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Cast of Characters

AUSTIN, 16, an incredibly bright teenager with fairly severe autism. He speaks with a slight monotone and has some physical tics.

LILY, 16, a popular high-school girl. Pretty, friendly and genuine, but secretly a little nerdy.

TRAVIS, 16, Lily's macho boyfriend. Wears a basketball uniform.

DONOVAN, 40s-50s, an unkempt professor. Intelligent, crass, and over-the-top. Can have a Brooklyn accent. Part of Austin's mind.

TALBOTT, 30s, a clean-cut, intensely straightforward aircraft pilot. Part of Austin's mind.

NICK, 15, an outgoing, friendly streetwise kid. Part of Austin's mind.

CHRISTIAN, 20s, a reserved, neatly dressed Oxford student. Can have a British accent. Part of Austin's mind.

Setting

The stage is divided into two different areas.

In one part of the stage: a sparse, uncomfortable classroom lined with desks. Austin sits at one of the desks. This is reality—the characters in this world are not aware of the characters in the other room.

In the other part of the stage: "the other room." It is a giant cage, big enough for four people to comfortably walk around in. The floor is scattered with books, charts, telescopes and scientific instruments. There can be couches and chairs too. This is where Donovan, Talbott, Nick and Christian spend their time. It is the realm of Austin's mind.

Note: If the cage is not an option, the realm of Austin's mind may be designated in a different way. This can be done however the designer desires, but the two areas must be kept separate and may not overlap. There can be a physical barrier between the two, such as jail bars, but this should not interfere with the actors' sightlines.

Author Notes

The characters in the other room are not “multiple personalities” and are not meant to suggest schizophrenia. They are representative of what goes on in Austin’s mind in a very abstract sense.

Austin is not aware of them consciously and never looks at them or directly acknowledges them. Their dialogue should flow as seamlessly as possible into Austin’s dialogue with Lily.

When they are focused on Lily, they gather close to the edge of the divide between the two spaces in order to face the classroom. When distracted, they wander away.

Acknowledgments

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THE OTHER ROOM

by Ariadne Blayde

(Lights up on DONOVAN and TALBOTT, who are having a heated discussion. CHRISTIAN is pacing and reading a book. NICK is dozing.)

(AUSTIN is in the classroom, reading a calculus textbook.)

TALBOTT. So if the set can't contain X because then X doesn't satisfy the predicate defining it, where did I go wrong?

DONOVAN. Kid, you made a mistake before you even stated the proposition, when you "decided" that sets should be defined using a predicate. I guess you don't pass pilot training based on your quantitative reasoning skills, huh. *(Pinching TALBOTT's face like he's a baby:)* That pwetty face is aaaall you need.

(CHRISTIAN looks up from his book.)

CHRISTIAN. Oh *do* knock it off, Donovan, you're wrong as well. Actually, the problem isn't the decision that sets should be defined with predicates, but the assumption that *every* predicate will define a set.

(TALBOTT makes a surprised "hm!" and begins to write in a notebook.)

DONOVAN. Oh, don't be such a smart-aleck. I could tell you a few things about my new factorization method, using the Extended Euclidean Algorithm, that would knock the socks off your little witticisms about proof by contradiction.

(Everyone groans, including NICK, who is awake by now.)

NICK. Not that again!

DONOVAN. Since when do you have any idea what I'm even talking about, Nick?

CHRISTIAN. Donovan, I'm sure we'd all love to hear about your algorithm theory...some other time.

(DONOVAN splutters in indignation.)

(LILY suddenly appears at the classroom door and AUSTIN looks up from his book.)

NICK. Look! Someone's here!

(They all crowd each other against the bars to watch. The dialogue of the characters in each room is intermingled.)

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

DONOVAN. Who is she?

CHRISTIAN. What we were talking about, again?

LILY. Have you seen a red backpack?

(She looks under the desks for it, but doesn't see it. NICK sees it next to AUSTIN and points.)

NICK. Check it out! Red backpack, right there!

(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.

CHRISTIAN. Third degree?

DONOVAN. No idea.

NICK. Like burns?

TALBOTT. Or murder?

AUSTIN. Does your boyfriend hurt you?

LILY. Uh...no?

DONOVAN. Then why on earth would she say third-degree?

TALBOTT. I guess she was lying.

CHRISTIAN. I despise liars.

NICK. But she smells really nice.

TALBOTT. She smells like those flowers at the 7th Street park, the orange ones.

