

SCENE 2

[JON enters his house. A whiteboard is in the living room. There's no writing on it, but it's seen better days.]

Jon does not look up from his phone, so he doesn't see ANDY enter to meet him. Andy is dressed like a regular guy, but the regularness stops there. He has a tremendous gash in his neck, not actively bleeding; old, rotting, congealed. His discolored head looks like it was all the way off at some point, then maybe stitched back on, but very poorly. The rest of his body seems okay, except for the rot and stuff.

Andy stares at Jon for a foreboding, quiet moment. Then:]

ANDY:

Hi, buddy. How was the show?

[Jon holds up one finger, indicating he's waiting for the song to end.]

ANDY:

Are you for real?

[He takes off his headphones.]

JON:

Sorry, Andy. Can't interrupt "When You Were Young." That's like rule number one of listening to music. Wouldn't you agree?

ANDY:

You and your white people music.

JON:

The show didn't suck but I forgot all the best parts.

ANDY:

What happened to the cards?

JON:

Left them in the green room.

ANDY:

Man, why do we go to the trouble of making cards if you forget them?

JON:

Oh, "we" go through the trouble of making cards.

ANDY:

I would write on them too but it's getting hard to grip pens and shit. Fingertips coming off. There's one over there; can you hand me that?

JON:

No. Get your own fingertips.

ANDY:

Lost one in the bathroom today too.

JON:

Andy, if I go into that shower, and there's finger bones in the drain...

ANDY:

You'll what— kill me?? Anyway, what parts did you forget? Of your show, I mean, not of your body.

[Jon is staring at his phone.]

ANDY:

I'm alone all fucking night with *Parks and Recreation* reruns and you can't look up from your phone? All that whooping from your parents and all you got was some content. At least mine taught me manners through it.

JON:

On the bright side, I really don't spill things anymore. Or when I do, I have a panic attack about it so people leave me alone.

ANDY:

Did I ever tell you about the time I dropped the F-bomb in front of my dad's boss at Take Your Stupid Kid To Work Day when I was twelve and he got his shoe off in the car ride home and went to town? Like can't even wait til we get home.

JON:

There's a joke in there.

ANDY:

That's really more your thing, joking about it. Even more your thing than drinking too much coffee. But less than not getting laid.

JON:

I met this reporter at the show. She wants to put me in this article she's writing. About like. Comedians and trauma--

ANDY/JON [*in unison*]:

Half of that is you.

ANDY:

Dang, you already made that joke tonight, huh?

JON:

Yeah, she just stared at me. She did that a lot. I don't know why someone that doesn't think I'm funny wants to write about me like I am.

ANDY:

When is this happening?

JON:

She wants to meet this week already.

ANDY:

Is she cute?

JON:

In that way that's like wanting nothing to do with someone like me.

ANDY:

Yeah, what business do we have dealing with women who are straightforward and well-adjusted with decent jobs? Unless she's into corpses...

JON:

That's no one.

ANDY:

Yeah right. I dare you to google it.

JON:

Hard pass.

ANDY:

"Hard pass" is a little too applicable.

[Jon notices Andy is starting a bullet point list on the white board. First thing: "women into corpses."]

JON:

Don't write that on the board!

ANDY:

I don't see you contributing anything.

JON:

Man I'm tired

ANDY:

Just tell me what worked and didn't work tonight.

JON:

I forgot the spanking part.

*[Andy writes on the other side of the board:
"no spanking" then, after careful
consideration, a sad face next to it.]*

ANDY:

Maybe you just didn't want to do that part.

JON:

I'm not sure I wanted to do any of it.

ANDY:

So don't.

JON:

Andy, I need to actually practice some of this. I can't just pick new shit every week.

ANDY:

The Attic is great for trying new stuff.

*[Andy had been preoccupying himself drawing
an arrow between "women who like corpses"
and "no spanking". He points it out to Jon.]*

JON:

It was great for you trying new stuff. I'm bombing. And I don't have the charisma to turn around bombing with a necrophilia joke. Most people don't, I guess.

*[This is the first shift in Andy to
something semi-serious, almost attentive.
Almost.]*

ANDY:

Nah, you didn't bomb. Right? Did you really? *[Off Jon's face]*

Look. What is bombing, really? You can just lean into the whole "awkward discomfort humor" thing. *The Office* was a highly successful TV show. So I heard. It gives me hives so I don't--

JON:

I thought I saw someone who looked like my dad. After the show.

