choices she's made in her life that have kept her from reaching her potential. This manifests mainly in her relationship with Mark, but similarly to Jon, Sara's late father kept her from leaving home by leaving her his bakery. Deep down inside, she knows she's as talented as Jon, so it hurts when he says things to make her believe she does in fact belong at home.

Jackie is insecure in a similar way. She feels like her life is stuck in one place, but her insecurity is hidden deeper than Sara's. Jackie became one of my comic relief characters: the tough, sassy broad. Jackie has been a waitress at the diner for years, but she's starting to get fed up with her station in life and fears that Jon will take over the diner if his music career doesn't pan out. As I said before, her fear of being stuck initially manifested in her love interest, Jamie, but that added too much unnecessary complication to the story. It worked better overall for her story to be understated and her personality to be amplified.

The same can be said for Johnny's story. He has dreams of playing matchmaker by bringing Jon and Sara together. He also has a crush of his own. His crush,

however, acts as a plot element to bring Jon and Sara together, rather than to make the story about Johnny. I decided to give the Rebecca plot closure later on, but made the closure that Johnny receives in the end be receiving his cupid's bow from an unknown source. I thought this played well into the hopefulness of his character. This hopefulness was aimed to give a foil for Jon. Johnny is in a similar situation as Jon at the beginning of the show, but Johnny doesn't have the baggage bringing him down that Jon does. This allows him to show Jon the error of his ways (not that Jon will listen) and push him towards Sara.

The last external force acting on Jon is his mother. Angie provides resistance when I need it, yet Sara needs to be supporting Jon. She is similar in personality to Baruska, Girl's mother in *Once*, meaning she is headstrong, outspoken, and defensive of her child. Having made Jon's ghost the death of his father and his attempted suicide, which he played off as an accident, there was already a built-in ghost for Angie. Her child's trauma triggered Angie's defensiveness, so when she tries to keep him from pursuing music, it is out of an attempt to keep him from getting hurt. This also means that she's there to protect him when he forms his partnership with Sara or when they decide to go on tour at the end. The tender scene where Jon talks to his mother in his apartment is meant to unpack all this and reconcile Jon's pride with his mother's protectiveness.

Structure

What stopped me the first time I began writing this musical almost eight years ago was a lack of direction. I tried to start at the beginning and just write, but I didn't know what was supposed to come next. Luckily, all these years later, I had access

to Dr. Murray's expertise in story structure. Using the beat structure she lays out in her web book *Three Act What* and her new book *Basics of Story Design*, I was able to create the spine for my story. The beat sheet, if used correctly, provides a template for a story that has all the necessary elements of a great story. Below is my beat sheet, along with a brief explanation of what is required in each beat.

Opening Image

“Lights up on just a piano. Jon enters, begins playing Opening Song. Sidetracked by thoughts about Sara (represented by a woman spotlighted off-center stage) he hits a couple of wrong chords in Opening Song. Stage starts to transition to the corner restaurant while Jon finishes the song.”

The opening image should grab the audience's attention while also introducing the premise and themes of the story. In this case, the premise that Jon is a failing musician in love with a girl is conveyed by the facts that she appears on stage and that he messes up the song. Having the male and female lead alone on stage at the beginning tells the audience that this is a love story. We also get the sense that his musical journey is somehow linked to her.

Ordinary World

“Stage fully transitioned to diner scene, Sara enters, notices Jon's presence and asks what he's doing back from New York. Jon's mother, apparently the owner of the diner, hands Jon an apron and a tray. Jon is working for his mother back home in Indiana after a failed attempt at performing in Nashville.

Other characters introduced are Jackie and Johnny. Jackie is a fixture of the restaurant. Johnny is a 16 year old starting his first summer job at the restaurant.”

The Ordinary World beat exists to introduce your audience to the protagonist and the world he lives in as they are now. By the end of the story this should change. The important thing about the ordinary world beat is to tell the audience what they need to know through action rather than exposition. This is why, for example, Jon's mom hands him the coffee pot and the apron rather than Jon telling Sara why he's back.

Storm Brewing

“Jon gets a phone call from his agent. He has found a singer/songwriter competition for Jon to enter, but he's going to need new material and some cash to enter.”

This is the point at which you signal that the ordinary world and your protagonist aren't going to stay the way they've always been. As Dr. Murray says in *Basics of Story Design*, you hint that your main character is “on the brink of change.”

Inciting Incident

“Sara, Jackie, and Johnny offer to help Jon come up with new songs for the competition. The catch is that Sara wants to go to Nashville too, if his manager thinks their stuff is good enough.”

This beat is also known as the “Catalyst.” Nothing has changed yet, but there is more than an indication that it might. This event sets into motion the events that will bring Jon and Sara together, that will reignite Jon's music career, and that will force him to face his troubled past.

Dilemma

“Jon is too proud for the idea of the band, feeling that he is good enough to write his own music and come up with the cash on his own.”

The protagonist is forced to make a decision about how to deal with the circumstances brought on in the inciting incident. Will he accept or reject? Stay or go? In most good stories, he won't accept immediately. Here, Jon rejects Sara's initial offer because of his pride, which is the vice Jon will fight for the rest of the show.

Threshold

“Jon is working on his music in the near empty diner when his mother tells him to close up. She's going out on a date. She hands him a bag of trash to take out. After she's gone, he slings it over his shoulder to take it out and trash flies everywhere. Between his mother and spilled trash, Jon can't take it anymore. He has to get out as soon as possible, which means he needs cash, so he decides to let Sara and the others help him with his music knowing that they'll help him raise the cash but not planning to let them contribute to the music he'll pitch to his agent.”

Here, at the threshold, the protagonist commits to going on the adventure. As you can see here, Jon's decision takes a bit of persuasion by circumstances, but he is not just swept into the adventure by a sequence of events. It is a conscious decision, a commitment.

Adventure Sequence

“Here we see the group begin to collaborate. They each begin to share some inspirations that they have for music. Johnny has had a crush on a girl in his class for a long time. Jackie struggles to think of anything in her life worth writing about. Sara has some superficial ideas but is reluctant to share the things weighing on her (her recent breakup). Jon and Sara disagree on how and what to write.”

The adventure sequence takes place in the “extraordinary world.” There should be marked differences from when the protagonist was in the ordinary world. The protagonist can grow through the experiences in the adventure sequence, but not so much that it will be impossible for him to be stopped by a brick wall beat later. The story still needs someplace to go.

In the script, the adventure sequence and collaboration take place in a couple of scenes, neither of which is fully encompassed here. The important thing is that those scenes were born out of this beat, which describes the necessary events of collaboration and disagreement. Beats are not meant to be all encompassing. Rather, I could have written two different scenes, and as long as they followed this beat, they may have worked just as well within the story.

Gaining Support

“The adults in the group make it their quest to get Johnny's crush to notice him. They devise a plot to get her to come to an open mic night at the restaurant. They decide to charge admission and leave out a tip jar in hopes of raising money for Jon’s agent. Johnny prompts Jon with questions about why he should spill his guts to his crush if Jon has lived next door to Sara all his life and never told her how he felt.”

During the Gaining Support sequence, the protagonist will ordinarily meet the supporting character. Since this is a love story, the supporting character was introduced in the beginning. Nonetheless, during this Gaining Support beat, we see a continued progression toward the midpoint, along with a character moment where the protagonist does something he wouldn’t have done before crossing the threshold. Here we see that

the influence exerted by Sara has convinced Jon to collaborate with her on this song for Johnny, something his pride got in the way of before.

Midpoint

“Open mic night comes along, Johnny sings to his crush. The concert nosedives. Rebecca has no idea who Johnny is and turns him down flat. Jon and Sara stay behind to clean up afterwards. Jon kisses Sara.”

The hallmark of the Midpoint beat is the transition of the protagonist from passive to active. Having triumphed against his pride by collaborating with Sara, Jon also lets go of his fear of rejection – a symptom of his pride – and kisses Sara. This changes the course of events. They can’t continue on the way they were. They will have to confront this decision.

All Downhill

“Sara and Jon discuss with their respective sidekicks the ramification of the kiss. Sara decides it’s time to get back in the saddle. Jon decides not to give up. They meet in the middle at the staircase determined to try a relationship with one another.

Sara’s ex-boyfriend, Mark, enters just as she’s asks Jon to dinner. Jon storms off. Mark’s back in town and wants to talk about what happened between him and Sara.

The band attempts to collaborate again. Sara shows up even though she’s been MIA for the past couple of days. She tries to get her thoughts out, but Jon pretends not to hear her because he thinks she’s going to get back together with Mark and blows up.”

In the All Downhill beat, we see everything get worse. Setbacks begin to undo the growth we saw at the midpoint. When Mark comes back, Jon’s fear of rejection comes

back, causing him to reject Sara in defense. He then refuses to collaborate for the same reason. This brings the conflict to a boiling point.

There is typically another character moment at this point, showing that the protagonist has grown, despite the set-backs. This isn't covered specifically in the beat, but for Jon this happens when he talks to the picture of his father, asking his advice. Before, Jon had not wanted to think about his father because it made him feel inadequate. Now he is looking to him for inspiration.

Brick Wall

“Sara tells Jon he can finish writing the music on his own like he wants and begins to storm out. He asks her about the money and she gives him the envelope she'd been keeping in the lockbox under the counter saying it's all his.

Jon packs to go to Nashville. Johnny tries to stop him, but he leaves anyway, not planning to use any of the music he and Sara wrote.”

At this point, all seems lost. Either by circumstance or the choice of the protagonist, he has reached a new low. He must take decisive action. In this case, Jon decides to leave, which is the wrong decision, so he'll have to realize that and fix it as his Final Face-off beat.

Final Face-off

“1. Jon arrives at the competition and realizes that he needs/wants Sara there with him, so he calls her.

2. Jon is disqualified from the competition.

3. Sara arrives at the competition and finds Jon despondent. He admits he should have been more receptive to her help and more patient with the Mark situation. She tells

him that Mark is gone. Sara has an idea. She could enter the competition under her name and they could perform as a duo. She is worried that Jon's pride won't allow him to perform under her name, but he agrees."

The Final Face-off happens in three stages: beginning, middle, and climax. At the beginning, the protagonist devises and enacts a plan. In the middle, the plan receives resistance. At the climax, the protagonist confronts the conflict with fully developed underdog values. Here, this is Jon accepting that Sara is now the headliner without letting his pride get in the way.

Resolution

"Two pianos enter the stage, and Jon and Sara play the final song. As they finish, the diner scene rolls back on. We learn that Jon and Sara are going on tour, and Angie is turning over the diner to Jackie so she can go with them as their manager."

The final scene shows how the ordinary world has changed through the story. Here, Jon and Sara have rekindled Jon's career, Sara is no longer stuck in the small town, Jackie is no longer just a waitress, and Johnny gets to say he brought Jon and Sara together.

Conclusions

Writing *Love, Jon* has been a fulfilling experience in many ways. Through my mentor SJ, working on this project has given me a glimpse into the life of the creative, something I may not have experienced later in life. Now, I leave college with a piece of work that I can call my own, but that is also a living document. I go forth knowing that this piece could be staged in a real theatre someday if I put the remaining

work into it that is needed, and that is an exciting proposition. While I still plan on earning my CPA license and working in public accounting, I also have *Love, Jon* to work on as a passion project. Moreover, I have the tools necessary to work on other projects I may want to pursue such as new works or a graduate degree in writing.

SJ and my fellow students have taught me so much throughout this process, but so have my characters. When you write a story, at least in my case, the characters tend to become very real inside your head. I would converse with them to try to figure out what they want to do within a scene. I would be happy when things were going well for them in the script and sad when things looked bleak. I also got to see them make mistakes. I saw Jon not communicate with his parents honestly. I saw him push away the people he cared about in order to save his pride. It inspired me to speak more honestly, but also with love. Jon carries on for so long, putting up walls and internalizing his struggle to the point that it destroys him. In the end, he learns how to let Sara in and to let go of the pride that kept him from sharing his struggles – musical and father-related – with Sara and his mother. The amazing thing about having people in your life that truly care about you is that they will take the time to hear your struggles. Even when it’s hard, it is worthwhile to let them hear you. Even if they can’t help, you’ve been heard, and, speaking from experience, sometimes that’s all it takes.

