

Night of the Cure/ by Austin Bunn

TUCKER, late 20s.

ELI, mid-40s.

CHRIS, mid-30s

Setting: A heavy door. Above, a flickering neon sign that reads "Sinners".  
Something not nearly clever enough.

Time: Six months from now, 12:23 am.

\*Note: Though this play features gay people, the actors shouldn't "look" gay, by whatever standards you have in your head. In fact, the less "gay-seeming", the better: overweight, untucked, uncertain, etc. Sweet in their way. This is the future.

LIGHTS RISE on the door. Painted black, dead bolt.  
This door has been around for decades. This door  
has seen things. Loud music -- *buckets! buckets!*  
*buckets!* -- thrumps from inside.

Two street-lamps make two pools of light on either  
side of the stage. Night above, field of stars.

TUCKER stands in front of the door. Oddly he lays  
his HAND on the door. Like feeling a pulse.

ELI approaches.

ELI

Are you the line?

TUCKER

Gotta be hundreds of guys inside. A thousand maybe. Every bar around here's  
the same way.

ELI

Big night.

TUCKER

The biggest.

ELI

I remember when this place was the only place. It was like Jiffy Lube. You could  
be in and out in 20 minutes. Just a lot of ghosts to me now.

TUCKER

They've got the drug, you know. The cure. All the bars do.

ELI

Another pill. Lovely.

TUCKER

Get everybody in one night. So the virus can't mutate. Just doesn't seem safe.

ELI

"Safe."

TUCKER

Guys go in, nobody comes out. It'll be the 1970s all over again.

ELI

And you were how old?

TUCKER

I've seen pictures.

ELI

I was in the pictures.

TUCKER

I thought I recognized you.

ELI

I was your age when it started. Back when we had sequins. You do remember sequins?

TUCKER

I have a bedazzler.

ELI

Good because for a moment I doubted. (beat, heading to open the door) No use putting it off. This is supposed to be a celebration. I bet there are fireworks.

TUCKER

(reluctant, unmoving)

I can't.

ELI

Why not?

TUCKER

I've been standing out here for hour. I'm terrified.

ELI

Nobody bites. Hard.

TUCKER

(haunted)  
This is where we met. This was his place.

ELI  
Oh, I see. Well, if he's here, he'll be happy to see you. He won't even remember what you did to him.

TUCKER  
What if he feels nothing?

ELI  
Then you don't even have to see him.  
(going to open the door again)  
Now. Come on. You're young enough to be my inner-child. I'll lead.

TUCKER  
What if he's not even here? What if he's...

ELI  
We'll find him. What was his name?

CHRIS kicks open the door and ENTERS, carrying two drinks in red plastic cups. He walks up to Tucker. (Chris does not see Eli. Eli does not see Chris.)

TUCKER  
Chris.

CHRIS  
(to Tucker)  
Hey I was wondering where you went.

ELI  
(spooked)  
Chris.

CHRIS  
(to Tucker)  
I thought you vanished.

TUCKER  
(to Chris)  
I didn't move.

ELI  
You coming kid?

Tucker is silent, seeing only Chris.

Tucker, right?  
CHRIS

Suit yourself.  
ELI

Eli EXITS through the door.

Chris and Tucker on stage. The music raises in volume. The street-lamp light skitters about, like a club mirrorball. We're now INSIDE in the club. Chris and Tucker kinda shout at each other to be heard.

TUCKER  
I wasn't sure you were coming back. When people tell me they're "getting a drink", they mean, "You have weird teeth and spit when you talk and goodbye."

You were wrong.  
CHRIS

TUCKER  
(avoiding his gaze, looking up)  
So... cargo netting.

CHRIS  
Do you typically come into bars and look up?

TUCKER  
I work at the planetarium. I'm better with up. (beat) Jerry Garcia's face lasered across the universe. That's me. I hate it actually.

CHRIS  
I used to think stars were lonely. Out in the space, so far apart, some of them already gone. Just light, streaming out.

TUCKER  
-- oh yeah, they exhaust their hydrogen, we had a thing on that --

CHRIS  
When I was a kid, I used to climb on the roof of our house to make sure each star got seen. One by one. Before they went dark.

TUCKER  
That's beautiful.

CHRIS  
"Beautiful." Nobody I know says that.

TUCKER

So what happened? On the roof, did you get to all of them?

CHRIS

No. I fell. 24 feet to pavement. My forearm was a bright white splinter. Wanna see?

TUCKER

I'm goosy around blood n stuff.

CHRIS

I'm an EMT now -- my whole day is splinters.

