

# THEY FAKE BEING OKAY

Written by

Tom Stohlgren

Writer:  
Tom Stohlgren  
Email: [tjstohlgren@gmail.com](mailto:tjstohlgren@gmail.com)  
Representation:  
Eleni Larchanidou, LL.M.  
Literary & Talent Manager  
PH: 1 (310) 696-3656  
email: [managerelenilllm@gmail.com](mailto:managerelenilllm@gmail.com)  
Copyright

FADE IN:

SUPER: "People don't fake depression. They fake being ok." - Robin Williams

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - MORNING

It's a typical sunny December morning outside "Island Continuation School."

A confident black female student, LASHAWN JACKSON (17), struts toward the front door, wearing well-worn shorts and an old T-shirt, EarBuds, and staring at her older cell phone that requires wires to her EarBuds.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

I remember only one day from high school. That's me, Lashawn Jackson, five years ago. I was sent to Continuation School for my last two years after being suspended twice from regular high school for fighting. We, 49 students, were isolated from the general high school population. We were termed at-risk students.

Lashawn sees a meek female Asian student, MICHELLE LI (17), walking quickly to catch up to her. Michelle wears new shorts, a pressed print shirt, and holds an upscale smartphone with wireless EarBuds.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

That's my best friend, Michelle Li, who delighted in being an underachiever in the eyes of her doctor parents. It was her crowning achievement that year in leading the class in absenteeism. She is my moral compass.

JIMMY SHEA (18), a wild Irish lad, RACES into the parking lot in an older pickup truck. He parks haphazardly, leaps out of the truck in a Hawaiian shirt, shorts, and EarBuds, and races to catch up to Lashawn.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

Jimmy Shea immigrated from Ireland as a kid and was held back a few times. He proudly told people that he could drive to school in eighth grade.

(MORE)

LASHAWN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Jimmy would be called an "eejit" in Dublin, but he loved me back then -- before things got crazy, Jimmy was my immoral compass.

Jimmy's passenger, WILL CARSON (16), a shorter, Native American in jeans and a hoodie, races to catch up to Michelle. Will wouldn't be caught dead without his EarBuds.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

Will Carson is a dyslexic Native American, but he's making progress. He was the happiest boy on this planet. Will was suspended twice for pot with Jimmy, who was also suspended twice.

(sad)

I've thought about Will every day over the past five years. No one should go through what Will did, or what we all did, that day.

The women turn to see the boys behind them, but they don't slow down.

LASHAWN

Last day before Christmas Break, don't let idiots screw it up.

Michelle whispers back.

MICHELLE

We have to call it Winter Break.  
(laughs)  
Like the Gulf of America! Not gonna happen!

LASHAWN (V.O.)

We had no idea that the day would be one giant shit-show that none of us would ever forget!

The bell RINGS.

The teens laugh as they stop to remove their EarBuds.

Jimmy, who speaks with an Irish accent, laughs the loudest.

JIMMY

Late, again! Shite!

MICHELLE

At least I'm here.

WILL

Let's run.

LASHAWN

Race ya!

Jimmy, Michelle, and Will run. Lashawn smiles and continues to stroll.

INT. LITERATURE CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

PRINCIPAL JANICE MARTIN (54) stands before a whiteboard that reads: "Principal Martin, Junior-Senior Literature, Period 1". She is stern and businesslike. A clock on the wall reads, "8:01."

Jimmy, Michelle, and Will race in and sit in the back row.

Lashawn strolls in and joins them.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

You're late again, Miss Jackson, Mr. Shea, Miss Li, and Mr. Carson. Do any of you have something to say?

The teens lack any sign of remorse.

MICHELLE

Sorry, Principal Martin. I lost track of time, which some scientists argue doesn't exist.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I'm afraid it does.

WILL

Sorry, I was late. I'm thrown off by this Daylight Saving BS.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

That was months ago.

JIMMY

I couldn't find me matching stockings.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

That's my matching stockings.

JIMMY

Oh, dear God, I wasn't lookin' for your stockings, Mum.

