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Playscripts, Inc.
P.O. Box 237060
New York, NY 10023

Phone/fax: 1-866-NEW-PLAY (639-7529)
Email: questions@playscripts.com
Web: www.playscripts.com

Cast of Characters

Actor 1

ROBERT: An intelligent yet troubled adolescent.

WALT: 40ish. An awkward “playwright.” Never looks comfortable.

JOURNALIST

TOUGH COP: A parody of Bruce Willis’ *Die Hard* character.

Actor 2

DAVID: Late thirties. A dedicated social worker.

HOWARD: An average non-popular adolescent.

ALEC: Heavily medicated, severely traumatized adolescent whose face has been shot off.

FRANKIE: A parody of the tightly wound modern gangster character seen in movies.

ZACK: A character created by Walt. The misunderstood outcast.

MR. EVADE: A man who has hidden from the world too long; at breaking point.

GUNGUY 2: A proud gun owner who loses the capacity for coherency once excited.

EDDIE VEDDER: Rock star; Grunge variety. Says “uh” in the spaces between words very quickly.

THEORIST 2: An expert who knows guns are to blame.

Actor 3

ALAN: Speaks in the classic anchor man / TV journalist voice. Slick looking.

JED: A disturbing, banjo-playing bloodhound.

SHERIFF: The toughest cowboy ever. Grizzled. No nonsense.

MITCH: A character created by Walt. The Bully. Likes popular violence.

THE WHY: A flaw of the human species. Has no clear face or form.

GUNGUY 1: A proud gun owner who agrees with other gun owners.

PREACHER: An exaggerated Baptist preacher who knows Satan is to blame.

Actor 4

CHERYL: Speaks in the classic TV journalist voice. Can be seductive when she chooses to be, but never human.

SARA: A normal adolescent girl who lived through a school shooting.

ROBBER: A parody of the English outlaw-chick that might be found in a Tarantino movie.

KELLY: A character created by Walt. The fickle girl who ends up having a heart of gold.

MRS. EVADE: A woman desperately hiding her fear of the world behind a smile.

THEORIST 1: An expert who knows society is to blame.

THE WHY

by Victor Kaufold

(Dark stage. Ominous waves of ambient sound. Quick samples fade in and out. Children singing a double dutch song. Wind chimes. Lawn mowers. News program reporting violence. Serial killer explaining his mindset. Action movie preview. School teacher asking a question. Double dutch song. Distant screams. Tempo and intensity spirals up and abruptly stops. "It is I." is whispered.)

ROBBER. Alright man, give me the fucking money and I let you walk out of here with your dick attached!

(Lights up on ROBBER with gun pointed at FRANKIE's crotch. His hands are up.)

FRANKIE. Whoa whoa whoa princess...

(FRANKIE jerks his hand, and a gun that was up his sleeve is now pointed at ROBBER.)

You act like you don't know who you're talkin' too. Nobody! Fucks! With Frankie Mangino!

(Enter SHERIFF.)

SHERIFF. Except me.

FRANKIE. And who in Christ's name are you?

SHERIFF. The angel of death if you're not careful.

ROBBER. Fuck off cowboy! This isn't your business!

SHERIFF. May not be my business missy, but it's my town. Now the three of us are going to have a little talk.

FRANKIE. This ragazza here is not to be taken lightly, Mister Hop-a-long.

SHERIFF. Drop that attitude or I drop you.

FRANKIE. Funny. I thought I heard you imply that if I were to continue orating, you would inflict physical harm upon my person.

I am curious to know what you have actually said, being that I am sure I have heard wrong.

SHERIFF. I said talk if you wanna die.

ROBBER. *(To SHERIFF:)* Go ahead and kill the little shit. You'd be saving me a bullet.

FRANKIE. Ah Christ!

(Enter TOUGH COP.)

TOUGH COP. Somebody here just say my name?

SHERIFF. I don't know who you are stranger, but if you plan to go on breathing you're gonna put down that gun.

TOUGH COP. Oh hey Tex, where are my manners? My name is Mister I'm-going-to-kill-all-of-you-if-you-don't-drop-your-guns-right-now. I think it's...Dutch.

ROBBER. Oh fuck this!

(ROBBER swings gun to SHERIFF. He instantly shoots her down.)

FRANKIE. *(Impressed:)* Nice shot.

SHERIFF. I got one bullet left. Which of you want it?

FRANKIE. Hey you! Did you hear that? He's just got one left! We can take him!

SHERIFF. One is better than none.

TOUGH COP. Hey...guys. Tonight's my anniversary. The wife's waitin' for me. So I'm gonna count to three, and then we'll all drop our guns and make friends. One...

SHERIFF. —You say two I'll kill you.

FRANKIE. Hey undershirt! Let's you and I be a team. He shoots you, I shoot him or vice versa.

(TOUGH COP suddenly shoots FRANKIE.)

TOUGH COP. There is no "I" in team...paisan.

SHERIFF. Pretty gun. But looks aren't everything.

TOUGH COP. Yeah? Well here's looking at yo—

(ROBBER props herself up and shoots TOUGH COP; he does not fall. He is an action hero.)

ROBBER. Eat shit you fugging fuck.

(TOUGH COP laughs. Fakes joviality. Shoots ROBBER on "lunch.")

TOUGH COP. Well honey, I'd really like to do that, but I had fast-food for lunch! *(To SHERIFF:)* Whoa! Now I'm excited. Feelin' lucky Tex? Let's go. Man to man.

SHERIFF. You mean man to boy.

TOUGH COP. Huh... That's good. You're real good. You know, I'd love to sit and joke all day, but I just went shopping and I wanna get home before the ice cream melts... What do ya say we do this?

SHERIFF. I'll kill ya before ya can even cock back the hammer.

(TOUGH COP shoots SHERIFF.)

TOUGH COP. I use an automatic...Tex.

(SHERIFF drops to his knees.)

SHERIFF. I'll be waiting for ya in hell...ya rat.

(FRANKIE pops up and rapidly pumps bullets into TOUGH COP who jiggles around like a marionette and then drops.)

FRANKIE. Take this! Take this! Take this! Take this from Frankie Mangino! Nobody fucks wi...with...Fran— Ah Christ!

(FRANKIE drops. Lights down. SHERIFF is now ALAN. Murder News music cue is heard.)

ALAN. After the movie stay tuned for a closer look into the twisted life of young murderer Jeremy Lamb.

Murder had a little lamb
Who seemed as pure as snow
but everywhere young Jeremy went
the blood
was sure

to flow.

Stay tuned for Murder News. Because there's three kinds of people in this world... The murderers, the murdered, and the well-informed.

(Murder News music is heard again. ROBERT, standing by himself on stage, screams over it.)

ROBERT. Stop! Stop it! *(To audience:)* Sorry.

(DAVID appears on stage along with two chairs.)

This'll be better.

(ROBERT joins DAVID in scene.)

—No.

DAVID. Please?

ROBERT. I don't feel like it.

DAVID. Pretty please?

ROBERT. That's not helping.

DAVID. Well I'm out of ideas. What do you think the problem is?

ROBERT. Well, it just seems kind of weird to sit here and tell you about my life. I mean...I guess it's relevant, but it doesn't seem right.

DAVID. Why's that?

