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just another school shooting

by Gerald Arthur Moore

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Characters

SHANNON LANE: gothic punk rock girl

TERRI LYNNE MCCUSKER: cheerleader

DALIA LEVY: scholar

RYAN BROOKS: athlete

MR. JOHN CLAYDON: teacher

MRS. BECKWITH: vice principal of West Hamilton High School

RICHARD VEREHEY: student gunman

VICTORIA MONROE: journalist

Time/Setting

Scene One: VICTORIA MONROE's newsroom. MONROE interviews RYAN, TERRI LYNNE, and SHANNON. Eighteen months after the shooting.

Scene Two: Conference room. Chairs set in a half circle. SHANNON is standing stage left making a cup of coffee. RYAN is in a wheelchair. Six months after the shooting.

Scene Three: VICTORIA MONROE soliloquy. A spotlight on VICTORIA MONROE, a journalist who is covering the shooting. Minutes after the shooting.

Scene Four: A high school classroom in West Hamilton. There is a sign above the blackboard that says West Hamilton Warriors. RYAN is able to walk again. This class takes place before the shooting.

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Act One Scene One: 18 Months After the Shooting

[Scene opens to journalist VICTORIA MONROE sitting at a desk. This is an interview room. Enter RYAN BROOKS in a wheelchair. He knocks and is met by VICTORIA MONROE. TERRI LYNNE MCCUSKER arrives shortly after. VICTORIA MONROE is wearing a ladies scarf, a blazer, and a skirt. RYAN's wheelchair has the number thirty three painted on the back of his seat]

VICTORIA MONROE

[Stands] Hi Ryan, you're the first one here.

RYAN

Who else is coming?

VICTORIA MONROE

[Reading] Just Terri Lynne McCusker and Shannon Lane.

RYAN

No Dalia Levy?

VICTORIA MONROE

I'm afraid she can't make it back. She's in England studying at Oxford.

RYAN

I heard that. What a brainer.

[Enter TERRI LYNNE from stage right. She is wearing a t-shirt and designer blue jeans. TERRI LYNNE does not knock and skips into the room bubbling with energy. She is carrying a fashionable purse and wearing high heels]

VICTORIA MONROE

Hi Terri Lynne. Thanks for taking the time to meet with me.

[THEY shake hands]

TERRI LYNNE

Hi Ryan, it's good to see you.

RYAN

Hi there. Good to see you too. It's been a long time.

TERRI LYNNE

[*To VICTORIA MONROE*] I like your scarf.

VICTORIA MONROE

Thanks. My husband got it in Scotland.

TERRI LYNNE

It's so pretty.

VICTORIA MONROE

Here, try it on. [*TERRI LYNNE tries on the scarf*]

TERRI LYNNE

[*Imitating a TV journalist holding a microphone*] I'm Terri Lynne McCusker, CNN News. You must love being a newswoman. It's so glamorous.

VICTORIA MONROE

You're a natural.

TERRI LYNNE

Really?

VICTORIA MONROE

Really. This could be a good be a good start for you.

RYAN

So, ladies of journalism, what are we doing today?

VICTORIA MONROE

Well, what we're doing is simply recording your voices. We're not filming. We have stock footage that we will use, and your voices will be placed over images. So don't worry about how you look.

TERRI LYNNE

[*Disappointed*] Ohhh, I wore my new jeans just for this interview. They make my buns look tight.

RYAN

At least you have something that is tight. [*Amused*] Just tellin' the people the truth. [*Pause*] Were you recording, because I'm on a roll? That's wheelchair humor.

VICTORIA MONROE

Okay guys, let me –

TERRI LYNNE

Were you suggesting I'm a slut?

RYAN

Nooo, I was merely complimenting your tight buns. [*RYAN looks smugly at VICTORIA MONROE*]

TERRI LYNNE

Well, okay then.

RYAN

So, Miss Monroe, what sort of things are you gonna ask us?

VICTORIA MONROE

I want to know about you and Terri Lynne, and how everyone has been doing at West Hamilton since the shooting? Just let me get this [*Recorder and microphone*] set up and turned on before I ask you questions. [*MONROE fiddles with the recording equipment and then holds up the microphone. SHE provides RYAN and TERRI LYNNE with a microphone to share*] Okay, are you guys ready?

RYAN and TERRI LYNNE

Yes.

VICTORIA MONROE

[*Takes out her notepad and reads*] It has been two years since the shooting at West Hamilton High School that resulted in the death of a two graduating students Suzanne Conroy and Stephanie Guran, and their teacher William Claydon. Seven students were also wounded in a shooting spree that lasted several minutes. Two students who were in Mr. Claydon's room on December 6, 2007 are here with us today to discuss how they have been coping. [*Pause*] Ryan Brooks and Terri Lynne McCusker, welcome, it is good to see you. How have you been doing?

RYAN

Hi Miss Monroe, we've been, I've been [*Pause*] adapting, and still struggle some days.

VICTORIA MONROE

Ryan, you were struck by a bullet during the shooting, a bullet that was fired by a former student that had been in your class at the beginning of that school year. Will you tell us about that?

RYAN

Yes, I was shot by a 9mm semi-automatic handgun. The bullet tore through my spine and permanently paralyzed me, from the waist down. I'm a paraplegic.

VICTORIA MONROE

Ryan, you were shot in the back, how did that happen?

RYAN

At one point, when the boy with the gun was distracted by another student, we tried to run out of the room.

TERRI LYNNE

[Takes the microphone from RYAN] Ryan pushed me toward the door and used his own body to shield me.

VICTORIA MONROE

That was an incredible act of heroism.

RYAN

No, it most certainly was not heroism. I was scared, really scared, and was just trying to get us out of there.

VICTORIA MONROE

[To TERRI LYNNE] How does it feel to be here again with Ryan?

TERRI LYNNE

I'm just so thankful that he blessed my life. If he hadn't been there that day *[Pause]* I don't know. He saved me, and He *[Pointing upward]* saved me.

RYAN

They can't see your God reference, this is audio.

TERRI LYNNE

Hi everybody, I just pointed at Heaven.

RYAN

Always with the holy holy holy.

VICTORIA MONROE

Terri Lynne, would you consider yourself a religious person?

TERRI LYNNE

Yes, I am.

VICTORIA MONROE

How has your faith helped you through the shooting?

TERRI LYNNE

I wouldn't have made it through this without God. He has given me a sense of unity. I mean, if Richard Verehey –

RYAN

[*Angry*] Will you please stop recording for a minute. [*To TERRI LYNNE*] I thought we agreed!

VICTORIA MONROE

[*Ignores RYAN's request, holds the microphone out*] Agreed to what Ryan?

RYAN

Never to say his name.

TERRI LYNNE

Yes we did. I'm sorry.

VICTORIA MONROE

Terri Lynne, you were talking about your spiritual connection. I'd like to get into that. How can you still have faith?

TERRI LYNNE

Well, if a *madman* could do a bad thing then there must be an opposite spiritual thingy out there looking after us.

[Enter SHANNON LANE stage right. SHANNON is wearing a black leather jacket over a t-shirt that says "MY PARENTS THINK I'M IN REHAB". Her make-up is heavy with dark Egyptian eye mascara in the teenage Goth style and a short black skirt with fishnet stockings. SHANNON compliments her ensemble with tall leather boots]

SHANNON

I heard that Terri Lynne. Are you being a good evangelist?

RYAN

Shannon Lane, queen of the Goths!

SHANNON

Hi Wheels! How's the life of a go-bot?

RYAN

It sucks.

SHANNON

Turn to drink. It works for me.

RYAN

That's not what I heard.

SHANNON

Oh yeah, what did you hear?

RYAN

I heard that booze is not so good for the college GPA.

SHANNON

It's art school for fuck sakes.

[VICTORIA MONROE drops her microphone in exasperation]

RYAN

Is that your excuse?

