

## Second Place

*Austin comes to visit Joe, his once best friend, after a wreck in which Austin's girlfriend was killed. Joe, who was driving the car, suffers a badly broken leg. As Austin seeks understanding of the circumstances surrounding the wreck, a violent non-stop battle ensues in which Joe and Austin are both forced to confront and are ultimately consumed by certain dark truths the control their lives.*

AUSTIN: I had a dream the day I found out about the wreck, that Monday. I had a dream. I slept so much that day. Ms. Anderson called that morning and told my parents, and then my parents told me after we had already eaten brunch together—eggs benedict and bacon and freshly squeezed orange juice. The plates were covered in egg juice and bacon bits with little pieces of parsley off to the side. I finished my second glass of orange juice. It was sweet. You could feel the little orange bits going down. It was so sweet.

My mom tried to tell me, but she opened her mouth and burst out crying. I mean, tears all of a sudden flew out of her eyes. Like you always see in cartoons when people cry. She looked at me and said, "Austin," and then opened her mouth to say it, and she burst out crying. My dad told me. He told me, "Austin, there was an accident last night. Susan is dead." Just like that. Such a simple statement. Three words. And what do they mean? "Susan is dead." What does that mean? Poof! She's gone? Like a genie, gone? "Susan is dead." I couldn't really prove it in my mind, sitting at the breakfast table, listening calmly as my dad calmly explained the details of the accident—I couldn't really prove that she had ever existed as a part of my life. It was like talking about the death of a fictional character. I wasn't really moved. Maybe it was shock.

I slept a lot that day. I cried some, too, but mostly I just slept. I felt so exhausted every time I'd open

## The Bridge Over The River

an excerpt of the play  
by Travis Chamberlain

my eyes that I'd just roll over and go back to sleep. Early the next morning, like four o'clock in the morning, I finally woke up and didn't go back to sleep. And I remembered suddenly a dream I had had at some point during the night.

*(Austin has moved so that he is now looking out the window. All room lights have begun to fade so that only the light coming through the window remains, creating a spotlight effect on Austin.)*

I dreamed that I was on a stage and I didn't know what show I was in or what part I was supposed to be playing or anything. The theater was packed full, and everyone was holding their breath—I mean, literally, I could *hear* them all holding their breath together—waiting for me to do something. (Beat.) But then someone in the audience stood up and called my name. I squinted out into the blackness, trying to make out the face of the speaker, but all I could make out was a vague silhouette. She called my name again and I realized it was Susan. "Suzy!" I said, "Suzy, is that you!" And the silhouette standing up in the audience said, "Yes." I said, "Suzy, I'm so glad to see you! It's been so long!" And she said, "Yes." I said, "Where do you live now?" And the silhouette said, "In Heaven." And I said, "In Heaven? Where's Heaven?" And she said, "You just take a right at the stop light and then go straight for 50 miles, cross over some bridges, and it'll be on your left. You can't miss it." And then the curtain came down in front of me and the audience was cheering. *(He smiles. Room lights return to full.)*

That's all I remember.

*(Beat.)*

JOE: What do you think it means?

AUSTIN: *(Suddenly defensive)* I don't think it means any thing. I don't know why I told you that. I didn't want to tell you that.

JOE: Why not?

AUSTIN: I wanted to keep it to myself.

JOE: Do you think it's true.

AUSTIN: What?

JOE: Take a right, 50 miles, bridges, can't miss it.

AUSTIN: I don't want to talk about it.

JOE: No, really. I'm serious. Do you think it's possible?

AUSTIN: *(After a moment)* I don't believe in Heaven. . . . I don't believe in Heaven. Susan's not in Heaven because I don't believe in Heaven.

JOE: But *she* did. What difference does it make, anyway? You can't—

AUSTIN: "What difference does it make?" It makes every bit of difference.

JOE: And no difference at all. There's nothing you can do about Susan's death but go on with your life.

AUSTIN: That is so selfish, Joe. How can I just "go on" with my life? This shit isn't that easy. Could you just "go on" with your life if your mom was killed in a car wreck on her way back from her birthday party this evening?

JOE: Yes.

AUSTIN: I don't think so, Joe. Think about how dependent