

NIGHTMARE

By Dennis Bush

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CHARACTERS

AUSTIN	Late teens to early 20s; can't outrun his life
A.J.	Austin in his early teens; has never had a sweet dream
LARKIN	Austin's mother; is devoted to the dog
LLOYD	Austin's father; the disciplinarian; loves the dog most of all
JILL	Austin's wife of six months; very clear about the way things should be
RIVER	Austin's best friend in his teen years; shared a tragic incident with him
LILA	Austin's girlfriend in high school
LESLIE	Austin's first girlfriend after high school
LYNN	Austin's girlfriend when he was 13

SETTING

Austin's nightmare. Now.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Reading
November, 2008
New York, NY

PREMIERE PRODUCTION
January, 2009
Phoenix, AZ

Original cast members were Jared Sikes, Ben Whitmire, Samantha Ortiz, Derek Weber, Ariana O'Rafter, Alex Rivera, Macy Cobb, Emily O'Brien and Roxanne Feldhake. The production was directed by the author.

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The stage is dark and quiet. Perhaps, the sound of breathing is heard.

AUSTIN: (screams)

(Uplights illuminate AUSTIN and cast large shadows behind him. HE stares straight ahead, perplexed, with hints of fear.)

JILL: *(Sweetly; almost flirtatiously)* You left the door unlocked.

A.J.: *(Terrified)* Don't get behind the truck! Don't get behind the truck!

JILL: *(More insistently)* You left the door unlocked.

LARKIN: The dog has dandruff.

LLOYD: The dog needs a dermatologist.

A.J.: Don't get behind the truck!

JILL: *(With an edge)* I've asked you not to leave the door unlocked.

LARKIN: Then he should go to the dermatologist.

LLOYD: The dandruff isn't going to go away on its own.

JILL: *(Angrily)* I told you not to leave the door unlocked!

A.J.: I told you not to get behind the truck!

RIVER: I heard you screaming.

LARKIN: It unnerved the dog.

LLOYD: And he has dandruff.

LARKIN: *(Reiterating the gravity of the situation)* The dog has dandruff.

LLOYD: And he needs a dermatologist.

LARKIN: Are you going to take him or should I?

LLOYD: I think we both should.

JILL: How long are you going to keep ignoring me?

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

AUSTIN: I'm not ignoring you.

ALL except LARKIN and LLOYD: I'm not ignoring you.

LARKIN and LLOYD: I'm not saying you were.

JILL: You were.

A.J., LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: You were, you were, you were, you were.

AUSTIN and RIVER: I could see my reflection in the blade of the knife. It was shiny.

ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: *(Whispered)* Shiny.

(The lines should continue with unbroken flow from one actor to the next. It should feel as if a single person is speaking.)

AUSTIN and RIVER: My hair was kind of messy. When I saw myself in the blade of the knife, I noticed that...

AUSTIN: My hair...

RIVER: Was kind of messy.

AUSTIN: I wanted to fix it, but...

RIVER: ... my hands were tied...

AUSTIN: ... behind my back.

RIVER: And you can't fix your hair...

AUSTIN: ... when your hands are tied...

RIVER: ... behind your back.

AUSTIN: Flipping your hair...

RIVER: ... can only do...

AUSTIN: ... so much.

LILA: It was a...

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

LILA: Flippin' mess.

LESLIE and LYNN: Flippin' mess.

LYNN: And I wasn't going to...

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

LYNN: ... clean it up.

LILA and LESLIE: ... clean it up.

LARKIN and LLOYD: The dog made a mess.

A.J.: It was all over the floor.

LILA: Blood was all over the floor.

LARKIN: *(Clarifying)* Not from the dog.

LLOYD: The dog didn't make that kind of mess.

LESLIE: Blood on the floor is a...

LLOYD, LILA and LYNN: ... flippin' mess.

LARKIN: I'm not going to mention it to the dermatologist.

LLOYD: He doesn't need to know.

LARKIN: He'd judge us.

LLOYD: He would.

LARKIN and LLOYD: He'd judge us and the dog.

JILL: And who wants that?

AUSTIN and A.J.: Not me.

LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: In any case...

LLOYD: Somebody...

A.J.: Somebody...

LLOYD: ... has to clean up the mess...

A.J., LARKIN, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: (*Angrily, getting louder with each phrase*) Clean it up, clean it up, clean it up, clean it up.

AUSTIN and RIVER: I heard you screaming and I thought...

ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: How strange!

AUSTIN and RIVER: I should be the one who's screaming. I'm the one who...

(The next three lines are delivered in rapid succession.)

JILL: Left the door unlocked.

A.J.: Got behind the truck.

LARKIN and LLOYD: Took the dog to the dermatologist.

AUSTIN: I'm the one who...

JILL: Always ignores me.

AUSTIN: I'm the one who...