ROBERT. Considering everything that's happened. How can I sit here and talk about...my pet dog and what my back yard looked like?

DAVID. Have to start somewhere.

ROBERT. Yeah... Can't you just start it off? I don't know what to say, I feel weird.

DAVID. Why? Why do you feel weird? What's on your mind?

ROBERT. *(Sarcastic:)* Baseball.

DAVID. Okay fine, what about baseball?

ROBERT. Nothing!

DAVID. Well...we don't have to talk today if you don't want to. No pressure. We can always set up another time.

ROBERT. No! It's not like I don't want to talk... I just don't know what to say. Where do I begin?

DAVID. Some might argue that we've already begun.

ROBERT. Yeah. I'd say we haven't.

DAVID. And that implies plenty of things.

ROBERT. Like what plenty of things? I've just— Can't you start? I'll just chime in when the moment's right.

DAVID. Well what should I talk about? What do you want to hear?

ROBERT. Your sex life— Look, I'm sure there's a number of things that you know to say when this happens.

DAVID. Every person is an individual. I don't have any formulas to go by.

ROBERT. Well that's...pretty formulaic. What else?

DAVID. How about we try this again tomorrow?

ROBERT. No no no, hold on. How about you tell me a story and then I tell you a story. —What did you do this morning?

DAVID. Okay. I woke up, actually a little earlier than usual. Had breakfast, came here. Your turn.

ROBERT. Details. Embellish.

DAVID. Okay. I woke up, I turned on the TV, watched some Tom and Jerry. And I came to work.

ROBERT. Tom and Jerry? Why?

DAVID. Well, actually, I once had a client who was disturbed by Tom's voice. She said it sounded like the end of the world. I thought I should hear it. But the whole episode was just Jerry watching over this little gray mouse. Tom was hardly in it. There was one point when the little gray mouse walked into his mouth

while he was sleeping, and Jerry made him sneeze him out, but that was it. That sneeze was as close as I got.

Your turn.

ROBERT. —There's no clock in my room. Uh, I don't know what that's about, but anyway, my breakfast was delivered at some point. Egg, toast, apple juice. But hey, I got fed.

But it was stupid because they'd only given me a spoon. 'Cause, you know, if they'd given me a fork or a knife the first thing I would have done would be stab myself to death. But, I know they have to do that. It's unnecessary for me, but I understand. They can't just go around giving people forks and knives... Though honestly, if you wanted to, you could kill yourself with a spoon. I mean, —that's what I don't get. It's only plastic but, you could still, you know, take the back end; stab yourself in the throat, —or pop your eyes out or whatever. I mean, anyone who wants to kill themselves badly enough is gonna find a way. —But I hope this doesn't make you think I'm crazy. I'm not. And I have no real desire to kill myself. Promise.

DAVID. I don't think you're crazy Robert.

ROBERT. Yeah sure. I believe that. I could have came in here and just been like: "Snow white! Zipidee do da za-bow!" —and you'd still be like—

DAVID. I'm being honest with you, I don't think you're crazy. And if you came in here...scatting... Well, I would have to send you somewhere else.

ROBERT. Like to a jazz club.

DAVID. Yes.

ROBERT. So...you don't talk to the *crazy* crazy people, you just talk to the mildly crazy people.

DAVID. You consider yourself mildly crazy?

ROBERT. —Considering what I did... Though it is becoming more and more of a normal thing, isn't it?

DAVID. How do you feel about that?

ROBERT. Idaknow...I don't really care one way or the other, but I will say that I bet a lot of these people aren't doing it for the right reasons.

DAVID. Care to expound upon that.

ROBERT. No. But I will, why not, that's what we're here for, right? Uh, I think a lot of them are doing it for attention, or because they're pissed off their girlfriend dumped them or because of some other stupid—

DAVID. —Robert, do you want to kill yourself?

ROBERT. What?

DAVID. Do you?

ROBERT. No. Whatthehell...what's that about?

DAVID. Surprise tactic.

ROBERT. Well, well good. This is about the spoon thing, isn't it?

Don't worry about it, it's nothing, it's just the way I talk. But, at the same time, I'm sixteen years old and I might spend the rest of my life in prison. Best case scenario: I'll get out when I'm, like, forty. Given the circumstances... —But don't worry...it's not my thing. It's so 1994, you know?... That was a joke.

DAVID. It's sometimes hard to discern when someone is joking in this profession.

ROBERT. Yeah. Okay.

But like I was saying, suicide's not something I'm gonna do. If I wanted to, hey, I could've done that instead of what I actually did...saved myself some bullets.

I'm sorry about that. I say some sick things sometimes... Can that be stricken from the record?

DAVID. There is no record.

ROBERT. Huh...good.

DAVID. Robert, don't take this the wrong way but, why not suicide? Convince me—

ROBERT. —Man. You're really hung up on this, maybe you need to talk to somebody. —It's too easy. It's too simple of a solution. It's like: Oh, things aren't going your way...well then just shoot yourself! It'll only take a second and all your problems will be gone!... Trust me I just don't— It's not something I'm gonna do, but I can see now I shouldn't of said that thing about the spoon...

DAVID. No. You were speaking freely, that's a good thing. How 'bout your parents? What is there to know about them?

ROBERT. Um, let me think... Nothing. They didn't have anything to do with any of this. They don't have anything to do with anything. I want that to be clear. It's me. It's all me.

DAVID. Have they visited yet?

(Pause.)

ROBERT. I'm sure they will. I'd rather not talk about them, can I say that?

DAVID. Fine. Do you want to get back to what you were saying about the other children who've committed similar acts?

ROBERT. Well...I could— But didn't you just cut me off?

DAVID. I did cut you off, what were you going to say?

ROBERT. I don't know. That's what happens when you cut somebody off.

DAVID. It's your time. How should we make the best use of it? You said you didn't wanna sit here and talk about your dog and your backyard.

(Pause.)

ROBERT. I never had a dog, that's probably why, but if I did, it would have been a bloodhound and I would've named it Jed. I would've taught it to play the banjo. People would come to see him and he could sign autographs and stuff. We could set him up in my back yard, which was, for the record, about...twenty by thirty feet? There was a chain link fence with a little garden part where my mom would grow tomatoes. Simple, but good enough.

(Enter JED with bloodhound mask and banjo. Strumming and then begins singing.)

JED. I'm sure glad I threw away my life
I'm real glad I threw my life away
I'm sure glad I caused a whole lotta strife
I'm real glad I threw my life away
Oh can't tell you how happy I am
that I'll never see the outside world again
I'm so-ho gla-ad
I threw my life away-eee!

(JED looks out into the audience.)

I can wait for your applause... Fine then. Fine. I'll just pretend like you applaud'n, makes no difference to me, people have always said I've got a very active 'magination:

Thank you ladies and gentlemen. Thank you. Dat wasa song I wrote for my former owner who fell upon some bad times. Sounds like a happy song, but it's quite tragic really. That's the way he is. Could be walkin' through the valley of the shadow of death; he'd be whis'lin'.

