

Alyson & the Great Bagel Mistake  
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## Alyson & the Great Bagel Mistake

### Cast

Austin	Male, 30s. Neurotic. Bald.
Alyson	Female, 20s. An enigma.
Dawn	Female, 20s. The jilted ex-girlfriend.
Dylan	Male, early 20s. The brash assistant.
Barry	Male, 30s. The gruff best friend.
Shanon	Female, late 20s. One of the guys.

Once the latter three have entered, they remain onstage, quietly playing cards when not actively engaged.

### Setting

Austin's home. There is a couch with a television implied in the audience. The other side of the stage has a dining table and chairs with a deck of cards on it.

There are pedestals on each side of the stage.

The story flows between the present, the past, and fantasy.

*Lights rise. Austin is center stage. Dawn and Alyson are perched on their pedestals, watching him. He looks back and forth between them, then addresses the audience.*

AUSTIN

The seventh grade, that's when my troubles started. Middle school: the two-to-three-year sentence for people hitting puberty, where I left sex ed absolutely certain that women got pregnant from sodomy.

There were eight of us at my bus stop. I'm the only one in my grade. There are six eighth grade girls... women, if you will... and one boy. Peter Harrington. He's got six inches on me, with long arms. Curly blond hair... he's some sort of Adonis. And two weeks into school, he hears that I've said something derogatory about him. Which I don't remember doing, but who knows... I said a lot of cocky things when I was kid.

I spent the year living in fear of mornings and afternoons. Which is a big part of the day, when you think about it. What form will it take today? Is it casual cut down Friday, scoffing-at-my-lack-of-masculinity Mondays, or will today involve shoving? Is it a day where I run away, or a day where I stand and get my ass kicked on principle? I don't really know what the girls' reaction was... I couldn't look at them. In a lot of ways I still can't.

*He approaches Alyson, still speaking to the audience.*

Alyson and I work together at SOS. Save Our Seals. Her commitment is pretty amazing. It's more a job for me. I don't hate seals or anything. But her passion is beautiful, and we all have something we care about the most. Or we should. I haven't found that yet... She laughs at my jokes, makes a lot of eye contact.

ALYSON

*(laughing)*

You are so funny.

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

We've been getting closer over the past month.

ALYSON

There's this guy who plays klezmer music on a harmonica and an accordion, want to go?

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

A dinner here, a concert there... just the two of us, or with friends, either way.

ALYSON

Vincent Price's "Comedy of Terrors" is playing at the Fillmore. I haven't seen it since I was little. It scared the crap out of me then, and I'm thinking I can exorcise those demons. Hold my hand if I get scared?

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

They're not dates. I know they're not dates. She's got some sort of long-distance relationship with a guy in Argentina or something. But when it's just the two of us, and she looks in my eyes...

ALYSON

That is not the movie I remember. It's funny how they never seem the same. When I look back, my memories... they are all pale.

AUSTIN

Maybe that means life's just getting brighter.

ALYSON

*(laughing)*

I like that. I'll try to think of it that way.

AUSTIN

*(again to the audience)*

There is no one else for me now. I am wrapped up in her, like a peanut in a Snickers. I'm in love. But I don't know what that means. Is it really her? Or is it me, needing her? Am I just some animal, smelling pheromones, craving a particular shape, or genetic material, or something else I don't understand? But something in us, together, is special. I know it. Or... I think I know it.

*Barry enters.*

BARRY

You think too much.

AUSTIN

You'll never be accused of that.

AUSTIN cont.

*(to audience)*

Barry, my best friend or something.

BARRY

How old are you, six? Do you want me to ask her friend if she likes you, likes you?

AUSTIN

Okay, this is fairly complicated here—

BARRY

No, it's not complicated, you're simple. And not simple as in uncomplicated; simple like you're a hunchback mongoloid.

AUSTIN

Thanks for the clarification. And the sympathy.

BARRY

I've got no sympathy for you.

AUSTIN

Is a little respect for my situation too much to ask?

BARRY

You don't have a situation. You're not pregnant. You didn't get a DUI.

AUSTIN

But today, Alyson—

BARRY

No. Shut it. I don't want to hear it. Do something! Make your move. It's the only way you're going to know if she digs you. Are you a man or a chicken-shit mouse? You like her? Kiss her, see how it goes.

