

## Emergency Contact, a short play

By Jake Alexander

### CHARACTERS

JULIAN, mid-twenties, male-identifying, Bryce's live-in boyfriend

BRYCE, mid-twenties, female-identifying, Julian's live-in girlfriend

NURSE, any age, ethnicity, or gender; working the late-shift

*(Lights up. A hospital emergency room, in some city. A few seats, paired together. A small table with some magazines. It's late, maybe midnight: We hear sounds of ambulances, doctors being paged, beeps of monitors, maybe a baby crying. After a moment, JULIAN enters supporting BRYCE, who is limping on one foot. They are both in sweats.)*

JULIAN

Okay, let's get you over here-

BRYCE

I'm really fine, we don't need to be here.

JULIAN

You can't walk!

BRYCE

I don't need you to hold me up, babe.

JULIAN *(ushering her into a chair)*

Bryce, you're obviously hurt, just take a seat. I'll check us in.

BRYCE

I'm here against my will.

JULIAN

Don't say that, people are going to think I had something to do with it-

BRYCE *(shouting, joking)*

He hit me! Pushed me down the stairs!

JULIAN *(shushing her)*

Don't joke about that!

BRYCE

Would you relax. We can go, seriously, I'm fine.

JULIAN

You slipped.

BRYCE  
Jules, please, let's just go.

JULIAN  
Bryce. C'mon-

BRYCE  
This is going to cost a fortune, I can just stay off it for awhile.

JULIAN  
Tell you what: you take ten steps for me to that chair right there (*he points*) then we can go home. I'll pay for the car myself.

BRYCE (*excited*)  
A yellow cab?

JULIAN  
Yes, fine, a yellow cab.

BRYCE  
I love to watch TV while being driven somewhere by a stranger.

JULIAN  
I know.

BRYCE  
Ten steps?

JULIAN  
Ten steps. And we'll go.

BRYCE  
Swear?

JULIAN  
I swear.

*(They shake hands. BRYCE hoists herself to her one foot, attempts to put pressure on the other one. She winces, almost falls back into the seat, but catches herself. JULIAN watches, amused. BRYCE smiles weakly back at him. She plants both her feet, barely putting weight on her bad ankle. She smiles back at JULIAN. Finally, she slides like an ice skater across the floor, barely touching the ground with her bad leg. She makes it to the seat, ten paces away. She turns, does a little hobbly-bow, and plants herself in the new seat.)*

BRYCE  
I hope the yellow cab is playing old Jimmy Fallon clips.

JULIAN  
Okay, you win, come on back now.

BRYCE  
That wasn't part of the deal!

JULIAN  
Let's get you your cab, come on now!

BRYCE  
Maybe you could carry me?

JULIAN  
Maybe you could get an x-ray?

BRYCE  
Fine, I'll come back. Twenty steps just to prove you wrong.

*(BRYCE hoists herself up again, starts to do the exact same move back to JULIAN. After a few steps, she stumbles, falls, catches herself on the table, knocking over the magazines.)*

BRYCE  
Okay, okay, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ouchhhhhhhh.

JULIAN  
You good?

BRYCE *(wincing in pain)*  
Okay, help me.

JULIAN *(helping her into the previous seat)*  
Still want that cab?

BRYCE  
Fine. Go check me in.

JULIAN *(looking offstage)*  
A nurse is coming.

*(The NURSE enters, carrying a clip board. They approach the couple.)*

NURSE  
How we doing tonight?

JULIAN

We're good. Well, actually no, she's got a broken ankle, we think.

BRYCE

It's not broken, just sprained-

JULIAN

She can hardly put weight on it.

BRYCE

I just did!

JULIAN

You fell.

NURSE

What happened?

JULIAN

She was getting a roll of paper towels down off of the top shelf, and the chair slipped out for under her.

NURSE (*to BRYCE*)

You landed on it?

BRYCE

I'm sorry?

NURSE

You landed on the ankle?

JULIAN

All her weight on it, yeah.

NURSE

Alright, well we're gonna have to get you checked out. You two came in on a good night.

BRYCE

Yeah?

NURSE

Hardly anyone in tonight. One stabbing, that's it.

JULIAN

Oh, my...

NURSE (*starting to fill out the forms with the info provided so far*)  
He'll live. His wife's going to jail, though.

BRYCE  
A guy's wife stabbed him?

NURSE  
Missed his heart by (*gesturing a tiny amount*) this much.

JULIAN  
Wow.

NURSE  
Oh, shoot. I probably shouldn't have told you that. Don't tell anyone I told you that. Anywho!  
(*they hand over the clip board and a pen*) Fill these out, and we'll get to you when you're done.  
You want something for the pain right now?

BRYCE  
I'm fine, thanks.

