

What a Drag It Is...
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Characters

Austin	Male, 28.
Sarah	Female, 24.
Richard	Male, very old.

Setting

The rec-room of a retirement home. A few folding tables displaying Christmas knickknacks and folding chairs are scattered haphazardly about. The walls are plain except for a large handmade sign that says "Senior Center Craft Sale."

Time

The present.

(Lights rise on Sarah and Austin, looking over one of the tables.)

AUSTIN

I think it's convenient, having them all in one place.

SARAH

What?

AUSTIN

In bigger cities, they'll have two, even three locations. There's a retirement home, a senior center...

SARAH

Oh, I see. I guess this is better.

AUSTIN

But the sign out front...

SARAH

Yes?

AUSTIN

They could've followed 'Senior Center' with "Abandon hope, all ye who enter." Terrible font choice.

SARAH

Oh... yeah...

(She walks away from him, to another table. He watches her go, then picks up a Christmas tree ornament and examines it.)

AUSTIN

I think I'm just going to wait for someone to die to get my own Christmas tree ornaments.

(Sarah's head jerks toward him, and she stares.)

SARAH

...Austin.

What? AUSTIN

At least keep your voice down. SARAH

Why? AUSTIN

(An old man wearing a name tag enters.)

What did you just say? RICHARD

I just said... oh!
(speaking louder)
No, no... not YOU... sir. I mean, like, when my grandmother croaks.

Not helping, Austin! SARAH

Wait... what are you saying? RICHARD

I was just saying... jokingly, you know... AUSTIN

(Richard raises his fists like a boxer and begins growling.)

Okay, now calm down... Richard? That's my grandfather's name! I mean, it was before he, uh, died.

What?? RICHARD

Austin, watch out! SARAH

(Richard moves in and starts hitting Austin completely ineffectually... real pillow punches. Sarah and Austin are embarrassed.)

RICHARD

Rrraaawwrrrr!! Rawr...

(Richard starts half-wheezing, half-hacking. Sarah helps him to a chair.)

SARAH

Here you go, Richard. You just ignore him and stay calm.

AUSTIN

That was awful.

SARAH

Are you going to apologize?

AUSTIN

What? No! For what?

SARAH

Are you kidding?

AUSTIN

Everybody dies, Sarah. Not just old people.

(to Richard)

No offense.

RICHARD

Prick.

AUSTIN

Oh, whatever. You're the one who resorted to violence.

SARAH

Well, sort of.

AUSTIN

If he could have, he would have, that's all I'm saying.

SARAH

(facing him angrily)

You just have to stop talking. Stop... saying things. What's wrong with you? What's next... cute Jackie Chan imitations at the Fu Kung?

AUSTIN

... I've done that.

SARAH

Of course you have. Maybe you ought to open up your world view to include anyone besides, I don't know, yourself. Everything doesn't have to be a joke. Some things really just aren't funny.

AUSTIN

(considers this)

I'm trying to do better?

SARAH

Well, that's a... start... hey.

(Sarah notices that at some point Richard started working his hand softly up her leg. She has no idea how long this has been going on.)

RICHARD

Hi.

SARAH

Ahhhh!!!

(Sarah runs and hides behind Austin, and has slight spasms of revulsion over the next few lines.)

AUSTIN

Wow. Miss Sensitivity Twenty-Twelve.

SARAH

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry, Richard. I mean... you shouldn't have... uh...

RICHARD

What?

SARAH

Grabbed my ass!

AUSTIN

You might want to keep your voice down.

SARAH

Shut up.

AUSTIN

I'm just saying, you might want to model some of that compassion you accuse me of not having.

SARAH

He didn't grab you.

RICHARD

You're right. I'm sorry

SARAH

That's okay, Richard.

RICHARD

ugh. If there is one part of my body that didn't need any more wrinkles...

AUSTIN

Ugh, wait, what, stop!

RICHARD

...and that doesn't look dignified with grey hair...

SARAH

OKAY, Richard, that's fine, that's okay.

(They all stare, Richard smiling and quietly chuckling. After a moment, Sarah and Austin step away from him and speak in hushed tones.)

AUSTIN

Look, this is getting weird.