LILY. Can I have my backpack now?

(The following dialogue is spoken simultaneously as the characters wander away from the bars.)

CHRISTIAN. The park. Where the old men play chess. You once played chess at the park with your dad, he won and then you spilled your ice cream...

DONOVAN. Flowers in your mother's hair, summertime when you used to lie together underneath the stars, you miss her, you want to go home...

TALBOTT. 7th street. 7 is a prime number, atomic number of nitrogen, smallest number of faces of a rectangular polygon not constructible by straightedge and compass...

(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 as TALBOTT, CHRISTIAN and DONOVAN slowly re-approach the bars.)

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

CHRISTIAN. Her eyes are so blue. Look at those perfect radials extending from the pupil. How interesting.

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

(She sits at a desk next to him.)

DONOVAN. It's like a tiny polar coordinate system. Ha, if you didn't take into account the convexity of the eye, you could do all sorts of amusing conversions—

CHRISTIAN. —between the polar and Cartesian coordinates, hypothetically rearranging the elements of her eye into a rectangular system.

AUSTIN. I like your eyes.

LILY. Thanks. You have nice eyes too.

AUSTIN. My name is Austin.

LILY. I'm Lily.

DONOVAN. *(Hushed, to CHRISTIAN:)* I wonder if that's why she smells like flowers?

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

LILY. What are you reading about?

NICK. Go on, tell her.

DONOVAN. Mmm... I dunno about this...

NICK. Shh!

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.

(The following speech by LILY occurs at the same time as the conversation of DONOVAN, TALBOTT, and CHRISTIAN, causing a very overwhelming effect. NICK, on the other hand, is listening to LILY intently.)

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...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!

TALBOTT. The last time you flew, was that a SAAB or a Boeing?

(They again wander away from the bars and argue very rapidly, with lots of overlap. As the argument escalates, AUSTIN begins to rock back and forth more and more violently.)

DONOVAN. A Boeing, of course.

CHRISTIAN. I seem to recall that it was a SAAB.

DONOVAN. No way, I remember we were at about 35,000 feet, which means it was obviously a Boeing 747.

NICK. Guys, be quiet, I can't—

CHRISTIAN. Boeing collaborated on a joint venture with Lockheed Martin producing rockets, correct?

TALBOTT. —35,000 is way too high for a plane of that class. You've got it wrong.

CHRISTIAN. I wonder if you'll ever get to fly on one of *those*.

DONOVAN. No, no, NO! 35,000 is the absolute norm for—

NICK. —I can't hear—

(TALBOTT takes a threatening stance.)

TALBOTT. Who's the pilot here, buddy, you or me!?

NICK. *(Pressing his hands to his ears:)* SHUT UP!!

(NICK, overwhelmed, turns away from the classroom angrily. At the same time, AUSTIN takes his head in his hands and shouts.)

AUSTIN. Quiet Quiet QUIET!

(LILY jumps away in fright. DONOVAN, TALBOTT and CHRISTIAN freeze.)

LILY. Oh!

NICK. She's mad! Say you're sorry.

(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—

NICK. You're doing that thing where you talk too much, man, calm down!

DONOVAN. No no, I think you'd better explain—

(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?

(TALBOTT has moved to the other side of the cage, a little cranky.)

TALBOTT. I wish she would go away so we could talk more. We never did finish our earlier conversation about quarks.

DONOVAN. But her eyes...

(DONOVAN, CHRISTIAN, and NICK are enchanted by LILY. AUSTIN makes eye contact with her for the first time.)

AUSTIN. No—stay.

LILY. Okay.

(*She smiles and sits down again.*)

NICK. Hey—when she moves her face like that, it means she's happy.

LILY. What are you doing here all alone anyway?

AUSTIN. My father always picks me up from school fifteen minutes late so that I can come here and read instead of sitting out front with all the other people. They're very loud and sometimes they touch me so I'd rather not be near them.

TALBOTT. Remember that time Harry Dillensby's hand accidentally touched your neck on the steps and—

ALL. YES!!

(*AUSTIN twitches violently.*)

TALBOTT. Sheesh, sorry...

CHRISTIAN. I really see no need to dwell on that experience.

LILY. Do people give you a hard time a lot? You know, like bother you?

AUSTIN. I... I don't...

NICK. Just tell the truth, man.

AUSTIN. I mean yes.

LILY. What do they do? Do they laugh at you?

