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SF PERUSALS

Maple and Vine

by Jordan Harrison

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the New York Premiere of *Maple and Vine* Off-Broadway in 2011

***Maple and Vine* premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in 2011. The Play was commissioned by Actors Theatre of Louisville and Berkeley Repertory Theatre. It was originally developed with members of The Civilians, and written with support from Guggenheim and Hodder Fellowships. It received developmental support from Playwrights Horizons, the Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School New Works Festival, and the Kesselring Fellowship through the Orchard Project and the National Arts Club.**

MAPLE AND VINE premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in March 2011. The production was directed by Anne Kauffman, with scenic design by Brian Sidney Bembridge, costume design by Connie Furr Soloman, lighting design by Jeff Nellis, sound design by Benjamin Marcum, and properties design by Alice Baldwin. The stage manager was Melissa Rae Miller. The dramaturg was Amy Wegener. The directing assistant was Rachel Paul, and the production assistant was Nick Bussett. The cast was as follows:

KATHA. . . . . Kate Turnbull
RYU . . . . . Peter Kim
DEAN. . . . . .Paul Niebanck
ELLEN/JENNA . . . . . .Jeanine Serralles
ROGER/OMAR. . . . . Jesse Pennington

MAPLE AND VINE had its New York premiere at Playwrights Horizons in December 2011 under the direction of Anne Kauffman. The production had scenic design by Alexander Dodge, costume design by Ilona Somogyi, lighting design by David Weiner, and properties design by Jessica Provenzale. The original music and sound design was by Bray Poor. The stage manager was William H. Lang. The assistant stage manager was Ryan Gohsman, and the directing assistant was Ilana Becker. The cast was as follows:

KATHA. . . . . Marin Ireland
RYU . . . . . Peter Kim
DEAN. . . . . Trent Dawson
ELLEN/JENNA . . . . . .Jeanine Serralles
ROGER/OMAR. . . . . Pedro Pascal

CHARACTERS

KATHA – mid to late 30s.

RYU – mid to late 30s.

DEAN – late 30s.

ELLEN – late 30s. Also plays **JENNA**.

ROGER – mid to late 30s. Also plays **OMAR**.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This is a play with many locations. The productions I've been involved with, while scenically ambitious, benefited from reducing the number of locations in the interest of fluidity. At the same time, many locations were minimally suggested. This is all to say, if your theater (like most theaters) isn't graced with lightning-quick hydraulic lifts or automated platforms as silent as a pin dropping, do not despair. I can imagine a production where costumes and wigs do nearly all the work in transporting us to the 1950s. While I can't say that locations are unimportant, I don't think they are as important as the narrative momentum. In this play, the way one scene "talks" to the following scene is sometimes as important as what happens within the scenes themselves.

In Part One, Dean and Ellen are speaking to a group of people who have already made the decision to try out the SDO but have not moved there yet. Think of it as a kind of large-scale orientation meeting.

SCRIPT NOTE

A slash mark (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

PART ONE

1.

(In the darkness, we hear:

Sounds of a rainforest.)

(The rainforest stops abruptly, and we hear:

Sounds of an ocean.)

(The ocean stops abruptly, and we hear:

Sounds of a babbling brook.)

(And back to the rainforest.)

RYU. Make up your mind.

(As our eyes adjust, we can make out **KATHA** *and* **RYU** *in bed.)*

KATHA. I've been awake for two hours.

RYU. Oh Baby.

KATHA. I've been counting the seconds between the jungle insects. There's a pattern. *(talking along with the sounds:)* Chirp-chirp. *(pause)* Chirp-chirp. Then it gets longer. You don't care.

RYU. I know what you're going to say, but what if you took a pill.

KATHA. I don't want to be zonked out all of tomorrow.

(Pause. She listens to **RYU** *breathing. We hear a* **WOMAN***'s strident voice from the street below.)*

WOMAN IN THE STREET. Simon. I know you're up there.

KATHA. Oh no.

WOMAN. Simon buzz me in.
Why are you DOING THIS TO ME?

KATHA. She's back.

RYU. Who?

KATHA. She usually comes around 2.

WOMAN. Why are you DOING THIS TO ME?

*(***RYU** *presses a button on the alarm clock and blue glowing numbers read "2:03.")*

RYU. She's right on time.

KATHA. It isn't funny.

This is, like, the farthest I'll ever get from being at work. This is it.

I should be having a *dream, /* I should be somewhere else, but instead I'm just – here.

WOMAN. *(overlapping at"/")* I came all this way, I took THREE TRAINS so I don't see how you can be DOING THIS TO ME!

RYU. Jesus.

WOMAN. No one deserves this Simon.

KATHA. No, Simon. No one deserves this.

*(***KATHA** *continues in a clenched, terrible way – stoked by the voice outside.)*

KATHA. I lie here all night thinking about the whole day in front of me I write imaginary emails I make imaginary trips to the copy room so when I actually LIVE IT it's like I'm doing it all over again like like Sisyphus or like Hell, I

WOMAN. Simon, if I have to stand out here in the cold any longer I think I'm really going to LOSE IT.

think it's probably very much what Hell would be like, this kind of cold like repetition with no chance of – peace.