SHANNON

What artist isn't a drunken junkie dropout? I'm just trying to fit in by dropping out. Maybe I'll cut off an ear or become a Jackson Pollock imitator, you know, throw paint from a stepladder. Hey, maybe I can precisely throw it from a perch on your wheelchair?

RYAN

No mistakes with falling paint. Like Pollock, deny the accident.

SHANNON

I've denied it from day one.

RYAN

Are we still talking about Jackson Pollock?

SHANNON

Maybe. *[SHANNON takes off her leather jacket and drapes it over the back of RYAN's wheelchair]* You need to get some hooks back here.

RYAN

Nice shirt.

SHANNON

Thanks. I made it with the furry iron-on letters.

RYAN

Would you make me one?

SHANNON

Yes I will Wheels? What do you want on it? How about, "I'd rather be walking."

RYAN

Yeah that's perfect. I've missed you.

SHANNON

I've missed you too.

TERRI LYNNE

So what happened at art school?

SHANNON

We parted ways. Artistic differences, I found my Yoko Ono.

TERRI LYNNE

Why? You were always such a good artist.

SHANNON

How would you know?

VICTORIA MONROE

Shannon, after the shooting you spent some time in addictions counseling.

SHANNON

[Coldly] Yes. I did.

VICTORIA MONROE

[Holding a microphone out] Has your addictions counseling been helpful?

SHANNON

It was great.

TERRI LYNNE

Why did you quit?

SHANNON

I was cured. *[Looking at TERRI LYNNE]* It's a Christmas miracle. Praise the glorious creator!

RYAN

Did your group say you were ready to leave?

SHANNON

My AA group?

RYAN

Are you ready, or should you still be in counseling?

SHANNON

I'm ready.

RYAN

Are you? [*Pause*] So what did you learn from the anonymous alcoholics?

SHANNON

How to smoke, for one. Everyone smokes there. They trade one vice for another.

RYAN

What vice did you trade for?

SHANNON

I traded alcohol for origami. I make paper pterodactyls. They're orgasmic.

RYAN

Why did you quit before you were ready?

SHANNON

No Wheels. I quit because I wasn't getting anywhere with their awesome origami therapy sessions. How did you know I quit?

RYAN

My letters got returned.

SHANNON

Oh Wheels, you wrote me letters! That's so sweet. [*SHE hugs HIM*] Thank you.

RYAN

Yeah, thank you. Where were you when I was going through [*Pause, then points at HIS wheelchair*] this?

SHANNON

I, I don't know, I never –

RYAN

Neither of you *friends* was there when I needed you.

TERRI LYNNE

We were all going through it. Not like you, but –

SHANNON

[*To VICTORIA MONROE*] We're going to have to do this another day.

VICTORIA MONROE

I really think your story could make a difference.

SHANNON

Well, that's too bad. We've got to talk privately. Would you loan us this room for a few minutes?

VICTORIA MONROE

Okay, I'm just going to leave you alone to talk. We can do this again some other day?

SHANNON

Okay. Too-da-loo. [*Hands the recording equipment to VICTORIA MONROE*]

VICTORIA MONROE

Shall we make a time now? Maybe next week?

SHANNON

Yeah, maybe next week? [*To RYAN*] I'll be in need of a parasite next week.

VICTORIA MONROE

Shannon, I'm not trying to pry into your lives, I'm trying –

SHANNON

Save it. I know what you're trying to do. I know what he's trying to say. I know that she's just trying to figure out the meanings of our sentences.

VICTORIA MONROE

Your story needs to be told. We have to bring attention to the wrong so that –

SHANNON

You are a headline whore. Don't try to make it into something it's not.

VICTORIA MONROE

Here guys, take my card. If you feel like calling, give me a call. I'll tell your story the way it should be told.

[*TERRI LYNNE takes the card and VICTORIA MONROE exits stage left*]

TERRI LYNNE

Why did you do that?

SHANNON

I just realized how much we were being taken advantage of.

RYAN

You were right to send her packing. Interesting that you got her to leave her own office.

SHANNON

Maybe Victoria Monroe can come visit you in your next trip to the crazy shack?

TERRI LYNNE

Was that a crack about my depression? I'm not ashamed. I needed to get help.

SHANNON

What did you have to be depressed about? You can walk right?

[VICTORIA MONROE enters stage left]

VICTORIA MONROE

Not to seem like I'm complaining, but I invited you here to get your story out to the world. I thought that you may want others to hear what you've gone through.

RYAN

We just can't talk to you about this. We're not ready. Maybe we never will be.

TERRI LYNNE

I think this could be a good opportunity to get our message out.

RYAN

We don't even know what *our* message is?

SHANNON

[To VICTORIA MONROE] We still have things to iron out between each other. Vicky, we can't speak to you now.

TERRI LYNNE

We can sort out the shooting for the world.

RYAN

We haven't even sorted it out ourselves.

VICTORIA MONROE

Isn't Richard Verehey the person that you should be focusing your anger –

SHANNON

[In anger] We don't say his name. *[Points directly in the face of VICTORIA MONROE]* Don't say it around us again.

VICTORIA MONROE

Okay, I'm sorry if this caused anything *[Pause]*, I hope you find peace. Call me when you're ready to talk. Take as long as you like.

[VICTORIA MONROE is met with silence. She exits stage left]

RYAN

It's just too early. I'm not ready to talk to anyone about this except for you guys, and Dalia.

SHANNON

Where is Dalia?

RYAN

She's at Oxford University.

SHANNON

No fuckin' way. Did her arm heal?

RYAN

No, she never got the use of her fingers. Not like she wanted anyway.

TERRI LYNNE

Oxford in Boston?

SHANNON

No wank-stick, that's Harvard. Oxford is in England. It's a small island country across the Ocean.

RYAN

She got a Rhodes scholarship.

TERRI LYNNE

I love Rocky Rhodes. It is the best ice cream –

SHANNON

[To RYAN] I can't believe you dated this idiot.

[TERRI LYNNE, offended, puts her hands on her hips and pouts]

RYAN

Well, we all knew that Dalia Levy was brilliant. Good to see it confirmed.

[*Long caesura*]

TERRI LYNNE

Ryan and I dated because we were perfect for each other...back then.

RYAN

So what happened? Why did all that come to end? [*Pause*] Why?

TERRI LYNNE

[*Pause*] Because, because we got attacked.

RYAN

So what! Why did you guys abandon me!

TERRI LYNNE

I know it must feel like that, but I wasn't abandoning you.

[*RYAN wheels downstage centre facing the audience. SHANNON and TERRI LYNNE are standing behind him*]

SHANNON

[*To RYAN*] So say what you need to say.

RYAN

I've already said everything I need to say to you. You're forgiven, more or less.

SHANNON

More or less? I can live with that. Thanks pal. [*Pause*] I'll leave you two *speds* to talk a while.

RYAN

But I haven't seen you in months.

SHANNON

I'll be at the café next door. Pop by when you're done. Give my regards to Vicky. I feel like we really bonded today.

RYAN

Okay. [*SHANNON turns to leave*] Hey! There's no café next door.

SHANNON

Right, then I'll be at the bar.

RYAN

We're under age.

SHANNON

So what? As if they're *not* going to serve you, wheelchair boy.

RYAN

I don't think it's a wheelchair accessible place.

SHANNON

[*Shaking her head but with an edge of sarcasm*] Not accessible to those with special needs, in this day and age? Well Wheels, roll over, tap on the window three times, and I'll come out. See you over there.

RYAN

You're not going to leave before I get there?

SHANNON

Nope, I'll wait. Take your time.

TERRI LYNNE

Yeah, see you later.

SHANNON

[*To TERRI LYNNE*] Be a good girl kiddo.

TERRI LYNNE

No snarky last remark?

SHANNON

Okay, sell those designer jeans and buy a third world village food for a year. See ya later.

[*SHANNON exits stage right*]

TERRI LYNNE

That girl is still a freak.

RYAN

Yeah, she sure is. The most original glorious freak I've ever met.

TERRI LYNNE

She hates my guts.

RYAN

I don't think so.