The class laughs as Jimmy shows off one red and one purple sock.

LASHAWN (V.O.)  
Jimmy's family was dirt-poor, which  
he found funny.

Lashawn sits down and politely raises her hand, but doesn't wait to be called on.

LASHAWN  
Sorry, I'm late, and I prefer to be  
called Ms. Jackson.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Be that as it may, Miss Jackson, we  
must use the District's accepted  
list of pronouns. This morning,  
I'll be passing back your essays.  
In general, I was underwhelmed.  
Most of you relied heavily on AI to  
write your essays, and you're only  
cheating yourselves when you do  
that.

Everyone in class is stone-faced and uncaring.

The principal strolls through the classroom distributing Blue Books with grades in a red marker.

Each blue book contains a student's name. They all have the same title, "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Lashawn studies the Principal's every move and facial expression as she returns the essays.

Lashawn glances at each of the five empty desks in the room.

Principal Martin returns an essay to SILVIA MARTINEZ (16), a fidgety student in a dopey pink sweatshirt, sitting alone in the corner. We see a grade of "C-."

Silvia accepts the graded essay with a vacuous look and a weak smile.

SILVIA  
Why don't we have any Christmas  
decorations up around the school,  
Principal Martin?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
So as not to show favoritism to any  
one religion or ideology, as the  
District demands, Miss Martinez.

Lashawn smiles compassionately at Silvia before glaring at the Principal.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

I wanted to tell Silvia not to worry about the C-. Principal Martin wouldn't be the smartest person in the room if she were in a closet. But Silvia's in her own world anyway. No different from anyone else. Each of us fakes being okay sometimes.

Principal Martin returns an essay to Michelle with a "C+." Michelle smirks.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Attendance for the discussion sections would have helped your grade. Your parents won't be proud of this one.

Michelle shrugs, then glances and smiles at Lashawn.

Principal Martin returns an essay to Will with a "D+." Will is thrilled to see the grade.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

It's beyond me why you all continue to have spelling errors despite access to AI grammar and spelling checkers.

WILL

I passed! I'll take that as a win.

Principal Martin shakes her head in disgust.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

Poor, Ms. Martin. She knew we all cheat with AI to save time and get on with our lives, but she failed to grasp the simplest concept that none of us cared about high school.

Principal Martin returns an essay to Jimmy. He throws his arms up and cheers to get a "B-."

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Don't be too happy, Jimmy, this is your second time through your junior year.

The principal glares at Lashawn and withholds the Blue Book. She turns to address the class.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Not all of you truly understood the instructions for your final essays of the semester.

(glares at Lashawn)

You were instructed to select any of the major characters in the book and describe the other characters from their point of view.

(to the class)

Most of you wisely selected Scout, the precocious narrator, or her father, Atticus Finch, the compassionate lawyer.

The principal holds up Lashawn's Blue Book with a bright red "F" circled on it. The students see the grade and gasp.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

(to Lashawn)

We weren't asking your opinion on poor Tom Robinson, the falsely accused black man, and why none of the black characters in the book are shown as smart, rich, or leaders in the community.

(to the class)

We weren't forcing you to see Atticus Finch as the Great White Hope to save Mr. Robinson from being lynched!

The students gasp.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

(compassionately)

So, you could never see yourself through the eyes of Scout, who was raised compassionately with a father who had a moral compass, simply because your home life is different.

(sternly)

This was a creative writing exercise, and you failed to follow the instructions.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

When she slapped that "F" on me, I should have said something clever like Barack Obama, who said, "You can't let your failures define you. You have to let your failures teach you." Today, I would shorten that to, "Failures don't define me, they refine me!" But I didn't say that either!

The principal jams her index finger on the Blue Book as Lashawn glares into her eyes.

LASHAWN

What the F\*ck?!

The students laugh!

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

That will cost you, Miss Jackson! And I'll expect a complete rewrite of your essay when you return from the Holiday Break.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

(laughs)

I still had to calibrate my moral compass heading into my last semester of high school, if I was ever gonna be any good to anybody growing up.