One theme in Sara Bareilles’s music is not bottling up emotion. “Let the Rain” creates a beautiful metaphor about cathartic release. “Bottle it Up” speaks against those who would have you keep your thoughts to yourself. “Brave” is an anthem of honesty, encouraging those little voices to “Say what you want to say, and let the words fall out, honestly.” This is, possibly, my strongest takeaway from Sara’s music and is a

theme I have aimed to weave into my own story. I hope that those who see any future stagings of *Love, Jon* or who read this script are encouraged to open the lines of communications with their loved ones and to speak honestly in a way that brings them closer.

ACT IBack to the Diner

Lights up on an empty stage with piano. Jon enters and plays Opening Song. Mid-song, Sara enters. Jon sees her and transitions to Beautiful Girl Song. She stands behind him. As she puts a hand on his shoulder, he looks back at her. Beat. He fumbles on the piano. Discordant music continues to play. Sara and the piano both roll offstage while Jon watches, stunned. The stage transitions to the diner scene. The diner has a counter with stools, a few tables and chairs, a door and a window into the kitchen, and a staircase that leads to an upstairs apartment. Jon stands in the diner. Onstage are Johnny, Jackie, and Jon's Mom, Angie, along with customers.

ANGIE

Table three needs topping off. Glad to have you home, son.

Angie bustles away. Jon takes a deep breath.

JON

Welcome to the Eden.

He takes the order at a nearby table.

Sara enters with a basket of goodies.

SARA

Morning Jackie. Sorry I'm late. It's been a whirlwind morning.

ANGIE

The diner opened twenty minutes ago.

SARA

Sorry, I had some car trouble getting here.

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE
You ride a bike.

SARA
Bike trouble.

ANGIE
It's a fifteen minute walk.

SARA
Foot... trouble.

Angie looks at Sara's feet, carries her gaze back up to Sara's eyes and holds it until Sara breaks.
Okay. I was up late last night writing and I forgot to set my alarm.

ANGIE
Now Sara, why didn't you tell me that in the first place. I would have understood.

(Beat)
These muffins are free, right?

SARA
The customer's always right.

Sara sees Jon as he walks to the window to place an order, and drops the basket of muffins in joy.
Jon. You're back.

Jon and Sara start picking up the muffins

ANGIE
Great. Now I have to go to the store. Jackie, make sure these two don't run me out of business.

JACKIE
Yes ma'am.

JON
It's good to see you.

SARA
You surprised me. What are you doing here? In an apron no less. I thought you were off pursuing your dream.

JON
Let's call it a matter of creative differences.

SARA

Sounds like there's a story there.

JON

Not so much. In this case "creative differences" means they thought I sucked, and they like music that doesn't suck, so they got our manager to pull me.

Jon and Sara both reach for the last muffin. Jon retracts his hand

Sorry.

Both stand up. Awkward beat.

No ring.

SARA

I've never worn a ring.

JON

I just thought Mark would have proposed by now.

SARA

We broke up.

JON

But you were so--

SARA

He moved to Culver.

JON

And you didn't go with him.

SARA

Culver is the only place more "nowhere" than here.

JON

I thought you liked it here.

SARA

I'm just going a little stir crazy.

JON

You need a vacation.

SARA

That's not it. Maybe "stuck" is a better word. Nothing ever changes around here.

JON

No, that's not true. I think Jackie here moved about two inches since I left. She even changed her lipstick.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

From "Pink Pop" to "Pretty Please" and just a hint of cherry lip gloss.

Jackie pops her lips

JON

Tasty.

JACKIE

If you don't stimulate a man every way you can, you might lose his attention.

JON

Jackie.

JACKIE

Calm down I'm only teasing. That's not a bad trick either.

SARA

You're bad.

JACKIE

Don't worry, I've known Jon since he was in diapers, and I promised myself I would never seduce a man that I have seen poop his pants. Again.

Johnny enters with a rack of coffee mugs.

JOHNNY

Fresh load, coming through.

JON

It looks like something has changed around here. Little Johnny Jenkins.

JOHNNY

Hey, I'm sixteen. You can stop calling me little.

JON

No way you're sixteen already.

JOHNNY

I've got a driver's license to prove it.

JACKIE

We'll make sure to watch out for you on the road.

JON

Aw, your first summer job, and out of all the places in town you picked here.

(CONTINUED)

SARA
Probably for the free food.

JOHNNY
You're not wrong.

Grabs a muffin and takes a bite.
Sara gasps. Jackie and Jon chuckle.
What? Crumbs?

Angie enters with a box of store
bought muffins.

JON
You chose a tough lady to work for. My mom--

Angie clears her throat. Jon turns
around. Johnny throws away the
muffin, grabs a rag, and cleans the
counter.
Is a treasure. Let me help you with those.

Jon and Angie exit into the back.
Jon shoots a "close call" look to
the others.

Sara and Jackie go to the end of
the counter to talk privately

JACKIE
Alright, time to come clean.

SARA
I tried, but he ate it before I could say anything.

JACKIE
Not the muffins. I'm talking about why you were late today.

SARA
I told Angie, I forgot to set the alarm.

JACKIE
Honey, you got liar written in big fat letters right there.
Now spill.

SARA
You're gonna think I'm an idiot.

JACKIE
Never.

SARA

I called Mark.

JACKIE

Mark. The good-for-nothing-son-of-a-bitch-that-broke-your-heart-and-then-skipped-town, Mark. You are out of your ever-lovin' mind.

(Beat)

Sweetheart.

SARA

I know, but I'm lonely.

JACKIE

Honey, we're all lonely. But we write in our journals, watch rom-coms, soak in the bubble bath until we look like E.T. We do not call our exes.

SARA

He wants me to come be with him.

JACKIE

He realized all the girls in Culver either have two teeth or three baby daddies.

SARA

Gee, thanks.

JACKIE

I didn't mean it like that, baby. He made a mistake leaving you. Just thank your lucky stars that he's gone and move on.

SARA

I'm working on it.

JACKIE

Good.

Kitchen bell rings

Shoot. Tell you what. Next time you want to call Mark, call me, and I'll talk you out of it.

SARA

Sounds like a plan. Thanks for being there for me Jackie.

Jackie delivers food. Music starts to play for Upbeat Heartbreak Song. Diners tap their feet. Sara sings and dances through diner. Jackie and two other waitresses join in as a backup trio. At the first chorus, the diners get up and dance, and

(CONTINUED)

the trio makes their way onto the counter. Sara dances with one of the male diners. In the last chorus, all the male dancers try to dance with Sara. She pushes them all away as the song ends. Lights down.

Stuck

The lights come up on another busy day in the diner. Jackie, Johnny, and Angie work in the dining room. Manny works in the kitchen window. Jon wipes down the end of the counter where Sara stocks baked goods. Action is maintained throughout dialog as actors pantomime taking orders, etc.

MANNY

Order up!

JACKIE

I got it.

ANGIE

I need sausage for Mr. Koppleson.

MRS. DIAMOND

I would like a table, please.

MANNY

You didn't gimme a ticket.

JACKIE

Mrs. Diamond, could you hold on just one second, I'll get a table bussed for you.

RANDY

Jackie, I've been waiting fifteen minutes for pancakes.

JACKIE

Sorry Randy, our computers wouldn't boot this morning. We're doing it the old fashioned way. I'll hunt down your ticket.

JON

I could set up a home studio upstairs.

SARA

You have that kind of money?

(CONTINUED)

JON

No. Mom is even taking money out of my paycheck for living upstairs. I swear this is her passive aggressive way of keeping me too poor to leave.

ANGIE

God bless computers. Always there to make your life better until they decide to make it hell.

Holds up a plate of pancakes.

Who are these for?

JACKIE

I got 'em

SARA

She wants the best for you.

JON

Which she thinks is me running this diner while the whole world passes me by.

SARA

I understand. Taking over my dad's bakery when he died was scary.

JON

I'm not scared of the responsibility. I'm scared of the obligation.

MRS. DIAMOND

Jackie, dear, I'm still waiting on that table.

JACKIE

I'm on it

(To Johnny)

Johnny, baby, could you bus table four for me?

JON

I've got dreams, and they don't include pancakes and aprons. You've gotta have a dream of your own.

SARA

I do. I'm just waiting for the opportunity to present itself.

JON

It never will if I stay cooped up here. You can't follow your dreams with no money and an overbearing mother.

ANGIE

Jon, try working the whole counter. You got Jackie running herself to death.

(CONTINUED)

As Angie goes back to the window, Jon shoots a "what did I tell you" look at Sara. He waits on the rest of the counter.

SARA

Take it easy on your mom. She's trying to help.

ANGIE

(To Manny)

I need those pancakes yesterday. Come on, you're killing me out here.

MANNY

That's it. I'm taking my smoke break. Be back in ten.

ANGIE

Son-of-a... Jon. I need your help over here. Manny just walked out and I need you to cover the griddle for a few minutes.

SARA

I can help if you need it. This was my last stop for the day.

JON

Thanks Sara, but you don't--

ANGIE

But nothing. Jon, griddle. Sara, make sure he doesn't burn anything.

JON

You really don't have to stay.

SARA

Come on. It'll be like when we used to make breakfast for dinner at your place.

JON

Because it was all we knew how to cook.

SARA

Still is.

Both exit to kitchen.

JACKIE

Here, Ange, I got all the tickets in order. I'm gonna hit the dining room.

Angie takes the tickets, but doesn't look at Jackie.

ANGIE

Great, thanks.

JACKIE

Angie, I was wondering. I heard Jon talking about how you want him to run the diner.

ANGIE

Well I can't do it forever.

JACKIE

I just thought, you know, with my experience--

ANGIE

Jackie, those customers won't seat themselves. We're in a rush here.

JACKIE

Right, of course.

Jackie moves to the dining room.
She helps Johnny bus a table.

You gotta work faster kid.

JOHNNY

Look at them.

Johnny points to Jon and Sara who
work playfully in the kitchen.
Beat.

Lovebirds.

JACKIE

You've lived here long enough to know better than that.

JOHNNY

I think they love each other.

JACKIE

Like you're some sort of love expert.

JOHNNY

I fancy myself a sort of Cupid, yes.

JACKIE

The wardrobe sure has upgraded since the diaper and wings.

JOHNNY

I just mean that I'm a good matchmaker. All my friends are in very successful relationships because of me.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

And yet the love expert doesn't have himself a girl.

JOHNNY

I've got something in the works, don't worry.

JACKIE

Well focus on that, because this match isn't going to happen.

JOHNNY

You don't know that.

JACKIE

I watched them grow up together. There's something there, but they've always been too blind to see it. Either that or they're avoiding it.

JOHNNY

I'll bet you they end up together.

JACKIE

I know them, kid. It's not gonna happen.

JOHNNY

Then you won't have a problem with a friendly wager.

JACKIE

You're serious.

JOHNNY

I bet you the two of them are together in the next year.

JACKIE

Wagers have stakes.

JOHNNY

Name them.

JACKIE

I want you to stop meddling. The last thing this town needs in Cupid Jr. running round, opening cans of worms.

JOHNNY

Fair enough.

JACKIE

Your turn.

JOHNNY

Waiter pays better than bus boy. If you think you can swing it with Angie.

JACKIE

Honey, I've got her wrapped around my finger.

JOHNNY

Then it's a bet.

Jackie and Johnny shake hands.

Now if you excuse me, I've got some work to do if I want to get these two together in a year.

JACKIE

That's against the rules. You can't push them together.

JOHNNY

Sorry, we didn't shake on any rules. Cupid out.

Johnny runs into the kitchen

JACKIE

Don't you do anything stupid.

(To herself)

This boy's gonna be the death of me.

Lights down.

The Proposal

The diner is empty except for Johnny, Jackie, and Jon. Johnny is reading a book, and Jackie is filing her nails. Jon is wiping one spot on the counter. Boredom is written on their faces. Jon's phone rings. All three jump. He answers.

JON

Hello. Uh-huh. Yes, I'd love to. Okay, and when was that? At the Grove Lounge. How much?. No, that's fine. Perfect. Okay, great. Thanks so much for thinking of me. Bye.