*Austin kneels before Alyson.*

AUSTIN

Faint heart never won fair lady?

BARRY

Pussies never score, that's right! At least tell her how you feel. Pussy.

*Barry goes and sits at the table.*

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

I'm not sure why we're friends. I mean... How can a mouse be made out of chicken shit? I think he just combines vulgarities at random.

DYLAN

*(entering)*

Touché! The man is a douche, no doubt about it. But you've gotta give it up for the funny. I give him an 8.3 from the Canadian judges. Makes me laugh, gotta give him that.

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

My intern, Dylan. He gets more female attention by accident than I have from years of desperate conniving.

DYLAN

Not just me. Barry, too. Do the math, chief. You're the bottom of our sexual food chain in your own tribe.

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

I'm very fond of the little bastard. He gets an 8.4 from me.

DYLAN

Oh yeah, and Shanon gets way more play than you do. I wouldn't usually include chicks on the list, but she's practically a guy!

SHANON

*(entering)*

I have girl parts, Dylan. I swear I do.

DYLAN

I mean it in a good way, like you're cool like guys are cool.

AUSTIN

Nice save.

DYLAN

Austin's upset that Barry told him to stop being a pussy and make a move on Alyson.

Ugh. AUSTIN

That's not nice, Barry. SHANON

Thank you. AUSTIN

You know Austin doesn't like moving. SHANON

I don't think he meant, like, reach over and literally grab her. I think he meant like talk to her, tell her how he feels. DYLAN

Yeah, got what you meant. That's what I meant, too... it's all one thing. One jumbled lunge of two hands, a million words, and a tongue. SHANON

Worked on you. AUSTIN

Congratulations, you're in my league of villains and scoundrels. SHANON

Ugh, let's play! DYLAN

*He crosses to the table and joins Barry. The card game starts. They clearly play all the time.*

It's ridiculous. I do talk to her. All the time. She thinks I'm great. She acts like I'm a rock star. AUSTIN

SHANON  
*(acting like he's a rock star)*  
Ooooh, Austin Johnson, sign my tits!  
*(dropping the act)*

So that's what she's doing? Does she hang around outside your office till you get off work? You always exaggerate.

AUSTIN

I love you, too, Shanon.

SHANON

So about me: last night I'm working on this remote at a Chili's.

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

She's a disc jockey.

SHANON

This guy comes up to me. He's cute, I guess. When I was a teenager, long hair meant a guy was wild. Now it means he doesn't have a good job.

AUSTIN

That's true.

SHANON

And it turns out he's a fan. He's been following me as I've worked around town. Not the music. Me. I've done country, classic rock, modern alternative, Nickelodeon Radio, for God's sake. He's been listening. For a second I'm flattered. And then it sinks in... he's creepy and sad. And why does he need to share this with me? What does he expect me to do, let him nail me in the Chili's bathroom?

AUSTIN

Doubtless what he was hoping for.

*(to audience)*

When I met Shanon, I was attracted to her. Then she said she liked tall skinny guys with long hair. In other words, not me. Since we were going nowhere romantically, we became real friends.

*(to Shanon)*

You won't believe what Alyson did today.

SHANON

Not if I don't let you tell me about it. I'm done. Move on. Make a move. Move away. Whatever, do something.

AUSTIN

It's pretty sad, huh?

SHANON

You just need a lobotomy. Romantic bliss is only a drill away.

*Shanon goes to the table.*

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

They've been suffering through my behavior for a long time. They can't see Alyson as what she is: The One. Really this time. They just see the pattern, the past. She is going to be the woman who is finally able to fall in love with me.

*Barry jumps up and joins him.*

BARRY

What about that psycho chick in high school?

AUSTIN

Which one?

BARRY

"Which one?" And I'm the insensitive one. Sophomore year, the one with the big forehead.

AUSTIN

Oh! Right...

*(to audience)*

I really have never been loved, as long as I can eliminate the clinically insane. Barry's referring to Sherri Swan.

BARRY

That's right, that's that big-forehead girl's name!

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

She sat next to me one lunch period, and the next day came into school madly in love with me. And I mean madly. Nuts. Crazy. She started a rumor about how I had a big penis, because she'd seen me peeing. It ended in an hour-long breakup behind a 7-11. There were flare-ups for a month, including one where she tried to make me jealous by kissing Barry.