TERRI LYNNE

Really?

RYAN

Yeah, she wouldn't spend so much time torturing you if you didn't matter to her.

TERRI LYNNE

That's so warped.

RYAN

I think we'll all be joined forever.

TERRI LYNNE

You really think Shannon and I are friends, sort of?

RYAN

You sort of fall on different sides of the fence on practically every issue.

TERRI LYNNE

Like what? Having good fashion sense?

RYAN

Like loyalty.

TERRI LYNNE

Okay, say it.

RYAN

Why? Why did you leave me after the shooting?

TERRI LYNNE

I didn't leave you. I left me.

RYAN

[Escalating to rage] Do you hear yourself? That's such a lame excuse.

TERRI LYNNE

You're not listening –

RYAN

I'm listening! You're just not saying anything believable.

TERRI LYNNE

You need to listen to me –

RYAN

Yes I am. Just tell me the truth. Say it!

TERRI LYNNE

What do you want?

RYAN

I want you to say it!

TERRI LYNNE

Say what?

RYAN

Say it! Say it to me. Please, just one time say it!

TERRI LYNNE

[Begins to cry] I don't know what you want me to tell you.

RYAN

[Yelling] Tell me the truth!

TERRI LYNNE

I'm trying. Let me speak.

RYAN

Then speak. Speak! You haven't told me a thing. You never gave me that simple explanation, you never spoke. So go ahead.

TERRI LYNNE

When we, when you got shot, I, I didn't know what to do. I couldn't handle the whole situation. I didn't know how to live. I felt, so, so guilty. At first when you were in the hospital I couldn't visit. Everyone told me to go, but I couldn't see you. I couldn't face you. I mean, you saved my life and, and in saving me you lost so much. I'm so sorry *[Crying]* I'm so sorry Ryan. Please forgive me.

RYAN

I just need you to say it.

TERRI LYNNE

Say what? What do you want me to say? I said I was sorry.

RYAN

Say that you dumped me because my legs are dead.

TERRI LYNNE

What?

RYAN

Say that you dumped me because I'm crippled!

TERRI LYNNE

That's not true.

RYAN

It is so.

TERRI LYNNE

No Ryan, that's not it.

RYAN

Then what is it? I need you to finally explain it to me.

TERRI LYNNE

I couldn't see you because I felt guilt! And then I stayed away for so long that it was impossible to face you, to face what happened at West Hamilton. And then I got sick. I lost myself Ryan. But it was guilt, so much guilt.

RYAN

Guilt? For what?

TERRI LYNNE

For surviving. I wasn't even scratched. Dalia was shot, the other kids died, Mr. Claydon, even Shannon got messed up, and you [*Pause*] –

RYAN

Say it. You need to say it.

TERRI LYNNE

I can't.

RYAN

I need you to say it. Say it for me.

TERRI LYNNE

[*Crying*] I can't baby, please, I can't.

RYAN

Say what happened to me.

TERRI LYNNE

[*Sobbing heavily*] He took your legs. Oh God, why? I'm so sorry.

RYAN

I think he stole you away from me. I think, in some ways, he won.

TERRI LYNNE

I'm so sorry Ryan. I'm so sorry for being weak.

[Long pause, RYAN reaches for HER hand, they touch hands, then he pulls her close to him. He holds her as she weeps and she strokes his head affectionately]

RYAN

You don't need to apologize. You didn't do anything.

TERRI LYNNE

I'm sorry I wasn't there for you after the shooting. *[Sobbing]* Please forgive me.

RYAN

I forgive you. Now you need to forgive yourself. If you can't do that you'll never get past it. Forgive yourself. We were innocent. We were so innocent.

[BLACKOUT]

Act One Scene Two: 6 Months After the Shooting

[SHANNON is dressed in the teenage gothic style – wearing thick black eye makeup, fishnet stockings, black evening gloves, and a frayed denim skirt. Black is the dominating color of her wardrobe but her lipstick is vivid red. She opens a pill bottle and takes two pills out, puts them under her mouth. She takes out a silver flask and washes the pills down]

[Enter TERRI LYNNE. TERRI LYNNE is dressed in designer jeans and a deep pink t-shirt that says "Angel" across the front]

TERRI LYNNE

Hey.

SHANNON

Hey.

TERRI LYNNE

You're Shannon right?

SHANNON

I was in your class all semester.

TERRI LYNNE

I guess we didn't talk that much.

SHANNON

Yeah.

TERRI LYNNE

I'm Terri Lynne McCusker.

SHANNON

I know.

[Uncomfortable silence]

[SHANNON walks to a table and begins adding ingredients to a Styrofoam coffee cup. She uses a ridiculous amount of sugar. After the sixth heaping teaspoon TERRI LYNNE questions her]

TERRI LYNNE

How much sugar do you want in your coffee? I'm pretty sure that after five teaspoons it stops becoming coffee and has a metamorphosis to candy.

SHANNON

That's what I'm making, a candy coffee. And for candy coffee you need heaps of sugar. Otherwise, you miss the sugar high. But good use of metamorphosis, and in context, have you been doing some reading in the psych ward?

TERRI LYNNE

It wasn't the psych ward, little Miss Sugar Scoop, it was the Ontario Hospital. I went there because of what happened. I wasn't the only one either; lots of kids who go through stressful situations are there.

SHANNON

Relax Terri Lynne, I was just teasing you.

TERRI LYNNE

Teasing or mocking?

SHANNON

Well, maybe mocking. Don't get your pom-poms in a twist.

TERRI LYNNE

Now you're going to attack me for being a cheerleader? When is someone else going to get here for you to pick on? I don't feel like your rudeness today.

SHANNON

Our principal should be here soon. Besides, I haven't even started to pick on you cheerleader lady. Lighten up.

TERRI LYNNE

Cheerleaders are serious athletes who commit their time and energy to something important. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?

[Enter DALIA wearing glasses and carrying a book bag. One of her arms is in a cast]

DALIA

Shalom my gentile sisters. How have you been?

SHANNON AND TERRI LYNNE

Hi Dalia.

DALIA

Hi Terri Lynne, I haven't seen you around. Where have you been hiding?

SHANNON

She was in the psych ward.

TERRI LYNNE

[Sheepishly] I was at the Ontario Hospital. I had some troubles after the shooting.

DALIA

Completely understandable.

[DALIA gives Terri Lynne a hug. After hugging Terri Lynne she opens her arms as if to hug SHANNON. SHANNON turns away to avoid her]

SHANNON

[To Dalia] Forget it hippie girl. I'm not into your touchy feely lesbianism.

DALIA

Oh come on sourpuss, give me a hug. *[DALIA hugs SHANNON with her good arm. SHANNON does not hug her back. SHANNON's arms dangle at her side]*

SHANNON

Okay, okay, get off me lovechild. That's enough affection.

DALIA

[*Teasing*] You love me.

SHANNON

No I don't weirdo.

TERRI LYNNE

So how's the arm?

DALIA

There's nerve damage, I guess. I can't feel my fingertips [*Squeezing her fingertips*] or the edge of my karate chop. [*Tracing the distal edge of her hand*] So much for becoming a surgeon.

TERRI LYNNE

[*Earnestly*] That's terrible.

DALIA

Whatever, I can still do research or something. [*Pause*] I kept the bullet from the operation. Want to see it? [*DALIA takes the bullet from a tiny pouch that she wears around her neck on a leather string*]

SHANNON

Holy shit, yeah! That's so strange. [*Taking the bullet from DALIA and then holding it up to examine*] This is trippy, what did you do, ask for it?

DALIA

Yes I did. It's an interesting ballistic specimen; fully intact. Fortunately fully intact.

TERRI LYNNE

It's smooshed.

DALIA

Good observation.

SHANNON

Fuck a duck; this went through your body.

TERRI LYNNE

[*Annoyed*] Do you have to swear in every sentence?

SHANNON

[*Amused*] Fuck no. I don't have to fucking swear in every fucking fucked up fuck of sentence.