Um um um. Just a boy... Ain't seen but a pebble but he thinks he knows somethin'. And the decisions he made back there never go away. A shame. A real shame. It's enough to get ol' Jed cryin' like a river if he thinks about it hard enough. 'Course I'm just a dog, so it's kinda hard for me to stay focused on one thing for too long. Sometimes I just—up and just...well you know, I...I was uh...—I was visiting him just the other day! You think I look sad just because I'm a bloodhound? Should have seen this boy's face. He was tryin' to hide it behind a smile, but you can't hide nut'in' from a dog, specially if'n that dog be yours truly.

(Plucks his banjo.)

Good kid despite what you've prob'ly heard. Just made a big mistake. Irrev-o-cable.

—But you didn't come here to hear me talk, now did ya? Naw. Reckon you didn't. “When is that mangy flea-bitten varmint gonna quit his yappin'?”

Well I hear you friends. Don't think Jed ain't got no ears...

(JED begins strumming as lights slowly cross fade to SARA. We can still hear JED strumming as she starts to speak.)

I call this one Whisky in the Water Bowl...

SARA. This is something I have to tell you.

JED. Well I moseyed on over to the water bowl...

SARA. This is something I have to tell you!

(JED stops and exits.)

We heard the stories on the news and me and my friends said if it ever happened in our school, we'd just surround the kid and tackle him. We figured if it would be anyone, it would be Crazy Lucas. So we all started trying to be extra nice to him just in case. So, one day... We were in the lunchroom, and there was a gun shot. It was Robert. All at once everyone just ran everywhere. They were tripping over book bags, falling, screaming.

We got into the hallway, everyone scattered in different directions.

The screaming was... No one should ever hear it.

I ended up in the shop wing supply closet. —I didn't even know Robert. I just knew him as this kid who I always passed on the way to the gym locker room. I used to wave at him sometimes. I was hoping he remembered. I don't know if it was dust in the closet, or what, but I sneezed. And, as soon as I sneezed, I thought I was dead. I actually started counting my heartbeats, like I only had a few left.

It seemed like forever before someone came over the P.A. saying that the gunman had been taken away and it was safe to exit the building. It still took me a while to move, but I had to see if Mark was okay.

Outside there was everything you could imagine: Police cars, fire trucks, even helicopters. And there were so many people! A bunch of kids, and parents, and newspeople... But I couldn't see anyone. I couldn't look for anyone. Right in the middle of it all I just fell

down and just wept. I never...I was lying on the ground, and I could feel it against my skin, but it was like nothing was there.

(Enter ROBERT and DAVID. Exit SARA.)

ROBERT. I used to just sit on the lawn of this church that happened to be at the intersection of these two busy streets by my house. I used to have fun looking at everybody in their cars when they got stopped at the red light.

DAVID. Oh?

ROBERT. Yeah. You should try it sometime. It's great!

DAVID. Tell me about it.

ROBERT. Nope. It's your turn to give... I can wait.

DAVID. Don't try my patience.

ROBERT. Well then how 'bout trying what this patient is telling you?

DAVID. You are aware that we are here for your benefit.

ROBERT. You ignore my pun, and you refuse to talk.

DAVID. I'm not talking to someone if they're going to be difficult. I'll see you next week.

ROBERT. But David! Remember who you're talking to! If you kick me out, there's no telling what I might do. I mean, jeez David...I'm a killer, I'm mentally fragile, I have no respect for life!

DAVID. Would you prefer not to have these sessions anymore Robert?

ROBERT. Ca'mon...don't do that. I just like to see what you do. You're really good at dealing with things. I admire that.

DAVID. I'm not here for your entertainment.

ROBERT. Okay. Alright. Sorry.

DAVID. People in cars...

ROBERT. Yeah. People in cars are...funny. It's like...they're exaggerations of what they're like in the real world. They're in this car,

and it's like they're completely absorbed in their own little capsule. Nothing outside of the car matters unless it's going to affect their car. They just sit there completely focused on the red light waiting for it to turn green. I'm pretty sure the wish "man, I hope this light turns green soon" is thought more often than "man, I wish everyone on Earth could live together in peace." —Traffic light was invented by a black man. Did you know that?

DAVID. No. Please continue.

ROBERT. Well, some people, they're so wrapped up in their little car related affairs, they don't notice anything. —Even things that are car universe relevant, like, say, the light changing. Then, this of course sends the guy behind them, who seemed fine just one second ago, into a complete and total rage. And you can watch him go out of his mind and wave his arms around inside his little capsule. —And during this special period, a person could do any of a number of things to this upstanding citizen, and he would never be the wiser.

But I've forgotten the best part: The people who do notice me, but *pretend* not to. Those are by far the coolest. You know, I'll start doing something weird, and they'll notice, —but instantly, this reflex kicks in which tells them not to look. So they just try to sit there and get nervous because they realize that their capsule is in danger of collapsing. But then, the black man's invention turns green, and they're off, safe and never to be seen again. One out of every million people will notice me, but they're usually kids, and kids of course don't count.

DAVID. Do you want people to think of you as a funny person?

ROBERT. What kind of question is that?

DAVID. What's so strange about it?

ROBERT. You're a robot. I say something and you turn it into a question. I think I saw you at a science fair once.

DAVID. Asking questions is my job. But there are other things we can do. You want to draw a picture?

ROBERT. I'm not five.

DAVID. I know that.

ROBERT. When your wife is feeling bad, do you ask her to draw you a picture?

DAVID. She's a talented artist.

(DAVID hands ROBERT paper and pencil.)

ROBERT. You like dinosaurs?

DAVID. Draw for me a picture of how you deal with your feelings. ...Whatever that means to you.

(ROBERT reacts negatively to this, thinks, and then quickly draws something.)

ROBERT. Okay. This here: this swirling mass of scribble? These are *my feelings*. And this box they're in, is a safe. And then you will notice that the safe is protected by some small predatory dinosaurs. See? Jurassic Park.

DAVID. And nothing ever gets out of here.

ROBERT. I should hope not.

DAVID. Not even your good feelings?

ROBERT. Well who can say which is which? It's like how this place keeps all us prisoners locked up: "Better keep all of them just in case." If I let them out now...I'd probably go crazy.

DAVID. Keeping them boxed up; that'll make you crazy.

(Pause.)

ROBERT. Well... Guess I'm going crazy...

(Lights down. Lights come up on CHERYL kneeling by a school desk.)

CHERYL. This is the desk where young Monica sat. And this is the pencil she used to take notes, pass messages to friends, and maybe make the occasional doodle. And this...is the window Monica used to gaze out of, basking in the glow of her once bright future. But that flame of hope, along with several others at May Laurence Middle School, has been snuffed out.

On the morning of June eleventh, as the late bell rang and the tardy students hustled off to another day of classes, all Jeremy Lamb could bring to school was a handful...of darkness.

Murder News has learned that sheepish Lamb used to take a bit of abuse over his last name. The fad progressed and Lamb sadly became the black sheep of the class. Each laugh: another snip of wool off the mangy coat of his sanity. Jeremy, like any of us, could only lose so much wool before becoming...morally bald.

It is this reporter's opinion that this tragedy could have been prevented. If only the classmates or Jeremy's parents had seen the warning signs that he was displaying so clearly. The unkempt hair. The Marilyn Manson songs. The fact that the letters of his name, when rearranged, spelled out the eerie phrase..."B red yam jel." He was crying out, yet no one heard this young Lamb's bleating.

