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This Side of Heaven

A dramatic comedy in one act

By Don Zolidis

One-act Drama
2F 1M

After two unlucky accidents, seventeen-year-olds Fever and Chase must adapt to the new limitations of their bodies: partial-paralysis for Chase and a permanent limp for Fever. Through a series of vignettes chronicling their weekly physical therapy appointments, the two also struggle to accept the reality of being disabled for the rest of their lives. With humor, honesty, and romance, Fever and Chase find a new sense of themselves in each other.

Cast of Characters

FEVER, 17, an athletic, somewhat popular girl who has had her femur broken in three places. At the beginning of the play, she wears a complete leg brace on her right leg.

CHASE, 17, kind of an odd duck and a T-4 Complete Paraplegic. Chase has no feeling below the waist but has regular abdominal, chest, and upper body strength. It has been three months since his car accident – he is in a manual wheelchair.

DR. ANNA, 30s-40s, a physical therapist specializing in recovery from severe injuries.

Setting: A room in a rehab center. Present day.

Casting:

Fever and Chase may be any ethnicity or race.

(A room in the Physical Rehab area of a clinic. It looks vaguely like a gym, with treadmills, exercise balls, weights, a walking bar, and other equipment. There are a few pieces that are specially designed for rehabilitation, such as a large flat surface that serves as a proxy bed.)

(At Rise, FEVER, 17, her entire right leg strapped in a clunky brace, is using the walking bar. DR. ANNA, 30-40s, is standing nearby.)

(FEVER has a set of crutches leaning against the equipment.)

DR. ANNA

Let's try that again.

FEVER

Okay.

DR. ANNA

I want you to put as much weight as is comfortable on your foot. Gently lower your leg –

FEVER

I'm having a hard time –

DR. ANNA

It's okay. You're fine.

(FEVER sets her foot gingerly on the floor.)

How does that feel?

FEVER

Not good.

(She tries to lift her leg back up.)

DR. ANNA

On a scale of one to ten, how would you describe your pain?

FEVER

Awful. Like seventy. Maybe seventy-five.

DR. ANNA

So that's a seven?

FEVER

Seventy-seven maybe. Up there. Okay all right maybe four.

DR. ANNA
That's a little better. And are you feeling that pain constantly?

FEVER
Mostly when I'm here. And at night. And during the day a lot.

DR. ANNA
Okay. Hmm.
(DR. ANNA notes something.)
I think we probably need to do another x-ray –

FEVER *(sarcastic)*
Yay.
(CHASE, 17, in a wheelchair, enters the room.)

DR. ANNA
Oh hi Chase –

CHASE
What's going on?

DR. ANNA
I have to finish up here – do you mind waiting outside?

CHASE
Can I just get started? I'm bubbling with excitement today.

FEVER
I don't mind.

DR. ANNA
All right – do you feel comfortable working on a transfer by yourself for a minute? I need to set up something for her.

CHASE
I'm cool.

DR. ANNA
All right. I'll be right back.
(DR. ANNA exits.)
(FEVER gets her crutches and checks her phone as CHASE wheels over to the bed.)

CHASE
Hey.

FEVER

Hey.

CHASE

What are you in for?

FEVER

Leg.

CHASE

Oh yeah. Nice.

FEVER *(back to looking at phone)*

Yeah.

CHASE

You come here often?

FEVER

What?

CHASE

Never mind. That's okay – go back to your phone. I won't bother you.

FEVER

I didn't hear what you said.

CHASE

I said do you come here often?

FEVER

Yeah I'm on Tuesdays.

CHASE

I mean – never mind –

FEVER

What?

CHASE

I was making a joke.

FEVER

You were?

CHASE

The – do you come here often? Like I'm hitting on you.

FEVER

Ohhhh. Oh.

CHASE

But I'm not hitting on you cause that would be weird.

FEVER

Right. Yeah. That would make this awkward.

CHASE

Right. Like this moment. This moment right here.