TERRI LYNNE

[Heavy exasperated breath] I'm sorry. I'll try to relax a little.

SHANNON

Fair enough. I'll try to limit the profanity to necessary swears. *[Holds out her hand. TERRI LYNNE and SHANNON shake hands]*

DALIA

Like fuck a duck?

SHANNON

Yes, exactly. Fuck a duck is a necessary swear.

TERRI LYNNE

Can I see the bullet?

SHANNON

Yes you *may*. *[SHANNON emphasizes TERRI LYNNE's grammatical error then hands TERRI LYNNE the bullet]*

TERRI LYNNE

Why is it shaped like this?

DALIA

Because of the slow velocity of the round. It smacked into my radius and ulna; these bones in my arm, *[Pointing]* mushroomed into this shape, and finally ended up just under the skin. I'm lucky it didn't shatter into a bunch of tiny pieces. They took it out when I was awake. In fact, to extract it, all they had to do was make a little incision and pinch the skin and it popped out. Isn't that cool!

SHANNON

Cool? It's freaky that you think so.

DALIA

May I have Chester back please? *[Holds her hand out for the bullet]*

SHANNON

Chester?

DALIA

Yes Chester. I named my bullet Chester. *[Takes the bullet from TERRI LYNNE]*

SHANNON

You named your bullet?

DALIA

Yep. *[DALIA pretends to pet the bullet]*

SHANNON

You're as crazy as a shithouse rat. *[Pause]* So why did you name it Chester?

DALIA

[Seriously] It took all the fear out of it, giving it a corny name I mean. It was... disarming.

SHANNON

[Smiles and shakes her head in understanding] Nice pun, Rapunzel.

[DALIA holds the bullet up to the light, examines it again, polishes it, then puts it back in her pocket]

TERRI LYNNE

Where's Ryan. I heard that he was coming.

DALIA

I'm not sure if he will be here or not. Since the shooting he's having enough trouble just learning how to use his wheelchair.

SHANNON

Do you want a coffee?

DALIA

Yes please. Hold your usual amount of sugar. I like mine black.

SHANNON

Will you be having Irish coffee? *[She takes out a silver flask and pours some into her cup]*

DALIA

No thanks. I'd like a virgin coffee.

TERRI LYNNE

What is that vodka?

SHANNON

No, that would make it a Russian coffee. This, my young preppy friend, is an Irish coffee; hence, whisky.

TERRI LYNNE

Aren't you afraid of getting caught?

SHANNON

Not really. I guess my give-a-fuck factor has been pretty low lately.

TERRI LYNNE

You could get the rest of us in trouble Sir Swears-a-lot.

SHANNON

Don't worry Terri Lynne, if I get busted you can act like you didn't know that I had anything in here.

[Enter MRS. BECKWITH from stage right. She is wearing a business blazer and skirt. The students immediately stop discussing SHANNON's whiskey. SHANNON pockets the flask and makes a threatening gesture towards TERRI LYNNE by drawing her finger across her own throat]

MRS. BECKWITH

Hello. I'm glad you guys came tonight.

SHANNON

[Sarcastically] Wouldn't miss it for the world; we've been counting the seconds.

MRS. BECKWITH:

Especially good to see you too Shannon Lane. So, let me get down to why we are here. *[Pause]* I've talked to your parents and we thought that it might be good to get together a few times before we go back to school, to talk about what happened, and to use each other for support. I know we've had individual challenges to overcome. We all lost friends in the shooting. John Claydon was a great teacher and he was my best friend. *[Pause]* I guess we're here to try to make some sense of what happened. We are also here to decide how we can best remember the students who were killed. *[Pause]*

TERRI LYNNE

I think the best thing we can do is raise money to build a memorial for the students who were killed.

SHANNON

[Coldly] Why do you think their memories should be preserved?

TERRI LYNNE

Why? *[Astonished]* Because they got shot to death in our school.

SHANNON

So getting shot is your criteria. I myself don't think that getting shot should be what qualifies you for a monument; although historically that has been the trend.

TERRI LYNNE

Why are you so negative?

SHANNON

I just don't agree with developing a monument that will recognize an evil moment rather than a bunch of kids who died tragically.

TERRI LYNNE

What are you saying?

SHANNON

Well, what did these kids actually do with their lives? None of them has done anything truly remarkable yet; they're just dead high school kids. Their most unusual and notable accomplishment is being stuck in the crosshairs of a whack-job with a gun. The tragedy is that they were taken before they could do anything that would really allow us to remember them. They didn't storm the beaches on D-day.

DALIA

This is a gruesome topic but a valid one. Will this proposed monument celebrate life, or will it be a reminder that a sick person shot up a school and murdered our friends? [*Long pause*]

SHANNON

What is that smell? Is that you? [*To TERRI LYNNE*] Did you ever notice that when it rains an elementary school smells like wet dog?

DALIA

I suspect that the damp dog smell interrupts pheromone transmission.

TERRI LYNNE

What are pher-ma-mones again?

SHANNON

Not pher-ma-mones, pheromones.

DALIA

They're the specific glandular fragrances that are produced by a species to attract a mate. Sometimes we are –

SHANNON

It's hump perfume. Only it is produced naturally, not like the Old Spice that you pour over yourself every morning. [*Waves her hand and wrinkles her nose as if smelling something offensive*]

TERRI LYNNE

I do not. Isn't Old Spice for men?

SHANNON

You lather that whore stink all over.

TERRI LYNNE

At least I attract men.

SHANNON

You don't need to smell like a potpourri basket to attract men. Men are like moths, all you have to do is light a candle.

MRS. BECKWITH

Okay girls, we don't need to insult one another. Especially –

DALIA

[Excitedly] Eureka! What about a candlelight vigil?

TERRI LYNNE

To attract men?

SHANNON

No, you idiot, to commemorate the dead. But if you smear yourself with lure and bring your pom-poms, I'm sure we can do both. *[Turning to DALIA]* Did you actually just say eureka? Who says that?

DALIA

I say it sometimes when a light-bulb comes on overhead.

SHANNON

It sounds like something you say after a giant scientific discovery. Like eureka, I've discovered gravity. Or, eureka, white wine takes out red wine stains.

TERRI LYNNE

Oh right, a candlelight vigil. Like the way they do it in Montreal on December sixth for Take Back the Night.

SHANNON

[To TERRI LYNNE] How long was that delay? What meds are you on and can I have some?

[Enter RYAN in a wheelchair from stage right. He is wearing his high school football jacket and a medieval jousting helmet with the visor down]

RYAN

[To the audience as well as to MRS. BECKWITH and STUDENTS] How now good barmaid? Has thou a flagon of ale or a cask of ripe sack? For my comrades and I have been scathed in battle for nearly a fortnight!

[Everyone looks on in quiet amusement]

DALIA

Oh fair knight; you shall have whatever you desire.

RYAN

I desire women, wine, and the sound of a lute.

DALIA

Sir Knight, which would you have first? The women?

RYAN

Of course the women; and I'll take them in descending order of virtue.

[EVERYONE laughs]

RYAN cont'd

[Raises his helmet visor] Hey guys, what's happening?

MRS. BECKWITH

Hey Ryan, welcome. I'm glad you made it. Wherever did you find the medieval helmet?

[MRS. BECKWITH crosses to RYAN and takes his helmet. Then sets helmet on coffee table]

RYAN

Winners. You should have seen the look on the lady's face when I brought it up to the counter. She asked, "Did you find everything you were looking for sir." And I looked up from below the counter and said, yes I did, thank you M'am. She must have thought I was nuts.

[Everyone laughs]

RYAN cont'd

How's it going?

MRS. BECKWITH

Pull up a chair Ryan. I mean...

[Uncomfortable moment]

RYAN

I'll just run over there and do that. [*Overly exaggerated*] Oh look, I have a chair right here, maybe I'll just use this one.