SILVIA

Can we still call it Christmas Break, Principal Martin?

The principal smiles compassionately at Silvia.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Miss Martinez, we raise our hands if we have a question, and then wait to be called on.

Silvia raises her hand and smiles. Some students smirk.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

One of the saddest commentaries about high school was watching how my classmates mistreated or simply ignored Silvia, like she were invisible.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Yes, Miss Martinez.

SILVIA  
Why can't we still call it  
Christmas Break?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
So as not to show favoritism to any  
one religion or ideology, as the  
District demands. It's more polite  
for our Jewish, Muslim, and --

JIMMY  
Atheists, Mum?

The students laugh as the Principal spins and glares at  
Jimmy.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
That's enough out of you, Mr. Shea!

The students giggle.

JASON WILEY (16), a bully, storms into the classroom.

LASHAWN (V.O.)  
I didn't think twice about Jason  
barging in late. He was grinning  
and licking a chocolate stain from  
the side of his mouth. He bullied  
everyone in school, except Jimmy  
and me. He knew not to mess with  
us.

JASON  
Sorry, I'm late. I couldn't find  
the room.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
You're continuing a very bad habit,  
Mr. Wiley.

Jason shrugs, unconcerned.

JASON  
Suppose so.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Take a seat, and don't be late  
again, Mr. Wiley.

Jason marches down a thin aisle of students, bumping them as  
he makes his way to the back row next to Silvia.

Principal Martin holds up a book, "Romeo and Juliet."

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Next semester, we'll begin by reading "Romeo and Juliet" by William Shakespeare. Begin your reading over the Winter Break.

The students GROAN.

Jason's cell phone BUZZES, so Principal Martinez marches to him and holds out her hand.

Jason looks up, puzzled.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Your phone. May I see it?

Jason reluctantly holds out his phone.

She snaps it away.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Pick it up after school from my office. If I see or hear a cellphone, you'll lose it for a week upon your return from break. School rules.

The students GROAN as they turn off and hide their phones.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Your four student body officers for next semester were voted on last week -- please stand when I announce your name.

(beat)

Michelle Li, Treasurer.

Michelle stands.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Jimmy Shea, Secretary.

Jimmy stands and bows a few times.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Will Carson, Vice President.

Will stands and smiles.

The principal pauses.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

And, Lashawn Jackson, Student Body  
President.

There's extensive applause and cheering for Lashawn.

Before Principal Martin can return to the front of the room,  
a voice of the school's ADMIN OFFICER (50s) comes over the  
intercom.

ADMIN OFFICER (V.O.)

Principal Martin, please check your  
phone.

She smiles at the students and then checks her phone.

Her phone reads: "Urgent text, private."

She turns her back to the students and reads, "Received a  
Death Threat 17 minutes ago. No Target was identified. Remain  
vigilant."

Principal Martin types back, "Happens every year."

Seconds later, another text reads, "Sheriff's office  
confirmed it was sent by a burner phone. Deputy Martinez is  
on her way."

Principal Martin remains perfectly calm.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

As is customary, the newly elected  
student body officers meet in the  
lunchroom for up to two periods to  
develop their goals and objectives  
for next semester.

Michelle's, Will's, and Jimmy's eyes open wide.

Lashawn stands immediately and heads to the door, pulling  
Michelle, Will, and Jimmy with her.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

I'll send Herb in to monitor your  
progress.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

Herb Smith was the school's always-  
angry janitor, but he was always  
better than Principal Martin any  
day.

The student body officers exit the room.

INT. LUNCHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The four students enter the empty lunchroom, laugh, and turn on the lights.

LASHAWN

The cooks don't get here for an hour.

Jimmy races to the kitchen.

JIMMY

Snack time!

MICHELLE

I'm glad I showed up today.

WILL

I'm tuning out!

LASHAWN (V.O.)

Tuning out was the phrase we used to plug in our EarBuds and tune out the world. Some people tuned out all the time, but Will was serious about it. He was my emotional compass. But, like everybody, he had issues deep down.