RYU. Baby please – You're shaking.

WOMAN. Simon!

RYU. Who's Simon?

KATHA. Who knows.

RYU. Is he the one with the pug?

KATHA. It's not like I've ever seen our neighbors.

WOMAN. SIMON!

KATHA. And yet I feel like I know him.

RYU. Baby, how about a pill.

KATHA. You're always trying to medicate me.

RYU. I'm always trying to help you. It's been six months.

KATHA. It takes as long as it takes.

RYU. Of course.

(Short pause)

KATHA. What if this is *me* now.

RYU. No.

KATHA. Hold me for a while?

RYU. Sure. I can do that.

(He holds her. **KATHA** *starts to suck her thumb. It helps, a little.)*

WOMAN. Simon!

2.

*(***DEAN** *speaks out to us. He wears an immaculate 1950s suit and well-shined wing tips. He takes off his hat, politely, before speaking. Revealing slick, aggressively parted hair.)*

*(***ELLEN** *stands further off, almost out of the light. She wears a smart, feminine suit, with hat and gloves.)*

DEAN. First of all, welcome. Welcome to the SDO.

I bet you're all feeling pretty anxious.

"Am I going to use the right words."

"Am I going to walk the right way."

I mean gosh, you've just taken a pretty huge step, right?

The first thing to remember is that all of us were newcomers at one point.

The other thing to remember – and this one really helped me – the other thing to remember is that the 1950s *weren't in black and white.* It sounds silly, but it's easy to think like that. All we've seen are the photographs. Old TV shows. But people in the '50s had yellow shirts and red sneakers just like you and me. So the main thing to remember is that you can live in color. You don't have to go around trying to act like someone in an old photo. I mean anyway you can't, because they're a photo, and you're…you.

That's what this place is for. So you can feel like you again.

I'm sure you all have a lot of questions.

"What do I wear?" "How do I talk?"

"How do I explain this to the kids?"

Ellen and I will help you answer all of these perfectly normal questions.

Everyone, this is my lovely wife Ellen.

ELLEN. Hello everyone.

DEAN. Isn't she something?

3.

*(***KATHA** *and* **RYU***'s apartment, the next morning.* **KATHA** *sits slumped in pajamas, staring at her laptop computer. Maybe she's still in bed. A bowl of cereal sits beside her, untouched. She looks happy in a tranquilized sort of way.* **RYU** *is fully dressed. He's also looking at a laptop, but more actively – web surfing, sipping his coffee.)*

(We hear period-sounding voices from Katha's computer:)

MALE VOICE. Don't you like it?

FEMALE VOICE. Like it?

(Soaring music plays.)

It's more exquisite than any dress I could ever have imagined.

MALE VOICE. Puff sleeves.

FEMALE VOICE. The puffiest in the world. You are a man of impeccable taste, Matthew.

KATHA. So beautiful…

MALE VOICE. Well, you don't / want to get your dress dirty.

RYU. What?

KATHA. *(still watching the video, rapt)* Just, the way Matthew doesn't ever say "I love you" but you just *know*?

RYU. Who's Matthew?

KATHA. Oh, sorry. It's "Anne of Green Gables."

RYU. Didn't you already watch that?

KATHA. There are 26 installments.

(sheepish)

The things they have on YouTube.

RYU. The things people look for on YouTube.

KATHA. It's my childhood. Don't begrudge me my opiates.

RYU. I never begrudge your opiates.

(He walks out of the room.)

KATHA. It's a nostalgia thing. But I'm not sure whether it's nostalgia for the 1880s or the *19*80s. My mother and I watched it all together on TV.

*(***RYU** *comes back in brushing his teeth.)*

It always seemed like a nice life. Go to the one-room schoolhouse. Do arithmetic on your slate. Dip some girl's pigtails in the inkwell.

*(***RYU** *disappears into the bathroom to spit.)*

It seemed like a nice life.

RYU. *(off)* I was just googling? There are some really affordable places in Nyack.

KATHA. Nyack?

(He comes back in.)

RYU. It'd be quieter, we'd have space. It's just the commute.

(She hits pause. The music stops.)

KATHA. Space for what.

RYU. You know, space.

KATHA. *(thin ice)* Space for kids?

RYU. Space for whatever.

KATHA. Let's – not have this conversation now.

RYU. Why not?

KATHA. I'm getting ready for work.

RYU. You don't look like you're getting ready. You look like you're at a slumber party.

KATHA. I'm eating breakfast.

(She grabs her cereal bowl. She starts the video again. Soaring music from the computer. **RYU** *shakes his head. He starts to put on his coat.)*

RYU. Well, see you tonight.

KATHA. *(not looking up)* Okay.
I'm home pretty late.

*(***RYU***'s hand on the doorknob.)*

What's your day like?

*(***RYU** *starts to cry.)*

KATHA. *(cont.)* Oh. Oh no. *(She hits pause.)*
What'd I say?

RYU. *(through tears)* It's just – it's like every day. I'll get *through* it. And then I come home, and you're –. There isn't any –

KATHA. Here. Come here.

RYU. I'm the one who's supposed to be there for you.

KATHA. There aren't any rules.

4.