[MRS. BECKWITH shakes RYAN's hand. DALIA and SHANNON both stand and give RYAN an affectionate hug. TERRI LYNNE crosses to be near RYAN but she doesn't touch him. RYAN waits and then looks up at her]

RYAN cont'd

Hey Terri Lynne, how have you been?

TERRI LYNNE

Good. I've been good. I've missed you.

RYAN

I missed you too. How's cheerleading?

TERRI LYNNE

We've got a great squad this year.

SHANNON

I hate that word squad. It sounds so wretched. In fact, I'm not a fan of a bunch of S-words. Squat, Squid, Squash, Saskatoon, Sasquatch... I'm going to bend over and take a big squad behind the bleachers.

TERRI LYNNE

[To SHANNON] I think it's time for you to self medicate? *[Turning to RYAN]* Will you be involved with the team this season?

RYAN

I'm not going to be playing any sports this year, if that's what you mean. You know, the wheelchair causes some problems, especially in basketball where I'm half the height of the other guys. [*Uncomfortable pause*]

SHANNON

That sucks pal. I'm sorry.

RYAN

Thanks SHANNON. How's the bleak world of the undead? Are there any colors in that bat cave brain?

SHANNON

Just black like my heart. [*Waves her black fingernails and then clutches her chest as if she is going to dig it out*]

RYAN

Like your 'heart of darkness'.

SHANNON

Nice pun Wheels. When did jocks start reading? And Joseph Conrad, I'm impressed? *[Pause]* Or did you just read that one line at the beginning of Eliot's 'The Hollow Men'?

RYAN

[Indignantly] Some of us know 'The Hollow Men' by heart. Be prepared to be amazed Bat Cave Chick. *[RYAN rolls to centre stage and begins reciting T.S. Eliot directly to the audience and finishes the first verse looking at MRS.*

BECKWITH]

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
[Pause]

MRS. BECKWITH

[Continuing where RYAN left off]

Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar
[Pause]

SHANNON

[Cuts to the ending of Eliot's poem]

This is the way the world ends

SHANNON, RYAN, AND MRS. BECKWITH

[Joining in]

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

RYAN

You know who taught me that poem? *[Waits]* Mr. Claydon. Grade eleven English. He said that Eliot was his favorite poet.

SHANNON

He said that pre-conversion Eliot was his favorite poet. Post conversion Eliot is like most second CD's. Freshman CD's are always better. Hmm, Mr. Claydon.

DALIA

He was such a good teacher. I found it so interesting that he liked that poem of Eliot's. It is so bleak and desperate, whereas Mr. Claydon was so full of fun loving energy.

TERRI LYNNE

That poem is gross.

SHANNON

Or beautiful.

DALIA

That poem is creepily applicable to our situation.

SHANNON

Yeah [*Amazed*], it's almost like Eliot was writing about the shooting. Because in the end, the big bang, the grenade didn't go off. Hey! Did you guys know that Dalia is a hero?

TERRI LYNNE

What are you talking about?

MRS. BECKWITH

I'd heard about that but I didn't want to get into specifics. But the cat is out of the bag now. Dalia, is what I've heard true. Did you stop Richard Verehey's grenade from going off?

[DALIA looks away shyly]

SHANNON

She sure did, with only a tiny yellow paperclip. [*Holds up her fingers imitating a tiny paperclip*]

TERRI LYNNE AND RYAN

What?

SHANNON

[To DALIA] Go on, tell them what you did. [*DALIA shakes her head in shy reservation*] Oh, come on, tell them.

TERRI LYNNE

Shannon, tell us what she did.

SHANNON

Okay, our little hero here was ordered to hold Richard Verehey's grenade. Just before that whack-job went on the shooting rampage, Dalia took a little yellow paperclip and put it through the hole in the grenade that stops it from blowing up. You know; the little hole where the grenade's pin was. You see, he pulled the pin out and then made Dalia hold the grenade. Apparently there's a second safety switch do-dad that starts the count down, but it doesn't get tripped until the handle falls off. But the handle didn't fall off because little Miss Genius here [*Pointing at DALIA*] pushed the paper clip through and bent it shut.

MRS. BECKWITH

Well done Dalia, quick thinking. How did you know how to do that?

DALIA

When I was in Tel Aviv, one of the soldiers told me that he kept a paper clip in his helmet to replace the pins in landmines and other traps, so it stood to reason that the paperclip would work on a grenade. I happened to be holding an essay in my hand when Richard Verehey came into our room.

TERRI LYNNE

Oh my land that was so smart.

SHANNON

And, when the idiot shot her, the grenade didn't blow up even though she dropped it.

RYAN

[*Amazed*] So Verehey shot himself thinking that the grenade was going to go off? [*Pause*] That guy was a complete erection.

DALIA

We are lucky that he shot himself.

TERRI LYNNE

Yeah, because if he didn't, he might have kept on shooting, like, maybe until he was out of bullets.

SHANNON

Hence, the weird coincidence between T.S. Eliot's ending in 'The Hollow Men' and our little West Hamilton High School shooting. This is the way the world ends, not with bang, but a whimper. [*SHANNON takes a long pull from her coffee cup. She makes a face at the effect of the whiskey. MRS. BECKWITH does not seem to notice. SHANNON raises her coffee cup as if to toast*] Thanks for nothin' Verehey. You should have eaten your gun before coming into our school.

RYAN

That was fast thinking Dalia. We're all alive, everyone in this room, because you thought to do that. It is amazing that such a tiny, inconsequential piece of metal, used for holding essays together, stopped a madman from murdering... [*Pause*] from murdering you. [*Points at each of them*] And you. And you. And you. [*Pause and points at himself*] And me.

SHANNON

[*Pointing at DALIA and starting to slur her words, demonstrating slight intoxication*] That's a girl I'd build a monument for.

DALIA

Come on guys. It was no big deal. I probably should have tried to throw it at Richard Verehey or clunked him on the head with it, or something.

MRS. BECKWITH

What you did was amazing. I'm so proud of you.

[*OTHERS nod in agreement*]

DALIA

[*Shyly*] Thank you. Let's get back to why we are here. What are we going to do for the kids who were killed?

RYAN

More like, what are we going to do for the families of the kids that were killed? Funerals, or post funerals aren't really about the dead.

DALIA

Quite right, it will be about the living.

TERRI LYNNE

So what about a candlelight vigil to recognize the students who were killed? Let's take back the night. We could even do it on December sixth to draw a link between the shooting at L'Ecole Polytechnique and our shooting at West Hamilton. How long ago was the shooting in Montreal?

MRS. BECKWITH

It was December sixth 1989.

DALIA

December sixth seems to hold a lot of horror for Canadians. It was also the date of the Halifax Explosion in 1917.

RYAN

Are you a walking encyclopedia? What time did the explosion occur?

DALIA

In the morning. *[Pause]* Four minutes after nine, I think. *[Pause]* And thirty five seconds. *[Pause]* We know that because so many of the watches stopped simultaneously –

SHANNON

One day your head is going to explode?

TERRI LYNNE

I feel like we are getting away from our agenda. Let's tell people about what happened at West Hamilton. I don't care if we do it on the sixth or not.

DALIA

And people want so badly to know.

RYAN

Why is that? *[Looking directly at the audience]* Why are you here! Why does everyone want to hear about this sick sort of event?

SHANNON

[Stands and walks to downstage centre] Because it breaks the norm; it provides them *[pointing at the audience]* something that they don't have in their lives, a beginning and an end. *[Pause]* Bad news is like a Shakespearean tragedy. It has all the ingredients of tragic drama, but in a different order. First we have the event, next we learn about the numbers of the victims, then the killer. Nobody is ever going to hear about the lives of the dead, unless it is to highlight the barbarity of the murderer. Sadly, everyone will hear about the killer. We're going to hear a lot about Richard Verehey. School shootings are big news events because they play out like good drama. News has become entertainment.

DALIA

Explain. Are you talking about slow speed chases and televised court cases? Or just the fact that Paris Hilton's jail experience gets more news than genocide in Darfur? Why are school shootings such big news?