RIVER: Ran away.

AUSTIN: The gun surprised me.

RIVER: (*Interjecting*) Both guns.

AUSTIN: (*Clarifying*) They both surprised me.

ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: Surprise!

AUSTIN: I was focused on the knife.

ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: (*Whispered*) Shiny.

AUSTIN: I noticed that my hair was...

ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: ... a flippin' mess.

AUSTIN and RIVER: And I didn't see him take out the gun.

ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: Surprise.

AUSTIN and RIVER: And his friend...

JILL: His friend?

AUSTIN and RIVER: I guess they were friends...

LARKIN and LLOYD: It's hard to tell sometimes.

AUSTIN and RIVER: His friend tied my hands behind my back.

LILA: Two hands.

LESLIE: Two guys.

LYNN: Two guns.

AUSTIN and RIVER: They made me take off my shoes and socks.

LILA: Two shoes.

LESLIE: Two socks.

LYNN: Two pair.

A.J.: Messy hair.

RIVER: Where was the sound coming from?

LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: Where?

JILL, LARKIN and LLOYD: Where?

AUSTIN and RIVER: It was the sound of an air compressor.

(ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER make a humming noise like an air compressor. THEY continue making the sound until the end is indicated.)

RIVER: It was coming from behind me.

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

RIVER: It was coming from my bedroom.

AUSTIN: It was coming from the bedroom.

RIVER: The man with the knife...

A.J.: *(Whispered)* Shiny.

RIVER: And the gun...

A.J.: *(Whispered)* Surprise.

RIVER: And his friend who tied my hands behind my back...

AUSTIN: *(Growing increasingly agitated)* And I can't fix my hair. I can't fix my hair. I can't fix my hair.

RIVER: They broke into my apartment.

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

RIVER: We were hanging out.

AUSTIN: We were hanging out.

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

RIVER: My friend and I were hanging out.

AUSTIN: My friend and I were hanging out.

RIVER: And they broke in. With the knife...

AUSTIN: Shiny.

RIVER: And the gun...

AUSTIN: Surprise.

RIVER: And the air compressor. *(Pause)* His friend...

AUSTIN: *(Interjecting, wondering)* I guess he was his friend.

RIVER: His friend set it up in the bedroom. The air compressor was in the bedroom – which seemed like a strange place to put an air compressor. But I was too busy worrying about the knife and the

gun and my hands being tied behind my back and having to take off my shoes and socks to notice that his friend was hooking up a nail gun to the air compressor. A pneumatic nail gun with three-and-a-half inch nails. *(Pause)* And he nailed my feet to the floor.

(The air compressor sound stops.)

(Repeating it slowly) He nailed my feet to the floor.
ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: Two nails. Two feet.
RIVER: And I heard you screaming and I thought...

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

RIVER: How strange.
ALL except AUSTIN: How strange.

RIVER: I'm the one whose feet got nailed to the floor and you're the one who's screaming.

AUSTIN: I'm sorry.

RIVER: Blood was all over the floor.

JILL: It was a flippin' mess.

RIVER and JILL: And I thought, "I'm not going to clean this up."

AUSTIN: And the guy with the gun yelled...

ALL except AUSTIN: RUN!

(The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.)

AUSTIN: And I did. *(Pause)* I ran.

RIVER: And you did. *(Pause)* You ran.

(A quick beat.)

RIVER: We were friends.

ALL except AUSTIN and RIVER: You were friends?

RIVER: I thought we were friends and you ran away and left me there.

AUSTIN: The guy said, "Run!" He pointed the gun at me and yelled, "Run!" *(Quick pause)* So I did. I thought you were right behind me. I was halfway down the street before I realized you weren't following me. You were still in the apartment.

RIVER: With my feet nailed to the floor.

(The next three lines are delivered in rapid succession.)

LILA: And blood...

LESLIE: Blood...

LYNN: Blood...

RIVER: Blood was everywhere.

AUSTIN: I'm sorry.

RIVER: (*Bitterly*) You're sorry.

AUSTIN: I am. I'm sorry.

RIVER: And I never screamed.

A.J.: (*Screaming*) Don't get behind the truck!

RIVER: (*Standing behind AUSTIN, shouting*) I never screamed!

LARKIN: (*Shouting*) You're upsetting the dog!

AUSTIN: (*Shouting*) I'm sorry!

JILL: And is that supposed to make me feel better?

(The next three lines should be done slightly faster and with an exaggerated style.)

AUSTIN and A.J.: I don't know. Does it?

JILL, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: Is it possible for you to have a conversation without the attitude?

AUSTIN and A.J.: I don't know. Is it?

(The next three lines are delivered in rapid succession.)

A.J. and LILA: I don't know.

LARKIN and LLOYD: I don't know

ALL except JILL: (*Getting increasing faster and louder*) Is it? Is it? Is it?
Is it?

