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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

# PROOF

by David Auburn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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## PROOF

*PROOF* premiered at Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) in New York City on May 23, 2000. It was directed by Daniel Sullivan; the set design was by John Lee Beatty; the lighting design was by Pat Collins; the original music and sound design were by John Gromada; the costume design was by Jess Goldstein; and the production stage manager was James Harker. The cast was as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| **ROBERT** | Larry Bryggman |
| **CATHERINE** | Mary-Louise Parker |
| **HAL** | Ben Shenkman |
| **CLAIRE** | Johanna Day |

*PROOF* was subsequently produced on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre by Manhattan Theatre Club, Roger Berlind, Carole Shorenstein Hays, Jujamcyn Theatres, Ostar Enterprises, Daryl Roth and Stuart Thompson on October 24, 2000. It was directed by Daniel Sullivan; the set design was by John Lee Beatty; the lighting design was by Pat Collins; the original music and sound design were by John Gromada; the costume design was by Jess Goldstein; and the production stage manager was James Harker. The cast was as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*For the Manhattan Theatre Club and Broadway productions, I wrote the following material for Catherine to speak during the final fade out, directly following her "Here:"*

**CATHERINE** I've got Eberhart's Conjecture setting up this section, $qn$ as the nth prime, all that stuff, $b$'s a positive not divisible by $p$... You know it. Pretty basic number theory. It just seems wrong to be using it to get to the Gauss. I'd like to go around, but when you eliminate it you get contradictions, or everything goes to zero. Unless...

## CHARACTERS

**ROBERT** – 50s
**CATHERINE** – 25
**CLAIRE** – 29
**HAL** – 28

## SETTING

The back porch of a house in Chicago.

# ACT I

## Scene One

*Night.* **CATHERINE** *sits in a chair. She is twenty-five, exhausted, haphazardly dressed. Eyes closed.* **ROBERT** *is standing behind her. He is* **CATHERINE***'s father. Rumpled academic look.* **CATHERINE** *does not know he is there. After a moment:*

**ROBERT** Can't sleep?

**CATHERINE** Jesus, you scared me.

**ROBERT** Sorry.

**CATHERINE** What are you doing here?

**ROBERT** I thought I'd check up on you. Why aren't you in bed?

**CATHERINE** Your student is still here. He's up in your study.

**ROBERT** He can let himself out.

**CATHERINE** I might as well wait up till he's done.

**ROBERT** He's not my student anymore. He's teaching now. Bright kid. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** What time is it?

**ROBERT** It's almost one.

**CATHERINE** Huh.

**ROBERT** After midnight...

**CATHERINE** So?

**ROBERT** So: *(He indicates something on the table behind him: a bottle of champagne)* happy birthday.

**CATHERINE** Dad.

**ROBERT** Do I ever forget?

**CATHERINE** Thank you.

**ROBERT** Twenty-five. I can't believe it.

**CATHERINE** Neither can I. Should we have it now?

**ROBERT** It's up to you.

**CATHERINE** Yes.

**ROBERT** You want me to open it?

**CATHERINE** Let me. Last time you opened a bottle of champagne out here you broke a window.

**ROBERT** That was a long time ago. I resent your bringing it up.

**CATHERINE** You're lucky you didn't lose an eye. *(She opens the bottle.)*

**ROBERT** Twenty-five!

**CATHERINE** I feel old.

**ROBERT** You're a kid.

**CATHERINE** Glasses?

**ROBERT** Goddamn it, I forgot the glasses. Do you want me to—

**CATHERINE** Nah. *(She drinks from the bottle. A long pull.* **ROBERT** *watches her.)*

**ROBERT** I hope you like it. I wasn't sure what to get you.

**CATHERINE** This is the worst champagne I have ever tasted.

**ROBERT** I am proud to say I don't know anything about wines. I hate those kind of people who are always talking about "vintages".