Hangs up phone.

Yes!

JACKIE

Calm down. You'll startle the customers.

Jackie gestures to the empty diner.

JON

I just got invited by an agent to go play a competition in Nashville. The winner gets recording time with the label that's hosting.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

That's great!

JON

I could even get signed. But I have no idea where to get money for the entry fee.

JOHNNY

It can't be that bad.

JON

Only five hundred, but I'm flat broke.

JACKIE

This could be one of those scams. I once had a man tell me he could make me a hair model. Went on and on about my radiant beauty. Who can blame him? Then he asked for a thousand bucks upfront for head shots. I just about gave him a head shot.

JON

There's a long line to see this guy. I don't want to miss my chance.

Sara enters.

JACKIE

You'll figure it out hon'.

SARA

Business is really booming tonight. I'm surprised you're all still here.

JACKIE

We're figuring out how Jon's gonna blow the socks off a big Nashville agent.

JON

She's exaggerating.

SARA

You've got a meeting.

JON

An invitation to a contest. Nothing huge.

JACKIE

You were just saying what a big deal this guy is.

(To Sara)

He's just being modest.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

One of his many wonderful qualities. Don't you think Sara?

Jackie shoots daggers at Johnny.

JACKIE

It's just a small matter of funds.

SARA

I'm sure you can figure it out.

JON

I've got until the end of the summer to get the money and have something ready for my new demo when I win those studio hours.

SARA

You know someday you're gonna have to get a job that pays in real money.

JON

What do you think I'm doing now? This apron isn't just a fashion statement.

JOHNNY

Suits you though. Handsome guy, this one.

Jackie stomps Johnny's foot behind the counter.

JON

Are you doing alright, bud? You look a little pale.

JOHNNY

Me? I'm fine. I think I'm just gonna go to the walk-in and, um, take inventory.

Johnny exits to the kitchen

JACKIE

Teenagers.

SARA

You should show me one of your new songs.

JON

I don't have anything great yet.

JACKIE

We'll take mediocre.

JON

Not sure I have any of that either.

SARA

We'll take anything at all.

JON

I don't have a note. I've been so busy working since I got back.

SARA

It's pretty slow right now. Bring your keyboard down.

JON

I don't think so.

SARA

It'll be fun.

JON

It'll be weird.

SARA

We've heard you play a million times.

JON

This is different. It's my creative process.

SARA

We can play a couple of songs to get your juices flowing.

(Beat)

Come on.

JON

(To Jackie)

I don't want to bother you.

JACKIE

Honey, only thing's gonna bother me is if you don't get that piano down right this second.

JON

Alright, alright.

Jon exits upstairs.

JACKIE

You're awfully smiley.

SARA

It's good to have him back.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

Almost makes you not miss Mark.

SARA

It makes me feel less lonely.

Johnny pops up in the kitchen window.

JOHNNY

You and Jon are really close.

Jackie jumps in surprise and hits Johnny with a towel.

JACKIE

You're going to scare me half to death. Stop creepin' around.

JOHNNY

(Exaggerated)

Sorry.

(To Sara)

You were saying about Jon.

SARA

I wasn't saying anything.

JOHNNY

I remember always seeing the two of you together. It must be nice to be that close to someone.

SARA

We've been best friends since we were little. Sunday school, piano lessons, braces. We went through it all together. Our houses were even right next door to each other. We'd peek through cracks in the fence or throw mud pies over like Battleship. It was great.

JOHNNY

I used to think you were his girlfriend.

SARA

Oh gosh. No. There was never anything between us but a fence.

JACKIE

And dating Mark threw up a bigger, fatter fence.

SARA

Yeah. Jon was always over-protective of me.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

Well a great job he did, letting that bastard break your heart.

SARA

It's not like he had much of a say in the matter. He left for Nashville a couple of months after we started dating.

JOHNNY

Jon skipped town just so he didn't have to watch you date some other guy? Sounds like more than brotherly love to me.

SARA

What?

JACKIE

Jon, hurry up with that keyboard.

Jon enters with his keyboard and plugs it in

JON

I had to work around a stationary bike and my grandma's collection of vintage cat figurines to get this thing down, but I found it.

(Holding out the keyboard stand)

Can you get this?

SARA

Sure.

Jackie grabs Johnny by the arm.

JACKIE

You're pushing, kid.

JOHNNY

I'm planting seeds.

JACKIE

Boy I am telling you, if that girl doesn't have a garden in her head by now, the soil ain't fertile.

JOHNNY

We'll see.

Jon and Sara finish setting up the keyboard. Sara plays.

JON

You've been practicing since I left.

(CONTINUED)

SARA

I've got a couple of songs if you want to hear them.

Jon gestures to the keyboard

Okay, feel free to jump in or offer any criticism.

Sara plays Fairytale Song. Jackie joins in again as the chorus. As Jon picks up on the song, he takes over the piano. Sara gets up and starts acting out the song with Jackie and Johnny.

JON

That's really fun.

SARA

I was hoping you'd like it.

JON

I'm almost jealous.

SARA

I have an idea.

JON

Sounds ominous.

SARA

We should write together.

JON

Together.

SARA

Yeah. And if it goes well we can take our music to Nashville together.

JON

No thanks. I'm a solo act.

SARA

At least think about it.

JON

I don't have to. My music is mine.

SARA

I'm not trying to steal your thunder. I think we could make good music together.

JON

My music is fine. I don't think more songs about princesses is gonna help me get a record deal.

JACKIE

Ooh, child.

SARA

I'm just as talented as you are.

JON

You wrote a couple of songs and now you think you're a pro. You haven't been out there in the real world.

JOHNNY

Hey, come on buddy.

SARA

If you think you don't need my help, that's fine. You don't have to be an ass.

JON

Fine. I don't need your help.

SARA

This isn't about helping you.

JON

So you're in it for yourself.

SARA

Just hear me out.

JON

I'm not gonna listen to you tell me I'm not good enough to make it on my own.

SARA

Fine. You don't need my help. You don't need my friendship. I guess you don't need me at all.

JON

Maybe I don't.

JACKIE

That's enough.

SARA

Thank you.

JACKIE

Don't you think you're off the hook. I'm going to take you home, and we are all going to think about what we've said. Do I make myself clear?

No one replies.
I said do I make myself clear?

JON AND SARA

Yes ma'am.

JOHNNY

Yes ma'am.

Everyone looks at Johnny.
Sorry, I felt left out.

JACKIE

Come on Sara.

SARA

I'm sorry, Jon.

JON
(Almost a whisper)

Yeah.

Sara and Jackie exit.

JOHNNY

You're really not gonna take her up on that.

JON

She wants to hijack my music.

JOHNNY

She wants to make beautiful music with you.

JON

You say that like she's interested in me.

JOHNNY

She could be.

JON

Sara's my closest friend.

JOHNNY

Some friend you were tonight.

JON

Things just got out of control.

JOHNNY

Some might call that passion. I'm gonna get started cleaning
or we'll be here till midnight.

(CONTINUED)

Johnny exits to the kitchen. Jon goes and sits at the piano. He plays Pining for Sara Song. Sara appears. She wanders around the diner. She enters and exits through every door, not real. Jon gets up from the piano. The music continues to play. He chases her. He can't catch her. He pauses at the piano, out of breath. She slowly approaches him. They dance for a bit. She separates from him near the end of the song and backs away. She pauses at the front door, then turns and exits. The song ends. He stands there breathless. Johnny pops up in the kitchen window.

I knew it. You're so into her.

JON

Not cool man.

JOHNNY

Be glad I heard it. You two are both too thick to see what's going on.

JON

There's nothing going on.

JOHNNY

She wants to go to Nashville with you. You're writing romantic songs about her.

JON

I doubt it. She's always been desperate to get out of this town. I'm just her ticket.

JOHNNY

You're more than that.

JON

I can't even think about going there.

JOHNNY

Think about? Dude you just sang a freaking ballad about how you can't sleep, can't eat because of how in love you are.

JON

I wrote that in high school. There were a lot of hormones in my system. I'd imagine you're familiar.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Look at it this way. She wants to write songs with you and potentially go to Nashville with you. This is an opportunity to lay some ground work, see if she feels the same way you do. If I were you, and in love with Sara--

JON

Love is a strong word

JOHNNY

If I were in love with Sara, I would take this. If nothing else you get to spend the last three months you have with her being as close as possible.

JON

I don't think anyone else is coming in tonight. You should head home.

JOHNNY

Think about it.

JON

Johnny, I know what I'm doing.

Johnny lingers.

Goodnight.

JOHNNY

'Night.

Johnny exits. Jon sits back down at the piano. He plays a new song.

JON

(Sung)

One of these days.

Changes chord.

One of these days.

Jon shakes his head, changes chords again.

One--

Jon grunts in frustration. He tries one more time

One of these days

Something's gotta change

Can't keep walking around like I'm okay

He opens his notebook to write down what he just played. Angie enters.

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE

(Frazzled)

Hey baby, have you seen my red dress with the frills upstairs in your closet?

JON

There's a lot of your stuff up there.

ANGIE

I'll go look for myself.

Angie goes upstairs. Jon turns back to writing. He can't remember what he played.

JON

Dammit.

He tries a few chords, but they don't work. He turns off the keyboard and takes his notepad to a table to work on lyrics.

JON

One of these days, somethings gotta change. I can't keep walking around like I'm okay. Wash away the days. Wash away the pain.

Jon mutters and hums. He writes things down, then scratches them out. Angie comes back downstairs wearing her red dress.

ANGIE

What do you think? I feel like I'm about to pop out of it ten different ways.

JON

It looks fine Mom.

ANGIE

I'm not going for fine. I'm going for fabulous.

JON

It's fabulous, Mom.

Jon focuses on his notebook.

ANGIE

I have a date. I was at Frank's Hardware Store yesterday to get light bulbs. They make so many kinds these days. I had been standing there for fifteen minutes when Frank came over to help, and he lays this line on me about how there seemed

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE (cont'd)
to be some wattage between us. You know normally I wouldn't go for that sort of thing, but I thought what the hell, I haven't been on a date in fifteen years.

JON
Real romantic Mom. Don't be late.

Angie uses a napkin holder as a mirror to check her hair.

ANGIE
I'm already late as it is.

Angie takes Jon's notebook.
You should be doing a little more working and a little less writing. That trash isn't gonna take itself out.

JON
Hey.

ANGIE
I'll see you tomorrow.

Angie exits. She leaves her clutch on a table.

Jon throws his pencil down. He grabs a bag of trash. As soon as he flings it over his shoulder it rips open and trash flies everywhere. He knocks a chair over.

JON
Dammit.

Deep breath. He snatches up loose pieces of trash.
I gotta get out of here. Just three months.

He looks at the door.
Three short months.

He pulls out his cellphone. Dials.
Hey, Sara. I've been thinking.
(Long beat)

SARA
Well?

JON
Just checking that you know we need a dozen poppy seed muffins for tomorrow.

SARA

I bring a dozen poppy seed every morning.

JON

Okay, great then we should be all squared--

Angie enters.

ANGIE

Forgot my purse. This place is a mess. We'll talk about it when I get back.

SARA

Are you still there?

JON

I'm still here. And I'm in. Let's do it.

Lights down.

For Better or Worse

A normal morning in the diner. Angie works the counter. Jon and Sara sit at a table. Customers dine.

SARA

I want us both to be protected.

JON

It's not like I'm going to steal your music.

SARA

Who says I'm not going to steal yours?

(Beat)

Look, I think it's smart to lay down some ground rules and expectations if we're going to work together. That's all. Rule number one: the only way the partnership gets dissolved is if both of us say so.

JON

That's ridiculous. What if it's not working?

SARA

Then we'll both know it. But it's going to be hard. We're going to have to push each other, and I don't want you running when it gets hard.

JON

You make it sound so intense.

(CONTINUED)

SARA

Well that's my only rule, so I figured I had to make it a good one.

JON

It's a pretty big one.

SARA

And this right here is why I need it. I need to be able to trust that you won't bail on me.

ANGIE

Jon, Fred's not coming in. I need a hand in the kitchen.

JON

Give me some time to think about it. I'm starting to second guess this whole thing.