SHANNON

[Looking directly at the audience] Okay, the reason that school shootings are such big news is because they encapsulate everything that our culture finds interesting, but more than that, they offer a story that has a beginning and an end. This is something that we don't have in life, and for that reason, the school shooting plays out to an audience, sometimes in real time. With the cameras tracking the event, hungry for blood, circling like sharks.

DALIA

I partially agree with this theory. I see how a third party could find the events of a school shooting intriguing, right down to the type of weapons used and the body count.

RYAN

[*To the audience*] Think about how much we've heard about Columbine. Name one student who was shot. [*Pause*] You can't can you? Neither can I. But I know the names of the two kids who did the murdering: Kleebold and Harris.

SHANNON

Yeah, like the way we know about serial killers but none of their victims. I mean, we know they were women, or kids, or prostitutes... not much else. You're right. Kleebold and Harris. [*Pause*] I wonder when Michael Moore is going to do a sequel to 'Bowling for Columbine'.

TERRI LYNNE

What would he call it, Bowling for West Hamilton or –

SHANNON

No, he'd call it [*Pause*] just another high school shooting.

[*Long Caesura*]

RYAN

That is the most callous thing I've ever heard. And I could be the poster boy for that project. I'd walk in, or rather, I'd roll in and tell everybody in a lazy monotone that there was another school shooting, and that's why I'm paralyzed.

TERRI LYNNE

Ryan, is there any chance for your recovery, or [*Pause*] is this permanent.

RYAN

It's permanent.

TERRI LYNNE

[*On the verge of tears*] I'm so sorry.

RYAN

You know, my most humiliating moment occurred in this chair. A dog began humping my leg and I didn't even feel it. My mother had to pull the bastard off me revealing a wet spot on my pants.

TERRI LYNNE

Oh no.

RYAN

Oh yes. I'm a rolling canine hump option.

SHANNON

Sorry buddy, that eats rat-shit.

RYAN

Well put scholar. Great use of imagery. *[Pause]* You know, I don't think we need a monument. We could just hang a sign on the back of my wheelchair with the names of the dead. Once a year folks could come and lay wreaths at my wheels or under my dead feet. I'm a rolling monument, but again we are stuck at the crossroads of whether or not I will commemorate the students or the evil deed.

TERRI LYNNE

Don't talk of yourself like a monument, Ryan.

RYAN

Come on Terri Lynne, if I don't laugh I'll cry. I have been doing both back to back and it has been freaking people out. For some reason people find it odd when someone goes from laughing hysterically to weeping like a madman.

MRS. BECKWITH

It makes sense to me Ryan. You've gone through extraordinary pain and loss. Your life has been uprooted. You, more than any of us, have had to overcome hardship.

RYAN

Not more than the dead.

MRS. BECKWITH

Even more than them, because you miss your friends, you saw the violence, you experienced the violence, and you have been permanently wounded. We can see your wounds Ryan. Even more than those wounds, are the ones we can't see. If I were you, I wouldn't be able to control the rage.

RYAN

I can't. Sometimes I feel so awful and these thoughts go through my head. I get so mad, so frustrated, so filled with complete pathetic unquenchable anger.

[SHANNON puts her hand on RYAN's shoulder to comfort him]

SHANNON

So what are we going to do, as a group, to put a positive spin on this whole mess? *[Sarcastically]* You know, to see the goodness; to marvel at the acts of heroism and individual sacrifice and bravery, to explain to the whole world about the power of one. And to tell the stories of Dalia Levy and Ryan Brooks. Two

SHANNON, Cont.

kids in the wrong place at the wrong time that did their best to save the lives of their fellow man.

TERRI LYNNE

Or do we tell the world about that evil hooligan Richard Verehey.

RYAN

Is that all you've got? Doesn't your repertoire of bitching go any deeper than hooligan?

SHANNON

I'm sure hooligan and rapsCALLION are in there somewhere. [*Pointing at TERRI LYNNE's head*]

RYAN

Isn't hooligan a little too soft for a mass murderer?

TERRI LYNNE

I just feel sorry for him. He was so...deranged –

RYAN

Come off it! Look at me! Look what he did to us!

DALIA

Terri Lynne, our sympathies may go out to his family on days when we are feeling particularly charitable, but I think we're all pretty much on the same page that he was a gigantic blight on the world that needed to be destroyed. Richard Verehey needs to be scrubbed away and forgotten.

MRS. BECKWITH

That's it isn't it. We're all trying to decide what to remember and what to forget; when in reality we don't have a choice about either. So where do we go from here?

RYAN

We need answers where there aren't any to be found. Evil is just evil and we don't know where it originates exactly or why it came to roost at West Hamilton.

DALIA

Evil, I think, exists to contrast good. I mean, how can we know light if we don't know darkness?

TERRI LYNNE

[*Seriously to SHANNON*] Is that why you wear black?

[RYAN and DALIA are amused by this comment]

RYAN

[Looking at SHANNON] Yeah, what's with the Marilyn Manson ensemble? Do you crave attention or repulsion?

SHANNON

I wear black because you don't. I think on some level I need to feel different. Dressing this way helps me to do that.

DALIA

That seems like the most honest response I've heard. Good self-reflection.

RYAN

That is a pretty good response. That's also the same reason I wear the wheelchair, because it makes me feel different than all the walking people.

[Uncomfortable pause]

SHANNON

We could individualize this chair for you.

RYAN

I've been thinking about that, but what would I do. What would be truly me?

SHANNON

How about flying a small pirate flag from an antenna?

RYAN

Carefully considered, but rejected.

SHANNON

I used to fly a squirrel tail on an old ford antenna from the banana seat of my bicycle. Nothin' like a chick flyin' the road kill.

RYAN

You were even a freak when you were a child.

DALIA

How about writing 'Damn the Torpedoes' across the back?

RYAN

I'm not really sure what that means so I'll pass.

MRS. BECKWITH

It has to be something unique to Ryan. It doesn't have to be forever, but it has to be something unique.

SHANNON

How about a bumper sticker that says, 'Enjoy Canadian lamb, twenty thousand coyotes can't be wrong'. [STUDENTS *chuckle*] Or, 'Jesus is coming, look busy'.

DALIA

What is with the 'Baby on Board' stickers? By the time you're close enough to read them you're endangering the baby.

SHANNON

Those stickers make me feel like ramming their car.

TERRI LYNNE

Ryan, what about getting a Jesus fish?

DALIA

How about the Star of David?

RYAN

I'm not Jewish.

DALIA

But Jesus was.

SHANNON

How about getting a Darwin fish?

TERRI LYNNE

What's that?

SHANNON

It's like a Jesus fish, but with tiny legs.

DALIA

I've seen those, they're pretty clever.

TERRI LYNNE

What about your number? Let's paint thirty-three on the back. And your name and WHHS. Think of how cool that will look.

SHANNON

That would be pretty cool. Your jock friends will dig it and so will all the poofy cheerleaders.

RYAN

[To SHANNON] What do you think of my number getting put on the back?

SHANNON

I like the skull and crossbones only second to a squirrel tail, but, the number thing is definitely you.

TERRI LYNNE

We could do a really professional job of it.

MRS. BECKWITH

Marvelous idea. It may indicate to others that we have been attacked, but our spirit is intact. In some ways, that small act may symbolize a great deal.

TERRI LYNNE

And thirty-three is the age that Jesus died.

RYAN

What?

TERRI LYNNE

Yeah, Jesus Christ was crucified when he was thirty-three years old.

RYAN

[Disgusted] Holy cow, that's not the statement that I'm trying to make here.
[Looking to MRS. BECKWITH] I'd prefer a more non-denominational symbol.

DALIA

Actually, think about it. It's perfect.

RYAN

What d'ya mean?

DALIA

I mean that your number is an ideal symbol. Evil has been overcome just by our still being alive. Just like your Jesus who left the legacy of the Christian faith. Just like the Jews who survived the Holocaust. We're still here to tell the story and to live productive lives. We're still here to perform acts of kindness. Verehey is gone. His violent moment is history.