The four teens whip out their phones and EarBuds. Their heads bob to tunes as they stroll around the lunchroom. They have some difficulty hearing each other speak, so they speak loudly.

WILL

I got Soundcloud. Who ya listening to?

LASHAWN

Satsang. Sweet soul reggae.

MICHELLE

Same.

JIMMY

Underground.

Will pulls out an EarBud to talk to Lashawn.

WILL

Why did she pick us? Even I know there wasn't a vote.

LASHAWN

Who knows? Maybe because we made it through Junior year without a suspension.

JIMMY

My second junior year without a suspension.

MICHELLE

She didn't have much to choose from.

(laughs)

And she gave Lashawn a big fat "F" on her essay.

Jimmy laughs.

JIMMY

Are you going to rewrite it over Christmas Break so she changes your grade?

LASHAWN

Hell no!

They all laugh.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

Woody Allen once said, "Ninety percent of success in life is just showing up." But five years ago, all of us who did show up were tuning out.

Everyone listens to tunes.

LASHAWN

(winks at Jimmy)

How is our plan for the semester coming, Mr. Secretary?

JIMMY

Drop dead, Madam President!

They hear a "BOOM" sound from the direction of the front of the school.

The teens duck.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Cherry bomb? Probably some new kid?

LASHAWN  
Not our problem.

INT. LITERATURE CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

The students and the principal duck and panic. The principal tries to restore calm.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Students, remain calm.

Silvia stands and paces erratically in the back of the room.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)  
Miss Martinez, please take your  
set.

Principal Martin takes out her phone and calls the office. She turns her body from the students, but they HEAR her over the intercom system.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)  
As a precautionary measure, please  
institute an active shooter  
protocol and lock and barricade all  
doors. We will notify the Sheriff's  
Department immediately. Please  
remain calm and orderly.  
(beat)  
Herb, please check on any students  
in the restrooms and the lunchroom.

Principal Martin ends the call and turns to the students to see terror in their eyes.

Silvia bursts out sobbing.

INT. LUNCHROOM - SAME TIME

The four teens wear their phones and EarBuds with music turned up high. Their heads bob to tunes as they joyfully stroll around the lunchroom.

Will is the happiest teen in the world, rocking out to his tunes.

HERB SMITH (40) in a janitor's work suit RACES in to see the teens rocking out to their tunes. He yells and he rips out Will's EarBuds.

HERB

Put those phones away and take out those stupid ear things. We're under an active shooter protocol.

The other students quickly remove their earbuds and pocket their phones.

LASHAWN

Active shooter protocol?

HERB

You heard me!

Herb locks and begins to barricade the door.

Will freezes in panic, while the students help Herb barricade the door with tables and chairs.

INT. LITERATURE CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

The students respond in an "Active Shooter Protocol." The window on the door is covered, the desks are piled against the door, and the students sit low on one side of the room, furthest from the door.

Principal Martin speaks into her phone, and there is a slight delay (echo) from the loudspeaker.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Please remain calm. The Sheriff's department has been notified, and they are on the way.

The principal puts her fingers to her lips, demanding quiet.

The principal gets another urgent text, "Mr. Simms needs assistance in the math room."

The principal's eyes open wide as she pulls out her phone, and everyone hears her over the intercom.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Herb, please attend to Mr. Simms in the math room -- immediately.

INT. LUNCHROOM - SAME TIME

Herb and the students begin dismantling the barricade.

HERB

While I attend to Mr. Simms, you must remain in an active shooter protocol mode. Lock and barricade the door. Don't let anyone in. I'll be back for you later.

Will remains paralyzed in fear. The other students see this and rush to him.

LASHAWN

Will, it's only a protocol!

HERB

Stay calm, son!

Herb begins to exit, but turns back to the students.

HERB (CONT'D)

Remember what I said!

Will freezes in panic again as Herb exits.

Lashawn, Michelle, and Jimmy help barricade the door with tables and chairs.

INT. LITERATURE CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

Principal Martin HEARS the nervous voice of DEPUTY SHERIFF ROXANNE MARTINEZ (37) outside her door.

