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CHARACTERS

TARA, 17, coeditor of the school newspaper.

STEPH, 17, coeditor of the school newspaper, Tara's best friend.

KURT, 17, class clown and somewhat of an outcast.

BRETT, 17, Kurt's best friend.

MEG, 14, school newspaper staffer.

AMY, 14, school newspaper staffer.

MR. R, mid-20s, first-year teacher.

MS. L, late 40s, veteran teacher.

MR. O, early 60s, veteran teacher.

Actors can double to play TEEN 1, 2, and 3, as well as PARENT 1 and 2.

INEVITABLE

Lights up on Steph, seventeen, and Tara, seventeen, sitting in an otherwise empty classroom. Tara sits on the teacher's desk, which has a Magic Marker sign that reads NEWSPAPER MEETING.

TARA. Having this conversation is insane. You're not tempting fate. You're like, telling fate He has a small dick.

STEPH. Fate is a woman.

TARA. Fate is an abstract concept that has been personified as a woman because it's seen as unstable. But there's nothing that seems to make womankind in general as murder-y as insulting a guy's dick, so. For this particular metaphor—

STEPH. I'm not saying it's going to happen.

TARA. Oh my God, stop.

STEPH. But if it did, what would you do?

TARA. Die.

STEPH. I'm trying to be serious.

TARA. You're trying to get us killed through the laws of dramatic foreshadowing. But I am being serious.

STEPH. You don't know that you'd die.

TARA. I do. I know myself very well. I've been taking BuzzFeed quizzes since fifth grade. I'm a Rachel and a Belle and a scrunchie. And I'd be part of the body count.

STEPH. You're just being morbid.

TARA. I was asking you whether we should order cheesy bread when you brought this up.

STEPH. Ordering cheesy bread would just highlight how many people we didn't get to show up to the meeting. Again.

Beat.

Why do you think you would die?

TARA. Steph. Seriously. Changing the subject. Want to see if we can play Seven Up with two people?

STEPH. We definitely can't.

TARA. Or do we only *think* we can't because of the limits our public education has put around our creativity?

STEPH. What if I saved you?

TARA. You couldn't.

STEPH. What if I think I'd die too?

TARA. You don't.

STEPH. You don't know—

TARA. Do I really have to say it?

STEPH. I have no idea what you're talking about.

TARA. So you are going to make me say it.

Beat.

STEPH. It was dark! You can't fight mood lighting!

TARA. "A first kiss is something you'll tell your grandchildren about." That's what you use to say. Would you like to retract that, Steph? I'm always open to printing a correction.

STEPH. My mom was playing that self-help book on the way to school. I had been listening to a very trustworthy-sounding British man telling me to "take chances, grab life" for a week.

TARA. Let the record show, Stephanie G. Tronkowski had her first kiss, age twelve, under the irresistible thrall of Jason B's face in the shadows of an unlit English classroom—

STEPH. Shut up.

TARA. During an active shooter drill.

STEPH. You know that's not what they called them in middle school.

TARA. Sorry. During an "intruder drill."

STEPH. If we're going to be journalists—

TARA. We are journalists—

STEPH. We need to respect the power of words.

TARA. And the intelligence of our subjects. Or do you want to say that our twelve-year-old selves, or even Casey D's twelve-year-old self, thought we were huddling in the corner with construction paper over the little door window to practice what would happen if an unarmed meth head "intruded" into our day to steal the DVD players?

STEPH. I mean, that still wouldn't be a great safety moment.

TARA. It was an active shooter drill. We knew it was an active shooter drill. And you cut your tongue on Jason's braces anyways. You know you're not going to die.

STEPH. Maybe I'm just an optimist.

TARA. I'm the one who ordered two pizzas, just in case some potential writers are on their way.

STEPH. Tara!

TARA. What, Steph?

STEPH. Just, for two seconds—it's not one hundred percent a hypothetical, right? I mean, yes, of course it is, but, it's like, it could not be, eventually. Maybe. How can you know?! Why do you have to be so sure of that? Why won't you let me save you in a made-up shooting? Why do you want to leave me to eat the entire pizza alone?

TARA. Aw, Steph. That got real *Degrassi* real fast.

STEPH. Be serious. For like, a second.

TARA. Okay. Okay. It's not that I think bad things are going to happen to me. It's just, when I read the…accounts. That story of the girl and she's on the ground and she's looking at someone else on the ground, and there's blood… You put yourself in the story, right? It's this massively fucked-up human impulse, but it's like how Mrs. Bart explained books to us, remember? Like a play playing in your head, and you're the only one in the audience? Only you never stay in the audience. You become the hero or the villain, the kid who finds out they've been magic all along. You cast yourself in the play. And I don't want to, but I'm never the one *looking* at the girl who's bleeding out.

STEPH. And that's something you should for sure talk about with a therapist. But your bleak choose-your-own-adventure ending does not mean you're seeing the future.

Tara sighs and hops off the desk. She starts writing on the chalkboard—Prom: More Classist Than Sexist?

TARA. Come on. If we don't at least start the meeting, the pizza won't taste like we've earned it.

STEPH. Socioeconomic-related stress is on Ms. L's list of forbidden topics.

TARA. Crap. Climate change?

Steph consults the list.

STEPH. We're good.

TARA. So we find out what ozone-destroying chemicals the dry cleaner on Stevens Street is using, the one where everyone gets their dresses altered.

STEPH. I think we should include bad guys. In the women's history package.

TARA. Bad guys.

STEPH. Like, infamous.

TARA. No, I got it. And why are we stealing column inches from Marie Curie for…?

STEPH. I don't know. Bonnie? The real woman from that movie we watched with Charlize Theron?

TARA. Because you want to give our entire gender a PR crisis?

STEPH. I mean, if Women's History Month is suppose to correct this lopsided thing, because like nine out of ten AP history questions are about guys…not all the questions are about FDR. Some are about Hitler.

TARA. So in the name of equality, we remind the school that in addition to being just as smart and capable, we can be just as homicidal as any man.

STEPH. Well, yeah.

TARA. We need to recruit more writers so it's easier to outvote you.

STEPH. Our job is to keep people informed.

TARA. They don't need to be that informed.

STEPH. Catchy. Totally like "All the news that's fit to print," if the *New York Times* started a North Korea edition.

TARA. Fine, Steph. For thinking we should write up Eleanor Roosevelt instead of the chick from *Monster*, I'm the Kim Jong Un of the paper.

STEPH. We should at least do Brenda Spencer.

TARA. I don't know who that is.

STEPH. One of the only girl school shooters.

TARA. Jesus, Steph, you're being weird. This is getting weird.

STEPH. History isn't all First Ladies and suffragists.

TARA. The pizza's going to be here soon. Are we going to enjoy our school-funded after-school snack and watch cat videos, or are you going to make me call guidance and get you put on the list?

STEPH. What list?

TARA. The list of loners and Hot Topic–wearers the teachers watch manically for a couple weeks after every "incident."

STEPH. You think I'm dangerous.

TARA. I think you're talking a lot about something I obviously don't want to talk about and the fact you're going against your natural people-pleaser tendencies is freaking me out.

STEPH. What, are you scared of me, Tara?

TARA. No, Steph, I'm not scared of you.

STEPH. Maybe you should be. Maybe we should all be afraid of everyone. Maybe then, we'd notice stuff.

TARA. Also, if people could just put down their phones and talk to each other—

STEPH. Shut up.

TARA. I'm sorry, we weren't pitching condescending think pieces?

STEPH. No one cares about greenhouse gases coming from the dry cleaners.

TARA. Is something so many people said in the eighties that we're going to be in a *Mad Max*–style hellscape by grad school. What's your point?

STEPH. At least people are talking about this.

TARA. This being—

STEPH. The shootings.

TARA. That's not what they're talking about.

STEPH. Do you want me to play the recordings?

TARA. I thought you stopped doing that.

STEPH. I have them from lunch, band, two weeks ago, three months ago, today. It's all anyone is talking about.

TARA. They're not talking about school shootings. They're talking about when Mikey or, I don't know, Kurt's going to finally go off.

STEPH. Same thing.

TARA. It's not the same thing. It makes them feel better. Like they really learned something through that stupid, cross the line game. "Cross the line if you've been bullied. Cross the line if you've felt bad about yourself. Cross the line if you're never going to say Amanda Green has a fupa ever again. What, no one's going to cross that one?" It's shitty to say Mikey wears his sweatpants up to his ears and mutters to himself, or that Kurt's face is more zit than face, but debating whether the fact you've been bullying them for a decade is going to make them take us all out is a public service.

STEPH. If people are trying to understand—

TARA. We put that Brenda whatever in the paper, and we go on that list. You know that, right? And the general student population hasn't even heard all the stuff you've said today. Do you want to be the person people are watching?

STEPH. What does it matter, Tara? Why should we care if they're watching, if there's nothing to see?

TARA. I don't want them staring at me like I'm a bomb. We can be eccentric, quiet. That's what we get, as girls. We can cry in public and we can eat yogurt and we can be weird as hell and no one looks at us like we're a bomb. Until someone fucks that up for us too.

STEPH. And you count that as a win for womankind?

Steph's phone chimes and she looks down to read the alert.

The pizza's here. It's your turn.

TARA. One hundred percent yours.

STEPH. Fine. I'm not saying you're right, but I need the extra steps.

Steph exits stage right. Tara takes out her phone and begins typing, then scrolling, obviously looking something up. Kurt, seventeen, enters without her noticing.

KURT. This is the meeting / right.

TARA. Holy—

KURT. Sorry.

TARA. No, yeah, no, it's, this is the meeting.

KURT. I didn't mean to sneak up on you.

TARA. Yeah, I was just—

KURT. Looking up school shooters?

TARA. What?

KURT. Sorry, I just. I saw your phone. Brenda Spencer.

TARA. You know who that is.

KURT. Well…yeah.

They stand in awkward silence for a minute.

She's like, one of the only girl school shooters.

TARA. I know, I just looked her up. Why do you know that?

KURT. I know lots of stuff.

TARA. It's just weird information to have.

KURT. You have it too.

TARA. Only because I just looked it up.

KURT. Why did you look it up?

TARA. I—someone mentioned it.

KURT. Someone with weird information.

TARA. Yeah, I guess.

KURT. Stephanie?

TARA. No.

KURT. You're bad at lying. Don't newspaper people have to be good at lying?

TARA. Um, no. That's incredibly cynical, we're literally working to uncover the truth, why are you here?

KURT. You're kind of rude for someone sitting in an empty classroom during their club meeting.

TARA. Steph's just downstairs getting pizza.

KURT. The same Steph who didn't bring up Brenda Spencer?

TARA. Why are you here, if you think journalists are liars?

KURT. I mean, what I think of journalists isn't really an issue here.

TARA. So you came to steal free pizza.

KURT. If you hadn't dropped out of philosophy last year, maybe you'd understand that you can't *steal* free pizza.

TARA. The pizza isn't paid for with money, it's paid for with work.

KURT. So it's communist pizza.

TARA. We're trying to run a paper here, and if we're going to be doing it without any help, it really isn't useful to have people running in and out probably getting pizza grease on the computers.

KURT. I could get behind socialist pizza—

TARA. Jesus, Kurt, this is why everyone hates you!

Tara is stunned she said this out loud. Kurt isn't.

I didn't mean that.

KURT. Because when people scream something out of frustration, it's usually something they don't mean.

TARA. Everyone doesn't hate you.

KURT. Yeah, they kind of do.

TARA. You were being, just, you were kind of being an ass, you know, and so, I'd say the same thing to Steph if she was being—

KURT. You tell Steph to shut up.

TARA. What?

KURT. You and Steph, when you're annoyed with each other. It's not super original, but it is consistent. Heather and the rest of the drama kids like to use Shakespearean insults. The baseball guys are the last people on campus who still think it's funny to call somebody homo, but Tommy's little brother just came out, so they'll probably pick a new thing soon.

A moment of awkward silence.

It's not that weird. You're standing there, looking at me like I'm some kind of creepy watcher, but if you thought about it for a second, you could do the list too. Literally anyone in our grade could. We've all been on top of each other since kindergarten. You notice shit. And if you wanted to puke it back up to win an argument, you could.

TARA. What argument?

KURT. No one says "everyone hates you" even if they're annoyed with someone, if it's not a little bit true. You didn't mean "Kurt, shut up," or "Kurt, I can't deal with you right now." You meant "Kurt I can't believe I'm the one, out of everyone who wishes you would disappear, who has to actually talk to you."

TARA. Kurt—

KURT. Brenda Spencer, school shooter, inspired the song "I Don't Like Mondays" because that's the reason she gave for the shooting. Do you know why I know that?

TARA. No.

KURT. It's in an episode of *The West Wing*. Which is my mom's favorite show. If something's on in the background while you're doing your homework for enough years, you remember some stuff.

TARA. My mom likes *Seinfeld*.

KURT. I don't like shows with laugh tracks.

TARA. Me either.

More silence. Tara looks at the door, as if willing Steph to come back.

Steph will be back with the pizza in a sec. You should stay.

KURT. You don't have to worry about me. You're in the clear.

TARA. What?

KURT. This isn't going to be the straw, or the grain of sand, or whatever. You didn't push me over the edge. You don't need to worry about me.

TARA. I—

KURT. Well, I mean, technically you wouldn't be worrying about me, anyways, right? But you know what I mean.

TARA. You should stay for pizza, Kurt.

KURT. You know how you can get sucked into a Wikipedia spiral? When does Easter break start, what are those things on Easter Island called, how many islands are there, anyways, are there any left for new rich people to buy?

TARA. Yeah.

KURT. If you go onto the school shootings in the U.S. page, there's this giant list, but all the links don't always go to a page about the school shooting. Some go to the guy who did it, and some just go to the school, no mention of the shooting at all. It seems sneaky, but like in a dumb way. Home of the Buccaneers, school of two thousand four hundred, upper middle-class, nothing else to see here folks. Maybe you guys can do an article on that. Did someone at the school make it harder to find the details? Did the Wikipedia gods, or whatever, decide not enough kids died to get a full entry?

TARA. We got breadsticks too. With three different dipping sauces.

KURT. I'll stay for a piece.

TARA. Good.

KURT. I noticed something else, you know. From the list?

TARA. What?

KURT. A lot of them, like a ton, weren't actually done by kids at the school. Some graduated a few years before. There was one who graduated like, two decades before. That's weird, I guess. I'm just saying.

TARA. What does that mean?

KURT. I don't know. I'm just saying. You should figure out what it means. Isn't that what you newspaper people do?

Lights down. Lights up on Kurt in his room. He's sitting on the edge of his bed playing a first-person shooter game. In just a few moments, it's obvious he's very good.

You think you fuckers can hide from me? I. Am. Everywhere!!

Kurt's mom yells from offstage that "Brett's here."

I'm in my room!

Brett enters from stage left. He's dressed all in black, and his left arm is wrapped in bandages from his wrist to his elbow.

Dude.

BRETT. I know.

KURT. Stitches?

BRETT. You know I'm on the DIY insurance plan.

KURT. Neosporin and hope?

BRETT. And a little wood glue.

KURT. Dude!

BRETT. If it's good enough for our dining room table, and chairs, and bookcase, it's good enough for my arm.

KURT. I should have recorded that, so I could play it back to you when the doctor's like "Mr. Beeckman, we're going to have to operate. As you may know, gangrene in twenty-first-century America is most commonly caused by complications arising from being a dumbass."

BRETT. And then I get one of the robot hands and become the best firefighter on the force, because I'll just be able to chill on the sidewalk and reach into apartment buildings and pull out babies.

KURT. You're mixing up actual prosthetics with Inspector Gadget.

BRETT. I'm seeing the future.

KURT. Whatever. When your wood glue starts leaking, just try not to get blood on my bed. What was it this time?

Beat.

BRETT. Box cutter.

Kurt sucks in a breath. They sit in silence for a movement.

KURT. Which you accidentally applied to your arm instead of a box because you got distracted by…

BRETT. Lizzie.

KURT. The freshman?

BRETT. Sophomore. Transfer.

KURT. Right.

BRETT. Ms. L is pissed. I got blood on the car. Now it has to be red.

KURT. She can't really complain. You're the only techie who can actually lift a set piece off the ground.

BRETT. Yeah. I've started bringing my own bandages, though.

Just so they can't bitch about the first aid budget. You know, if anyone goes on a murder spree in the drama club, I'm definitely going to be framed for it. My DNA is everywhere.

KURT. If there was a murder spree, wouldn't everyone's DNA be everywhere?

BRETT. I guess.

Beat.

KURT. So I went to the newspaper meeting today.

BRETT. Sounds boring.

KURT. Says the guy who spends like fifty percent of his life at drama practice.

BRETT. In the dark with a Home Depot–level range of power tools with a ratio of girls to guys like twenty-to-one is not the same thing as debating "who" or "whom" with that bitch.

KURT. Dude. Eighth grade was a long time ago. Let it go.

BRETT. Whatever. Tara is still a BIIIIIITCH!

KURT. You're an idiot.

Beat.

So, Steph is into girl school shooters, apparently.

BRETT. Seriously?

KURT. I guess. She was having Tara research them, or something.

BRETT. Shit. This is what they're talking about. When they say if you see something, say something.

KURT. That's about terrorism.

BRETT. Whatever. We should tell someone.

KURT. We should tell someone what?

BRETT. That Steph's going to shoot up the school.

KURT. Yeah, cool. Definitely. And then we should tell someone Tara's building pipe bombs.

BRETT. She might be. That sounds like something she would do.

KURT. We're not telling anyone about Steph.

BRETT. You're going to feel like shit when she shoots everybody.

KURT. Steph isn't going to shoot anyone. She threw up when we dissected the pig.

BRETT. So she'll have to take some Pepto Bismol before she loads up her bullet clips.

KURT. You've really got that gun slang down.

BRETT. Sorry we're not all junior all-American NRA champions or whatever.

KURT. Marksman champion. And I thought you'd just absorb, like some basic terms from watching movies. Or, you know, the news.

BRETT. What's the biggest thing you've ever killed?

KURT. My parents' hopes and dreams.

BRETT. But seriously.

KURT. Big ass deer.

BRETT. You murdered Bambi.

KURT. Nah, it was an old stag. So Bambi's dad. And that dude was a deadbeat anyways.

BRETT. You know, you've never shown me.

KURT. The deer? We ate it.

BRETT. Your gun.

KURT. Guns.

BRETT. You have two?

KURT. I have five.

BRETT. No way.

KURT. This family believes in getting twice your recommended daily allowance of calories, and ten times the household average for firearms.

BRETT. Shit. Can I see them?

KURT. Maybe later.

BRETT. Come on.

KURT. Mom doesn't like us to take them out for company. Some Ms. Manners thing.

BRETT. What about when I come over Sunday?

KURT. Maybe.

BRETT. How many guns do you think Steph has?

KURT. Zero.

BRETT. But you don't know.

KURT. I think it's a safe guess.

BRETT. But you don't really know her. I mean I'm your best friend, and I was off by four when I guessed your gun count.

KURT. I guess that's a point.

Brett gets up to leave.

BRETT. It's a great point. It's a freakin' awesome point. You know, if we told, and they find like an arsenal under her bed, we'd be heroes.

KURT. And if we're wrong, I think we'd be dealing with a "he who smelt it dealt it" situation.

BRETT. What?

KURT. Like, why are Brett and Kurt seeing shooters everywhere? Is it on their minds? Are they thinking about it?

BRETT. Whatever. We'd be fine.

KURT. *(Unconvinced.)* We'd be fine.

BRETT. Well, if anyone gives us any trouble. You know.

KURT. What?

BRETT. You've got five guns.

Lights down. Lights up on a cafeteria. Steph and Tara sit with freshmen Meg and Amy. Tara and Steph are deep in their own conversation as Meg and Amy begin to talk.

MEG. I just can't believe—

AMY. He's the worst, and you have to ignore him—

MEG. You can't ignore misogynists. That just makes more misogynists.

AMY. Ew. Like asexual reproduction? Like—

She puts her fingers together in an O then slowly pulls them apart, forming a separate O with each hand.

Bloooop! One misogynist becomes two?

MEG. Gross.

AMY. No no no, I got it, like *Gremlins*, only instead of water making

extra little misogynists pop out of his back, it's your compliance. *(Putting on a younger, high-pitched voice.)* You're right Mr. O. Things were a lot simpler when women weren't in the workplace.

She then straightens up and puts a carrot stick across her upper lip, à la a mustache. She then starts to shake, then mime things popping out of her back.

MEG. You're not helpful.

Steph and Tara have been low-key watching the exchange.

TARA. Is the spring musical really experimental this year, or what?

MEG. We're talking about Mr. O.

AMY. And our duty to confront him and his offensive ways.

TARA. Oh, to be young again. Do you remember it, Steph?

STEPH. I do, Tara, I do. We were just training bras full of righteousness.

MEG. Hey.

AMY. My boobs are totally bigger than yours.

STEPH. Spoken as a true feminist.

TARA. Save your strength, baby freshmen. The halls are wide, and full of creeps.

STEPH. And all your peers are simply sheep.

TARA. But get to Civ, then you can sleep.

TARA and STEPH. Just get to Civ, then you can sleep.

MEG. Um?

TARA. That's what we did when we wanted to punch Mr. O in the face freshman year. Poetry parody.

STEPH. Whatever gets you through the day. There was a girl in the last row who gave Wite-Out French manicures for two dollars.

TARA. Aw, Nikki. I miss her. You know that's how she paid for her homecoming dress.

MEG. You guys are terrible mentors.

TARA. We never promised mentorship. We promised pizza.

STEPH. Pizza and knowledge. I can't believe we have a staff of four now.

TARA. Five.

STEPH. You recruited another freshman?

TARA. No…

STEPH. Oh. So we're just going to pretend Kurt's on staff now?

TARA. He's shown up to the last three meetings. He's covered two basketball games.

STEPH. He wrote haikus.

AMY. *(Reading from a paper she gets out of her backpack.)* "Game of basketball, The orange moves so quickly, Moon landing was a hoax."

STEPH. He's mocking our vocation.

TARA. He's giving us a literary arts section.

STEPH. Why do you like him all of a sudden?

TARA. It isn't sudden. It's actually pretty gradual. I think I've grown to like him about five percent more with every encounter.

AMY. Oh my God.

MEG. It's happening.

TARA. What's happening?

MEG. It's so beautiful, she doesn't even realize it's happening.

AMY. So romantic.

STEPH. What's happening?

AMY. Tara has a crush on Kurt.

MEG. Tara might be in love with Kurt.

TARA. You guys have lost your minds.

AMY. And you have lost your heart.

MEG. To Kurt!

TARA. Because I appreciate the guy's work—

MEG. His poetry—

TARA. I obviously want him.

STEPH. I mean, you did order him a half pineapple pizza last meeting.

TARA. I was being welcoming.

MEG. He does have nice eyes.

AMY. If he could just get a slight wardrobe update.

MEG. Right! Like, nothing to rob him of his individuality or anything. Just something to make his individuality a little less skull-themed.

TARA. I'm not into Kurt.

STEPH. *(Not convinced, teasing.)* Maybe not yet. But another meeting could bring you five percent closer.

AMY. Just don't break his heart.

TARA. Because it would ruin the Jane Austen-esque happy ending?

AMY. No. Because, well. You know.

TARA. No…

AMY. Tara. I'm not saying I say it. But, you know. Other people.

TARA. Because of the whole junior NRA thing? Brian K and Steve won something too.

MEG. Yeah, but. Brian and Steve don't—

TARA. Dare to challenge the unwritten American Eagle uniform?

AMY. It's honestly so cute that you're defending him. Painfully adorable. But we know about that thing, from when you guys were in eighth grade—

MEG. I don't.

TARA. That was five years ago.

AMY. He got expelled.

TARA. Suspended.

AMY. My sister said like half the class was crying.

TARA. Two people were crying. It was eighth grade. At least two people were crying every class period.

AMY. He said he was going to blow up the whole school.

TARA. *Ted* said he was going to blow up the whole school. A fictional character in his fictional short story.

MEG. But, that's got to come from somewhere.

TARA. It definitely does. Possibly the inescapable violence of America.

AMY. Which you never thought he wanted to like, I don't know, participate in?

STEPH. Tara's in a seriously "see no evil" zone guys.

TARA. I'm in an "assume no evil" zone. There's a difference.

AMY. I don't think he's going to do anything. I'm just—I think it might be a good idea not to push him.

TARA. Because he's dangerous.

MEG. I think she's saying, I mean, because we don't know if he's dangerous… We should be careful.

Kurt appears behind Meg.

KURT. Who might be dangerous?

AMY. *(Seriously freaked, but trying to play it cool.)* We don't know! We totally don't know, and we probably shouldn't guess, who are we God, we're not God. None of us are GOD!

KURT. Cool. So you were definitely talking about me.

MEG. No we weren't.

KURT. Someone tell the freshmen about "Ted's Big Explosion"?

AMY. You called it "Ted's Big Explosion"?

KURT. Yeah. The title was not my best work. But it has a decent use of imagery for a thirteen-year-old.

STEPH. Wait, you. I mean no judgement. But. You still have it?

KURT. It's my first censored work. Got to keep it for my retrospective.

STEPH. And you've read it recently?

KURT. I've got it memorized, Steph. "Ted stood in front of the fire. It was hot. Like summer, but with more screaming." I can also do "The Road Not Taken."

There's an awkward pause.

TARA. Is that suppose to scare us?

KURT. All good art scares the complacent.

TARA. Did you write up last night's game?

KURT. It'll be on your desk by tomorrow morning.

AMY. I'm sorry, Kurt. I didn't mean—

KURT. It's chill. I forgive you. You won't be on *(Whispered.)* the list.

AMY. That's funny. That's, that's really funny.

TARA. Kurt.

KURT. Fine, I'll stop.

TARA. No. I was just going to say. Do you want to, you know, sit down?

Kurt is taken aback. He's never been asked to join a new lunch table before.

KURT. Oh. Uh, yeah. Yeah. Uh, does anyone want… *(Digging in his backpack and pulling out a truly pulverized cookie bag.)* mostly crushed Oreos?

Kurt sits down.

So what are we talking about? Besides me.

AMY. Mr. O.

KURT. You've got him? I'm so sorry. *(Imitating Mr. O.)* And that's how we won World War Two. It was easier to win wars back then. Before everyone was worried about political correctness.

MEG. He's got to be retiring soon, right?

STEPH. Just ignore him, guys. Use the time for more important things.

AMY. But we're probably gonna need to know American history, at some point.

KURT. Nah. You know the greatest hits by fifth grade.

The bell rings. They gather their belongings to leave. Kurt and Tara stay.

TARA. Hey sorry about—

KURT. It's totally fine. It's been years since I've been a morbid curiosity. TGFF right?

TARA. What?

KURT. Thank God for freshmen.

TARA. You are such a dork.

KURT. Aw. That's the nicest thing anyone has said to me all lunch. Really.

TARA. You know, I'm not saying it's your fault, or anything. But—You could probably, be a little more, I don't know. Proactive in ditching the whole potential murderer rep.

KURT. Who said I wanted to ditch it?

TARA. You want the entire student body to think you're the next Dylan Klebold?

He pulls out his phone and starts typing.

What are you doing?

KURT. Looking up Dylan Klebold.

TARA. Seriously?

KURT. Hunh. Still name-dropping school shooters. Be careful. You could end up with a potential murderer rep.

TARA. You knew who he was.

KURT. Because I'm up on all the teenage monsters?

TARA. Because you're, you know. Well-informed.

KURT. So, were you going to give me tips? On how to convince our peers they've been wrong about me all along? *(Mock excitement.)* Did you submit me for *MADE*: I Want to Be Exactly the Same, but With Less Worried Side-Eye in the Halls?

TARA. Kurt—

KURT. Do you remember what Bobby Michaels did in eighth grade?

TARA. You mean the thing with the cat?

KURT. Yeah, the thing with the cat.

TARA. Of course I remember.

KURT. And why aren't we worried about Bobby's potential murderer rep? Oh, that's right, he's the captain of the football team. Good thing athletes are never violent psychopaths.

TARA. He changed—

KURT. Yeah, he changed. He grew six inches and gained like fifty pounds of muscles and bought a bunch of shirts with little animals on them.

TARA. Animals?

KURT. Animals. Those little animals that might as well have platinum credit cards held in their tiny stitched-on animal fists. You'd think he wouldn't want people to think of animals when they look at him—

TARA. You're kind of rambling, dude.

KURT. Did you just call me dude?

TARA. I thought it might snap you out of it.

KURT. All I'm saying is, Bobby didn't have to go on an apology tour for his middle school sins. He just had to get hot.

TARA. You think Bobby is hot?

KURT. Some things are just facts.

TARA. I mean, you're not—

KURT. Not what?

TARA. You're not not hot.

Kurt has no clever response.

Wow. Even more effective than calling you dude.

KURT. So that was just to shut me up?

TARA. No.

KURT. We should. No I mean we could—I mean I think we should, but that's just my opinion…

TARA. What could we should we do?

KURT. We could go to prom. Together.

TARA. Are you asking me to prom?

KURT. You're really going to be a fantastic investigative reporter, T.

TARA. T?

KURT. I think that was my attempt at dude-ing you.

TARA. I like it.

KURT. And, I mean, I know there could be implications—

TARA. I'm not sleeping with you at prom. That's like, a cliché wrapped in a PSA.

KURT. No! No, that's not what I meant.

TARA. I mean, I could sleep with you.

KURT. *(Slightly breathless.)* What?

TARA. Virginity is a social construct.

KURT. I totally agree.

TARA. I'm not saying I will.

KURT. No. Of course not.

TARA. But I could.

KURT. That's fantastic.

TARA. So what were you talking about?

KURT. Are you serious? I have no idea.

TARA. The implications of going to prom.

KURT. Right. I just meant—you might run the risk of becoming, in the eyes of our brilliant classmates…Mrs. Potential Murderer.

TARA. Well that's pretty presumptuous.

KURT. Yeah, I know, they're like, ninety percent assholes, but—

TARA. No, I mean you. *MRS.* Potential Murderer. It's just prom, dude.

KURT. Noted, T.

TARA. See you at the newspaper meeting?

KURT. As long as there's pizza.

TARA. What if we accidentally blew through the pizza budget last week?

KURT. Yeah, I'm still there.

Tara turns to leave, but then reconsiders.

TARA. I think it's important, even if you're trying to move, kind of above the masses, intellectually, just from a kind of developmental psychology standpoint, it might be beneficial, to go through all the expected adolescent rites of passage.

KURT. Uh…you know I find it incredibly hot when you quote from our abnormal psych book, but I'm gonna need the SparkNotes for that one.

TARA. It's kind of overdone, and plays into ridiculous gender roles, but…I wouldn't absolutely hate a prom-posal.

Lights down. Lights up on Brett and Kurt in the band room.

Kurt has a sketch pad on his lap. Brett is throwing things, basketball-style, into a propped-up tuba.

BRETT. I saw this coming.

KURT. You saw me going to prom with one of the hottest girls in the junior class? Could have given me a heads up.

BRETT. Tara isn't that hot.

KURT. Tara is fucking gorgeous. Your jealousy must be messing with your eyesight. I think I saw that happen on an episode of *House*.

BRETT. I knew she would have you whipped.

KURT. She doesn't have me whipped.

BRETT. You're not even dating, and she's making demands.

KURT. Requests.

BRETT. Ultimatums.

KURT. You know what? That's fine. If her ultimatum is "Buy me cupcakes with 'prom?' written on them or else I won't press my beautiful body against yours for the length of a slow dance," I'm cool with that. I will buy the cupcakes.

BRETT. You think Tara is going to be happy with "will you go to prom" cupcakes?

KURT. It's like, the number one prom-posal result on Instagram. I looked it up.

BRETT. Right. And is Tara the kind of girl who likes the most popular thing on Instagram?

KURT. Shit.

BRETT. Yeah.

KURT. Well, oh wise one, what do you suggest?

BRETT. Avoid the public shame and serious hit to your bank account and don't do the stupid prom—No. I'm not even saying the word. It's too freakin' dumb.

KURT. Says the guy who will probably spend prom night in his basement.

BRETT. Just because I don't want to be controlled by some bitch.

KURT. Dude, chill. You know, I bet if you asked Steph—

BRETT. *(In a girly voice.)* And we could, like, really double date? God, it's like she already infected you with estrogen.

KURT. You need to pay more attention in bio, man. Cus that's not how it works. Now can you forget about your own sad lonely dick for a second and help me out?

BRETT. Fine. Whatever. You can't look this shit up on Instagram. You've got to make it—personalized, or whatever.

KURT. Yeah. No, that's good. So I could like, put an ad in the school paper. Like a classified or something.

BRETT. Sad, lonely dick looking for vagina with low standards?

KURT. I think I'm gonna go ahead and not hire you as my ghost-writer.

BRETT. One of the guys on the soccer team did that last week.

KURT. I think I would have noticed that, as one of the five people on the paper.

BRETT. He put it in the *New York Times*.

KURT. No way.

BRETT. His aunt or something is the editor of the love section, or whatever, and put it in for him. He's taking Lizbeth Sanders.

KURT. Lizbeth—she was on that episode of *Big Bang Theory* as the perfect woman they created in a lab.

BRETT. And apparently she reads the *New York Times*.

KURT. But, I mean, Tara isn't expecting anything…big…

BRETT. Keep telling yourself that, man. My sister told me girls expect a guy to spend a month's salary on an engagement ring. Doesn't matter what they do. That Amazon dude ever puts a ring on somebody, it's going to have to be a moon rock. Because with girls, it's not about the money. It's about being able to look at their hand and say "I have a month of their life. Forever."

KURT. I'm pretty sure Tara's not expecting a ring.

BRETT. But she still wants to own a month of your life. So that's what you have to prove. That you thought about whatever dumb stunt you pull for a month.

KURT. Oh, God.

BRETT. It's not too late to back out. There's always an extra controller in the rec room for you.

KURT. Pass. So I need to do a little brainstorming. I'm creative.

BRETT. You did come up with a personalized sound each kid in the grade would make when they died in that story.

KURT. Oh man. Remember Jerry's?

BRETT. "Like an explosion, if the bomb was covered in homemade slime." Burned in my brain forever.

KURT. Jesus, how am I going come up with a month's worth of planning in three days?

BRETT. I don't know…what's her favorite movie?

KURT. It's this documentary on the fast food industry.

BRETT. You have fantastic taste in women.

KURT. Shut up.

BRETT. What about that show where the chick kills herself? With the tapes?

KURT. *Thirteen Reasons Why*?

BRETT. Yeah. You could like, leave her thirteen tapes. About, you know, thirteen reasons why she makes you *not* want to kill yourself.

KURT. Because I know you're really trying, I'm not going to spend a ton of time explaining how messed up that suggestion is. But just in case your dick ever gets less lonely, even if a girl is super into *Titanic*, it does not mean she'll think it's romantic if you throw her in a freezing cold lake.

BRETT. Like I'd ever hook up with a girl who likes *Titanic*.

KURT. You are way too picky for your level of loneliness. What about a flash mob?

BRETT. They got kind of dark after those videos came out of people doing them in prison. Maybe you should use your skills.

KURT. Which of my many skills are you talking about?

BRETT. You know. Mr. Junior Marksman.

KURT. You think I should shoot her a prom-posal duck.

BRETT. Naw man, a swan. I once read off a Snapple cap they mate for life.

KURT. You want me to hand her a dead swan, because they mate for life. As in "Here Tara, I've widowed a swan for you, still up for prom?"

BRETT. You know what, just get her the cupcakes. Maybe she's that basic.

KURT. You've really got to stop saying shit about Tara.

BRETT. Or what?

KURT. You want me to threaten you?

BRETT. Aren't you?

KURT. No. I'm just making a request.

BRETT. And if I request you stop spending so much time and energy on stuck-up bitches—

Kurt suddenly gets right in Brett's face.

KURT. Dude. I'm dead serious. Stop.

BRETT. You gonna make me?

KURT. Do you remember what sound you made?

BRETT. *(Not sure if he should be scared or not.)* "Like a tire being popped. If the tire was full of screams." So what, I insult your girlfriend, and you're gonna kill me?

KURT. I never said that. Just, don't be such an ass.

BRETT. Don't be such a psychopath.

KURT. I try, man. But you know, every day is a struggle.

Kurt begins to pack up his stuff. He sticks out his hand to low-five Brett, who hesitates, but eventually gives in. Kurt exits stage left. Brett sits in silence for a moment before getting up and exiting stage right. We can hear him offstage asking "Mr. R, can I talk to you about something?"

Lights down. Lights up on a teacher's lounge. Two teachers sit at a small round table: Mr. R, twenty-five, and Ms. L, forty-seven. A box of munchkins sits on the table. Mr. O, sixty-two, comes up behind them, grabs a handful of munchkins, and leans on the wall behind them to eat them.

MR. O. So. Who's pregnant?

Mr. R looks genuinely scandalized. Ms. L isn't particularly interested.

MR. R. No one, I mean, do you mean on staff, I mean not that I know of—

MS. L. Breathe, Jake. Mike always assumes that's the problem. We don't have any funding for the arts, the history books stop well before these kids were born, but the biggest problem that could possibly hit the school is teen pregnancy.

MR. O. I see these kids. In their yoga pants.

MS. L. I swear to God, Mike, if I see you seeing the kids in their yoga pants for any extended period of time—

MR. O. We can't fight it with the dress code anymore! Cover up the stomach, pull up your pants, but when they're wrapped ankles to collarbone in spandex and cheese cloth…

MS. L. Make sure they go out into the world with a general sense of how we got here, Mike, and then you can worry about their fashion choices.

MR. O. That's what I'm trying to figure out! How the hell we got here!

MR. R. Have either of you ever. I mean. Have you ever had a student you were concerned about?

MS. L. What do you mean?

MR. R. If a student was to come to you, with concerns about another student—

MR. O. That's different.

MR. R. What?

MR. O. You don't have the concern, the student does.

MR. R. Well, their concern has made me concerned.

MR. O. You can't let them get inside your head. That's how they convince you to teach class outside, just for the day. And one day outside is all it takes to lose their respect, forever.

MS. L. Leave him alone, Mike. What kind of concern, Jake?

MR. R. If a student were to come to me—

MR. O. Jesus, you millennials love hypotheticals. Who's causing trouble. McNally? Watson?

MR. R. I'd rather not use names while I'm trying to figure this out.

MS. L. If it's the spiked Vitaminwater, Trent already knows.

MR. R. No, it's. A student has come to me with concerns about violence.

Ms. L and Mr. O exchange uncomfortable looks.

MS. L. Has a student made a threat?

MR. R. No, but this student who came to me is concerned about another student's state of mind.

MR. O. Well, I'm concerned about the state of all their minds every goddamn day. Any more specific—

MR. R. *(In a rush.)* The student has weapons. Guns. Multiple guns.

MS. L. And he's made a threat?

MR. R. Not exactly a threat, I don't think.

MR. O. Well he doesn't have to hit the bullseye to make a mark. I don't see the question here.

MR. R. I'm just not sure—

MR. O. You turn the little psycho's ass in. You become a local hero, the teacher who prevented the next bloodbath. No one will ever give you the evil eye for taking the last munchkin, and you'll never have to take parking lot duty on a Friday.

MR. R. It's not that simple.

MR. O. Bullshit—

MS. L. Jake. There really isn't any other choice. You need to bring this to the administration. Today.

MR. R. I just think there might be something else going on here.

MS. L. What do you mean?

MR. R. Talking with the student. I just got the sense he was…angry with the student he accused.

MR. O. Wouldn't you be pissed if someone was going to shoot up your school?

MR. R. No, I mean. I think he might want him to get in trouble. Whether or not there's actually trouble.

MR. O. The kid has guns. That means there's trouble there.

MR. R. Come on, Mike. Half the kids in this school have had hunting riffles since they were thirteen. I bet you have a gun.

MR. O. Of course I have a gun. It's my God-given right as an American.

MR. R. So you know we can't just round up all the kids with guns and—

MR. O. It's McMillian, isn't it.

MR. R. I—

MR. O. Of course it is. You know, I hear the debates, on TV with people who haven't been with these kids eight hours a day for the last thirty-five years, talking about mental health this, bullying that. Kids have always picked on the smaller guy, the girl whose hair isn't the way the magazines say her hair should be. And they leave before the bell rings, crying, and sometimes I see them, years later, still watery-eyed, still trying to get away from the bullies. And sometimes they come back, and they're bigger, or they don't give a shit what their hair looks like, and they've got better lives than the assholes who made their high school lives hell. They're not the ones who bring the shotguns to school. We don't need to stop the bullies or sing "Kumbaya." They just have to ask the teachers "Who's it going to be?" We know. We know them on sight. From day one. And any second-guessing about that gut feeling? That's what's going to get us all killed.

MS. L. I think what Mike's trying to say—

MR. O. Don't, Maureen. I don't *try* to say anything. I have a one hundred percent success rate of my thoughts coming out of my mouth exactly the way I wanted them to. McMillian's a little psycho sitting on a pile of guns his folks probably got him to teach him "discipline" or "responsibility," when really they were just trying to convince themselves their kid couldn't possibly be dangerous, because if he was dangerous, they never would have bought him a gun.

MR. R. You read things, I mean not just read things, you see

things, in your life, in your past. It's easy to judge these kids, but they're just trying to figure things out.

MR. O. Yeah, they're regular New Age philosophers. And what some of them "figure out" is they'd be a lot better off if the rest of us were dead. Should we give them space to explore that?

MR. R. Kurt has always seemed like a smart, sweet kid to me.

MR. O. And that's the sound-bite you'll give CNN. If you're one of the survivors.

MS. L. Jake, I understand…feeling like you don't want to make an unfounded accusation, but in these cases, I think we need to err on the side of caution.

MR. R. If a student accused another student of cheating, I'd sit down with them before bringing it to the administration. I just don't think the way to handle this—

MR. O. I'm done with this conversation. I'm going to Trent and telling him we've got a ticking time bomb, and it's up to us to figure out whether that's a metaphor or not.

MR. R. What if we're wrong? What if we're getting in the middle of a fight between two kids that ends with a kid on the edge getting pushed into a future self he wasn't really heading for?

MS. L. We need to think of all of them, Jake. We can't put every student's life in jeopardy to protect one.

MR. R. So you're fine with it? You're fine with giving up on him? Because if we're wrong, he's never coming back from this. You know that. You both know that.

MR. O. I'm going to sleep just fine.

MS. L. We protect them as much as we can, Jake. A lot of times, that's not a lot. You can't walk away from the chance to protect so many of them because of…indecision.

MR. R. Please, Maureen. I'm not in your lit class. Please don't reduce me genuinely struggling here, struggling to make the right choice, to just a little indecision.

Ms. L gets up abruptly, and starts gathering up her things, still gathering, and not looking at Mr. R as she talks to him.

MS. L. I don't reduce the struggles of my students. I try to give

them the best chance. That's all I think about, every day in class. Not that I give them the definition of alliteration or the symbolism in Austen. That I give them the best chance of having even a semblance of the life they're daydreaming about while they're not quite paying attention. Everyone caught in a moment of indecision thinks it's because they're grappling with life's big questions. It's not. It's because they're hoping, praying, that while they're sitting in big, important, thought, someone they think is simpler will come by and make the choice for them. And they can keep thinking, and railing against the person who actually got up and moved. Are you coming, Mike?

MR. O. You bet.

He digs his hand into the munchkin box and pulls out another handful.

You coming, Jake?

Mr. R shakes his head.

Your loss. We'll get this all straightened out for you, don't worry about that. But you're still going to get Friday parking lot duty.

Mr. R sits for a moment, obviously almost painfully conflicted. He reaches in and takes the last munchkin. Lights down. Lights up on a sheet hanging in front of a stage. The silhouettes of teenagers and adults can be seen behind it. Some are on their phones, some are texting, some are in groups talking to each other in person.

TEEN 1. They found a bomb in his locker.

TEEN 2. And a hit list.

TEEN 1. Who was on it?

TEEN 2. Exactly who you'd think.

PARENT 1. *(Texting.)* The important thing is this would-be assailant was caught. This is proof our systems are working. Our schools are working. Our children are safe. That's the takeaway we should get from this. Proof our children are safe.

TEEN 2. Did you see the hit list?

TEEN 3. You saw it?

TEEN 2. Someone took a picture and sent it around.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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