If only the students of May Laurence could have suppressed their instinct of cruelty. If only young Jeremy didn't know where to find his grandfather's gun. If only...so many things... We can sit here and reflect forever. But that will not give back the seven lives that were lost that fateful morning. "If only." was probably the last thought that ran through Monica's twelve-year-old brain before it was splattered all over the window behind me. The very window...where she had gazed upon her once bright future. —I'm Cheryl Marks.

(Lights up on ALAN.)

ALAN. Thank you Cheryl. Truly...a touching tribute. Later, a special report focusing on Jeremy's press-shy parents exposing what thoughts dwell behind...The Silence...of the Lambs.

—Now! As promised, some info on how to enter the Murder News "Getting Away with Murder" sweepstakes. Just send a postcard with your name and address along with the phrase "I want to get away with murder" to Murder News and you and the guest of your choice could win a trip to scenic and historic Mexico. Mexico. The murder capital of the world.

Up next on Murder News: Hear the story of a murderer who allegedly murdered his victims with murderous intent.

(Lights up on ROBERT in his cell.)

ROBERT. I am positive of your non-existence, yet I find myself praying. Well, I give up, time to come out... Maybe security's too tight, is that it? Or maybe the walls are too thick. —Maybe my window's too small. It's too small for me... I have to imagine you're bigger than I am. Or maybe you don't exist, maybe that's what it is...

(JED enters playing banjo and singing.)

JED. Doing time in the hole.
Doing time without a soul.
'Cause even God don't wanna talk to you
when yo ass is in the hole.

ROBERT. No God, but you're here.

JED. And that's the kina welcome an ugly ol' dog is used to. *(To audience:)* But that don't mean I can't hope for better.

ROBERT. Go away.

JED. That ain't no way to treat ol' Jed. Um um um... Now you wouldn't say that if'n I was some slinky sexy little lady, now would you?

ROBERT. Does this mean— Am I going insane, is that what this means?

JED. I tell ya my heart goes out to you. Here you are in a prison and you ain't never known the comforts of a woman. And how long you gonna be in here...for life? Forty years? Um um um. My heart does go out to you.

'Course you ain't a dog, it's a lot harder for you. Alls I have to do is just find me a woman and as long as she ain't a fast runner, she's mine. Say, what was the name of that one girl you had your eye on? The one who waved to you every day near the gym? Pretty little thing? Ssss...Sara. You didn't even have the first idea what to do around her did ya?

ROBERT. Go away.

JED. You know I may just be your only friend, my boy.

ROBERT. Get out!

JED. *(Softly singing:)* Might as well kill the messenger 'cause you sure can't kill the truth.

(MR. EVADE is seated enjoying a cup of coffee while MRS. EVADE is tending to something.)

MR. I wonder what's on the radio.

MRS. Nothing good I'm sure. You remember that time we had it on?

MR. Well that time and this time are two different times aren't they, Mrs. Evade?

MRS. Well I can't argue with that, Mr. Evade.

MR. No you can't. Sure would be nice to hear a little music right now. Maybe a little news.

MRS. Tomatoes are 39 cents-a-pound over at the Safe Value.

MR. Should pick up a few.

MRS. The tomato's a fruit.

MR. A fruit that rhymes with potato.

MRS. Tomato!

MR. Rhymes with radio.

MRS. That's a half rhyme. —The Johansons' boy graduated this year.

MR. Out in the world now. Lot of things out there.

MRS. A lotta things you wish that weren't.

MR. You can't just keep sweeping them under the rug though.

MRS. When was the last time we cleaned our floors? Must've been over a year.

MR. "There comes a time when you can no longer live in a cave." Heard a fella at work say that the other day.

MRS. Remember the time we had the Carters over and I slipped on that throw rug? That was a hoot.

MR. Certainly was. Did you ever realize that there are millions of radio waves traveling through the air at all times that only gain significance once the radio has been turned on?

MRS. One minute I was up, the next was on my back. Wheat Thins and baby carrots all over the place, willy-nilly.

MR. Wonder what the paper has to say.

MRS. Nothing. A paper can't talk, silly.

MR. Wonder what the TV has to offer us.

MRS. Nothing good. Unless it's Lucy. I love Lucy. Hey! That's the name of the show!

MR. How-'bout-that. I was interested in the news.

MRS. Well what would you wanna watch that for? Nothing but one bad thing aft—

MR. —Sometimes it's good to hear bad things, Mrs. Evade.

MRS. What?

MR. I said, sometimes it's good to hear bad things.

MRS. I thought you said: "Sometimes the needier bank thinks: renegade."

MR. I fantasize about killing you sometimes.

MRS. Wha...wh...ho...

MR. Oh yeah.

MRS. But...No!

MR. Oh, you're right dear. I was just pulling your leg.

MRS. Well that's not something to joke about honey.

MR. You're right. It's very serious. Speaking of serious, we should watch the news.

MRS. But honey—

MR. We've got the radio, the TV or the newspaper. Which one do ya want?

MRS. I'd rather not have any, truthfully.

MR. Well that's no longer an option Mrs. Evade.

MRS. I—

MR. Radio. TV. Paper. The time to choose is now.

MRS. Ra...T...Pa...—Radio.

MR. Sounds good. —I tell ya what honey, don't you move a muscle, I'll turn it on myself.

(MR. EVADE turns on the radio.)

RADIO. A good good morning to you. Mike in the mornings on your favorite Oldies superstation. We have a request for "Love Will Keep Us Together" that I'll have coming up in just a cupulla moments—but first, I was wondering what you kids out there think about all the heat the movie industry's been taking over these school shootings. How do—

(MRS. EVADE turns off radio.)

MRS. Dear, I've changed my mind. I'd rather look at the TV.

MR. Well this is a democracy, isn't it Mrs. Evade.

(MR. EVADE clicks a remote. Lights up on ALAN. MR. EVADE and MRS. EVADE become frightened during the following tirade.)

ALAN. Police brutality. Rapist. Genocide. Starvation. Lynching. Giant ball of flames. Plane crash. Epidemic. Dumpster baby crushed to death. Murder. Murder. MURDER. MURDER!

(MR. EVADE and MRS. EVADE exit screaming. Amidst this confusion WALT enters.)

WALT. Hi. I'm Walt Hopkins and I've been, uh, deeply...intrigued by the tragedy of these school shootings that seem to keep occurring and I've been doing some research on...what causes these events and...I'm writing a play about it. I've always...had it in my mind to write a play, I just...never knew what to write about. But then I was watching the news and, you know, I learned about these

school shootings that were going on and I thought to myself: “Hey, I should write a play about that!” It captured me and... Well maybe I should just shut up and show you some of it...

(ZACK, MITCH, and KELLY enter as their names are spoken.)

The three main characters are Zack, Mitch, and sssCindy—Kelly. They’re all teenagers—and...I know I’m not...a teenager, but I was once so...Well how ’bout I just show you the play.

(MITCH bumps into ZACK on purpose.)

MITCH. Hey why don’t you watch where you’re going butt hole!

ZACK. Sorry Mitch.

(KELLY laughs.)

MITCH. Yeah, can you believe this guy Kelly?

(KELLY laughs.)

MITCH. Can I get a what-what! Man...Zack you better make sure you don’t bump into me again or I’ll suplex you just like Goldberg did to Val Venis.

