

Synesthesia

Conor Gunn

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Jun - Male, 23 - Student.

Josh - Male, 25 - American Immigrant. Works in a kitchen appliance shop.

Kay - Non-Binary (They/Them), 24. Self-Employed Artist.

THERAPIST'S OFFICE.INT.DAY

For now, the stage is completely dark. For now, we only hear a pre-recorded version of a conversation between two people.

PERSON 1

Every day, I feel like I'm falling.

This first voice sounds like a young man, around mid-twenties.

PERSON 1

Like, I'm stepping further and further down a dark stairway. And I can feel it. This, like, this 'darkness' I guess.

The sound of a cello holding a single low note beings.

PERSON 1

Like, it's encroaching on me. More and more and I don't know how to stop it.

A second voice joins the conversation.

PERSON 2

And do you know what this 'darkness' is?

Their voice is much older.

PERSON 1

It's kinda like. I just. Fuckin', I. No. I got no clue what it is. But it's there. All the time. Every moment it's just there hovering over me and no matter what I do, what I try, it's always there.

The recording ends and the stage lights go up. We see two people on the stage. A young man, Jun, sitting in an old leather chair, and Mr. Jeong, sitting with a very similar chair holding a notepad and pencil. Jun bounces his knee impatiently, his eyes quickly darting between the docotr and

the clock placed on the mantle behind them. The clock is facing toward Mr. Jeong, so Jun cannot see the time. All is dead silent except for Jun's fidgeting. His foot tapping on the floor, the squeaks of the chair as he shifts his sitting position. All the while, Mr. Jeong is writing something down on his pad. In the background, a single window cages within it a bright golden light. It is a high window, but it has bars on the outside, only allowing a small amount of light in. Eventually, Mr. Jeong looks up from his pad and to the clock.

MR. JEONG

I think that just about wraps us up
for today.

The lights go out again. All but the light in the window. But soon, that dies too.

STREET.INT.DAY

On the dark stage, the sound of a door opening and closing. Then, the ambient songs of a busy street. The stage lights up again with the projection of a sidewalk as Jun enters from stage left and stands in the middle of the stage, facing stage right. His clothes are bright and colourful, in complete contrast to the drab background. He puts on a pair of headphones and music begins to play. It has a slow, rhythmic drumbeat and a simple, sad melody. Jun continues to stand still in the middle of the stage, but the projection behind him begins to move, scrolling to the left, giving the image that Jun is moving down a street. Passer-bys enter randomly from stages right and left and walk past Jun as he remains still. The projection scrolls on with images of very similar white-washed buildings over and over again.

After one minute the projection fades away as does the music.

TRAIN.INT.EVENING

A stage-hand rolls out a chair behind Jun as he sits down in the centre of the stage. The ambiance of a train carriage fades in. Then, a bright golden light slowly envelops the stage. A distant, slow calming synth begins to play. Jun leans back in his seat and smiles. The golden light is covered by something we cannot see, most likely a building outside of the train, and within an instant it is gone. The synth grows tinny and weak and Jun's smile fades. The lights on the stage fade away and the ambiance of the train slowly fades a few seconds later.

APARTMENT.INT.NIGHT

Jun enters from the door on stage left. The apartment is small. Very small. Right now, we can only see the front room/kitchen/living room. The centre-back wall of the stage is where the corridor to the bedrooms is. A straight line with doors on either side. The door on the left side has a bright light spilling out from underneath.

Right now, the apartment is blanketed in darkness, except for the door in the background and a closet directly across from Jun, on stage right. Though for the purposes of the play it would be dimly lit by dark blue lights so the audience can see. Lining the tops of the walls are what seem to be fairy lights, though they are inactive and their wiring is maddening to try and follow. Littered around the apartment are wires, cables and different computer parts from various failed projects. The closet has a mixture of blue and purple light pouring out. Outside the closet, pressed against the wall is a small and rickety old table. On the table is an old laptop and a musical keyboard. Wires and cables stretch out from the devices and twist and tangle into the closet. In front of the table, tapping away on the keyboard and laptop is a man, slightly older than Jun, wearing a pair of old headphones.

