

When former *Y&R* star **Justin Hartley** first read the script for his new show *This Is Us*, he knew it was right for him, he tells *TV SOAP*

THIS IS US
Wednesdays
at 8.30pm on
TEN

Heartbreak hero

“It makes out with your heart and then it hits you with a hammer,” says Justin Hartley of his show *This Is Us*’s emotional punch. And boy, does it tug at the heartstrings. Emotional, confronting, hopeful and real, the show can bring on tears, especially when it’s delivering tough life lessons and shock plot twists, which start right from episode one. The first twist is a doozy and even floored Hartley.

“I’m not gonna lie to you and say that I [saw it coming],” he explains. “To me I did not even a little bit see that coming and then when I read [the script] I had to put it down. I think I put it down and I think I got up and walked 10 steps away and walked back and re-read it because I did not see it coming at all.”

Fresh from *The Young and the Restless*, Hartley has found himself in one of America’s most talked about and popular new shows of last year, which is now finally airing in Australia. Created by Dan Fogelman, the writer of hit film *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, *This Is Us* is about a group of 36-year-olds who share the same birthday.

Hartley plays an actor named Kevin,

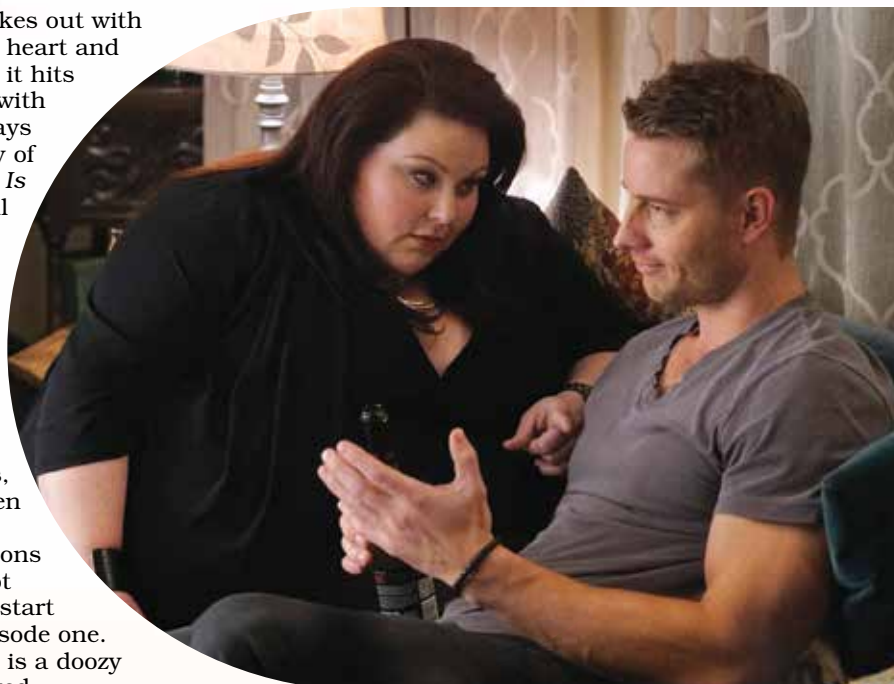
a role that almost seems tailor made for him. It’s a sentiment shared by one of Hartley’s friends who thought Fogelman and Hartley must have known each other, such was the likeness in the character.

“He sent me the script and I read it and I could understand what my friend was saying and when I read it I was like ‘I have to go in and audition for this,’” says Hartley. “I auditioned for it and I think it was just one of those things, for whatever reason I had a certain way of relating to this character that I think maybe they hadn’t seen.”

But it was more than relating to the character that had Hartley begging to be involved. “I thought, ▶

I thought, ‘This is one of the best things I ever read in my life.’

Words by Rachael Gavin



RED CARPET MOMENT
Hartley with his fiancée Chrishell Stause at the Golden Globes.



‘LETTING LOOSE’
Hartley in an epic scene on *This Is Us* with the late actor Alan Thicke and (above) with on-screen sister Kate (Chrissy Metz). The tantrum scene with Thicke was “some of the most fun I’ve ever had in my life”, says Hartley.





'This is one of the best things I ever read in my life.' I don't think I've ever read an episode of television that's this good and then when I saw it on the screen I was like, 'Oh my God, Dan didn't write it to be read, he wrote it to be seen.' It's even better on the screen, it's unbelievable.

"It was everything about it, from the first page I was like, 'This guy's got me like privately tearing up reading this stuff and at the same time laughing through the agony' ... It's this great tone that I don't think we have on TV right now."

In *This Is Us*, Kevin is starring in a sitcom but senses he is not being taken seriously as an actor. Combine that with turning 36, realising he's not where he wants to be at this stage of his life and with only his sister Kate (Chrissy Metz) to turn to and you have the makings of a touching, relatable drama. It all builds up to an epic on-set rant by Kevin during a guest appearance on the fictional sitcom from the late, great Alan Thicke. It goes viral and throws Kevin's career into turmoil but for Hartley it was a lot of fun to film.

"It was great until my voice went away," he smiles. "It was one of those things you hear of but you never really see it and then I actually got to do it. It was pretty cool and in

COOL RESUMÉ

(Above) Hartley (as Patrick) with Madeleine Stowe (Victoria), on *Revenge*. (This photo) As Adam Newman with Chelsea (Melissa Claire Egan) and son Connor on *The Young and the Restless*. "I love those people," he says of *Y&R*.



a way a little bit cathartic ... it was nice to be able to let loose and be able to act like that on a set and have people clap when you're done instead of fire you. Kind of a dream, it was weird, I had some of the most fun I've ever had in my life just being in a safe environment just being a complete a-hole."

However, joining *This Is Us* meant Hartley had to say farewell to starring in *The Young and the Restless*, as Adam Newman. The 40-year-old, who has also appeared in *Mistresses*, *Revenge* and *Passions*, says while it was tough to say goodbye it was time for a new chapter of life.

"I love those people over there and we had a good run and it's always hard to leave a place on good terms ... But I like to think I changed that character quite a bit and I wanted to evolve him and I feel like I did that and I'm glad I was able to do that. I'm glad I took that job. It was just time, you know. Once I read

this script I realised it was time to do this, so yeah, bittersweet."

And if you're still not enticed to watch *This Is Us*, Hartley has a message for you and promises there'll be plenty to keep you entertained and get you thinking. "First of all we have Milo's arse [Milo Ventimiglia who plays Jack is briefly naked in episode one] and then after that I would say in a distant second, we have real-life situations that happen to real-life people. Just situations that are tough and are hard but things that people are going through that you don't talk about at parties but that sit with you in your private moments.

"If you just said, 'I don't care about the message, I just want to be entertained', I'd be very confident in saying, 'Watch our show' and if you said, 'I won't be entertained unless I have a message', I would feel very confident in saying, 'Watch our show.' It really does have everything." **TVS**