

Heat of the Summer

by Ryan Michael Dunn

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CHARACTERS

AUSTIN DAVIS	A young man in high school, 18. AUSTIN is resilient but has suffered with mental health issues in the past. He recently had ankle surgery, leaving him using crutches with his left foot in a cast.
NORMAN	One of AUSTIN's best friends and co-worker at Ross Beach. A total comic book nerd. His parents divorced when he was young. 17/18.
ZACHARY	One of AUSTIN's best friends and co-worker at Ross Beach. Similarly nerdy as Norman. 17/18.
CHLOE CAMPBELL	Lifeguard at Ross Beach. 17/18.
RILEY DAVIS	AUSTIN's little sister, around the age of 12. RILEY will be starting 7th grade in the fall.
CHRIS DAVIS	AUSTIN's dad, mid-50s. He recently underwent surgery to treat a brain tumor, leaving a large indent on his head.
TRACEY DAVIS	AUSTIN's mom, mid-50s. The rock of the family.
JASON	Late teens. A patient at Evergreen. He suffers from what appears to be an undisclosed mental illness.
DOCTOR P	A psychiatrist at Evergreen Valley Hospital.
NURSE	A nurse at Evergreen Valley Hospital.
MAN	A patient at Evergreen Valley Hospital.
RICK	The muscle at Evergreen.
OFFICER	A police officer.
PATIENT 1	Any gender. An adult patient at Evergreen.
PATIENT 2	Any gender. Another adult patient at Evergreen.

SYNOPSIS: The Davis family was shaken to the core when dad Chris was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. To escape the turbulence at home, Austin takes his coping mechanisms to the extreme and steadily slips away from reality, into a battle with the American medical system.

SETTING: The suburbs of Boston.

TIME: Present. A week in summertime.

CASTING

Heat of the Summer is meant to be cast using color-conscious casting. While no one role is meant to be a particular ethnicity, the playwright encourages the director to provide ample opportunities for POC in this production.

The play may be cast either in a 1:1 actor/character pairing or as follows:

ACTOR (M) 1: AUSTIN DAVIS

ACTOR (M) 2: RICK, DR. P, NORMAN, OFFICER, JASON

ACTOR (M) 3: MAN, ZACHARY, CHRIS DAVIS

ACTOR (F) 1: NURSE, TRACEY DAVIS, PATIENT 1

ACTOR (F) 2: RILEY DAVIS

ACTOR (F) 3: CHLOE CAMPBELL, PATIENT 2

(“/” indicates interrupting lines. A character’s NAME with a blank space underneath indicates a silent beat.)

Act I

Prologue

(A blank deck. Back lighting illuminates the silhouettes of the full cast in tableau. Quietly at first, a bass riff resembling the wail of an ambulance siren. Tense.)

NORMAN

He's a nutcase.

CHLOE

A goddamn maniac.

RILEY

What a psycho.

TRACEY

Crazy.

CHRIS

Unhinged.

JASON

Schizo.

ZACHARY

Let's just say she's got a couple of screws loose.

RICK

What can I say? He's fucked in the head.

(The bass riff steadily grows. It's hard to listen to. Intimidating.)

NURSE

...was killed last night in a confrontation with police. In what started as a mental health call...

MAN

...but officials say it has nothing to do with gun control, instead calling it a mental health issue.

NORMAN

...all I'm saying, Tom, is that the dope fiends on Methadone Mile need to start by helping themselves.

DR. P

Junkie.

CHRIS

Meth head.

RICK

Crack whore.

JASON

The dude's demented.

CHLOE

Cutter.

RILEY

He scares me.

ZACHARY

Watch out for her, she's dangerous.

TRACEY

I heard she has a therapist.

DR. P

Can't believe they lost. I'm so depressed.

NURSE

I know, I'm totally OCD.

RICK

He's insane.

MAN

She's so bipolar.

(The bass peaks. By now it has grown into something disturbing. Then, sudden

deafening SILENCE.)

NORMAN

Yeah if that happened to me I'd probably kill myself.

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 1

(Sunday evening. TRACEY making spaghetti for dinner. AUSTIN crutches in, ecstatic. He begins to set the table. RILEY follows, exhausted.)

AUSTIN

Hey Mom!

TRACEY

Hi, honey, how was... Austin, is this? A good mood I see on your face?

AUSTIN

Maybe!

RILEY

He made us sing in the car.

TRACEY

Sounds like a good drive home! What happened?

RILEY

He won't tell us.

AUSTIN

Do I need a good reason to show joy in my own home?

TRACEY

It's not drugs, is it honey?

AUSTIN

No, Mom! I don't know, I swear! I've just been feeling better lately.

TRACEY

(to RILEY)

I'm so glad. I was starting to get worried. Since...

AUSTIN

Since, yeah. It's not like I'm gonna be happy about it. But, I don't know, he's been feeling a little better lately, right?

TRACEY

Um... kind of, yes. I was going to say since your surgery.

AUSTIN

Oh.

TRACEY

But yes. He's been talking a lot more, although he's still having trouble with some words. He just doesn't *feel* good.

AUSTIN

Well. You don't have to worry about me. I feel good.

TRACEY

"You don't have to worry."

AUSTIN

What?

TRACEY

You'll understand when you have kids. Ry, do you want meatballs?

RILEY

Yes please.

TRACEY

How was your day?

RILEY

Okay.

TRACEY

Just okay?

RILEY

That's what I said.

AUSTIN

Ooh, testy.

RILEY

I'm tired.

AUSTIN

What do you have to be tired about?

RILEY

Nothing.

You weren't up late last night? **AUSTIN**

No. **RILEY**

Huh. **AUSTIN**

Weird that your light was on past 2am.

It wasn't. **RILEY**

Okay, okay. **AUSTIN**

How's Jake?

Austin! **RILEY**

What? **AUSTIN**

I told you not to tell anyone! **RILEY**

No, you said not to tell any of my friends. You didn't say anything about telling Mom. **AUSTIN**

Who's Jake? **TRACEY**

No one. **RILEY**

Hmm. **TRACEY**

I didn't know you had a boyfriend.

He's not my boyfriend! **RILEY**

TRACEY

How old is Jake?

RILEY

There is no Jake.

AUSTIN

I'm just teasing her. I don't know why she'd be interested, he's not even that cute.

(RILEY kicks AUSTIN)

AUSTIN

Ow! Hey!

TRACEY

Riley!

RILEY

He said he wouldn't tell. Austin, this is why I didn't want to tell you!

AUSTIN

I'm sorry! You're right. I shouldn't have told Mom that you were caught behind the snack shack making out with an 8th grader named Jacob Miller, who funny enough is actually cousins with Jenny / Miller

(RILEY kicks AUSTIN again, harder)

AUSTIN

Oww!

TRACEY

Riley, you made out with Jenny Miller's cousin?

AUSTIN

That one really hurt!

RILEY

Good.

TRACEY

Riley Denise Davis.

RILEY

Austin skipped class to buy a birthday cake for Chloe Campbell.

What?
TRACEY

Riley!
AUSTIN

(RILEY sticks out her tongue at AUSTIN)

You skipped class?
TRACEY

Last year, yes.
AUSTIN

Oh, Austin...
TRACEY

RILEY
Austin skips class at Springfield too. He had an 8am that he only went to five times.

Riley!
AUSTIN

Austin.
TRACEY

I'm sorry.
AUSTIN

Do you have any idea how much money that class cost?
TRACEY

I got a B+!
AUSTIN

He got a B.
RILEY

It's college credit. I'm still ahead of the game.
AUSTIN

You said you were bored at high school. I didn't think dual enrollment kids cut class.
TRACEY

AUSTIN

Well Riley... uh... Riley... I don't have any more dirt on Riley.

TRACEY

It's \$600 dollars a credit.

AUSTIN

I know, I know. I passed, didn't I?

(Heavy footsteps upstairs)

TRACEY

We're going to have a conversation about this later.

AUSTIN

Okay.

(CHRIS stumbles into the kitchen, walking with difficulty. He wears bandages from brain surgery. CHRIS speaks with a stutter)

CHRIS

H-Hey family.

TRACEY

Hi honey.

AUSTIN

(hugging CHRIS)

Hey Dad. How are you feeling?

CHRIS

Not s-so great today. Chemo is kicking my ass.

RILEY

(hugging CHRIS)

Hi, Dad.

CHRIS

Hi, sweetie.

(AUSTIN crutches to the cabinet and grabs a mug for CHRIS. RILEY shoots daggers at him. AUSTIN pours a cup of coffee and hands CHRIS the mug.)

CHRIS

I-Is this a new b... b... uh, what's the word?

TRACEY

Brand? They had a sale at Market Basket.

(CHRIS takes another sip)

CHRIS

I like it.

TRACEY

Feta?

(RILEY grabs a mug from the cabinet)

CHRIS

W-whoa, hey-ey, what d-do you think y-you're doing?

RILEY

Getting coffee?

CHRIS

Uh, haha, not ye-et, Riley.

RILEY

What?

CHRIS

Y-you're too young. It's late any-y-way.

RILEY

I'm almost a teenager. And you're drinking it too!

CHRIS

I'm drinking it t-to keep me awa-ake for five minutes. H-honey, help me out here?

TRACEY

Chris, she's old enough for coffee.

CHRIS

N-no, she's not. I didn't start d-drinking coffee until c-college.

TRACEY

Just let her have some.

CHRIS

No, Tracey. C-caffeine can stunt puberty at this a-age.

RILEY

Oh my god. Ew.

CHRIS

S-sorry, honey. I know it su-uucks, but I'm j-just looking out for you.

RILEY

All my friends drink coffee.

TRACEY

She just wants to fit in.

CHRIS

Oh, so we're th-those kinds of parents?

TRACEY

What does that mean?

CHRIS

(addressing RILEY)

Honey, you don't have-ave to drink coffee to f-fit in.

RILEY

I don't want to fit in, I just want coffee. I'm tired.

CHRIS

It's too late, honey. You'll b-be up all night.

RILEY

But you're having some!

CHRIS

Trust m-me, I won't have a-any trouble f-falling asleep.

TRACEY

Don't worry Ry, we'll pick some up on our way home tomorrow.

CHRIS

Like H-Hell you will.

TRACEY

One cappuccino is not going to stunt her growth.

CHRIS

No, but one becomes t-two, two becomes five-ive, five becomes /

TRACEY

I'll get her decaf.

CHRIS

Oh, you'll g-get her decaf. Oh, okay. Why don't you get h-her a light b-beer on your way home?

TRACEY

Chris. This is not a big deal.

CHRIS

You going b-behind my back is a pretty big f-fu-

(Beat. He takes a deep breath.)

I'm so-orry.

(RILEY, distressed, runs upstairs.)

TRACEY

Nice.

CHRIS

D-do not m-make me the b-bad guy here.

TRACEY

Honey, I think you're just confused.

CHRIS

No, I'm not.

TRACEY

We've let her have coffee before.

CHRIS

I have cancer, not dementia.

TRACEY

I'm not making this up!

CHRIS

Austin, h-have we let Riley have coffee before?

AUSTIN

I don't know. Maybe?

CHRIS

Whatever-r. I don't want her to have any more. Besides, it's expensive.

TRACEY

We can make it at home. It's not going to break the bank.

CHRIS

The bank is already broken.

TRACEY

We're doing ok.

CHRIS

Did you ask h-him?

TRACEY

No.

AUSTIN

Ask me what?

CHRIS

We might need your help.

TRACEY

We haven't finished our discussion.

CHRIS

There's not a discussion, Tracey.

AUSTIN

I can help with money if that's what you need.

CHRIS

Thank you. But it's more than that.

AUSTIN

What are you talking about?

CHRIS

We might need you to... include a g-gap year in your p-plans.

That's not what I want for him. **TRACEY**

I understand. **AUSTIN**

We don't need to do that. **TRACEY**

I was thinking about it anyway. Maybe I take some time to figure out what I want to do. **AUSTIN**

No. **TRACEY**

W-what's so wrong with that? **CHRIS**

We saved the college fund for *college*. **TRACEY**

(pointing to his bandage)
It's not up to m-me how much this shit costs! **CHRIS**

I want to help! **AUSTIN**

(exploding)
I won't let cancer fuck up your life! **TRACEY**

(AUSTIN and CHRIS are speechless.)
I won't.