ZACK. It won’t happen again.

MITCH. It better not retard.

KELLY. Oh leave him alone Mitch.

MITCH. Oh do you have a crush on him Kelly?

KELLY. No way!

(ZACK, MITCH, and KELLY all look to WALT.)

WALT. So that’s probably the end of scene one right there. I’m pretty excited. But back to the play right? Right. It’s time for Zack’s first monologue.

(MITCH and KELLY exit.)

ZACK. I really hate being picked on. Sometimes I wish I could shoot them like I shoot aliens in my favorite video game. Bam! Bam! I could too. My dad has a gun and I know where he keeps it. He doesn’t know I know, but I know. Imagine how Mitch would feel if

I pulled a gun out on him. Bam! It would be just like that movie I saw—

(Enter KELLY.)

—Hey Kelly!

KELLY. Um, yeah?

ZACK. I just wanted to thank you for getting Mitch off my back.

KELLY. Um, sure.

ZACK. It was nice of you.

KELLY. Um, yeah. Well I should go. It wouldn't be good if Mitch saw me talking to you.

ZACK. Yeah...I guess you're right.

WALT. —Did you catch that anger building up there?

KELLY. Well, see ya.

ZACK. See ya. K-Kelly.

WALT. So far so good, right? Well that's actually all I have right now, but...there's more to come, that's for sure! I should go though...the news is coming on. And I haven't eaten yet, have I?

(WALT exits. Enter PREACHER, THEORIST 1, and THEORIST 2.)

VOICE-OVER. And we're back. Before the break reverend, you were saying...

PREACHER. And you may ask yourself, "Why are these atrocities happening?"

THEORIST 1. And the question is why are...these atrocities happening?

THEORIST 2. The answer is obvious.

PREACHER. America's children suffer from a deficiency of religion!

THEORIST 1. Well the trigger's not hard to find it's coming from everywhere.

PREACHER. An astounding number of America's children have no connection to Christian morals!

THEORIST 1. They see it in the movies. They see it on the news. They see it in their video games...

PREACHER. Where are the teachings of Jesus in America today?

THEORIST 2. It's simple.

THEORIST 1. It's lurking around...every corner. Where can a child go to avoid it?

PREACHER. Down the toilet!

THEORIST 2. Everyone is pointing fingers at all sorts of factors, however...

PREACHER. I say to you, my fellow Christians, that if we don't act soon, the America we used to know will be gone!

THEORIST 1. It's impossible.

PREACHER. We must find a way to regain authority over our children.

THEORIST 2. Guns are the only real answer.

PREACHER. We must pressure our children to understand that the Ten Commandments are not suggestions, they are orders!

THEORIST 1. It should be noted that the adolescent's level of stress increases with each passing generation.

THEORIST 2. Adolescence has always been a difficult time.

THEORIST 1. The problems that today's teenager is forced to deal with weren't even issues thirty, forty years ago.

THEORIST 2. The pain and anguish that lead these teens to commit these acts have existed since the dawn of time. Only *now* more and more children have access to guns.

THEORIST 1. Not guns, but society.

PREACHER. Not society, but Satan.

THEORIST 2. Guns!

THEORIST 1. Society!

PREACHER. Satan!

THEORIST 1. Society!

THEORIST 2. Guns!

PREACHER. The Lord's adversary, Satan. —The devil's—keeping our morals at unacceptable levels!

THEORIST 1. Society! Society! Society's to blame. We must level everything and start over again!

THEORIST 2. Ban guns! Ban guns! The guns are the ones! Also ban the bullets that are shot from the guns!

VOICE-OVER. And we're out of time. Thank you everyone.

ALL. Thank you.

(Lights up on ALAN.)

ALAN. Good evening. I'm Alan Burroughs, and you've made it to another edition of Murder News.

(Murder News sound cue.)

In our top story tonight, Eddie Vedder, lead singer of the rock giant Pearl Jam is facing accusations that his song "Jeremy" may have served as a motivation for the young murderer Jeremy Lamb. Vedder declined our request for an interview, but did issue this statement to the press:

(Lights up on EDDIE VEDDER.)

EDDIE VEDDER. The uh-idea that uh-our song Jeremy is uh-being...dragged into this uh-horrific maelstrom... It uh... "The fault dear Brutus is not in our stars, but in our selves." That's a quote. Uh-Shakespeare.

(Lights down on EDDIE VEDDER.)

ALAN. The accusation was made by parents of a May Laurence student who admitted to tormenting Jeremy by singing lines of the song in his presence. The student, who shall remain unnamed, hap-

pened to be absent the day Jeremy, as the song puts it, “spoke in class.”

(Projection of a classic school house shape with a question mark inside it.)

It’s been eight days since young murderer Jeremy Lamb opened fire on his classmates. People are starting to wonder where the next shooting will be. Stay tuned for the top ten warning signs of a massacre in the making. After all, your child’s school could be next. — More news of murderous mayhem, after this.

(Cross fade to ROBERT.)

ROBERT. Okay. I took a gun into school, shot four kids, three of which died, and now I’m sitting here... It’s weird but I can almost forget I did anything.

Like look at it this way: Does the universe miss those three people I killed? Killing a person, I don’t think is any different than killing an animal or chopping down a tree. Each one is going to upset certain people...but when you look at the big picture, is anything any different, did anything really change? No.

How many people do you think have died on this earth never doing one worthwhile thing their whole lives? The number must be in the fucking trillions...

When I shot William Blackwell and Jamal Livingston and Jessica whatever-her-name-is and Alec... —I saw enough to know their lives were already wasted.

They happened to be four wasted lives in easy shooting distance, that’s all. Is that so hard to understand? I mean, okay: *William* was going to continue being an asshole and end up working like a slave to support a family that hates him, right? And Jamal... What? Honestly... A drug overdose? Stabbed to death by a jacket thief? Ms. Jessica... Well she was clearly going to end up being some mindless trophy wife for some exec guy who had about ten other trophies. And Alec...poor Alec wasn’t gonna do anything.

And neither was I. That’s the one thing I learned at school. At least I don’t have to worry about going back there... Same dirty hallways,

same stupid faces. Same sounds. Regulations. Moving through the halls like cattle.

Every day. There it was, right in your face. It sucked. I hated it.

But now, well... Now I have new things to bother me. And this time they're all my fault.

Alec didn't die. One of my bullets took off *his face* but he didn't die. Right now he's somewhere with hamburger meat for a face...

(Bell rings.)

Oh... Lunch time...

(ROBERT exits. Enter GUNGUY 1 and GUNGUY 2.)

GUNGUY 1. Didja get lunch yet?

GUNGUY 2. Still a bit early for lunch.

GUNGUY 1. Suppose it is... Ya' catch that baseball game last night?

GUNGUY 2. Nope, I did not. What happened?

GUNGUY 1. Lost. As usual.

(GUNGUY 2 makes sound of disgust. Both reveal guns, take out a cloth, and begin to clean them.)

GUNGUY 1. Yup... So you hear any more 'bout dat gun control bill?

GUNGUY 2. Aw I don't know. I don't think it's gotten anywhere. I thank God for the Congressmen who are able to keep a level head through all this.

GUNGUY 1. Umm.

GUNGUY 2. Yeah these school shootings are making everybody go crazy.

