

# MOHAMMED AND THE SLEEPING CAT

A one-act  
by

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*Two men on a couch. MAX sitting, JONAH asleep curled up, head pushed up against Max's lap.*

*Jonah is quite handsome, boyish looking. He wears an old blue sweater. Max addresses the audience - he does not write as he speaks.*

MAX

Dear James. I got your letter, obviously.

I'm writing this letter back to you trying not to wake Jonah, who 10 minutes ago put down his copy of the Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe and is now taking a nap next to me.

My mind is stringing through several related fantasies as Jonah lies pushed up next to me in the thrift-store navy-blue sweater which, coincidence: you gave me once.

*Pause, he doesn't move.*

In between the last line and this one, I have stared at him for 5 minutes, leaned in, smelled his skin, breathed in deeply, then exhaled facing away so my breathing won't wake him. He twitches. I smell.

*Jonah twitches.*

He twitches.

And what I am imagining is: Jonah is my best friend and we are both 17 and I have still never been able to touch him though I dream of it every night. And this casual nap against my leg, unconsidered by him, will mark a turning point for me, the high point of our intimacy. Maybe it's 1952 and this will be the high water mark of my entire sexual life, the wound I will brood upon.

*Jonah moves his firmly head onto Max's lap, though still asleep.*

MAX (cont)

It is 1952 right now, and I think our love is purer, more noble, for never having been acted upon.

*Slowly, Max lets a hand rest on Jonah's head.*

Now I am imagining, I am imagining he is 14, 12 even. And my cousin - doubly forbidden. I am still at my present age, 29. He has run away from home and shamefully, passionately, we have sex every night. He has instigated it but I know I am doing wrong, a terrible wrong. But then this hidden, intimate, easy moment feels all the more precious. I could go to jail for this, I know, and I should. And I will be tortured there, I will be at the bottom of the prison food chain. This moment starts to feel very blessed, very -

*Jonah mumbles, his glasses fall to the floor, Max picks them up, examines them.*

And now I am imagining we are both in our 50s - 59, I imagine arbitrarily, and so we have been together... 33 years. He is still smooth and beautiful, and I have not aged nearly as badly as I'd assumed I would. He is still trying to read the complete works of Poe, and again he naps 2 pages into it. I am still questioning whether he is attracted to me, or could do better than me, and still neither of us has cheated. Our love - over 30 years together - seems miraculous to us, to others.

Jonah is still sleeping. I have managed to grab this piece of paper and pen without waking him - artfully with my foot and my fingertips. His skin touches my writing arm but he does not wake. I am reminded of Mohammed and the sleeping cat.

I lean in again and sniff: deodorant and soap, fresh, Jonah takes care of himself. He rarely smells anything but fresh, masculine, any one of the number of adjectives deodorant manufacturers promise, and he smells like them all. Smooth skin, a stray grown up hair here and there, the barest hint of his real age. When he first took his clothes off, all I could think was: I should have to pay to have sex with someone who

MAX (cont)

looks like that. And as I write this, a voice inside me says, *don't worry you will.*

He moves -

*Indeed, Jonah wakes,  
stretches.*

JONAH

Darling?

MAX

You were napping.

JONAH

Oh. How long was I asleep?

MAX

An hour maybe. I was writing a letter.

JONAH

On paper?

MAX

'Fraid so.

JONAH

Shit, I hate to fall asleep in the afternoon. You should've woken me.

MAX

You looked so peaceful.

JONAH

Yeah? I hate to nap.

MAX

What were you dreaming about?

JONAH

I don't know. We were old in my dream, I think. You had aged *terribly.*

MAX

Thanks.

JONAH

Or wait, I think you'd died. Yeah. That never means what it seems like it means in a dream, right? (*New thought*) I said we'd go out tonight right?

MAX

You did.

JONAH

I just wanna finish this one story. Okay?

MAX

Okay.

*Jonah lays down on Max's lap and reads...*

*...Then naps.*

MAX

Jonah has been reading *The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe* for the entire length of our relationship.

In between the last line and this line the sun has set. The cold November air has mixed with the too warm steam heat in our apartment - making it feel oddly like a lovely spring breeze is blowing.

I am thinking about the letter you sent and the offer you made... which tugs at me with more force than you might imagine. And which feels real, and impossible, like this breeze.

