

LILY & AUSTIN

(AUSTIN sitting at desk reading a book)

(Enter LILY)

LILY Oh! I didn't know there was anybody in here.

(She looks under the desks for it, but doesn't see it.)

(AUSTIN silently holds up the backpack for LILY to see.)

LILY Oh yes, thanks! It's actually my boyfriend's, I was holding on to it for him during practice yesterday and I guess I left it in here somehow. How responsible, huh? He's been giving me the third degree about it.

AUSTIN Does your boyfriend hurt you?

LILY Uh...no?

(She moves to take the backpack from him. He pulls away, lets out a groan and starts to make rocking motions with his upper body.)

LILY What's the matter? Is something... Ohhh. You're like, special needs? Yeah, I remember now, I've seen you around. I didn't mean... I didn't mean to scare you, I promise.

(He gradually stops rocking and looks at her.)

LILY What's...what's your name?

LILY You don't have to answer, if you don't want.

(She sits at a desk next to him.)

AUSTIN I like your eyes.

LILY Thanks. You have nice eyes too.

AUSTIN My name is Austin.

LILY I'm Lily.

(A pause. LILY gestures to Austin's books.)

LILY What are you reading about?

AUSTIN Spacecraft. And calculus.

LILY. Calculus? Wow. Are you good at math?

AUSTIN I used to want to be an engineer at Lockheed Martin, and my dad thought I could even though I have autism, because I placed first in the tri-state College Mathematics Exam.

LILY But you don't want to anymore?

AUSTIN Lockheed Martin designs the best air and spacecraft but also a lot of weapons like missiles and nuclear bombs, and I don't like things like that. So what I want to do is be an astronaut or an aircraft pilot because I could still be part of something I like but not hurt people.

LILY That's really cool. I can't stand being up in the air, it makes me so nervous. You know a lot about planes so they probably don't scare you at all...

(AUSTIN begins to rock back and forth more and more violently.)

LILY but whenever there's any turbulence I'm always afraid the plane is going to fall right out of the sky and I'm going to have to use my seat cushion as a floatation device or something, ha!

AUSTIN Quiet Quiet QUIET!

The Other Room – Ariadne Blayde

(LILY jumps away in fright.)

LILY Oh!

(AUSTIN draws deep breaths and eventually stops rocking.)

AUSTIN I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you angry.

LILY I'm not angry...

AUSTIN I make people angry a lot. Sometimes my mother says "Austin if you don't cut it out right now I swear I will pack you off to the looney bin." At first I didn't know what "cut it out" meant because usually I can't have scissors or knives except when my dad and I do wood carvings—

LILY Shh, it's okay, I'm not mad, I promise—

(He continues without looking at her, his speech gaining momentum.)

AUSTIN —but she said it means "stop doing that," usually like when I'm yelling. She said people don't like it when I am yelling but usually it's because they touched me or something so it's not my fault but they make noise and laugh anyway—

LILY I would never laugh at you, I think it's awful that people do.

(AUSTIN still does not look at her.)

LILY Do you, um, want me to go?

(AUSTIN makes eye contact with her for the first time.)

AUSTIN No—stay.

LILY Okay.

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LILY What are you thinking about?

AUSTIN (*Lost in her eyes:*) Stars.

LILY Really?

AUSTIN Why did you say “really”?

LILY (*Shyly:*) Oh nothing, it’s just...well, I never told anyone this, because it’s a little silly, but I’m kind of obsessed with stars. Every night I take a blanket outside and just watch them hanging there in the sky. Some nights I’m out there for hours, you know, just looking up. Sometimes my mom and dad... well, I guess it’s a lot more peaceful outside in the dark with the stars.

AUSTIN I have a telescope that I use every night after I play mahjong with my dad and before I feed Newton. That’s at 8:15.

LILY So we’re looking at the stars at the same time!