(Short pause)

I can imagine you right now tweeting about me. `Freak boy hitting on me in rehab.' Course that might have a different meaning – people might think you were a drug addict or something.

(short pause)

I'm just gonna practice my transfers then.

(He parks his wheelchair next to the bed and locks the wheels.)

(Using only his arms, CHASE awkwardly lifts himself out of his chair and flops onto the bed. He's not used to doing this yet, but manages it well enough.)

CHASE

I'm Chase, by the way. Irony alert.

(He struggles to uncross his legs.)

FEVER

Why is that ironic?

CHASE

Cause I'm not gonna be chasing anybody any more.

FEVER

Could be a car chase.

CHASE

Yeah I guess.

FEVER

Wheelchair chase.

CHASE

That could also work, I suppose.

FEVER

It could be worse – you could be named Jogger.

CHASE

I don't think there's anybody named Jogger.

FEVER

There are people named everything.

(CHASE throws his legs down on the bed and they tremble and spasm.)

Oh man.

CHASE

Yeah. There's a lot of fun parts to being paralyzed, but this is one of my favorites. Your muscles start freaking out all the time – I don't know if they're just upset that they're being neglected or whatever, but it's like `aaaaah! Pay attention to us!' It'll stop in a second.

FEVER

Bummer.

CHASE

Yeah. There's a few of those. Hey wanna see how I sleep now?

(He rolls over onto his stomach, face down.)

Like this.

FEVER

Okay.

CHASE

And then when I get up I just roll back over. And it's back to the chair.

(He starts moving from off the bed to get back in his chair.)

What's your name?

FEVER

Fever.

CHASE

I'm sorry, what?

FEVER

Fever.

CHASE

As in, the condition that happens to you when your blood is boiling to fight off infections?

FEVER

Yeah, but normally I go by Fee.

CHASE

Like what you pay at an ATM.

FEVER

Yeah.

CHASE

Were your parents high when they named you?

FEVER

It was my Mom – and I think – the way I justify it is that she was on a lot of painkillers at the time.

CHASE

Man. Fever. Wow.

FEVER

You won't forget it.

CHASE

True. I think on the upside is that you can hang that over your Mom's head your whole life, you know? Like if she says, "go clean your room" you can say "You ruined my life by calling me Fever!"

FEVER

She didn't ruin my life. My life isn't ruined.

CHASE

You know what I mean.

(CHASE succeeds in getting back in the chair.)

One.

FEVER

So your arms work?

CHASE

You noticed. Yep. Just…

(He's having some difficulty)

There was a bit of a question as to whether I would be totally paralyzed or only partially paralyzed.

FEVER

Right.

Skipping Forward

CHASE

Rarrrrrgh! Yes! YESSSS!

(FEVER is laughing and can't manage to do her crunches.)

FEVER

I can't do crunches while I'm laughing.

CHASE

No excuses! There are no excuses!

FEVER

Shut up!

CHASE

Unnnnh! Unnnnh! I'm getting so Pumped!

FEVER

What are those, ten pounds?

CHASE

Twelve thank you very much.

FEVER

I don't understand why you're lifting weights with your arms.

CHASE

Um… cause I can't lift them with my legs?

FEVER

No, but –

CHASE

So I can build up arm strength so I can wheel myself around in the chair.

FEVER

Ohh. So are you… ever gonna get better?

CHASE

Define better.

FEVER

Like walk.

CHASE

At this moment I'm working towards bladder control. I know it kind of explodes the myth I've been creating in your mind, but that is my current goal.

FEVER

Like right now?

CHASE

Oh yeah. Right now I am experimenting with bladder control. It's awesome.

FEVER

Do you have any – like – feeling?

CHASE

Tell you what – let's not talk about our catheters and see how that goes.

FEVER

I don't have a catheter.

CHASE

That makes one of us.

FEVER

Oh.

CHASE

It's better than the alternative.

FEVER

So with a catheter – do they…?

CHASE

Actually I can do it myself now. And it just goes…

FEVER

Oh jeez.