GUNGUY 1. Umm-hm.

GUNGUY 2. If you got kids runnin' round with guns, you don't wanna get rid of the guns! You wanna get more guns. If the teachers in those schools had guns, then they could've shot them little killers!

GUNGUY 1. Pure truth.

GUNGUY 2. But they don't tell you that on the news...

GUNGUY 1. They don't want you to think about that.

GUNGUY 2. I tell ya the whole thing is a mess.

GUNGUY 1. Um-hmm.

GUNGUY 2. Don't get mad at the gun for killin' somebody, get mad at the person aimin' it! And don't take your frustration out on responsible gun owners, take your frustration out on the parents of those kids who didn't keep their guns hidden away and locked up like they should!

GUNGUY 1. Amen!

GUNGUY 2. It's like they say: Guns don't kill people, people do!

GUNGUY 1. Cain didn't use no gun to slew Abel!

GUNGUY 2. How quickly do the American people forget that this country was founded on the gun!

GUNGUY 1. Sometimes I think you should run for office.

GUNGUY 2. Without guns, how could we have fought off the British? What would've we killed the Indians with?

GUNGUY 1. We have a right to bear arms! Our forefathers said so!

GUNGUY 2. Guns aren't going to be the death of this country, der gonna be da gonba de da ba guba ga ya!

GUNGUY 1. Yes sir! What say we go into the field and celebrate a few rounds of our God given right?

GUNGUY 2. Where police be? Or Army? Faggot-abortion! Chink-nigger-spick!

GUNGUY 1. Up shit's creek without a paddle, that's where! Guns! How could anybody be against them?

GUNGUY 2. Big sound! Big sound go *pow!*

(In all their excitement both accidentally shoot each other and drop to the ground dead. Enter DAVID.)

DAVID. Hey.

ROBERT. Hey.

DAVID. I couldn't help but notice that you didn't show up for your appointment.

(Pause.)

ROBERT. I have my good days, then I have my real days.

DAVID. If you're in pain, you should talk to somebody. In this particular institution, that happens to be me.

ROBERT. You want to help me, get me out of here.

DAVID. Has something happened?

ROBERT. You can't get me out of here, why should I talk to you?

DAVID. Because I'll listen.

ROBERT. Go home. You're off the clock. Go home to your wife.

DAVID. I'm here, I'm available f—

ROBERT. Go home.

(DAVID and ROBERT exit. Enter MITCH and KELLY.)

MITCH. Man, somebody needs to hurt that Zack. For real. What-what!

KELLY. Oh Mitch, he doesn't bother anybody.

MITCH. Yes he does! He bothers me! You saw him bump into me today.

KELLY. I saw you bump into him.

MITCH. Oh that's right I forgot, he's your boyfriend.

KELLY. Shut up Mitch! You can be a real butthead sometimes, you know that?

MITCH. You better remember who you're talking to. Or I'm gonna have to "shut 'em down open up shop..."* I think that Alice girl is pretty hot. Maybe she'd be nicer to me than you are.

*(*Line from Ruff Ryders Anthem by DMX.)*

KELLY. Get bent.

(MITCH grabs KELLY.)

MITCH. You better say you're sorry.

KELLY. Ow! Mitch! Let go of me! Let go of me! Ow!

(He throws her.)

I am leaving!

MITCH. But we were gonna—! Oh man Zack, are you gonna pay for this, little man.

(MITCH exits. KELLY flies across stage and bumps into ZACK.)

KELLY. Zack!

ZACK. Kelly! I was...I was just thinking about you.

KELLY. Oh. Really?

ZACK. You look sad, are you okay?

KELLY. Um, yeah.

ZACK. Uh...are you sure?

KELLY. Well, actually, no. I'm not okay.

ZACK. What is it?

KELLY. It's Mitch.

ZACK. I knew it! What did he do to you?

KELLY. Nothing really... He was just...being a jerk.

ZACK. Someone needs to teach him and his friends a lesson. Are you gonna be alright?

KELLY. Wow. You really care about me.

(Scene freezes.)

WALT. The plot thickens huh? I've worked it all out and I've decided that by the end of the play, Kelly is going to fall in love with Zack and find out about how he's thinking of killing Mitch, but she'll prevent that. And that'll be it!

(ZACK and KELLY exit.)

See, this way I can manage to pull a happy ending out of the whole thing. —Because I was thinking: Oh boy, I don't know Walt, school shootings? How do you expect to...get a happy ending out of that! But here's the answer! Problem solved! I have to admit it...feels pretty good to have it all worked out. And...do you know what? I think I'll go out to a bar tonight.

(WALT exits. Enter ALEC with face covered in bandage and gauze. He is heavily medicated. It is almost as if he is entranced.)

ALEC. Hardest thing... He...didn't know. Who. To kill... Kill when you don't... How? When you don't?... Clothes? Other people might...who... I won't go out. I...I'm afraid. Don't want anyone I know...I'm afraid. I'm...—for them. They might...I'm...afraid. *(Touching his face:)* Burns... How? How? How? I'm afraid.

(Enter ROBERT.)

ROBERT. They don't care. They don't care.

(To audience:) When are you going to stop pretending you care?

(Pulls ALEC downstage.)

I shot this kid's face off. I killed some people. But they weren't you. They weren't your kids. Why can't you admit that you don't care? I know you don't.

You hear something bad on the news and you put on your serious face and say what a tragedy it is, but you're just saying that because you know that's what you're supposed to say.

And I'm in here, —understand this, my life is ruined, only because you pretend to care. *(To ALEC:)* I'm sorry Alec.

(ALEC turns and exits.)

But don't waste your time thinking they care. *(To audience:)* What?

(Cross fade to ALAN.)

ALAN. Good evening. I'm Alan Burroughs and you've made it to another edition of Murder News.

(Murder News sound cue. Projected image of a doctored black and yellow School Crossing sign. The student symbols have guns in their hands.)

There's always been gun violence in the inner city, but now that the problem has spread to less urban, whiter communities, the nation has grown concerned. Kids killing kids: the chilling reality.

As fear and terror grip a nation, Murder News is brave enough to ask the question: Who will be next to turn a house of learning...into a house...of murder. We now bring the first installment of a Murder News special report: Portrait...of a Time Bomb.

(Portrait of a Time Bomb sound cue.)

Cheryl Marks has the story.

(Lights down on ALAN and up on CHERYL.)

CHERYL. According to a recent Gallup poll, thirty-seven percent of thirteen- to seventeen-year-olds nationwide have heard of Columbine-style threats at their own schools. But a threat of violence and an act of violence are two very different things. Who will be next to snap in the nation's sea of frustrated youths? Perhaps it will be...Howard Gibbs.

(Enter HOWARD with bookbag. He appears normal and performs a few regular student actions as CHERYL continues.)

A student at Lilymount High, trenchcoated Howard regularly floats unnoticed down the harshly lit hallways. At a school where you're only cool if you're a jock or prep, Howard is neither. It's easy to imagine Howard having a tough adolescence... But due to the recent epidemic in the country's schools, it's easy to imagine a whole lot more.

(CHERYL and HOWARD begin to move toward two chairs.)

I recently sat down with Howard and the two of us had a talk. A talk which at times may be a bit shocking and unsettling to some viewers. A talk...which displays feelings, we are slowly learning, that are all *too real* for many children across this country.

