

LOCKDOWN
By
Eric Mansfield

LOCKDOWN

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LOCKDOWN

Character Breakdown:

Cast*: (2 males, 4 females)

Ruth Carey, 50-60, School Counselor

Benji Bragg, 25-30, Assistant Football Coach

Jane Thompson, 18, Senior Class Treasurer, Athlete

Hope Pfeiffer, 35-45, PTA President

Brenda Simms, 25-35, History Teacher

Simon Sanders, 17, Sophomore

*the gender and/or orientation of all characters may be modified to fit the desires of a specific production. For example, if cast as a female-identifying character, Simon would change to Simone and reference pronouns would change accordingly. However, the playwright should be consulted prior to producing a modified version of the play.

/ Indicates overlapping dialogue

Author's note: LOCKDOWN is meant to be performed in real time with no breaks.

Content Warning: Audience members should be told about the use of a prop gun and that this story includes references to physical abuse and school shootings as the content may be triggering for some.

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SETTING: High school counselor's office in the Midwest. The office has a traditional desk, a small conference table, a white board and a couch. The office door is in the center and there is a coat closet off to one side.

AT RISE: Loud noises are coming from outside of the office. People are heard running with the sound of panic and chaos. Clearly a crisis is at hand. Ruth is pacing in her office trying to process the chaos she hears outside. She opens the door a few inches and looks into the hallway.

RUTH. Benji. In here. Quick.

BENJI. What are you doing? We should get out / of here.

RUTH. No, trust me. We can hide here.

BENJI. Is it safe? (*Ruth pulls Benji in and locks the door.*)

RUTH. Safer than out there. Jesus. I can't believe this.

BENJI. What the hell happened? I heard the shot. I think it was. Was it a shot?

RUTH. I think so. I don't know. It was loud. What else could it be?

BENJI. I .. I ran into the hallway. Everyone was running. I only had two kids in detention. They both ran out through / door 12.

RUTH. Was Simon in there?

BENJI. Who?

RUTH. Simon. The kid with the hair and the death tattoos? Isn't he always in morning detention?

BENJI. No. Why?

RUTH. Just trying to figure out who was firing. First one I thought of.

BENJI. Why the hell do you say that?

RUTH. Have you seen that kid? Different color hair every day. All those tattoos. Rarely speaks unless he's telling a teacher to go screw / themselves.

BENJI. And that makes him the shooter?

RUTH. He's been in this office repeatedly for problems. We get nowhere.

BENJI. So?

RUTH. So other times, he just sits outside my office day after day for no reason.

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BENJI. I don't follow --

RUTH. Benji, I've been scared of Simon since the day he arrived. I swear I can even feel him watching me go to my car before and after school. That kid isn't right.

BENJI. I guess ... maybe – (*Quick banging on the door.*)

VOICES FROM HALL. Let us in. Open up. Let us in right now.

BENJI. Who is it?

VOICES. Open it damn it! Now! Please! please!

BENJI. (*Quietly to Ruth.*) What do we do?

RUTH. (*To Benji.*) It could be the shooter?

BRENDA. (*From hallway.*) Benji. It's me. Open up. (*Benji opens the door. Brenda, Jane and Hope rush in as Benji re-locks the door.*)

HOPE. Thank you Jesus.

BENJI. Everyone get down. And be quiet.

RUTH. It's ok. Hope. Look at me. It's ok. You're safe now. You're going to be ok.

BRENDA. Who was firing? Do you know?

BENJI. No idea.

JANE. I don't know Miss Sims. I just ... Oh my God .. I just followed the crowd.

RUTH. You're ok now, Jane. We need to let the principal know we're here. (*Ruth picks up desk phone but she obviously isn't getting a dial tone.*)

HOPE. I need to know my son got out ... and let my husband know I'm ok.

BENJI. (*To Hope.*) Well do it quietly. Ruth?

RUTH. It's just buzzing. That's weird.

BRENDA. I've got to call my sister. She's going to freak. Shouldn't we run?

BENJI. (*To himself.*) Yeah, you know how do that.

BRENDA. (*agitated*) Hey.

BENJI. No. If it is gunshots, we don't want to be in the line of fire. We sure as hell don't want anyone to hear us on the damn phone.

RUTH. I just said --

HOPE. OK. I just want to stay here.

JANE. (*To Hope.*) I'll stay with you Mrs. Pfeiffer.

BENJI. You're going to do what I tell you to do Jane, understand?

JANE. I know coach. I'm just --

RUTH. You're fine Jane. And you're fine too Hope. Now just hold still. Let us think for a second.

