

# Scene 2

Seth flopped down on the ragged couch in his family's musty wood-paneled basement den. He peeled off the enormous Mark Twain mustache with a sigh of relief, glanced around, and stuck it on a mannequin in a fur-trimmed broad-brimmed pimp hat to keep it from getting lost in the avalanche of decorations and costume bits that covered the walls and filled most of the surfaces in the room. Seth had performed in almost every theatrical production at West Elm High and had a starring role in many of them. Many of the costume accessories were souvenirs from shows in middle and high school. Now, solidly into his Senior year, he had enough pull with the school's Drama Department that his opinions about dialogue and creative direction were usually heard and incorporated into their shows. Their current production, *Enemies Abound*, was already cast and well into rehearsal. It was the first of his scripts to be approved by their exacting Drama teacher, Mr. Haverty.

Jonesy sank into the usual ragged recliner that he had claimed as his own since early middle school, despite it being in his friend's house. They had all gathered in this room for years to relax, gossip, smoke a little pot, and generally recharge from their busy lives. He smiled as he looked around, satisfied to have made it back to a safe place after paranoid slinking through the dark streets of their neighborhood. He kept his costume's main accessory, an authentic TarGard cigarette holder, Hunter S. Thompson's trademark accessory along with his iconic Aviator sunglasses, clamped firmly between his teeth. The cigarette had fallen out somewhere during their frantic run from the party.

Travis and Francine were both packed into the small bathroom, door open, wiping the zombie and victim makeup off their faces and arms. The couples costume had been Francine's idea. Travis had loved zombie movies, and horror movies in general, since the two had first become friends Freshman year. But then, sometime last summer, he had gotten serious about his Christian faith and made some abrupt changes - he decreed that he was giving up alcohol and pot for good because they were "tempting him down the wrong path." His interest in horror movies had faded at the same time and he started volunteering at the church and at school. His friends on the football team had given him shit about it, but ultimately found it unsatisfying to tease a friend for wanting to be a better person, so they just stopped offering him drinks at parties. He had started dating Francine around the same time. She still drank and smoked on occasion, especially when Jonesy was around, but she seemed to have lost her taste for it as well.

By the time Travis and Francine finally emerged from the tiny bathroom, still lightly smudged with makeup, Seth was setting up a game on the battered coffee table in the center of the room. A square central board featured a series of spiral paths that crossed each other at intervals and they wound toward a circle in the center. Four game pieces and a single six-sided die were set aside on the table top along with a large deck of cards with an unsettling pattern printed on the back. Jonesy picked up the single page rule sheet and was reading intently.

Travis and Francine settled into their usual chairs, a pair of faded recliners with wooden arms rubbed pale from countless hands over the years. Seth had told them when they all first became friends at West Elm Middle that the basement furniture was there when they first moved in and his father had proclaimed them "Good enough for a basement hangout room."

Francine was eyeing the game board and pieces. "This looks pretty straightforward. Roll the die, move your piece toward the center, follow instructions and draw cards along the way. Sounds perfect for a game we're starting at midnight!" she smiled.

"I agree completely", Seth said with a grin. "Let's add to the atmosphere. It is Halloween night, after all." He popped up off the couch, opened a cabinet half-hidden behind a large papier-mache mushroom (a leftover from their much-celebrated performance of Alice in Wonderland), and pulled out a squat glass bong and a small ornately-carved wooden box.

"Justin Bong has joined the party!" he said with a flourish as he unrolled a baggie of weed from the wooden box and started rolling it between his fingers.

Jonesy was leaning forward with anticipation. "Now we're talking! We're stuck here for a while anyway. Tomorrow is Saturday, Seth's folks are out of town, and it's my favorite holiday. Hell, this could be the last Halloween we all spend together. We'll probably be getting baked with our college friends next year." He traced an imagined tear slowly down his cheek. "Let's all get stoned and play this weird game. Travis, you in? For old times sake?"

"You know I gave that stuff up, Jonesy. You said you wouldn't hassle me about it."

"Yeah, I did say that. It's just... this feels like the end of an era for all of us, you know? Graduation, college, real life... it's all right around the corner. We may not get an opportunity like this again anytime soon. Maybe never. Let's have a couple drinks, smoke up, and celebrate all the fun times we've had together before we go our separate ways. Come on man, we've been friends since our playground days. What d'ya say?"

Travis looked over at Francine. Hoping she would jump in to tell Jonesy to back off in that disarming way she had. But she was silent, watching the exchange with a wistful look on her face.

Jonesy followed Travis' gaze. "Frannie, you're going to partake tonight, right? It's a special night, let's not waste it."

"Yeah, I'm in." she said, looking briefly at Travis before averting her gaze.

"Frannie's in. Seth's pretty obviously in." He gestured to Seth, who had just finished packing the bowl and was reaching for a lighter. "I'm in. And I'll be honest, I could use a night like this after what happened to my brother at the end of last year. Andy's not making any progress in physical therapy and he's losing hope that he'll ever walk again. He's on a road trip with my folks for the next few days getting a third opinion from a joint specialist at the Mayo Clinic. It's pretty grim around my house these days. Come on, man, I could really use a taste of the good 'ol days again. This can be your last night ever smoking the Devil's Lettuce. I promise. Let's do it for Andy. What do you say?"

Travis looked pained. He was staring at the floor between his feet. "Alright man, I'm in. Just like old times. Let's do it." He looked up at Jonesy, his expression still grim. "For Andy."

Seth clapped his hands together. "That... was intense. Now lets lighten up the mood, dim the lights, and get started. This weed is extra-special and this game is not going to play itself." He took the first long draw on the bong while the rest of his friends listened to the bubbling water in silence.

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