Don’t Leave Me Hanging
CHARACTERS

DANA: Mid to late 20s. Has cultivated a direct and brusque sense of humor.

JULIAN: Mid to late 20s. Avoids anxiety by concentrating really hard.

SETTING

The living room of a small apartment in a major city. A whiteboard that is not always there has been placed in the center of the room. There’s an eraser face down in the tray. There’s a game of hangman on the board, with blanks like this:

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

The letters B, Q, and T are at the bottom, and the head and body of the hangman are drawn in.
DON’T LEAVE ME HANGING

JULIAN draws the first leg of the hangman as DANA stands by. Honestly, she has no interest in playing word games right now. But she wants to find out where this is going, and is ready to enjoy it if she can tease JULIAN a little bit.

DANA
Umm, E.

JULIAN
Yeah.

DANA
Okay... R.

JULIAN
Yeah. There’s two.

DANA
A?

JULIAN
Oh, no. Sorry.

DANA
There’s no A?

JULIAN
No.

DANA
That’s weird.

JULIAN
Weird? Why’s it weird?

DANA
Most words have an A.

JULIAN
Well actually, about forty-six percent of words don’t have an A in them.

DANA
I am so glad you know that statistic.

JULIAN
Yeah, it’s kind of inter-
DANA
  Kind of? It’s pretty much changed my entire outlook on life!

JULIAN
  I just thought it was kind of inter-

DANA
  (Teasing)
  You’re probably trying to trick me. You spent the last hour googling the world’s hardest hangman words, didn’t you?

JULIAN
  What? No!

DANA
  You’re not fooling me. Is it sphynx? Ambidextrous? Philanthropist?

JULIAN
  Technically you wold be up to arms for those, but...

DANA
  Go ahead, give me arms if it makes you feel powerful.

JULIAN
  No, I know you were kidding.

DANA
  Wow, I didn’t realize you took hangman so seriously.

JULIAN
  No, I don’t. I’m just trying to play the game—I’m allowed to take some things seriously.

  DANA feels a little guilty. She decides to play along.

DANA
  Of course you are. Does it have an I?

JULIAN
  Yes it does.

DANA
  S?

JULIAN
  (regretfully)
  No. Sorry.
DANA
A real gentleman would let the lady win.

JULIAN
Do you want a hint?

DANA
No!

JULIAN
Okay.

DANA
P!

JULIAN
No.

DANA
Okay. Give me a hint.

JULIAN
Okay. This letter looks like an M...But upside down.

JULIAN
Why didn’t you just say W?

DANA
M but upside down? What a mystery! Can I have a hint for that hint?
    (Gets serious again.)
    Okay, W.

JULIAN
Yep.

DANA
Y.

JULIAN
You’re on a roll now.

DANA
(Starting to get into the competitive spirit)
    Okay. Okay, it has to have more vowels...O.

JULIAN
Yes again.

DANA
Am I supposed to start guessing the whole sentence at this point?
JULIAN shrugs as if to say, "It’s your choice." I’m having that thing where I can’t think of a really obvious word. It always happens when I’m with a client or something, you know, at the most important moments. I guess this must be an important moment, huh?

JULIAN

(Wisely)
You never know what the important moments will end up being.

DANA
Are you trying to foreshadow right now? I can hear the literary aspirations in your voice.

JULIAN
I’m just playing the game.

DANA
Wait, this is a prank! What’re you trying to get me to do?

JULIAN
It’s hangman. Don’t overthink it.

DANA
Funny you of all people would say that. Okay, I’m playing! But I don’t know what else to guess.

JULIAN
Do you... want another hint?

DANA
You stumped me. Why don’t you tell me what it says?

JULIAN
No! I just really want you to guess it.

DANA
You seem so uptight right now.

JULIAN
(Uptight-ly)
I’m not. Let’s finish this.

DANA
The whole reason I agreed to play hangman was so you’d relax.

JULIAN
I don’t need to re-
DANA
    But it’s not exactly working is it?

JULIAN
    I don’t need to re-

DANA
    You know what? Why don’t we just leave now?

JULIAN
    We don’t have to be there until eight.

DANA
    If we leave early we’ll have time to take a walk in that park you like. That would be relaxing, wouldn’t it?