Ouch. **CHRIS**

Austin, go to your room. **TRACEY**

I'm not helpless, I/ **AUSTIN**

Austin, please! **TRACEY**

Please.

(AUSTIN crutches upstairs. CHRIS sips his coffee. TRACEY crosses her arms. They stare at each other, unsure where to start. Lights fade.)

(Transition. Heavy bass. Backlight on AUSTIN.)

DR. P

(voiceover)

...can be found in the family of mood affective disorders, typically first appearing in a patient's adolescence, around the ages of 18 to 22. Though a trigger is not necessary to bring about an initial diagnosis, patients often report their first experience during a period of high stress or transition. It's important to reassure patients that although their new condition seems overwhelming, it is not the defining characteristic of this new chapter in their lives. In other words, they should refrain from reflecting on their life story as the "before" and "after" times.

(Lights fade.)

Scene 2

(Monday morning. AUSTIN, NORMAN, and ZACHARY at a coffee shop. Engaged in raucous conversation.)

AUSTIN is focused on writing in a small notebook, two coffees in front of him. His left leg, contained within a cast, sits propped up on one of the chairs.)

NORMAN

...But it's a ghost dick.

ZACHARY

That's completely besides the point. You're a fucking idiot.

NORMAN

I'm the idiot for choosing *Superman*.

ZACHARY

Yes. Superman would crush your bones into dust with one thrust of his mighty super cock.

NORMAN

Superman has sex with Lois Lane all the time in the comics.

ZACHARY

Yes, but Spider-Man fucked MJ and his radioactive cum gave her cancer. Er, sorry Austin.

(AUSTIN doesn't even look up)

NORMAN

What's your point?

ZACHARY

My point is if Spider-sex kills you, Super-sex definitely does. I don't care who's writing.

NORMAN

Fair, but I feel you're significantly underestimating this... ghost dick.

ZACHARY

He's a child.

NORMAN

He's a ghost. Austin, help me out here?

AUSTIN

Huh?

NORMAN

Fuck, marry, kill: Superman, Casper the Friendly Ghost, Hitler.

AUSTIN

What?

NORMAN

I know, you obviously fuck Superman.

ZACHARY

If you're stupid.

AUSTIN

Jesus.

NORMAN

No no, he's not an option. Although next round.../

ZACHARY

Ew.

AUSTIN

At least you went with kill Hitler.

ZACHARY

Norman didn't.

AUSTIN

What?

ZACHARY

I know! Think about it! You physically can't kill Superman or Casper. Where are you going to find Kryptonite? How are you going to kill a ghost?

AUSTIN

You marry Hitler?

NORMAN

I know, I know, but bear with me here. You can't pass on Superman sex, that's

non-negotiable.

ZACHARY

You're disgusting.

NORMAN

And Casper would make a terrible husband.

ZACHARY

Finally, we find common ground.

NORMAN

So the only logical conclusion is kill Casper, marry Hitler, and fuck/

AUSTIN

Fuck Superman. I'm with Norman.

ZACHARY

What?

NORMAN

Yes!

AUSTIN

His logic is flawless.

NORMAN

(disgusted)

See! Ghost dick!

ZACHARY

Yes, Norman, we've all fully considered ghost dick.

AUSTIN

Kryptonian schlong trumps ghost schlong.

NORMAN

You're a fool, Zachary. You fool! Fooooo!

ZACHARY

Calm down.

NORMAN

No! I refuse! Fooooo!

I want my friends to know what the good shit is. Because then I benefit too. That's just how it fucking works. It's economics.

AUSTIN

That's not what economics is.

NORMAN

That is basic economics.

ZACHARY

You know what basic economics is? \$7.25 an hour is bullshit. That's economics.

NORMAN

Yeah, well, old man Dickledorf needs to save up for his yacht somehow.

AUSTIN

(laughing)

Dickledorf.

NORMAN

That's what I call him.

AUSTIN

Not to his face.

NORMAN

Right to his face!

ZACHARY

No you don't.

NORMAN

I do!

ZACHARY

You call him Mr. McDerve and maybe Richard if you're feeling brave.

NORMAN

Yeah, no, I don't call him that.

ZACHARY

We know you don't! We didn't think you did for a second!

NORMAN

Yeah, but it'd be funny if I did though.

ZACHARY

No it wouldn't, you'd get fired.

NORMAN

Yeah, but like, for a second it'd be funny.

ZACHARY

No, no it wouldn't.

AUSTIN

I'd laugh.

NORMAN

Thank you! See? Austin would laugh.

ZACHARY

Austin would laugh to make you feel better and then get pissed five seconds later when he realized he'd have to cover your shifts.

AUSTIN

I could use the extra cash.

(AUSTIN goes back to his notebook)

NORMAN

I'm the funniest one here, and I'm so underappreciated.

ZACHARY

I'm the manliest.

AUSTIN

NORMAN

Austin?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

NORMAN

What are you?

AUSTIN

What am I?

NORMAN

Yeah.

AUSTIN

Uh, human?

NORMAN

No, like, what's your niche?

AUSTIN

My niche?

NORMAN

What are you working on, anyway?

AUSTIN

Nothing.

ZACHARY

Oooohh, sounds like something embarrassing!

AUSTIN

(groans)

It's nothing.

NORMAN

Well let's see!

AUSTIN

No, it's/

(NORMAN and AUSTIN playfully wrestle for the notebook. Banter ("Let go!" "Give it!"). AUSTIN lets it go.)

NORMAN

(passing the notebook around)

What language is this?

AUSTIN

It's number theory.

ZACHARY

You're doing math right now?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

God my god, why?
ZACHARY

I have my reasons.
AUSTIN

Do not tell me it's for fun.
ZACHARY

It's not for fun.
AUSTIN

Then why, Austin?
ZACHARY
(exasperated)

I have my reasons!
AUSTIN

What, is someone paying you to do math?
ZACHARY

Sort of.
AUSTIN

Sort of?
ZACHARY

There's money involved.
AUSTIN

Smarty-smarty-smarty pants, Austin Davis.
NORMAN

Who is paying you?
ZACHARY

Nobody's paying me. Yet.
AUSTIN

What, your paycheck hasn't come in yet?
NORMAN

Shut up.
AUSTIN

ZACHARY

(grabbing the notebook)

Austin, what the hell is this?

AUSTIN

It's called the Riemann hypothesis. Basically, there's this thing called the Riemann zeta function / that has complex arguments

(ZACHARY yawns obnoxiously)

See this is why I didn't tell you!

NORMAN

Austin, I'm concerned that you're torturing yourself. Wouldn't you rather slowly insert a needle down your urethra?

AUSTIN

Augh!

NORMAN

Or maybe stick a nail in your toenail and jump kick a metal door?

AUSTIN

I'm doing it / because

NORMAN

Or clamp jumper cables to your nipples and /

AUSTIN

If I solve it, I win a million dollars!

ZACHARY

A million dollars!?

NORMAN

Give me that. Is it hard?

AUSTIN

Yeah. That's why it's worth so much.

ZACHARY

Let me see this. Is this real?

AUSTIN

Look it up.

NORMAN

(pulling out his phone and flipping through the pages)

Oh my God, it's real. Fuck it, I took an honors math class. What's the question?

AUSTIN

(laughing)

Ohh, ha ha, wai-, uh, hang on/

NORMAN

(flipping through the pages)

Oooooohh, math isn't the only thing on Mr. Davis' mind...

Date ideeeeeeas!

AUSTIN

Yeah, ha ha, give it back now..

NORMAN

Ohh, a picnic! You hopeless romantic.

ZACHARY

Who are these for?

AUSTIN

No one.

NORMAN

No one? Not even a certain lifeguard at a certain beach?

ZACHARY

Which one? Lucy?

NORMAN

No/

AUSTIN

Norman.

ZACHARY

Chloe?

NORMAN

I am sworn to secrecy. I cannot reveal more.

(AUSTIN rolls his eyes or makes a similar gesture)

What?

ZACHARY

You're not gonna pick her up in your shitty SUV, are you?

AUSTIN

I don't know. I was planning to?

NORMAN

Austin, no!

ZACHARY

Your car sucks, dude.

AUSTIN

At least I have a car.

ZACHARY

You'd be better off picking her up on a bicycle.

AUSTIN

She's not going to care what kind of car I drive. She's not like that.

NORMAN

You know what you should do. You should pick her up on a motorcycle.

AUSTIN

I don't own a motorcycle.

NORMAN

You could buy one.

AUSTIN

No I couldn't.

NORMAN

Why not?

AUSTIN

Because... it's a motorcycle.

And? **NORMAN**

It's... expensive? **AUSTIN**

Okay but what's expensive to you? **NORMAN**

Anything is expensive at \$7.25 an hour. **ZACHARY**

Let's look at Craig's list. **NORMAN**

Let's not look at Craig's list. **ZACHARY**

How much does one even cost? A couple grand? **AUSTIN**

Old? Used? You could maybe get one for free on the side of the right road. **NORMAN**

Really? **AUSTIN**

Yeah, for a piece of shit you learn to love. **NORMAN**

Damn. **AUSTIN**

Austin. Don't get a motorcycle. **ZACHARY**

Guys, I won't. **AUSTIN**

But you could. **NORMAN**

AUSTIN

I could.

ZACHARY

For a girl, Austin?/

AUSTIN

I'm not gonna do it. I just thought they were way more expensive than that.

ZACHARY

Yeah, the good, safe ones are! You'll have plenty of money to spare when you've solved the circumference of the sun.

AUSTIN

What?

ZACHARY

Or, you know, whatever the prize money is for.

AUSTIN

Wait, so you can have like, a motorcycle and a car?

NORMAN

Yes?

AUSTIN

Oh.

NORMAN

Did you think it was impossible somehow?

AUSTIN

No, I just... I always saw motorcycles on the highway, and I was like, well, you're a motorcycle guy, not a car guy. But no, you can totally have both.

NORMAN

Of course you can have both!

AUSTIN

I could get a motorcycle.

ZACHARY

Don't get a motorcycle to impress a girl.

AUSTIN

It wouldn't be to impress the girl.

ZACHARY

Oh my God, Austin, you are so much smarter than this.

AUSTIN

I just think it would be cool to have!

ZACHARY

Austin, if you're smart enough to do a million dollar math problem, you're especially qualified to not buy a motorcycle to impress a girl.

AUSTIN

I'm not! I'm not buying a motorcycle.

ZACHARY

Thank God.

NORMAN

You should though.

AUSTIN

Maybe.

ZACHARY

No!

(getting up to leave)

I am not going to be a part of this conversation.

NORMAN

Do it. Do it, Austin. Do it.

ZACHARY

Nope, nope nope nope / nope nope

NORMAN

Do-it, do-it, do-it, do-it/

AUSTIN

Wait, what time is it?

(Looking at his phone)

Oh, shit.

ZACHARY

(checking his phone as well)

Shit.

AUSTIN

(to NORMAN)

Can you help me carry these?

NORMAN

Sure thing, buddy.

(Transition. Heavy bass. Backlight on the three boys.)

NURSE

(voiceover)

Maintaining friendships can be especially difficult. We like to remind patients that although some relationships may become more difficult to keep up with, the important people in their life will stay with them during this trying time. If they do not, they were never meant to be in patients' lives anyway.

Scene 3

(Tuesday afternoon. The beach. CHLOE sits atop her lifeguard chair, intently scanning the sands.

AUSTIN wanders over, best as he can on crutches. He wears a camp counselor T-shirt.)

AUSTIN

Hey, Chloe.

CHLOE

(playfully)

Hey there, Crutchie. Sell any “papes” today?

AUSTIN

(putting on a terrible New York accent)

I don't need the limp to sell papes. I got poy-suh-nality.

CHLOE

Oof. That accent hurt my ears.

AUSTIN

That's how he says it!

CHLOE

That is not how he says it.

AUSTIN

How are the kids today?

CHLOE

Not bad. They won't put on their sunscreen. And they won't stop asking me if I have any gummy worms for some reason. Yours?

AUSTIN

Chlo, they're killing me.

CHLOE

How so?

AUSTIN

At least, they're trying to. Sophia stabbed me with a pencil.

CHLOE

(shocked)

Sophia?