SARA

Which is why we need this agreement. You can't just give up.

ANGIE

An agreement?

SARA

Jon agreed to let me be his musical partner. We're just working out the details.

Angie pushes Jon back down in his seat and pulls up a chair.

ANGIE

Where are you writing this down?

SARA

Oh we--

ANGIE

You always want to write these things down. I used to have a partner when I first opened the diner. He tried to sell it out from under me, the bastard. What he didn't know was that according to our partnership agreement, I technically owned the whole diner. He just owned the name. And that's how The Eagle Diner became The Eden.

JON

Damn.

ANGIE

Oh, I knew he was a crook from the start. I just had to be a smarter crook.

(CONTINUED)

SARA

Bad-ass.

ANGIE

So now I have to ask. Are you a crook?

SARA

Angie, you've known me all my life.

ANGIE

You're right. It's probably this one we have to worry about.

JON

Don't worry, I don't think your diabolical mind got passed down.

ANGIE

Even so, let's write up a few things so poor Sara isn't stuck with you when things start to go downhill.

JON

Wait a sec.

SARA

Neither of us gets out unless both of us want to. It's the only way we'll be able to push each other.

JON

Obviously that's not going to work. Sorry.

Jon starts to stand up, but Angie pushes him back down.

ANGIE

That's ballsy.

(Beat)

I'm sold. Now just a few more terms. Jon is the headliner. He's been doing this longer, and he got the gig in Nashville, so all profits split 60/40.

SARA

Fair. For the first two years. After that, it's 50/50.

JON

Two years is a long time.

ANGIE

Fair. No one goes solo with any of the songs you write while you're partners.

SARA

Don't worry, Jon doesn't want to steal my music.

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE

Both partners have to contribute equally. Anything that needs paying gets split evenly, at least until there's some money in the partnership.

JON

Guys.

SARA

That would be best.

JON

Guys.

ANGIE

What, sweetie?

JON

I have a condition.

Sara looks at Angie, who nods approval.

SARA

Go ahead.

JON

If we don't win in Nashville, the partnership is over.

SARA

That's harsh.

JON

It makes sense. If we lose there we know we don't pass muster.

SARA

We can still be good without winning.

JON

It's the only way I'm signing this.

SARA

Fine. I have my agreement. You have your out.

ANGIE

It would be better typed, but it'll do. Quick, sign before he changes his mind.

Sara signs. She pushes the piece of paper toward Jon. He pauses, looks at it, looks at Sara, and signs.

Now if you don't mind, I have a diner to run.

(CONTINUED)

Angie exits to the kitchen. Sara goes to the counter and grabs hold of a towel that covers something up.

SARA

Now that the agreement is all ironed out, it's time we start fundraising. Jackie and I were talking about it last night, and we came up with a pretty great idea.

JON

What's under the towel?

SARA

The great thing about it is that it isn't just a money thing. It's also gonna help unlock our creativity. Loosen us up.

JON

Sara.

SARA

It's gonna work out really great. I know it.

JON

Show me what's under the towel.

SARA

I'm going to, but I feel like you're not being very open to the idea --

Jon rips the towel off an overly decorated tip jar.

JON

Wow.

SARA

Yes "wow."

JON

A tip jar.

SARA

Not just any tip jar. A musical tip jar.

JON

A tip jar that plays music.

SARA

Not quite.

(CONTINUED)

Sara pulls a guitar out from behind the counter and hands it to Jon.
Jon stares at the guitar and Sara.

Come on. It'll be fun.

JON

You want me to play my music for tips. In my own diner.

SARA

Not at all. New songs.

JON

I don't have any new songs.

SARA

That's what makes these songs new.

JON

"These songs."

Sara sighs.

SARA

When someone puts money in the jar, we're going to make up a song for them on the spot. No thinking, no writing, just music.

JON

This is the most embarrassing thing I've ever done.

SARA

In sixth grade you got up in front of the class and read a poem about "our changing bodies."

JON

Mrs. Maddox made me.

SARA

Welcome to class.

Sara straps the guitar to Jon.

JON

I'm not in sixth grade.

SARA

Nope. You're a grown man. Don't let people judge you for your art.

JON

This isn't art. This is--

A customer puts money in the jar and stares at Jon. Jon stares at the customer, then turns to Sara.

SARA

She's waiting.

Jon turns reluctantly back to the customer.

JON

(Sung)

Thank you for your order of scrambled eggs and waffles.

We will do our very best to make sure they're not awful.

The diner continues to stare in expectation. Sara takes the guitar from Jon.

SARA

(Sung)

You woke up today

And you thought, "Hey,

What could be finer

Than breakfast at the diner?"

Some eggs, maybe bacon.

No matter what, you'll be makin'

The greatest decision

When you--

Sara falters.

JON

-- eat from our kitchen

JON AND SARA

So have yourself a dinerific day.

The customer applauds and exits.

SARA

Alright. That's five bucks. I think we've got ninety-nine more where those came from.

JON

I'll go upstairs and grab the keyboard. No reason we should have to take turns with the guitar.

Sara looks stunned as Jon leaves, then she breaks into a happy dance. Lights down.

Brainstorming

Another late night at the diner. Jackie sweeps. Johnny wipes down the counter. Jon brings his keyboard downstairs as Angie leaves.

ANGIE

Jon, I'm leaving. Make sure Jackie and Johnny close up right. I was checking the kitchen today, and nobody's been sweeping under the flat top.

JON

Got it, Mom.

ANGIE

I don't want you getting distracted.

JON

Go home, Mom. I've got it covered.

ANGIE

Make sure you use the closing checklist. We have it for a reason.

JON

Sara and I will take a break when they're done, and I will check under the flat top.

ANGIE

And the checklist.

JON

The whole checklist. Now go.

ANGIE

Jackie, keep him in check.

JACKIE

I'll channel my inner Angie, best I can. Good night.

Sara enters.

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE

(To Sara)

Make sure he checks under the flat top.

SARA

And the milkshake machine if I can swing it.

Angie Exits the Diner.

JON

Ignore her. I thought we'd work down here, so I went ahead and got the piano down.

SARA

I thought we would work up in your apartment. We don't want to distract Jackie and Johnny.

JON

We're not distracting them.

JOHNNY

Actually--

JACKIE

Not at all. You two do your thing.

JOHNNY

Although a little privacy could be nice.

Jackie knocks Johnny with her broom.

JOHNNY

(Pained)

I mean, "please don't leave." Excuse me.

Johnny and Jackie exit to the back.

JON

Let's get to work. I have a melody I've been playing with, but I'm having trouble with the words. The tip jar is great, but now everything I write is about breakfast food.

SARA

I have a whole notebook full of lyric ideas we could look through.

JON

You should probably listen to the song first.

SARA

Of course.

(CONTINUED)

Jon takes a seat at the keyboard.

JON

I had a pretty specific direction in mind. If you listen to it you'll hear--

SARA

Just let her rip. I can follow.

JON

It starts off with a simple melody.

Jon plays A Song About a Boy/Girl

(Sung)

SARA

There was a girl who dreamt of being a star
She'd work hard and writes songs and get real far
But life tends to get in the way
She got caught up in the day-to-day
Now she's working in a bakery
Wondering what ever happened to her dream

JON

(Spoken)

That's good, but how about

(Sung)

There was a boy who needed to be on stage
He sang and practiced piano day after day
But life tends to get in the way
The world tells you "No son, not today"
Now he's stuck behind a diner counter
Watching his dream slip away by the hour

SARA

That girl is a fighter inside
She's not gonna let her dream slip by

JON

That boy knows he's got what it takes to succeed
He's gonna go out and get his dream

(CONTINUED)

But life tends to get in the way
Of a girl
Of a boy
Getting out
Finding joy
Finding something to get him through each dinerific day
To move out, to move up, to be seen, to get unstuck
To break open what she buried deep down inside
The day when she buried her life's dream alive
That boy
That girl's
Gonna take on the world
Gonna show them that though life tends to get in the way
That she's got the passion
That he's got the brains
That she won't stop fighting
That he's taking the stage
That boy
No, that girl
No, that boy

(CONTINUED)

No, that girl

SARA

Gets out

JON

Takes the stage

Moves out

SARA

Gets away

Her dreams will come true

JON

You don't think his will too

SARA

This song's not about you

But sure

The boy can do it too
(End Song)

Johnny pops out from the kitchen
with a plate of fries.

JOHNNY

Guys, that was awesome.

JON

You better have swept under the flat top.

Jon begins to pack up the keyboard.

SARA

We're not done.

JON

This isn't going to work if we can't agree on what our songs
should even be about.

SARA

We can't agree if we don't try.

JOHNNY

Maybe it's too close to home.

SARA

It's music. It should be something personal.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

What I'm saying is that y'all work together fine when you're singing about eggs and bacon. So work your way up to the really personal stuff. Sing about somebody else's life first.

JON

Alright, tell us about yours.

SARA

Be our muse.

JOHNNY

I spend all my spare time here. You can't write about me.

SARA

That's what's happening on the outside. What's inside is what's worth writing about.

JOHNNY

I oughtta get back to cleaning. That flat top isn't gonna sweep under itself.

Jackie enters with a clipboard.

JACKIE

Checklist is done. Everything's ready to go for the morning shift. I'm gone.

SARA

Wait a minute. Johnny was about to spill his guts so we can write about them.

JACKIE

Torturing the kid. I'm in.

Jackie sets her purse down and
pulls up a chair.

Ooh, tell them about your girlfriend.

JOHNNY

Jackie.

JON

I didn't know you had a girlfriend.

JOHNNY

I don't.

JACKIE

Her name is all over your notebook, unless they added Rebecca to the periodic table of elements.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

She's a girl in my class.

SARA

Aw, Johnny's got a crush.

JOHNNY

More than a crush. I've been in love with her since kindergarten.

SARA

You should ask her out.

JOHNNY

It's not that simple, not with someone you've known your whole life. Right, Jon?

JON

Let's focus. Think about how we can turn this into a song.

SARA

It should be a proclamation of love.

JACKIE

He should sing it to her.

SARA

He could do it here, at the diner.

JOHNNY

Whoa, whoa, whoa.

SARA

We could have a whole concert, raise money for the contest, then Johnny proclaims his love in front of the town. She'll love it.

Sara scribbles in her notebook.

JACKIE

He plays electric guitar, so throw some of that in there.

JOHNNY

Guys.

JON

That'll be great. Chicks dig a good guitar solo.

JACKIE

Make sure it's not too sweet. He's already lacking in the backbone department.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Hey.

SARA

I think we've got enough to go on for now.

JOHNNY

But.

JACKIE

Come on, kid. Let's let them work.

Jackie pulls a stupefied Johnny out of the diner.

JON

Grab yourself a drink. I'm gonna go upstairs and get my electric.

SARA

Let's move upstairs. Your upright is so much better than the keyboard.

JON

To be honest, it's not company-ready. My stuff is still everywhere from the move.

SARA

I'll give you two minutes, then I'm coming up, ready or not.

JON

You're ridiculous. I'm not gonna--

SARA

One fifty-nine, one-fifty eight--

JON

Seriously.

SARA

I can go up now if you want

Sara heads toward the stairs.

JON

Wait. Fine. Gimme two minutes.

SARA

You're down to a minute forty-five.

Jon groans in frustration, runs upstairs, and cleans. Sara leans against the wall at the foot of the staircase.

(CONTINUED)

SARA

I'm excited. It's been years since I've seen the apartment. Your mom was so protective of it once she starting using it as a studio.

JON

Her painting phase. I don't know what was worse, that or her sculpting phase.

SARA

Her jam making phase was my favorite. Her boysenberry jam on one of my dad's fresh croissants. Mmm.

Jon pulls a painting out from under the bed.

JON

Hey, here's one from her blue period.

He tosses the painting down the stairs. Sara picks it up.

SARA

You can really see the pain. Or is that strawberry jam? This would go perfectly right here.

She pulls a clock off the wall and hangs up the painting. She checks her watch.

You've got thirty seconds.

JON

You never realize how much crap you have until someone might see it.

SARA

Don't feel like you need to hide Teddy from me. I know he's up there hiding under your pillow anyway.