*(***DEAN** *speaks directly to us.)*

DEAN. It wasn't that the modern world was too fast, or too noisy. In a way, it was too *quiet*. Let me explain. In the 21st century, everything's pretty easy, right? You have your drive-thru espresso. Your drive-thru pharmacy. Or why go to the store when you can get it online? You hardly have to interact with anyone – except for all those people you've never even met who enter your life through your computer, pulling you every which way.

In the '50s it's different. In the '50s you have to *go* places. You have to *talk* to people. You pick up the phone to make a call and there's an operator on the other end and you say "Good morning." Or say you want to find something out, you go down to the library and Miss Wilkes looks it up in the Dewey Decimals. There's a separate store for meat, and fish, and fruit, and a gent behind each counter who knows your name. A man brings the milk every morning.

In the modern world, I used to make it through half the day without talking to a single soul. I used to have it so easy. And now, looking back – I realize how lonely I was.

5.

(At the office, late that morning. **KATHA** *stares at her phone, catatonic.)*

*(***OMAR** *and* **JENNA** *watch her from a distance.)*

OMAR. Pssst.

JENNA. What's going on?

OMAR. Haven't you noticed?

JENNA. *(nodding)* She should really rethink the sweater.

OMAR. No, I mean – she hasn't moved in like ten minutes.

JENNA. Why not?

OMAR. 'Cause she's depressed I guess.

JENNA. What about?

OMAR. Nothing.

JENNA. How do you know it's nothing?

OMAR. Her husband's a doctor.

JENNA. What kind?

OMAR. Plastic surgeon.

*(***KATHA** *appears to be giving herself a private little pep talk. Maybe she gives herself a light slap on each cheek.)*

JENNA. Ohmygod.

OMAR. What's she doing?

JENNA. Ohmygod.

*(***KATHA** *picks up the receiver.)*

OMAR. Every day she comes in later.

JENNA. I know, isn't it great?

OMAR. No, I mean: What if they let her go.

JENNA. Let her go. I'll take her job.

OMAR. *(loving it)* Don't be terrible! Besides, you wouldn't get it.

JENNA. Why not?

OMAR. You're too nice.

JENNA. I know, I'm nice right?

OMAR. You're *too* nice.

In that job you have to be able to tell people / No.

KATHA. *(overlapping with* **OMAR***'s "No")* No! I will not hold!

(She has been put on hold. She hangs up, starts to dial again.)

JENNA. And I suppose you can tell people No?

OMAR. *(arch)* Maybe.

*(***OMAR** *starts to leave.)*

JENNA. Fancy salad place for lunch?

OMAR. Always.

(And he's gone, headed towards **KATHA***'s office.)*

KATHA. *(brightly)* Yes, you just put me on hold? Do not do that again.

–

Marcus please.

–

Katha at Random House.

–

Well I'm pretty sure he's at his desk for *me* because he left me three messages about the Labradoodle book.

–

An early *lunch,* what a luxury. You'd think the man putting together the most urgent coffee table book of our times wouldn't have time to –

–

No. I'll be here.

*(***KATHA** *hangs up. She stares at her phone.)*

I'll be here.

*(***KATHA** *sucks her thumb unconsciously.* **OMAR** *comes sidling up to the doorway.)*

OMAR. Katha? Knock knock.

KATHA. Who's there?

OMAR. Omar.

KATHA. Omar who.

OMAR. *(concerned)* You know, *Omar.*

Oh, I get it – we're doing a thing, a knock-knock thing.

(Short pause)

KATHA. You know for a homosexual you're not very funny.

OMAR. Well, you're my boss, so.

KATHA. So.

OMAR. So we don't really have that relationship?

(Beat)

Are you ready?

KATHA. Ready…

OMAR. You have the Department Head meeting in ten minutes.

(For a moment, **KATHA** *seems to forget how to breathe.)*

Unless you want me to tell them you're busy sucking your thumb.

(He exits.)

KATHA. "Unless you want me to tell them…"

That's good. Maybe he is funny.

You're talking out loud.

(She stares at her phone. Inhales and exhales. She picks up the receiver and dials just two numbers.)

Yes. Put me through to Human Resources.

6.

*(***ELLEN** *speaks directly to us.* **DEAN** *stands farther off now.)*

ELLEN. In the beginning, most people try a little too hard with the lingo.

It's easy to get carried away. There are lots of fun terms: "Don't be a square." "Back-seat bingo."

But you don't want to use them all in one sentence.

DEAN. "Hey cat, don't be a square, how 'bout we jump in my hot rod and play a little back-seat bingo?"

ELLEN. I'm not that kind of girl!

DEAN. Oh yes you are.

(They have a laugh at this.)

ELLEN. *(to us again)* That was a lot of fun. But you see the problem. You can end up sounding like you're a person at a theme party, not a person. The most colorful slang from the '50s comes from the Beats and the Hotrodders, so nice ordinary people will want to use those words sparingly.

DEAN. What people don't realize is that a lot of the most common '50s sayings are still in use in 2011, so they'll come naturally to you.

"Cool it." "Make out." "Have a blast."

"Word from the bird."

Just kidding. I was just making sure you were paying attention.