ANDY:

Now you're just making me jealous. Two dead people? Am I not enough for you?

*[He writes in a third spot on the board:
"dead dad".*

*He notices Jon is staring at his phone
again.]*

ANDY:

You do know he's dead, right?

JON:

Course I know. Best motivator to get out of bed other than coffee.

ANDY:

And you know I'm dead too, right?

JON:

You only make a joke about it every minute. Why do you think I don't know this shit?

ANDY:

Sorry, sorry. Just... trying to get the pulse of the room. I don't have one so I need the practice somehow.

*[Trying to get Jon's attention again, he
squeaks the marker as loudly as he can,
drawing another arrow between the three
topics on the board, now making a triangle.]*

JON:

I got an email from her.

ANDY:

I'm surprised your Yahoo account still has that capability.

JON:

We're gonna meet tomorrow.

ANDY:

Where are you going to find time in your schedule between four bartending shifts, a tight five at The Attic, and contemplating how to kill an acquaintance and make it look like an accident so you can get in at The Blue Room open mic night?

JON:

What the hell is your problem today? I'm about to try to give you news. Like an actual update on me and my career.

ANDY:

Sorry, it's just that I literally don't exist outside of this house and your imagination, but you get home and want to stare at this email from this reporter girl for a century. I'm trying to get to the bottom of what you hated about your set tonight. I'm just trying to help.

[He takes a pause that could be interpreted as meaningful until:]

ANDY:

I mean, I'm really sticking my neck out here for you—

JON:

Sorry.

ANDY:

You say sorry so easy. What's the career news?

JON:

Apparently this girl is also including big names in her article but she's decided I should be the center of it.

ANDY:

She wants you to be the center of her trauma porn fanfiction?

JON:

Well... okay when you put it like that—

ANDY:

I guess it's not a fanfiction per se because it's not fiction but it is trauma porn also you don't have fans per se--

JON:

Fucking take it easy today dude

ANDY:

Damn this set REALLY has you pissed! Don't lose your head! People will say you're copying me again.

JON:

I don't know why I tell you anything.

ANDY:

Who else is there? A psychologist? God, don't be ridiculous. I'm right here and I'm free and I'm only two months decayed.

JON:

Has it really been two months...?

ANDY:

Never mind. I think if you get some work done you might feel better because you're a good little capitalist just like me - and look at me, I turned out great.

JON:

I think I'm just gonna head to bed.

ANDY:

Hey, wait... maybe if I look at your index cards, I can help or something... like make them more organized for you? Or see if something's not clear on them? Maybe that can help.

[Jon searches his pockets. He only comes up with a fresh pack of mints.]

JON:

Maybe I forgot them at the venue.

ANDY:

Oh, great. Solid move. Maybe next time you should bring your laptop with that pilot you've been working on for six years and leave it open on page one on the table.

JON:

You know what? Actually, I think I gave them to the reporter.

ANDY:

Why...

JON:

For zero reason other than to piss you off right this second.

[Handing Andy the mints]

JON:

Got you these so you can work tonight if you want to

[He exits]

ANDY:

I don't NEED mints to work! I just like having a quirk! What else am I going to do in the opening credits of my future Netflix special?

JON *[offstage]*:

There's no Netflix for the dead!

ANDY:

Yeah... I guess that's more of a Hulu thing...

[In the quiet, Andy actually looks kind of scared. Desperate for something to do, he takes his mints over to the board. As he stares at it, he unwraps them and eats one. Still focused, he coughs a couple times.

Then he reaches into his neck wound and pulls one out.

Kind of amused at himself, he goes to write on the board, only to find that by himself, the marker doesn't write for him. He tests a couple more spooky things like that: like maybe he goes to turn the TV on but the remote doesn't answer him pressing the buttons, faucets won't run for him, etc.

Sad, dissatisfied, he disappears in some mysterious way. Maybe in the fridge, out the window, into the trash can. Whatever's funniest.]

SCENE 3.

[In some hip café, JON brings a coffee nearly the size of his head to a table where RACHEL already has a small coffee, notepad, and something to record with.]