BARRY

She seemed sad.

AUSTIN

So did you.

*(to audience)*

Among Sherri's bad traits, she was a pathological liar, and not very good at it. A few months after our non-affair ended, she told me that she was dying from a rare liver disease, and I laughed at her. I still don't feel bad about it. She survived just fine, at least until I didn't know her anymore.

BARRY

Her head was weird.

DAWN

*(angrily)*

Argh! I can't listen to this anymore! Austin, what am I doing here?

*He crosses to her.*

AUSTIN

I don't know.

DAWN

As much as I appreciate this lovely pedestal, if all you're going to do is ignore me—

AUSTIN

Sorry, I didn't mean to—

DAWN

Blah blah blah, Alyson this, Alyson that. I don't care. Inviting me here, and then leaving me alone in a corner to listen to you talk about some other woman... you're a jerk!

AUSTIN

Whoa! I didn't invite you.

DAWN

Yes, you did.

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

This is Dawn, my—



SHANON

Heard it eighty times, it never gets old.

BARRY

You have got to hear this.

*They swap telling parts of the story to her. Austin watches.*

DYLAN

So I'm working at this place called the Bagel Factory as a waiter to pay my way through college, and I get a week off to go to Boise for this annual college conference-slash-party thing. I only had one thing in mind: sex. I see other people going off on these things, and they hook up. Intimacy with someone you won't see next week. This was my turn.

SHANON

I picked Christy out of the crowd at an opening night dance. She was very cute... she looked like Madonna in the "Lucky Star" video. We danced, and then ended up back at this hotel room with about twenty other people. I thought I'd missed my chance, but then she said "I majored in Russian in college."

DYLAN

So I say "ya ne pah-ne-ma-yu pa-Russki." I know hardly twenty words, but my accent? Pretty good. Chrissy looks at me with wide open eyes...

BARRY

We spent the rest of the week together. The cafes, I had to grab any sugar I wanted quickly, because she would take the rest. Recovering coke addict. I guess she needed the fix.

SHANON

And on Saturday afternoon, the last day of the conference, she tells me "I don't want this time to be like every other conference, where I just sleep with some guy at the end of week!"

AUSTIN

*(throwing his arms in the air)*

What the hell do you think we were DOING??

BARRY

I got back to town, and I was just mad. Now the cokehead was too good for me?? This one Bagel Factory waitress, Dawn...

*(to Dawn)*

... you...

*(to audience)*

...had always had a big crush on me, and so I asked her out to dinner. I didn't enjoy myself, but afterward, she kept telling me over and over what a great time she'd had.

DYLAN

A week later I'm at this party at her parents' house. They're on vacation. I go to the bathroom, and when I come out... everyone but her is gone.

*Austin sits next to Dawn.*

SHANON

"Sure, yes, absolutely, if we sleep together tonight, we'll be dating in the morning."

DYLAN

I meant it at the time. But then, the sex... she's the only woman I've ever been with that was just lame.

*Austin and Dawn glare at each other.*

SHANON

I've been with a woman with one leg, and she was not lame. They've all been different, amazing in their own unique way... with Dawn, it was like I was being allowed the sex... My behavior was acceptable.

BARRY

But then, afterward... she acted like it had been amazing, running her nails all over me as if I'd pleased her to the moon. But when we went again... same thing.

SHANON

So I broke up with her two days later. She was desperate, so I let her blow me. And then broke up with her again.

AUSTIN

*(to Dawn)*

I felt guilty while I was doing it, and I feel bad now.

DAWN

And so you fucking tell everyone?!

AUSTIN

Well—

DAWN

You tell people because you think it's funny, and you like the title "The Great Bagel Mistake." And you use my real name. Do you understand why that matters, Austin?

*Alyson gets up from the table and goes to Austin.*

ALYSON

You've never told me that story.

AUSTIN

God no.

ALYSON

But everyone else knows it?

AUSTIN

I don't want you to see me like that.

ALYSON

Why aren't you yourself with me?

DYLAN

He's not the same around you. He's crazy. Like when you watched that movie with us, and he was yelling at Feral.

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

My cat.

*Dylan, Austin, and Alyson all sit together on the couch.*

DYLAN

*(to audience)*

We're watching this movie together, and his cat starts yowling downstairs.