ELLEN. Oh Dean.

Sometimes you just razz my berries.

7.

(Early that afternoon. **KATHA** *and* **RYU** *in Madison Square Park, with hot dogs.* **KATHA** *isn't eating hers.* **RYU** *still has his scrubs on.)*

KATHA. Happy? I don't know.

RYU. I mean the last time you really – felt like yourself.

KATHA. I guess when we rented bikes in Amsterdam? And we got falafel?

*(***RYU***'s beeper beeps. He takes it out.)*

That was almost two years ago.

RYU. *(glancing at it)* What about Cape Cod – was that after? When we pulled the bikes over

KATHA. And we had oysters from that stand.

RYU. That was good.

(Beat)

KATHA. So the secret is bikes.

RYU. Or food.

(He takes a bite of his hot dog, trying to be jaunty.)

KATHA. Great, Ryu.
Then we're all set, we'll just get some…*bikes* / and and

RYU. Baby.

KATHA. and some hot dogs and some Cherry fucking / *Garcia*

RYU. Baby okay / okay

KATHA. and it'll be like it never happened!

RYU. Of course it happened. It was terrible. But that doesn't mean we have to give up.

KATHA. Oh right, "Snap out of it, Katha – it's been six whole months, get over it. / Chin up, kiddo."

RYU. I didn't say that. I would never / say that.

KATHA. "Six months, time to pop out another one!"

RYU. Now you're just / being crazy –

KATHA. Maybe I don't want to love something for all that time again just to have it, to have it / stolen away!

RYU. Settle down.

KATHA. We saw him, Ryu! We saw him!

(quieter now, spent)

He was real.

RYU. Of course he was.
He was mine too.

KATHA. I'm sorry – shit.
You must get / tired of this routine.

RYU. Don't be sorry.

KATHA. I love you.

RYU. I love you.

KATHA. I want us to be happy.

RYU. I think…people aren't happy. People have *never* been happy. The whole idea is a tyranny. Slaves building the pyramids…*Serfs.* They didn't have enough time to ask "Am I happy?" This is not even a hundred-year-old idea: "Am I happy."

KATHA. Maybe that's what happy *is.*

RYU. What.

KATHA. Not having enough time to wonder if you're happy.

*(***RYU***'s beeper beeps again.)*

RYU. No, that's just busy.

(He looks at it.)

I should, I'm sorry –

(He stands up, brushes crumbs off his pants.)

We'll keep talking tonight.

KATHA. You just got here.

RYU. You think it stops?

KATHA. I know

RYU. Bags of blood, and bags of *fat…*

KATHA. *("tasty")* Mmm

RYU. …and 15-year-olds who want boobs.
I have to go back. You do too.

KATHA. No I don't. I quit.

*(***RYU** *takes her in – she is strangely cavalier.)*

RYU. You quit?

KATHA. I quit. Finito Mussolini.

RYU. When?

KATHA. This morning.

RYU. Why didn't you say that before?

KATHA. I didn't feel like talking about it.

(Pause. **RYU** *is deeply weirded out.)*

(His phone rings.)

RYU. Jesus. *(The phone rings.)*
I'm going to cancel my procedures. I mean you're clearly – *(The phone rings.)*
Are you sure you're not –

KATHA. I'm not a flight risk. Go. *(The phone rings.)*

RYU. I'll be right back. *(answering)* Hello?

*(***RYU** *runs off.* **KATHA** *doesn't know what to do with herself. She takes a first bite of her hot dog.)*

*(***DEAN** *enters in his '50s garb. He is lost, squinting at street names. There is something unmistakably, gorgeously out of place about him.)*

DEAN. Excuse me.

KATHA. *(giving him the signal for "I just have to swallow this")*
Mmph.

DEAN. Oh, sorry.

(He offers her the handkerchief out of his breast pocket in one smooth gesture.)

KATHA. No, it's fine. Sorry.

DEAN. Not at all. Do you know where 200 Fifth Avenue is?

KATHA. Oh yeah, it's confusing. The entrance is on 25th. That's right by where I work. Worked.

DEAN. Well, lucky I ran into you.

(He tips his hat, starting to go.)

Thank you.

KATHA. Job interview?

DEAN. What? No. Why do you ask?

KATHA. Just, the suit and everything. It's just pretty put together.

DEAN. Thank you. I have the same one in navy and dark brown.

KATHA. This whole thing you have going – *(making a circling gesture with her hands, as if circumscribing his outfit)* – it's like something out of the '50s.

DEAN. Yes.

KATHA. Is that what they're doing downtown now? Let me guess, there's nothing shocking left so the only shocking thing is to be straight-laced. We've come full circle.

(He just looks at her.)

Or is it less… *(succumbing to self-consciousness)* self-conscious.

DEAN. I'm not part of a fashion movement. If that's what you're suggesting.

KATHA. Oh I don't mean to make it sound… / superficial.

DEAN. That's all right. We're used to people being suspicious.

KATHA. Suspicious?

DEAN. Of the way we do things. Especially people who are content with the way the world is nowadays.

KATHA. "Content."

What's that like?

(He seems to really see her for the first time.)

DEAN. What I mean is, we're used to explaining ourselves to people.