RACHEL:

Wow! That's such a big drink.

JON:

Late nights. Catches up with me sometimes. I'll have an early night tonight, though. I'm not that cool, I can't do this more than a couple nights in a row. Not yet I mean. Guess I'll get used to it. *Hope* I'll get used to it. You know? I mean, probably not. You seem like someone with a healthy bedtime routine. Sorry if I'm basically acting like a squirrel.

RACHEL *[amused]*:

A squirrel?

JON:

Just, you know, jumpy. That's all. Also you can't tell but I've got about fifty peanuts in my mouth. *[She laughs politely.]* I'd keep going but I don't know anything else about squirrels.

RACHEL:

They're one of the top carriers of Lyme disease in the country.

JON:

That's so interesting. We should just talk about squirrels. *[She does not laugh politely.]* I've never had a profile done on me. I've never had *anything* done on me. Except an analysis by the high school guidance counselor. Didn't work, I still picked performance art.

RACHEL:

You're doing great, Jon.

JON:

I guess if it's supposed to be truthful journalism, it can't be done badly, right?

RACHEL:

Of course.

JON:

Are you gonna put the squirrel thing in it?

RACHEL:

We're not on the record yet. But do you want me to?

JON:

Do you think it's funny?

RACHEL:

I enjoyed it.

JON:

Nope, that's not the same thing. Keep it out. Please. When are we on the record?

[She readies a recording app or device on her phone.]

RACHEL:

Once we start recording. Are you okay to?

JON:

Am I okay?

RACHEL:

To start recording?

JON:

Oh! Yeah! Sure, uh—

[She taps it, it starts.]

JON:

Sorry, just, one quick question first —

[She taps it again.]

JON:

Sorry, does that fuck up the recording or anything?

RACHEL:

No, it's fine, I have plenty of memory.

JON:

Same. It's a real problem. *[to himself]* Damn, that's kinda good, wish we were recording.

RACHEL:

So what's up?

JON:

What are the — um — questions? Like what exactly are we talking about?

RACHEL:

The intersection of trauma and comedy.

JON:

I guess I'm confused by, sorry, like, the intersection? What does that mean?

[She consults her notebook, maybe makes a few scratches in it.]

JON:

Sorry.

RACHEL:

It's really no problem. Basically, I'm pursuing an idea that if someone had significant trauma in their early life, and they pursue comedy, both of those things together create an interesting harmony. While I would never say trauma itself is beneficial, I wonder if it might increase the likelihood of a comedian's success. Or at least, for that person, provide a way out of the darkness.

JON:

Successful in comedy, huh?

[She senses the self-deprecating tone before he has the chance to make another joke about it.]

RACHEL:

Yes, I've been following The Attic's social media for quite a while, and you're there nearly every week. And even preliminary research indicates you've been invited on three podcasts in the past two months, right?

JON:

That's just podcasts. And I knew one of them already from The Attic...

RACHEL:

Three is more than I've been on!

JON:

Well, you know what would be better than that?

RACHEL:

What?

JON:
Four podcasts.

[The briefest of uncomfortable pauses where he waits for her to laugh, but she just restarts the recording.]

RACHEL:
You post to your YouTube account very frequently. You have over five hundred subscribers.

JON:
You know what would be better than that?

RACHEL:
I suppose six hundred. But yes, I've watched you online and in person and I would call your standup successful.

JON:
Yeah, but what do I know about trauma, right?

RACHEL:
I think quite a lot, Jon.

JON:
Yeah, I'm just kidding. That's kinda my whole thing.

RACHEL:
I'm not kidding though.

JON:
Right.

RACHEL:
You know, I do my research. There are many comedians in New York City. You were *chosen* to be featured.

JON:
You can edit my awkward jokes out right? And all future bits that won't work? Which will be most of them?

RACHEL:
I think they're working just fine.

JON:
You haven't laughed much.

RACHEL:
We also haven't started the interview.

JON:

But you're recording. Writing, too. In your notebook?

RACHEL:

Supplemental.

JON:

You're going to ask questions now, right?

RACHEL:

Hopefully.

JON:

That's... funny. Funnier than me. What's the first question?

RACHEL:

What's the earliest instance of physical abuse you remember?