**CATHERINE** It's not even champagne.

**ROBERT** The bottle was the right shape.

**CATHERINE** "Great Lakes Vineyards." I didn't know they made wine in Wisconsin.

**ROBERT** A girl who's drinking from the bottle shouldn't complain. Don't guzzle it. It's an elegant beverage. Sip.

**CATHERINE** *(offering the bottle)* Do you—

**ROBERT** No, go ahead.

**CATHERINE** You sure?

**ROBERT** Yeah. It's your birthday.

**CATHERINE** Happy birthday to me.

**ROBERT** What are you going to do on your birthday?

**CATHERINE** Drink this. Have some.

**ROBERT** No. I hope you're not spending your birthday alone.

**CATHERINE** I'm not alone.

**ROBERT** I don't count.

**CATHERINE** Why not?

**ROBERT** I'm your old man. Go out with some friends.

**CATHERINE** Right.

**ROBERT** Your friends aren't taking you out?

**CATHERINE** No.

**ROBERT** Why not?

**CATHERINE** Because in order for your friends to take you out you generally have to have friends.

**ROBERT** *(dismissive)* Oh—

**CATHERINE** It's funny how that works.

**ROBERT** You have friends. What about that cute blonde, what was her name?

**CATHERINE** What?

**ROBERT** She lives over on Ellis Avenue – you used to spend every minute together.

**CATHERINE** Cindy Jacobsen?

**ROBERT** Cindy Jacobsen!

**CATHERINE** That was in third grade, Dad. Her family moved to Florida in 1983.

**ROBERT** What about Claire?

**CATHERINE** She's not my friend, she's my sister. And she's in New York. And I don't like her.

**ROBERT** I thought she was coming in.

**CATHERINE** Not till tomorrow. *(beat)*

**ROBERT** My advice, if you find yourself awake late at night, is to sit down and do some mathematics.

**CATHERINE** Oh please.

**ROBERT** We could do some together.

**CATHERINE** No.

**ROBERT** Why not?

**CATHERINE** I can't think of anything worse. You sure you don't want any?

**ROBERT** Yeah, thanks.

You used to love it.

**CATHERINE** Not anymore.

**ROBERT** You knew what a prime number was before you could read.

**CATHERINE** Well now I've forgotten.

**ROBERT** *(hard)* Don't waste your talent, Catherine. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** I knew you'd say something like that.

**ROBERT** I realise you've had a difficult time.

**CATHERINE** Thanks.

**ROBERT** That's not an excuse. Don't be lazy.

**CATHERINE** I haven't been lazy, I've been taking care of you.

**ROBERT** Kid, I've seen you. You sleep till noon, you eat junk, you don't work, the dishes pile up in the sink. If you go out it's to buy magazines. You come back with a stack of magazines this high – I don't know how you read that crap. And those are the good days. Some days you don't get up, you don't get out of bed.

**CATHERINE** Those are the good days.

**ROBERT** Bullshit. Those days are lost. You threw them away. And you'll never know what else you threw away with them – the work you lost, the ideas you didn't have, discoveries you never made because you were moping in your bed at four in the afternoon. *(beat)* You know I'm right. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** I've lost a few days.

**ROBERT** How many?

**CATHERINE** Oh, I don't know.

**ROBERT** I bet you do.

**CATHERINE** What?

**ROBERT** I bet you count.

**CATHERINE** Knock it off.

**ROBERT** Well do you know or don't you?

**CATHERINE** I don't.

**ROBERT** Of course you do. How many days have you lost?

**CATHERINE** A month. Around a month.

**ROBERT** Exactly.

**CATHERINE** Goddamn it, I don't—

**ROBERT** HOW MANY?

**CATHERINE** Thirty-three days.

**ROBERT** Exactly?

**CATHERINE** I don't know.

**ROBERT** Be precise, for Chrissake.

**CATHERINE** I slept till noon today.

**ROBERT** Call it thirty-three and a quarter days.

**CATHERINE** Yes, all right.

**ROBERT** You're kidding!

**CATHERINE** No.

**ROBERT** Amazing number!

**CATHERINE** It's a depressing fucking number.

**ROBERT** Catherine, if every day you say you've lost were a year, it would be a very interesting fucking number.

**CATHERINE** Thirty-three and a quarter years is not interesting.

**ROBERT** Stop it. You know exactly what I mean.

**CATHERINE** *(conceding)* 1,729 weeks.

**ROBERT** 1,729. Great number. The smallest number expressible—

**CATHERINE** —expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways.

**ROBERT** Twelve cubed plus one cubed equals 1,729.

**CATHERINE** And ten cubed plus nine cubed. Yes, we've got it, thank you.

**ROBERT** You see? Even your depression is mathematical. Stop moping and get to work. The kind of potential you have—

**CATHERINE** I haven't done anything good.

**ROBERT** You're young. You've got time.

**CATHERINE** I do?

**ROBERT** Yes.

**CATHERINE** By the time you were my age you were famous.

**ROBERT** By the time I was your age I'd already done my best work. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** What about after?

**ROBERT** After what?

**CATHERINE** After you got sick.

**ROBERT** What about it?

**CATHERINE** You couldn't work then.

**ROBERT** No, if anything I was sharper.

**CATHERINE** *(she can't help it; she laughs)* Dad.

**ROBERT** I was. Hey, it's true. The clarity – that was the amazing thing. No doubts.

**CATHERINE** You were happy?

**ROBERT** Yeah, I was busy.

**CATHERINE** Not the same thing.

**ROBERT** I don't see the difference. I knew what I wanted to do and I did it.

If I wanted to work a problem all day long, I did it.