KATHA. Who's we?

DEAN. May I sit down?

8.

*(***DEAN** *speaks directly to us.)*

DEAN. I'm called back, now and then, on business. Spreading the word.

And it's not just my job to tell the rest of the world about us. I have to decide what to tell *us* about *them.* I have more access to the news, and if it's gossip about so-and-so is dating so-and-so, of course I don't tell you – but when a plane crashes into the World Trade Center I tell you, when the war in Iraq starts I tell you.

Because I have more access to the outside world, it can be a struggle for me. I have a cell phone, for emergencies. I keep it in a drawer in my house. I keep the drawer locked. Just knowing it's there can be hard. It can be a distraction. That's why people today can't think straight, because there are so many distractions. They are not quiet in their mind. If you're here, you probably know that already.

It may be hard at first. I won't lie to you. When you first come to the SDO, you're used to a different kind of freedom. In the Society of Dynamic Obsolescence, there are very specific boundaries. By which I mean, if you're a gardener, you garden – you won't get invited into the house of the man you're working for. If you are a homemaker, you make your home. That's what you do. You don't start an Ultimate Frisbee team, you don't go backpacking in Thailand. Your husband and kids are going to be home soon and dinner has to be on the table. You are not free. But in another way, you're more free.

We may seem behind bars to them, but to us, they are behind the bars.

9.

*(***KATHA** *and* **RYU** *returning to their apartment, early that evening.)*

RYU. I thought you were like college friends. I never imagined you'd befriended this – strange clean man who speaks in complete sentences.

KATHA. Didn't you like him?

RYU. I didn't like that he was trying to sell us something.

KATHA. He wasn't *selling* something. He was explaining his way of life.

How long has it been since we met someone who seemed so…

RYU. Don't say happy.

KATHA. He can't be much older than us. He was us a few years ago.

RYU. So he said.

KATHA. And now there he is with his briefcase and his little hat, he's got it all figured out.

But it's silly, right?

RYU. It's not just silly. It's a cult.

KATHA. It's not a cult. They have non-profit status.

RYU. I'm not sure I even get it. It's like Civil War reenactors?

KATHA. Except for you live there.

RYU. Crazy.

KATHA. But I think the intriguing part is when you hear 1950s you think it's going to be all *Stepford Wives*. You think identical houses, identical cars, a kid on each lawn all bouncing their balls in unison. But it's not that. It's not just suburbs. There's a whole universe in there.

RYU. Did you just call it intriguing?

KATHA. You can be anything there. Beat poets. Secret Communists. They need dissenters too, you heard him. We wouldn't have to be June Cleaver and…her husband, help me

RYU. Ward

KATHA. Ward Cleaver.

RYU. You said, "We."

KATHA. What?

RYU. "We" wouldn't have to be June –

KATHA. Oh, I mean "we" like "one." One wouldn't have to be June Cleaver.

RYU. Huh.

Are you hungry? I'm starving.

KATHA. Again?

RYU. How about this. How about we order in, we get a bottle of wine, get out some actual *plates*. And then maybe later we can… *(He means have sex.)*

KATHA. I told you, it's icky when you plan it.

RYU. It's been two months.

KATHA. Six weeks.

RYU. Got it. No sex.

KATHA. No *planning*.

RYU. Oh, fine, so I'll just come and take you in the night sometime, is that what you'd prefer?

(Pause. A feeling like maybe it is. **RYU** *takes out his cell.)*

Sushi or Middle Eastern?

KATHA. I don't know. Was there sushi in the '50s?

RYU. Doubtful.

KATHA. They probably didn't even have take-out. It'd be, "Honey, fix me my dinner."

RYU. Now it's starting to sound good.

KATHA. *(a deterrent)* Remember I'd be the one doing the cooking.

RYU. You have your moments. You make a good grilled cheese.

(She makes an ironic "I'm the champion of the world" gesture.)

So sushi? Say yes, 'cause I'm dialing.

KATHA. *(almost to herself)* I used to make a good red sauce.

RYU. Dragon Roll?

KATHA. I wonder if we could.

RYU. What.

KATHA. Do it, I wonder if we could live there.

RYU. You're being serious?

(He looks at her. She looks at him. He closes the phone.)

KATHA. They do trial periods. Just six months, to see.

RYU. Six months?

KATHA. Although he said most people don't feel settled for about a year.

RYU. You're not in your right mind. You're just reaching for anything that's different.

KATHA. Dean said you might have that reaction.

RYU. Dean said – . *(He contains his sudden anger.)* I want to make sure I understand. A man you just met in the *park* is part of this cult, the Society of Dynamic – what was it?

KATHA. "Dynamic Obsolescence." The SDO for short.

RYU. And all the members of this cult –

KATHA. Why don't we find another word besides "cult" –

RYU. And all the members of this non-cult devote themselves to recreating a rigorously detailed 1950s America.

KATHA. 1955. It's always 1955.

RYU. And you are really entertaining the idea that we would leave our jobs –

KATHA. Done –

RYU. Leave our jobs and move to this gated community that just cropped up right in the middle of a landlocked Midwestern state, where we don't know anyone and we have no contact with the outside world, and we, what, we live off the land and drink ice cream sodas and pretend there's no internet?