CHASE

Yeah. I file that under – things I never wanted to learn how to do. But um… to actually answer your question – no – I'm permanently… paralyzed.

FEVER

I'm sorry.

CHASE

I try to look on the bright side. I was never all that good at running anyway so it's not like – oh no I'll never play football again I'm useless as a human, you know? Like – I wasn't any good before –

FEVER

You might be better now.

CHASE

I might be. I think cause people would feel bad about tackling me.

FEVER

No they wouldn't.

CHASE

You're right.

(CHASE returns the weights to the weight rack as FEVER gets off the ball. She heads for the walking bars.)

You know where Dr. Anna is?

FEVER

She should be here any minute. Can I ask you something? How do you deal with like…?

CHASE

What?

FEVER

So I got my x-rays back. And I hurt myself like four months ago, right?

CHASE

Okay.

FEVER

And now I've got – so my bone got infected and then I had to have a second surgery and then a third surgery – this was in Omaha – and then they brought somebody else in and anyway – so now I've got something called a malformed bone? Like my femur didn't heal right? So basically that means I'm going to have permanent damage to my leg – after it heals wrong it's almost impossible to make it heal right.

CHASE

So what does that mean for you?

FEVER

They told me that I was going to always be dealing with pain in some way, and that I would probably have a permanent limp. And that usually people who have this sort of thing end up using a cane, or a walker of some kind… or those little hover-round things. So I guess I'm just wondering – you seem really upbeat/ about the whole –

CHASE

I seem upbeat?

FEVER

Well, you know what I mean. Like – how do you – deal with it?

CHASE

First of all, your "it" and my "it" are not in the same universe.

FEVER

I know that but –

CHASE

And then, like, what else are you gonna do?

FEVER

I mean I keep thinking – and this is stupid I know – but I'm never going to be able to play soccer again and I was on varsity for three years –

CHASE

Who cares?

FEVER

But that was a big part of my life, you know? That probably doesn't mean much to you, but, for me – it's a huge deal, like – all my friends play soccer and all my friends –

CHASE

So they're going to hate you now cause you don't play soccer?

FEVER

That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying I'm seventeen and I'm never going to play soccer again. I'm never going to be able to ride a bike, I'm never going to be able to run a marathon –

CHASE

None of that stuff sounds fun to me –

FEVER

Why are you being like this?

CHASE

Like what?

FEVER

Why are you being a jerk?

CHASE

I'm not being a jerk –

FEVER

Yes you are. Just because something bad happened to you doesn't mean that you can't have any empathy for anyone –

CHASE

You have a limp. I'm in a wheelchair the rest of my life –

FEVER

I know. Okay? I know you have it worse than me – a lot worse, but that doesn't mean that –

CHASE

Fine. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Go on.

FEVER

I'm just – this sucks. I was in Starbucks the other day and I'm sitting there looking out the window, and all these people are walking by – like everyone is walking by – just like nothing – and I kept thinking that I couldn't do that, you know? Like – I can't walk down the street. I'm never going to really be able to walk down the street again. I'm not going to be able to do what I want – and all of a sudden it just felt like a boulder had fallen on me and a million doors just slammed in my face. And then I thought about the grocery store.

CHASE

They have those little scooters there –

FEVER

I know! I know! And I hate the scooters. I'm going to hate being in the scooter, like I'm some kind of pathetic half-robot that has to beep every time I back up, and I'm going to run over some toddler –

CHASE

You're not going to run over a toddler on accident. On purpose maybe.

FEVER

Okay and then this is… this is really stupid …

CHASE

What?

FEVER

It's stupid.

CHASE

What is?

FEVER

It's one of things where you've got it a million times worse so I should just stop whining –

CHASE

What were you gonna say?

FEVER

I was going to say that – how'm I going to fall in love if I'm not… whole?

CHASE

Are you saying that being able to walk around a grocery store is a prerequisite to falling in love?

FEVER

I told you it was stupid.

CHASE

Cause I've seen a lot of people on those carts with like nine hundred children and it doesn't seem to be slowing them down any –

FEVER

You know what I'm saying?