Jon pulls a teddy bear out from under a pillow and puts him in the hamper under a shirt.

Ten seconds.

Jon pushes boxes from the piano's side of the room over to the bed.

Nine, eight...

He lifts an overflowing box and carries it over.

Seven, six, five...

Jon hoists the box. A picture falls out. Sara peeks up the staircase.

(CONTINUED)

Four, three...

Jon runs to grab a stack of papers off the piano and stuffs them in a box by the bed. He misses the picture he dropped.

Two, one. Ready or not, here I come.

JON

Pretty good for two minutes.

SARA

Your mother would be so proud.

Sara picks up the picture.

Henry.

JON

Shoot. Here, I'll put it back in the box.

SARA

You can't stuff your dad in a box. Let the man breathe.

JON

Sara, come on.

SARA

Sorry. You should leave it out, though. He might inspire you.

JON

Or remind me of what I can't do.

SARA

You can't mean that.

JON

He's a lot to measure up to. He was a leader, wrote songs, provided for his family, and came to every little league game. I can't be him.

SARA

You can try.

(Beat)

Here, put him on the piano, and he can tell you when a song you're writing is good or not. Kind of like a WWJD for music.

JON

You don't give up.

It's part of my charm.

SARA

Sara crosses to the hamper and unveils Teddy
Right, Teddy? Plug in that electric. We've got a song to write.

Lights down.

The Concert

Lights up on the diner, now decked out with a mini stage with a mic and Jon's keyboard. Tables are outfitted with decorations and balloons. The lights are dimmed to create atmosphere. The diner is filled with customers. Jon finishes a song. Applause.

JON

Thank you guys. I'm going to go ahead and take a break in my set, but when I come back I'll introduce a very special guest to the stage.

Jon crosses to the counter where Sara and Jackie sit.

What a great turnout.

SARA

It looks like half the town is here.

JACKIE

This crowd is gonna make me sweat if you don't turn the air conditioning up, and I am not a pretty sweater.

JON

I just turned it as cold as it will go.

SARA

Oh no.

Jon stands on a crate and holds his hand up to a vent in the wall.

JON

Nothing.

Jackie fans her armpits.

JACKIE
Here it comes.

Johnny enters from the kitchen dressed up. He's clearly been sweating.

JOHNNY
Guys, I don't think I can do this. I'm pitting out. Jackie, are you nervous too?

Jackie blots herself with napkins.

JACKIE
The A/C is out kid. We're all about to be pitting out.

SARA
At least we'll all be in the same boat.

JON
Yeah, but who's going to hang around for the rest of the show in this heat?

SARA
We'll switch the drink specials to lemonade and iced coffee.

JACKIE
Good idea. I'll go get some ice.

Jackie exits to the kitchen.

JOHNNY
Guys.

JON
It's gonna be fine Johnny, just calm down.

JOHNNY
But--

SARA
You're gonna knock her socks off.

JOHNNY
Oh, are her socks here? Because she isn't.

SARA
I thought you said you'd make sure she showed up.

JOHNNY
I did. She said it sounded like a lot of fun and to give her the details when I knew what night it would be.

(CONTINUED)

JON
And you gave her the details.

JOHNNY
(Pathetically)
Aw man.

Johnny slumps over on the counter.

MRS. DIAMOND
Excuse me dears, is the next act coming up soon? It's a tad warm in here, and I need to get home to Meemaw Wrinkles.

JON
Wow, that's amazing that your grandmother is still alive.

MRS. DIAMOND
No, Meemaw Wrinkles is my hairless sphynx. She gets angry when I'm out late.

SARA
Johnny here is gonna be ready in just a second. In the meantime we can get you an iced coffee or lemonade.

MRS. DIAMOND
A lemonade sounds lovely, dear.
(Looks around to see if anyone is listening)
And throw in a couple of shots of vodka if it's handy.

SARA
(Shocked)
Mrs. Diamond.

JON
We'll see what we can do.

MRS. DIAMOND
Thank you, handsome.

Mrs. Diamond returns to her seat as Jackie returns with a tray of lemonade and iced coffee.

JACKIE
Operation "chill" is underway.

SARA
Thank you so much Jackie. Just start giving them away before people melt. We need to figure out how to get Rebecca here.

JACKIE

You set up a grand romantic gesture, but you forgot the girl. Way to go, player.

Jackie gives Johnny, who is still face down on the counter, a slap on the back, and he whimpers.

Alright, let's cool these folks down.

JON

Hold on a sec.

Jon pulls out a flask and pours some in a glass of lemonade.

That one's Mrs. Diamond's.

Jackie and Sara stare at him. They wait for an explanation.

I get nervous too, okay.

Jackie serves drinks.

I'm gonna go ahead and do a sound check on the electric. If she shows up we want to be ready.

Jon plugs in an electric guitar and does a sound check. It's way too loud.

(Into the mic)

Sorry.

(Loud feedback)

As Jon struggles to get the feedback under control, Rebecca enters. A girl stands up and waves her over.

SARA

Johnny, look.

Johnny lifts his head from the counter, then bolts up.

JOHNNY

That's her.

SARA

Okay, let's go get ready.

Johnny meets Jon at the mic and gets ready to perform. Sara catches Jackie's attention, then indicates toward Rebecca before she sits at the piano. Jackie walks to Rebecca to serve her a drink.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

How you doin', sweetheart; something to drink?

REBECCA

Oh, thanks.

JACKIE

Rebecca, right?

REBECCA

Um, yeah. Do you know my parents?

JACKIE

Do I look like I'm old enough to-- Nevermind. Johnny's just talked a lot about you is all.

REBECCA

I don't know who Johnny is.

JACKIE

You go to school with him.

REBECCA

Doesn't ring any bells.

JACKIE

Oh no. Nice meeting you.

Jackie runs to the counter and puts her tray down. She begins to wave her arms to tell them to stop the song, but the lights dim and the music starts as Jon introduces Johnny.

JON

Alright everybody, it's time to welcome our next entertainer to the stage. Our regulars will recognize him as a bus-boy but tonight he is going to sing his heart out to you, one girl in particular. Take it away Johnny.

JOHNNY

I'd like to dedicate this song to Rebecca Holtz. You're the first thing I see when I walk in the room.

Johnny sings Ballad to Rebecca. Jon plays the piano. Johnny plays electric guitar. When the song is over he goes to stand by Sara. By this point, Johnny has brought Rebecca to the front of the stage by her hand.

So what do you say? Will you go out with me?

(CONTINUED)

REBECCA

Oh my god.

(Beat)

What a freak. Ruby let's get out of here.

The whole diner sits in awkward silence as the two girls leave. Johnny stands frozen, mouth agape. Jon moves him out from in front of the mic.

JON

Well folks, I think with that, we're gonna call it an evening. Thanks for coming and don't forget to tip the waitress.

Diners begin to shuffle out. Sara hugs Johnny.

SARA

I'm so sorry, Johnny.

JON

I didn't see that coming.

JOHNNY

I-- I--

JACKIE

What were you thinking?

SARA

Jackie.

JACKIE

That girl didn't even know your name, you damn fool. That is not how you introduce yourself.

JOHNNY

I thought-- I thought that--

JACKIE

You'd get up there and make a fool of yourself, and she would just fall into your arms. That's not how it works, Cupid.

JON

She really had no idea who you are? I thought you said you'd been in school together your whole lives.

JOHNNY

I think I'm going to go sit in the freezer now. Goodnight.

(CONTINUED)

Johnny exits to the kitchen, still
in shock.

JACKIE

I'll go make sure he doesn't give himself frostbite.

SARA

That went well.

JON

Let's get this mess cleaned up.

Jon and Sara disassemble equipment
in silence. Sara breaks the
silence.

SARA

The crowd really enjoyed your set. I hadn't heard some of
those songs. They're really good.

JON

I worked hard while I was on the road. I've come a long way
since I left.

SARA

I can tell.

(Long pause)

The song we wrote for Johnny was good. Really good.

JON

I know.

SARA

It wasn't our fault that Rebecca turned him down.

JON

(Curtly)

I know.

SARA

Okay. It's just that you seem upset about something out of
nowhere.

JON

I'm not. I'm just tired.

(Another long pause)

SARA

It was really good, though.

JON

I get it, okay. You can shut up about your song.

(CONTINUED)

SARA
My song? Jon, it's yours too.

JON
It doesn't feel that way.

SARA
We wrote it together. The music, the lyrics, all of it. How is it mine any more than yours?

JON
It just isn't. It isn't mine. It isn't me.

SARA
Well it was our first song together. We'll work on it. We'll get better at blending our voices.

JON
We should just call it quits. You said it yourself, my music is getting better. I can come up with songs of my own before the competition.

SARA
You're calling it off. Just like that.

JON
I'm not made to be a duo, Sara. I can't work under someone else.

SARA
You're not working under someone else. You're working with me.

JON
But I don't need your help.

SARA
We agreed this was a partnership. I don't understand.

JON
Maybe it's better if you don't.

Jon turns to continue to break down equipment. Sara moves to Jon and puts her hand on his shoulder.

SARA
Jon talk to me.
(Long pause)

JON
If I succeed--

When. SARA

JON
When I succeed, I want it to be on my own merits.

SARA
You can still do that with us as partners.

Jon turns around so he and Sara are face to face. Johnny and Jackie poke their heads up and peer from the kitchen window.

JON
You really want go to Nashville with me.

SARA
Yes.

JON
Me.

SARA
Yes.

Jon kisses Sara. She is caught off guard, but settles into the kiss. Spotlight down. Intermission.

ACT 2Kisses & Consequences

It's daytime in the diner. The usual diners are there, including Mrs. Diamond. Manny, Angie, Jackie, and Johnny all work. Jon comes downstairs from the apartment and all attention is on him. He grabs a mug and fills it with coffee. He sits at the counter.

JACKIE

Well lookie there. The man finally shows his face.

MANNY

You're the talk of the town, brother.

JOHNNY

I knew you could do it.

JON

Slow down. I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS. DIAMOND

They told me all about it. I think it's the sweetest thing. Takes me back to the days when my Robert and I were young lovers. I played hard to get, but he got me. Just goes to show sometimes you gotta grab the bull by its horns.

JON

You saw the kiss.

JOHNNY

Young love is beautiful. Don't you think, Jackie?

JACKIE

Oh hush. You'll get yours. Let Jon talk.

MANNY

C'mon man, we gotta know what happened.
(Embarrassed, then overly manly)
I mean, you know, if you got any.

JON

At least let me finish my coffee first.

ANGIE

Now, now everybody. Give him some space. This is a big step he's taken. My little boy finally pulled his head out of the dirt and realized the love of his life's been staring him in the face since he was in diapers.

(CONTINUED)

JON

Mom--

ANGIE

No, you listen to me son. For the first time in your life you're dating the right girl. I want you to know that as hard as it will be, I'm willing to give away my baby if I know he's going to the right woman. That's why I wanted you to have my mother's engagement ring to--

Jon jumps off his stool.

JON

Mom. Everybody. It was just a kiss. Don't get me wrong, I was the happiest I've been in my entire life--

JOHNNY

Chase that feeling.

JON

No, it was the happiest I've been in my entire life, but I didn't think about how I would feel after. I'm terrified.

The door chimes. Sara enters. All heads turn. Every eye is on her. The silence swells as she sees everyone looking at her.

SARA

Jackie, I need to talk to you. Privately.

JACKIE

Of course sweetie. Let's go upstairs. I'm sure Jon won't mind.

Jackie and Sara go upstairs into the apartment.

JOHNNY

Everyone back to work. No need to worry.

Angie and Manny glare at Johnny.

ANGIE

Excuse me.

JOHNNY

Angie, a word.

Johnny motions for Manny to go back to the kitchen. He goes, disgruntled.

Your son is having a crisis. I think what he needs right now is advice from someone who knows a thing or two about love.

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE

And you think that's you, after what happened last night.

JOHNNY

Angie, I consider myself somewhat of a Cupid in training. Last night's incident was unfortunate, but it's not ours to find love.

ANGIE

A Cupid. Are you-- Do you-- You know what, I have a diner to run.

Angie walks away from Johnny.
Johnny turns back to Jon.
The lights come up on Sara and Jackie in the apartment.