If I wanted to look for information – secrets, complex and tantalizing messages – I could find them all around me: in the air. In a pile of fallen leaves some neighbour raked together. In box scores in the paper, written in the steam coming up off a cup of coffee. The whole world was talking to me.

If I just wanted to close my eyes, sit quietly on the porch and listen for the messages, I did that.

It was wonderful. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** How old were you? When it started.

**ROBERT** Mid-twenties. Twenty-three, four. *(beat)*

Is that what you're worried about?

**CATHERINE** I've thought about it.

**ROBERT** Just getting a year older means nothing, Catherine.

**CATHERINE** It's not just getting older.

**ROBERT** It's me. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** I've thought about it.

**ROBERT** Really?

**CATHERINE** How could I not?

**ROBERT** Well if that's why you're worried you're not keeping up with the medical literature. There are all kinds of factors. It's not simply something you inherit. Just because I went bughouse doesn't mean you will.

**CATHERINE** Dad...

**ROBERT** Listen to me. Life changes fast in your early twenties and it shakes you up. You're feeling down. It's been a bad week. You've had a lousy couple years, no one knows that better than me. But you're gonna be okay.

**CATHERINE** Yeah?

**ROBERT** Yes. I promise you. Push yourself. Don't read so many magazines. Sit down and get the machinery going and I swear to God you'll feel fine. The simple fact that we can talk about this together is a good sign.

**CATHERINE** A good sign?

**ROBERT** Yes!

**CATHERINE** How could it be a good sign?

**ROBERT** Because! Crazy people don't sit around wondering if they're nuts.

**CATHERINE** They don't?

**ROBERT** Of course not. They've got better things to do. Take it from me. A very good sign that you're crazy is an inability to ask the question, "Am I crazy?"

**CATHERINE** Even if the answer is yes?

**ROBERT** Crazy people don't ask. You see?

**CATHERINE** Yes.

**ROBERT** So if you're asking...

**CATHERINE** I'm not.

**ROBERT** But if you were, it would be a very good sign.

**CATHERINE** A good sign...

**ROBERT** A good sign that you're fine.

**CATHERINE** Right.

**ROBERT** You see? You've just gotta think these things through. Now come on, what do you say? Let's call it a night, you go up, get some sleep, and then in the morning you can—

**CATHERINE** Wait. No.

**ROBERT** What's the matter?

**CATHERINE** It doesn't work.

**ROBERT** Why not?

**CATHERINE** It doesn't make sense.

**ROBERT** Sure it does.

**CATHERINE** No.

**ROBERT** Where's the problem?

**CATHERINE** The problem is you are crazy!

**ROBERT** What difference does that make?

**CATHERINE** You admitted – you just told me that you are.

**ROBERT** So?

**CATHERINE** You said a crazy person would never admit that.

**ROBERT** Yeah, but it's...oh. I see.

**CATHERINE** So?

**ROBERT** It's a point.

**CATHERINE** So how can you admit it?

**ROBERT** Well. Because I'm also dead. *(beat)* Aren't I?

**CATHERINE** You died a week ago.

**ROBERT** Heart failure. Quick. The funeral's tomorrow.

**CATHERINE** That's why Claire's flying in from New York.

**ROBERT** Yes.

**CATHERINE** You're sitting here. You're giving me advice. You brought me champagne.

**ROBERT** Yes. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** Which means...

**ROBERT** For you?

**CATHERINE** Yes.

**ROBERT** For you, Catherine, my daughter, who I love very much... It could be a bad sign.

*They sit together for a moment. Noise off.* **HAL** *enters, twenty-eight, semi-hip clothes. He carries a backpack and a jacket, folded. He lets the door go and it bangs shut.* **CATHERINE** *sits up with a jolt.*

**CATHERINE** What?

**HAL** Oh, God, sorry – did I wake you?

**CATHERINE** What?

**HAL** Were you asleep? *(beat)*

**ROBERT** *is gone.*

**CATHERINE** You scared me, for Chrissake. What are you doing?

**HAL** I'm sorry. I didn't realise it had gotten so late. I'm done for the night.

**CATHERINE** Good.

**HAL** Drinking alone?

*She realises she is holding the champagne bottle. She puts it down quickly.*

**CATHERINE** Yes.

**HAL** Champagne, huh?

**CATHERINE** Yes.

**HAL** Celebrating?

**CATHERINE** No. I just like champagne.

**HAL** It's festive.

**CATHERINE** What?

**HAL** Festive. *(He makes an awkward "party" gesture.)*

**CATHERINE** Do you want some?

**HAL** Sure.

**CATHERINE** *(gives him the bottle)* I'm done. You can take the rest with you.

**HAL** Oh. No thanks.

**CATHERINE** Take it, I'm done.

**HAL** No, I shouldn't. I'm driving. *(beat)*

Well. I can let myself out.