(A beat.)

JILL: (*Simply*) Tell me what you're thinking.

A.J.: Is it bad that I like the smell of hand sanitizer?

JILL: (*More intently*) Tell me what you're thinking.

ALL except JILL: You don't wanna know.

JILL: (*Forcefully*) Tell me what you're thinking!

AUSTIN: I don't wanna. (*Very quick pause*) No!

RIVER: (*Yelling*) NO!

JILL: No!

LARKIN and LLOYD: No!

A.J., RIVER, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: (*Fast and getting increasingly louder*) No, no!

JILL: No, that isn't what I wanted. It's not what I asked you to get. You know what I always get.

(The next eight lines are spoken in unison, loudly. JILL, A.J., LARKIN, LLOYD, LILA, RIVER, LESLIE and LYNN all speak at the same time.)

JILL: Green tea frappacino with caramel layered. Whip cream on the top. Caramel on the whip.

A.J.: Passionfruit lemonade iced tea with two pumps of extra sweetener.

LARKIN: Skinny soy vanilla latte.

LLOYD: Decaf mocha. *(Pause)* Decaf mocha.

LYNN: Eight pumps, please. Yes, eight pumps, please.

RIVER: Chicory, chicory, chicory, chicory.

LESLIE: Half-caf caramel macchiato.

LILA: Chai tea. *(Pause)* Chai tea.

(A quick beat.)

JILL: How could you forget what I always get?

(The next eight lines are spoken in unison, loudly. JILL, A.J., LARKIN, LLOYD, LILA, RIVER, LESLIE and LYNN all speak at the same time.)

JILL: Green tea frappacino with caramel layered. Whip cream on the top. Caramel on the whip.

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LLOYD: Decaf mocha. *(Pause)* Decaf mocha.

LYNN: Eight pumps, please. Yes, eight pumps, please.

RIVER: Chicory, chicory, chicory, chicory.

LESLIE: Half-caf caramel macchiato.

LILA: Chai tea. *(Pause)* Chai tea.

(A quick beat.)

JILL: How could you forget that?

AUSTIN: I'm sorry.

JILL: *(Playfully, with more than a hint of condescension)* It's OK. I love you anyway.

AUSTIN: OK, good.

JILL: OK, good? I said, "I love you."

AUSTIN: And that's a good thing, right? So, I said, "OK, good."

JILL and LESLIE: You never say, "I love you."

LESLIE: I say it to you, but you don't say it back. When somebody says, "I love you," you're supposed to say it back.

JILL: Don't you know that?

ALL except JILL, AUSTIN and LESLIE: (*Taunting*) Don't you know that?

LESLIE: I said, "I love you," so, you were supposed to say it back to me. (*Pause*) That's why I said it.

(*The next two lines should be spoken simultaneously.*)

LESLIE: Don't you know that?

ALL except LESLIE and AUSTIN: Don't you know that?

JILL and LESLIE: I love you.

ALL except JILL, LESLIE and AUSTIN: Say it!

JILL and LESLIE: I love you!

ALL except JILL, LESLIE and AUSTIN: Say it!

JILL and LESLIE: (*Angrily, with no trace of affection*) I LOVE YOU!

ALL except JILL, LESLIE and AUSTIN: (*Getting increasingly louder*) Say it. SAY IT! SAY IT! SAY IT!

AUSTIN: Yes.

JILL and LESLIE: (*With no emotion*) I love you.

A.J.: Yes.

LARKIN and LLOYD: We love you.

JILL, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: Lather, rinse, repeat.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JILL, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: Lather, rinse, repeat.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JILL, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: Lather. Lather. Lather. Lather.

A.J., RIVER, LARKIN and LLOYD: Rinse. Rinse. Rinse. Rinse.

ALL except AUSTIN: Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

AUSTIN: OK, good.

LILA: Some manners would help.

LESLIE: Some manners would be nice.

LYNN: Would it have killed you to tell me to my face?

LILA: Would it have killed you to let me know how you felt?

LESLIE: Would it have killed you?

ALL except AUSTIN, A.J., JILL and LESLIE: Would it?

JILL: I could have killed you. (*Pause*) Who leaves their wife at a party? I went to the bathroom, and when I came out, you were gone. So I asked Nico and Ellen where you were and Nico shrugged his shoulders and mumbled. He knew where you went. But he wouldn't tell me. Guys are like that. You protect each other. You lie for each other. If you wanted to leave, you should have said something. It's just good manners.

LILA: Some manners would be nice. *(Pause)* I thought you had been in an accident. Why else wouldn't you come to pick me up. You said you were going to pick me up. You said it. When you say you're going to do something, you should do it.

LARKIN, LLOYD, A.J. and RIVER: Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it.

LESLIE: It's just good manners.