JOHNNY

We were at "terrified."

JON

I feel like I jumped off a cliff last night, and I'm still falling.

SARA

It feels so surreal.

JACKIE

It's not like it came out of the blue, Sara.

JOHNNY

What did you expect. It's called falling in love.

JON

It's a figure of speech. I didn't know it would be so literal.

JACKIE

Start from the beginning, with what happened last night after the kiss.

JOHNNY

Back up. Tell me what happened before she left.

SARA

It all happened so fast. It's a blur.

JON

She was almost too calm.

SARA

He walked me out of the diner. Then, well, I said "thank you."

(CONTINUED)

JON

She said "thank you."

Jackie and Johnny groan.

JACKIE

Please tell me that isn't all.

JON

She still gave me a hug goodbye.

SARA

We hugged, and I got out of there as fast as I could.

JOHNNY

I'm surprised she didn't talk to Jackie sooner.

JACKIE

I tried calling, but you didn't answer.

SARA

I was up all night looking at old photo albums. He's been there my whole life. He could have felt this way all along and never told me.

JON

I'm so stupid. I don't even know how she feels.

SARA

I feel like an idiot. I can't think straight.

JON

I freaked her out. She's hiding up in my apartment trying to figure out how to let me down easy.

JACKIE

You can't talk to him until you know how you feel. You don't want to complicate things.

JOHNNY

You need to talk to her before you jump to conclusions. She could be up there planning your future together.

SARA

Oh my god, he's probably already planned our whole future. He's had twenty-something years to think about it.

JACKIE

Focus. You need to figure out how you feel, because eventually that boy is gonna want to use his apartment, and I don't think you're ready for pillow talk.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

I'm sure they'll be down any minute, then you can get all the answers you need.

Sara pulls out a letter.

SARA

When I was going through those albums, I found this letter. It was from our first summer apart. Jon was at camp, and I was working at the bakery with my dad.

JON

I think my answer has been staring me in the face my whole life.

SARA

It said the usual stuff. "Camp's been great." "The food sucks." "Wish you were here."

JON

If she wanted me, we would have been together a long time ago.

SARA

And I got to the bottom where he signed his name. It said "Love, Jon."

JOHNNY

It's not like you told her you love her.

SARA

It took me back to that day, standing in the bakery, reading that letter. It was the first time I had ever heard that word from Jon. "Love." It made me feel warm.

JON

But she would have felt it.

SARA

I want to feel that again.

JACKIE

So you've decided.

Sara nods. Jackie squeals and hugs her. Lights down in the apartment.

JON

That's it. I'm gonna tell her it was all a big mistake, and she can forget the whole thing ever happened.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Jon, you love this woman.

JON

Yes, and for years I was able to keep that love intact by keeping it hidden deep, deep down.

JOHNNY

Don't wuss out now. You finally have a chance to get what you spent all those years peeking through the fence at.

JON

I don't know.

Johnny groans and pulls at his hair.

JOHNNY

I swear, if I don't get my bow and arrow for this.

Sara and Jackie enter.

SARA

Jon.

Jon and Johnny jump.

A word.

JOHNNY

Do not screw this up, man.

Jon and Sara move to the staircase. Jackie joins Johnny behind the counter, and they attempt to eavesdrop.

SARA

I guess what I need to tell you is--

JON

Don't worry about it. I know now it was stupid. I got caught up in the moment and--

SARA

Jon.

JON

You just want a musical partner, not a boyfriend. I get that.

SARA

Jon.

(CONTINUED)

JON

You just got out of a long relationship, and I would hate to take advantage of any vulnerability you're feeling, and--

SARA

Jon.

Jon meets Sara's gaze. He sees the letter clutched to her chest and the look in her eyes he's waited for all his life.

Have dinner with me tonight.

JON

I--

Mark enters.

MARK

Sara, I've been looking all over for you.

SARA

(Surprised)

Mark.

MARK

I'd like to talk to you. Are you busy?

Sara doesn't take her eyes off Mark.

SARA

I'm--

JON

She's free for dinner.

Jon storms upstairs.

Lights down.

Mark the Jerk

Lights up. Daytime. The diner does normal business. Jon, Jackie, and Johnny work in the dining room and behind the counter. Jackie is in the middle of a story.

JACKIE

So after he dumps her on the side of the road, Clara takes her heels off and starts walking home. Then, Mr. O'Reilly, God knows what he was doing driving around at that hour, pulls over and tries to pick her up.

(CONTINUED)

She doesn't get the reaction she expected from Jon or Johnny.
Like, "pick her up," pick her up.

It still doesn't register.
He thought she was a hooker.

JOHNNY
She's not?

Sara enters. Jon sees her and goes behind the counter. He fiddles with the coffee maker.

SARA
Jon, you can't keep dodging my calls.

Jon doesn't turn around.
Neither of us quits unless we both do. You agreed.

JON
I didn't agree to this. To him.

SARA
He's beside the point.

JON
I've got to get a new bag from the back.

SARA
We're not back together.

JON
Go home, Sara.

Sara comes around the counter and blocks his way to the kitchen.

SARA
Talk to me.
(Beat)

JON
You can't be behind the counter.

SARA
We can go wherever you want.

JON
Sit over there. I'll be out in a sec.

Jon gestures to a stool at the end of the counter and exits to the kitchen. Sara sits. Mark enters. He rushes to Sara.

SARA

Mark, please go away.

MARK

But you didn't give me an answer.

SARA

I need space.

MARK

To think, I know but--

Jon enters from the kitchen and SLAMS a bag of coffee on the counter. He shakes his head at Sara.

Buddy, we're having a conversation here.

JON

Of course, talk all you want.

MARK

Hold up a sec. I heard around town you do a pretty mean singing waiter bit. Show me.

JON

For tipping customers only.

MARK

I'll take a cup of coffee.

Jon throws a mug on the counter in front of Mark and splashes some coffee into it.

Great service.

Mark drops a dollar in the tip jar.

SARA

Mark, stop.

JON

It's fine. Tipping customers deserve their song.

(Sung)

Some men are just born leaders

Gods of unending talent, charm, and good looks

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JON (cont'd)

Some guys have brains, tenacity, drive
And this guy's a one for the books
For when God mixed him up, spun him out of the ether
He opened his cabinet of good things to give
He surveyed all the qualities one man could have
Pondered what sort of life this new man could live
He usually gives men one or two talents
Be the man witty, wise, or quick
But for this man he picked up all of the talents
And tossed them out the window 'cause this guy's a dick
He's got foul breath
I've heard he snores
He's dumb as a brick
He belongs outdoors.
He's ugly. He's lazy. No sense of direction.
If I had to guess, bet he can't hold an--

SARA

(Spoken)

Jon.

JON

(Sung)

In the grand scheme of things it doesn't matter
He doesn't care if he ruins your day
He doesn't seem to care he's getting fatter
He'll take your hopes and dreams away
Forget the girl who would be a star
And the boy who wanted to go far
He has plans for a different life

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JON (cont'd)
Where she sees a star. He sees a wife
He'll give her a million dinerific days
But he's never gonna take her away
But what can you expect from half a man
She's gotta be his, so she's gotta quit
He's got no talents, no goodness to speak of
He's a useless, miserable piece of--

Mark tackles Jon and they fight.
Sara watches for a moment, shocked.
She exits the diner.

JOHNNY
Hey, knock it off guys.

Mark takes a swing at Johnny, but misses.
Woah, so not cool.

Jackie pours a pitcher of lemonade
on the pair fighting on the ground.
They recoil in shock.

JACKIE
If you want to fight take it out of my diner.

JON
This is my home. Get out.

MARK
Gladly. You really screwed yourself over, buddy.

Mark exits.

JACKIE
Upstairs. Now.

Jon storms upstairs. Jackie cleans
up the lemonade.

JOHNNY
Your diner.

JACKIE
I didn't mean anything by it.

JOHNNY

Of course. Neither did Mr. O'Reilly.

Lights down.

What Do You Think, Dad?

Lights up on the apartment. Jon is by himself. He fiddles around on the piano and scratches notes in a notebook.

JON

(Sung)

She could be the girl

She could be my world

(Spoken)

What do you think, Dad?

(Beat)

Don't overwhelm me with advice. You're right. It's not fair. You're just a picture. You don't know. But I really need you right now. You're the only one who made any of this feel right, until Sara. I lost her, Dad. And you know what happened when I lost you. At least, I assume you know. That you're up there somewhere listening to all of this. That you can hear me, but you can't tell me what to do. Maybe I just can't hear you. Or maybe I'm talking to myself. All the best ones were crazy, though, right?

(Sung)

He was my world

I lost my whole world

Angie KNOCKS. She enters the apartment with a plate of food.

ANGIE

I haven't seen you eat tonight.

JON

I'm writing, Mom.

ANGIE

You can't do good work if you don't eat something.

JON

Let me focus. Please.

ANGIE

I just wanted to--

(CONTINUED)

JON

Mom, I'm on the verge of something.

ANGIE

I remember this. You had just won your first little league game. He was so proud.

JON

Was.

ANGIE

He would still be proud of you. Not when you yell at your mother for bringing you food.

JON

Why? I can't do anything he did. I don't have a family. I won't support you by taking over the diner. I'm a failure of a musician.

ANGIE

Jon, you don't have to be any of the things your father was for us to love you. The diner won't live or die by you.

JON

You act like it would.

ANGIE

I want to have you near me. I always will. If I could knit a sweater big enough to fit both of us, I would.

JON

Your knitting phase didn't last especially long.

ANGIE

What I'm saying is I never want to lose you. No parent does. We worry what's going to happen to you when you're not around. I almost lost you once, and that feeling sticks with you.

JON

When I fell in the river.

ANGIE

I know you're not that reckless little boy anymore, but maternal instinct latches on to images of your son being unloaded from an ambulance.

JON

Music isn't the same.

ANGIE

When you got kicked off that tour it was like seeing you unloaded from that ambulance all over again.

(CONTINUED)

JON
Mom, I'm going to get hurt.

ANGIE
I should have stopped you from going.

JON
You can't protect me.

ANGIE
But I love you.

JON
Then just do that. Hold on.
(Sung)
He was my world
He loved me, and he always will

Sara knocks, enters.

ANGIE
I'll give you some privacy.

Angie exits.

SARA
You're working on a new song.

Jon indicates toward the picture.

JON
He thinks I'm on to something.

SARA
I'm happy for you.

JON
I'm sorry about what I sang about Mark and the fight. You
needed to talk, and I let my anger get the best of me.

SARA
What's done is done.

JON
That's a relief because I want to run this new song by you.
It could be a good direction for the rest of our stuff.

SARA
Jon. I didn't mean I can forget what happened. The fight was
awful, but the song. I didn't know you had it in you.

(CONTINUED)

JON

He started it. The fight, the song. He came in just to taunt me.

SARA

No, he came in to talk to me about something I really needed to talk to you about.

JON

Then talk to me now.

SARA

It doesn't matter anymore.

JON

Don't be like that.

SARA

It's not worth talking about.

JON

You're closing yourself off. We can't work together if you don't let me in. You taught me that.

SARA

We can't work together.

JON

What?

SARA

That's why I'm here: to give you your out.

JON

I don't want an out.

SARA

I'm done, Jon. I can't do it anymore. The constant push-back, the anger--

JON

Mark.

SARA

You can't let go of your jealousy long enough to see that there are bigger problems here than Mark.

JON

Neither of us quits until both of us do. That was your term.

SARA

And I'm breaking it. Keep the songs. Keep the money. I'm done.

(CONTINUED)

Sara pulls papers out of her bag,
and puts them on the piano.

JON

Sara, please.

SARA

Good luck in Nashville, Jon. Hopefully I'll hear you on the
radio someday.

Sara exits. Jon looks at the papers
Sara left. He sweeps them off the
piano, along with the picture of
his dad. He collapses. Lights down.

Falling Apart

Lights up on diner. Daytime. Jackie
and Johnny work the counter. Jon
works the dining room. He has his
music notebook and order-taking
notepad. Order tickets and notebook
paper stick out of his pockets.

JON

(To diners)

What can I get for you?

DINER #1

Honey, what do you want?

JON

That's good.

