

Cast... the players

AUSTIN JOHNSON Neurotic. Bald. 30s.

ALYSON An enigma. 20s.

AMBER The jilted ex-girlfriend. 20s.

...and the chorus

DYLAN The young assistant. Brash. Early 20s.

BARRY The best friend. Gruff. 30s.

SHANON Female friend. Sarcastic. 30s.

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

Setting

The majority of the stage is Austin's home. It has two visible areas with furniture. The first is Austin's living room, which has a couch and table. A television is implied in the audience. The second has a table with four chairs and a deck of cards on it. There are four chairs at the table. The look is clean, orderly, and a bit sterile.

There is a stool/pedestal on each side of the stage. They are large enough for Amber and Alyson to perch on.

Time

The present.

(The lights rise on AUSTIN, downstage. AMBER and ALYSON watch him from their pedestals in dim light. He looks from AMBER to ALYSON, then out over the audience.)

AUSTIN

In the seventh grade, that's when my troubles started. I'm sure of it. 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. Where no one notices or cares that the fat kid named Something McCrackin is now referred to as "Fat Crack," behind his back and to his face.

My bus stop had eight kids at it. I'm the only kid in my grade there... there are six eighth grade girls... women, if you will... and one boy. Peter Harrison. He's big, and not like Fat Crack. He's freakishly tall, 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.

(pause)

I do that a lot less now.

(pause)

I spent the next 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 Fridays, scoffing-at-my-lack-of-masculinity Monday, 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 looks from AMBER to ALYSON, approaching the latter, but still speaking to the audience.)

Have you ever wanted someone so badly that everything hurts? I hope so. That's where I'm at. Alyson and I work together at SOS. You've heard of it? Save Our Seals. She's one of the top organizers. Her commitment is pretty amazing. Not that I'm not into it... I don't hate seals or anything. But it's more a job for me. I mean, it almost feels cliché, just picking one of your stuffed animals from childhood and crusading for it. But her passion is beautiful, and hey, we all have something we care about most. Or we should. I haven't found that yet. But personally, we get on great. 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 great guy who plays klezmer music on a harmonica and 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 down at the Fillmore. I haven't seen it since I was little. It scared the crap out of me then, so 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 some guy in Argentina or something... but when it's just the two of us, and we touch, she looks in my eyes.

ALYSON

That is not the movie I remember. S'funny how they never seem the same. You move on. I move on anyway. I get to what's next, and when I look back, it's 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 with her sadness. But I don't know what those feelings mean. 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 I sense something in us together that truly is unique and special. And I can't say 'no.'

(BARRY enters.)

BARRY

You think too much.

AUSTIN

You'll never be accused of that.

(to audience)

Barry, my best friend or something.

BARRY

How old are you? Six? Do you want me to go ask her friends if she likes you?

AUSTIN

Okay, this is fairly complicated here—

BARRY

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

AUSTIN

Thanks for the clarification.

BARRY

No one should sympathize with you. You're a privileged person who whines too much.

AUSTIN

Would a little respect for my situation be 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, man! Make your move, cue ball. That's the only way you're going to know if she digs aging dwarves like you. Are you a man or a chicken-shit mouse? You like her? Kiss her, see how it goes.

AUSTIN

(kneeling before ALYSON)

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)

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

AUSTIN

(to audience)

My 'playah' intern, Dylan. He gets more play from women by accident than I have from years of desperate contriving. I suppose I do have to "give it up" for that.

DYLAN

Not just me. Barry, too. Do the math, boss. You're the bottom of our sexual totem pole.

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. You just slid further to the bottom. Most girls can't get on the totem pole, but she's practically a guy!

SHANON

(entering)

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

DYLAN

Oh, no, I totally mean it in a good way, like you're cool like guys are cool.

SHANON

Like my mother always wanted.

DYLAN

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

AUSTIN

Ugh.

SHANON

That's not nice, Dylan.

AUSTIN

Thank you.

SHANON

You know Austin doesn't like moving. It's not pretty when he does.

DYLAN

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

SHANON

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.

AUSTIN

Worked on you.

DYLAN

Aw, all you old people talk about old things all the time. Let it go!

(He crosses to the table and joins BARRY. The card game starts. The silences are now sometimes filled with the noise of shuffling.)

AUSTIN

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

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 exaggerate. You always do that.

AUSTIN

Hi, Shanon. I love you, too.

SHANON

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

AUSTIN

(to audience)

She's a disc jockey.

SHANON

And this guy comes up to me. He's cute, I guess, but one thing that's changed as I've gotten older: long hair used to mean a guy was wild; now it means that 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... that embarrassing muscular dystrophy marathon where we raised, like three hundred dollars. He's been listening. And 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, wanted to get to know her better. Then she said something to me about how she liked tall skinny guys with long hair. In other words, not me. Since we were going nowhere romantically, we became real friends. She's not always right, but I know she's always on my side.

(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 talking to you about her. Move on. Make a move. Move away. Whatever, do something.

AUSTIN

It's pretty sad, huh?

SHANON

Look on the bright side... maybe you just need a little lobotomy. Maybe romantic bliss is one drill insertion away.

(SHANON goes to the table.)

AUSTIN

(to audience)

Those are the long-suffering friends. Alyson's not the first. She's a pattern. And I've never felt their love back. Sometimes, for a while, maybe a little. But never anything like what I go through.

(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. Whatever. 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 foreheaded 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. She'd gone into the men's room and seen me peeing. Which of course is crap... I'm not one of those horse-men you see in the porn, a foot-long when flaccid. It ended in an hour-long conversation behind a 7-11 where I told her again and again that this wasn't going to work for me. 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. Still don't feel bad about it, though who knows, maybe I should. She seemed to survive until I didn't know her anymore, and if she didn't, well, not everyone does, and she seemed ill-equipped for the journey anyway.

BARRY

Her head was weird.