**CATHERINE** Good.

**HAL** When should I come back?

**CATHERINE** Come back?

**HAL** Yeah. I'm nowhere near finished. Maybe tomorrow?

**CATHERINE** We have a funeral tomorrow.

**HAL** God, you're right, I'm sorry. I was going to attend, if that's all right.

**CATHERINE** Yes.

**HAL** What about Sunday? Will you be around?

**CATHERINE** You've had three days.

**HAL** I'd love to get in some more time up there.

**CATHERINE** How much longer do you need?

**HAL** Another week. At least.

**CATHERINE** Are you joking?

**HAL** No. Do you know how much stuff there is?

**CATHERINE** A week?

**HAL** I know you don't need anybody in your hair right now. Look, I spent the last couple days getting everything sorted out. It's mostly notebooks. He dated them all; now that I've got them in order I don't have to work here. I could take some stuff home, read it, bring it back.

**CATHERINE** No.

**HAL** I'll be careful.

**CATHERINE** My father wouldn't want anything moved and I don't want anything to leave this house.

**HAL** Then I should work here. I'll stay out of the way.

**CATHERINE** You're wasting your time.

**HAL** Someone needs to go through your dad's papers.

**CATHERINE** There's nothing up there. It's garbage.

**HAL** There are a hundred and three notebooks.

**CATHERINE** I've looked at those. It's gibberish.

**HAL** Someone should read them.

**CATHERINE** He was crazy.

**HAL** Yes, but he wrote them.

**CATHERINE** He was a graphomaniac, Harold. Do you know what that is?

**HAL** I know. He wrote compulsively. Call me Hal.

**CATHERINE** There's no connection between the ideas. There's no ideas. It's like a monkey at a typewriter. One hundred and three notebooks full of bullshit.

**HAL** Let's make sure they're bullshit.

**CATHERINE** I'm sure.

**HAL** I'm prepared to look at every page. Are you?

**CATHERINE** No. I'M not crazy. *(beat)*

**HAL** Well, I'm gonna be late... Some friends of mine are in this band. They're playing at a bar up on Diversey. Way down the bill, they're probably going on around two, two-thirty. I said I'd be there.

**CATHERINE** Great.

**HAL** They're all in the math department. They're really good. They have this great song, you'd like it, called "i" – lowercase I. They just stand there and don't play anything for three minutes.

**CATHERINE** "Imaginary Number."

**HAL** It's a math joke.

You see why they're way down the bill.

**CATHERINE** Long drive to see some nerds in a band.

**HAL** God I hate when people say that. It is not that long a drive.

**CATHERINE** So they are nerds.

**HAL** Oh they're raging geeks. But they're geeks who, you know, can dress themselves...hold down a job at a major university... Some of them have switched from glasses to contacts. They play sports, they play in a band, they get laid surprisingly often, so in that sense they sort of make you question the

whole set of terms – geek, nerd, wonk, dweeb, Dilbert, paste-eater.

**CATHERINE** You're in this band, aren't you?

**HAL** Okay yes. I play drums. You want to come? I never sing, I swear to God.

**CATHERINE** No thanks.

**HAL** All right. Look, Catherine, Monday: what do you say?

**CATHERINE** Don't you have a job?

**HAL** Yeah, I have a full teaching load this quarter plus my own work.

**CATHERINE** Plus band practice.

**HAL** I don't have time to do this but I'm going to. If you'll let me. *(beat)* I loved your dad.

I don't believe a mind like his can just shut down. He had lucid moments. He had a lucid year, a whole year four years ago.

**CATHERINE** It wasn't a year. It was more like nine months.

**HAL** A school year. He was advising students... I was stalled on my Ph.D. I was this close to quitting. I met with your dad and he put me on the right track with my research. I owe him.

**CATHERINE** Sorry.

**HAL** Look. Let me – you're twenty-five, right?

**CATHERINE** How old are you?

**HAL** It doesn't matter. Listen:

**CATHERINE** Fuck you, how old are you?

**HAL** I'm twenty-eight, all right? When your dad was younger than both of us he made major contributions to three fields: game theory, algebraic geometry, and nonlinear operator theory. Most of us never get our heads around one. He basically invented the mathematical techniques for studying rational

behavior, and he gave the astrophysicists plenty to work over too. Okay?