(Short pause)

KATHA. It sounds better when you say it out loud, doesn't it.

10.

*(***ELLEN** *speaks directly to us. She smokes, wonderfully. This time* **DEAN** *is standing farther off, just out of the light.)*

ELLEN. Here are some things you've never heard of:

Hummus.

Baba Ganoush.

Falafel.

Focaccia

Ciabatta

Whole grain bread.

(She raises her eyebrows significantly: "Yes, not even whole-grain bread.")

Portobello mushrooms

Shiitake mushrooms

Chipotle peppers

Chipotle anything.

Jamaican Jerk.

Miso.

Sushi.

That one is hard for me.

But I do without.

You'll do without too.

Gruyere

Manchego

Parmiggiano Reggiano – the parmesan in a can is all right.

No Kalamata olives

No pine nuts

No pesto

No *Lattes.*

That's hard for a lot of people.

ELLEN. *(cont.)* What you get

Is salt.

You get pepper.

Mayonnaise. Mustard.

You get dried oregano.

Bay leaves.

Paprika, if you want a little kick.

Sanka.

It's a relief, the limitations. You'll find that it's a relief.

It may be hard to maintain a vegetarian lifestyle. Some people have tried. You're always welcome to try, if it coincides with the rest of your Dossier. For instance, it might coincide with the Dossier of a beatnik English professor – but if you're taking on the identity of an oil man or an ad executive, it would be pretty disruptive not to have steak and a martini for lunch.

Disrupting means you're not period-appropriate.

One question we get a lot is health concerns.

"Do I *have* to smoke?"

"Do I *have* to drink?"

"Do I *have* to eat hot fudge sundaes."

Of course, we can't ask for more commitment than you're willing to give. But we think you will get much more out of the experience with total commitment, total authenticity.

What's a little hypertension if you're happy.

11.

(Split scene: **ELLEN** *is rummaging through* **KATHA***'s closet;* **RYU** *is elsewhere with* **DEAN**.*)*

ELLEN. Just once a year. During recruiting season.

KATHA. It must be hard, coming back.

ELLEN. Not at all.

KATHA. You don't get, I don't know, *tempted?* "Ooh, HBO." "Ooh, internet."

ELLEN. Mostly I'm just reminded how hard it was. When I see all the really desperate cases.

(This hangs in the air.)

KATHA. Well. What's the prognosis?

ELLEN. You can keep the ones with cotton, wool, or silk. But throw out the poly-blends.

KATHA. Throw out?

ELLEN. Or storage. But most people decide to stay after the trial period. It doesn't really matter, as long as you keep them out of the SDO. The same goes for Lycra, ultrasuede – most of it wasn't in homes until the '70s. No digital timepieces, of course. And absolutely no Velcro *anything*.

KATHA. Isn't that always the rule?

ELLEN. Oh, you're a funny one.

KATHA. I don't know…

ELLEN. *(cheerful in a slightly metallic way)* No, it's good to know what your skills are.

*(***ELLEN** *disappears into the deep recesses of the closet. A pair of sneakers comes flying on.)*

(off) Oh dear. Most of these will have to go.

KATHA. I thought this was just a consultation?

(Over to **DEAN** *and* **RYU**. **DEAN** *makes notes on a clipboard.)*

DEAN. Of course there are certain things about your situation that will limit your Dossier.

RYU. My situation.

DEAN. Yours and Katha's.

RYU. Katha's and mine.

DEAN. Oh dear, I'm not making myself clear. When we have a mixed-race couple, that tends to suggest certain details about their Dossier. *(He glances down at his clipboard.)* You'd be living in the North, I imagine?

RYU. North of what?

DEAN. The Mason-Dixon.

(Pause)

RYU. There's a Mason-Dixon line in the gated community?

DEAN. We have everything in microcosm, yes. So there are areas with the spirit of the South and areas that have more the feeling of the North. The Midwest. The West is still under construction, so that won't be an option for another year or two.

RYU. Well, then – I guess we would probably live in the North, yes.

DEAN. *(looking at the clipboard)* How do you feel about boxes?

RYU. Boxes?

(Back to **ELLEN** *and* **KATHA**. **ELLEN** *is holding up a frock on a hanger.)*

ELLEN. This one will work nicely.

KATHA. That was my mother's.

ELLEN. And this one.

(Pause)

KATHA. That's it?

ELLEN. And the solid-color sweaters. I'm afraid you have a very synthetic closet.

KATHA. What am I supposed to wear?

ELLEN. I sew all my own clothes now. I'll teach you. It's simple if you use patterns, and fun. You'll want to change your hair, of course. And you'll probably want to try out the support undergarments before you get to the SDO. You can find a lot of them online. There's a whole different architecture to the undergarments. It really helps with period posture and bearing.

KATHA. Is it the same for everyone?

I mean, I'm sure the beatnik chicks aren't wearing girdles, right?

ELLEN. Beatnik chicks.

KATHA. I just don't know if the whole housewife thing is the way I want to go.

(Pause)

ELLEN. Sure, smoking reefer and reading Ginsberg is fun for a day.