SARAH

This started weird. Lunch and the Senior Center Craft Sale?

AUSTIN

Quaint?

SARAH

On principle, maybe. In fact? No. Weird.

AUSTIN

Maybe a bar next time?

SARAH

Next time?

RICHARD

(joining them)

I've been you. Scrapping over every little thing. Missing everything because I was too busy fighting against the stream. Life keeps flowing –

AUSTIN

Look, Richard, we were having a private –

SARAH

Austin! At least pretend you're learning from this experience.

AUSTIN

Oh, that's... okay, fine. Tell me, Richard, what's on your mind? Teach me.

(Richard puts a hand on each of their shoulders, very fatherly and emotional.)

RICHARD

It all gets away from you so fast. It takes forever... and then you realize it's almost over, and your whole life was just a moment... I spent so much of it dithering over nothing. And now that I'm reaching the end of my days here, I wonder if it hasn't all been meaningless, no matter what I convinced myself of when I was younger. Going to church. Donating to United Way? Not cheating on my marriage as often as I could have! What was really the reason for any of it?

(They share a sad moment...

Then Sarah realizes that Richard's hand has again moved to her bottom.)

SARAH

AAAAAHHHHH!!!

(She lays into him with her purse. Austin pulls her from the cowering old man.

She turns her angry purse on him. He cowers as well. The beating stops.

She looks between the two of them...)

Men! This is the worst first date I've ever been on.

(...and exits. The boys watch her go.)

AUSTIN

Sarah... I blame you, Richard.

RICHARD

(sitting by the tree decorations table)

And then she walked out of your life forever.

AUSTIN

You think?

RICHARD

That's what that looks like. Believe me, I know what that looks like.

AUSTIN

Look... Richard. I'm sorry you're old, and getting older, and that you're not happy about that. It beats the alternative, right? You didn't want to die in a motorcycle accident, or die in a fire. And really... what's the beef with old age homes? This place looks cool... I mean, it's a bunch of people with common experiences, all in one place. With games and activities!

RICHARD

Think about it.

AUSTIN

I wish I could live in a place like this...

RICHARD

Do you?

AUSTIN

Well, I guess your friends keep dying all the time... and that half of them have dementia... well, okay, the smell...

RICHARD

Mmhmm.

AUSTIN

I meant eventually. I won't mind it when the time comes.

RICHARD

That's how everyone ends up here. So, yes, young man, I think you could afford me some consideration.

(Richard rises, picking up an ornament. He offers it to Austin.)

AUSTIN

What? No, thanks... I don't want to buy an ornament... I don't even have a tree!

RICHARD

Please... take it. No money.

(Austin reluctantly accepts it... Richard grasps his hand tightly, and they stare into each other's eyes. After a long moment, they break apart. Richard seems dazed; Austin is excited. Their consciences have switched bodies.)

AUSTIN (Richard)

OH... oh this is... whoo wee. How you doing in there, Austin?

RICHARD (Austin)

Huh... what... ow.

(He gropes clumsily over his body at the pain of instant aging. The younger man laughs, enraging the older. The old man tries to come at the younger, who dances away. The old man pulls up, grabbing his bottom, clearly having... trouble.)

Oh no.

AUSTIN (Richard)

That part is terrible, isn't it? Keep clenching. The spasms will pass.

(helping him to a seat)

Here you go. You'll have to learn to not exert yourself. Now, the staff here already thinks you're insane and have delusions, so good luck with convincing them that you're really me. I'm going to go now. She may have walked out of your life forever, but I'm hoping to pick that girl up on the rebound.

RICHARD (Austin)

You can't do this.

AUSTIN (Richard)

It's already done, old man.

RICHARD (Austin)

Leave her alone, you...

(More hacking. The young man stares at him as he recovers.)

AUSTIN (Richard)

What was that attractive young lady's name... Sarah? I tell you one thing for nothing: I remember every beautiful woman who got away. Who I didn't ask out, or who I found an excuse not to commit to. This time around, none of them are going walk out of my life forever because of my lack of guts. Youth won't be wasted on me a second time. You should get an attendant. You're starting to smell.

(The young man bounds off, the older one watching him, terrified and impotent. Lights fade. The end.)