SHANNON

Can we agree not to say that fucker's name ever again? I never want to hear Verehey. It is obscene.

RYAN

Yes. Let's erase him from the past.

DALIA

Start anew.

TERRI LYNNE

Aren't we the future or something?

RYAN

I think you're resorting to eighties music lyrics.

DALIA

Our lives can serve as a constant symbol opposing evil. Our legacy can be the light.

[SHANNON walks to the downstage centre and speaks directly to the audience]

SHANNON

[Sarcastically, with moments of outrage] You know, this is it; this is the only sense we are ever going to be able to make out of this crazy shit. *[Pause]* Just like Jesus Christ overcame evil with his sacrifice upon the cross? Just like Nelson Mandela during Apartheid in South Africa? Just like Martin Luther King's vision for a non-segregated America, and Gandhi's Salt March? Just like the Jews throughout history? *[No longer sarcastic; changes to a serious tone as if in self-revelation]* Good has overcome evil. And do you know what they all had in common? *[Pause]* They all overcame evil not through violence, not through meeting evil with evil, but through profound weakness. A weakness that is somehow stronger than might because it refuses to indulge evil, but opposes it completely, as only something that is right, and true, and good, and beautiful.

[SHANNON holds up her silver flask, pops a pill in her mouth, and then speaks with the pill still in her mouth]

Cheers! *[SHANNON toasts the audience and takes a long drink. Her expression is pained from the harshness of the whisky. Looking worried, MRS. BECKWITH immediately stands and begins to walk over as if to inspect the flask]*

[BLACKOUT]

[CURTAIN]

Act One Scene Three: Minutes after the Shooting

[BLACKOUT stage right]

[LIGHTS UP stage left. VICTORIA MONROE, a journalist, holds a microphone and faces the audience. She runs her fingers through her hair and straightens her skirt moments before the cameras are rolling]

OFFSTAGE VOICE

We're live in five, four, three, two *[Pause]* –

VICTORIA MONROE

Breaking news from West Hamilton High School, Hamilton Ontario. Approximately one hour ago, reports indicate that a lone gunman began a shooting spree that lasted ten minutes. We have been told that numerous shots, maybe as many as thirty shots, were fired inside the school. Witnesses say that the gunman, who was armed with a grenade and a handgun, began a firing rampage shortly after classes started this morning. At least three students and a teacher have been wounded. *[Pause, listening into her earphone]* We just have word that two people are reported in critical condition including one West Hamilton teacher. Details are pouring in, but there is no confirmation as to how many students may have been injured. *[Pause]* If you're just joining us, there has been a shooting at West Hamilton High School, there are two people listed in critical condition. Police sources say that several students have been taken to McMaster Medical Centre where they are receiving treatment for gunshot wounds; we don't have an exact number at this time. The names of those wounded students are being withheld until their families can be notified. *[Pause]* Police have not confirmed the status of the gunman, but some witnesses say that the gunman took his own life before the authorities arrived. We will keep you updated as more information comes in. We are live at West Hamilton High School, Victoria Monroe, CNN News.

[BLACKOUT]

Act One Scene Four: Before the Shooting

[The curtain opens to reveal a high school classroom. RYAN and TERRI LYNNE are at the back of the classroom. They are sitting facing each other. TERRI LYNNE has her hands on RYAN's knees. They appear to be intimate with each other – possibly in a love relationship. Their backs are to the audience]

TERRI LYNNE

Tell me.

RYAN

You will have to guess.

TERRI LYNNE

Alright, I love this game... Is it a car?

RYAN

Yeah, I got you a car. All I had to do was take on a morning paper route. You did want a Porsche, right?

TERRI LYNNE

Tell me! What is it? At least give me a hint.

RYAN

Here's your hint... Tickets.

TERRI LYNNE

To what? Oh Ryan, what to? The movies?

RYAN

Better.

TERRI LYNNE

'Phantom of the Opera'?

RYAN

God no. No musicals.

TERRI LYNNE

What to?

RYAN

A band. *[Pause]* I'll give you another hint. *[RYAN puts his hands on his knees and squats down, flaring his lips, doing a Mick Jagger imitation. He sings]* "I can't get no, satisfaction. I can't get no, satisfaction...well I try and I try and I try and I try, I can't get no..."

TERRI LYNNE

[Squealing with delight] The Rolling Stones! You got us tickets to the Rolling Stones rock band.

RYAN

Just say the Stones baby. *[Produces the tickets and fans them out in his hand]* Happy birthday.

[OTHER STUDENTS fill into the class including SHANNON and DALIA. MR. CLAYDON, the teacher, enters the class carrying a clip-board. He looks up as if he is taking attendance. He calls out the last few names]

MR. CLAYDON

Shannon Lane... Dalia Levy... Mick Jagger. *[Looking at RYAN]* Is Mick Jagger here?

RYAN

[Embarrassed] Here.

MR. CLAYDON

What an honor to have you here at West Hamilton Mr. Jagger.

[CLASS laughs. SEVERAL STUDETNS call out for Mr. Claydon to tell a joke]

MR. CLAYDON

Just let me know when you are ready and I'll begin. *[He waits for the class to quiet]*

RYAN

[Turning to the audience and placing a finger in front of his lips to shush them] Shut up, I want to hear Mr. Claydon tell a joke. *[MR. CLAYDON waits a few seconds, looks at the audience as well as the students on stage, giving the impression that the entire theatre is part of the classroom]*

MR. CLAYDON

Alright, I'll tell you one... What do you call an empty jar of Cheese Wiz?

CLASS

[In chorus] What do you call an empty jar of Cheese Wiz?

MR. CLAYDON

Cheese was! *[Laughs by himself, the rest of the CLASS moans]*

RYAN

Come on Mr. Claydon, please tell me a joke with substance; something that will titillate my humor centre, something that transcends crude jokes and puns, but submits before sophisticated satire and irony.

MR. CLAYDON

That's a tall order Ryan. Let me see what I can do. *[Pause]* Hmmm, *[Scratches his head]* a chicken walks into a library, passes by the librarian, and makes her

MR. CLAYDON, Cont.

way into the stacks. She comes back a couple of minutes later with three books and places them on the counter in front of the librarian and says, “bock, bock, bock.” The librarian can’t believe it, a talking chicken. The librarian checks out the books and the chicken leaves. About forty minutes later the chicken returns, sets the books in front of the librarian and says, “bock, bock, bock.” The chicken disappears into the shelves of books and comes back with three more books. Again the chicken says, “bock, bock, bock.” The librarian signs out the books for the talking chicken, but this time, when the chicken leaves the librarian follows. The chicken walks down the street toward the pond. Sitting in the centre of the pond is an emerald green lily pad. And upon that emerald green lily pad sits a huge bullfrog. The chicken takes out the books and shows the frog. The chicken says, “book, book, book.” And the frog says, “read it, read it, read it.”

[*CLASS groans*]

SHANNON

I’m not sure which was lamer, the Cheese Wiz or the chicken.

MR. CLAYDON

You wound me Shannon Lane. [*Holding his hands to his heart*] But enough of my shattered self esteem, lets get down to business. Ladies and gentlemen, tell me what has been happening in the world.

[*Pause*]

[*DALIA puts up her hand. MR. CLAYDON looks over the crowd then calls on DALIA*]

MR. CLAYDON

Yes, Dalia.

DALIA

North Korea claims to have tested a nuclear weapon.

MR. CLAYDON

Yes, that’s right. But why did they test a nuclear weapon?

DALIA

I think they tested the weapon to send a message to the United States.

MR. CLAYDON

Who believes that North Korea should have nuclear weapons?

SHANNON

I don’t think anyone should have nuclear weapons.

DALIA

What about a country like Israel who requires the threat of mutual destruction as a factor that prevents countries from using weapons of mass destruction against it?

SHANNON

We are getting into the chicken-before-the-egg argument, which doesn't get anyone anywhere. I just believe that nuclear weapons are too dangerous to be in the hands of any country.