*(Shanon makes a yowling cat noise.)*

And he's yelling from the couch:

AUSTIN

Feral!

*(Shanon yowls again.)*

BE QUIET, Feral!!

*(Shanon yowls again.)*

I SWEAR TO GOD, FERAL, IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP, I'M GOING TO HANG YOU FROM THE CEILING BY YOUR CLAWS!!!

*Shanon pauses, then yowls again, louder.*

DYLAN

It goes on like this for fifteen minutes.

AUSTIN

It wasn't that bad. Alyson, please, tell me it wasn't that bad.

ALYSON

You don't know what I think about that. I wonder why... Could it be that you never asked me in real life?

*Alyson leaves the couch and goes back to her pedestal.*

DYLAN

Smooth, really smooth.

*(to audience)*

My boss is freaking hysterical. Don't get me wrong: I'm a fan of Austin Johnson. Easy-going guy to work for. We hang outside of work, and it's not just pity coz he's all old and lonely. But it's like a three-legged dog: you gotta laugh when they try to run. That's what it's like watching this guy with a crush. A running three-legged dog. Seriously.

*Shanon and Barry join him.*

SHANON

Like the other night.

DYLAN

Oh yeah!

SHANON and DYLAN and BARRY

Soul mate!

*Austin rises. They go back to the table.*

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

I'm coming home, where these three are waiting for me, planning to play hearts. I'm coming back after going to hear a guy play the banjo. I'm there with Alyson. They're having whatever conversation they must have when I'm not around.

SHANON

He'll be here soon!

DYLAN

Austin sure is a great guy!

BARRY

He's the best, all right!

DYLAN

He said I was his best friend! I really think he's more young and vital than me.

BARRY

I've been his best friend longer! I really think he's more manly than me.

SHANON

*(softly)*

I sure wish he was in love with me instead of Alyson, because he's so attractive!

AUSTIN

*(to audience)*

I'm sure it sounded something like that.

*Austin comes up to the others.*

DYLAN

The fourth arrives.

AUSTIN

Turns out I can't play tonight, guys. Alyson's coming over.

SHANON

*(simultaneous)*

Really? She's really coming?

BARRY

*(simultaneous)*  
Nice! Movie? Is it a movie?

DYLAN

*(simultaneous)*  
Way to go, A-Man!

AUSTIN

Concert was great, she's coming over, you all are leaving right now. And don't call me A-Man. That's not catching on. Let it go.

DYLAN

Touché!

BARRY

She could be a fifth for Hearts.

AUSTIN

No, we need to be alone. I... I think she's my soul mate.

*They stare at him, then erupt in laughter. They all stay at the table and watch as Alyson enters and sits on the couch. Austin joins her, smiling.*

ALYSON

Austin... I got engaged.

AUSTIN

Oh.

*He gets up, walks around the couch, and sits back down.*

Well... when?

ALYSON

Little over a week ago.

*Austin goes around the couch again.*

I haven't been exactly telling people, but it's not a secret. To Francisco.

In Peru. AUSTIN

Honduras. ALYSON

*He goes the other way around the couch, this time sitting on the couch arm, facing away from her.*

Right. AUSTIN

*(to audience)*  
I was originally going to suggest something romantic. Instead I go for "Saw II."

*They both sit back and listen with increasing discomfort to the sounds of people screaming in pain. By the time it ends, they're traumatized.*

Parting is uncomfortable.  
*(to Alyson)*

Um... bye, I guess.

I'll call you. ALYSON

*Alyson turns and starts to go.*

Alyson. AUSTIN

*She turns back. He pauses, sighs, and crosses past her. He lies on his stomach in front of her pedestal. She steps on his back to get back on it. He looks up at her.*

Congratulations.

*She looks at him enigmatically. He sits with his friends.*

You knew she had a boyfriend. SHANON

In Costa Rica. AUSTIN

SHANON

Honduras.

AUSTIN

Whatever. He's a million miles away, and he's more an excuse to avoid intimacy than a boyfriend.

SHANON

And that's absolutely your call to make.

AUSTIN

I call it as I see it.

SHANON

Will you get an invitation to the wedding?

AUSTIN

If I do, I'm not going to Peru for it.

EVERYONE BUT AUSTIN

Honduras.