AUSTIN

Yeah, I know, right? So I took her pencil, and then Liam next to me started stabbing her with his pencil /

CHLOE

Oh my God /

AUSTIN

So then I took his pencil, and he said to me, I'm not kidding, "My dad's a cop. If you don't give me my pencil back, I'll tell him you hit me."

CHLOE

Oh my God!

AUSTIN

Yeah. So. Rough Monday.

CHLOE

Is his dad a cop?

AUSTIN

I think so!

CHLOE

That's terrible!

AUSTIN

Yeah, yeah. I mean, yeah.

CHLOE

What a little shit. I had an 8-year-old ask me to marry him today.

AUSTIN

Ohh, that's cute.

CHLOE

I told him I'm seeing someone. Had to let him down gently.

AUSTIN

Oh, ha, yeah. Are you?

CHLOE

No, why?

AUSTIN

I was kind of wondering if you wanted to get dinner sometime.

CHLOE

You were?

AUSTIN

Yeah. Is that okay?

(CHLOE becomes visibly distressed, her breathing more labored.)

CHLOE

I'm not sure.

AUSTIN

Oh.

CHLOE

I just need a minute.

AUSTIN

Yeah. No problem.

(Beat.)

CHLOE

I just don't know.

AUSTIN

No worries.

CHLOE

You're making that face you make.

AUSTIN

What face?

CHLOE

You look like a puppy that just learned Santa's not real.

AUSTIN

Really, don't worry about it.

I didn't say no, Austin!

CHLOE

You said you don't know.

AUSTIN

Well I don't!

CHLOE

That means no.

AUSTIN

It means I'm scared, okay?

CHLOE

AUSTIN

CHLOE

AUSTIN

I didn't mean to scare you.

CHLOE

You remember my "incident."

AUSTIN

Your incident?

CHLOE

Don't pretend you don't remember.

AUSTIN

I'm not. What happened?

CHLOE

Everyone was there.

AUSTIN

Could you refresh my memory?

CHLOE

It's Valentine's Day. We're at lunch. Somebody tells Keegan that I have a huge crush on him, and he thinks that's hilarious. Yeah, it's really fucking funny. So he quietly goes around to the tables and tells all his friends to gather around me. I see people coming around, and they start asking about the play, they tell me they really loved my

performance. I'm still the new kid so I'm excited. Then Keegan comes over with flowers in a little vase, he's got a little card he made, and he says these really really sweet things. He does a whole act where he pretends to be shy, and he hands me the card. I read it and it says, "Meet me in the locker room, I'll get you a towel." That grosses me out so I look up like what the hell are you talking about, and he dumps the vase all over me. I'm soaked. And everybody laughs their asses off, I start crying in front of everyone, and, and, and...

AUSTIN

All I remember is how much of a prick Keegan was, nothing about you/

CHLOE

I felt like I was dying. I couldn't breathe. And any time I think about it too much-

(Her breathing sharpens.)

It feels like. Like. Oh, God!

AUSTIN

Chloe.

CHLOE

I'm sorry! I can't think straight. This is what I was afraid would happen!

AUSTIN

Chloe, look at me.

You're safe. You're not at school, you're at the beach.

CHLOE

The kids. I can't be like this. What if/

AUSTIN

They're safe too. I'm right here. I'm watching them too. And I'm not going anywhere. Okay?

CHLOE

Okay.

AUSTIN

Just keep breathing. This is only temporary. Okay? It's going to go away. I promise. What can I do to help?

CHLOE

I don't know. Whatever you're doing.

AUSTIN

Okay. I'm gonna count to 8, and you're going to breathe in.

(CHLOE does so.)

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. And now out. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Okay? What do you think?

CHLOE

That feels better.

(Her breathing slows. It's easier.)

AUSTIN

In. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight.
Out. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight.

Talk to me. How are you feeling?

CHLOE

Better. Good. How did you know how to do that?

AUSTIN

I think you were having a panic attack. Riley gets them sometimes.

CHLOE

I knew I shouldn't be a lifeguard.

AUSTIN

What do you mean?

CHLOE

I shouldn't be in charge of kids' lives if that can happen. I can't be. I can't handle it.

AUSTIN

Sure you can.

CHLOE

How?

AUSTIN

Because you can get treatment. You can learn how. You can have an amazing life even with anxiety. Amazing.

CHLOE

You always know what to say.

AUSTIN

I'm really sorry I brought that up for you. I'm such an idiot.

CHLOE

No you're not.

AUSTIN

I should really get back to my kids.

CHLOE

Austin.

AUSTIN

You never know when they'll find more pencils.

CHLOE

Wait.

AUSTIN

I left them alone too long anyway. I'll see you tomorrow?

CHLOE

I want to spend time with you.

AUSTIN

And I want what's best for you. That's not me right now. It's nobody's fault.

CHLOE

It's Keegan's fault.

AUSTIN

Well, yeah. No, you're right, it's Keegan's fault. But the point is it's not yours.

*(AUSTIN begins crutching away from
CHLOE.)*

CHLOE

What if it's not a date?

AUSTIN

Huh?

CHLOE

What if it's just two friends, doing something friends do.

AUSTIN

Are you sure?

CHLOE

Yeah. I'm sure.

AUSTIN

I'd like that.

CHLOE

Me too. What do you want to do?

AUSTIN

Well. There is this one thing I was hoping to do this week.

CHLOE

What's that?

AUSTIN

Do you like motorcycles?

(Lights fade.)

*(Transition. Heavy bass. Louder than before.
Backlight on AUSTIN and CHLOE.)*

RICK

(voiceover)

I know it's not exactly... what, PC? To say, but I would never date somebody like that. I couldn't handle it, man. My friend's uncle shaved his head and tried to get on the news about the end of the world. They're all the same, man. It's not worth it.

Scene 4

(Monday evening. AUSTIN in his room, on the phone with NORMAN.)

Mid-conversation. AUSTIN is upset.)

AUSTIN

I'm freaking out a little bit, dude.

NORMAN

What's going on?

AUSTIN

I need so much money.

NORMAN

Oh my god do you need bail?

AUSTIN

What? No!

NORMAN

What is it?

AUSTIN

I don't know if I can go to school next year.

NORMAN

Didn't you get a scholarship?

AUSTIN

Yeah. It's not enough.

NORMAN

I'm surprised. I didn't know it was a problem.

AUSTIN

It wasn't.

NORMAN

What changed?

AUSTIN

My dad.

NORMAN

Oh. Duh, of course. Your insurance doesn't cover it all?

AUSTIN

No. And we have *good* insurance.

NORMAN

Wow. That's so fucked.

AUSTIN

Yeah. Plus... well I don't know, you said I could get the motorcycle for free, right?

NORMAN

Austin, Zach would kill us both.

AUSTIN

I know. But.

NORMAN

What?

AUSTIN

I'm taking Chloe out Friday.

NORMAN

Heyyyyyy! My man! What did you say to her?

AUSTIN

Uhhhhh... okay, so... uh....

NORMAN

What did you say?

AUSTIN

Okay, so, I lied a little bit.

NORMAN

You lied? About what? ...No. Austin, nooo.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

NORMAN

You told her you got a motorcycle?

AUSTIN

Yes!

NORMAN

Why?

AUSTIN

I don't know! We needed something to do!

NORMAN

You needed something to do, and your first go-to was/

AUSTIN

I just thought... I'd... pretend? I bought it?

NORMAN

Dude, you gotta call me *before* you do these things!

AUSTIN

What do I do?

NORMAN

Well, I would start by slamming your head against the nearest wall, in the hopes that, whatever part of your brain got knocked loose yesterday, will fall back into place.

AUSTIN

What do I actually do?

NORMAN

I'm serious.

AUSTIN

I'm serious.

NORMAN

I don't know. This is quite the conundrum, young man.

AUSTIN

I have to prove the Riemann hypothesis.

NORMAN

That million dollar thingy?

AUSTIN

Yeah. I have to solve it by Thursday.

NORMAN

Soo like how far are you exactly?

AUSTIN

Not nearly far enough. Shit.

I want to impress her so bad, dude. And goddamn it, I want to go to college too!

NORMAN

I know. You will. We'll figure this out. You want me to take a look at it too?

AUSTIN

I could use all the help I can get.

NORMAN

Don't worry. You're gonna get it. And we're gonna make this thing happen, no matter what it takes.

AUSTIN

Thank you, Norman.

NORMAN

Of course. But also, I feel like you haven't fully considered /

AUSTIN

Ghost dick?

NORMAN

Well that, and also, she said yes, dude!

AUSTIN

I'm gonna look so cool when I roll up.

NORMAN

Hell yeah you are! You're gonna sweep her off her feet.

AUSTIN

Will you help me look for a bike?

NORMAN

Sure, when?

AUSTIN

Tomorrow?

NORMAN

Oh hell yeah, I am so down to skip work with you.

AUSTIN

I meant after work.

NORMAN

But I don't want to go to work tomorrow! I swear to fucking God, if those kids give me the same bullshit about snack time, I'll... You know that's your fault, right?

AUSTIN

Yes.

NORMAN

You and your fucking gummy worms, that's what happens when you feed kids!

(The sound of RILEY crying.)

AUSTIN

But they stopped pinching me. I-

(AUSTIN registers the sound.)

I gotta go, dude. Thanks for the call.

NORMAN

Of course. Peace.

AUSTIN

Bye.

(AUSTIN hangs up and heads down to the kitchen. He scoops ice cream into a bowl and heads toward the front porch, the source of the noise. Outside he finds RILEY, on the front steps, in tears.)

Riley.

(She turns around.)

What's going on?

RILEY

Nothing.

AUSTIN

Are you okay?

Yeah. **RILEY**

Are you sure? **AUSTIN**

No. **RILEY**

(AUSTIN sits next to her)

What's up? **AUSTIN**

Nothing new. **RILEY**

What do you mean? **AUSTIN**

You know what I mean. **RILEY**

It's hard seeing him this way. **AUSTIN**

Yeah. **RILEY**

Well, when he's done with chemotherapy, he'll get better. **AUSTIN**

I hope so. **RILEY**

(They stare off into the night)

Me too, kiddo. Me too. **AUSTIN**

Want some ice cream? **AUSTIN**

No, I'm good. **RILEY**

Riley. **AUSTIN**

Okay. **RILEY**

(She takes a big bite. And another.)

Any good? **AUSTIN**

RILEY
(full mouth)

Yeah. *(They both laugh)*

It's all going to work out. Alright? **AUSTIN**

RILEY
(full mouth)

Okay. *(They laugh even harder this time)*

Anything else? **AUSTIN**

(RILEY goes to speak)

And, chew and swallow first, please. **AUSTIN**

RILEY
(swallowing)

Mom too. **AUSTIN**

Why? **RILEY**

They keep fighting over nothing. **AUSTIN**

Yeah. It can be a really stressful time right now, for both of them.

RILEY

They fight so much.

AUSTIN

I'm sorry they fight in front of you.

RILEY

I wish you didn't have to go to college.

AUSTIN

I wish you could come with me to college.

I'm always here for you, okay? I'll just be a phone call away.

RILEY

Okay. Thank you.

AUSTIN

You don't have to say thank you.

(Batman voice)

And you'll never have to.

RILEY

Was that a Batman reference?

AUSTIN

I'm so proud you got that.

RILEY

I wish I didn't.

AUSTIN

Do you want to watch it?

RILEY

Tonight?

AUSTIN

Yes.

RILEY

It's past midnight.

So?
AUSTIN

Don't make me watch it.
RILEY

I'm gonna make you watch it.
AUSTIN

Austiin!
RILEY

I'll make popcorn. Let's go.
AUSTIN

I'm tired.
RILEY

AUSTIN
So is Batman. But he finds the strength to carry on. Come on.

(AUSTIN crutches inside. RILEY rolls her eyes, smiles, and joins.)

(Transition. Heavy bass. Backlight on AUSTIN and RILEY.)

JASON
(voiceover)
Imagine being related to one. You gotta see them at holidays? No escape? Sounds terrible. What if they try to kill you?

Scene 5

(Tuesday morning. AUSTIN is sitting in the kitchen with his cast propped up on another chair, scribbling in his notebook. Sitting at the same table are TRACEY and CHRIS.)

TRACEY

Chris, did you change the password for our account?

CHRIS

W-which account?

TRACEY

The, the, just come look at it.