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BRENDA. *(To Jane.)* Text your parents you're ok. *(Jane takes out her phone, then stops.)*

JANE. I can't.

BRENDA. Why not?

JANE. Texting and Wi-Fi are blocked in this part of the building.

BRENDA. Great. *(To Ruth.)* Why the hell did you guys do that?

RUTH. The principal didn't want kids hanging around texting or surfing / porn.

BRENDA. Well that was a stupid thing to do.

RUTH. Wasn't my idea.

BRENDA. Oh, but it's ok if they check Facebook in my American Government class --

JANE. I think you mean Tik Tok.

BRENDA. Whatever. You know what I mean. They can waste time on *that* but God forbid they send selfies in the counselor's --

BENJI. Stop it. Both of you.

HOPE. Yes, stop please. Listen to Coach.

BENJI. Jane --

JANE. My mom is gonna freak --

BENJI. *(To Jane.)* Hey. Look at me. You're ok. We'll deal with your mom later. Peek out the window. What do you see? *(Jane looks through the blinds into the hallway.)* Anything?

JANE. There's trash cans tipped over and backpacks and books everywhere. I -- I don't see anyone.

BENJI. Then we're just going to sit tight --

BRENDA. And just wait here to die?

BENJI. Look Brenda, or do I call you Miss Simms now?

BRENDA. Hey.

BENJI. Whatever. You go out there, and you're definitely in the line of fire. So you know what, just shut / your trap.

BRENDA. Don't talk to me that way. You don't get to talk to me like. Like those football goons you boss / around.

BENJI. You don't know what you're talking about. And where do you get off lecturing me? You're out of your mind lady.

BRENDA. You're so full of yourself. Can you even see beyond your own fragile male ego?

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RUTH. Both of you stop it. Just stop. You're worse than the kids who come in here. *(beat.)* Hope, what did you see?

HOPE. I was dropping off baked goods in the PTA office, and then I was headed home until I had to be back to help with dismissal like I always / do.

BENJI. That's the complete other side of the building. How did you end up over here?

HOPE. I - I don't know. I heard the noise as I came out of the room, and the hall was ... God .. I just started moving --

BRENDA. *(To Hope.)* And then I grabbed you and we turned the corner. You, Jane and me. Remember? *(To Ruth.)* And here we are in your office just as Hope and I were earlier. Before whatever the hell this is. *(To Benji.)* Didn't know you would be here.

BENJI. Yeah? Bet you're glad I am, aren't you?

RUTH. Did you see that Simon kid anywhere?

BENJI. Here we go again.

BRENDA. No, I didn't.

HOPE. Which kid is that?

BRENDA. The one who always looks like he's going to shoot up a McDonald's.

RUTH. Right?? That's what I thought.

HOPE. I don't know him. But if you're right, he might have a hit list of students to kill.

BRENDA. Most shooters do.

BENJI. All three of you! Stop! You don't --

BRENDA. Don't what? Recognize a killer in waiting?

RUTH. *(To Brenda.)* Scares the hell out of me.

BRENDA. Me too.

BENJI. Again, stop it. None of you know a damn thing about that kid.

BRENDA. I don't? You've been here what, a year and a half?

BENJI. You would know.

BRENDA. Fine. Whatever Benji. I've taught in this school for 8 years, and I know a violent punk when I see one. That kid's off his / meds or something.

BENJI. Brenda you're so full of shit --

RUTH. Coach, Language. I'll remind you we have a student with us.

JANE. It's ok.

BENJI. Don't tell me what to do. We're hiding for our lives right now.

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RUTH. Yeah, in *my* office.

BENJI. Well thanks for that. My damn language is the least of our damn worries.

RUTH. Still --

JANE. It's ok.

BENJI. She's heard a lot worse playing sports believe me.

JANE. (*To herself.*) And at home.

HOPE. (*To Benji.*) That doesn't make it right.

JANE. Really. It's ok. I've had Alice Training since third grade. So we need to barricade this door if a shooter tries / to enter.

HOPE. Can I tell you Jane how much parents hate Alice? That the schools *have* to teach it?

JANE. Twice a year we learn how to deny access to our classroom ... or if we have to, how to fight / back.

HOPE. Wait a minute. I'm hung up on the third-grade part. You first learned what do about a gunman .. in the third grade?

RUTH. Shooters go after young kids too, Hope.

BENJI. Bastards.

BRENDA. Yep. That's what we do in education now. We scare the living hell out of third graders like Jane here .. while they're at school. Because we have to.