NURSE  
Holler if you need me.

(*The NURSE exits back the way they came. JULIAN starts to fill out the paperwork.*)

BRYCE  
I can do it, babe.

JULIAN  
I got it, you just relax.

BRYCE  
You don't have to take care of me like this.

JULIAN  
It's what I do.

(*A beat. JULIAN fills out the forms.*)

BRYCE  
I wish you hadn't said that to them.

JULIAN  
What?

BRYCE  
Told them what happened.

JULIAN  
They asked.

BRYCE  
No, they didn't ask \*specifically\* what happened. You could've just said I fell. You didn't need to include the paper towels or the chair or whatever. It makes me feel stupid.

JULIAN  
It was an accident, Bry.

BRYCE  
Well now the nurse thinks I don't know how to get paper towels down off of a shelf.

JULIAN  
I'm sure they don't And if so, who cares? You'll never see them again after this.

BRYCE  
But that's the thing, they'll tell people. I can tell, they're a gossip.

JULIAN  
What? Just because they told us about the guy and his wife? We interacted with them for like a minute. You can't tell that after one minute of interaction.

BRYCE  
They're going to go home and tell their husband or wife or boyfriend or girlfriend or kids about the idiot woman who fell getting a new roll of paper towels down and broke her ankle.

JULIAN  
We don't know it's broken.

BRYCE  
You said it was.

JULIAN  
What do I know?

BRYCE  
Just let me do the talking when we meet with the doctor, okay?

JULIAN  
I'm sure they won't even let me in the room with you, babe. Everything will be fine.

*(A beat. BRYCE massages her temples.)*

BRYCE

I should've asked for aspirin.

JULIAN

Is it hurting you?

BRYCE

A little.

JULIAN

Well, let me-

BRYCE

No, it's fine. I'm fine. You don't need to do anything for me.

JULIAN

Okay? *(moving on)* Hey, what's the address of the agency?

BRYCE

Why?

JULIAN *(indicating the form)*

They're asking about your employment, they want the address.

BRYCE

It's on 52<sup>nd</sup> between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>.

JULIAN

You don't know the building number?

BRYCE

No I just know which doors to walk into. *(flustered)* Hold on, lemme look it up.

*(BRYCE pulls out her phone and looks up the address.)*

JULIAN

They also need the main office line.

BRYCE

That's the 646 number, you know it.

JULIAN

Right.

BRYCE  
The building number is 739.

JULIAN  
Got it. And for occupation, you want me to write Associate or-

BRYCE  
That's not my title.

JULIAN  
Well, you haven't switched over yet, so I figured-

BRYCE  
I'm a director now, you can put that. Director of Marketing.

JULIAN  
I thought it wasn't official yet?

BRYCE  
They're making it official this week.

JULIAN  
You didn't tell me that.

BRYCE (*stumped*)  
What?

JULIAN  
I didn't know that was happening this week?

BRYCE  
I thought I told you. They told me a few days ago.

JULIAN (*over-the-moon*)  
Babe! That's huge, congrats.

BRYCE  
Yeah, can we not celebrate right now? I'm just not like-

JULIAN  
Right, right. Okay.

*(A beat. BRYCE looks around, grabs a magazine. She starts to read it, flips through quickly, then puts it away.)*



BRYCE  
What do you think he did?

JULIAN  
Who?

BRYCE  
The husband? Who got stabbed.

JULIAN  
Oh, I don't know. Must've been pretty bad to have his own wife stab him. A crime of passion.

BRYCE  
I would never stab you.

JULIAN  
Awww.

BRYCE  
Wait this is fun, we should- Yeah. What's the most you'd do to me?

JULIAN  
What do you mean?

BRYCE  
I mean violence-wise.

JULIAN  
Well. That's kind of a weird question.

BRYCE  
No! It's fun! What's the most you'd hurt me.

JULIAN  
I don't really want to talk or think about that.

BRYCE  
C'mon, it's fun! I think I'd/

JULIAN  
/Babe, that's freaky./

BRYCE  
/Burn you.

*(A beat. JULIAN looks at BRYCE.)*

JULIAN  
Burn me?

BRYCE  
Yeah.

JULIAN  
Like with a hot pan, or-?

BRYCE  
Like grease. Like throw grease in your face.

JULIAN *(astonished)*  
Babe-

BRYCE  
Or with like a branding stick.

JULIAN  
That's so messed up.

BRYCE  
No! C'mon, it's fun. What's your answer?

JULIAN  
I really don't want to play.

BRYCE  
I told you mine, you tell me yours.

JULIAN *(final)*  
I wouldn't hurt you, Bryce. Like. I'm not capable of that.

*(A beat. JULIAN goes back to the forms.)*

BRYCE *(feeling foolish)*  
I just thought it'd be fun.