CHRIS

Oh. I m-might've.

TRACEY

What did you change it to?

CHRIS

Uh... give me a moment.

TRACEY

CHRIS

I'm not s-sure.

TRACEY

You don't remember the password?

CHRIS

Tracey, there's a fu-ucking hole in my h-head.

TRACEY

Then write it down.

CHRIS

I was t-trying to do s-something helpful /

TRACEY

Okay, well, I get so frustrated when you try to do these things and then you forget, and now we can't pay our bills. I don't have time to call any customer service lines today.

CHRIS

Fine, I-I guess I'll just-t stop trying. I'll do noth-thing. Except suck up all the money.

TRACEY

What are you talking about?

CHRIS

That's all I am to you any-ymore. A burden. Just sa-ay it, Tracey.

TRACEY

Austin, go to your room.

AUSTIN

What?

TRACEY

Go to your room.

AUSTIN

No, I'm 18 years old.

TRACEY

Austin, this is not the time to make a point /

AUSTIN

No, I think it is! This is ridiculous. You two need professional help or something.

TRACEY

Excuse me?

CHRIS

Yeah-eah, say that again, young m-man?

AUSTIN

Don't you see how you're hurting Riley?

TRACEY

Oh, we're hurting Riley?

AUSTIN

Yes, you are.

TRACEY

Oh I'm sorry, did I smoke cigarettes behind the garage?

AUSTIN

I didn't think she'd see that.

TRACEY

No, but did you make her cry?

AUSTIN

You're asking if I made her cry? What the hell do you think happened last night?

CHRIS

Do not talk to your mother that way.

AUSTIN

Maybe I have to. Maybe this is the only way you'll listen to me.

CHRIS

What has gotten into you?

AUSTIN

You! Both of you. I don't understand what's happening.

TRACEY

And what do you think is happening?

AUSTIN

Me? I think you're being selfish. Yeah.

CHRIS

You made a m-mistake not going to your room.

AUSTIN

Dad, you need to be nicer to Mom. Mom, you need to be nicer to Dad. It's not that hard!

TRACEY

I'm not mean to him, I just get frustrated when everyone in this house is on their asses and I'm the only one doing anything for this family without any help!

CHRIS

You're the o-only one doing an-nything? Why, have you l-lost my last several p-paychecks?

TRACEY

Well the paychecks aren't enough as of late, are they?

CHRIS

Ohh, throw it all b-back in my face. I don't see you p-picking up the slack!

TRACEY

I am busting my ass to keep this family together!

AUSTIN

Jesus, if you two hate each other so much why don't you just get a fucking divorce?

CHRIS

Of course we're not/

TRACEY

(in the heat of the moment)

Because he can't take care of himself!

(CHRIS takes it like a bullet)

CHRIS

(deflated)

I... oh.

TRACEY

(to AUSTIN)

It's time for you to leave.

AUSTIN

Oh, yeah?

TRACEY

Get out.

AUSTIN

Let me just crutch on out of the house!

TRACEY

Get out!

(AUSTIN crutches to the door)

Scene 6: Interlude

(It's still Tuesday morning. AUSTIN sits on a curb in his neighborhood. He pulls out a cigarette and lights it. Sighs. Then, he pulls out his notebook. He rabidly scribbles. At first it looks like he's made a breakthrough, but then: something is wrong. Heartbreak. Rage.)

AUSTIN

Wait. Shit. No, no, no, no... No, no, no... God damn it! Stupid.

So fucking stupid, always so fucking stupid. Idiot!

(AUSTIN trembles. He fights to hold back tears, but they escape his eyes anyway.)

Why am I like this?

(AUSTIN rushes to exit, but his path is blocked by an invisible force.)

Please!

(He tries again, at a different part of the stage. No success.)

I just want to be happy. Why can't I do anything right?

(He tries again, but this time, he is stopped by the entrance of NORMAN.)

NORMAN

No, Austin! You did it.

AUSTIN

Norman?

NORMAN

Dude! I knew you could do it!

AUSTIN

What do you mean? What are you doing here?

NORMAN

You just dropped a negative. Look.

(NORMAN gently takes the notebook and points to its contents.)

See?

AUSTIN

Ohh, yeah, yeah... so then, you can cancel it out...

(AUSTIN is stunned.)

NORMAN

What did I tell you?

AUSTIN

Dude!!

(As NORMAN chants, his voice begins to distort, slower, uncanny.)

NORMAN

Hell yeah! You did it, Austin! You diid iit, Austin. You diiiid iiiit, Auuustiin.

(AUSTIN laughs. Too much.)

AUSTIN

Yeah, I fucking did it, dude! Do you know what this means??

NORMAN

Fuuuck yeeeah!

(CHLOE runs on stage. She hugs AUSTIN. Her voice begins to distort.)

CHLOE

I knew you could dooo iiiiit. Coongraatulations.

(CHRIS enters, strong and vibrant. His voice, too, distorts, but his stutter is gone.)

CHRIS

Iii'm feeeliing soo muuch betterrr Austiin.

*(The rest of the cast enters. *)*

ALL BUT AUSTIN

Austin! Austin! Auuustiin!

(The heavy bass riff from the Prologue plays. Slow drums. Then, strings: a dangerous waltz. AUSTIN takes CHLOE's hand, and they cover the stage dancing. The rest of the cast pair up and join their dance, elegantly circling AUSTIN and CHLOE. Strings rise. BLACKOUT.)

**NOTE: If the show is cast using six actors instead of twelve, the pairs should be as follows: AUSTIN and CHLOE, TRACEY and CHRIS, RILEY and NORMAN.*

Scene 7

(Tuesday evening. NORMAN at ZACHARY's house, lounging in the family room.

NORMAN enters.)

ZACHARY

Well?

NORMAN

They haven't seen him since this morning.

ZACHARY

Shit. What do we do?

NORMAN

I don't know.

ZACHARY

It hasn't been 24 hours.

NORMAN

So?

ZACHARY

So we can't file a missing person's report.

NORMAN

What are you talking about? That's a myth.

ZACHARY

Well how do we know he didn't just run off with mystery girl somewhere?

NORMAN

I mean... I hope.

ZACHARY

Where else would he have gone? He can't get that far on his crutches. But in his car?

NORMAN

His parents said it's still in the driveway.

ZACHARY

Damn. Who else is in town?

NORMAN

Who else, as in?

ZACHARY

Someone he might be with.

NORMAN

I don't know.

ZACHARY

Or maybe a friend from college?

NORMAN

It doesn't make sense.

(The sound of NORMAN's doorbell.)

NORMAN approaches the door. Looks through the glass.)

NORMAN

(relief)

Oh my God.

(NORMAN opens the door, and AUSTIN crutches in. He is in his underwear.)

Austin.

ZACHARY

Hey!

NORMAN

What's going on?

AUSTIN

I solved it.

ZACHARY

Oh?

AUSTIN

Look. It was so easy! I can't believe no one's done it before!

ZACHARY

Why are you in your underwear? Are you ok?

AUSTIN

I... oh. I'm not sure.

ZACHARY

You're not sure?

AUSTIN

I don't know.

NORMAN

Let me get you some clothes.

AUSTIN

No, that's ok. I don't want them.

NORMAN

Take the blanket then.

(NORMAN hands AUSTIN a blanket from the couch. AUSTIN covers himself with the blanket, reluctantly.)

What *do* you remember?

AUSTIN

The proof. It's beautiful.

NORMAN

Did you skip work to finish this?

(AUSTIN shows NORMAN the contents of the notebook.)

AUSTIN

(giggling)

All I had to do was... I mean all I had to do was really think about it! Just think about it!

AUSTIN (cont'd)

It's so easy!

NORMAN

What part is the proof?

AUSTIN

What do you mean? The whole thing.

NORMAN

Well, it starts out fairly legible, but... then you kind of start scribbling. Here. See?

AUSTIN

Ohh, that. I can see why you'd think that.

(like a child sharing a secret)

I invented a new kind of math.

ZACHARY

Wow.

NORMAN

Austin, maybe you should sit down.

AUSTIN

Why? This is the happiest I've ever been! I'm going to be a millionaire!

NORMAN

Just. Sit. How much sleep did you get last night?

AUSTIN

None. I pulled an all-nighter. To finish this!

ZACHARY

That's dedication.

NORMAN

Zach.

Let me get you some water. Did you tell anyone where you were going?

AUSTIN

No, no. Then they might steal it.

ZACHARY

Steal what?

AUSTIN

The proof. I couldn't let anyone know.

NORMAN

(returning with water)

So where did you go?

AUSTIN

I just went on a walk.

NORMAN

All day?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

ZACHARY

You could have told us!

AUSTIN

I know, I know. But! The inspiration! It just struck me like a bolt of lightning. I knew what I had to do.

(NORMAN hands ZACHARY AUSTIN's notebook, giving him a look that says, "Look at this.")

NORMAN

Did you see anyone?

AUSTIN

What's with all these questions? I solved an un-solve-able theorem. I'm set for life! And I'm taking you guys straight to the top with me!

ZACHARY

Are you sure you... double-checked this?

AUSTIN

Yes, I double-checked it. I even started on the next one! There are seven total. Somebody already solved one of them, which leaves six. If I really work at it, I can do at least one more. Hell, what am I saying? I could solve them all! I am God!

ZACHARY

Whoaahh, slow down there, Einstein.

Oh my God. I am God. **AUSTIN**

Austin. **ZACHARY**

What? **AUSTIN**

You're freaking me out. **ZACHARY**

Why? **AUSTIN**

You don't actually think that, do you? **ZACHARY**

What? **AUSTIN**

That you're... I can't even say it. **ZACHARY**

That I'm God? **AUSTIN**

ZACHARY

NORMAN

AUSTIN

No. No, of course not. But. Look at the proof! I already did the math. If I solve all of them by the end of this summer, that's six million. If I put one million in a series of spending accounts and invest the five million into some index funds, I'm set. I'm set for life!

Why do you keep looking at me like that?

NORMAN

Buddy. I really care about you.

What? **AUSTIN**

NORMAN

I... I think you need some sleep.

AUSTIN

Sleep? Why the fuck would I sleep when I could be working on the next problem?

ZACHARY

Tell you what. If you go nap, I'll start working on the next one. Give you a head start.

AUSTIN

Head start? I am God, I don't need a head start!

ZACHARY

Why'd you have to say that again?

NORMAN

I'm calling his parents.

(AUSTIN slaps the phone out of NORMAN's hands.)

AUSTIN

Don't you dare.

NORMAN

What the fuck?

AUSTIN

They don't get my money. None of it. That's for me and Riley. I'm taking her away from them.

NORMAN

(moving toward AUSTIN)

Dude, I get that things are not chill at home right now but they need to know what's/

AUSTIN

Don't you fucking touch me!

(AUSTIN sticks his arm out toward NORMAN like he's trying to use the force.)

NORMAN

What are you doing?

(AUSTIN breathes heavily, still intent on

somehow affecting NORMAN with his telekinetic abilities.)

Alright, alright, alright. I won't call your parents.

(NORMAN mouths "nine-one-one" to ZACHARY)

NORMAN (cont'd)

Why don't you sit down and explain the proof to me?

AUSTIN

Okay. Now we're getting somewhere.

(ZACHARY grabs his phone and slips out of the room)

AUSTIN

You know what we should do? We should buy a house.

The three of us. Just picture that. Buying a house with cash! No mortgage! Oh my God, the money we'd save. And I could set Riley up at a private school, then an Ivy league, she wouldn't need financial aid or any loans. And we wouldn't even need to have jobs. And... and Norman, all the comic books you ever wanted, we could buy a whole comic shop! You've always wanted to be a movie star, right? I could set you up with the hottest agency in Hollywood.

And then... I mean, I already decided. I'm gonna give it to the National Brain Tumor Society. Maybe some soup kitchens or something. But that's where the money needs to go. Maybe we might skimp on the comic books?

NORMAN

That sounds really cool, Austin.

AUSTIN

And Zach, we could-

Where's Zach?

NORMAN

He had to use the bathroom.

AUSTIN

Oh. Okay.

I still don't get why you guys look so sad.

NORMAN

It's a lot to take in.

AUSTIN

I guess. That makes sense.

So, be honest. Should I tell Chloe?

ZACHARY

Chloe?