Jon writes in his notebook.

What do you want?

Do you want me to leave?

I'm asking you to stay.

Stay with me.

DINER #2

I'll have the BLT.

DINER #1

Then I'll get the tomato soup.

JON

No problem.

Jon starts writing the order in his
notebook.

(CONTINUED)

DINER #1

Hun, I don't think that's the right book.

JON

Right.

Jon switches books.

That was a BLT and potato soup.

DINER #1

Tomato.

JON

Tomato.

Potato.

Tomato potato, potato tomato.

All the ways you tell me to let go.

DINER #2

You seem stressed. Should I go order at the counter?

JON

I'm fine. Song ideas, they come when you least expect them.

Jon rips the order ticket and
stuffs it in his pocket.

Let's start over. Grilled cheese and--

JACKIE

Sweetie, can I talk to you over here for a sec. Johnny here
is gonna take y'all's order.

JOHNNY

But I'm not a--

JACKIE

You just got promoted, kid.

(To Jon)

You're about to be demoted.

JON

I'm fine. I need two more songs by Friday for the
competition, but I can multitask till then.

JACKIE

I'd rather you take the day off than scare tipping customers
away.

(CONTINUED)

Tips. Yes.

JON

Jon grabs the tip jar off the counter. He stands on a chair. Don't forget to put a tip in the jar if your service today was exceptional. I'll even write you a song on the spot.

Silence. Jon gets off the chair. He slams the jar on a table where diners sit.

I've got a song if you've got a dollar. I'll even take loose change.

JACKIE

That's it. Gimme that thing.

JON

They want to hear a song, Jackie.

JACKIE

Let go, Jon.

Both tug at the jar. It pops out of their hands and shatters on the ground.

JON

That was all I had left.

JACKIE

The money's still good, honey.

JON

The jar. It was all I had left.

JACKIE

Oh. She's not gone Jon.

JON

Both of them are.

Lights down.

That Day on the River

Jackie and Johnny work in the diner. Sara enters.

SARA

Jackie, thanks for calling.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

He's in pretty bad shape.

SARA

I'll fix it.

Sara goes upstairs. Jon is on the floor. He pulls things out of boxes.

JON

I know I had another notebook in here.

SARA

Jon. You look awful.

JON

She came back to add insult to injury. Fantastic.

SARA

I came to make sure you're alright.

JON

You're the reason I'm not alright.

SARA

I'm sorry we fought.

JON

Get out. I don't need your help this time.

SARA

Obviously you do. Look at this place.

JON

You pull me out of a river one time and you think that means you're my guardian angel.

SARA

We were kids. I saved your life. Try being grateful.

JON

I didn't want you to save me.

Long beat.

SARA

I know.

JON

You didn't even know me yet. You couldn't have known.

(CONTINUED)

SARA

I saw you throw yourself in the river. I knew it was on purpose.

JON

You never said anything.

SARA

I didn't think you would want me to.

JON

So all these years, you've just been friends with me because I was "pathetic suicide kid."

SARA

Our friendship is real.

JON

Was. I've got work to do.

SARA

I still want us to be friends.

JON

Then you shouldn't have pulled me out of the river just to drop me back in.

SARA

You threw yourself in Jon. I keep trying to save you, but every time you end up back in that river.

JON

Get out.

Sara exits. Jon picks up the picture of his dad off the floor. He grabs some papers off the piano and puts everything in a box. Lights down.

Hitting the Road

Lights up on Jon's apartment. Jon talks to Johnny as he packs a bag.

JOHNNY

I'm telling you, you guys can work this out, but you have to talk to her.

JON

Not with him around. It's his role in life to come between us.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Melodramatic. The world doesn't revolve around your love life.

JON

Could have fooled me with that crowd that ambushed me after the kiss.

JOHNNY

Proof that everyone can tell you and Sara are meant to be.

JON

I'm not going to compete with him. She knows how I feel.

JOHNNY

If you're not going to compete, then you might as well stop packing now.

JON

I was talking about Sara.

JOHNNY

Who is so much more important than some stupid competition. Be willing to fight for that.

JON

Sara is done, Johnny. She cut ties and ran.

JOHNNY

And you're going to go to the competition and use the songs you wrote together. You still have ties.

JON

Actually, no. I'm not going to use the music we wrote. It was part of our agreement, and I'm sticking to it.

JOHNNY

But you only wrote one song since the two of you broke up.

JON

I'm not taking that either. It still feels like it's hers in a way. I'll figure something else out.

JOHNNY

Fix things with her.

JON

Johnny, cut it out. I have to go. Who knows, maybe I'll wind up failing again and be right back.

JOHNNY

Don't leave like this.

(CONTINUED)

JON

Johnny, that bus is coming, and I'm getting on it.

Jon exits the apartment. Johnny sits down on the bed, defeated. Lights down.

Can't Wait to See You Again

Jon sits alone on the bed in a hotel room. He writes in a notebook and eats takeout.

JON

(Singing with his mouth full)

Hello, it's me.

(Note: This line should be replaced with a recognizable line from a currently popular song. This example is from Adele's "Hello")

(Spoken)

No, that's stupid.

He hums and writes. He pulls a box onto the bed and sifts through what's inside, notebooks and papers.

I know I had a good one in here somewhere.

He finds the letter that Sara left in his apartment.

"Dear Sara." How did this get in here?

Jon reads the letter and chuckles.

"Can't wait to see you. Love, Jon." Huh.

Jon sits at his keyboard, sets up the letter on the music stand, and plays "Can't Wait to See You."

(Sung)

It's been a really great summer

The weather's not too wet

My cabin mates rock

One can burp the alphabet

But I wish you were here

We could kayak together

and make tasty s'mores

(CONTINUED)

and enjoy summer weather
 'Cause while summer camp's great
 I've had so much fun
 If I shared it with you
 It'd be second to none
 But for now, best friend
 I'll tell you some stories
 Of summer camp days
 And summer night glories
 While camp is amazing
 And summer skies are blue
 What I can't keep from thinking
 Is I can't wait to see you

Jon grabs his notebook off the bed
 and brings it to the desk. He
 scribbles down what he sang. Lights
 down.

Check-in Time

Jon is backstage at the
 competition. Two people man the
 check-in table where other
 musicians check in, receive
 numbers, and take their places in
 line. Jon approaches the table

Name?	CHECK-IN WORKER
Jon.	JON
Last name.	CHECK-IN WORKER
Sorry, Lovejoy.	JON

(CONTINUED)

CHECK-IN WORKER

Lovejoy, Jon. Number twenty-three. Stand in line over there. Wait your turn. Carlos will tell you when you're up. Next.

Jon finds his place in line next to Number 22, an older guy. Carlos, a big, bouncer type guards the stage entrance.

NUMBER 22

I wouldn't have gotten here so early if I knew I'd have to perform so soon. They're already on twenty.

JON

Wow. Efficient.

NUMBER 22

Less time to get nervous, though. Can't complain about that.

JON

I didn't expect it to be so mechanical. The guy on the phone made it sound like a music festival.

NUMBER 22

They called to invite you? Someone must really like you, then.

JON

Russell Hoffman saw me on tour earlier this year. I guess he thought I showed promise or something.

NUMBER 22

Russell Hoffman, man what I wouldn't give for that kind of connection. I've been going to these gigs for two years and haven't struck gold yet. But I will. Any day now.

CARLOS

Twenty-one.

Number 21 exits to the stage. Jon and Number 22 shift forward.

JON

I'm surprised you haven't. You look like you have a lot of experience.

NUMBER 22

You mean I look old. Well, this is sort of a second life for me. I worked HR for a big company up in New York. Right when I got promoted to vice president was when I realized I'd jump out a window if I didn't quit. So I did.

(CONTINUED)

JON

That's crazy. You gave up a lot.

NUMBER 22

Well, money and things are just money and things. I still got what really matters: My music, my wife, and my beautiful little girl. They's out there in the audience right now.

JON

Your wife had to have been furious that you wanted to quit your job.

NUMBER 22

She knows that doing what you love with who you love is more important than any amount of prestige or money. I'm lucky to have found someone who is so supportive of my dreams. Shoot, if she wasn't I don't know what I'd do. She's my best friend.

JON

Shit.

NUMBER 22

Sorry kid, I don't mean to rub it in.

JON

No, it's me. I'm an idiot.

NUMBER 22

Take it from an man with a lot of experience, a lot of idiocy can be fixed with a sincere apology.

CARLOS

Twenty-two, you're up.

NUMBER 22

That's me. Hey, here's my card. Give me a call if you ever need a banjo player.

Jon takes the card and reads it.

JON

Thanks, Jonas.

Jonas exits. Jon gets out his phone.

JON

(To Carlos)

I have to make a phone call real quick. I'll be right back.

CARLOS

You're up next.

JON

It'll be fast, I promise.

Jon steps out of line and dials. Sara stands at a counter. She is covered in flour from baking. Her phone rings. She silences it. Jon lowers his phone.

Dammit.

He moves toward his place in line. Sara looks back at her phone. She picks it up and dials. Jon's phone rings.

Sara.

SARA

Sorry, I was in baking.

JON

It's okay, I'm glad you answered. I need you to come to Nashville.

SARA

Last time I saw you, you threw me out of your apartment.

JON

I'm such an idiot. I screwed everything up.

SARA

Yeah, you did. I tried to help you, and you spit in my face.

JON

And I'm so sorry. I don't want to be here alone.

SARA

You didn't let me finish. I wasn't being completely honest with you either. I didn't tell you what was going on with me, and you spiraled.

JON

I don't care anymore Sara. I just want to put the drama behind us.

SARA

Me too.

JON

I wrote a new song. I want you to see me perform it here.

(CONTINUED)

SARA
I'd have to close the bakery.

JON
You're the boss.

SARA
It would take me hours to get there. There can't be that many people in front of you.

JON
I can stall.

CARLOS
Hey twenty-three, you're up.

SARA
Okay.

JON
Okay? Great. Meet me backstage when you get here. I can't wait to see you.

SARA
Me either.

Both hang up. Jon turns to face Carlos.

JON
I need a favor.

CARLOS
You're holding up my show.

JON
I need to trade spots. I'm waiting for someone to get here.

CARLOS
You're number twenty-three.

JON
But if we could just wait--

CARLOS
Look buddy, I get paid to stand here and tell people it's their turn, and I'm telling you it's your turn.

JON
And you're doing such a great job. I think you deserve a tip.

Jon slips Carlos money. Carlos snatches it up.

CARLOS

No waiting. It's now or never.

Lights down.

Gotta Go!

Sara bursts into the diner. She runs to the register where Angie stands and cuts in front of customers. Jackie takes orders and Johnny mops floors.

SARA

Angie, I need to borrow your car.

ANGIE

Sara, my customers.

SARA

I need to get to Nashville as soon as possible.

ANGIE

Lord God Almighty and all his saints. You both came to your senses.

SARA

Angie, the car.

ANGIE

One second.

Angie steps up on a crate behind the counter.

Everyone pack it up. Diner's closed. If you ain't paid yet it's free.

The diners appear confused.

Get.

The diners dash.

JACKIE

Hey, I was in the middle of taking an order.

JOHNNY

Hush, I think we're about to get the afternoon off.

ANGIE

We're closed up. Sara and I are going to Nashville.

SARA

Angie, I didn't mean--

ANGIE

I know what you meant, and if you think you're going to Nashville without me you're plum crazy.

JOHNNY

If she's going, then we're going too.

JACKIE

You don't speak for me.

SARA

So I guess it's the three of us.

JACKIE

I didn't say I didn't want to go.

ANGIE

It's settled then. Take off those aprons. We're going to Nashville.

SARA

I just need to grab some things from upstairs.

ANGIE

We'll meet you at the car.

Jackie, Johnny, and Angie exit. Sara goes upstairs and grabs some papers from off the piano. She sees the smashed picture of Jon's dad on the floor. She slides the picture out of the frame and takes it along with the papers. A horn honks. Sara runs down the stairs and exits. Lights down.

A Dangerous Idea

Backstage at the competition. Jon sits with his head in his hands. Angie, Jackie, Johnny, and Sara enter. They chatter excitedly.

ANGIE

There's my baby boy. I'm so proud of you.