CHASE

No, cause what you're saying is stupid.

FEVER

It's the way I feel. If I'm always just like shuffling around like the walking dead, then why would a guy go for me when he could go for a girl who can actually walk?

CHASE

Do you realize how dumb that sounds?

FEVER

Yes.

CHASE

You've still got boobs.

FEVER

Shut up.

CHASE

No I'm serious – guys don't care if you can walk quickly – oh no she's got a limp –

FEVER

But guys are superficial.

CHASE

But, as a bonus, we have really low standards. No – come on – this is not going to – are you kidding me you're thinking about this?

FEVER

I told you it was dumb. But it's just – that's what I'm thinking –

CHASE

Oh no I'm going to be fractionally slower than I was before! Now my life is in ruins!

FEVER

Fine. Whatever. Obviously I don't have any problems.

(She goes back to working on her rehab.)

(CHASE watches her.)

CHASE

Sorry.

FEVER

It's all right.

CHASE

I don't mean to diminish/ what you're –

FEVER

I know.

CHASE

I'm sure you'll probably get better.

FEVER

Well I'll be out of this brace anyway.

CHASE

Yeah. Yeah so that's good.

FEVER

Yeah.

(Pause.)

CHASE

I don't deal with it, by the way. I don't.

(CHASE goes back to the bed.)

(Lights change.)

(Scene three.)

(No one is onstage.)

CHASE *(off-stage from the right)*

You ready?

FEVER *(off-stage, from the left)*

Come at me, bro!

CHASE *(off-stage)*

One. Two. Three!

(CHASE and FEVER, both in wheelchairs, wheel in as fast as they can, holding crutches like lances.)

(They charge.)

FEVER

Don't hit my leg!

(They hit each other. FEVER takes the worst of it.)

Ow!

CHASE *(arms raised in triumph)*

Victory is mine!

FEVER

Am I thrown from my horse? No.

CHASE

Oh you want more. I see.

(CHASE turns and chases her in his chair. FEVER tries to wheel away from him, but she's awkward and slow.)

FEVER

Ah!

(She jumps up from the chair as CHASE attacks. She stands awkwardly, puts too much weight on her bad leg, and falls over.)

Arg! Dang it! Ow. Owwww.

CHASE

I win!

(FEVER is still on the ground.)

Did you hurt your leg?

FEVER

Yeah I broke it in like a million pieces. Oh you meant just now. It's hard to tell with the agonizing constant pain I'm in.

(CHASE gets out of his wheelchair and crawls towards her.)

What are you doing?

CHASE

I'm empathizing.

(He lays on the ground next to her, head-to-head.

FEVER

You know Dr. Anna is going to come in here and she's gonna be like, they're both dead.

CHASE

It will make her day more interesting.

FEVER

That's nice.

CHASE

I'm always thinking of others.

(He lays next to her.)

Okay so here's something I was thinking. Death, right?

FEVER

Yes.

CHASE

How close were you to death?

FEVER

Like on a scale of one to ten, ten being almost certain –

CHASE

Yeah.

Skipping Forward

CHASE
Huh. I guess that makes sense. I think I would prefer to be in the wuss section.

FEVER
Any other questions about the afterlife you want me to answer?

CHASE
You figure I'll be able to walk?

FEVER
Probably.

CHASE
Just probably?

FEVER
If you've learned your lesson.

CHASE
What do you think my lesson is?

FEVER
What do *you* think your lesson is?

CHASE
Maybe there's no lesson.

FEVER
Don't fall asleep while driving might be a good one.

CHASE
Yeah… Now I know. Thank you life-altering injury.

FEVER
You're insane.

CHASE
Yes.
(CHASE reaches back and messes with FEVER's face.)

FEVER
Ah!

CHASE *(joking)*
So beautiful.

(FEVER starts stroking his face.)

FEVER

What's going on here? What is this? These are problem areas.

CHASE

Hey – I've fallen, and I can't get up.

(Dr. ANNA enters.)