NORMAN

No. I don't think you should share this with anyone else.

AUSTIN

You're right. Don't want people to start pretending they're friends with me just because I'm loaded.

NORMAN

Right. We'll always be friends with you. No matter what.

AUSTIN

Thanks man. You really mean the world to me.

So! We should go on vacation.

NORMAN

Yeah, we should.

AUSTIN

Where do we want to go?

NORMAN

Always thought it would be cool to visit Paris.

AUSTIN

Oh, yeah.

NORMAN

Or... Spain.

AUSTIN

Yeah. Somewhere we'd get to learn a whole language.

(Emergency lights flash through the windows of NORMAN's house)

What's going on?

NORMAN

Just sit tight, buddy.

(ZACHARY walks back in)

AUSTIN

What the fuck did you do?

ZACHARY

Nothing.

AUSTIN

Then what the fuck is that?

ZACHARY

I don't know.

AUSTIN

Yes you do. You called the fucking cops.

ZACHARY

Austin.

AUSTIN

Why!?

ZACHARY

I think you need help.

(OFFICER enters. ZACHARY gestures him in.)

OFFICER

Which one of you is Austin?

ZACHARY

This is him.

AUSTIN

OFFICER

Austin, what's been going on tonight?

AUSTIN

What do you mean?

OFFICER

Well I got a call saying you were having a bad night.

AUSTIN

I am.

OFFICER

What's been going on?

AUSTIN

I'm not sure I want to talk to you.

OFFICER

Oh, and why would that be?

AUSTIN

You know why.

OFFICER

Do I now?

AUSTIN

You're going to lock me up.

OFFICER

Now Austin, I'm just here to help. Do you know where you are?

AUSTIN

I'm at my... "friend's" house.

OFFICER

Your friends just want to help you. Now I understand you've been under some stress lately, and I just want to help you talk about it.

AUSTIN

You want to help me talk? That's why you showed up with your badge and your gun?

OFFICER

Mr. Davis. I'm just doing my job.

AUSTIN

Yeah, I get that. I get that. But there's no story here, Officer.

OFFICER

Okay, well. I think I'm going to wait until the paramedics arrive, and we can figure things out from there.

AUSTIN

I know what happens when the paramedics arrive. I'm not stupid.

OFFICER

What happens?

AUSTIN

You're trying to lock me up.

OFFICER

Why do you think that will happen?

AUSTIN

I don't know if it's Norman or Zachary or my family somehow. But I'm not crazy. You're not locking me up.

OFFICER

(stifling a laugh)

No one is trying to take you jail.

AUSTIN

Then why don't you leave?

OFFICER

I'm/

AUSTIN

Yeah, right, you're just doing your job!

ZACHARY

Austin, I really think you should cooperate.

AUSTIN

Cooperate!?! It was you. You called the cops, didn't you!?

ZACHARY

...
Yes, I did. For you.

AUSTIN

So you could lock me up.

ZACHARY

I didn't want anything bad to happen to you.

AUSTIN

Then why'd you call the cops, Zach!?

ZACHARY

So they could help you.

AUSTIN

What the fuck are the cops going to do besides lock me up? Fuck you!

OFFICER

Hey! You better relax, young man, or things could get real ugly for you.

AUSTIN

Oh yeah?

OFFICER

Now you've got two options. You could either wait here and talk to the paramedics for a little bit, or you could come with me.

AUSTIN

Ohhh, yeah, wait til the paramedics decide. I'm not stupid. What are the ambulance drivers going to do, decide I'm not going to the hospital? I know how this works. Everybody knows how this works. Somebody calls 911, and you -- you, the cops, decide I'm a mental case, and then when the paramedics show up they just agree with your assessment and take me to the hospital. Where they don't let me out.

OFFICER

I don't make medical assessments.

AUSTIN

No. But you already did.

OFFICER

Alright Mr. Davis, you're gonna need to calm down or I'm gonna need to call backup.

AUSTIN

You're gonna ask me to sign a consent form. I don't need to sign it. Say what you want. I'm not signing.

I haven't committed a crime. I'm of sound body and mind. I'm not going.

ZACHARY

Austin, just do what the cop says!

AUSTIN

(AUSTIN spits in ZACHARY's face)

OFFICER

You just landed yourself a Section 12, asshole.

(OFFICER graps AUSTIN violently, locks him in handcuffs, and drags him out of the house)

Act II

Scene 1

(Tuesday evening. The Emergency Room of Evergreen Valley Hospital. AUSTIN, a 20-something young man, lies on a stretcher in the hallway. He's dressed in scrubs and wears a brace on his left ankle. The sound of a fluorescent light drones in the background.)

(At first a murmur, dialogue between NURSE and MAN. It gets louder as the conversation gets heated.)

MAN

It was a bar fight. These things happen, you know? We were both drunk -- I'm sober now, I've sobered up -- but we were both drunk and, these things happen, you know? These things happen.

NURSE

I understand.

MAN

He called my girl fat. I'm her man. I can't just, I can't just sit there and ignore it. So I stood up, not looking for -- I didn't come there looking for trouble, you know? It found me. He insulted my girl. She's got all these insecurities about... he insulted her. All I did was stand up. And then this guy throws a punch! He throws the first punch. That's -- I didn't start anything, I just stood up. And this guy swings at me, so I try to grapple him, I wasn't even -- this wasn't my fight, I was just looking for a night out on the town.

NURSE

You sound like a good boyfriend.

MAN

Right, right. I mean I didn't hit her, you understand. Is that what they told you? I just tried to grab him, so he wouldn't hit her. It was -- it was all self-defense.

NURSE

It sounds like a difficult situation.

MAN

So somebody calls the police, and -- and I get that, I understand why, it was a scene.

MAN (cont'd)

It turned into a whole scene. Some lady, I think, calls the police, she's scared -- I don't blame her. Everybody there was just trying to have a good time.

NURSE

Mmhmm.

MAN

And then when the police show up, they start questioning everybody: you know, what happened? And I told them who threw the first punch, they didn't care who threw the first punch, they just said ID, let's see your ID, and I was cooperating. I wasn't like those people on the news you see, resisting arrest, trying to grab the guys' gun -- I was being an upstanding citizen. They asked questions, I answered them. The guy wasn't even hurt. He maybe had a cut on his face, or something. But you know how those are, you must know how those are, all the bleeding but it's not really that bad, it's just a little -- scratch, I gave him a scratch. I wasn't trying to. It was a bar fight. He called my girl fat.

NURSE

No one is trying to send you to prison.

MAN

No, I don't -- I'll stand trial or whatever, if that's what needs to happen. I had -- my cousin, he got wrapped up in something like this a while back, and he went to trial and the whole case got dismissed. And in that situation, the dude he was scrapping with got hurt, really hurt. All charges dropped, he was free to go.

NURSE

We're not here to charge you with anything.

MAN

Sure, sure, sure, yeah, I'm -- I mean I'm in the ER, I'm not in a court room, why would I? -- but, but, listen, I'm not done.

NURSE

Okay.

(AUSTIN sits up, swings his legs over the side.)

MAN

The medics show up, and they're just there to do their jobs. Like you. I get it. You're just doing your job, I don't think you're -- there's protocols, or whatever, they're just doing their job. So they start asking me about everything, and I mean -- I'm getting kind of freaked out, because -- I mean, my blood's pumping, adrenaline, I'm like, I'm not gonna be calm in a situation like this. And again, if a judge says I did something wrong, I'm a man, I'll own up to the charges. I'm a good guy. But I mean come on, it's a whole

MAN (cont'd)

situation, I'm wired up. And you know how cops are around here, I don't know if they're gonna plant something on me, or what, but I don't know. What could happen? They're looking at me like I'm this -- I know I probably shouldn't use that word in here, but they're like, this guy's crazy. And they start talking about taking me to a hospital.

NURSE

That's their job.

MAN

Yeah yeah yeah, everybody's doing their job. I got a 9-to-5, that's important, actually, because I need to be back there in the morning -- so they start talking about taking me to the hospital, and I can't go. I can't afford it. My 9-to-5, my job, the benefits aren't -- I mean I have health insurance, but it's not good enough. I can't afford this. The ambulance alone -- I tried that too, right, I told them I'd have my girl drive me to the hospital. She's not that drunk. But they said no, you'd need to come with us. I couldn't do that. I've got a kid at home -- with her, you know. We're not married or anything but, sometimes things happen -- and I wasn't gonna leave the kid at somebody's doorstep, I'm a man, I take care of my kid -- good care -- anyway, and I've gotta pay for this kid's life. I can't afford this.

NURSE

We have a good bills department, they've got everything they need to work with you and your family to/

MAN

But I can't afford it. They're not wizards in there, this is gonna cost me a lot, too much, I need to take care of my kid.

NURSE

Our first priority is your health, because if you're not healthy, how can you take care of / anyone at home?

MAN

But I can't. So I start arguing with the medics, I'm not going. And then the cops step in, and I'm like, why are you involved in my healthcare? If I don't want to go to the hospital it's not a crime. And they tell me I'm not cooperating. Not cooperating? I've sat here, listening to you, I gave my full report, I don't want to go to the hospital, I'm not going. And they say you can either go to the hospital or come with us. They said that! So I started yelling. It was basically robbery. They're trying to get me to pay out the ass for this thing I don't need. I need to be at work tomorrow. I can't be stuck in the hospital. And these fucking cops, fucking pigs -- sorry, I don't know if you've got any family who's police or, -- these fucking assholes help the medics tie me down to a stretcher, and they -- they basically kidnap me -- it's a crime, it should be a crime. They take me here, and I'm thinking alright, maybe I'll see a doctor and he'll give me some

MAN (cont'd)

pain medication or something, because -- what would the doctor even do for me? I'm not bleeding anywhere. I've got some bruises, I guess, but what's the doctor gonna do besides tell me to rest up and the bruises will be gone in a couple weeks?

NURSE

But there could be injuries you don't know about, / that's our job, to make sure you're

MAN

(getting louder)

But then they take me here, with all these -- again, I shouldn't say it, probably, but these insane -- I'm not one of these guys. I don't know if there was -- a mistake, maybe, in in-patient processing, but I shouldn't be here. If you're gonna stick me in the hospital, fine, I lost that battle, but why am I here? I don't belong here.

NURSE

I don't make that decision. When the doctor sees you, he might discharge you as soon as tomorrow morning.

MAN

But you can't keep me here. I have rights. If I don't want medical treatment, you can't just/

NURSE

There are protocols that we have to follow to make sure / you're healthy enough to return to

MAN

I'm trying to be reasonable. But I don't want this treatment. You can't just keep me here. I'm not a lawyer, but I know you can't keep me here without my consent. I haven't committed a crime. If they charged me with a crime, that's one thing, but they didn't! I'm an innocent man. You can't keep me here.

NURSE

Actually, we can.

MAN

No you can't! You can't just lock somebody up in this country!

NURSE

Sir.

MAN

Let me out! I don't belong here! You have to let me out!

Sir.

NURSE

(The sound of MAN running)

Rick!

NURSE

(The sound of MAN banging on a door, followed by a pair of heavy footsteps. RICK speaks, a loud booming voice:)

RICK

It's locked, smart-ass. Get back to your room.

You try anything like that again, you and I are gonna have a real problem. You don't want that, do you?

MAN

(whimpering)

No. No, I don't.

RICK

Didn't think so.

(More footsteps. The sound of a door closing.)

(Lighter footsteps. NURSE, a young woman, around 30, approaches AUSTIN, carrying a clipboard.)

NURSE

Whoo! Sorry you had to hear that. It's been a crazy night here. You are... Austin Davis?

AUSTIN

NURSE

Austin?

AUSTIN

(NURSE scribbles on her clipboard)

NURSE

Can you confirm your name and date-of-birth?

AUSTIN

Austin Davis. February 16th.

NURSE

Thank you. I'm gonna put this guy on your finger, real quick.

(NURSE clamps a pulse oximeter around AUSTIN's finger)

Would you mind holding this?

(NURSE hands the inflation bulb of her blood pressure cuff to AUSTIN. She stretches the velcro cuff around his bicep and takes it back, taking his blood pressure.)

NURSE

Oookay. Good.
So tell me, Austin, what brings you in here tonight?

(Lights dim. NURSE and RICK load AUSTIN onto a stretcher.