DONOVAN. (*Through clenched teeth, sing-song:*) Whyyyy are we talking about thissss?

AUSTIN. Yes.

LILY. That's terrible.

AUSTIN. Well at first I didn't mind when they laughed. I thought laughing was good. I didn't know it was bad until the time when Dave and Sam and I were playing a game where they kept throwing my rabbit key-chain in the toilet and seeing how fast I could get it out and we were all laughing but then my dad came and yelled at them and said to me "They're only laughing in a mean way, and that's because you're Different." And I don't want to be "Different," so I don't laugh anymore.

LILY. People are so terrible.

DONOVAN. They are indeed.

CHRISTIAN. She's not, though...why's she being so nice?

NICK. Because she *likes* you, duh. Keep at it!

LILY. Do you have any friends here?

CHRISTIAN. This is hardly pleasant.

DONOVAN. Let's get out of here.

AUSTIN. Sometimes I think of my books as friends.

(TALBOTT draws everyone's attention away by pulling out a textbook.)

TALBOTT. Look everybody, quarks! Little particles with funny names!

(DONOVAN and CHRISTIAN "ooh" and start towards him. They all begin to march and sing a little ditty to the words "Up down charm strange top and bottom" and AUSTIN, muttering, joins in.)

AUSTIN. —Up, down, charm, strange, top, bottom—

LILY. What? Oh, wait, I know this! You're talking about quarks, aren't you, the, uh, different types of quarks.

(DONOVAN and CHRISTIAN stop in their tracks and turn back towards the action, totally impressed. AUSTIN gives LILY a rather blank look.)

LILY. *(Blushing:)* I... I took physics last year and we talked a little about quarks, but not much. I checked out some other books because I wanted to learn more...

(DONOVAN and CHRISTIAN elbow each other happily as she speaks.)

AUSTIN. I taught myself too. There's a book I have...

(He rummages in his own bookbag, pulls out a worn book.)

AUSTIN. It was the first thing I ever read on physics, when I was seven and three-quarters years old.

DONOVAN. It's good when you give things to people, right?

(AUSTIN quickly shoves the book at LILY.)

AUSTIN. You can have it if you want.

(She smiles and gently gives the book back to him.)

NICK. She doesn't want it—

TALBOTT. Alrighty then, that's that! Let's move on.

NICK. —but I don't think she's mad, either.

CHRISTIAN. She's quite lovely, wouldn't you say, Donovan?

DONOVAN. Heck if I know.

NICK. I like her too.

(TALBOTT has picked up a model aircraft and continues his unsuccessful yet goofy attempt to draw the others' attention.)

TALBOTT. Let's talk about planes!

NICK. *(Snippy:)* She doesn't like planes, remember? Talk about something else!

AUSTIN. What do you—what do you—

(He makes an awkward gesture towards the book.)

LILY. ...Like to read about?

(AUSTIN nods carefully.)

LILY. Oh, I dunno. Usually I just read novels but I've been reading non-fiction about astronomy lately. I just started reading Stephen Hawking, I bet you know all about him. It's so interesting, don't you think?

(TALBOTT talks over her throughout.)

TALBOTT. *(Miming a handheld speaker:)* Aaaaand, welcome aboard ladies and gentleman, this is your captain speaking. Today we'll be flying on a SAAB 340 B, a Swedish two-engine turboprop aircraft designed and initially produced by a partnership between Saab and Fairchild Aircraft in a 65:35 ratio—

NICK. Shut up, you're distracting him!

(AUSTIN looks away from LILY and starts to fidget.)

NICK. Austin, focus! She's talking about Stephen Hawking, come on, *you know this!*

AUSTIN. I like Stephen Hawking too. "When I hear of Schrodinger's cat, I reach for my pistol."

LILY. What?

(TALBOTT has approached the other characters and is flying the model plane around their heads, complete with buzzing sounds. They all swat him away.)

AUSTIN. It was a joke he made. I don't really understand it because I never understand jokes. But I do know about Schrodinger's cat, so I like to say the joke because it reminds me.

LILY. Oh right, where the cat is alive and dead at the same time?

AUSTIN. It's a mind-game designed to criticize the strangeness of superposition, or the combination of all the possible positions of a

subatomic particle. Specifically it's a criticism of the Copenhagen interpretation, which implies that—

LILY. Whoa, slow down! You're so literal about everything.

AUSTIN. I can't help it.

LILY. I know, it's okay. You're obviously really smart. You're just hard to follow sometimes.

AUSTIN. But I'm not going anywhere. I'm sitting here, and you're sitting—

(LILY giggles.)

AUSTIN. What is it?

LILY. (*Smiling:*) Nothing. (*Pause.*) You know, I've seen you at lunch before. Maybe we could sit together sometime, if you want.

DONOVAN. But... but...

CHRISTIAN. If they sat together at lunch, he might have to sit with her at a different table.

(AUSTIN starts to wring his hands.)

DONOVAN. And even if she sat with *him*, she still might eat something purple like cabbage or beets!

TALBOTT. (*Terrified:*) Or her food might touch!

CHRISTIAN. Wiser to avoid it.

DONOVAN. Let's not think about this right now.

(TALBOTT pulls out a chart for demonstration.)

TALBOTT. The ERJ-140 has a cruising altitude of 37,000 feet, with a wingspan of 65 feet 9 inches and—

NICK. No! No planes. New thought.

DONOVAN. Uh...

LILY. What's the matter? You look like a deer in the headlights!

(*Confused, he touches his face.*)

AUSTIN. A deer?

(*She smiles warmly.*)

LILY. No, it's just an expression...obviously you don't have antlers or anything...

DONOVAN. She's moving her face like she's happy again!

TALBOTT. What does it mean?

CHRISTIAN. Perhaps she would like to be friends.

NICK. That would be awesome.

CHRISTIAN. Look how her eyes sparkle...

(AUSTIN makes eye contact, entranced.)

LILY. What are you thinking about?

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

LILY. Really?

DONOVAN. Wait, woah, why is she interrogating you? Does she know you were looking in her eyes? Is that socially unacceptable or something?

CHRISTIAN. Hmm...that's a tricky one, but I'd say it's borderline commonplace.

NICK. So then...

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.

(The characters by this time have all calmly gathered by the bars, facing LILY.)

AUSTIN. I have a telescope that I use every night after I play mah-jong 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!

(TALBOTT jumps to his feet.)

TALBOTT. *(Warningly:)* Ah-ah-ah!

(The others try to hush him and get him to sit down.)

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.

(They finally get TALBOTT to sit. AUSTIN is shyly pleased.)

AUSTIN. Okay.

LILY. Okay.

(TALBOTT has picked up a collapsible telescope and is pushing it in and out. DONOVAN yanks it from him.)

DONOVAN. Give-me-that!

AUSTIN. Did you ever build your own telescope?

(DONOVAN is pointing the telescope at LILY. CHRISTIAN and NICK fight for turns to use it.)

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 lightyears 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?

(TALBOTT raises a finger and begins to pile textbook upon textbook on a table.)

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.

(TALBOTT flips through the textbooks in frustration.)

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.

(Throughout LILY's speech, the lighting gradually changes. The lights dim to near black, and as she speaks of stars, tiny pricks of lights appear. NICK, DONOVAN, and CHRISTIAN look around in awe. CHRISTIAN softly puts an arm on TALBOTT who stops his frenetic search and joins them. Softly colored and slowly changing pools of light move throughout the room. The four all move more slowly than usual.)

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...

(DONOVAN is in one of the nebular pools of light.)

AUSTIN. *Intuitive.*

LILY. Exactly.

NICK. We've been here before.

LILY. See, Austin? You see the beauty too.

CHRISTIAN. It never seemed quite so real before, though, did it?

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

dinky backyard, are just another part of the same whole... it's pretty 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?

NICK. She is absolutely, without a doubt, the best thing that has ever happened in the history of the universe.

(The mood in the other space begins to escalate into joyous celebration.)

DONOVAN. She's like quarks—

TALBOTT. —and Boeings—

CHRISTIAN. —and supernovas and parallel universes and fractals—

NICK. —all combined and multiplied by a billion and sprinkled with puppies and Christmas!

AUSTIN. *(Gushing!)* I think you're the best person I've ever seen!

LILY. Oh Austin!

(LILY is so emotionally affected that she throws her arms around him. Immediately a deafening warning siren begins to blare. The beautiful star world is replaced by harsh bright light. Pandemonium ensues in the study. AUSTIN violently yanks backward.)

DONOVAN. WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON!

CHRISTIAN. *(Pacing, hands on his temples:)* I can't abide this.

NICK. Oh man oh man oh man...okay, just...everybody stay calm...

LILY. Austin, what is it, what did I do???

(He rocks and moans out of control.)