LYNN: Some manners would help.

LILA: So, I figured it was a misunderstanding. I thought, maybe, I was confused. Maybe you weren't supposed to pick me up. Maybe we were supposed to meet at the dance. So, I went to the dance. *(Pause)* My mom drove me. *(Pause)* But you weren't there. Lindsey told me that you told Brian that you weren't ever planning to go. That you didn't want to be going out with me at all. Ever. But you got "forced" into it. I don't remember holding a gun to your head when you asked me out. I think I'd remember that. I really think I'd remember that.

RIVER: You'd remember it.

ALL except AUSTIN, RIVER and JILL: *(Whispered)* Remember. Remember. Remember. Remember.

LILA: You were the one who asked me out. You asked me, so I don't know how you twist that into you being forced into anything. And even if you were forced – which you weren't – but even if you were, you still could have told me to my face that you didn't wanna go out any more. Would it have...

RIVER, JILL, LESLIE and LYNN: Killed you...

LILA: ... To let me know how you felt...

LYNN: ... To tell me to my face. *(Pause)* I thought everything was fine. You said you were happy. You said you loved me. You wrote my name on your sneakers. *(Quick pause)* That's like giving somebody a ring. *(Quick pause)* It's better than a ring. It's like I'm always walking with you. Like we're walking around and holding hands. That's what writing somebody's name on your sneakers means. It's serious. It's a commitment. That's what it means. So, when you scribbled all over my name with red marker, it broke my heart. There wasn't any warning. I didn't have time to prepare myself for the emotional toll because you never let me know how you felt. You just scribbled over my name like it never existed. Like we didn't exist. Like us being together was a mistake you had to scratch out. *(Quick pause)* It was like the blood from my broken heart got all over your sneakers. You stomped all over my broken heart until your feet were covered with blood.

RIVER: Just like mine.

A.J. and AUSTIN: Mine!

JILL, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: Mine.

A.J.: It's mine. It's my popsicle.

JILL, LARKIN, LLOYD, LESLIE and LYNN: Popsicle.

A.J. and AUSTIN: Popsicle!

ALL: Popsicle. Popsicle. Popsicle. Popsicle.

LARKIN and LLOYD: The dog likes popsicles.

A.J. and AUSTIN: It's my popsicle.

LLOYD: Share it with the dog.

LARKIN: The dog likes popsicles.

A.J.: *(Shouting)* It's MY POPSICLE!

LARKIN: *(Intensely)* Share it with the dog.

A.J.: No.

LARKIN: *(Taken aback and angry)* What?

AUSTIN: No!

LLOYD: *(Livid)* What?

A.J.: No!

LARKIN and LLOYD: Austin James Webb!

(JILL, RIVER, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN gasp at the use of the first middle and last name.)

A.J.: No!

LLOYD: That's it.

LARKIN: Disobedience demands discipline.

LLOYD: Go out to the garage, young man.

A.J.: *(Visibly afraid)* No...

LLOYD: Wait for me behind the truck.

AUSTIN: *(Almost in tears)* Don't get behind the truck.

LLOYD: And don't you move till I get out there with the belt.

LARKIN: Actions have consequences, young man. Remember that.

JILL, RIVER, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: Remember. Remember.

Remember. Remember.

LLOYD: Think about what you've learned from this.

A.J. and AUSTIN: No.

ALL except A.J. and AUSTIN: *(The word should sound like the whack of a paddle; the actors should also clap in unison as they shout the word)* What!

A.J. and AUSTIN: No!

ALL except A.J. and AUSTIN: *(Like the whack of a paddle and with a clap in unison)* What!

A.J. and AUSTIN: NO!

ALL except A.J. and AUSTIN: *(Like the whack of a paddle and with a clap in unison)* WHAT!

A.J. and AUSTIN: NO!

ALL except A.J. and AUSTIN: *(Like the whack of a paddle and with a clap in unison)* WHAT!

JILL: What was going through your mind?

AUSTIN: I don't know. What do you think?

JILL: Don't turn this back around on me. And don't think I'm going to forget that you did it. Actions have consequences.

A.J.: *(Crying)* Don't get behind the truck.

JILL: How would you like it if I just left you somewhere without telling you I was leaving?

AUSTIN: I don't know.

JILL: What is your problem?

A.J., RIVER, LILA, LESLIE and LYNN: I'm not happy.

LARKIN and LLOYD: I'm not unhappy. *(Pause)* I'm not happy, but I'm not unhappy.

LYNN: Unhappy means not happy. They mean the same thing.

RIVER: Unhappy... not happy. Six of one, half dozen of the other.

A.J.: I wanna be happy. But I'm not sure how to do that. *(Quick pause)* And being unhappy just happens.

LILA: *(A simple truth, with a hint of sarcasm)* Unhappiness happens.

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