**CATHERINE** Don't lecture me.

**HAL** I'm not. I'm telling you if I came up with one-tenth of the shit your dad produced I could write my own ticket to any math department in the country. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** Give me your backpack.

**HAL** What?

**CATHERINE** Give me your backpack.

**HAL** Why?

**CATHERINE** I want to look inside it.

**HAL** What?

**CATHERINE** Open it and give it to me.

**HAL** Oh come on.

**CATHERINE** You're not taking anything out of this house.

**HAL** I wouldn't do that.

**CATHERINE** You're hoping to find something upstairs that you can publish.

**HAL** Sure.

**CATHERINE** Then you can write your own ticket.

**HAL** What? No! It would be under your dad's name. It would be for your dad.

**CATHERINE** I don't believe you. You have a notebook in that backpack.

**HAL** What are you talking about?

**CATHERINE** Give it to me.

**HAL** You're being a little bit paranoid.

**CATHERINE** PARANOID?

**HAL** Maybe a little.

**CATHERINE** Fuck you, HAL. I KNOW you have one of my notebooks.

**HAL** I think you should calm down and think about what you're saying.

**CATHERINE** I'm saying you're lying to me and stealing my family's property.

**HAL** And I think that sounds paranoid.

**CATHERINE** Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean there isn't something in that backpack.

**HAL** You just said yourself there's nothing up there. Didn't you?

**CATHERINE** I—

**HAL** Didn't you say that?

**CATHERINE** Yes.

**HAL** So what would I take?

Right? *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** You're right.

**HAL** Thank you.

**CATHERINE** So you don't need to come back.

**HAL** *(sighs)* Please. Someone should know for sure whether—

**CATHERINE** I LIVED WITH HIM.

I spent my life with him. I fed him. Talked to him. Tried to listen when he talked. Talked to people who weren't there... Watched him shuffling around like a ghost. A very smelly ghost. He was filthy. I had to make sure he bathed. My own father.

**HAL** I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...

**CATHERINE** After my mother died it was just me here. I tried to keep him happy no matter what idiotic project he was doing. He used to read all day. He kept demanding more and

more books. I took them out of the library by the carload. We had hundreds upstairs. Then I realised he wasn't reading: he believed aliens were sending him messages through the dewey decimal numbers on the library books. He was trying to work out the code.

**HAL** What kind of messages?

**CATHERINE** Beautiful mathematics. Answers to everything. The most elegant proofs, perfect proofs, proofs like music.

**HAL** Sounds good.

**CATHERINE** Plus fashion tips, knock-knock jokes – I mean it was NUTS, okay?

**HAL** He was ill. It was a tragedy.

**CATHERINE** Later the writing phase: scribbling, nineteen, twenty hours a day... I ordered him a case of notebooks and he used every one.

I dropped out of school... I'm glad he's dead.

**HAL** I understand why you'd feel that way.

**CATHERINE** Fuck you.

**HAL** You're right. I can't imagine dealing with that. It must have been awful. I know you—

**CATHERINE** You don't know me. I want to be alone. I don't want him around.

**HAL** *(confused)* Him? I don't—

**CATHERINE** You. I don't want you here.

**HAL** Why?

**CATHERINE** He's dead.

**HAL** But I'm not—

**CATHERINE** HE's dead; I don't need any protégés around.

**HAL** There will be others.

**CATHERINE** What?

**HAL** You think I'm the only one? People are already working over his stuff. Someone's gonna read those notebooks.

**CATHERINE** I'll do it.

**HAL** No, you—

**CATHERINE** He's my father, I'll do it.

**HAL** You can't.

**CATHERINE** Why not?

**HAL** You don't have the math. It's all just squiggles on a page. You wouldn't know the good stuff from the junk.

**CATHERINE** It's all junk.

**HAL** If it's not we can't afford to miss any through carelessness.

**CATHERINE** I know mathematics.

**HAL** If there were anything up there it would be pretty high-order. It would take a professional to recognise it.

**CATHERINE** I think I could recognise it.

**HAL** *(patient)* Cathy...

**CATHERINE** WHAT?

**HAL** I know your dad taught you some basic stuff, but come on.

**CATHERINE** You don't think I could do it.

**HAL** I'm sorry: I know that you couldn't. *(beat)*

**CATHERINE** *angrily snatches his backpack.*

Hey! Oh come on. Give me a break.

*She opens the backpack and rifles through it.*

This isn't an airport.

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