(CHERYL and HOWARD are seated.)

What's it like growing up as Howard Gibbs?

HOWARD. Well...it's tough. But I guess it's tough for everyone.

CHERYL. I see. And what about it is "tough"?

HOWARD. A lota kids at my school are pretty mean...to me...in particular. People think I'm weird and don't wanna talk to me. Other kids sometimes call me a fag and threaten to beat me up.

CHERYL. Does it bother you that your fellow classmates do not accept your homosexuality?

HOWARD. I'm...not gay. Uh, kids just call me a fag sometimes. I don't think they actually think I'm gay, they just...call me a fag 'cause it's something to call someone.

CHERYL. Who does, Howard?

HOWARD. Uh, just a few kids really.

CHERYL. —Jocks?

HOWARD. I think one of them plays sports.

CHERYL. Why do you think the jocks pick on you Howard?

HOWARD. 'Cause I'm not like them. 'Cause I actually have a brain in my head. 'Cause...I actually care about more than who's dating who and what they're wearing.

CHERYL. Your classmates sound stupid. But they're more than just stupid aren't they Howard? Would you describe them as "vicious" or "evil"?

HOWARD. Maybe some of them.

CHERYL. Did you ever find yourself thinking about how nice it would be at your school if all of the stupid vicious evil children went away?

HOWARD. Sometimes.

CHERYL. How do you feel when you're walking down the hallway and a few jocks walk by with their pretty girlfriends?

HOWARD. I guess I kind of feel like I've been left out. Like they think I'm not good enough to hang out with them.

CHERYL. But you are good enough. In fact you're better than they are.

HOWARD. Thanks.

CHERYL. Howard, do you ever wish that there was something you could do to show them how pathetic and stupid they all really are? Something that would make them drop their put-on personalities and suddenly regret any cross words they have ever said about you?

HOWARD. Yes.

CHERYL. Wouldn't it be nice if there could be at least one day in your school when it wasn't *cool* to be a jock?

HOWARD. I would love that.

CHERYL. Have you ever thought about the name of your school? Lily Mount? A mountain of lilies? A pile of flowers for the dead?

HOWARD. What?

CHERYL. Do you have a girlfriend Howard?

HOWARD. No.

CHERYL. Oh, that's too bad. Why do you think all the pretty girls go out with the jocks, the same vicious degenerates that pick on you every day?

HOWARD. Well, it's all about being popular. If you want to be popular, you have to date someone who's popular.

CHERYL. Can I tell you something Howard?

HOWARD. Please.

CHERYL. A woman likes a man of action. Somebody who stands up for themselves... Someone who's not afraid to teach people a lesson.

HOWARD. Well, I wouldn't mind teaching those jocks a lesson...

CHERYL. This is different side to you. As a woman I must say I find it very attractive. How are you going to put these jocks their place?

HOWARD. I don't...know.

CHERYL. ...I think you do Howard.

(JOURNALIST enters, looking at the scene.)

JOURNALIST. This is unfair. I'm an actual journalist, —and I'll be the first to admit that some of my colleagues have, on occasion, made some poor decisions... —But I find this kind of gross satirization offensive. It's disrespectful to the real life victims of these tragedies and it's disrespectful to me and all the credible journalists across this country.

In my reporting of the May Laurence shooting, I came into the possession of a picture of a twelve-year-old girl who was never going to make it out of seventh grade. I stayed up all night staring into her eyes and I started to realize that all people want from a journalist are answers. The who, the what, the where, the when: they're all accessories. The Why is the only thing that matters. I realized that for the victims of May Laurence there was no why, yet it was my job to explain what happened. People find fault over our intense coverage of these school shootings, but would they prefer if we just ignored it, or treated it like a routine story?

Well what about that?

(JOURNALIST exits as banjo music filters in. JED enters playing and singing. ROBERT enters, waiting for DAVID.)

JED. —Well if it isn't the man of the hour!... Give this a listen.

There's a place over yonder
 where we'll all get along.
 Past all the towers
 Past all the hours
 There's a place we'll get along
 No one who's ever gone
 has ever come back.
 'Cause it's just that great a place!
 You can bet your life on that!

(Strange lights up on DAVID and ROBERT. JED observes the action.)

DAVID. A word to describe how you are feeling today.

ROBERT. Horrible.

(JED makes “wrong answer” buzz.)

DAVID. I’m sorry Robert, but the response we were looking for was: What is better. What. Is. Better. Also please remember to phrase your response in the form of a question. Let’s move on. The answer is: On the road to recovery.

ROBERT. What is something that you think I’m on?

DAVID. Judges...?

(DAVID looks to JED who shakes his head and makes buzzer sound.)

I’m sorry Robert that was close, but the judges have decided it was not close enough. The correct response would have been: What is something that I am on. Not “you think.” Sometimes it all comes down to the matter of...a few words. But let’s continue. The answer is: Complete remorse.

ROBERT. *(To JED:)* Why are we doing this?

DAVID. Ten seconds...

ROBERT. *(Sighs.)* Okay. What I feel about what I did to Alec.

(The buzzer is heard.)

DAVID. Oh. Again. Not quite the full answer. We were looking for: The emotion I feel when I think about what I did to William, Jamal, Jessica, Alec, the entire population of C.B. Malcolm High School, and the world.

JED. Um um um.

(JED exits. Normal lighting returns.)

DAVID. Robert? How are you doing today Robert?

ROBERT. The correct response to that question is: “I’m fine.”

DAVID. Look, I know it's tough right now, but this is all part of the healing process. You have to realize the full ramifications of your actions. Then we work together to help you find peace.

(Pause.)

It seems strange...I know it does, but you have to trust me. This isn't some sort of experiment. This is a time-tested method that does work. It's—

ROBERT. —Does it look like it's working for me?

DAVID. It will.

ROBERT. Faith. Good for you. I thought maybe I could give you this. It's a letter I wrote to Alec. Could you send it to him? Do you think it would be okay? Him getting a letter from me?

DAVID. Yes.

ROBERT. Do you think he'd want to read it, or is it a bad idea?

DAVID. Robert it's good that you feel remorse about what you did to Alec, but you never mention William, Jamal, or Jessica. Do you feel remorse for them?

(Pause.)

ROBERT. I don't feel. I don't feel about anything. Feelings are for human beings. I'm cattle now.

DAVID. You're lying.

ROBERT. Yeah? You lie to me all the time. You just lied to me a second ago... You lied when you said you didn't think I was crazy... Your whole profession is lies. Positive bullshit that a six-year-old could see through. Why do you think I'm in here? Why do you think I did it? I may not be smart enough to get a good grade on a fucking history test, but I am smart enough to see through lies. To see this life for what it really is. Most people pretend life has some kind of purpose, life is precious. That there's some kind of hope for the human race, like we're ever going to do anything besides blow each other up and fuck each other over. It's fucking bullshit. Anyone who hides from that is a fool.

DAVID. No matter how bad things are you can always hope. That's our gift. That's how we stay alive.

ROBERT. So the secret to life is all about deluding one's self.

DAVID. Robert...the first time I met you I told you you were an individual.

ROBERT. Yeah, so? That's what you were supposed to say.