DR. ANNA

Sorry about that, I was –

(she stops and spots them on the floor.)

CHASE

Hello.

FEVER

I've fallen.

CHASE

Me too.

(Lights change.)

(Scene 4.)

(FEVER is attempting to walk with the help of the bars. DR. ANNA is helping.)

(CHASE is nearby.)

CHASE

Yeah that's right! Get it, Girl! Get it!

(FEVER is laughing and trying to keep it together.)

You show that leg who's boss! Who's boss? Who is in charge!? Say it!

FEVER

I am in charge!

CHASE

I got the fever!

FEVER

Shut up.

CHASE

I got the fever for more leg exercises! Yes! One and two and three and four – work it! Work it! Worrrrrrrk itttttt! That's right, baby! Now I'm feelin' you!

DR. ANNA

Chase?

CHASE

What? Well you're not saying anything. I'm offering moral encouragement. Maybe I could be a personal trainer.

DR. ANNA

Although I appreciate your efforts, at this point it's important not to overtax the muscles. Okay?

CHASE

Got it.

DR. ANNA *(to FEVER)*

Okay. Can you try that again?

FEVER

All right.

CHASE

Excuse me – I have a question. When can she return to shaking it?

FEVER

I'm not shaking it.

CHASE

Shake it!

FEVER

No!

CHASE

Shaaaaake ittt!

FEVER

You shake it!

CHASE

I thought you'd never ask.

(CHASE starts "shaking it" with his wheelchair.)

Oh here we go. Now we're going. You gonna learn something. Watch this.

(He breaks it down with a wheelie, nearly falls out of his chair.)

Whoah. Hey can you imagine a rapper in a wheelchair? Like he comes out for his concert and he's like ` uh huh, yeah, uh yeah, I am the greatest' and then just pops wheelies?

FEVER

Not a lot of rappers in wheelchairs.

CHASE

Is it sad that my role models are now limited to like middle-aged guys playing wheelchair basketball? Is this what I'm supposed to aspire to now?

DR. ANNA

Stephen Hawking is in a wheelchair.

CHASE

That's not the same thing.

FEVER

That guy from Family Guy.

CHASE

Seriously?

FEVER

Um… FDR.

DR. ANNA

Christopher Reeve.

CHASE

This is not really helping me.

FEVER

I don't know – become one.

CHASE

Also – not a lot of rappers with catheters. Kind of punctures the image. Cause I got my pee coming out of a tube better watch yourself son cause I fill up the room –
(he makes a catheter gang sign)

FEVER

That's like highly disturbing.

DR. ANNA

Chase?

CHASE

Do I have to go back in the box now?

DR. ANNA

Maybe it's time for less enthusiasm.

(Lights change.)

(Scene 5.)

(CHASE is on the bed, barefoot. DR. ANNA is helping him.)

CHASE

Could you do the Rocky theme song while we do this?

DR. ANNA

I don't think I know it.

CHASE

Do we have it on the iPad or something?

DR. ANNA

Uh… well…

CHASE

Cause if I'm going to get dressed I need to have theme music.

DR. ANNA

Why don't you just give it a shot?

CHASE

I'll hum then.

(He begins humming the Rocky Theme Song, "Gonna Fly Now".)

Dun de dun da-dun dun de dun
Dun de dun da-dun dun de dun
DA-DUN!
Dun da Dun
Dun da Dun
Dun da Dun

(While doing this, CHASE is attempting to put his socks on. It's very difficult. His foot won't stay still as he tries to fit a sock over his toes.)

DR. ANNA

Try putting your foot on your knee. Can you do that?

(CHASE puts his right foot on his left knee.)

CHASE

This would work better if you were humming along. Come on.

DR. ANNA

If you wrap your arm around your leg it will make it easier.

CHASE

Okay then.

(He gets the sock on.)

And the other foot.

(FEVER enters. Her brace is off and she is now using a walker.)

FEVER

Hello.

DR. ANNA

Oh hi there. Can you give us a minute?

CHASE

Actually, I work better with an audience. Fee do you know the Rocky theme song?