JUN

Josh!

The man doesn't respond.

JUN

Josh!

Again, he doesn't respond.

JUN

God dammit.

Jun walks the very short distance into the kitchen part of their apartment.

JUN

Has enough time to get the closet lights working, but doesn't have enough time to get the rest of them working.

As he is speaking, he pulls an apple out of the bag sitting on the counter and lightly tosses it at Josh.

Josh shrieks in fright and rips off his headphones. He whips around and throws the headphones. They soar past Jun and bang into the wall behind him. Jun looks back to the headphones on the floor.

JUN

If they somehow weren't broken before,
they sure are now.

Josh stands up.

JOSH

Are you fucking crazy?! I could've
killed you!

JUN

Could you?

Josh hesitates.

JOSH

Maybe...

JUN

What's the deal with the lights?

Jun points up to the ceiling as he raises his other hand, signalling Josh to toss him back the apple. Josh tosses the apple back and Jun enters the kitchen.

JOSH

Man, I got off my shift, like, an hour
ago. I just got in.

JUN

Oh. Good day?

Jun puts the apple back in the bag. Josh approaches the kitchen.

JOSH

It was definitely 'a' day. Had someone
come in today asking if they can
return a blender that was literally in
two pieces.

JUN

Are you serious?

JOSH

And then she got all mad when I said I

couldn't take it. She said I was robbing her with a faulty product. Then, she demanded to speak to a manager, saying that maybe my Korean just wasn't good enough to do my job properly. Like, bitch, you're the one who can't read the simple instructions.

Jun chuckles.

JOSH

Like, how do you even break a blender in half? What do you have to do to make a perfect clean break. How do you fuck up that badly?

JUN

I don't know man. You seen Kay?

JOSH

They've been in their room all day working on commissions. How'd your session go today?

JUN

It went well.

JOSH

What d'you talk about?

JUN

Whole lotta nothing.

JOSH

Is that because you have nothing to talk about, or don't want to.

JUN

It's not that I don't want to, it's just that I [Pauses, then stutters. Becomes frustrated and begins snapping fingers furiously] the words don't come. I want to, man. But, I just. It doesn't happen.

JOSH

Is it worth the money?

JUN

What do you mean?

JOSH
Going to this therapist every week? Is
it worth the 93,000 won?

JUN
[Aggressive] Of course it is.

JOSH
Okay.

Jun casually leaves the kitchen and goes to the laptop
outside the closet.

JUN
Did you come up with something for the
hook?

Josh comes over to join him.

JOSH
Nah. Nothing feels like it fits.
Transitioning between verse and chorus
is difficult when we made them both
different tempos.

JUN
Yeah, but what do we always say?

JOSH
[Chuckling] "If it sounds cool, put it
in and worry about it later."

JUN
Yep.

Jun starts tapping different keys on the musical keyboard.
There isn't any particular melody, he's mainly messing around
trying to find something that can work.

Just then, from down the hall, Kay exits their bedroom and
enters the kitchen and begins to make a pot of coffee. Kay
seems lost in their own world, not even addressing Josh and
Jun. Then, Kay raises their head, realising they're not alone
and smiles at Josh and Jun.

KAY
Hey guys!

JOSH
So, what have yo been up to today?

KAY

[Sighs Heavily] I've been drawing commissions all day. I'm a bit concerned about rent this month, so I'm taking literally any job that comes my way.

The coffee is ready. Kay takes the pot and pours some into a mug. Then Kay pauses. They look at the pot and then to the mug. Then, slowly Kay begins to drink from the pot before Josh lowers their arm. Kay groans and puts the pot back.

Kay yawns as they leave the kitchen and go to the front of the room to sit on the sofa.

KAY

I'm worried we won't make it this month.

Kay looks to Josh.

JOSH

And we're already late. We need to start cutting needless expenses if we wanna make rent.