Angie pinches Jon's cheeks.

Mom. JON

This place is huge. JOHNNY

I had no idea you were playing on a real stage. This is just like one of those singing competitions on TV. JACKIE

Is my boy gonna be on TV? ANGIE

No, Mom. I'm not gonna be on TV. JON

Let's go find our seats. JOHNNY

Don't want to miss your big performance. JACKIE

Johnny, Jackie, and Angie exit.

Your mom seems to finally be on board. SARA

She's pretty easily sold on anything she can associate with a TV show. JON

I should go catch up with them. SARA

Wait. There's a problem. I'm not performing. JON

Jon, you have to. This is your chance. SARA

I blew it. I tried to stall, and I missed my spot. JON

We'll talk to the people at check-in. They seem nice I'm sure they'll give you another chance. SARA

Sara, I've already tried everything. I'm not getting on that stage. JON

SARA

You should have called. Everyone's out there waiting for you to play.

JON

I know. I was just so embarrassed, and I thought I could figure a way out of it.

SARA

So you let your ego get the best of you yet again. You're never gonna learn.

JON

I didn't know what to do.

SARA

Now I have to go out there and tell everyone I dragged them out here for no reason.

JON

Stay in Nashville with me.

SARA

Jon.

JON

We can find some other way to get our music produced. It doesn't have to be this.

SARA

We're leaving.

JON

You said I was the flighty one, but here you are leaving me again.

SARA

I leave because you push me away.

JON

I'm begging you to stay.
(Beat)

SARA

Then why doesn't it feel like it?

Sara walks away. Jon hops on a nearby piano and sings. Sara stops and listens.

JON

(Sung)
While camp is amazing

(CONTINUED)

And summer skies are blue
What I can't keep from thinking
Is I can't wait to see you.
I miss my best friend
And I wanna be home
Where we can hang out all day
Spend the night on the phone.
Tell my mom that I love her.
Ask your dad "How d'you do?"
And hold on a while longer
Until I see you.
(Spoken)
Love, Jon.

Over the past few weeks I let my pride get in the way of us.
Our music, our friendship, our, well, us. And that's not
going to happen anymore.

Jon pulls out the letter.
I found this letter I wrote you from summer camp in my
stuff. I'm not sure how it got there, but it reminded me of
what made our friendship great and all the things that I
wouldn't trade for the world.

Sara takes the letter.

SARA
Like roasting marshmallows on the diner's stove.

JON
Even though it made my mom so mad. And our music. I know
I've let my pride get the best of me, and I let Mark come
between us. I just want to say that I'm not gonna do that
anymore, because it almost meant that you weren't here to
see me perform.

SARA
You've performed plenty without me.

JON
It's different now. I feel like I owe you something. My
music isn't the same. It's like--

(CONTINUED)

Sara pulls out the picture of Jon's dad.

SARA

Like your dad's there with you.

Jon takes the picture. He looks at it and takes a deep breath.

JON

I've been thinking, and there's a loophole in our contract.

SARA

I'm listening.

JON

Well we said that if we lost this competition, we would break up, right? You can't lose if you don't compete.

SARA

Let's forget the contract.

JON

You still don't want to work together.

SARA

I do. But we don't need a piece of paper telling us who we are.

JON

And you're sure I'm not a rotten scoundrel who's gonna steal all your music.

SARA

Let's call it a leap of faith.

JON

Such confidence. And hey, I'm not gonna give you any more grief about Mark. As soon as we get back I'm gonna mend fences. Our friendship means more than my grudge.

SARA

Mark proposed.

JON

I'll be best man.

SARA

I said no.

JON

Oh. That's a shame. I really liked the guy.

SARA
Shut up.

JON
Are you okay?

SARA
I've spent the last few weeks getting over it, so I'm fine.

JON
Weeks. And I had no idea. I'm such an idiot.

SARA
I came in the night after he proposed to talk to you, but then y'all got in that fight. And when I tried to talk to you about it later, you kicked me out.

JON
Part of our new unofficial partnership agreement: if I am ever not listening to you please smack me. Right here.

SARA
I'm actually glad to have closure. It feels like it ended right this time.

JON
I'm really glad for you.

SARA
I'm sorry you didn't get to play.

JON
I'll live. We'll go back to the diner and cook up an entire demo, the right way this time.

SARA
There has to be some way you can perform.

JON
The check-in lady was pretty definite. Jon Lovejoy is number twenty-three. If Jon Lovejoy doesn't perform twenty-third, Jon Lovejoy does not perform at all.

SARA
I have an idea.

JON
You've got your "Jon's not gonna like this idea" face on.

SARA
You might not love it.

Lay it on me.

JON

You have to keep an open mind.

SARA

I'm open.

JON

And remember this isn't about your pride.

SARA

My ego is on vacation.

JON

You're sure.

SARA

It's drinking a piña colada out of a one of those carved out pineapples with the little umbrella.

JON

We should enter under my name.

SARA

What.

JON

Well you said "Jon Lovejoy is number twenty-three," and that you can't perform if you're not twenty-three, and I was thinking that I'm not number twenty-three so maybe if we signed up under my name we could perform together, and you hate this idea.

SARA

I love it.

JON

But it's not gonna be your name up in lights.

SARA

Someday both our names will be. It can be your turn.

JON

Lights down.

A Little Bit of Resolution

Lights up. Two Pianos face each other on an otherwise empty stage.

ANNOUNCER

Next up, Sara D'Angelo.

Jon and Sara enter and seat themselves at their respective pianos. They play Finale Song. The diner scene rolls in around them. They finish the song. Jackie, Johnny, Angie, Manny, and diners applaud.

SARA

Oh, please stop.

JON

Or don't. Just kidding. We want to thank you all for coming to our farewell concert, as it were.

SARA

Without your love and support we would not be embarking on our very own tour.

(Muffled)

Opening for another very popular band.

JON

I'm excited to get to have a second shot at fame, but this time with a partner behind me that'll keep me true to who I am.

Jon and Sara share a look.

But this isn't just our party. We have a couple of other people to honor tonight.

Sara pulls out two bouquets of flowers and hand ones to Jon.

SARA

Congratulations, Jackie, for your promotion to general manager of the Eden diner. You basically run this place already, so we all know you're going to do a fantastic job.

Diners applaud. Jackie accepts her bouquet from Sara.

JACKIE

Thanks, babe. I just want to say how grateful I am, and that some of y'all fools are in for a rude awakening. I'm talking to you Manny.

JON

And if y'all are wondering what my mom is going to do if she's not running the diner, she has agreed to come along with Sara and I as our tour manager.

(CONTINUED)

Diners applaud. Angie accepts her bouquet from Jon.

ANGIE

Thank you son. I love you.

JON

Love you too, Mom.

SARA

Now let's get this party started. Someone cut the cake.

Music turns on and the diners converse.

JOHNNY

(To Jackie)

I can help if you need me to.

JACKIE

First I wanna run something by you.

JOHNNY

I'm not gonna pop out of the cake if that's what you're thinking.

JACKIE

Can it. I'm actually thinking my first act as general manager should be promoting you to waiter, you know, to fill my spot.

JOHNNY

But I didn't get them together before the competition.

JACKIE

I think you did alright. Now go cut the cake. There should be a cutter under the counter.

Johnny goes behind the counter. He searches under the counter for a cake cutter and comes back up with a cupid-style bow and arrow. He looks around, then up to the sky, dumbfounded.

SARA

(To Jon)

Your mom seems excited about going on tour.

JON

I don't think she realizes the main duty of tour manager is running the merch table.

(CONTINUED)

SARA

The way she cuts a deal, I'm sure we'll be the headliners by the time the tour is over.

JON

Wouldn't that be something? The nationwide tour of Jon Lovejoy and Sara D'Angelo.

Sara shakes her head.

Or Sara D'Angelo and Jon Lovejoy.

SARA

Better.

JON

Or Jon and Sara Lovejoy.

As he says this, Jon picks up a muffin. He offers it to Sara. She simultaneously grabs it and gives him a kiss. Lights down.

THE END

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Auntie Mame*. Dir. Morton DaCosta. By Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Bronislaw Kaper. Perf. Rosalind Russell, Forrest Tucker, Coral Browne, Fred Clark, Roger Smith, Patric Knowles, and Peggy Cass. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1958. DVD.
- Bareilles, Sara. *The Blessed Unrest*. Epic Records, 2013. MP3.
- Bareilles, Sara. *Careful Confessions*. Tiny Bear Publishing, 2003. MP3.
- Bareilles, Sara. *Kaleidoscope Heart*. Epic Records, 2010. MP3.
- Bareilles, Sara. *Little Voice*. Sony BMG Music, 2007. MP3.
- Bareilles, Sara. *What's Inside: Songs From Waitress*. Sony BMG Music, 2016. MP3.
- Desk Set*. Dir. Walter Lang. Perf. Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. 20th Century Fox, 1957. DVD.
- Egri, Lajos. *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960. Print.
- Eric Hutchinson. *Pure Fiction*. Let's Break Records, 2014. MP3.
- Finding Nemo*. Dir. Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich. Perf. Albert Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres, Alexander Gould. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003. DVD.
- Frozen*. Dir. Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee, and Hans Christian Anderson. Disney, 2013. DVD.
- Irving Berlin's Holiday Inn*. Dir. Mark Sandrich. Perf. Fred Astaire. Paramount Pictures, 1942. DVD.
- Lawrence, Jerome, Robert Edwin Lee, and Patrick Dennis. *Auntie Mame: A New Play*. New York: Vanguard, 1957. Print.
- McLaughlin, Jon. *Forever If Ever*. Self-Released, 2011. CD.
- McLaughlin, Jon. *Holding My Breath*. Razor & Tie, 2013. CD.

- McLaughlin, Jon. *Indiana*. Island Def Jam Music Group, 2007. MP3.
- McLaughlin, Jon. *Like Us*. Razor & Tie, 2015. MP3.
- McLaughlin, Jon. *OK Now*. Island Def Jam Music Group, 2008. MP3.
- McLaughlin, Jon. *Promising Promises*. Razor & Tie, 2012. MP3.
- McLaughlin, Jon. *Songs I Wrote and Later Recorded*. Self-Released, 2005. MP3.
- Miss Congeniality*. Dir. Donald Petrie. By Mark Lawrence. Perf. Sandra Bullock. Warner Brothers, 2000. DVD.
- Murray, Sarah-Jane. "Three Act What?" Snippet App, Web. 09 Apr. 2015.
- Murray, Sarah-Jane. *Basics of Story Design*. (in press, 2016).
- My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Dir. Joel Zwick. By Nia Vardalos. Perf. Nia Vardalos, John Corbett. Warner Bros, 2003. DVD.
- The Philadelphia Story*. Dir. George Cukor. Prod. Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Screenplay by Donald Ogden Stewart. Perf. Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, James Stewart. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1940. DVD.
- Sabrina*. Dir. Billy Wilder. Perf. Humphrey Bogart, Audrey Hepburn, William Holden. Paramount Pictures Corp, 1954. DVD.
- Sherman-Palladino, Amy, and Daniel Palladino, prods. *Gilmore Girls*. The WB. 05 Oct. 2000. Television.
- Singin' in the Rain*. Dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen. Perf. Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds. MGM, 1952. DVD.
- Star Wars*. Dir. George Lucas. By George Lucas. Perf. Liam Neeson, Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, Jake Lloyd, and Samuel L. Jackson. 20th Century Fox Film Corporation, 1999. DVD.
- Two Weeks Notice*. Dir. Mark Lawrence. By Mark Lawrence. Perf. Sandra Bullock, Hugh Grant. Warner Brothers, 2002. DVD.
- Walsh, Enda, Glen Hansard, and Markéta Irglová. *Once*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013. Print.

While You Were Sleeping. Dir. Jon Turteltaub. Prod. Roger Birnbaum. By Sullivan Daniel G. and Fredric Lebow. Perf. Sandra Bullock, Bill Pullman, and Peter Gallagher. Buena Vista Pictures, 1995. DVD.

White Christmas. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Prod. Robert Emmett Dolan. By Norman Krasna. Perf. Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney, and Vera-Ellen. Paramount Pictures Corp., 1954. DVD.