(The ambulance bass riff plays.)

AUSTIN

This is really tight, can I loosen it?

NURSE

Sure.

(AUSTIN moves to loosen the straps of the stretcher. RICK slaps his hand away.)

RICK

I just told you no!

(We arrive at the "living room" of Evergreen Valley Hospital. DOCTOR P sits in a wooden chair. AUSTIN sits in the only other chair in the room, a rocking chair, across from him.

(Obnoxious pop music plays. DOCTOR P speaks with a Greek accent.)

DOCTOR P

Let's see here...

(DOCTOR P flips through a binder with his notes)

So, Austin. Can you tell me why you're here?

AUSTIN

The people from the Emergency Room brought me here.

DOCTOR P

Well, yes, I noted that.

AUSTIN

Okay.

DOCTOR P

Why did they bring you here?

AUSTIN

They were following protocol.

DOCTOR P

And what protocol were they following?

AUSTIN

I don't know, some protocol where they bring the psych patients to the nearest mental hospital that takes their insurance, I guess.

DOCTOR P

So, Austin. You found yourself in the emergency room, and the staff there classified you as a patient with psychiatric needs. Do I follow?

AUSTIN

Yeah. Can you turn that music off?

DOCTOR P

The nurses and I are trying to figure out what's going on. The technician comes in tomorrow.

What brought you to the emergency room?

AUSTIN

Police.

DOCTOR P

I see. I'm sorry to hear that.

AUSTIN

Yeah. It was... unpleasant for everyone involved.

DOCTOR P

And why did the police bring you to the emergency room?

AUSTIN

Because my friends... people who I thought were my friends called and said I was going crazy. Or something.

DOCTOR P

If they called 911, it must have been because they really cared about you.

AUSTIN

I don't follow.

DOCTOR P

Let's say they didn't call anyone. We'll pretend they saw their friend in great distress and did nothing about it. Would they be your friends then?

AUSTIN

I wasn't in distress. I was having one of the best weeks of my life.

(DOCTOR P writes in his notebook)

DOCTOR P

Tell me about it.

AUSTIN

I don't think I want to.

DOCTOR P

And why is that?

AUSTIN

Because I know how it sounds.

DOCTOR P

What do you think it sounds like?

AUSTIN

I know what this looks like. I'm sure to someone who sees psychiatric patients all day, I look like the rest of them. But I'm not.

DOCTOR P

So why don't you tell me about what happened, and we can discuss together why it may or may not be what it looks like.

AUSTIN

DOCTOR P

You mentioned you were having a great day. Tell me about that.

AUSTIN

Well. Great in some ways, rough in others.

DOCTOR P

How so?

AUSTIN

There's this girl. That things were going well with.

DOCTOR P

I'm glad to hear it.

AUSTIN

Thanks.

DOCTOR P

Could you be more specific?

AUSTIN

I asked her on a date. I think it was a date.

DOCTOR P

Hard to tell with your generation, from what I've read.

AUSTIN

You read about us?

DOCTOR P

It helps to be in the loop.

AUSTIN

Didn't know they wrote books about it.

DOCTOR P

Go on, please.

AUSTIN

Well, I asked her if she wanted to ride my motorcycle.

DOCTOR P

Ah. Do you often ride motorcycles?

AUSTIN

I don't actually have one.

DOCTOR P

I see. So was this when the delusions started?

AUSTIN

Delusions? I'm not delusional, doctor.

DOCTOR P

Then why did you ask her to ride a motorcycle you didn't have?

AUSTIN

See? This is what I was talking about. I know how it sounds.

DOCTOR P

Help me understand, please.

AUSTIN

I lied.

DOCTOR P

Did you not think she would say yes without this motorcycle

AUSTIN

I did. Or, I don't know. It was a stupid idea. I know. Haven't you ever done something stupid to impress a girl?

DOCTOR P

I understand where you're coming from. You said your week was mixed.

AUSTIN

Yes.

DOCTOR P

Tell me about its more difficult aspects.

AUSTIN

I got in a fight with my parents.

DOCTOR

What kind of fight?

AUSTIN

We screamed at each other.

DOCTOR P

Over what?

AUSTIN

They scream at each other all the time. Over everything. Over nothing. So I said I was sick of it, I was sick of them fighting in front of my little sister. And... everything spiraled from there.

DOCTOR P

That's a difficult situation to be in.

AUSTIN

This is a difficult situation to be in.

DOCTOR P

This?

AUSTIN

Being locked in a mental hospital when there's nothing wrong with me. This whole thing. It's a bunch of misunderstandings like that.

DOCTOR P

What else?

AUSTIN

Have you ever heard of the Millenium Problems?

DOCTOR P

I'm familiar, actually.

AUSTIN

My friends thought I was just scribbling gibberish. But I was trying to prove the Riemann hypothesis.

DOCTOR P

Very advanced mathematics.

AUSTIN

Yeah. It's tough.

DOCTOR P

Are you a student of math?

AUSTIN

I'm not a math major, if that's what you mean.

DOCTOR P

It takes a great mind to contend with the Millenium Problems.

AUSTIN

Thanks.

DOCTOR P

But you should know that there are many psychiatric conditions for which an obsession with mathematics is a symptom.

AUSTIN

I'm not crazy.

DOCTOR P

I didn't say you were. I don't think you are. I don't think you've ever been.

But, given the evidence, I think it warrants you stay here for a few days so the medical staff and I can observe you.

AUSTIN

I don't need to be here.

DOCTOR P

Austin. Put yourself in my shoes. If you were the medical director of a facility like this and you had a patient who's displayed all of these symptoms: potential delusions, a traumatic event, a sudden obsession over a math problem. I can't leave you out on the streets without making sure you're alright.

AUSTIN

I told you it was a misunderstanding. What, that's what everyone says, right? "Nobody's crazy in here!"

DOCTOR P

No one is.

Austin, I'm keeping you here for the next few days. Now. You can either stay here in the voluntary wing or the involuntary wing.

AUSTIN

Is that a threat?

DOCTOR P

It's your choice.

(DOCTOR P hands AUSTIN a clipboard)

Depending on if you sign or not.

AUSTIN

DOCTOR P

AUSTIN

Can I think about it?

(FADE TO BLACK.)

Scene 2

(Wednesday morning. The TV Room: it screams sterile; fluorescent lights might as well blind you. JASON, a young man in his 20s, sits slouched on a couch, half watching the screen. At rise, AUSTIN nervously enters the room)

You mind if I join you?

AUSTIN

I'll take that as a no.

JASON

No as in, yes.

AUSTIN

Yes as in you'll let me join you?

JASON

No.

AUSTIN

Oh. I don't really have anywhere else to go.

JASON

You could have a breakdown in your room. That's what most of us are doing in between group.

AUSTIN

I already did.

JASON

Not just one. Try again.

I'm gonna join you.

AUSTIN

Why'd you even ask?

JASON

To be polite.

AUSTIN

People like you drive me up the fucking wall.

JASON

People who are polite?

AUSTIN

People who are fake.

JASON

I'm not fake for using a common introduction.

AUSTIN

What about a book? There's a library here.

JASON

I'm good.

AUSTIN

So how long have you been here?

JASON

There's a TV in the caf[?], too.

AUSTIN

Look, I don't think it's that much to ask to let me sit here without bitching.

JASON

And there goes Mr. Polite.

AUSTIN

Do you do this every time somebody says good morning?

JASON

Only when people don't mean it.

AUSTIN

I'm not fake.

JASON

Your roommate is probably nicer than me.

AUSTIN

He's catatonic.

JASON

Exactly. Way nicer.

AUSTIN

I'm not leaving.

JASON

You will.

AUSTIN

And why's that?

JASON

You're soft as fuck. Look how worked up you are.

AUSTIN

You're being a jackass.

JASON

And I can keep it up, man.

So can I. **AUSTIN**

Nahhh. **JASON**

AUSTIN

JASON

I can offer you a way out of here. **AUSTIN**

Oh, Jesus. **JASON**

I have a plan. **AUSTIN**

Yeah, you and everybody else here for the first time. **JASON**

What do you mean? **AUSTIN**

You want to know what happens to the people who escape? They get sent right back here. You're trying to convince people this is all a big mistake, right? **JASON**

It is. **AUSTIN**

Yeah, screw you for even being that naive my dude. **JASON**

I can clear everything up if I can just/ **AUSTIN**

JASON

Get a lawyer?

AUSTIN

It's worth a shot.

JASON

No it's not.

AUSTIN

Why not? They can't just keep me here.

JASON

Denial's tough, dude, I get it. Just please go process your shit somewhere else.

AUSTIN

I'm not in denial.

JASON

How did you end up here?

AUSTIN

I checked in myself.

JASON

Why?

AUSTIN

Depression. Doesn't mean I'm crazy.

JASON

Bullshit.

AUSTIN

What?

JASON

It's your first day here, and you're already looking to escape? You're lying to me.

AUSTIN

Okay. I was brought here.

JASON

Yeah, I know.

AUSTIN

Fuck you. How's that for genuine?

JASON

Wow, I'm so glad you're here now.

AUSTIN

I'm sorry. I don't know what to do.

JASON

Go take a depression nap.

AUSTIN

I'll do anything. I have to get out of here.

JASON

Why not plot with somebody who cares?

AUSTIN

There's nobody else here who's even close to lucid.

JASON

Yeah, they're all numb and dumb. Go try that. Take your meds.

AUSTIN

I have to meet a girl on Friday.

JASON

No, you don't.

AUSTIN

I do.

JASON

You *had* to meet a girl on Friday. You're not getting out of here by then.

AUSTIN

I can't miss it. I've wanted this for a long time.

JASON

What are you, on three day?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

JASON

Yeah, sorry. Gonna need a rain check.

AUSTIN

I'll give you my nicotine patches.

JASON

I don't smoke.

AUSTIN

Aha. Who's the liar now?

JASON

What?

AUSTIN

I saw you fiending last night. Begging the nurses. You only get so many.

JASON

I chew.

AUSTIN

Sure you do, whatever. You want more. I want out.

JASON

How very polite of you, to take advantage of my addiction.

AUSTIN

We'll call this the real me. It's what you wanted, isn't it?

JASON

Man I just wanted you to leave.

(AUSTIN pulls a nicotine patch out of his pocket. He offers it to JASON. JASON glares at AUSTIN)

AUSTIN

So we have an understanding?

JASON

Go fuck yourself.

(AUSTIN and JASON both sit, watching the TV)

Scene 3

(Thursday morning. AUSTIN sits in the hallway. Down the hall is a phonebooth-style phone on the wall. Ambient sound of a patient on the phone. The patient ends his/her conversation and leaves in view of AUSTIN. As AUSTIN starts to get up, another PATIENT briskly walks down the hallway and starts another conversation on the phone.

(The second PATIENT ends his/her conversation. AUSTIN, fast as he can, limps to the phone. He dials a number and waits. RILEY's voice can be heard on the other side.)

Hello? **RILEY**

Riley? **AUSTIN**

Austin? **RILEY**

Riley, can you put Mom or Dad on the phone? **AUSTIN**

Austin!?! Where are you? Where have you been? **RILEY**

Something happened. I'm at... I'm at Evergreen Valley Hospital. **AUSTIN**

You're in the hospital? **RILEY**

Yes. **AUSTIN**

Are you okay? What happened? **RILEY**

AUSTIN

It's a lot to explain. I don't know how to put it into words. I need Mom or Dad. Is one of them home?

RILEY

No, Mom's out looking for you and Dad's taking a nap.

(JASON meanders toward AUSTIN)

AUSTIN

Could you wake Dad up?

RILEY

He needs his sleep.

JASON

Hey, Austin, buddy.

AUSTIN

(to JASON)

Not now.

(to RILEY)

I know, I know, I just really need to talk to him.

JASON

Oh, you don't want to talk to me?

AUSTIN

(to JASON)

No, I don't.

JASON

Wonder what that's like.

AUSTIN

Get bent.

RILEY

What?

AUSTIN

(to RILEY)

No, Ry, that wasn't to you. Can you wake Dad up?

RILEY

Why?

AUSTIN

Because, I need Mom and Dad to help me out.

RILEY

You yelled at them.

AUSTIN

I know. It was a misunderstanding.

RILEY

Then why did you yell at them? They said you ran away.