JULIAN  
It's a morbid question, I really don't want to think about it.

BRYCE  
Okay. Okay, sorry.

JULIAN  
It's fine.

BRYCE  
Babe. You don't have to like, be afraid of it. I wouldn't actually burn you.

JULIAN  
Okay.

*(A beat. BRYCE picks up a different magazine, she flips through it for a moment, pauses on an article.)*

BRYCE  
Apparently the country is running out of gold...

JULIAN  
Do you have your insurance card?

BRYCE  
Yeah, in my purse.

JULIAN  
It's Blue Cross Blue Shield, right?

BRYCE *(getting the card out of her purse)*  
Yeah.

JULIAN  
What's the member ID?

BRYCE *(reading it off to him)*  
JZ3454789087.

JULIAN  
Allergic to walnuts-

BRYCE  
Right.

JULIAN  
Emergency Contact-

BRYCE  
Just put my mom.

*(A beat.)*

JULIAN  
Your mom?

BRYCE  
Yeah.

JULIAN  
Why would I put your mom?

BRYCE *(re-assuredly, nonchalant)*  
She can get here, she's just in Jersey.

JULIAN  
Bryce.

BRYCE  
What?

JULIAN  
Why wouldn't I be your emergency contact?

*(A beat. JULIAN stares at BRYCE)*

BRYCE  
I don't know?

JULIAN  
We live together.

BRYCE  
It's not like-

JULIAN  
We've been dating for five years.

BRYCE  
We're not engaged.

JULIAN  
So?

BRYCE

I just said my mom, put yourself if you want! You're the one filling out the form.

JULIAN  
But you said-

BRYCE  
I just said my mom, I wasn't thinking. My ankle is killing me, I was just-

JULIAN  
So lemme get this straight: say you get hit by a car on your way to work, you want them to call your sixty-five-year-old mother, who lives in Hackensack-New Jersey to come and get you in the hospital? But not your boyfriend of five years who you live with and who could get here in two minutes?

BRYCE  
You're making this into a bigger thing than it needs to be.

JULIAN  
Why wouldn't I be your emergency contact?

*(The NURSE re-enters.)*

NURSE  
Doing okay?

BRYCE  
Actually, it is kind of starting to ache. Can I get some aspirin?

NURSE  
Sure thing. *(to JULIAN)* Just let me know when you're done with the forms, okay?

JULIAN *(bluntly)*  
Yeah, hang on.

NURSE  
All right.

*(The NURSE exits, a little peeved.)*

BRYCE *(to JULIAN, an almost whisper)*  
Don't be rude! They're just doing their job!

JULIAN  
Why wouldn't I be your emergency contact?

BRYCE *(blurting it out)*

Because we don't know what's going to happen.

*(A beat.)*

JULIAN  
We don't?

BRYCE  
I meant-

JULIAN  
You meant you didn't know if we were still going to be together.

BRYCE  
Don't put words in my mouth.

JULIAN  
Then what did you mean?

BRYCE  
Okay! Yes, I meant that.

JULIAN  
Wow this is fucked up.

BRYCE  
Can we finish the form so I can get my ankle x-rayed, please?

JULIAN  
You're not sure if we're still going to be together, so why list me as an emergency contact, right?

BRYCE  
I just told you to put yourself.

JULIAN  
Not at first!

BRYCE  
Babe, c'mon. My ankle is broken over here, I'm in no place to be talking about all of this right now. My head is all mixed up.

JULIAN  
This kind of makes sense. You didn't tell me about the promotion being official, and you want to burn me with a hot rod, apparently-

BRYCE  
That was a joke!

*(The NURSE re-enters with a small cup with two aspirin and a cup of water. They hand them to BRYCE.)*

BRYCE  
Thank you. You're a life saver.

NURSE *(pointedly)*  
That's my job.

*(The NURSE exits.)*

BRYCE  
Now you've made them mad and they're going to charge me for like a sonogram and an ultrasound and all this other stuff-

JULIAN  
So you don't think we're going to stay together?

BRYCE *(definitive)*  
Jules, I can't with this right now.

JULIAN  
Why did you say "we're not engaged"?

BRYCE  
When?

JULIAN  
Before. You were making the argument I should put your mother down, and you said "we're not engaged".

BRYCE  
Because we're not.

JULIAN  
All right. Another question: will you consider us an actual, real relationship once we are engaged?

BRYCE  
Absolutely.

JULIAN

But we aren't now?

BRYCE  
I didn't say that.

JULIAN  
So then what are we?

*(A beat. BRYCE looks back at the magazine.)*

JULIAN  
Are we roommates? A couple? "Seeing each other"? Fuck-buddies? Hmm? Huh?