JULIAN
    I don’t need to re-

DANA
    You always get like this before you see your brother.

JULIAN
    That’s not what this is about.

DANA
    It’s fine. I don’t know why he always insists on asking you, you know, (mocking the brother’s voice) "When are you going to get a real job?"

JULIAN
    I have a job!

DANA
    Come on, I know that. Just tell him you’re doing some freelance work—that sounds impressive.

JULIAN
    I don’t need to impress my brother. That’s not what this is a-

DANA
    Ooh, tell him about that piece in the Times. That’s impressive.

JULIAN
    They didn’t publish that.

DANA
    You think he’ll ever find that out? He hasn’t cracked open a newspaper since computers were invented.
JULIAN
Can we please just finish the game?

DANA
Yeah, it’s just, there’s about twenty things I have to do right now./I do have to get dressed at some point.

JULIAN
You only have five more spaces. And two of them are doubles.

DANA
Did you like that thing I wore to the gallery the other night?

JULIAN
Yeah.
    (Meaningfully)
You looked beautiful.

DANA
Thanks, babe. Okay, let’s say we’ll leave in twenty minutes.

JULIAN
Can you just-

DANA
Is that what you’re wearing?

JULIAN
Is this...?

DANA
Shouldn’t you maybe put on something nicer?

JULIAN
Oh. If you think.

DANA
It wouldn’t hurt.

JULIAN
Yeah.

_DANA exits. JULIAN is stuck for a moment. Then, he makes a decision, picks up the pen, and fills in the rest of the letters, so the board now says “will you marry me”._

Dana? Can you come in here?
DANA (Offstage)
Can it wait?

JULIAN
I just want to show you something. It’ll only take a second.

DANA enters now wearing an interesting dress. JULIAN makes an awkward gesture towards the board: "here it is!" DANA stares. When it has been silent too long, JULIAN feels the need to speak.
So...This is basically why I wanted to play hangman.

DANA
Seriously?

JULIAN
What?

DANA
You’re supposed to be a writer!

JULIAN
(Seeing his mistake)
Oh- oh my God.

DANA
Yeah.

JULIAN
No wait, wait—I can fix it.
(Continues to correct it)
Dana?
Please don’t make that the important part.

DANA
I knew it had an A!

JULIAN
You did.

DANA
I told you most words have an A!

JULIAN
I know.

DANA
"Don’t overthink it."
JULIAN
   You know what? Anybody who was the tiniest bit forgiving would see this as a very romantic gesture.

DANA
   Ooh, you know what’s romantic? Spell-check.

JULIAN
   This is just the kind of spontaneous thing those artist guys you’re always drooling over would do.

DANA
   Or actually, you know what else is romantic? A ring! But no, this isn’t you being cheap and unprepared—this is art.

JULIAN
   It’s not necessary for you to be mean to me.

DANA
   Oh, I’m sorry. Was I being mean?

JULIAN
   Yeah. Yeah, you were. A lot of times when you think you’re just teasing and we’re both just having fun? It isn’t fun for me. It’s mean.
   (He starts to feel he’s being too harsh.)
   But other times, you’re not mean, and you put up with me. So, the offer still stands, if you want to...let me put up with you too...Forever.

DANA
   I mean, this is a lot to think about.

JULIAN
   (Playing the tough guy. He might cross his arms and casually lean on the board.)
   Yeah. So think, I guess.

   So, DANA thinks. When she has made her decision, she draws two more blanks on the board. Seeing this, JULIAN is crushed. After a second, DANA writes in "OK." JULIAN is more relieved than he has ever been in his life.

   That’s not a real word.

DANA
   I know.
JULIAN
    And that’s a terrible answer, "OK."

DANA
    I know.

JULIAN
    Should we call it a tie?

DANA
    Yeah. Maybe we need a fresh start. Maybe tic tac toe? Let’s just erase this.

JULIAN
    Great idea. I’ll just take this eraser and...

    He picks up the eraser, and turns it over to reveal a ring stuck between the felt pieces.

DANA
    Oh my God... You were better prepared than I realized.

JULIAN
    Does that mean yes?

    DANA is frozen in indecision.
    Dana? It’s your turn.

    Lights down.