To be with you again...

22 years old and you and me living on 11<sup>th</sup> street. That rat-trap, literally I think we saw a rat once. And we made the bed out of the couch every night and in my memory we were always having burritos, terrible burritos, and I was miserable, and I thought: this is the stage in life people romanticize?

*He shakes his head at the memory, romanticizes it.*

No one could kiss like you.

*He looks at Jonah.*

MAX (cont)

Jonah's head is warm against my thigh. His shirt will leave an indentation on my arm and he'll apologize. We apologize a lot, Jonah and me. He says *I'm sorry* whenever he, you know, interrupts me by mistake. *I'm sorry*, I'll say, when the dinner isn't perfect. *I'm sorry* I'm a little spacey, *I'm sorry* you didn't have fun at the party tonight... I used to think this was a sign he and I didn't want to fuck things up.

Today I think we have just been putting easy apologies in the bank, stored up as protection for when the real sins get committed.

*Jonah startles awake.*

JONAH

Shit. Was I napping *again*?

MAX

'Fraid so

JONAH

You know I hate to nap. Oh, my collar left a crease on your arm, I'm sorry.

MAX

That's okay.

JONAH

(Yawn) Fuck. I'm never gonna finish this book.

MAX

Maybe you need a new book.

JONAH

I just want to read it all through once. I wanna-

*Yawns. Tries to read Max's pad.*

I wanna read your letter! Your letter on paper!

MAX

No.

JONAH

Who were you writing?

MAX

None of your business.

JONAH

Is it about me? Let me read.

MAX

Please don't.

*Jonah glimpses sees a bit.*

Rude.

JONAH

Oh my god, do you keep a journal? *Dear diary, today was a most exciting day!*

MAX

Shut up. *(Beat)* I'm writing about Mohammed and the sleeping cat.

JONAH

*(As though he's writing about some sexy Arab guy)* Who's Mohammed?

MAX

Who's Mohammed?

JONAH

Oh. That one.

MAX

Mohammed's beloved cat falls asleep on the sleeve of his favorite robe....

*Jonah lays face up on Max's lap.*

JONAH

Cat falls asleep on robe. I'm listening.

MAX

Anyway, so Mohammed has some, I don't know, battle to fight, some announcement to make, but he doesn't want to get up cause he doesn't want to wake the cat. His um, lieutenants are like yelling at him to hurry. To rush off somewhere. And he goes: shhhhh... don't wake this perfect sleeping creature by me. And then he cuts off his sleeve, so the cat can stay asleep.

JONAH

Where did he get the scissors?

MAX

He grabbed them with his feet.

JONAH

They were just lying around?

MAX

I don't know. Or someone handed him a saber.

JONAH

Wouldn't the cat like have gone to sleep one second later anyway? They sleep all the time. Cats *love* to get woken up so they can sleep again!

MAX

You are an infidel.

JONAH

Or he just coulda killed the cat.

*Silence.*

MAX

Excuse me?

JONAH

I mean it's just a *cat*. He could have you know released him from his earthly struggles. Sent him to heaven. Assuming Muslims believe cats go to heaven. (*A bit gay*) Though that would've *ruined* the robe. Ooh ooh, can we get a cat!

MAX

No.

JONAH

Pleeaase?

MAX

(*Old fight*) I'm allergic.

JONAH

I want a sleeping cat!

MAX

If I leave you, you can get a cat.

JONAH  
You thinking of leaving me?

MAX  
Of course not.

*Beat.*

JONAH  
You know if you left me I'd be *devastated...* but if you got me a cat, then it would get me through the misery...

MAX  
So it'd sorta be a 50/50 kinda trade off.

JONAH  
Something like that.

MAX  
Read your book.

JONAH  
Nah. Wanna fool around?

MAX  
No. *(Beat)* Okay.

*They kiss.*

*They kiss again. As they  
make out:*

JONAH  
Who were you writing?

MAX  
What?

JONAH  
Who were you writing a letter on paper to?

*They are still kissing.*

MAX  
James.

JONAH

Who's James?

MAX

Um, college beau. I told you about James.

*Jonah pulls back, smiles wickedly.*

JONAH

Now I *have* to read it!

MAX

No.