AUSTIN

I don't care where he lives!

SHANON

We're here to help, Austin.

AUSTIN

God, I hate that expression.

*He storms over to Dawn.*

DYLAN

Ooh, sensitive.

SHANON

He'd make a beautiful woman.

BARRY

Exit left, the ball-less loser. Whose deal is it?

*Austin and Dawn share a long moment. He starts to speak... then stops... then looks at her...*

I'm waiting for you. DAWN

That seems unlikely. AUSTIN

To speak, idiot. You're not a blip on my radar. DAWN

Oh. AUSTIN

*Another moment. He goes to leave... but stays... looks at her...*

I didn't go in looking to hurt you... but that's what happened. I see that it was my fault.

DAWN  
Just because you hate yourself doesn't make me feel any better.  
(pause)

You know, there is one thing I've been wanting to tell you. You were the worst lover I've ever had!

AUSTIN  
That was YOU!

DAWN  
Whatever you need to tell yourself.

AUSTIN  
No, really, I swear. No offense, but you were corpse-like.

DAWN  
You don't know my life. Maybe I have trouble trusting anyone, and whenever I manage to, it's some asshole like you. Maybe my taste in men is for abusers. Maybe that's you.

AUSTIN  
What do you want from me?  
Am I still paying for what I did to you?

DAWN  
How would I know?

AUSTIN

The price seems pretty steep. I was young.

DAWN

Weren't we all.

AUSTIN

I can't change the past. Does it help at all if I say I'm sorry?

SHANON

*(joining them)*

He apologizes all the time. He even means it, every time.

DAWN

Do you really?

AUSTIN

Yes. I am remorseful. Packed to the brim with festering remorse.

DAWN

Then I accept your apology.

*(to Shanon)*

Give us a minute alone?

*Shanon returns to the card game.*

DAWN

You have to go talk to her. You have to tell her what you're feeling.

AUSTIN

I don't want to make this any worse than it is.

DAWN

What worse? You're all "ooh, I'm in misery." What's worse than misery? Aren't you curious about what her response will be. You think you know, but you don't. You can't. Let your curiosity lead you.

AUSTIN

I'm more of a cat. Curiosity's not good for my kind.

*Dawn kisses him on the cheek, then exits. He sits on the ground. Shanon comes over and rubs his shoulders.*

SHANON  
Hello, sad man.

AUSTIN  
Hello, frank girl.

SHANON  
Hello, angry at friends guy.

AUSTIN  
Hello, most forgiving and best friend.

SHANON  
Aw, it's me? Not Barry, not Dylan?

AUSTIN  
It's you, baby. Try not to rub it in their faces too much.

SHANON  
I'm already plotting how this bomb will be dropped on them.  
(*pause*)

How's Alyson?

(*pause*)  
Oh, come on, I'm asking, you're dying to tell me.

AUSTIN  
Dying, anyway.

SHANON  
Aw, poor monkey. Don't let her do it to you again. It's time for a preemptive romantic strike. Don't let this drag on for years. Say to yourself, "Not this time! Not with the seal-loving chick." Tell her, and if she isn't smart enough to see what's in front of her, then leave and let both of you get on with your lives.

*She leaves.*

AUSTIN  
She's right.

*Alyson comes up to him.*

ALYSON  
Hi.

AUSTIN

Thanks for coming over.

ALYSON

What's up? It sounded urgent.

AUSTIN

Did it? I was shooting for nonchalant.

ALYSON

I was worried someone had died. What's going on, Austin?

AUSTIN

So... okay... I have to ask this question... but I need you to let me get through this before you respond.

ALYSON

Au—

AUSTIN

Yeah yeah yeah, that's what I'm talking about, let me ask my question. As soon as you talk, as soon as you need something from me, that's all I can do. And I need to tell you that I'm in love with you... And I know you've got a boyfriend in... Honduras. And I know I've been an exaggerator, and a dork, and I can't feel that I deserve your love, and I want you to give it to me anyway. Because I'll never know the answers without you. Science or soul mate, I've got no idea. All I know is that right now I need you or I won't be able to figure out all this mess in me. So my question is... Could you love me, and need me, and help me, and accept my love? I... need to know.

*They look at each other, him desperate, her neutral. She reaches up and puts her hand on his cheek. No response. The lights fade. End of play.*