JON:

Physical abuse meaning?

RACHEL:

Whatever you want it to mean.

JON:

I guess I'm just not used to the word "want" being associated with it.

RACHEL:

Then let's start with -- what's the earliest you remember being hit?

JON:

Well, god, when does memory begin?

RACHEL:

Is that the earliest distinct memory you have?

JON:

Yeah, I'd say so.

RACHEL:

Do you remember what it was for?

JON:

Probably something REALLY BAD. Like needing a diaper change. No, I don't remember. I do remember what the earliest bad one was about.

RACHEL:

What did a *bad* instance of abuse entail?

JON:

Like hurt bad enough that it didn't just hurt in the moment. A run of the mill spanking you can walk away from. Most stuff with the belt was... less so.

RACHEL:

What was this first instance about?

JON:

I took this carton of milk out of the fridge that I was way too young to be able to pour steadily myself. I got as far as climbing on the counter to get a cup out, and putting that with the milk on my table, those cute little plastic tables kids have?

RACHEL:

I had one myself.

JON:

Yeah, having my own fake furniture set was supposed to make up for getting the shit kicked out of me sometimes. But so I opened the milk and my mom walks in, and she says, "Jonathan, no, you're going to spill it." And I have no idea what came over me, but I kept looking at her, and I still opened the milk carton. And she just did that terrifying parent thing where she isn't even mad, she just says my name with that very intimidating period on the end of it, "Jonathan." And I kept looking at her. And I poured the milk. And of course...

RACHEL:

There was a spill?

JON:

Biblical.

RACHEL:

What did she do?

JON:

Nothing. That's just it. See, my mom was more than capable of doling out some shit, but when I really needed to get it. That's when we would wait for my dad to come home.

RACHEL:

When you "really needed to get it" meaning?

JON:

Usually the belt.

RACHEL:
He'd beat you with his belt when he came home?

JON:
Usually, yeah. Sometimes other stuff.

RACHEL:
Like—

JON:
I think a dustpan once? Dust clouds everywhere. Real dramatic effect. Not a broom, weirdly. I don't think. Though a bottle of cleaner once—to be fair, because I spilled that everywhere too. I spilled a lot of things. I don't really blame them for freaking out. Money was really tight then. I'd freak out too.

[Even with the recorder out, she is making notes with frenetic pace. He notices.]

JON:
I feel like I'm making it seem like it happened every five seconds. It really wasn't that often.

RACHEL:
How often, would you say?

JON:
Once... a month? The bad ones, way less.

RACHEL:
Can you recall, of the "bad ones" which was the worst?

JON:
Uh... no.

RACHEL:
Did you ever need medical attention from these incidents?

JON:
Can I still be in the article if I say no?

RACHEL:
I don't consider needing medical attention and experiencing trauma to be mutually exclusive.

JON:
Sorry, that was another bad joke.

RACHEL:
It was good. I'm just focused.

JON:

You know what the really weird thing is? I know I just described all this gnarly stuff - and I'm not stupid, I know it's more than what most of my friends were dealing with at home - but I never really thought of it as trauma.

RACHEL:

Would you say it seemed like trauma was just part of growing up?

JON:

I still wouldn't call myself traumatized. Doesn't really sound like a word anymore, does it?

RACHEL:

Have you had a traumatic event since you lived here?

[He pauses to think for the first time in a while. Maybe attempts to finish an empty coffee.]

JON:

Sorry, but that's like uh... interesting phrasing.

RACHEL:

Or maybe, the most recent significant event you've been able to process through your work.

JON:

The most recent...

RACHEL:

Has anything happened to you since you lived in Queens that you like to process through your stand up that you want to tell me about?

JON:

No, I remember the question, it's just-- Not really.

[There's a pause. She flips through her notebook a bit, clears her throat, sips her coffee.]

JON:

Sorry. *[She scratches something in her notebook. It makes him uneasy.]* Are there like, any other questions? Or are we good? Is that the whole profile?

RACHEL:

Well, this is just one meeting.

JON:

We're doing more?

RACHEL:

You're the center of the profile, Jon.

[Another pause.]

RACHEL:

I thought my email—

JON:

But there's others, right? Other comedians?

RACHEL:

Of course. The running theme of it is following you.