AUSTIN

I was... trying to... look, it doesn't matter now. I need them to come visit me in the hospital.

RILEY

Can you call back later when Dad's awake? I don't want to wake him up.

AUSTIN

I need to talk to him now.

JASON

Bro, stop hoggin' the line.

AUSTIN

Please wake Dad up. I need to talk to him.

RILEY

No.

AUSTIN

Riley!

JASON

Yo, your dad needs his sleep, bro, let me get to the phone!

AUSTIN

I waited five times as long as you did.

RILEY

Why haven't you answered any of Mom's calls?

AUSTIN

I'm at... a special hospital. I don't have my phone.

RILEY

You didn't bring it with you?

AUSTIN

The hospital staff took it from me.

JASON

Austin! Get off the phone!

AUSTIN

Did I tell you to fuck off, or did I tell you to fuck off?

JASON

You trying to start something, gimp-y?

RILEY

Can you just give me the hospital's number so I can call you back?

AUSTIN

No, they don't- apparently they're supposed to, but they don't tell us when someone calls. I need to reach Dad now.

RILEY

He's sleeping!

AUSTIN

I know, goddamn it, Riley, just wake him up!

JASON

I'm coming to take that phone.

AUSTIN

Nurse!

JASON

Not in earshot.

AUSTIN

Fuck off and die!

RILEY

Austin!

AUSTIN

Riley!

(JASON lunges for the phone. AUSTIN maneuvers and trips JASON with his cane. JASON falls flat on his face.)

Riley?

Riley.

Riley!

(The line is dead)

AUSTIN

(to himself)

Riley.

(JASON moans on the floor.

AUSTIN re-dials. The phone rings.)

DAVIS FAMILY ANSWERING MACHINE

(TRACEY's VOICE)

Hi there! You've reached the Davis Family. We're off on some fantastical adventure, so please leave a message at the beep!

(BEEP!)

AUSTIN hangs up the phone. Collapses on the floor. Lights fade.)

Scene 4

(Friday morning. AUSTIN in the cafeteria. He navigates the tables, cane in one hand, wipes in another. Enter JASON)

AUSTIN

JASON

AUSTIN

Mop's over there.

JASON

I'm not mopping.

AUSTIN

Broom's over there.

JASON

AUSTIN

Look, I'm not pleased about this either, but good behavior, fast release. I know you want that too.

JASON

I don't.

AUSTIN

What do you mean?

JASON

AUSTIN

How could you not?

JASON

Don't get curious.

AUSTIN

Fine.

JASON

Can you pass me more wipes?

AUSTIN

Get them yourself.

JASON

AUSTIN

Come on. The faster we get this done, the faster we don't have to see each other.

JASON

Meh. I'll still have to see you at meals.

AUSTIN

Then we'll get a longer break from each other.

JASON

I'll take as long as I want.

AUSTIN

You really want to spend the morning like this?

JASON

My choice.

AUSTIN

Awesome.

(AUSTIN chucks the container of wipes across the room. The container knocks the coffee maker over)

AUSTIN

I can't do this anymore.

JASON

Oh, dude, I told you to have your breakdown in your room.

AUSTIN

Shut up. My sister is one of the only things I have left and because of you now she won't talk to me.

JASON

Oh because of me? You're kidding yourself.

AUSTIN

No I'm not. You push everybody else away, but you don't get to push people away from me! I won't let you.

JASON

Is that a threat? I'm wayyy more ready for round 2, dude.

AUSTIN

I don't know what it is. I don't know what you want from me now.

JASON

You tried to take advantage of me.

AUSTIN

I- Yeah. I did. I'm sorry.

JASON

No, you're not. None of you are.

AUSTIN

No, I am. I fuck everything up. Everything. School, work, Mom, Dad, Riley. Oh my god. I'm such a fucking idiot. I thought I was God? I thought I was God. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry/

JASON

Jesus dude, calm down.

AUSTIN

I shouldn't have hurt you. I shouldn't have, I'm sorry, I fucked up- I- Jason, Riley, Mom, Dad, Chloe, Norman, Zach, I'm sorry I'm sorry/

JASON

Austin it's not that fuckin bad!

AUSTIN

Yes it is, I'm such a fuckup, I fucked up everything I had going for me.

JASON

Not even close.

AUSTIN

Everyone thinks I'm a nutcase. I spit on one of my best friends.

JASON

Dude, just... trust me.

AUSTIN

It's been so hard. I just wanted something nice. Just a silly little date. And of course I fucked it up. Of course I chose this week to snap.

JASON

You don't choose.

AUSTIN

My brain did. I've made it this far and this one week of all weeks my brain let go.

JASON

That's not how this works, dude. Should I get a nurse or something?

AUSTIN

No, they don't fucking listen.

JASON

Neither do I.

AUSTIN

This is how you wanted to spend your morning, apparently. You don't want to hear it, start cleaning.

JASON

Fine, damn.

AUSTIN

Riley... I'm so sorry...

JASON

You said if I cleaned, you'd stop.

AUSTIN

I think I'm just gonna end it.

JASON

Dude.

AUSTIN

They make it so hard here.

JASON

Please don't talk like that.

AUSTIN

I could punch glass. You'd help me, right?

JASON

What? No.

AUSTIN

Oh come on. You hate me. Then help me. Help me end it.

JASON

You don't have to end it.

AUSTIN

No, I don't have to, I want to. This world has never offered me anything worth staying for. Or, no, it has but when it does I fuck it up. I don't belong here or anywhere.

JASON

Please stop.

AUSTIN

You don't have to hear me talk about it if you just help me. I can't do another day in here or out there. I just want out. Please even if it's an OD it'll hurt but it'll be better than/

JASON

(breaking)

I'm here because I almost tried to kill *myself*, Austin! Fuck! Stop it! Just fucking stop!

AUSTIN

Then you understand, don't you?

JASON

Yes but you can't think like that!

AUSTIN

So why can't you take your own advice?

JASON

Because you actually have something to live for. I don't.

AUSTIN

Let's do it together.

JASON

Look me in the fucking eyes. Are you homeless?

No. **AUSTIN**

Check. You have friends? **JASON**

Yes but/ **AUSTIN**

Check. Loving family? **JASON**

It's complicated. My dad's health/ **AUSTIN**

Check. You've got it made and if you can't see that, that's your real sickness. **JASON**

I want to die. **AUSTIN**

No you don't. I mean, you think you do but you shouldn't. **JASON**

I know what I want. **AUSTIN**

JASON
Listen to me. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia when I was 13. I thought my mom had been replaced with a robot, and I thought my house was covered with cameras. My family came home to me dumping pond water all over the house to short circuit them. This shit has followed me my entire life. Always something, always some med not working or a problem with insurance when it does. Two weeks ago my sister cut contact with a phone call where she said she hoped I'd die. I'm alone and I can't take it anymore. I'm the one who doesn't belong anywhere.

AUSTIN
You don't have to be alone.

JASON
Yes I do. Because what happens when the cycle continues and I break your shit? Or I finally do it. Finally. I can't risk that. ...But you, Austin? You've gotta fight, man. You've got shit to live for. Live for it.

Why? **AUSTIN**

Because you have to. **JASON**

AUSTIN

JASON

AUSTIN

You're good to finish this up, right? **JASON**

I- **AUSTIN**

(JASON walks briskly out of the room. We can hear a fierce attempt to stifle snuffles from the hallway. AUSTIN crutches over to the coffee maker and begins to clean his mess)

Scene 5

*(Friday afternoon. The hospital cafeteria.
AUSTIN sits painting. Then, from off:)*

TRACEY

Where is he? Where?

NURSE

He's right in there.

*(TRACEY rushes in and hugs AUSTIN
tightly before he can say a word.)*

AUSTIN

Mom!

TRACEY

Oh, honey. Oh my god. Are you all right? What happened?

(CHRIS carefully walks in.)

CHRIS

Austin.

AUSTIN

Hi Dad.

(CHRIS embraces AUSTIN.)

CHRIS

H-how are you feeling?

AUSTIN

Well good now.

TRACEY

I wasn't sure... erm.

AUSTIN

What?

TRACEY

I didn't know if you wanted to see us.

AUSTIN

Of course I do.

TRACEY

Oh, Austin. You make me so happy, honey.

AUSTIN

Where's Riley?

TRACEY

Well... They wouldn't let her in. She's too young.

AUSTIN

So stupid.

TRACEY

I know.

AUSTIN

Mom, Dad. I'm so sorry. I/

CHRIS

N-n-no. Austin. Th-this is my fault.

AUSTIN

No it's not.

TRACEY

I had no idea what you were going through. If anyone should apologize it's me.

AUSTIN

Mom, no.

CHRIS

I should never have said those things to you.

(to TRACEY)

Or you, sweetie. I'm sorry.

AUSTIN

I love you so much, Dad. Mom.

TRACEY

I love you.

CHRIS

I love you too.

(NORMAN enters.)

NORMAN

Hey, buddy.

AUSTIN

Norman!

NORMAN

I know you're probably not happy to see me. But / I needed to see you

*(AUSTIN crutches from his family to
NORMAN and hugs him tightly.)*

NORMAN

You feeling better?

AUSTIN

A lot better. A lot, lot.

NORMAN

Dude, you're back. I'm so glad you're back!

(whispering)

Listen, let me know if you see a nurse because technically I snuck in here.

AUSTIN

What did you do?

NORMAN

They said there was a visitor limit.

AUSTIN

Yeah, it's four!

NORMAN

Oh. Well it's outside visiting hours.

AUSTIN

It *is* visiting hours.

(They laugh.)

Is Zach coming, or?

NORMAN

He... couldn't make it.

AUSTIN

Oh.

NORMAN

Yeah. He didn't say he wasn't coming, ever. But I think he just needs some time.

AUSTIN

I get it.

NORMAN

Things weren't supposed to go down the way they did.

AUSTIN

I know.

NORMAN

We were just trying to help. I thought... I don't know what I thought, exactly, but I thought they were supposed to help. I thought we were calling, like, emergency medical services. Not the cops.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

NORMAN

I mean, they send a guy with a gun in? That's the first guy they send in when someone's

in crisis? I thought they were bringing help, Austin.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

NORMAN

I thought, like, a magic mental health fairy was going to show up and know what was going on.

AUSTIN

Shrinkerbell.

NORMAN

Yeah, I thought Shrinkerbell was going to show up and tell us what to do! I didn't think they were going to lock you up because... what, you thought you had won a few million dollars?

AUSTIN

I thought I was God for a hot sec, there, too.

NORMAN

Yeah, dude. So does Kanye. It doesn't mean you're crazy.

AUSTIN

Thank you, Norman.

(Enter CHLOE.)

AUSTIN

Chlo.

CHLOE

Hi.

(NORMAN winks, gives finger guns, and exits.)

NURSE

(from off)

Who are you? Did you sign the visitor log?

NORMAN

Shit!

TRACEY

Hello, Chloe. How are you?

Good, Mrs. Davis. And you? **CHLOE**

Good. Do you want privacy, or? **TRACEY**

Mom! **AUSTIN**

Nice to see you, Ch-Chloe. **CHRIS**

You too, Mr. Davis. **CHLOE**

(TRACEY and CHRIS leave.)

How are you feeling? **CHLOE**

A little embarrassed. **AUSTIN**

For what? **CHLOE**

I was hoping for a nicer venue. **AUSTIN**

(AUSTIN smiles. Then, it's too much. He breaks down crying.)

I'm sorry. I couldn't get out in time. **AUSTIN**

It's *okay*. **CHLOE**

(AUSTIN breaks down)

You shouldn't be seeing me like this. **AUSTIN**

(CHLOE embraces him)

CHLOE

Austin. Like what?

AUSTIN

Because I'm a fucking psycho and on top of that I'm crying in front of you.

CHLOE

You're not a psycho.

AUSTIN

I don't know- I don't know what they told you. Or who told you. Or how you figured out where I was. But -- goddamn it! -- you shouldn't be here.

CHLOE

Do you want me to leave?

AUSTIN

I didn't say that.

CHLOE

Okay. I want to do whatever helps you most.

AUSTIN

Just.

I don't know.

I don't want you to see me like this. I want you to... I want to be... more than I am.

CHLOE

You don't need to be.

AUSTIN

You deserve a guy who can handle his own shit.

CHLOE

What does that mean?