DONOVAN. No touching, hate touching, hate skin, stop, go away, uh, uh...

(TALBOTT frantically repeats aircraft-lingo as DONOVAN and CHRISTIAN argue about math.)

DONOVAN. ...We can let a of n plus one be the first element in the sequence x that is strictly between a of n and b of n because of Property Three, which states that between any two numbers there is another.

NICK. Everyone be quiet, please!

TALBOTT. Touching, laughing, stop it, cockpit, fuselage, yoke, fan, airfoil, rudder, cockpit, fuselage, yoke, fan, airfoil, rudder...

(TALBOTT repeats this, more and more loudly, throughout.)

CHRISTIAN. That is completely bogus! There can't be a first element, since according to Property Three it is imperative that there be an element in the sequence x that is strictly between a of n and a of n plus one!

NICK. Stop it! Austin, COME ON! Please, just look at her, just look at how perfect she is, don't do this!

(AUSTIN continues to rock and wring his hands, more and more violently.)

LILY. Austin...please...I'm sorry.

(She reaches out to put a hand on his shoulder and he scrambles away, ending up on the floor in the corner of the classroom.)

LILY. What can I do?

(She hurries over to him. His rocking and moaning gets more and more out of control. LILY continues to implore him throughout the following dialogue.)

DONOVAN. But that element won't come *EARLIER* in the sequence. It will be some *a of m*, where *m* is greater than *n plus one*, so therefore *LATER* in the sequence!

CHRISTIAN. You always insist on being right, don't you, Donovan. You ought to learn to speak to your intellectual superiors with a little more respect, Mr. Community College.

(The action in both rooms escalates frantically. NICK is near tears.)

NICK. Please, please, don't scare her away, she's the first person who ever liked you and you're scaring her...

TALBOTT. COCKPIT FUSELAGE YOKE FAN AIRFOIL RUDDER
COCKPIT FUSELAGE YOKE FAN AIRFOIL RUDDER...

LILY. Austin? I don't know what to do!

NICK. STOP! EVERYBODY STOP!

DONOVAN. Don't you dare call yourself my superior, you arrogant little twit!

LILY. Shh, shh, it's okay!

CHRISTIAN. Washed-out old pedant!

(LILY reaches out to stroke his face.)

TALBOTT. NOT THE FACE! NEVER—THE— FACE!!!

(DONOVAN punches CHRISTIAN as AUSTIN flails, accidentally punching LILY hard in the face. She falls backward across a desk and onto the floor, crying in pain. She gets up, looks at him in horror, and runs out of the classroom limping, holding her face. A stunned silence from the others.)

NICK. Oh no, oh no. *(Shouting at AUSTIN:)* Why can't you ever do anything right, you stupid slob?

(AUSTIN's rocking gradually subsides as everyone in the other room, dazed, returns to their original seats. AUSTIN shakily stands, leaning against the wall.)

(After a few moments, TRAVIS, Lily's macho boyfriend, enters.)

TRAVIS. What's going on?

(AUSTIN looks at him with teary eyes, totally lost.)

TRAVIS. Hey! My girlfriend's out in the hall with a bloody lip, she won't tell me what happened but all I know is she came running out of this room crying. So from what I can tell, you're the jerk who did it to her. Look at me!

(AUSTIN *obsessively wrings his hands.*)

TRAVIS. Oh, I get it. "Special needs," huh? You're lucky, I'd kick the crap out of you if you knew what you were doing. Nobody touches my girl.

(*He starts to leave, and stops at the desk where the textbook and backpack are.*)

TRAVIS. Been looking for this.

(*He shoulders it, then picks up the textbook.*)

TRAVIS. "Experimental Techniques In Condensed Matter Physics" I'm guessing *this* isn't yours. I bet you don't even know what a plus sign is, do you.

(*AUSTIN opens his mouth but can't respond. LILY appears at the side of the doorway. TRAVIS drops the book and walks away.*)

TRAVIS. How pathetic. Come on, Lily.

(*AUSTIN notices her there. TRAVIS exits. LILY lingers at the door a moment. She opens her mouth as if to say something, then shakes her head warily and walks away. NICK stands by the edge of the space longingly. LILY exits and AUSTIN slowly sinks back down to the floor.*)

(*A long pause.*)

DONOVAN. (*Dejectedly.*) So what do you want to talk about?

CHRISTIAN. String theory? Trig?

(*Silence. The lights fade.*)

End of Play