BRYCE  
What do you think happens when we run out of gold?

JULIAN  
Bry. This is fucked up beyond belief.

BRYCE *(turning to him)*  
I shouldn't have said anything.

*(A beat. JULIAN turns back to the form.)*

JULIAN  
I'm just going to put your mom.

BRYCE  
Jules, don't do that. Just put yourself.

JULIAN *(turning to her, pointedly)*  
I'm putting your mother down on the line. End of discussion.

*(A beat. JULIAN finishes filling out the form. He clicks the pen closed. The NURSE re-enters.)*

NURSE  
All set?

BRYCE  
Looks like it.

NURSE *(taking the clip board)*  
I don't want you walking on that without support. Lemme drop these at the nurse's station and I'll come to help you to the x-ray machine. Be right back.

BRYCE



Thank you.

*(A beat. They sit in silence for awhile.)*

BRYCE  
Julian?

JULIAN

I'd stab you. That's my answer. I just carried you ten blocks to the ER, I've taken care of you, lifted you off the floor, paid for meals, compromised in a ton of ways, loved you unconditionally, including now, which has been pretty shitty. I wouldn't shoot you because that would be quick. Shoving you down stairs or off a cliff would probably be a lot of build-up to not-that-satisfying a result. And you said burning, which I think is just fucking malicious. I'd probably stab you.

Because it *\*is\** a crime of passion and it would at least show you that I felt strongly enough about you. It's personal, you know? Because I love you. And I could at least show you I loved you.

*(A beat.)*

BRYCE  
Wow.

JULIAN  
You wanted to know, so.

BRYCE *(relishing it)*  
You're a little fucked up inside, aren't you?

JULIAN  
I didn't used to be. Before I met you.

*(They sit in silence. The NURSE re-enters with the wheelchair.)*

NURSE  
All right, let's get you kids out of here. *(to JULIAN)* You'll have to wait out here. That okay?

JULIAN  
Sure.

NURSE *(holding out a hand for BRYCE)*  
Here we go.

*(BRYCE stops the NURSE.)*

BRYCE  
Wait, I'm sorry- *(to the NURSE)* Why did the woman stab her husband?

NURSE

Oh, I really shouldn't have said anything before. HIPAA and all that-

BRYCE

C'mon we won't tell.

NURSE (*thinking it over*)

Well. You know? I like you two. (*getting into the gossip of it all*) I overheard her giving the police her statement. They've been together forty-five years, just celebrated their anniversary with some big party the other day, blah blah blah. And tonight she just snapped! Came into the living room, he's sitting on the recliner watching some game show or something, eating the lasagna she made, and she comes into the room and asks him what he's watching, and he tells her, she says "huh", just kind uninterested, and then \*BAM\* stabs him right in the chest. One of the cops showed one of the other nurses the crime scene photos on his phone- blood right there, all over the chair and the lasagna! She didn't even let him finish! But this part you really can't tell anyone- it was because he was whistling.

BRYCE

Whistling?

NURSE

Yeah, he just kept whistling. All through the anniversary party, for the past month, as she tells it, he's whistling over and over and he won't stop. He was whistling that- what's that racist song from Disney that everyone was angry about? They're changing that ride?

BRYCE

Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah?

NURSE

Yes! That one! He's whistling it over and over and over and, apparently, it's driving her crazy, but she doesn't tell him this. As she tells it to the cops, she actually kind of likes that song, racist issues aside. But tonight, for whatever reason, she lost it. But this part I can't get over: the absolutely crazy part? She wants him to call her. She's waiting at the police precinct and she wants him to call her when he gets out of surgery. Just make sure that he's okay. And he said he would. The first call he's going to make is to the woman who stabbed him. Say what you want, love makes people do some fucked up things. Pardon my language. Anyways, I'm blabbing on here. Let's get you all better.

*(The NURSE helps BRYCE to her foot, supports her. BRYCE turns to JULIAN.)*

BRYCE (*scared*)

Jules?

JULIAN

Yeah?

BRYCE  
You'll wait out here for me?

JULIAN (*seeing her fear*)  
Sure. I'll be here.

BRYCE  
Okay.

JULIAN  
Okay. (*re-assuring*) It's all going to be fine.

BRYCE  
Yeah?

JULIAN  
I'll wait right here for you.

NURSE (*to BRYCE*)  
Ready?

BRYCE  
Yes.

*(They start to exit.)*

BRYCE (*to NURSE*)  
You know, you can tell my story to people if you want, it's kind of funny.

NURSE  
Oh, honey, you're story is not that interesting.

*(They're gone. JULIAN sits and stares for awhile. He exhales. He picks up the magazine BRYCE was reading earlier. He reads it. Lights down. End of play.)*