AUSTIN

A guy who, I don't know, just figures his shit out. Figures it out. Doesn't... end up in a place like this. You deserve someone normal.

CHLOE

Nobody's normal.

AUSTIN

I'm freaking out in front of you right now.

CHLOE

Austin I freaked out in front of you first!

AUSTIN

That wasn't a big deal.

CHLOE

Have you ever heard of the phrase cognitive dissonance?

AUSTIN

I'm bipolar, Chloe! They told me last night. I have a serious disorder. God it feels like a death sentence.

CHLOE

So does mine.

AUSTIN

CHLOE

I like you, Austin. It's really hard for me to think about, but I like you a lot. Why isn't that enough for you?

AUSTIN

...It is.

CHLOE

Then let me like you!

AUSTIN

I like you too.

CHLOE

I know. You asked me on a date.

AUSTIN

So it is a date?

CHLOE

It depends. Is *this* a date?

AUSTIN

Is it possible to have a dinner date where the main course is graham crackers with carton milk?

CHLOE

Of course. That was the move in middle school.

AUSTIN

(pointing to the fluorescent lights)

We've got the same romantic lighting.

CHLOE

Then it's a date.

AUSTIN

I'm really glad you came. Shit has been so heavy in here.

CHLOE

Do you want to talk about... everything?

AUSTIN

I don't know.

CHLOE

You don't have to.

AUSTIN

You know what, yeah, I want to.

CHLOE

Okay. Start wherever you want.

AUSTIN

My parents and I got in a fight. My mom told me to get out of the house. I was on crutches. I was... I have never in my life felt unwelcome in my own home. And the rage in her eyes, the way I caused it. I did that to my own mother. I had to crutch out of the house. So vulnerable. And my whole life was just going to be a long slope downhill. Was my family going to give up on me completely? Was I going to be totally alone? That's... that's a piece of what my mind was going through. And. I don't know. When I went to Norman about it... and Zach called the fucking police... I lost it. Completely lost it.

I know that sounds stupid. I got in a fight with my parents. I shouldn't have ended up in the hospital over it. There's something fucked up in my head. A chemical imbalance or something. That's just how my brain works.

CHLOE

Yeah, but you know what Norman told me? About the money?

AUSTIN

Norman told you?

CHLOE

That you were going to give it all away? That you thought, you really thought, you were a millionaire, and you were going to give it all away to charity? I don't know what most people would do if they had a million dollars. I think most people would turn real ugly. But you, Austin? You really believed you had a million dollars. And the first thing you were going to spend it on was the people around you. And you were going to give the rest away.

I like the way your brain works.

(Fade to black.)

Scene 6

(Friday evening. JASON eating cereal in the hospital cafeteria. AUSTIN enters. JASON looks up. Disregards him. Keeps eating. AUSTIN sits across the table and pours himself a bowl of cereal. He picks up a spoon and starts to eat.)

I got you something. **AUSTIN**

Mmm. **JASON**

I did. **AUSTIN**

I believe you. **JASON**

Don't you want to know? **AUSTIN**

Do I have to? **JASON**

(AUSTIN takes 4 or 5 nicotine patches out of his pocket. He hands them to JASON)

Ah. **JASON**

Honestly I wasn't sure if this was nice or a slap in the face. But. Yeah. They're yours. **AUSTIN**

You told them you smoke? **JASON**

I do. **AUSTIN**

No you don't. **JASON**

It's not a habit, yet.

AUSTIN

It'll kill you.

JASON

That gum will rot your teeth out. Yet here we are.

AUSTIN

Thanks for the PSA.

JASON

Do you want the patches or not?

AUSTIN

Damn. *(reaching for the patches)* I'm too proud for this, I swear to god.

JASON

Don't take it that way, then. It's supposed to be a thanks.

AUSTIN

For?

JASON

This is gonna sound weird.

AUSTIN

(JASON unwraps a patch and rubs it on his arm.)

Ok, then don't say it.

JASON

You saved my life.

AUSTIN

Oh god, no I didn't.

JASON

You did. It sounds strange /

AUSTIN

Please shut up.

JASON

AUSTIN

I just really needed to hear that. “Because you have to.” “You have to.” It sounds so simple.

JASON

(of the patch)

Am I not rubbing hard enough?

AUSTIN

Nobody’s ever said something like that to me.

JASON

No one has ever encouraged you to live?

AUSTIN

No, no one’s ever *framed* it like that. It’s always, “the good outweighs the bad,” but that’s bullshit.

JASON

I mean. For some people it’s not.

AUSTIN

But it’s not about that. If it’s “worth it” or not. Why live? You just...

JASON

You have to.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

JASON

Well. I’m glad I guess.

AUSTIN

How did you know that?

JASON

Came up with it myself.

AUSTIN

But how do you know?

JASON

I just do.

AUSTIN

But you really don't have a reason? Some people have a wife, right. Or kids, a pet. That keeps them alive.

JASON

I don't have one.

AUSTIN

How could you not?

JASON

You can't pick one thing, then if that thing goes away you kill yourself. And it might go away.

AUSTIN

Shouldn't you pick a different reason at that point?

JASON

No. It's always the same reason. You have to.

AUSTIN

Right but why?

JASON

I don't think you're gonna get it.

AUSTIN

I get it!

JASON

Listen. There are a million reasons to live. The sunset, if you really fucking like those, some people do, that's why you live. Or your friends. You've got some great people surrounding you. Your parents are sweet. Your buddy climbed in a window for you. I saw you with your little girlfriend. Believe me, I wish I had all that. But that's not it.

Drawing. Painting. The first snow every winter, the heat of the summer, whatever. Maybe you like nature, you wanna feed a deer or some shit. I don't know, I'm not one of those people.

But that's not *why*. And this is the part I really want you awake for. Put down the spoon. No, I'm serious, put it down. There used to be this road by my house, back when, you know, that's the kind of place I lived. I didn't have any friends. But that didn't matter because all I had to do was take my bike down to Blue Curve and ride until my callouses bled under my gloves. And then, the week I was diagnosed, they started blasting at the quarry and fucked up the best stretch. Same day step-dad clubbed me with a wrench for what I did to the house. Yeah, I wanted to die. I even had a plan. I was searching,

searching, desperate to replace my old reason. But I couldn't find it. And then I had a revelation: I wasn't going to find one. I'm not alive because I have a reason, I'm alive because I have to be. And just like that, I found my new road.

AUSTIN

So it wasn't the road, it was the bike. That was your reason.

JASON

No, Austin, because if my bike broke down I'd find a car I liked, and if all the vehicles in the world blew up I'd take up fishing. Yes I'd find something, but that's never *the* thing. *The* thing is accepting that, whether it be because of survival instinct or God, literally whatever you want it to be, you don't *want* to live. Really. You just have to.

AUSTIN

Wow.

JASON

Yeah. And that's what did it for me, guy. I can't say it'll work for you, but that's my thing. And the shit works.

AUSTIN

You know, I'm actually looking for a motorcycle.

JASON

No.

AUSTIN

I wasn't asking/

JASON

Hell no.

AUSTIN

I wasn't asking for yours!

JASON

Good.

AUSTIN

JASON

I could give you the name of a scooter guy, though. He might have something for you.

AUSTIN

A scooter?

JASON

I'm not putting you on a bike.

AUSTIN

It's gonna take more patches, I'm guessing?

JASON

God, you'd really make me beg, huh? No, just do that for me anyway.

AUSTIN

I can't.

JASON

What do you mean?

AUSTIN

I'm getting discharged today.

JASON

Well I'll be damned.
You have a long, good goddamn life, Austin. Why?

AUSTIN

I know why.

JASON

Good.

AUSTIN

You changed my life.

JASON

Shut the fuck up.

AUSTIN

Thank you.

(Lights down.)

Scene 7

(Back at home. RILEY sits on the porch.

AUSTIN sits down next to her.)

Hey.

AUSTIN

RILEY

Are you okay?

AUSTIN

I don't want to talk to you.

RILEY

What?

AUSTIN

Riley, why?

RILEY

That boy in the hospital. You said terrible things to him. Why would you act like that?

AUSTIN

Because he was being a bad person.

RILEY

Really?

AUSTIN

He was trying to take the phone from me.

RILEY

And that makes him a bad person?

AUSTIN

He was... I don't know how to put it into words. He was acting like- I know you don't like swearing.

RILEY

He threatened me.

AUSTIN

So he was a bully?

RILEY

Yeah. He was a bully.

AUSTIN

And that makes him a bad person?

RILEY

Maybe I shouldn't have used those words.

AUSTIN

I know you heard things. Things that were hard to hear.

I just wish you could understand what it was like in there. It's called a hospital. But it's not the same place you saw when Dad got diagnosed.

It's meaner there. People fight with each other. I had to fight with the patients just to get to the phone. Just to call you.

I don't know how much of the fight with Mom and Dad you heard. I know it was scary.

RILEY

I'm not a kid. I wasn't scared. I was mad.

AUSTIN

Mad?

RILEY

You shouted at Mom. You were an asshole.

AUSTIN

RILEY

And you yelled at Dad too. I thought you were on my side.

AUSTIN

I was. I am. I was trying to protect you.

RILEY

I like living with Mom and Dad. I don't want them to get a divorce. Why would you say that?

AUSTIN

They were hurting you.

RILEY

Yes, they argue. Everybody does that.

AUSTIN

But they argue too much. It's not healthy for you to hear it.

RILEY

And you think a divorce would be better?

AUSTIN

I was trying to stop the fighting.

RILEY

No. You were trying to make decisions for all of us.

AUSTIN

I was trying to be a good big brother.

RILEY

Well, you weren't.

AUSTIN

RILEY

AUSTIN

I thought... at the time. I had solved this math problem. I thought I was about to win a lot of money.

RILEY

That doesn't make sense.

AUSTIN

I know. I wasn't thinking straight.

I love you so much, Riley. I know it doesn't make sense, but I was trying to do what I thought was best. I wish they allowed you in there, it would've made it so much easier for you to understand.

They did. **RILEY**

What? **AUSTIN**

I was allowed in. I told Mom I didn't want to go. **RILEY**

Because of what I said on the phone? **AUSTIN**

Because of who you are. **RILEY**

Riley, that's not who I am. **AUSTIN**

Just go. **RILEY**

Riley... **AUSTIN**

Just go! **RILEY**

Riley, I was sick/ **AUSTIN**

Just go!!! **RILEY**

(AUSTIN rises, placing his weight on the cane. He leaves, as much as it hurts.)

Scene 8

(AUSTIN and CHLOE in a field. They stand in front of a small electric scooter.)

AUSTIN

So how does it work?

CHLOE

Well, you have to put the key in for one.

(CHLOE hands AUSTIN a small key.)

AUSTIN

Riiight... here.

(AUSTIN puts the key in and turns it. The scooter lights up.)

CHLOE

There you go.

(AUSTIN steps on.)

AUSTIN

How do I look?

CHLOE

Like you need training wheels.

(AUSTIN pouts.)

I'm *kidding*. Although I don't think you should ride it by yourself. It would be really bad if you fell over the wrong way.

AUSTIN

Yeah, good point.

(AUSTIN slides forward.)

CHLOE

I didn't mean I was getting on the back.

AUSTIN

Oh. Sure.

front.) (AUSTIN slides back. CHLOE hops in

AUSTIN

What's the top speed on this thing?

CHLOE

I don't know. I haven't tested it yet.

AUSTIN

Wanna find out?

CHLOE

You're a special kind of crazy, Austin.

AUSTIN

CHLOE

I didn't mean... I just meant/

AUSTIN

I am.

I'm a little crazy.

CHLOE

A fun kind of crazy.

AUSTIN

A sexy crazy?

CHLOE

I did not say that.

AUSTIN

No, no, okay, too far.

CHLOE

A bold crazy.

AUSTIN

An adventurous crazy.

CHLOE

A... I did not say sexy. But. A... charming. Crazy.

AUSTIN

Shall we?

CHLOE

We can give it a try.

AUSTIN

Okay.

(A bittersweet song -- possibly "Heat of the Summer" or "Superposition," both by Young the Giant -- rises over the sound of CHLOE revving the scooter's electric motor as lights fade out. Enter the rest of the cast. They dance, more controlled and joyful this time. BLACKOUT. End of play.)