TUCKER

I've been doing these fucking star-shows for two years and I only know a few things -- pathetic actually -- but one of them is this: more than half of stars are bound to other stars. By gravity. So they're not alone. Millions of miles of space between them, they still feel a pull.

CHRIS

Beautiful.

Chris LAYS his hand on Tucker's chest. (This should echo the hand motion we saw from Tucker in at the start.) This tenderness Tucker did not expect. The music vanishes. The lights CENTER on them.

TUCKER

That feels...amazing.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Can we just skip the getting to know you part?

TUCKER

And the me-buying-you-a-book-and-spending-two-hours-trying-to-write-the-inscription part?

Chris untucks Tucker's shirt.

CHRIS

What about the three-date minimum-before-reckless-touching part?

TUCKER

That was a part?

CHRIS

I don't feel like I have a lot of time.

TUCKER

I have weird teeth and I spit when I talk and you didn't say anything.

CHRIS

There's something you need to know.

TUCKER

(unbuttoning Chris's shirt)

You have problems with intimacy. You have to have a piece of leather somewhere in the room at all times. I don't care. I'll work around. It's been a long time since I met someone, I mean someone I liked, like astronomically, and--

CHRIS

I'm positive.

Tucker FLINCHES.

Chris registers this, re-buttons his shirt. Total shift of mood.

TUCKER

I'm sorry. I didn't...

CHRIS

I see where this is going.

Chris slowly BACKS away from Tucker, heading off-stage, fading out...

TUCKER

You didn't give me a chance. Four years ago, you saw my fear and left, like light streaming away.

The street-lights RETURN to position. Music returns behind the door. It's present time again.

TUCKER (CONT'D)

I felt a pull then that I haven't felt since. There's time now, isn't there. More time.

Tucker goes to lay his hand on the door, except he GRABS the knobs and opens it. He enters.

As soon as it shuts, Eli RE-ENTERS the stage through the door. Two pills in hand.

ELI

OK kid, it took some legwork but I got us two of them. They're giant horse pills actually--

(sees Tucker is missing.  
Disappointment.)

Chris ENTERS, stage-left.

ELI (CONT'D)

...You.

CHRIS

You can't get rid of me.

ELI

You look just like the last time I saw you.

CHRIS

I only ever had one good outfit. What do you have?

ELI

(removing two gleaming, white PILLS)

They're giving them out. In bowls. Like dinner mints.

CHRIS

You got two.

ELI

For me...And a friend.

CHRIS

(heading to the door)

Good for you.

ELI

Chris. I haven't been with anyone since. Us.

CHRIS

Stop punishing yourself. It's boring.

ELI

I felt like poison.

CHRIS

You were poison. That's how the disease worked. Except you were lucky. You never got sick.

ELI

But I couldn't touch anyone. I was a plate of glass, walking around. Every step sent up a crack.

CHRIS

And now?

ELI

Like an uncomfortable old chair no one uses. The last of a set.

CHRIS

Do you interior decorate all your feelings?

ELI

It came tonight to find you.

CHRIS

Our old place. Can't believe it's still standing.

ELI

To tell you I'm sorry.

CHRIS

But I'm not here, kiddo. I'm not anywhere. I didn't make it. T-cells dropped to zero and hung out. You know what got me? Liver disease. Like my fucking *grandfather*. (beat) So your little apology? Beam it out there... (point into the night)

ELI

Were you alone when it happened? Did you have anybody?

CHRIS

Look -- take your little cure and do me the favor of forgetting all about me.

ELI

(with pill in hand)

I don't want to.

Bang: Tucker RE-ENTERS through the door, back outside. Sweaty. He carries two sparklers.

This time, Tucker doesn't see Chris.

TUCKER

You were right. They've got fireworks. Major fire hazard, but whatever.

ELI

Did you find who you were looking for?

TUCKER

I went through and looked. At everybody, one by one.

CHRIS

That was my line.

TUCKER

He wasn't there. Then I realized everybody else was looking too. But they weren't looking to see who didn't make it. They were looking to see who did. It's like: you don't really see night when you look up. You see stars.

Tucker gives Eli one of the sparklers. He takes out a lighter.

ELI

Don't be nice to me. I'm a bad person.

TUCKER

You're a person.

Eli LAYS his hand on Tucker's chest. The move strikes Tucker: a recognition.

ELI

You have no idea.

TUCKER

This isn't nice. This is company. Come on, this is your inner child speaking.

Tucker lights the sparklers. Lights start to fade on Chris at the door.

CHRIS

Night boys.

The two pools of light from the street-lamps INCH toward each other.

ELI

Look at that.

Just sparklers: two stars and their gravities. The two men swallow their pills.