JANE. (*To Hope.*) Really, I'm used to it Mrs. Pfeiffer--

BRENDA. See?? She's *used* to being scared at school. Isn't that just what a family school district is all about?

BENJI. Hey. Easy.

BRENDA. You know why math scores are down? Do you? (*Brenda begins writing on the dry erase board.*) It's right here. It's because *we're* teaching 8-year-olds that 5 times 5 is 25. Right? But the equation *little Billy* is solving is this one: (*Brenda draws stick figures.*) X equals the classmates needed to be shot by Y number of bullets for me to have enough time jump from the window. The answer of course is three. But on the bright side, Billy's learning algebra at an early / age.

BENJI. Fine. Then why do it?

HOPE. Yeah? Why train them for something that just scares the be-jeezus out of them .. and their parents?

BRENDA. Seriously? Do you watch the news ever? What else can we do? There's a new school shooting damn near every day.

BENJI. Not true.

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BRENDA. Yes true. And look at where we are right now? We're hiding from a gunman.

BENJI. Ohhhh .. nice that you can be passionate about something --

BRENDA. Benji, knock it off. This isn't the time. So you can see why --

HOPE. Why you wish you had a gun in school?

BRENDA. That's not what I was about to say.

HOPE. It's where you were headed. How else are you going to defend yourself against a gunman? (*Hope takes marker from Brenda and adds stick figures to the white board.*) How else are you going to protect little Billy here? Just so he has enough time to calculate his life-saving algebra -- while his classmates die?

RUTH. Hope, honey --

HOPE. No. I want to know. Is this a first-floor window? Or can Billy jump from the *second* floor?

BRENDA. Guess it depends on Z.

JANE. What's Z?

BRENDA. How good of a shot Simon is.

BENJI. (*to Brenda.*) Hey, that's out of line. (*to Hope, referencing Brenda.*)

And that's not what she Do you know .. That's .. That's not it! If I had a gun -- right here -- on my hip, don't you think my students or my football players would be completely fixated on it?

RUTH. They wouldn't be able to stop looking at it.

BRENDA. So?

BENJI. So they can't *not* think about guns if they're faced with one in their face all day. No one can learn like that.

HOPE. (*to Benji and Brenda.*) Wait? You two think that's what we parents want to hear?

RUTH. Hope --

HOPE. No, seriously. You two actually have *our* kids -- our precious children -- in your classes and hallways and locker rooms every day ... and you're *not* going to do everything in your power to protect them?

BENJI. Whoa. Hold / your horses.

BRENDA. Wait a minute Hope

HOPE. Stop it. You all know I'm right.

JANE. Mrs. Pfieffer, I don't think they meant --

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HOPE. *(to Jane.)* Jane, you just said they've been scaring you since elementary school. *(to Benji and Brenda.)* You all say there's a new school shooting every day. And you all admit that our kids are thinking about how they're going to survive in home room. And the parents are just supposed to accept that *not* being able to shoot back is ok?

RUTH. What do you want us to do?

HOPE. Do for these students what didn't happen at Parkland.

RUTH. And what's that?

HOPE. Protect them, Ruth. Protect. Them. 17 kids were killed there with an officer in the building. And 17 more were wounded.

BRENDA. You don't think we know that? You don't think we felt that *that* day? And every day thereafter? How dare you --

HOPE. Then do it. Protect these kids. Protect Jane here. And every other kid in this school. Don't let the grim reaper claim their souls if you can help it.

BENJI. That's what we do, Hope. Every day.

BRENDA. Yes, we do. Just not with a gun.

HOPE. Oh .. No? You're telling me kids are scared and the threat is real. So where is the firepower? Where is whatever-the-hell-it's-going-to-take to keep our kids alive?

JANE. My mom worries about that too.

HOPE. *(to Jane.)* Of course she does honey. Of course, she does. *(to everyone.)* But do you know how hard it is for parents -- and trust me they tell me -- to drop their kids off outside or kiss their heads walking out the door ... praying to God they come home alive eight hours later?

BENJI. Look --

HOPE. No, you look. I know I'm not a teacher or a coach or a counselor . But damn it to hell .. How quickly you all brushed aside the value that a teacher might offer if they could just shoot back. *(Beat.)*

BRENDA. No.

HOPE. That's it? Just, no?

BRENDA. No. No. No. That isn't the job. That isn't what I signed up for.

BENJI. Me either.

BRENDA. Hope, you're not a student so I'm not going to sugarcoat this. There are 800 kids in this school --

RUTH. 824.

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BRENDA. (*struggling to keep composure.*) Ok, 824 students ... and ... and ...