They both look over at Jun, who's still at the keyboard, not a part of their conversation. A few seconds of silence pass. Kay hesitates before they speak.

KAY

Jun, how was therapy today?

JUN

[Still playing the keyboard] Good.

Kay and Josh look to one another. Kay looks back to Jun.

KAY

Talk about anything interesting?

JUN

Not really.

Kay sighs heavily. They bounce their knee.

KAY

Jun... Do you...

Jun continues to play the keyboard.

KAY

Do you think that, uh...

Jun still plays the keyboard.

KAY

Like, do you think its necessary to...

Kay looks to Josh for help on their phrasing.

JOSH

Do you need the therapy?

Jun's playing stops. Silence for a few seconds. Jun turns slowly to meet them.

JUN

What do you mean?

A single note on the cello, this time sliding down from highest to lowest plays. The dark blue light of the room shifts to a dark tone.

JOSH

Look man, rent is becoming a problem and we're low on money. We're all cutting back on shit. Hell, Kay hasn't bought fast food in weeks. And I'm buying less computer parts. If you have nothing to talk about, do you really need it?

JUN

Of course I need it! Its just that I, uh, I just. It's just that I can't.[Frustrated] You don't understand!

JOSH

It doesn't matter if I don't understand. You need to understand that we could lose this place. 93K a week is a lot of money, Jun.

KAY

We're not saying you're making it up, but maybe you don't need weekly sessions.

JUN

But I-!

A knock at the front door stops the cello and the lights revert to how they were. The three look to the door. Josh walks over quickly and swings open the door. Josh nods, responding to someone and then closes the door over. He turns back to the group.

JOSH

That was our, uh, landlord. He wants to talk about our rent. I'm gonna go deal with that.

Kay springs up from the couch.

KAY

I should get back to work.

Both leave the room, Josh out the front and Kay into their bedroom. Their doors close at the same time. At the sound of the doors shutting, the dark blue lights are replaced with a single dark blue spotlight on Jun as he stands alone in a black void. Jun shivers as he slowly sits back down the chair.

JUN

Dear god, I'm falling.

A single violin plays. It is a sorrowful and lonely melody. Gently and perfectly sliding from note to note as Jun slowly closes in on himself. As he slowly turns toward the keyboard. Jun taps one key, a high key. It fits slightly with the violin. As it plays the one time, a ripple of bright yellow pulses on the background. Jun plays another key, this time lower and another ripple this time green, pulses on another part of the back wall. In 2/4 time, a gentle piano melody begins to intertwine with the soft violin and one after another the ripples accompany the tune.

Jun then taps a key and the piano begins to play those notes, and the ripples, on loop. He then presses another button on the keyboard. As he taps the keys they play drum sounds. Jun keeps a simple kick and tambourine to rhythmically match the piano. In the background, we can see Kay leave their room and see Jun playing. Kay slowly and silently walks down the hallway and sits up on the counter, watching him play.

Jun then lets the drums play on loop as he taps another button on the keyboard. Then, in an instant the music stops, replaced by Jun playing a simple piano chord. And then he switches to another chord and then to another. In 3/4 time he holds these chords one after another. Then, he mixes it with the 2/4 time melody from before.

As he plays, Kay adjusts themselves on the counter and accidentally bumps a mug. The sound startles Jun as he stops playing. As soon as he stops, the lights return to normal.

JUN

I'm sorry...

KAY

[Under their breath, trying to put the mug back accidentally making more noise] Shit, fuck dammit. [To Jun] No, its fine. I'm sorry. What were you playing?

JUN

I, uh, I dunno. I just kinda. I just kinda did it. There wasn't really any kind of idea [falls into a mumble]. What are you doing out here?

KAY

Well, I just fuckin' heard you. You didn't put any headphones in.

JUN

Oh, uh. Sorry. Sorry about that.

Silence ensnares the apartment for a moment.

KAY

What did you mean by we 'don't understand'.

JUN

It's, it's hard to explain.

Kay moves from the counter over to the couch.

KAY

It's okay, take it slow.