JONAH

You write your college boyfriend often?

MAX

No.

JONAH

Hmm... suspicious.

MAX

That sweater was his, I don't know, it reminded me of him.

JONAH

You gave *me* this sweater!

MAX

I *lent* it to you.

JONAH

You lent it to me on my *birthday*.

*Jonah takes the sweater off*

MAX

Oh come on you look great in it.

JONAH

No, it's just a little warm in here.

MAX

I'm sorry I told you.

JONAH

No, it's a sweet gift. He must've loved you.

MAX

How do you know?

JONAH

You're lovable.

MAX

Awww.... You're not jealous?

JONAH

Nah.

MAX

*(Trying to make him jealous)* I write him often.

JONAH

Oh you do not.

MAX

I do, I still love him.

JONAH

Lies! You were smitten with me from the start. Where is he now?

MAX

I'm not telling.

JONAH

Fine. Finish your letter.

*Max becomes dead serious.  
Decides to tell him  
everything:*

MAX

Do you...?

JONAH

*(Playful)* Yeeessss?

*Max changes his mind:*

MAX

Nothing.

JONAH

What?

*Changing it again:*

MAX

Will you tell me you love me?

JONAH

Didn't I just?

MAX

Did you?

JONAH

I said you're lovable, same thing. *(Beat)* Fine: I love you. I love you I love you. That was easy.

MAX

*(Soft, sad)* Yeah.

JONAH

*(Serious)* What's up, baby?

*Beat.*

MAX

I'm thinking of travelling.

JONAH

Ooh where do you wanna go?

MAX

India. Maybe.

JONAH

Ugh, please don't get all *spiritual* on me-

MAX

Alone.

*Silence.*

JONAH

Oh. Do you have the money?

MAX

I could charge it.

JONAH

Like on a whim?

MAX

Yeah.

JONAH

Wow. Ok. Have fun, baby.

MAX

Would you miss me?

JONAH

Are you insane, of course not.

*Jonah was joking.*

*But also he senses the sudden, odd gravity of the moment.*

JONAH

I know you hate that I read Poe.

*Now it's Max who's confused.*

I know that you hate Poe and um, you make fun of the fact that it's taking me like 3 years to read all his stories. You think it's stupid I'm reading one book over and over, don't you?

Well fuck you I *like* this book. I like falling asleep and waking up and getting bored and getting interested again. One writer.

*Jonah lets his double meaning land. He then impulsively kisses Max on the forehead, but gently. Then he smiles, playful.*

Ok, I'm gonna finish my Poe now. Promise I won't nap. Then we'll go out, okay?

*Jonah starts reading.*

*Max stares at him, considers.*

*Almost as soon as Jonah  
starts reading...*

*...he falls asleep on Max's  
lap, head on the sweater.*

*Max turns to the audience.*

MAX

Dear James. In between the last line and this one, 2 years have passed.

In this time I have left one job and started another, Jonah has become "All-But-Dissertation," we traveled to Montreal for a week, visited my sister in Seattle.

I think about your life, in Nepal or Peru or Africa, wherever you are now. You have *adventures*. You have *quests*. I have a solid wonderful something going on 5 years now, that still somehow seems mysterious to me, part of a great drama. I imagine that if I could see what I have now through *your eyes*, it might look very commonplace.

When you wrote me, asked me to abandon everything and here was money for a plane ticket and what the hell would I come live with you? When you wrote me out of the blue after 7 years-

...and I never wrote back-

...I thought: well then, this is it. I'm 29 and I have found the man I'll spend my life with and I'm happy. Unlike 3/4s of my friends, I know how to be happy.

And I thought: I have this couch. This head on my lap. I love you's that are no longer risky like they were once, no longer jumps off a cliff and oh god will he catch me? Just sweet markers, now, for everything else. Just a promise.

*He looks at Jonah.*

I could leave him. I could find you wherever you are. I could get him a cat.

JONAH

*(Into the sweater) Mmmm... You smell great.*

*Max smiles.*

MAX

Anyway so I was cleaning today and I found this half written letter from 2 years ago. And I sat down, opened a beer, and decided what the hell I'd finish it.

And if I ever find out where you are now, wherever you are travelling now in this world...

I promise, I promise, I'll send it.