But you seem like you'd want something more complicated. *(enticing)* Some repression, some rich subtext. Someone you can really grow into.

KATHA. Repression…

ELLEN. In the '50s, people keep things to themselves. They hold their heads high. People have a lot of secrets.

(Beat)

I know, you think a housewife is just someone in a pretty dress. But a housewife makes things *work*. If there's a silence, she fills it. If there's a wound, she dresses it.

You're a tall girl, Kathy –

KATHA. Oh, it's "Katha."

ELLEN. *(cheerful)* I know what I said.

You're a tall girl. If you didn't slouch so much *(She corrects* **KATHA***'s posture.)*, you could really command a room.

KATHA. And that's…allowed, in 1955?

*(***ELLEN** *checks to make sure they're alone.)*

ELLEN. It's different for girls. It's a different kind of power. It's not about shaking a big stick. We aren't trying to be men. What we do is more indirect. But in the end, we get what we want.

(They share a smile. Back to **RYU** *and* **DEAN**.*)*

DEAN. The nice thing is you can do a trial period. So if it turns out it isn't a fit, you're free to leave at any time.

RYU. Why does that always have an ominous ring to it?

DEAN. Maybe because you're a distrustful person.

RYU. Excuse me?

DEAN. *(warm, frank)* How can you be any other way in a big city? Identity fraud, online profiles… All of your information is just – out there. That's one of the things people love about the SDO. There's less information. A kind of privacy long since extinct. A more innocent world to raise the kids in.

You do want children, don't you?

(Beat)

RYU. We tried, once. And Katha…lost it at twenty weeks, so

DEAN. I'm sorry

RYU. So I want to try again. But Katha – isn't so sure.

DEAN. Not yet.

(Pause. They lock eyes.)

For many women, that becomes very important after moving to the SDO.

*(***RYU** *stands up.)*

RYU. I should see how Katha's doing.

DEAN. Listen, Ryu. Just listen for a second. I want to ask you something. Have you ever gone hiking for the day in the clean air and come back feeling refreshed?

RYU. Sure.

DEAN. You stand up straighter, right? You think more clearly. Everything's better when you come back, at least until that feeling wears off. So then: Why do you ever come back?

*(***KATHA** *comes in wearing one of the dresses that passed muster. Her hair is up in a kerchief* **ELLEN** *gave her. She does a little twirl.)*

KATHA. *(to* **RYU***)* Well? What do you think?

ELLEN. I love it.

RYU. *(to* **KATHA***)* Can we talk alone please?

DEAN. Absolutely, what a great idea. Take your time.

*(***DEAN** *and* **ELLEN** *stand a ways off, but don't exit. They watch* **RYU** *and* **KATHA** *during the following.)*

KATHA. I know what you're going to say.

RYU. What am I going to say.

KATHA. That this is all crazy,

That it'll never work,

That they're a couple of irony-free androids and what if everyone there is like them.

RYU. *(impressed and a little bewildered)* That *is* what I was going to say.

(They glance at **DEAN** *and* **ELLEN**. **ELLEN** *waves.)*

KATHA. They're not going to be our best friends.

They're not going to be coming over for Tupperware parties every day.

It's still going to be You and Me, without all the things that make it impossible for us to be You and Me here.

DEAN. How are you folks doing over there?

KATHA. Fine, just another minute!

RYU. *(sotto voce)* He called us a Mixed-Race Couple.

KATHA. We *are* a mixed-race couple.

RYU. But he said it with capital letters.

(She gives him a "You're being paranoid" look.)

You know how much I'd be making there? Four figures.

KATHA. Money goes farther there. It's adjusted for inflation. Deflation.

RYU. I went to medical school, Katha.

KATHA. You're the one who's always talking about the hours. The emptiness. The injecting goo into trophy wives who think you're their best friend. Give it six months. Think of it like a vacation. A vacation from your life. And if you miss all that, I'm sure they'll be dying to have you back.

(Beat)

Do you love your job?

RYU. No.

KATHA. Do you love your life?

RYU. No.

KATHA. Do you love me?

RYU. Yes.

12.

DEAN. The more people who come to the community, the more accuracy we're capable of. So it's not just good because Hey, the more the merrier – it's good because everyone who joins us contributes to the authenticity.

Our city planners are a good example. You see, fifty years ago, the roads were narrower and the sidewalks were wider. Did you know that? And our city planners make sure that is accurately represented. A lot of times they'll work together with the landscape architects. So we have city parks that are spotless for the nice neighborhoods. Fountains and everything, really nice. And we have parks with graffiti for the neighborhoods that maybe aren't as nice. The kind where homosexuals and communists might meet at night. There might be candy wrappers on the grass. The trees might have the names of lovers carved in them. The graffiti was a lot tamer back then, of course. We have a pamphlet for that.

Some of the technology has been hard to track down. Typewriter ribbon, mimeographs. Our engineers had to learn how to replicate them. Now they can do it so it's just like new. I mean just like old.

*(***ELLEN** *laughs wholesomely.)*

This is all to say, you might want to think about how *you* can contribute. And if you can't think of something, you might consider joining your local Authenticity Committee. Ellen can tell you about that, she's the Vice President.

ELLEN. Six years running.