DAVID. Listen, you are an individual, so is everyone, and that in itself, is the reason that everyone is valuable. You are valuable. For all of eternity, there will only ever be one you and that—

ROBERT. There are a million people exactly like me.

DAVID. You don't believe that. You know exactly who you are. You know you are smart. You know you're funny. You know that you are an incredibly original person. We all are. And if you would use your intelligence to look past the surface of people then you would understand why a life is the most important valuable beautiful gift that there is. Listen Robert, you're afraid to admit this because you're afraid to feel guilty for the lives you've taken. But you have to let yourself go there. You have to let that out. We can work through it. We can get through it.

ROBERT. This is when I bust into tears, music swells, I hug you, fade to black.

DAVID. But we're not in a movie, are we?

ROBERT. No.

DAVID. So then we both know it's not going to be that easy.

ROBERT. Well played. Remember that letter to Alec.

(Lights down on ROBERT and DAVID. Ambient sound from the opening returns. THE WHY enters.)

THE WHY It is I.

It is I.

I am the why.

THEORIST 1. *(Voice-over:)* Why are these atrocities happening?

THE WHY I am the why.

(Embodying rage:) This is me!
(Embodying misery:) This is me.
(Embodying fear:) This is me.
(Embodying hopelessness:) This is me.
This is I.
This is why.
It is I who am the why.
They punish them.
But I am why.
They punish them.
Can't punish I.
I'm here.
I'm there.
All times
I am.
I, the why, in all of them.
In all of they.
In all of you.
I am the why.
I am all through.
Here and there:
No end to me.
For I, the why
will always be.
In you,
In them,
In they,
Is me.
And I, the why
Will always be.
They punish them.
Can't punish I.
Yet it is I
Who am the why.
They are not blind.
They see!
They see!
They know I'm why.
They know it's me.

They punish them
To get at me.
But I, the why
Will always be
In you
In them
In they
Is me
And I, the why
Will always be.

(THE WHY exits. Lights up on SARA.)

SARA. I keep seeing Robert with that gun.

I know I'm lucky. I'm lucky to be alive, but at the same time...I'd be outside on a nice day, someone would ask me how I am and I'd say "fine," but...

My parents have me seeing a therapist. The idea is I keep seeing Robert because when I spun around and saw him standing there with that gun, I realized that I had no control over my life. That's something that's true for all of us. It's a truth everyone would rather not realize, but my therapist is trying to show me that I do have power. I can control things. Not everything, but some things.

And he's right. Last week I stopped something bad from happening. All I did was yell. That was enough. He got right off of her and left.

I see Robert less.

We have no control over what happens, but that's not the end of it.

(Lights down on SARA. Lights up on TOUGH COP testing catch phrases. With each delivered line, he plays with sticking his chin forward, glaring threateningly, and holding his gun different ways.)

TOUGH COP. *(Draws gun. Assumes posture.)* Party's over.

(Again draws gun and assumes posture.) Party's over dirtbag.

(Again.) Party's over...dirtbag.

(Enter SHERIFF, gun drawn, slowly sneaking up behind TOUGH COP. TOUGH COP continues.)

Party's over dirt-punk.

SHERIFF. Well well.

(TOUGH COP violently spins around to point his gun at SHERIFF using his practiced posture.)

TOUGH COP. Well hell.

SHERIFF. My town doesn't need any more crazies.

TOUGH COP. Ya know, last time I checked this was Los Angeles and uh...unless you look real different on TV, I'm pretty sure you aren't the Mayor.

SHERIFF. You say any more words they might be carved on your tombstone.

TOUGH COP. Huh, well, I hate to ruin the moment, but it looks like we got company.

(Enter FRANKIE and ROBBER with guns fixed on each other.)

FRANKIE. I swear to the heavenly father above: I will end you right here. I will end you! Do not play with me honey! Do not play—

ROBBER. Go play with yourself you greasy shit.

FRANKIE. That's enough! That's enough from you!

SHERIFF. Alright now the four of us are gonna have a little chat.

ROBBER. These two again.

FRANKIE. Ah Christ!

TOUGH COP. Did somebody say my name?

SHERIFF. Everybody drop your guns.

FRANKIE. I don't like this... Frankie does not like this!

ROBBER. Fucking strange things are afoot.

FRANKIE. You got that right. Everyone here; and we're all pointin' guns... I'd like to know how or why this is happening.

TOUGH COP. Yeah? Well maybe you'll have time to figure it out behind bars...punk-bag!

SHERIFF. That's enough out of you, undershirt.

ROBBER. The guido is right. Something's fucked.

SHERIFF. Now where did a lady learn to talk like that?

ROBBER. Shit-Fuck!

FRANKIE. *(To ROBBER:)* Alright. So you agree with me. Something isn't right.

TOUGH COP. Ah guys, I'd love to sit around and talk all day, but my son's got a tee-ball game that I need to be getting—

FRANKIE. Shut up you friggin' cretino!

ROBBER. Fuck this shit. What do we all want ta shoot each other for? We should all just walk.

FRANKIE. She makes a point. What do you to say?

TOUGH COP. *(Mouth open; darting his eyeballs around.)* Whoa! I don't think we're in Kansas anymore Tex.

SHERIFF. Don't talk to me you half-wit.

FRANKIE. So are we at an understanding?

SHERIFF. What in blazes is going on here? That's what I'd like to know.

ROBBER. I don't know but whatever the fuck it is, I want out. Who's with me?

TOUGH COP. Yippy-ki-a motherfucker.

SHERIFF. Fine. We'll call it a draw.

(SHERIFF, TOUGH COP, ROBBER, and FRANKIE cautiously lower their guns.)

FRANKIE. Well, as for me, I'm getting out of here and hope that our paths will refrain from crossing in the future.

(FRANKIE *proceeds to exit.*)

ROBBER. Don't any of you bastards follow me.

(ROBBER *proceeds to exit.*)

TOUGH COP. Yeah, well I hate to disappoint, but the meter's running on the cab, so uh...

(TOUGH COP *realizes he has nothing to say and quickly exits.*
SHERIFF *stares at the gun in his hand.*)

SHERIFF. There's something downright weird about this whole thing.

(*Lights down on SHERIFF. Enter DAVID. Waits before talking.*)

DAVID. Robert told me he was planning to go to the yard during lunch. I thought it was a good sign. First time he showed any social behavior.

The guards say that he sat on one of the benches the whole time and watched some of the kids play basketball. Then, right about when lunch was almost over, he walked up to Isaiah Jenkins, the most violent inmate in here, and punched him in the face.

There was a second that Isaiah just stood there, holding his jaw in shock. But it was just a second. Isaiah and his friends... It took seven guards to tear them off.

Robert was rushed to the infirmary. From there he was taken to the hospital. He had four broken ribs and a collapsed lung. His face was...missing teeth, broken nose, swelling everywhere... He wasn't going to make it.

He wasn't conscious when I saw him. His mother and father were standing off in the corner. I think it was the first time they had visited him. Isaiah said that right before Robert punched him, he said: "Make sure they send my letter to Alec."

(DAVID *takes out letter and reads.*)

Alec: You probably won't believe me when I tell you this, but I'm sorry. I know it doesn't change anything, but I still thought you should know. I am very sorry for everything. I think about you every day. Please know that I am very, very sorry.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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