JON:

Why me at the center?

RACHEL:

We wanted someone up and coming.

JON:

So who are other ones?

RACHEL:

So far? We've got material on Tig Notaro, Christopher Titus, and John Mulaney.

JON:

Got it. Zero pressure then. That's like, how many Grammys, Emmys, and pilots between them?

RACHEL:

They have many more years of experience between them as well.

JON:

Hang on, let me just Google how much John Mulaney ISN'T older than me by--

RACHEL:

Luck has a lot to do with it.

JON:

Wait, so were we good with the questions?

RACHEL:

I do have other questions. I just wanted to give you a moment.

JON:

A moment to do what?

RACHEL:

I'm not sure exactly.

JON:

That's weird. You've seemed totally sure of your words so far.

*[That's the most biting his tone has been.
She's quiet.]*

JON:

I wonder what that's like.

Sorry, I didn't need mean to be all doom and gloom.

*[She makes another scratch in her notebook.
Her mood changes.]*

RACHEL:

What about Andy?

JON:

What *about* Andy?

RACHEL:

Your friend Andy?

JON:

What friend Andy?

RACHEL:

Andrew Neel. He was a comedian who performed regularly at The Attic too.

JON:

Yeah, he did.

RACHEL:

And Caroline's?

JON:

Well, not *regularly*, just the one time. But yeah, he was at Caroline's. He auditioned for SNL once too. Didn't get in.

RACHEL:

And he was your roommate?

JON:

Yes.

RACHEL:
So why did you ask "what friend Andy"—

JON:
Because I had a friend Andy but now I don't.

RACHEL:
Can you tell me about that?

JON:
He died at the thirtieth avenue subway stop.

[She seems to be waiting for something from him. He senses it, and tries this:]

JON:
You know they just put a Fresco's Cantina there?

[Sensing this was not the right answer:]

JON:
Sorry.

[She makes no secret of putting a tally in her notes. He catches on.]

JON:
How many times?

RACHEL:
Ten.

[At the same time, a shadowy figure near them in the café looks over and flashes a Heineken bottle. Jon is so startled he spills the rest of his coffee, partially on Rachel.]

JON:
OH sorry. But hey -- eleven is probably a more interesting number for your article, huh?

[He exits before she can say anything to stop him. She turns around to try and find what he saw, but gets nothing.]

SCENE 4.

[Having stomped home, music in his headphones on blast, JON makes a beeline for the whiteboard and starts scrawling little tidbits about what just happened in the coffeeshop - jokes he tried to make, things Rachel said, the word "sorry" in a few different ways, the names of comedians Rachel mentioned, more comedians she didn't.

ANDY enters and watches him for a moment. He's wearing a scarf covering his neck wound but he still looks quite dead.]

ANDY:

Do scarves become me?

[No response.]

ANDY:

Hey Rain Man. Do I look ready for a night on the town?

[No response. Andy heaves a sigh.]

ANDY:

What are you listening to?

JON:

Fall Out Boy.

ANDY:

What like, for free? Like no one's paying you to do that?

JON:

Scarf doesn't work. You still look dead.

ANDY:

Well, *I'm* dead, what's your excuse?

JON:

I went to that interview.

ANDY:

Publicity makes me want to die too. The New Yorker put me in their Going On About Town section and I just couldn't take it anymore, man!

JON:

She was taking tallies of how many times I said the word sorry.

ANDY:

That's weird. How many times did you say sorry?

JON:

Ten, apparently. Eleven when I left... I spilled my coffee.

ANDY:

How long were you there?

JON:

I don't know. Fifteen minutes?

ANDY:

The ratio's not great.

JON:

What do you want me to do? What does SHE want me to do? Not say sorry? People bitch at comedians all the time demanding they apologize for every stupid thing they say and then I say sorry a few times too many and suddenly I'm the fuck-up!

ANDY:

You know, I was dating this girl a little while back, and one night she clocked how many times I said "my bad."

JON:

Why'd you need to say my bad multiple times?

ANDY:

I forget why the first couple times but the second time I came too fast - which only happened that one time ever [*he doesn't even need to look at Jon's face*] Don't say anything. So, I thought it was a perfectly valid reason to say "my bad." What does she want me to say? "That was great"? "Stuck the landing"? "No notes"?