RUTH. Me too, Brenda. Me too.

BRENDA. (*Fighting emotions.*) Kids whose lives I wanted to change ... so they could chase their dreams and take on the world and become who they were meant to be. That's their job. My job? I'm their teacher. I'm not their bodyguard.

HOPE. Nobody said --

BRENDA. Yes, you did. (*Beat.*) And I resent that you or any other parent condemn me for it .. or think it makes me any less of a mamma bear that I don't want to arm myself to save these students -- my kids -- any one of the 824 of them from the bogeyman or from a purple-headed teen terrorist in a trench coat.

RUTH. Ohhh ... what was Simon wearing today?

BENJI. Here we go. None of us saw Simon. None of us. And where do you get off saying a trench coat?

BRENDA. Just saying.

JANE. He's usually in jeans and that oversized black hoodie.

RUTH. (*Snaps fingers.*) Baggy clothes. See. Not a trench coat, but yes. He could hide a gun under there. Easily.

JANE. Not Simon.

BRENDA. That's why I think he's the shooter --

JANE. Not Simon.

RUTH. It has to be him --

HOPE. Wait a minute Ruth. (*To Jane.*) "Not Simon" what?

JANE. Simon is ... He's ok. I don't think he did this.

BRENDA. Yeah, and how would you know?

BENJI. & HOPE. (*To Brenda.*) Shhh.

HOPE. Do you know him, Jane?

JANE. No. Not really. But he's here in the office a lot when I have meetings with the other class officers. And --

RUTH. And, what?

JANE. I don't know Mrs. Carey. I see his eyes.

BRENDA. Crazy, right? I mean crazy --

JANE. No. No. He looks at me and the other students like he wishes something --

RUTH. What do you mean?

JANE. He looks at letterman jackets like he wishes he had one.

BRENDA. Probably wants to steal one --

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RUTH. Sell it for cash. Or drugs --

JANE. No.

BENJI. If he wants one, he can try out for the team like -

JANE. That's just it, coach. I don't think he could join a sport or a club. I mean, I don't think he has anyone to get him to school.

BENJI. Well he gets here somehow.

RUTH. Jane, I think it's nice that you want to see the good in someone like Simon. We teach you that here, but --

JANE. No, Mrs. Carey. It's not that. He looks at the folders we're carrying ... ya know, for colleges --

BRENDA. Oh please. That kid's not getting into college. He's going to an institution alright, but it ain't one for higher learning. Trust me.

HOPE. I think you're getting a little bit carried away.

RUTH. No she's not. Simon is bad news. Brenda and I both see it. He's a killer in waiting, and he might be out there trying to notch his first body, assuming today is his first --

JANE. (*Bold*) No. He's not.

BENJI. How do you know, Jane?

JANE. Because I talked to him. I saw him by the front door yesterday, and he had a bruise on his cheek, and I think a bit of blood on his shirt. So I asked him if he got into a fight.

RUTH. Jane. You should not have done that. You should have gotten a teacher.

JANE. If I'd done that, I think he would have run out of the school --

BRENDA. Would have made the school safer.

JANE. I don't know. He was just acting like he needed help. Like he wished someone would offer. I'd never spoken to Simon before, so I asked him if he was ok or if he needed to go to the nurse.

BENJI. You could have brought him to the coaching office.

JANE. Simon just shrugged and said he was so tired of all of it. His eyes seemed distant. And then he looked me right in the eye and he said the weirdest thing --

RUTH. What?

JANE. He said, "I hope it will be worth it."

BRENDA. Oh my God. See, he's the shooter. That's him right there. Plotting.

RUTH. Absolutely.

HOPE. You might be right, but you really don't know that.

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BENJI. No, you don't.

RUTH. For the last time, that kid -- that monster of teen flesh -- is dangerous. Can we just be honest? I know it. *You* know it, and it was only a matter of time before Simon Sanders shot up the whole damn --

(A loud noise comes from the closet causing everyone to freeze. When Benji checks, he finds Simon hiding inside. Saying nothing, Simon stares at the group. As the room fills with disbelief, Benji reaches out a friendly hand to Simon.)

BENJI. It's ok, you're safe here son. *(Simon cautiously takes Benji's hand. As soon as they touch, Benji pushes Simon to the floor and begins a police-style pat-down.)*

SIMON. What the hell man? Get off me. What's your deal dude?

BENJI. You gotta a gun?

SIMON. No.

BENJI. A knife? Tell me now.

SIMON. I told you man, get off me.

BENJI. *(Covering Simon's mouth)* Keep your voice down. Now, I'm gonna let you up, and you're going to stay quiet or I'm going to play the fight song on your windpipe. You understand me? *(Simon stops struggling, shakes his head in agreement. Benji lets him up.)*

RUTH. Why are you hiding in my office?

SIMON. Excuse me?

BRENDA. You heard her. What are you doing in this office? In that closet?

SIMON. Hiding.

RUTH. From what?

SIMON. From the shots. Same as you bitches. *(Benji shoves Simon.)*

RUTH. Hey, knock it off Simon

SIMON. Oh, she can call me a killer and she can too ... but I'm the one who's out of line?

HOPE. Well, if you didn't fire the shots -- and I'm not saying you did -- who do you think did?

SIMON. I have no idea, but you did say it was me. *(to Ruth and Brenda.)* Both of you did. *(to the group.)* I heard the shit go down and ran in here.

BENJI. From where? Where were you?

SIMON. I don't know. What does it matter?

RUTH. You go to school here, and you don't know where you were?

BRENDA. Coach, are you sure he isn't packing?

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SIMON. I'm not carrying.

BENJI. You heard the counselor. Where were you?

SIMON. What the fu -- You ask all of them where they were?

JANE. Simon, what were you near when you heard the shots?

SIMON. By the painting stuff above the lunchroom.

JANE. Ok, that's the Art wing. It's real close. That's where you were.

SIMON. OK, I was in the Art wing. You happy?

BRENDA. Don't take that tone Mister Sanders.

JANE. He didn't know Miss Simms. He didn't know. (*To Simon.*) Have you ever been in *that* part of the building before? (*Simon shakes his head no.*) Ok. Again, that's the Art wing. It's between the math rooms and the gym. So next time you'll know.

SIMON. Fine. Whatever. Guess next time I just have to figure out which window to jump out of. (*Simon taps blackboard.*)

BRENDA. Not funny kid.

RUTH. There's not going to be a next time if you're expelled, or in / jail.

SIMON. I told you, I didn't fire a shot. And I ain't got a gun. Why don't you believe me? Why don't you ever believe me?

BENJI. How did you know it was a shot?

SIMON. Really? You all thought it was a shot too or you wouldn't be hiding here. So go screw yourselves.

BENJI. Boy, you mouth off again, and I'm gonna make your weird hair a new color -- blood red.

HOPE. We're all just scared after what happened --

JANE. Wait. You're scared about today?

HOPE. Of course.

BRENDA. Sure we are.

JANE. But, why are *you* scared?

BENJI. You serious Jane?

JANE. No, I'm not being difficult. I'm honestly asking why you're all scared when school leaders have been telling Simon and me for years: 'don't be scared' and 'everything is going to be fine at school' and how 'we should just focus on learning, and you'll take care of the rest'? Right?

SIMON. Damn straight. Sound familiar?

RUTH. Well of course we told you that. We don't want you kids to worry.

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JANE. Really? Really? You don't think kids know what's going on? You teach us what to do if the bogeyman comes into class, and then expect us to flip a switch and drift off peacefully back into Harry Potter?

BENJI. Well, there's more to it than that.

JANE. I haven't been able to relax in school since I was 8. My eyesight is 20-200 but I ask to sit way in the back of every class so that I'm not the first one a gunman sees at the door.

BRENDA. Oh honey.

JANE. I remember it was a Tuesday, and I was in Mrs. Wilson's class --

SIMON. Ninth Grade.

JANE. Right. I can still remember hearing the glass break in the hall .. and the screaming ... and then the school police officer bolting down the hall ... and then Mrs. Wilson locking the door.

RUTH. The glass you heard was the trophy case breaking. Two girls were fighting. That's all it was.

JANE. You think *we* knew that? I thought I was going to die. Whole thing might have only been 10 seconds, but ... (*choking up.*)

RUTH. We made an announcement that it was only a fight. You should have come to my office if you were that upset.

JANE. Come to the office? Come to the office?? (*beat*) I. Couldn't. Speak. I. Couldn't. Sleep.

BRENDA. Easy Jane.

JANE. I didn't know what to do and neither did any of the other kids in the class for like a week. Don't any of you get that?

BENJI. Your teachers would have protected you had it been a real shooter.

BRENDA. Benji, I don't think that's the point she's making.

JANE. My best friends are somewhere in this building. Maybe hurt or bleeding. Or maybe dead. I can't connect my phone with anyone to know what's going on ... and once again the adults in the room are telling us students that 'everything's going to be alright.'

RUTH. That's enough.

SIMON. I think she's trying to tell you know-it-all that the fear you're feeling right now is what we students deal with *all* the time.

HOPE. How were your teachers supposed to know that?

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SIMON. Oh, come on. You're all so scared, you're reliving other school shootings before this one's even over.

BRENDA. Don't attack us. We all remember exactly where we were when Florida happened. You probably remember the shooter's name.

SIMON. Scott Beigel.

BENJI. Oh my god. You do.

BRENDA. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. That's not it.

SIMON. No, it's not teacher lady.

BRENDA. (*Thinking.*) Scott was a geography teacher who let kids hide in his classroom. He was killed in the doorway protecting them, but they all survived. He's a hero.

SIMON. One of -- count them -- three staff members who died that day protecting kids. (*to Hope.*) It wasn't just 17 kids.

HOPE. I don't know what to say.

SIMON. Well you can start by getting your facts straight if you're going to criticize these teachers.

HOPE. But how did you know that?

BRENDA. Do you study school shootings? Is that your thing?

SIMON. No, I pay attention. And I read. But my God lady, listen to yourself. I heard you talking about me, and you're still doing it. You all think I'm a killer just waiting to explode.

RUTH. No, we don't.

SIMON. Yes, you do. You especially Mrs. Carey. What did I ever do to deserve that? What? Cuz my hair is a different color? Cuz I wear the same dirty pants every day?

BRENDA. Simon, you have to put yourself in our shoes.

SIMON. Bullshit. You walk a mile in mine. You've never had me in class. You see me in the halls, but really you pretend that you don't. You don't know where I come from. You don't / know.

BENJI. Kid, I'm not going to tell you again to calm down.

SIMON. You too coach. What the hell man? Jane is the only one of you who even talked to me, and she don't even know me.

RUTH. She told us what you said.

SIMON. (*To Jane.*) What? What did I --

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BRENDA. "I hope it will be worth it?" You say that Simon? Kind of stuff a shooter would say don't you think?

HOPE. You can see why teachers would be concerned.

SIMON. That's not ...

BENJI. Let me see your phone.

SIMON. Why?

BENJI. Make sure you didn't create a manifesto online.

SIMON. All of you. All of you. ... you and you and you ... the hell with you.

RUTH. You can't use that language in here --

BENJI. Quiet. Ok? We all need to shut the hell up. (*To Simon.*) Especially you freak-show.

BRENDA. You can't check his phone. There's no wi-fi here, remember? (*Simon fumes as he makes eye contact with each person but can't seem to make words come out.*)

JANE. (*breaks tension of the silence.*) Simon. I was worried when we spoke the other day. And I don't really know you --

SIMON. (*to Jane*) No, you don't. You tried, but you don't. But at least you said something. At least she talked to me. None of you assholes did --

RUTH. Son, you will / respect --

SIMON. I'm not your son.

HOPE. Easy Simon. She didn't mean ... did you Ruth?

SIMON. (*to Ruth.*) I only came to the office because I heard you tell all the other kids that when times are tough, they can come to you. So when I heard the shit go down, I ran here.

RUTH. Simon.

SIMON. Guess I was wrong. Guess that's just for the regular students around here, and the rest of us are on our own.

RUTH. Simon, I'm sorry. Ok?

SIMON. All you had to do was talk to me. You know how many times I sat right outside this door listening to the love you show other kids?

RUTH. Yeah, well sometimes you weren't supposed to be here.

SIMON. So? So? The other kids have a bad day and it's 'here take a moment to hug Teddy and you'll feel better' (*gestures at stuffed animal on Ruth's desk.*) But me? When it was my turn ... you're just 'why weren't you in class Simon?' 'why are you

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late again?' and 'don't I know I'm a screwup?' (*Ruth puts the bear in her desk drawer, shutting it with disgust.*)

RUTH. You. You. You don't get to judge me.

BRENDA. (*stepping between Simon and Ruth.*) Whoa. Whoa. Everyone easy. Do you have any idea how many kids she sees every day for counseling?

SIMON. That's my fault?

BRENDA. We get it. Kids are carrying a lot on their shoulders --

BENJI. Yeah, we all see it.

SIMON. Again. Not my --

HOPE. No, it's not young man. But you can understand that one kid might be dangerous, and that maybe teachers -- well maybe not these two --

BENJI. Not / fair.

BRENDA. C'mon Hope.

HOPE. -- might want to carry a gun in school? To protect themselves? And to protect you and the other students?

SIMON. *Protect?* Oh, you're one to talk.

HOPE. Excuse me young man?

RUTH. You can't talk to her like that.

SIMON. Ask her. (*Beat.*) She knows I'm right.

HOPE. I don't know what you're talking about.

SIMON. You're lecturing these teachers on guns? Really? Is it because you know what it's like to pull the trigger?

JANE. What?

BENJI. You're out of line.

SIMON. Am I? Am I Mrs. Pfeiffer?

HOPE. That's sealed. You can't possibly ... I'm not allowed to talk about that.

BRENDA. Talk about what? What is going on here? Hope?

HOPE. (*To Simon.*) You really want to go there?

SIMON. Lady. I got nothing but time to kill. You?

HOPE. Fine. I shot someone.

BENJI. What?

HOPE. I thought he was an intruder. I thought I was alone in my house. I heard steps and I thought ... My heart was going a million miles an hour, and I grabbed Bill's gun from the drawer. The door to the bedroom started to open ... I knew it wasn't Bill ... it had to be someone else.

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BRENDA. Oh Hope.

HOPE. I should have said something -- anything -- but I froze. I'd never fired a gun before. I thought it would just be loud and scare away whoever it was. When I shot through the door, I heard him scream.

RUTH. Oh my God. You shot your husband?

HOPE. No. I hit a teen boy. Only grazed him thankfully. He was staying with the foster family next door. Bill had come home early. Thought he looked like a nice kid ...

BRENDA. So ...

HOPE. So ... he hired him on the spot to do yard work. But when Bill sent him inside for tools, he got lost and came towards the bedroom.

Jesus. He's only 14.

SIMON. Tommy Stevens.

HOPE. How did you know that? How do you know his name is Tommy Stevens?

SIMON. Same way I know you were charged with assault with a firearm.

BENJI. Kid, where do you come up with this?

HOPE. No one in this school knew that. No one in this county. How did you --

SIMON. I get placed with that same foster family sometimes. They told me what happened. Told me you called 9-1-1 and did First Aid and were real remorseful. They also told me your hot-shot attorney got you probation. Let you plead guilty quietly and avoid trial. But with a gun conviction --

BRENDA. Oh Hope. You can't be in a school building.

RUTH. You absolutely can't volunteer here.

SIMON. Ergo .. why no one knows about it.

HOPE. You think you're so smart? Kid you don't know a damn thing. You don't know what I live / with.

SIMON. You're right, I don't. Just like none of you know me. But that didn't stop you from playing judge and jury did it?

BENJI. Hey.

HOPE. I see Tommy's face every night. The blood on his arm. The fear on his face and the tears streaming down his cheeks. Every. Night.

SIMON. So why then would you want to encourage the teachers in this school to pack heat? So that they might have to live your same nightmare?

HOPE. You're twisting my words.

SIMON. Am I?

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BRENDA. Wait. Wait. Maybe I would.

BENJI. Excuse me? Maybe you would, what?

BRENDA. You know what. I might just .. if I had a gun.

JANE. You would Miss Simms?

BRENDA. I don't want to die. And we don't know if we're getting out of here alive.

HOPE. Brenda.

BRENDA. I never thought I'd say this but I wish I *did* have a gun.

RUTH. I can't believe what I'm hearing. A gun? Would you use it?

BENJI. No, she wouldn't. You can't fire a gun in a school full of kids.

BRENDA. Why not? A killer can. And someone did in this building, what, 20 minutes ago? So why can't I?

SIMON. Because you're not a killer.

BRENDA. Oh yeah? Bring a gun into my classroom. You just watch me.

RUTH. We can't have guns lying around in the school.

BRENDA. Why not?

HOPE. Well that would be dangerous.

BRENDA. Dangerous? A few minutes ago you were in / favor of --

HOPE. I don't know. Ok? I'm just so lost right now trying to process all of this. I just want our kids to / be ok.

BRENDA. Yeah. I can see why now.

SIMON. But you all think a gun in a school is dangerous?

BENJI & HOPE. Yes.

SIMON. Just being there?

BRENDA. A gun brought in by an adult?

SIMON. Sure. Jane, would that scare you?

JANE. My teachers being armed?

BRENDA. Yeah. Knowing that teachers -- let's just say grownups here in this school -- had guns?

JANE. I guess I hadn't thought about it. My parents taught me to never to touch a gun.

BENJI. (*To Jane,*) Damn right you shouldn't. If you see one, you should get a teacher.

BRENDA. I'm not talking about finding a stray firearm laying around. I'm saying people who know what they're doing. With training. With a license. Wouldn't that be better right now than sitting here helpless?

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JANE. The police are coming, right?

HOPE. Yes, they are Jane. They'll be the ones with the guns.

SIMON. As opposed to?

BENJI. Having guns already in the building.

SIMON. You mean here at school?

HOPE. That's what we're debating.

SIMON. So let's take this up a notch. If there were a gun say in a desk drawer .. say in *this* office ... and no one was touching it ... it would be dangerous?

HOPE. Yes.

RUTH. Yes.

BRENDA. No, it wouldn't. But since I can't have one here, I have to think of other ways to survive.

HOPE. So you admit it. You do think about this stuff? Surviving a shooting?

BRENDA. Well of course I do. Every teacher does. We have to. Why do you think I keep that letter opener on my desk? No one is sending me mail these days, but it's right there if I have to defend myself.

BENJI. So you would dual with someone like it's a light saber?

BRENDA. Ha-ha-ha. Keep laughing. I've got a classic coke bottle I can smash over someone's head ... a 5-pound paperweight that will cave a person's chest in ... and those 9-inch scissors on my desk? Those aren't for craft time. If a gunman comes in to my class ... oh, we're going to relive the shower scene in *Psycho* ... (*Brenda mimics stabbing motion.*)

SIMON. (*To Jane.*) I am soooo signing up for her class.

RUTH. You know that's not in the teacher's handbook Brenda. And I don't think the union contract covers you stabbing someone with / scissors.

BRENDA. Well damn it Ruth it should be. Don't you think?

HOPE. Can we go back to guns? They can't be here. No matter what the law says.

BENJI. Ok. Ok. Ohhhhhhh kay. This isn't the time to debate the damn Constitution. We all know the Second Amendment guarantees the right to / bear arms.

SIMON. No it doesn't.

BENJI. Um, even a football coach knows that. And you'd know that too if you ever went to class.

SIMON. Um ... Even a dumb sophomore like me knows, no, it doesn't.

BENJI. So the kid who spends more time in detention than anyone else --

SIMON. It doesn't provide the right to bear arms. Does it ... Miss Simms?

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BRENDA. Well ..

BENJI. Well, what?

BRENDA. He's actually --

SIMON. (*Reciting from memory as he begins searching Ruth's bookcase.*) "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." (*Simon hands copy of Constitution to Benji.*) That's what the amendment says. Exactly.

BENJI. Well there you go. You said it yourself. It's the people's right to keep and bear arms.

SIMON. (*Makes buzzer sound.*) Wrong again Knute Rockne.

BRENDA. He's right Benji.

HOPE. What?

BENJI. What do you mean he's right?

SIMON. The amendment was written to keep the government from infringing on your ability to own a firearm. Not to *give* people the right to pick up a gun.

BENJI. Same thing. Semantics.

SIMON. (*Makes buzzer sound again.*) The Supreme Court disagreed with you.

BENJI. When?

SIMON. United States v. Cruikshank. The court found that the right to bear arms is not granted by the Constitution; neither is it in any manner dependent upon that instrument for its existence.

BENJI. You're making that up.

SIMON. Strike three. You're out. That's a baseball reference for you football folks.

BENJI. Hey.

SIMON. Coach, the justices made clear that the Second Amendment means no more than that it shall not be infringed by Congress, and has no other effect than to restrict the powers of the National Government.

BRENDA. Right, but later in 2008 --

SIMON. Ding-Ding. Columbia v. Heller? That's when the justices first affirmed that the right belongs to individuals, for self-defense in the home.

JANE. I remember this part.

SIMON. The court also said the right is not unlimited. And, it does not preclude forbidding the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill.

RUTH. Simon. How did you --

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SIMON. The justices clearly wrote that state and local governments are limited to the same extent as the federal government from infringing upon this right. Look it up coach. The second amendment is about *preventing* government overreach, and not about *giving* you nothing.

BRENDA. Simon, how do you ... you're never in class.. but you know *that*?

SIMON. I have English the same time you teach U.S. Government. Mrs. Stone puts me in the hall a lot for smarting off.

BRENDA. So?

SIMON. So, I have ears. I heard you teach about the Bill of Rights last spring.

BRENDA. God, I wish all of my students paid attention like that.

RUTH. I'm speechless.

BENJI. Who are you? Rainman or something?

SIMON. A. That's offensive to kids on the spectrum. You'd all see them if you actually opened your eyes ... Including spectrum kids already on the football team.

BENJI. Stop it.

SIMON. And Two. I know that because I pay attention. While you dreamcatchers are hypnotized in your social media ... I'm inhaling what's really in the air around here. You should try it sometime.

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