JUN

Every day, I feel like I'm falling. Or no, there's this, like, darkness-no, wait. It's more like being weightless, I. Fuck, I'm sorry. I just-

Jun sighs heavily and lays his head in his hands. He turns his head toward the audience.

JUN
It's kinda like that.

He points out toward the audience.

KAY
Like what?

Kay looks out the window now, too.

JUN
The lights of the city. The lights of
the city at night.

KAY
How so?

Jun turns his body to face toward the audience while still
sitting in the chair.

JUN
Like it's this, fucking god, this
whole, like spread, or this array of
lights. You know, bright lights, all
different colours and shit. All of
them littered around the fucking
place, but it's all around this-this
fucking, like, void almost. So, its
all these lights in a deep void.
[Pause] Does that make any sense?

KAY
I think I kinda get it. So, what, the
lights are like good times and the
void is bad?

JUN
No. Sorry, I did it wrong. It's like
the void is all of it and the lights
are. No, that's not it. I,fuck. I
just. [Stutters in frustration] I'm
sorry. That's what the problem is; I
can't EVER seem to get it right. Every
time I think I have it, it doesn't
feel quite right and the whole, uh,
explanation unravels and I just
fucking can't handle whatever this
bullshit is.

He lays his head in his hands again.

JUN

I have no fucking idea what's wrong with me. [Pause] But, I know there's something wrong with me.

Kay stands up and walks over to him. They lays a hand on his shoulder.

KAY

It's okay. We'll get through it.

Suddenly, the door opens. Josh steps through the door. He closes the door slowly and steps over to the kitchen.

JOSH

He says we have until the end of the week. After that, he's kicking us out. No exceptions.

KAY

He can't do that!

JOSH

He absolutely can. He wanted to throw us out tonight, but I managed to talk him into a week. And that's final.

Silence falls on the apartment.

JOSH

So Jun, I ask again, do you need the therapy?

JUN

I, uh...

Josh accepts that as a no and turns to head into his bedroom as a violin begins to screech once more, but it is silenced by a sudden intervention.

KAY

I think he does.

JOSH

What? Where's this coming from?

KAY

I just think... maybe we should give it a chance.

JOSH
But for how long?

KAY
I... I don't know. Just let's give it
a chance.

JOSH
I was gone for like, 3 minutes max,
what the fuck happened?!

JUN
Just... Please Josh, I need this.

JOSH
What we need is a home. In which to
sleep! So we don't die! On the
streets!

JUN
Just-

Josh throws his hands up in the air.

JOSH
You know what? I'm done!

Josh stomps down the hallway and slams his bedroom door
behind him.

KAY
Good thing he isn't the one who sleeps
on the couch, or else that would have
been a pretty awkward walk-out, huh?

Kay stands up nervously.

KAY
[Awkward sigh] I think we should give
him time to cool off. Wanna go grab
dinner?

JUN
Uh, sure.

Jun stands up slowly.

KAY
There's this new take-out place at the
end of the street I wanna try.

They grab coats and head out the door.

For a few seconds the stage is silent and empty.

Then, the click of a door. And the gentle whine of a door opening. At the back of the stage, Josh's door is open. He steps out and sees that he is alone.

JOSH

Jun? Kay?

He walks out into the front of the stage. He looks toward the door. He sees that their coats are gone and sighs heavily.

A moment later, he begins to go around the front room of the apartment cleaning up computer parts and different cables and wires begrudgingly. Josh begins to speak to himself in a soliloquy as he cleans.

JOSH

Why do I always get so frustrated over the small shit? I didn't want to upset him. It's just... It's just we're so fucking behind on that rent. And if we can't pay, then we get evicted, and then I might lose my visa and have to go back to the states. I know that sounds fucking extreme and all but... it could easily happen. Jun and Kay have homes they can stay at here in Seoul to find new places to live, but me? I don't have a safety net in this country. I don't make enough to stay anywhere on my own. Could I find a place in a week? Would it be close to my job? Would they change my hours because of the time I'd need to find a new place?