RYAN

So where does that leave a country like Israel? Canada is insulated against attack by our big brother to the south, but what about a country that is responsible for protecting itself in a sea of potential enemy countries and national threats?

MR. CLAYDON

Interesting questions; should countries like Israel, or North Korea, be able to create nuclear weapons to offset a threat against them? Is it reasonable for the countries with nuclear weapons to prevent other countries from gaining that technology? [*There is a sharp knock on the door. MR. CLAYDON ignores the knock and continues with his debate*] Which countries should be permitted to have these weapons? Who should be responsible for deciding?

[Again a loud knocking on the door]

TERRI LYNNE

Mr. Claydon, someone's at the door. Do you want me to open it for them?

MR. CLAYDON

No thank you. They are late, they should be made to wait rather than interrupt the debating genius that is taking place in this class. What about – [*knocking*]

[The knocking on the door becomes a pounding. Mr. Claydon must now answer it. Looking perturbed, he crosses the front of the classroom and opens the door – stage left. A VOICE (RICHARD VEREHEY) from out in the hall...]

MR. CLAYDON

Yes! [*As he opens the door*]

RICHARD VEREHEY

Do you like Richard Kipling?

MR. CLAYDON

Excuse me?

RICHARD VEREHEY

[Raising his voice] Do you like Richard Kipling?

MR. CLAYDON

[Astonished] I'm sorry? I don't –

RICHARD VEREHEY

[Screaming in rage] Do you like Richard Kipling!!

MR. CLAYDON

[Frantic and befuddled] Umm, I'm sorry, I don't, I'm sorry, pardon me?

SHANNON

[Calling out into the hallway, almost laughing] Don't you mean Rudyard Kipling?
[RYAN laughs, stands up and gives SHANNON a high-five, complimenting her timely mockery]

[MR. CLAYDON and VEREHEY continue talking in the hallway]

RYAN

[To SHANNON] Nice one, excellent literary reference.

MR. CLAYDON

Richard, I'm –

RICHARD VEREHEY

Shut up! You will listen to me!

[MR. CLAYDON leans in and looks nervously at the class. His look begins at SHANNON and RYAN to still them, and then pans over the audience. This causes the class to quiet. MR. CLAYDON reaches in and shuts the door. From outside there is some muffled conversation. TERRI LYNNE, who is sitting near the door, is encouraged by the rest of the CLASS to tell them what is going on]

TERRI LYNNE

Mr. Claydon is trying to get him to leave. Oh my god!

RYAN

What's going on?

TERRI LYNNE

They're talking about some guy.

DALIA

Which guy? Who?

RYAN

Shush, let her tell us.

TERRI LYNNE

It's that guy who used to sit at the back.

SHANNON

Which guy?

TERRI LYNNE

The kid who never said anything.

RYAN

Who's that?

TERRI LYNNE

He's the kid who had the hairy ears.

RYAN

Hairy ears?

TERRI LYNNE

Yeah, coming out. Long old man hairs. It looked like a spider was crawling out.

SHANNON

Yummy.

TERRI LYNNE

I forget his name. He sits right there. [*Points to an empty desk at the back of the classroom*]

DALIA

His name is Richard.

TERRI LYNNE

[*Now listening again at the door*] He keeps asking Mr. Claydon if he knows who he is? This is so weird; this guy is out to lunch. Oh my...

SHANNON

What? What's happening?

He sounds really mad.
TERRI LYNNE

Who? Claydon?
SHANNON

No, the other guy.
TERRI LYNNE

SHANNON
How could anyone be mad at the author of the Chicken Joke and Cheese Was?

TERRI LYNNE
[*Alarmed*] I think he's threatening Mr. Claydon.

SHANNON
Is Mr. Claydon mad?

TERRI LYNNE
No, he sounds scared.

RYAN
Really?

TERRI LYNNE
I think, [*Looking through the crack in the door*] I think he's got a weapon.

RYAN
Really?

TERRI LYNNE
[*With fear rising in her voice*] Seriously. He's wavin' something around.

SHANNON
Like what! Can we have a little more detail?

TERRI LYNNE
I don't know. I can't see what it is.

RYAN
Should I go out?

TERRI LYNNE
Oh my God!

SHANNON

What's going on?

DALIA

Maybe we should call down to the office for help.

TERRI LYNNE

He's armed!

DALIA

[Urgently] Shannon, use your phone. Call the police –

RICHARD VEREHEY

[Audible through the door] Get – on – your – knees!

MR. CLAYDON

[Also audible through the door] No, please, please no...!!!

[The STUDENTS lean forward in their chairs trying to listen to what is happening in the hallway. SHANNON quickly looks through her bag for her telephone]

[Crack, crack, crack!!! Three gunshots sound. The STUDENTS scream]

RYAN

Lock the door! *[RYAN leaps up and begins to rush for the door, but before he can close the distance RICHARD VEREHEY enters. VEREHEY is holding a handgun which he points at RYAN. MR. CLAYDON does not return to the room]*

RICHARD VEREHEY

Get back! Get back or you're next.

TERRI LYNNE

Oh no, no, p-l-e-a-s-e, don't hurt us.

[VEREHEY grabs TERRI LYNNE by the hair and violently pulls her down to the floor]

RICHARD VEREHEY

Shut up, right now, shut up. Don't anyone move. *[He points the gun at the CLASS. VEREHEY inspects the audience and takes aim at several members. The audience continues to be part of the class]* Don't you move!

RYAN

Wait a minute, calm down man. Nobody –

RICHARD VEREHEY

[Screaming and pointing the gun at RYAN] Are you a hero!

RYAN

[Frantic] No man, I'm not –

RICHARD VEREHEY

Do you want to be a dead hero! Do you want me to give you death? *[VEREHEY takes a grenade out of his pocket and pulls out the pin]* We can all die!

DALIA

Please sir, don't kill us. We haven't done anything wrong.

RICHARD VEREHEY

Wrong! Ha, the whole lot of you is so filthy that the world aches. You're sick and you need to be cut away. You're a cancer; an evil cancer. Every breath you take sickens God. I'm here to purify! This must be made right. We need to cleanse your sins with blood. *[Laughing]* You don't understand do you? You're so simple and self absorbed that you don't understand what's happening here. *[VEREHEY walks to centre stage and speaks directly to the audience]* You're here, you can see me with your own eyes, yet you still don't believe.

DALIA

I'm sorry Richard, I'll try to understand, just put the pin back into the grenade, please.

RICHARD VEREHEY

You hold the grenade. Here. Don't drop it. *[VEREHEY forces DALIA to take the grenade at gunpoint. DALIA makes sure that the spoon from the grenade remains on the explosive]* Once the spoon falls off the grenade we'll all die. But not yet. We're not ready yet. So be careful.

DALIA

[Voice shaking] Richard, may I please have the pin to put into the hole? Richard, I'm afraid –

RICHARD VEREHEY

[Screaming] No you may not! *[He holds the muzzle against DALIA's head]*

[TERRI LYNNE begins to cry and VEREHEY turns his attention to her. While this is happening DALIA steps aside and takes a paper clip off an essay. While hiding the grenade from VEREHEY, she opens the clip and places it through the grenade]

RICHARD VEREHEY

[*VEREHEY points his gun at TERRI LYNNE*] Show it to me or I'll kill her.

[*DALIA holds the grenade up, holding it awkwardly with both hands*]

DALIA

It's right here, you don't need to hurt anyone.

RICHARD VEREHEY

[*To SHANNON*] I want you to sit down right now. Sit down!

RYAN

Please, would you mind –

RICHARD VEREHEY

If you say another word I'll kill these girls.

SHANNON

[*Voice shaking but trying to seem self assured*] Would you mind starting with me, I have a terrible headache anyway.

RICHARD VEREHEY

I will help you my sister, but first I'll help your friends make their transition.

SHANNON

[*Un-phased*] You know *brother*; I was going to skip school today.

RICHARD VEREHEY

I guess you should have skipped.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes