

ENOUGH!

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FOREWORD

The fierce, urgent plays you will find in this anthology are meant to move, haunt, and—hopefully—motivate us. At the same time, though, it has to be said: They shouldn't have to exist. This whole initiative shouldn't have to exist.

These young writers—these artists and activists, playwrights and poets—should not have to write about gun violence in their schools, their homes, their neighborhoods, their nation, to get us to pay attention.

Imagine what they could write about—imagine what we all could accomplish—if the story of gun violence were over.

This is a crisis our young people should not have to stage, let alone solve. Yet this year, a record number showed up to try—pouring their hopes, fears, ideas, questions, and dreams into 244 remarkable play submissions. In the face of the unspeakable, they stepped up to the example set by one of our greatest writers, Toni Morrison, who said, “This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.”

Our six outstanding playwrights of ENOUGH!—Niarra, Andy, Pepper, Sam, Justin, and Valentine—went to work. And I am thankful to all of them. I am thankful they resisted despair, surpassed self-pity, rejected silence, and overcame fear. Thankful they are speaking, writing, and “doing language,” to guide us into a new story. I am thankful for the myriad of ways their plays help us begin to heal.

In the theatre, we speak of the “inciting incident”—the moment in a story when everything changes, and the real action begins. To you, the reader, I offer an opportunity and a challenge: Let experiencing these plays be *your* inciting incident. Let them lead *you* to real action.

It's time to stop waiting in the wings. Our young people have put gun violence center stage. Soon, it'll be your turn to act. Your turn to say, "Enough."

This is your cue. Don't miss it.

—Michael Cotey
Joaquin Oliver* Artistic Producer
ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence

Michael Cotey is a Chicago-based director and producer. He founded ENOUGH! in 2019.

**Joaquin "Guac" Oliver was among the seventeen killed in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018. His parents, Manuel and Patricia, created the nonprofit Change the Ref to confront gun violence and honor his legacy. Learn more at changetheref.org.*

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NOTES FOR PRODUCING ALL SIX PLAYS TOGETHER

Required Credit

The world premiere of ENOUGH! was co-produced by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 1st Stage, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, Olney Theatre Center, Round House Theatre, Signature Theatre, and the Theatre Lab.

Performance Order

If you produce all six plays together for an evening of theater, the order in which the plays have been published in this anthology is also the order we strongly suggest they are presented in for your production, with the *Prologue* and *Epilogue* available to you to bookend the plays. If you do change up the order, please end with *The Smiles Behind*. Your audience will appreciate the hopeful note it ends on.

Prologue/Epilogue

A Note on Play Titles: The titles of the six winning plays are woven into the characters' dialogue and italicized for the actors' convenience. In order for this to land in the audience's ear as intended, we suggest that the actors pay special attention to these titles in performance. "Serve it up." Make the titles stand apart using vocal tools like pace, inflection, tone, and (to a lesser degree) volume so they don't blend into the phrases around them.

Names of Plays and Writers: The epilogue contains a moment when the ensemble actors list the other 238 playwrights of 2023's ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence submissions. It should feel like a waterfall of names and titles, starting slow and distinct before crescendoing. Actors should do their best to pronounce each name accurately; at the very least, pronounce as best as you can with confidence.

A Note on Cast Size/Doubling: The script specifically mentions seventeen actors, one for each character in all six plays. However, feel free to change the number in the script to accurately reflect the number of actors actually appearing on your stage.

If actors are portraying multiple roles, they can either a) simply read the lines assigned to all the characters they play, or b) reassign lines so each actor is reading an (approximately) equal number of lines. Please note that the lines have been assigned to each character intentionally, so any line reassignment should reflect that as closely as possible. (For example, please have characters read titles corresponding to the play in which they appear.)

A Note on Other Changeable Language: The script makes direct reference to being in a “theater.” If this word does not accurately suit the venue you are in, feel free to change it to better reflect your surroundings.

Production History: PROLOGUE and EPILOGUE were commissioned by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer). It was produced as part of ENOUGH!’s Nationwide Reading and had its world premiere produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Signature Theatre on November 6, 2023. It was directed by Shanara Gabrielle.

PROLOGUE

by Jennifer Vosters

Lights up on a bare stage—or at least an incomplete one. As the lights rise, all seventeen actors begin to file on, carrying music stands, chairs, binders, etc. to continue setting up. They begin to speak while still getting ready.*

HALLIE. Hello, America. We're back.

MENDOZA. Just like last year.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. And the year before that.

HALLIE. Now, this might be your first time watching plays by teens about gun violence.

SIERRA. But we, the young people of America, have been doing this since 2020.

LAY. Picking up our pens and stepping onto stages.

JACK. —to try to make a difference this time.

LATETE. But we're all here because something's still the same.

Everyone is in position by now on the stage, facing the audience, still. A breath.

DIANE. America is a *disorderly house*.

JEFF. We're stuck in a mess and no one agrees on how to put things right.

UP-AND-COMING. A mess we inherited, but one that's still ours to fix.

CAMERON. We're here to think about how.

KOSTIC. By listening to six voices—six brilliant young voices—

* See Note on Cast Size/Doubling

UP-AND-COMING. Trying to build toward a world where there are *no prospering weapons*—

DOWN-AND-FALLING. —just prospering people.

KAY. But we're not there yet.

JEFF. We're not there yet.

BRIAN. Not. There. Yet.

LATETE. And *the matter at hand* is simple, and serious.

ALL. (*Unison.*) Gun violence is out of control.

MENDOZA. In our schools.

KAY. In our streets.

RONNIE. In our homes.

MARTHA. Everywhere we look.

LAY. And we can't trust *the smiles behind* the thoughts and prayers—

KOSTIC. Because nothing seems to change.

DIANE. So we're bringing it all to the stage.

BILL. Our streets.

CAMERON. Our schools.

BRIAN. Our homes.

SIERRA. This is not *a call for help*.

JACK. This is a call to action.

HALLIE. Because when *lightning strikes*, you can't be ready.

BILL. You'll never be ready.

MARTHA. You'll never be ready.

LAY. It's time to change the story, America. But first, we have to hear it.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. We're up here, ready to act. Are you?

DIANE. Are you ready?

JEFF. Are you ready to listen?

SIERRA. Are you ready to say—

ALL. (*Unison.*) Enough?

End of Prologue

A CALL FOR HELP

BY PEPPER FOX

PRODUCTION HISTORY

A CALL FOR HELP was awarded a winner of the 2023 ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence competition and received further development with ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), through support from the Dramatists Guild of America. It was produced as part of ENOUGH!'s Nationwide Reading and had its world premiere produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Signature Theatre on November 6, 2023. It was directed by David Zobell. The play was sponsored by Change the Ref. The cast was as follows:

BRIAN	Ethan Miller
RONNIE	Kari Ginsburg
BILL	Christopher Bloch
CAMERON	Jonah Uffelman
SIERRA	Sydney Sunday Coleman
MARTHA	Natascia Diaz

REQUIRED CREDIT

The world premiere of A CALL FOR HELP was co-produced by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Signature Theatre.

CHARACTERS

The Dispatchers

BRIAN, younger man. Outgoing, a joker with his coworkers.

RONNIE, slightly more mature woman. Sarcastic. Best friends with Brian.

BILL, middle-aged man. Family man. Soft-spoken and serious about his job. Has been working in the field for a long time and tries to relate to his younger coworkers.

The Callers

CAMERON, twelve-year-old boy. Strong.

SIERRA, teenage girl. Stubborn and defeated, but very angry.

MARTHA, forty-five-year-old woman who works in an office. Hard worker and slightly eccentric.

SETTING

Set in an emergency communications center, three dispatchers sitting at small and personalized desks, a sense of calm before the storm.

NOTE ON OVERLAPPING SECTIONS OF DIALOGUE

The bolded lines are to be heard louder than the others at the moment. How to “arrange” the rest of the dialogue is up to the actors/director to suit their pleasure.

A CALL FOR HELP

Lights up on a 9-1-1 call center. There are three desks, each with their own dispatcher: Brian, Ronnie, and Bill. Brian has rolled his chair up to Ronnie's desk. Bill is minding his own business, trying not to get involved. Their headsets are around their necks.

BRIAN. *(Midconversation.)* No because she was absolutely insane and I never would have expected it. I mean she texted me FOUR times in the span of a single hour.

RONNIE. *(Sarcastically.)* Yeah dude, four is a biiiiig number, I bet she was.

BRIAN. Man, I swear she was practically begging for me to buy her a second drink and I was just like, "Nah girl sorry but I have better places to be," and she flipped out. *(Sits back.)* She was feeling me, and I just had to leave her.

BILL. *(Finally giving in.)* But why? I mean, she seemed like a nice enough girl, and was into you?

Brian and Ronnie exchange a look and start laughing.

BRIAN. Come on man, why would I waste my perfectly good money on a drink on a crazy lady when I could go home and catch the end of the game?

RONNIE. Fair.

There is an awkward pause; Ronnie gestures at Bill to Brian, suggesting he start a conversation. Brian shakes his head and Ronnie silently insists.

BRIAN. So hey Bill, uh, how's the missus?

BILL. Oh! Um, yeah she's good, the kids can be a handful but she's great with them, and being able to balance work.

RONNIE. Oh yeah, has she finished school yet?

BILL. Last year.

RONNIE. Oh, um, that long ago?

BILL. Yup.

BRIAN. (*Seeing an opening to poke fun.*) Yeah, Ronnie, Jesus, I'm glad to know you care so much.

RONNIE. Shut up. I bet you don't even know her name.

BRIAN. I know her name!

Beat.

So what is she up to now?

BILL. Eleanor just got hired as a vice principal / down the street—

BRIAN. (*To Ronnie.*) See, *Eleanor* just got hired as a vice principal down the street, I knew that! (*To Bill.*) That's great!

BILL. We're excited about it.

BRIAN. She's such a character. (*To Ronnie.*) Remember that dress she wore to the staff party? Total middle-school-principal vibes.

BILL. What does that mean?

Things are awkward for a second, then—

Brian and Ronnie laugh; Bill slightly smiles, looking back at his computer.

RONNIE. We really need to fix the way you talk about women, Brian. It's been a long time coming and as a feminist I think I'm failing the world by not putting you in check.

BRIAN. Oh please, I'm waaaaay more of a feminist than you. I love women, you—you don't care about the world. You're practically a dude anyways. I've seen the way you treat your little boyfriends. Yep boyfriends. As in plural.

RONNIE. Okay, never categorize me with you, idiot, and I would never cheat. I'm not dating anyone. (*End of discussion.*) Women are better than you, at work and in relationships. It's just time you admit it.

BRIAN. (*Jokingly.*) You are playing a dangerous game here. You don't wanna see me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry.

RONNIE. Brian, I don't like you period.

Ronnie giggles and Brian starts throwing little trinkets from his desk at her and they both laugh harder.

BILL. Okay, you two, come on now; it can't be playtime twenty-four seven.

BRIAN. Oh, come on, "Dad," it's a Sunday at (*Checks watch.*) four PM; not necessarily crime o'clock.

Defeated, Bill goes back to his computer, putting his headset on.

RONNIE. (*Quietly to Brian.*) Jeez, jerkoff, be nice to him. You know he takes all that shit personally. He's a sensitive guy.

BRIAN. I know, but it's not really—

A ringing comes in from Brian's computer; everyone else freezes. Brian immediately puts on his headset and rolls his chair back to his desk. Lights down on everything except for Brian and his desk.

Nine one one, what's your emergency?

Lights up on Cameron, a twelve-year-old boy. He's dressed in pajamas and holding a phone as he paces back and forth.

CAMERON. (*Scared, frantic.*) It's Nick—I—he's—I was just playing around, he said it wasn't loaded—

BRIAN. Okay, try to calm down for me. What's your name?

CAMERON. (*Voice breaking, quickly pacing.*) Cameron, but please, he's not moving. My mom isn't home and she's not answering, I don't know what to do.

BRIAN. Deep breath, Cameron, are you able to run me through what just happened?

CAMERON. (*Hyperventilating.*) It went off—the gun, it went off and Nick—my friend—he...he's not answering me...

Cameron is right on the verge of breaking down. He gasps and exclaims:

HE BREATHED I SAW HIM—oh my God he's not dead please PLEASE send someone right now, sir, please.

BRIAN. I'm sending people to your house right now, kiddo, I promise. I need you to run me through what happened to your friend, it'll assist us in helping him get better.

Cameron sighs deeply.

CAMERON. We always do stuff like this, like—joke around, I guess.

BRIAN. Like playing games together?

CAMERON. *(Sniffling.)* Yeah, exactly, except this time I don't know why but I reached for the gun cabinet. My dad never really keeps it locked—I thought it would be funny—

BRIAN. Okay, so you accidentally shot your friend?

CAMERON. *(Voice breaking again.)* Yeah—Dad said—I SWEAR he said he didn't keep it loaded, a safety precaution or something.

BRIAN. I understand. Where did he get wounded?

CAMERON. It's like right by his left shoulder, but like up really high, kind of neck area?

BRIAN. Okay, is the / injury deep?

CAMERON. There's so much blood oh my God please please please—

BRIAN. One more question, Cameron, stay with me. How long ago was this accident?

CAMERON. Only like a minute.

BRIAN. *(Kind.)* Good job. I'm going to ask you some questions, just to keep your mind off of everything. I just need you to stay calm and answer quietly, okay?

CAMERON. *(Sigh of release.)* Mhmm okay.

BRIAN. Now, my name is Brian. How old are you, Cameron?

CAMERON. Eleven—no! Twelve now.

BRIAN. Oh really? Wow, you're getting pretty grown-up. When was your birthday?

CAMERON. Yesterday, actually.

BRIAN. Wooow, what did you get?

CAMERON. My dad got me this big Lego set, it has Hogwarts and all of the characters from Harry Potter and everything.

He smiles slightly and wipes his tears away.

Another ring is heard. Lights down on Cameron and Brian as they freeze where they are. Lights up on Ronnie. She puts on her headset.

RONNIE. Nine one one, what's your emergency?

Lights up on Sierra, holding a phone and pacing back and forth. She is disheveled and in her school clothes.

SIERRA. I don't want to do this anymore.

RONNIE. I'm sorry? Could you please clearly state the nature of your emergency.

SIERRA. My mom said it's a passing phase. That everyone kinda feels like this sometimes but that is such complete and utter bullshit, I mean she has no idea what it's like to live in my head. It's so aggravating—I just, ugh, I don't understand.

RONNIE. Ma'am, I need to know what is happening in order to help you.

Sierra sighs and stops walking around. Pause.

SIERRA. I'm going to kill myself.

There is a slight pause as Ronnie looks behind her and motions something. She takes a moment and continues.

RONNIE. A unit is on the way to you right now, sweetie, just stay calm and talk to me. What's your name?

SIERRA. My name's Sierra.

Pause.

Oh, um, Sierra Draffen.

RONNIE. Hi, it's nice to meet you, Sierra Draffen, I'm Ronnie Moore. Where do you go to school?

SIERRA. I, um, I'm a senior now, at East High School. I know it's pretty shit.

RONNIE. Not at all, I have a niece there; she likes it alright, I believe.

SIERRA. She's definitely not in my friend group then because she would want to drop dead too. Jesus Christ I feel like I'm always moving in a fucking circle.

RONNIE. What do you mean by a circle? Is your mom home, or is anyone else in the house with you right now that you can go to or that we can contact?

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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NO PROSPERING WEAPONS

**BY JUSTIN CAMERON
WASHINGTON**

PRODUCTION HISTORY

NO PROSPERING WEAPONS was awarded a winner of the 2023 ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence competition and received further development with ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), through support from the Dramatists Guild of America. It was produced as part of ENOUGH!'s Nationwide Reading and had its world premiere produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Round House Theatre Teen Performance Company on November 6, 2023. It was directed by Danisha Crosby, with support from student director Soa Andriamananjara. The play was sponsored by Change the Ref. The cast was as follows:

UP-AND-COMING Joshua Pinchback
DOWN-AND-FALLING Noah Green

REQUIRED CREDIT

The world premiere of NO PROSPERING WEAPONS was co-produced by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Round House Theatre Teen Performance Company.

CHARACTERS

UP-AND-COMING, real name Isaiah. An up-and-coming artist. The killed.

DOWN-AND-FALLING, real name Smith Wesson. A downfalling man. The killer.

SETTING

The Gray Area. In the middle of Black and White, there is always a Gray Area. This is where both Up-and-Coming and Down-and-Falling reside. Everything in this world—costumes, chairs, accessories—all exists in different shades of gray.

EPIGRAPH

“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.”
—Isaiah 54:17

NO PROSPERING WEAPONS

Lights up on the Gray Area, the area that always exists between Black and White. Everything that exists in this world is a shade of gray. Two chairs sit facing each other. Up-and-Coming enters carrying a single rose in his hand and takes the empty seat on the right. He gazes at the audience. Down-and-Falling enters and sits in the other seat. Up-and-Coming shifts his gaze to Down-and-Falling, but Down-and-Falling refuses to meet it.

UP-AND-COMING. Look at me.

BOTH. You...couldn't even look at me.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. I couldn't even look at myself. Still can't.

UP-AND-COMING. You still have that blessing, I see?

...I've never wanted to change the world. I fear it, actually. I pick up a pen to pass my passions to a pad. I experiment with lyrics, hooks, and beats like a young scientist in the lab. Soon enough, after a few miniature immature mixtapes, I gain appeal from the students I strut the halls with. Which shortly spills into the soon-to-be-delinquents who sneak from street to street. I finally realize my precarious purpose is producing a perfect pitch. Mama always tells me, "Baby, Action is a boomerang. You throw it, and it comes back to smack ya in the face." You get what you give the world. At times I give it my peace, others my pain. I guess the bad outweighs the good.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. You have the choice between bad and good? I mean, technically, everyone does...mine is just a little blurrier. I swipe up a mask so I can move without leaving evidence. I catch the attention of girls and social media who never even looked my direction. Which soon leads to "street militaries" seeking my recruitment. As a boy, my pops would instruct me, "A man who loses battle has no right to rest." So—

BOTH. I do what every man of age I know in my life does—

DOWN-AND-FALLING. I run the streets—

BOTH. Obtaining protection...

UP-AND-COMING. Protection the world frowned upon...

DOWN-AND-FALLING. Protection to help me win the battle.

BOTH. To be able to rest at night.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. But this protection comes with terms and conditions.

UP-AND-COMING. I've never lived life by terms and conditions. I do as I please regardless of the perspection. Who doesn't love me? But in my race to acquire love, I actually attract hate. Eyes jolt at my glistening neckwear as I walked my old block. Ears open to clicking cameras catching my presence. Noses flare open as the scent of freshly produced ATM money reeks from my designer clothes. Mouths drop as my grilled cheeses transform to grilled-lined teeth. Hands reach out to me desperately as my dirty nails file down to colorful rings and watches. Even in my years of premature poverty, never one time did I stress. Because I knew I had it. I was up-and-coming.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. I wish I read my terms and conditions. Fists fly as I tumble to the ground. Lips stay shut in as I make an oath to my crew. Nostrils pinch at the cooking of illegal substances. Eardrums ring at the banging of weapons as I toss and turn on the bedroom floor. Then—

Down-and-Falling and Up-and-Coming suddenly stare intently at each other.

BOTH. Eyes.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. Lock onto you—

UP-AND-COMING. Onto you—

DOWN-AND-FALLING. When I see you walk down the street wearing my wants.

UP-AND-COMING. When I see you wearing the desperation I want to escape from.

They stare at each other for another moment. Up-and-Coming looks away.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. You...couldn't even look at me.

Beat.

I was taught to take. In this world that gives you nothing you're forced to take. But in my battle to finesse possessions, my sympathy grows poor. I have dreams full of desire. But a frown is far from needed. Because I know I am gonna have it. I have to have it. If I am gonna escape the "down-and-falling"...you are going to give it to me.

UP-AND-COMING. After late Saturday nights in the studio living life through the devil, I rise Sunday morning impersonating a funeral, in a black-fitted suit. To worship God and please my family. I see MY Creator often. Recently, it's been a twenty-four-karat diamond cross I link on my chest. I leave those in the car as I enter the church. I unwrap the rubber band off my stack of money and drop it in the offering plate. Other worshipers look at my family in shock. My father glares at me in shame. Hm. I guess Jesus isn't a fan of hundreds. Pastor pulls me aside after service as my kin rushes down the aisle with the others. He says to me: "No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, says the Lord... Isaiah 54:17."

Beat.

He stares into my soul. Attempting to convey that this verse he has laid on the fading red carpet is deeper than any verse I've laid on 808 heavy beats. He must've seen my music video, which had just hit a million views. Where my "gang" waved pieces of steel like handymen. Or heard my hit song blast from speakers on block corners. Where kids tuck their pinkie and ring finger to their palms, connect the index and middle, and poke thumbs up to the sky.

Up-and-Coming does as he says, molding his hand into the shape of a gun. Shrugs.

It goes with the lyrics, I guess. It sure gets the job done. I reach into my pockets and I brush against the hugger of my hot iron. Pastor analyzes the lump on my side as if it's a cancerous tumor plaguing our community. As if *I'm* that cancer. For glorifying the very item that shot through my videos. That boomed on the block. That

popped onto my hip. Glorifying the exact same reason that my talk with Pastor will be the closest I ever get with God until—

DOWN-AND-FALLING. I see you, in the dusk of Saturday. I spend the night in the parking lot, scoping out the studio in which you sit. Satan creeps through my pupils as I gaze at you entering and exiting. After memorizing the address and analyzing the valuables, I arrive back to my humble abode, where my mattress waits for me on the peeling floor. I have never owned my own sanctuary. I can't remember a time I've ever had sufficient funds for anything but a cup of noodles. Corner stores know me for being a frequent shoplifter. City bus drivers recognize my face as a common sneaking passenger. And soon enough, the police station labels me your "petty thief." That night, I can only digest my own hunger before slumber. So I attempt to rest, but every time I lock my lids, I see demons providing motivation. Who masquerades as my little baby girl. Telling me she's hungry. And she needs to be fed. As she does so, the Bonnie to my Clyde grabs my chin and leads it to hers. Peck. "Remember: In and out, one and done, nothing to worry about. You got mouths to feed same way he do."

UP-AND-COMING. When the moon and sun cross paths, so do me and my youngin'. I pull into the residence in which my baby stays. We are jus gonna ride around. I jus want to see him. Hear him. Feel his innocence in this mature world I operate in. But he is, in fact, not a baby anymore. His mini silhouette drops lower and lower as he hops down the porch. The immediate thought of music jumps in my mind as I recall I needed to turn my album into my label in the morning. I still have to record the outro. The pressure of paid art. My pupil's bills get paid with this playful poetry I participate in. I remember being his age and already wanting things. And I knew the extent I would go to get it. I want him motivated but not hungry. I send a text to the guys and producer and let them know we have to hit the studio tonight.

My door slams open and shut quickly an' my instincts reach for my hip. I'm trippin'. It's jus my son. I tell him to relax on my damn door. We share a laugh. "Sorry, Dad," he says through high-pitched laughter. I don't see him well as I begin to pull off. I tell him he's a big boy now and he can come sit in the front seat if he desires. Without

a second's pause, I hear the seat belt click, and the swing of a shoe rocks me in the face. I laugh, got too much going on to be upset.

As we exchange more laughter I spot bruises spotted on his body like leopard print. I squinted my eyes at my seed, an' he knows why I do so. "A lil fight," he says. "I fought back, though, Dad." He speaks with conviction.

I have nothing motivational to say. I repay my blood in the best way I know how as I reach in my pocket and hand him a stack. "Here lil man," I whisper. "Give this to your momma, but this for you, alright?" I glance at the house as I see a figure rocking a robe and bonnet shake their head. "Okay, Daddy!" he shouts with a grin on his face. "And remember! Always fight back!" He flexes and throws a few infantile blows at me before he shuts the door. I begin to put the studio location in my GPS. Under my breath I repeat my legacy's words. "Always fight back..."

Up-and-Coming uses the single rose in his hand and repurposes it to a microphone.

Drop my son off. Didn't know it'd be the last.
Spent my whole life trying to move through the low- and the high-class.
Opposition looks over here, and all they see is greener grass.
Wasn't speeding down the street, but I was moving kinda fast.
Plotting on the next song, like this one, could use a lil brass.

DOWN-AND-FALLING. I grab my g**—

Both Down-and-Falling and Up-and-Coming throw up a "shh" over their mouths in place of saying "gun."

Make sure I tie my hoodie past my mask.
Take a grip of the bottle, liquid courage leaves the glass.
Finally make it to your spot, ease my foot up off the gas.
Put the car in park, dreaming, "What am I gonna do with all this cash?"

UP-AND-COMING. Finally, make it to the stu'.

Know what it's time to do.

Make my way up to the mic as I dab up all my crew.
Producer cues the beat as 808s bang through our shoes.
Some of the gang leave out, they're talking about gettin' some food.
But I don't really think nothing of it, as there's a die down of the mood.

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THE MATTER AT HAND

BY VALENTINE WULF

PRODUCTION HISTORY

THE MATTER AT HAND was awarded a winner of the 2023 ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence competition and received further development with ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), through support from the Dramatists Guild of America. It was produced as part of ENOUGH!'s Nationwide Reading and had its world premiere produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Olney Theatre Center, in partnership with Wheaton High School, on November 6, 2023. It was directed by Hallie Gordon and Rebecca Dzida. The play was sponsored by Change the Ref. The cast was as follows:

CLAUDETTE LATETE	Rosselyn Pacas Villalobos
JANKO KOSTIC	Cristian Pastora
CESAR MENDOZA	Daniel Palacios

REQUIRED CREDIT

The world premiere of THE MATTER AT HAND was co-produced by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Olney Theatre Center, in partnership with Wheaton High School.

CHARACTERS

CLAUDETTE LATETE has been the principal for as long as anyone can remember. Her walkie-talkie is loud. Her lanyard is jingly. She can't figure out how to turn the projector on. Ninety percent of school funding goes toward her ineffectual anti-bullying campaign.

JANKO KOSTIC has been after Latete's job for years. Unfortunately, it doesn't look like she plans on retiring anytime soon. So until then, Kostic is stuck doing all the work Latete doesn't do. Underpaid, jaded, and lonely (his wife left him and took his dog), Kostic is at his wit's end.

CESAR MENDOZA's bad toupee and questionable wardrobe choices are a hit with students. None of his essay assignments have a minimum word limit, because, in his words, "the only thing they limit is your creativity!"

SETTING

The principal's office.

NOTE

To be played fast, deadpan, and completely straight. Do not pause. Do not try to be funny.

THE MATTER AT HAND

Lights up on a small principal's office. There is a desk with a jar of Dum-Dums, a potted plant, and an old radiator. Maybe some posters with smiley faces or children holding hands on the wall.

Principal Claudette Latete sits across from Vice Principal Janko Kostic.

LATETE. See Janko, your problem is that you're stuck in a fixed mindset, when you need to open your mind and embrace a growth mindset. All you're focusing on here is the negative. Sitting around wishing you had things you don't have is only setting yourself up for failure.

KOSTIC. Claudette, I really need a salary increase.

The radiator clangs and whines in the background.

LATETE. Shhh. Do you hear that? That's the sound of a fixed mindset.

KOSTIC. It's the sound of the broken furnace.

LATETE. I need you to ask yourself why it's broken, Janko.

KOSTIC. Because we can't afford to fix it.

LATETE. Can we focus on the matter at hand here?

KOSTIC. My salary?

LATETE. The matter at hand *before* you started being a negative Nelly.

KOSTIC. I'm just saying, I've been vice principal for ten years, and I've done eighty-five percent of the paperwork that keeps this school running.

LATETE. Then let's keep that streak going!

She sets a tower of papers in front of him.

So these are the receipts from the PTA bake sale, these are proposals for a new school mascot, these are letters objecting to changing the mascot, these are permission slips that parents mailed in, these are checks for the field trip, and these are letters from parents, I think, expressing concern about the bomb threat last year—

KOSTIC. Which one?

LATETE. All of them. So I'm gonna have you sort through these, staple the checks to the respective permission slips, and throw away the parent letters. Sound good?

KOSTIC. Instead of throwing away the letters, shouldn't we read them? And respond to them?

LATETE. If you have time to do that, be my guest.

Kostic weighs his options between a mountain of parent letters and another mountain of paperwork.

KOSTIC. Can we at least recycle them?

LATETE. Sure.

Kostic dumps the stack of letters into the recycling bin.

Now, the matter at hand: You know what this week is?

KOSTIC. Vice Principal Kostic gets a raise week?

LATETE. It's school kindness week! Let's not bring this attitude to school kindness week.

She sticks a smiley face sticker to his jacket. He sighs.

I really think it's going to work better this year. If the kids feel more involved, they'll be more inspired to contribute to an atmosphere of kindness.

KOSTIC. I'm going to be truly shocked if there's a single good slogan in any of those submission boxes.

LATETE. *(As one would gently reprimand a dog or a toddler.)* Fixed mindset.

KOSTIC. *(Placating her.)* Sorry.

LATETE. Here. Have a Dum-Dum.

She offers him a Dum-Dum from the jar on her desk. He reluctantly takes one. A knock at the door. Cesar Mendoza

enters the office, wearing a bad toupee and shirt that says "Beer O'Clock." He carries a file folder and a box of cupcakes.

Mr. Mendoza! How's it going? Have a Dum-Dum!

He takes a Dum-Dum.

MENDOZA. Great, man! My sixth-period class has free time, which means *I* get my Mendoza time! I ran out and got cupcakes if anyone wants some.

KOSTIC. I feel like your students get a lot of free time.

MENDOZA. I'm encouraging independent thinking. That's why none of my essays have word limits, man. The only thing they limit is your creativity! Speaking of creativity...

Mendoza holds up the folder.

LATETE. What's in the folder?

MENDOZA. The student slogan submissions for school kindness week! There are some good ones in here!

Mendoza tosses the folder open on the table.

Topics include anti-bullying, discouraging drugs, positive thinking, and school shootings. (*Beat.*) Stopping them. We want to stop them. (*Beat.*) You know, I think we also need to reward the kids for stepping up to make the school a better place.

KOSTIC. Well, last year, they got rewarded with a bomb threat on the first day of school kindness week, which I think is a great indicator of how effective the whole thing is.

MENDOZA. Maybe we should give them cupcakes. Or a pizza party. Or a pizza *and* cupcake party. We can keep track of different students' kindness scores and the class with the most points wins the cupcake-slash-pizza party.

LATETE. We don't have the money to buy the children pizza and cupcakes for being kind.

MENDOZA. That's what the PTA is for.

KOSTIC. Maybe we could go back to hitting them with yardsticks when they're not kind.

LATETE. Well, that's not setting a very good example, is it?

MENDOZA. Janko, you can go around sitting in on different

classes and making tallies for each kid when they do something kind. Then at the end of the year, we add up which class has the most—

KOSTIC. I don't have time to go around to every classroom making sure the children are being kind.

LATETE. (*Condescendingly.*) That's right, Janko doesn't have time to go around to every classroom making sure the children are being kind.

KOSTIC. (*Under his breath.*) Maybe I would if you didn't make me do all your goddamn paperwork.

LATETE. Language! It's school *kindness* week, for crying out loud!

MENDOZA. Okay, then maybe we can assign various students to be kindness officers who go around—

LATETE. Oh, I like that.

MENDOZA. ...and hand out...Dum-Dums to kids who they see being kind.

LATETE. Oh, and they can have little uniforms!

MENDOZA. We can give them armbands with smiley faces on them!

KOSTIC. I don't think we should do that.

MENDOZA. We can call them Positivity Police!

LATETE. No, that abbreviates to PP. How about the Smile Squad?

KOSTIC. Maybe we don't call them the SS.

LATETE. Okay? You know what? Let's take things one step at a time. Starting with the slogans.

Latete, Kostic, and Mendoza sort through the stack of student-submitted slogans.

"Meanies are weenies." Oh, I like that one. "Less gun, more fun." "This campaign is stupid." Interesting. "The only AKs in this school are Awesome Kids." That's a good one!

KOSTIC. "Use your voice to make the right choice." An obscene drawing. Another obscene drawing. "Principal Latete sucks..." accompanied by an obscene drawing...of Claudette.

Mendoza snatches the drawing. Latete snatches it from him.

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LIGHTNING STRIKE

BY ANDY FAGAN

PRODUCTION HISTORY

LIGHTNING STRIKE was awarded a winner of the 2023 ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence competition and received further development with ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), through support from the Dramatists Guild of America. It was produced as part of ENOUGH!'s Nationwide Reading and had its world premiere produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Imagination Stage on November 6, 2023. It was directed by Nikki Kaplan. The play was sponsored by Change the Ref. The cast was as follows:

HALLIE 1	Morgane Reed-Roth
HALLIE 2	Aashna Kapur
HALLIE 3	Caro Dubberly
HALLIE 4	Jasmine Brooks

REQUIRED CREDIT

The world premiere of LIGHTNING STRIKE was co-produced by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Imagination Stage.

CHARACTERS

HALLIE, a nondescript woman. She is the American youth.

SETTING

A classroom in every city in every state, United States of America.

A NOTE ON CASTING

The role of Hallie can be played by a single actor or four actors representing her at different ages—Age Seventeen, Age Twenty-Seven, Age Thirty-One, and Age Forty.

LIGHTNING STRIKE

Lights up on a classroom in disarray—turned-over chairs and desks, books strewn about the floor. There is a Hydro Flask water bottle somewhere in the chaos. Hallie, a seventeen-year-old girl, is seated on the only upright chair.

HALLIE, AGE SEVENTEEN. I experienced my first active-shooter drill in January of 2013. Our teacher ushered us into the corner of the room and urged us to be quiet. She told us we were practicing hiding in case an angry parent or a bear was in the hallways. And I bought it because I was seven and I didn't watch the news. I didn't know what had happened, and I didn't know how it could affect me. The world wasn't allowed to be cruel to me yet. So I believed we were hiding from a bear. But I'm older now. I know exactly what we were hiding from in January of 2013.

Pause.

I also know that the chances of experiencing a school shooting are infinitesimal. You're more likely to be struck by lightning than die in a school shooting.

She stands slowly.

I've never been struck by lightning. Yet I am now what they call a survivor. My classmates are leaving the school in body bags, while I still stand here, a survivor. My hands are shaking, and I can't make them stop because I'm a survivor, and Asa hasn't answered my texts.

She looks down.

Asa hasn't answered my texts. But that doesn't mean anything—it doesn't mean anything! Asa is fine, because he has to be, because I don't know what I'm going to do if he isn't.

She holds out her phone, silently praying for a notification that will never come.

The headlines say sixteen dead. It used to be twelve. It'll go up again. I can still see their faces—Mr. Phipps was the first. Of course, he was the first. He was closest to the door. I was right there, standing right beside him. Holding a...

She spots the Hydro Flask and picks it up.

Holding my Hydro Flask. I used to joke with my friends that you could kill someone with one of those things.

She sets it down.

So why didn't I? I was right there. I could have thrown it, could have been the hero. Everyone says they're going to be the hero right up until the moment that they have to actually do it. Then, they just hide under the teacher's desk and listen to the sounds of their classmates being slaughtered. That's why I'm here. That's why I made it. Because I'm a coward.

She sits back in the same chair.

Asa still hasn't answered my texts.

Lights fade. While the lights are down, a voice reads out a headline:

HEADLINE. (Voice-over.) DEATH TOLL OF BENJAMIN HARRISON HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING RISES TO TWENTY-TWO.

Lights back up on Hallie. It has been several weeks since the shooting. The classroom remains, perhaps even messier than before. Hallie rights a chair and sits in it.

HALLIE, AGE SEVENTEEN. Asa died this morning. The doctors declared him brain-dead last week. His family finally decided to pull the plug. I *hoped* he was going to be okay, but I *knew* better. Most people don't survive being shot in the head.

She takes her phone out.

Asa still hasn't answered my texts.

She stares at her phone for a moment as if expecting Asa might finally text her back.

I still don't know what's worse—the shock of what happened, or the ache of what never will. It's been three weeks. It's been three weeks, and I haven't yet managed to get out of here. Everywhere I go—I'm still here, stuck in this classroom, hiding underneath Mr. Phipps's desk.

Pause.

We're supposed to go back to school tomorrow. Can you believe that? I don't know how I'm supposed to walk back into this building and pretend nothing happened. I don't know how I'm supposed to get out of this. I don't know how I'm supposed to do anything.

Lights down. Another headline:

HEADLINE. *(Voice-over.)* IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS SINCE A SHOOTING AT BENJAMIN HARRISON HIGH SCHOOL CLAIMED TWENTY-TWO LIVES; WHAT HAS CHANGED?

When the lights come up, it has been ten years. Hallie is twenty-seven. She is wearing a graduation cap and holding a diploma.

HALLIE, AGE TWENTY-SEVEN. Well, today's the day. I'm finally graduating from college.

She moves the tassel on her cap to the left side. Then, she pins the diploma on the whiteboard. She rights an overturned chair and sits in it.

(Trying to sound enthusiastic, failing.) Woooo.

Pause.

I did it. I'm a college graduate. Sure, maybe it took me five more years than the average person, but I did it. I'm here. I'm...

She looks around the classroom.

...still here. I still remember it all, just like it was yesterday.

She walks around the room, pointing out places.

This was where Ethan's body was. And this was where Delia tried to hide.

She sits on a desk.

And...of course, here was Mr. Phipps and...me.

She stands suddenly.

(Incredulous.) What am I doing? I'm graduating. I should be celebrating! I made it through college—I should be proud of myself! Yet here I am, always stuck in this godforsaken classroom! I want out—I want to move on, like everyone else has. Is that really too much to ask? Is it?

No one answers. Hallie continues to wait anyway. Finally, she gives up and sits on the floor in the middle of the chaos.

I don't know what's wrong with me. I just get...so angry sometimes. It's never been like this before. It's been ten years. Shouldn't I be past this by now? Or am I just destined to spend the rest of my life stuck on seventeen forever?

Hallie considers this for a moment. When she speaks again, the anger is gone from her voice. She fixes a few chairs, replaces them at their desks.

Yet somehow, I've been able to return to normality, with the ghosts of the dead watching what I've made of the life they were denied. I've got a boyfriend, a roommate, a nice apartment, a degree in computer science. I used to want to be an actor. But I was a stupid kid with stupider dreams. So I went with computer science instead. That's pretty good, right?

A pause—she is reconsidering again.

Except Ethan was an amazing artist. And Delia had such a beautiful singing voice. And Asa was... Asa was... Asa was supposed to be here. We were always going to graduate college together. We made that plan when we were six. It's not like him to miss it. I sent him an invitation, but he still hasn't answered my texts.

She looks at her phone for a moment, still waiting for Asa's response.

And then there's me. The only one left. The only one to ever get a degree in anything. I keep telling myself that I'm alright—that I'm over everything, that I don't lie awake at night imagining what Ethan or Delia or Asa would be doing if they were here instead of me. They would be making us proud—I'm sure of that. They would be famous and successful and not spending their college graduation thinking about something that happened ten years ago. But they're not. I am. And I have to make it count. I have to make them all proud.

Hallie puts her head in her hands.

Asa would know what to do. Asa would have it all figured out. (*Sighs.*) Maybe Mom is right. Maybe I should see a therapist.

Lights down. Another headline:

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A DISORDERLY HOUSE

BY SAM LEE VICTOR

PRODUCTION HISTORY

A DISORDERLY HOUSE was awarded a winner of the 2023 ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence competition and received further development with ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), through support from the Dramatists Guild of America. It was produced as part of ENOUGH!'s Nationwide Reading and had its world premiere produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 1st Stage, and the Theatre Lab on November 6, 2023. It was directed by Deidra LaWan Starnes. The play was sponsored by Change the Ref. The cast was as follows:

JACK Matthew Sparacino
DIANE Tamieka Chavis

REQUIRED CREDIT

The world premiere of A DISORDERLY HOUSE was co-produced by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 1st Stage, and the Theatre Lab.

CHARACTERS

DIANE, female. Late forties. She probably works in marketing or accounting. She keeps a very well-decorated house; it changes based on the season, with pillows and everything.

JACK, male. Early fifties. Husband to Diane. The kind of dad that is computer-savvy and wears colorful sneakers that have industrial-level insoles in them.

SETTING

Inside a dorm room, a double. The dorm was built in the sixties and looks as such, with mysterious stains dotting the ceilings, mold emanating from every surface, and bees living in the light fixtures. Since it's a double, there are two of everything: two lofted beds, desks, wardrobes, end tables, etc. The room is split harshly down the middle, dividing the different styles of the people who live there.

On one side of the room lives someone who probably had a successful career as a cosplayer when they were fourteen. There's a full computer setup, with multiple monitors crammed on the tiny desk. The computer itself is glowing purple. There's a psychedelic blanket hung on the wall, plastic vines taped everywhere, and an end table that has been turned into a crystal shrine. The bed is unmade, and clothes are scattered about the area.

On the other side of the room, the walls are covered in paper drawings and random bits of crap: small flowers, Krispy Kreme hats, polaroids, etc. The bed has a navy duvet, and there are a few stuffed animals on top of it. It's on this side that the action takes place.

A DISORDERLY HOUSE

Lights up on a college dorm room. It's a double. And it's disgusting. On one side, there's a bed with a psychedelic blanket on it and fairy lights galore. On the other, there's a bed with a navy duvet. This is where Diane is crouched, with a suitcase and an industrial trash bag beside her. Both are half-full. She's going through a plastic storage bin, putting its contents into the trash bag. Soon, there's a knock at the door.

DIANE. It's unlocked.

...

There's another knock. Diane gets up and opens the door for Jack, who enters carrying two cafeteria takeout boxes.

JACK. You need the card to open it—

DIANE. How'd you get in the hall?

JACK. They propped open the door.

He puts the food down.

Do all the halls have themes?

DIANE. I don't know.

JACK. It's cool. Rainbows everywhere.

DIANE. Yeah.

JACK. I forgot forks.

DIANE. Just use your hands. What'd you get—

JACK. Just whatever was there.

Didn't we buy her forks?

DIANE. I haven't been able to find shit in here.

She holds up the bin.

We could sell this.

JACK. Okay.
When?

DIANE. Or we could just leave it in the hall—someone'll take it.

JACK. Oh you know I was in the cafeteria—and there were all these lines everywhere and this person was helping me and after, they were like: "I'm the RA—her RA," and they were like: "You don't have to take everything now." We do it whenever. We paid for the semester.

DIANE. I don't wanna have to come back.
And the roommate would just be...like looking at it.

JACK. Well yeah, but—I mean—
It's an option.
I'm gonna wash my hands—

DIANE. Wait—

Diane hands Jack the empty bin.

JACK. Might wanna just throw it out it's broken at the bottom.

DIANE. They won't care.

Jack leaves, taking the bin with him. Diane turns to the bed, first taking off a stuffed animal that has been loved into an unrecognizable ball of fluff—she puts this into the suitcase. Everything else goes into a trash bag—this includes the fitted sheet which she literally has to wrestle from the bed. There's soon another knock at the door. Diane opens it.

JACK. That bathroom...oh my God.

DIANE. Yeah.

Diane props open the door.

JACK. Paint all in the sink.

DIANE. Yeah.

JACK. Paint. Also a full Chipotle burrito on the counter. Half-eaten. It was standing, it wasn't lying down. It was—like—like it was saying hello.

DIANE. Okay—

JACK. You know I thought on a floor like this they would take care of the bathroom.

DIANE. Yeah—

JACK. With a name like “Lavender”—you’d think they’d keep the bathrooms lavender-scented.

DIANE. Don’t say that the door’s open.

JACK. What. It’s the name—

DIANE. I just don’t think they call it that.

JACK. Well—they should clean their bathroom don’t you think.

DIANE. There are actual people who clean it. You want them to clean a communal bathroom?

JACK. Throw out the burrito. Or maybe it’s supposed to be funny. (*Referring to the trash bag.*) Is it only clothes and stuff in there?

DIANE. I don’t wanna donate it.

JACK. Okay.

DIANE. I mean you’re not supposed to give to the Salvation Army anymore and he said that the thrift stores around here were really expensive and that’s why he was spending so much money on clothes so they’d probably only give us like two bucks.

JACK. Could put it in the hall too. Out there I met some...some Lavender...Lavender Livers—Lavender Dwellers—

DIANE. Jack—

JACK. Yeah the alliteration makes it—
What—

DIANE. It sounds like you’re—

JACK. I’m just being funny.
Well—they were excited about that bin.

DIANE. They’re excited class was canceled.

JACK. Well—they were also happy about a free bin.

DIANE. If we donate the clothes they won’t be free—

JACK. That’s why if it was in the hall—

DIANE. You know they canceled half the day yesterday and the whole day today, and then they get the weekend. Three and a half days off.

JACK. You think they still should’ve had class?

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THE SMILES BEHIND

BY NIARRA C. BELL

PRODUCTION HISTORY

THE SMILES BEHIND was awarded a winner of the 2023 ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence competition and received further development with ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), through support from the Dramatists Guild of America. It was produced as part of ENOUGH!'s Nationwide Reading and had its world premiere produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Arena Stage on November 6, 2023. It was directed by Mauricio Pita, with support from student director Jada Ayanda. The play was sponsored by Change the Ref. The cast was as follows:

LAY	Chase Carolyn Williams
JEFFERSON	Camilo Linares
KAY	Calvin Marshall

REQUIRED CREDIT

The world premiere of THE SMILES BEHIND was co-produced by ENOUGH! Plays to End Gun Violence (Michael Cotey, Joaquin Oliver Artistic Producer), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Arena Stage.

CHARACTERS

LAYLA (LAY), a young African American girl who is curious, sweet, and thoughtful.

OFFICER JEFFERSON (JEFF), a man of any racial background. He is serious, kind-hearted, and solemn.

KAYDIN (KAY), an African American boy in his late teens. He is charming, charismatic, and caring.

SETTING

Middle of the night, around one AM. A rundown park (i.e., worn and well-used playground equipment and basketball courts without nets on the hoops). A single streetlight serves to light the entire park.

NOTE ON CASTING OFFICER JEFFERSON

Violence inflicted on African American communities by the police is not restricted to any specific race of the police officer. The problem is the broken relationship between the police force and African Americans as a whole. In other words, Officer Jefferson can be white but does not have to be, and perhaps if he isn't, you, your actors, and your audience will experience another layer of complexity and nuance in the story.

THE SMILES BEHIND

Lights up. Middle of the night, around one AM. A rundown park (i.e., worn and well-used playground equipment and basketball courts without nets on the hoops). A single street-light serves to light the entire park. Then—

OFFICER JEFFERSON. (*Offstage, speaking into his radio.*) I'm in pursuit of an African American male in his late teens. Proceeding with extreme caution. Suspect is possibly armed.

Kay, an African American teen, enters. He trips over an abandoned toy in the playground and falls. Officer Jefferson approaches quickly. Kay hastily reaches for his back pocket—unclear for what.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Place your hands where I can see them! **KAY.** (*Fraught.*) I didn't do it! It wasn't me. Don't shoot. Don't shoot. Please. It wasn't me. I—
Stop what you're doing! Hands up. Now!

Kay continues to reach behind him. Just as hastily as Kay reaches for his back pocket, Officer Jefferson reaches for the gun in his holster and points it at Kay with the intention to shoot.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Freeze!

At that moment, everything freezes. Completely. Then—

Kay disappears. Officer Jefferson's gun has also disappeared. A young African American girl, Lay, comes skipping out from the opposite direction Jefferson is looking. Officer Jefferson is still frozen.

LAY. Who's it?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. What?

LAY. *You're frozen, so someone had to freeze you or the game wouldn't make sense.*

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Listen, sweetheart. I'm not playing a game. I'm— (*Realizing he cannot move.*) I can't move.

LAY. I already told you. You're frozen.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Very funny kid, but— (*Suddenly panicked.*) Where's my gun?

LAY. I dunno.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Kid, that is a dangerous weapon. You need to give—

LAY. I don't have it. I'm not allowed to touch things like that, and you can't have a gun either! We're playing freeze tag.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Well how do we stop playing freeze tag?

LAY. Well, (*Drawing the word out to mock Officer Jefferson.*) I can unfreeze you!

Lay eagerly reaches her hand out before suddenly and suspiciously pulling it back.

But first, answer my question.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Okay. What is it?

LAY. Why was Kay running?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Who?

LAY. My brother, (*Pointing to where Kay was.*) Kay. If you weren't playing a game, why were you chasing him?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. (*Avoiding.*) Well...I...um—

LAY. I can't unfreeze you if you won't tell me.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Kid, I—

LAY. What's your name?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. It's Jefferson.

She salutes Officer Jefferson.

LAY. (*Acting like a soldier.*) Nice to meet you, Officer Jefferson.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. What's your name, kid?

LAY. It's Lay.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Your name is Lay and your brother's name is Kay?

LAY. Well Kay's is short for Kaydin and mine is short for Layla, but everybody calls us Lay and Kay.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Who's everybody? Your mom and dad?

LAY. No, not Mom and Dad.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. So who calls you Lay?

LAY. Aunt.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. What does your mom call you?

LAY. Aunt is my mom.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. (*Understanding.*) Oh. Well, does Aunt know you're out this late?

Lay doesn't respond.

Let's get you home, sweetheart. I think Aunt would want you to come home.

LAY. Can't.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Layla, unfreeze me right now!

LAY. I said no!

OFFICER JEFFERSON. You need to go home!

LAY. NO!

Beat.

I can't leave yet.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Why not?

LAY. You're still frozen, and Aunt is worried about Kay.

Beat.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I really need to get you home. It's too late for kids to be out.

LAY. Aunt is worried.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. It's really late and—

LAY. Aunt is really worried.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. You've got to get home, Lay.

LAY. I'm worried too.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I understand kid, but—

LAY. Do you have a Kay?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. No, I don't know anyone named Kay.

LAY. Not an actual Kay. You know, you're not very smart for a police officer?

Beat.

I meant, do you have someone to worry about, like Auntie worries about Kay?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Yeah, I do.

LAY. Who is it?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. My son. (*Beat, then—*) And if he was out this late, I'd be really worried so—

LAY. What's his name?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. His name is Jason. He's about your age.

LAY. Really?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Yeah, he's just a little older than you.

LAY. Maybe we could be friends.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I don't know about that.

LAY. About what?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I'm not sure you two would be very good friends.

LAY. That's a mean thing to say!

OFFICER JEFFERSON. No, what I meant was—

LAY. Why wouldn't we be friends? Is Jason mean or something?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. No, he's very nice.

LAY. Then why can't we be friends?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Well— (*How to explain...?*) Jason lives very far away.

LAY. But don't you live here?

JEFF. Yes, I do.

LAY. I thought you said you were Jason's dad.

JEFF. I am his dad.

LAY. But you don't live with Jason.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. No, I don't.

LAY. If you don't live with Jason, who takes care of him like Auntie takes care of me?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Jason lives with his mother.

LAY. Why don't you live with them? Do you not like Jason?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. No, I love my son very much.

LAY. Then why don't you live with him?

The question stumps Officer Jefferson.

Families are supposed to stay together, no matter what. That's what Auntie always says. "Families are like puzzles because they aren't complete without all the pieces!"

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Is that what she says?

LAY. Yeah. So that means your puzzle isn't complete.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Oh, it isn't complete?

LAY. Nope! It isn't because you're here and they're somewhere else that's far away. You're the missing piece!

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I guess I am.

LAY. Don't worry. It's okay to be the missing piece. Mom and Dad are two missing pieces at our house.

Beat.

You know you never answered my first question?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. You've asked so many, I must've forgotten.

LAY. Remember, I can't unfreeze you until you answer that question.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Okay. What was your first question?

LAY. You never told me why Kay was running.

Long pause.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I was chasing him.

LAY. Why? You weren't the one who was it.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. We weren't playing tag.

LAY. Then why were you both running?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. There was a robbery a few blocks down. Someone was shot. Your brother fits the description of the man who did it.

LAY. ...Okay?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Kay was seen fleeing the scene—

LAY. (So...?) Why did you chase him?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. When people run, they are usually guilty.

LAY. Usually. *Not* always.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. (Sighs.) Kid—

LAY. What do you do about the sometimes?

Beat.

What do you do when they run from fear and not guilt? What if Kay ran because he was scared? You had a gun and he didn't. I saw you reaching for it before you froze.

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I saw him reaching for a weapon!

LAY. DID YOU?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. YES!

LAY. DID YOU REALLY? ARE YOU SURE?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Yes I—

LAY. What did it look like?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. It was—

LAY. Did he point it at you?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. No but—

LAY. So how'd you see it?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. I thought he had—

LAY. No, you didn't think! You were scared of what Kay could've done to you, scared that he might've had a gun. You were going to shoot my brother because of *ifs* and *maybes*. Weren't you?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. Layla, as an officer of the law it is my responsibility to—

LAY. What if it was Jason?

OFFICER JEFFERSON. What?

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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