Josh stops himself and pauses in the centre of the room. He takes a deep breath and continues cleaning at a slower pace.

JOSH

I don't want him to stop doing therapy. I wish we didn't have to cut our expenses so rapidly, but that extra money might just save us. But, it's all going out of control and they aren't listening. If I could just get them to sympathize with me on this then we can-

He pauses again in the midst of cleaning as he realises the road he's going down.

JOSH

That's Jun's situation, isn't it?

He takes a few more seconds to think before sighing.

JOSH

Shit.

He takes up the rest of the computer parts and carries them all into his room. His door is left open.

As he leaves, Jun and Kay return to the room. They are carrying plastic bags of take-away food that they place on the kitchen counter.

KAY

You already seem a bit better.

Josh steps into his doorway, but stops when he hears Kay speak.

JUN

I don't know. The lights of the city at night have always made me feel calmer. Is that a word? 'Calmer'? It feels like it isn't. But yeah, the colours always calm me, and I have no clue why.

KAY

Well, I'm sure there's some psychological reason that your therapist can explain.

JUN

But he's a therapist, not a psychologist.

Josh begins to ponder in his doorway.

KAY

Are they two different things?

JUN

Yeah, but don't ask me how.

Josh walks out from his doorway into the front room and nervously freezes when he see Kay and Jun. When Jun sees him,

his mood changes from comfortable and casual to uneasy. A few seconds of silence as the shallow darkness of the stage begins to increase, slowly wrapping the entire stage in a complete darkness as Josh walks toward the front door. He stops next to the door and crouches down next to some wires and begins to fiddle with them without a word to the others.

Then, in an instant, the lights dotted around the apartment light up in a mixture of blue, purple and pink. Bringing a new energy to the apartment and outright eliminating the overpowering dark blue light.

JOSH

So, I've had a think.

KAY

And we've had a talk.

JOSH

Jun, I shouldn't have pressured you to stop therapy.

JUN

And I, uh, I shouldn't have been so aggressive to defend myself. I was being selfish.

JOSH

I didn't think to understand what you were going through. I was so scared of having to go back home that I just wanted to control everything.

JUN

I can stop to save the apartment.

JOSH

No. That's not fair.

JUN

But, we need to cut back on expenses, right?

JOSH

Some are more important. We'll find another way.

JUN

But, I-

KAY

Why don't you just cut back to a session every other week? Dear God, you two would just go on forever, wouldn't you?

Jun and Josh look between each other.

KAY

Does that compromise work for the two of you? And Jun, we're here to listen for the times you need someone, okay?

JOSH

Kay's right. We're family here, and we should support you like one.

He pats Jun on the shoulder.

JOSH

However, right now I'm gonna head out because I need to get dinner and I don't like Indian, so I'm gonna see if that Korean place down the street is open.

KAY

You're gonna need to be more specific. They're all Korean places.

JOSH

You know what I mean!

Josh hurries out the door, grabbing a coat as he leaves. As the door closes, Kay stretches and begins to head back toward their room.

KAY

I'm gonna get some more work done before he gets back. You okay here?

JUN

Yeah.

Kay stops at the mouth of the hallway.

KAY

Are you sure?

Jun nods.

JUN

Yeah, I'm good.

Kay leaves. Now only Jun is left in the apartment, bathed in the new light, he smiles as he approaches the keyboard again. The lights drop so only the fairy lights, and the light from Kay's room and the closet remain as he begins to play that same song from before, but in a higher, more energetic and happy register. The melody remains simple, no drums just the piano as its keys release the pulsations of colours from around the stage. And for a while, the fairy lights turn on and off in time with the melody. Jun plays and plays and plays as all sorts of colours and shapes dance around him and the stage, before the song slows as to the colours. The coloured lights around the stage now begin to dip and as the song hits its final few keys, the lights die down, until it is all left within a dark void. But, the faint sound of a happy, joyful melody plays off in the distance as a reminder that not all is lost to this darkness. It passes and fades away.

END.