AUSTIN Well not necessarily because sometimes I do it earlier or later like when I’m studying a particular astral event. And whenever I explore a field of study I like to immerse myself in its conventions which means when I’m stargazing I use Local Mean Time rather than Eastern Standard Time because Local Mean Time historically governs the planispheres, and by that standard every 13 square miles is a different time zone because of the varying degrees of longitude and subsequent differing visual angles, so for you and me the time would probably be different by at least one minute. Not to mention that time moves slower near the earth’s surface so if you were in your yard and I was on my balcony that would make a difference too.

LILY You know what I say?

AUSTIN What?

LILY I say, we’re looking at the stars together.

(*AUSTIN is shyly pleased.*)

AUSTIN Okay.

LILY Okay.

AUSTIN Did you ever build your own telescope?

LILY Oh yeah. I always kind of wanted to be an astronomer. It’s just so beautiful out there, don’t you think?

AUSTIN I don’t know.

LILY Well then, why do you look through your telescope every night at 8:15 or maybe earlier or maybe later?

AUSTIN I just finished splitting the Double Quasar in Ursa Major and lately I’ve been locating stars within one hundred light years of earth, breaking down their light emissions into the visible spectrum

and finding what wavelengths are missing, which allows me to determine each star’s thermal postmark and atmospheric composition. I’ll start something new soon.

LILY Wow, I always just made constellation pictures and stuff. Are you... *always* so scientific about it? Don’t you ever just, you know, look up and wonder?

AUSTIN Well... Sometimes when I’m looking for gamma ray activity in search of supernovas I think about the questions they could answer for us if we understood them better.

LILY Like what?

AUSTIN Like does gravity have a repellent component or where is the universe's missing mass or is the inflation hypothesis correct like could the entire big bang theory as we know it be disproved?

LILY See, exactly! I think about those things too! But...with smaller words.

AUSTIN There are so many things as a scientist and a person that I want to understand and knowing that I might not ever find the answers is very very frustrating.

LILY When that happens to me, when I'm just so mad at how small and limited the human mind is, my whole life really, you know what I do?

AUSTIN No.

LILY I just try to stop thinking and—this sounds dumb—but just, let it wash over me. The way it looks out there. The razor-sharp blackness punctured by little pricks of light made of every single color you could imagine...those shapes you see in the nebulas, you know, that are completely alien but also seem totally, oh, I dunno...

AUSTIN *Intuitive.*

LILY Exactly.

LILY See, Austin? You see the beauty too.

AUSTIN What I like to think about is how quiet and still it must be out there with no gravity and no molecules for sound to travel through. And then I think about how in the middle of all that there are billions and billions of potential nuclear furnaces burning millions of pounds of matter every second.

LILY *Wow. (Pause.)* The whole thing seems like a paradox, doesn't it? Maybe that's why it creeps some people out. All that stuff you were talking about, supernovas and star deaths and stuff, it all happens on such a different time scale, like either at the speed of light or over billions of years, that it doesn't even seem possible that it could exist in the same reality as us. And knowing that you, lying in your unbelievable. And in a way, it's also kind of comforting, because—

AUSTIN —because it means that anything is possible.

(She nods.)

Sometimes I go back to Schrodinger's cat but take it even further and imagine that at every moment the universe splits into an infinite number of parallel universes where anything could happen and everything could be completely different than it is in this one...like shrimp wouldn't exist and you would be a professional ping-pong player and we would call chairs "flumwangles" and... I wouldn't—I would be...

(A pause. There is deep gravity in the room.)

But most people are afraid of infinity. They think space is empty and distant because it doesn't make sense to them and it seems so different from what they're used to. But they forget that this planet is only a part of space, not separate from it and they're the ones missing out because when they think of space as frightening and empty it's really just a reflection of their world. They don't see space as a possibility, they see it as an empty void and that's what I don't understand.

(A beat.)

Because for me it's different because space is where I would feel comfortable. It's here that is a void.

(LILY is deeply moved.)

LILY *(Passionately:)* Austin...it doesn't have to be like that anymore. We'll make them see, we'll make them see how beautiful space really is, we'll take back the world and show them what they're missing and then it won't be a void anymore, I promise. I won't let it be. Okay?