FEVER

What?

CHASE

If you could sing while I put on my shoes that would be awesome.

FEVER

Um… okay. Sorry I'm late by the way my Dad forgot to get me –

DR. ANNA

That's all right.

FEVER *(singing)*

It's the Eye of the Tiger it's the thrill of the chase
Dun na nun, dun –

CHASE

That's Rocky Four.

FEVER

No it's not.

DR. ANNA

Is your Dad still out there?

FEVER

Yeah, he's in the lobby –

DR. ANNA

Skipping Forward

CHASE

I'm just saying that you're worried about being awkward at a dance and I'm trying to figure out how to dress myself.

(He's not having any luck with his shoe.)

Dang it. Come on.

(He shoves his leg roughly away from him and tosses down his shoe.)

FEVER

You all right?

CHASE

No I'm in a wheelchair if you haven't noticed.

FEVER

All right. Sorry I asked.

(CHASE looks at his shoe on the floor.)

CHASE

I don't really understand the point of me putting shoes on anyway. Like – are these going to be useful or something? It's not like I'm going to be putting my feet on the ground.

FEVER

It's to keep them from getting scraped up, right?

CHASE

Oh thanks. Thank you're an expert I guess.

(CHASE starts getting out of his chair to go after his shoe.)

You know what sucks? Not as in –I didn't get asked to the prom sucks – but I mean, actual, truthful sucking. I've seen a couple of guys in here who've come from Afghanistan – and they'd had – you know they've been hit with IEDs or whatever – they get all torn up and they get amputated – they're like heroes, you know? They come home – there's a parade down the street, somebody puts them in a commercial… for the rest of their lives they got people standing up and saying thanks for your service. Whatever.

(He gets a hold of his shoe but stays there.)

It's so stupid to say it. I'm jealous… I'm jealous of guys who got a cooler story of how they got in a wheelchair – cause I've got – I've got no reason except dumb luck. Except bad luck – I mean I guess the luck I had was that I didn't die – and now I've got… you know I've got half of me that's never going to work again, I'm going to be lugging these useless things around for the rest of my life – if I had gotten blown up, if I had gotten amputated, then I'd get the artificial legs, I'd walk again – give me those Oscar Pistorious blades and I'd be like something out of the future and – instead I got this. Like I'm trailing dead snakes wherever I go.

You know I pretty much wet the bed every night?

FEVER

Chase.

CHASE

I'm learning to put on my clothes and I wet the damn bed every night. And I can't feel it, you know – I can't even feel it – I'm lying there in this mess and I don't even know – like I'm some kind of infant that can't – people don't look at me anymore, you know? They don't look at me. They look past me, or they crouch down next to me like I'm some kind of toddler or they look at my legs or the chair or –

FEVER

It's gonna be okay.

(She approaches and helps him with his shoe. He lets her.)

CHASE

Did you just say that? It's gonna be okay? No it's not –

FEVER

All right –

CHASE

This is me for the next sixty years. I've got sixty years of this.

FEVER

Okay.

CHASE

Okay? That's what you say? Okay?

FEVER

What do you want me to say?

CHASE

There's nothing you can say.

FEVER

Then don't ask me!

CHASE

I didn't ask you to say anything, all right?

FEVER

You just want me to stand here and feel sorry/ for you?

CHASE

I don't want you to feel sorry for me! I don't want anyone to feel sorry for me!

FEVER

Then stop acting like it! You think you're the only one whose life has been damaged?

CHASE

Damaged? My life has been *damaged*?

FEVER

I had a soccer scholarship –

CHASE

Oh my God no way.

FEVER

Screw you.

CHASE

No please tell me how you're going to have difficulty playing soccer now. Please I really want to hear that. Please go on and on about how it's going to be so *difficult* for you to meet the man of your dreams at the Prom, and how almost impossible it's going to be for you to dance at your wedding, and how you're going to be so inconvenienced by all this!

End of Excerpt.
To purchase this play, visit www.concordtheatricals.com