JON:

What girl was this?

ANDY:

Don't worry about it.

JON:

God, that's what you say- what you said- every time. You never want to talk to your friends about girls.

ANDY:

I just did.

JON:

In a way that means something.

ANDY:

Because I had everything I needed already. Friends and girls.
And a Hulu pilot deal. Who needs talking?

JON:

Still, not even in college? You don't think that's weird?

ANDY:

I think it's more weird to be like you and spend eight hours
trying to decipher if a period at the end of a text is a sign
she might be mad at you for not holding the door open at the end
of the date.

JON:

That was because Brooke never used punctuation in her texts
before! Then a period out of nowhere! What am I supposed to
think?

ANDY:

Then you said "sorry" unprompted and she ghosted you.

JON:

Why do I say sorry all the time?

ANDY:

I'm no psychologist - if the whole train thing wasn't a dead
giveaway - but could it have something to do with the rampant
physical abuse in your childhood?

JON:

You had the same thing and you never say sorry.

ANDY:

Did you miss the "my bad" bit from two minutes ago?

JON:

That seems somehow healthier.

ANDY:

Well, I also killed myself.

JON:

Maybe Rachel's onto something.

ANDY:

Maybe you should just chill with talking to this lady.

JON:

Why?

ANDY:

You have that actual big deal show coming up and don't want you want to focus up for like ten minutes of your life?

JON:

What big show? I'm not back at the Attic for like five days.

ANDY:

No, dude. Tomorrow night at the Blue Room.

JON:

At Blue Room? Me? Tomorrow?

ANDY:

How did you forget?

JON:

I never booked a show there. How did that happen? Did they reach out?

ANDY:

Oh. Well, maybe I booked it for you.

JON:

That's- how did you-

ANDY:

I googled possession. Taking to it like a fish to water. Maybe dying was just a way to answer my true calling.

JON:

I don't remember being possessed.

ANDY:

My bad?

JON:

I wonder if I should get the reporter to go.

ANDY:

WHAT is your obsession with her-

JON:

It's good publicity!

ANDY:

Is it?

JON:

I'm not as far along as you are—... were. I need stuff like this.

ANDY:

Not if you come off like a freak. What kind of person does stand up and apologizes constantly?

JON:

Wait, I'm a freak? Your head is not fully attached!

ANDY:

That's your imagination at work, pal!

JON:

No, it's not! It's what I saw!

*[Not much to say to that, so they pause.
Jon's phone rings.]*

ANDY:

Well... my bad. *[Jon ignores him, picks up his phone]* At least laugh at that before answering the phone. It was a good call back.

JON:

Hi, Rachel. I wanted to say—that I apologize for making things weird at the end there. Maybe overreacted. I didn't mean to spill the drink on you. The timing was actually good so you know I didn't mean to do it.

RACHEL:

No, I was completely out of line with the recording of it.

JON:

That's okay.

RACHEL:

I would understand if you didn't want to continue, but if you did, I had this idea that you could pick where we met to continue the interview. Somewhere you're comfortable maybe. A club you're familiar with, maybe at The Attic. I could even come see you at home.

[Jon looks over at Andy, who has been trying on multiple methods of covering up his neck, maybe including chains, just his hands, a towel, etc. When Jon sees him, Andy has Jon's headphones on.]

JON:

At home?

RACHEL:

I've done that before many times. But if you have any reservations—

JON:

Just that I need to actually clean up for once in my life. But that's fine.

RACHEL:

If you're sure.

JON:

Can you come tomorrow?

RACHEL:

I'll check with my boss but I'll likely be able to, yes. Is the afternoon okay?

JON:

Whenever is fine.

ANDY:

No, not whenever. Your show's at eight, stupid.

RACHEL:

Great, I'll email you to finalize tonight.

JON:

Cool, see you then.

ANDY:

Don't you hear me? Please tell me I haven't just become a visual hallucination. That's so lame.

[Once Jon has hung up, he goes to the white board to erase it.]

ANDY:

Hey! Some of that is serviceable.

JON:

It won't be serviceable by tomorrow night and I'd like to not seem like a total lunatic in front of this woman.

ANDY:

Why, who cares? No one reads the Astoria Daily, dude!