DEAN. My wife, a woman of influence.

13.

(Back at the office. **OMAR** *sits at* **KATHA***'s desk now.* **KATHA** *stands behind him, training him. They both look at the computer screen.)*

KATHA. I usually dump the Unsoliciteds in this folder.

OMAR. "Siberia." Cute.

KATHA. That way they aren't haunting me before I have time to deal with them.

Usually I give myself an hour on Friday morning and just burn through them. There's this one guy, Mr. Firestone? He must be in his eighties at least. He sends us all his war stories, and I mean war stories like *war.* Korea. Really, um, representational. And he always calls, asking for the hard copy back. We don't do that. He knows we don't do that. He's just looking for a way to get me on the phone – I mean you.

OMAR. Um, Katha, I wanted to thank you…

KATHA. Thank me?

OMAR. I don't want this to be weird, but you really made my career, by leaving I mean.

KATHA. Well, you can have it.

OMAR. I know I can.

KATHA. No, I mean, I don't want anything to do with it.

OMAR. You really burned out.

KATHA. I don't know if that's the word I'd–.

Fine, I "burned out."

OMAR. Do you have any advice for me?

KATHA. Advice…

OMAR. I mean, to not burn out like you?

KATHA. Um. Take breaks. Try to punch out at five. I don't know.

With you I sense a… *(as though she's saying "ruthlessness")* stability I didn't have, so.

*(***OMAR** *smiles at this.)*

OMAR. *(suddenly confidential)* Is it true you're joining a cult?

(Short pause)

That's what they're saying.

KATHA. Who.

OMAR. Everyone.

KATHA. If it's easier for you to believe, then yes, it's a cult.

OMAR. What do you mean easier to believe?

KATHA. If it means you don't have to wonder which of us is crazy: Me, for leaving? Or you, for working a 60-hour week just so you can pay for an apartment the size of a matchbox, while you spend the rest of what you make buying drinks to numb yourself while you complain to your husband which makes him hate you and makes you hate yourself even more because you're supposed to be this woman, this powerful woman because that's what you're supposed to BE, except for you don't feel powerful, you feel like someone who doesn't SLEEP or DREAM or do anything but just get THROUGH it.

OMAR. Wow.

KATHA. I'm sorry, that was – not really about you, was it. Good luck. With everything, Omar. Really.

OMAR. What is this place you're going, anyway?

(Short pause)

KATHA. You know how you'll go hiking for the day in the clean air and come back feeling refreshed? You feel better, you think clearer. So then…why do you ever come back?

OMAR. I don't really go hiking, so.

(Short pause. The phone beeps. **JENNA***'s voice comes through the speaker.)*

JENNA. Fancy salads?

OMAR. *(pressing a button on the phone, leaning towards it)* Totally.

JENNA. Is she still there?

(He looks at **KATHA**, *sheepish.)*

OMAR. Yeah, we're just finishing up in here.

(The phone beeps a farewell sound.)

Sorry. You were saying?

KATHA. No. That was all.

14.

*(***ELLEN** *speaks out.* **DEAN** *stands farther off.)*

ELLEN. We take our job very seriously on the Authenticity Committee. It's not just clothes and mimeograph machines – it's about everyone's *emotional* experience. And the question we have to answer again and again is how far do you take it.

We have people from all walks of life in the SDO. And the question sometimes is how do we respond authentically to these people. For instance, we have a Japanese-American fellow moving in right now. And it's interesting, what the research tells us, what we have by 1955 is already a kind of *counter*-prejudice… People have started to feel a little uncomfortable that American citizens were interned, during the war? So prejudice might not look like "Get out of my neighborhood." It might look more like "Here, I baked you some cookies, neighbor." Of course, it isn't always cookies. *(Beat)* It can be complicated to navigate, but authenticity is very important to us.

*(***DEAN** *comes forward to join her. His arm around her shoulder, supportively.)*

DEAN. The SDO is…*built* on the idea of giving up one kind of freedom for another kind of freedom. Ellen and I had to give things up. *(Beat)*

But there's something about facing obstacles – it has a way of binding families together, husbands and wives. You will not believe the rewards that come from authenticity.

15.

*(***KATHA** *is holding flashcards, testing* **RYU**.*)*

RYU. Eisenhower.

KATHA. Easy. Vice president?

RYU. Nixon.

KATHA. First lady.

RYU. Mamie.

KATHA. Soviet president.

RYU. Khrushchev. These are too easy.

(She flips past a few cards.)

KATHA. Best-selling car.

RYU. Chevy?

KATHA. Buick.

When was the Evacuation Claims Act?

RYU. 1948.

KATHA. *What* was the Evacuation Claims Act?

RYU. Truman agreed to compensate Japanese-Americans for their forced evacuation during the war.

KATHA. And?

RYU. And?

KATHA. How did it turn out?

RYU. Not…well.

KATHA. *(reading)* "Thirty-eight million dollars were set aside for the more than one-hundred thousand Japanese-Americans who had been moved to internment camps. But this turned out not to be nearly enough compensation to replace the decimated farms and blacklisted businesses, not to mention the emotional cost of internment." This is good stuff, this will really help you create your character.

RYU. My character.

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