DEPUTY MARTINEZ (O.C.)

Janice, this is Roxanne.

SILVIA

Mommy?

Silvia races to the door.

DEPUTY MARTINEZ

Silvia, honey, for your safety, please don't approach the door. We haven't ruled out a shooter. The gunshot could have come from a hunter. We have a small team combing the area.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Mr. Simms needs help in the Math room.

DEPUTY MARTINEZ

A student called the office and said he might have fainted. They freed up the barricaded door to let the janitor in. I'll check on Mr. Simms after I sweep the interior.

Tension is high all around, but Silvia shakes in fear.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Thanks, Roxanne.  
(to Silvia)  
You can return to your safe spot, Silvia.

Principal Martin takes out her phone. We hear her delayed voice over the loudspeaker.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

(calmly)  
The protocol is not over yet. Officers are sweeping the school and the grounds. You may hear an ambulance coming for a teacher. Nothing to concern yourselves with.

Principal Martin holds her phone tightly.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Class, continue reading in silence.

All the students are still on page one.

EXT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

All four of the students' phones BUZZ with text messages.

LASHAWN

Boom, active shooter protocol.

MICHELLE

They all heard it.

Will panics.

WILL

The Deputy is sweeping the school. This is it.

Jimmy sounds worried.

JIMMY

Was Mr. Simms shot?

Lashawn speaks as she sends text messages.

LASHAWN  
We need intel. Keep us informed.

INT. MATH CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

ALEX (16), an openly gay Middle Eastern student in a wildly colorful long-sleeve shirt, hides behind other students as the janitor, Herb, races in and checks the Math teacher, MR. ARTHUR SIMMS (40s) for a pulse.

ALEX  
He looked like he was falling  
asleep. Fell right out of his seat.

Herb sounds angry, as usual.

HERB  
He's got a pulse, but it's weak.

ALEX  
Maybe he fainted.

HERB  
He didn't faint! We'll wait for the  
ambulance! Stay back!

Alex sends a text to Lashawn, "Mr. Simms looks out of it. Angry Herb is calling for an ambulance."

EXT. LUNCHROOM - SAME TIME

Lashawn, Michelle, and Jimmy stare out the windows. Will is collapsed at a lunchroom table with his head down.

LASHAWN  
Look around for a shooter.

She types a message, "We're on lookout."

JIMMY  
Cherry bomb is still my guess.

Lashawn receives another text.

WILL  
It is deer season. The shot could  
have come from anywhere.

Everyone nods and looks around.

LASHAWN  
Sounded like a rifle, everyone  
says.

MICHELLE  
Ask them about Mr. Simms? Was he  
shot?

They wait impatiently.

They HEAR a siren in the distance.

Lashawn texts as she speaks.

LASHAWN  
Coming for Mr. Simms. We don't see  
a shooter.

The ambulance arrives at the school. Michelle sends a text as  
she speaks.

MICHELLE  
We want to know if Mr. Simms was  
shot?

LASHAWN  
(sternly)  
Our job has to be looking out for  
an active shooter.

JIMMY  
This is stupid.

Lashawn glares at Jimmy.

LASHAWN  
It wouldn't be stupid if you were  
in one of those classrooms! Keep a  
lookout!

Jimmy looks away and then stares out the window with a  
vacuous look.

Lashawn looks suspiciously at Jimmy.

LASHAWN (V.O.)  
Looking back five years later, I  
wish that I were smart enough back  
then to see warning signs in my  
closest friends.

Lashawn looks back at Will, worriedly.

INT. MATH CLASSROOM - SAME

Two EMTs (30s, one male, one female) enter the room to see Herb keeping the student back from Mr. Simms.

EMT #1  
Who do we have here?

Herb still sounds angry.

HERB  
Arthur Simms, math teacher. Kids said he fell off his chair. I don't see blood.

ALEX  
He looked like he was falling asleep.

EMT #1 shakes Mr. Simms.

EMT #1  
Mr. Simms, can you hear me?

No response.

EMT #2  
We're here to help you, Ms. Simms. No blood. No signs of a gunshot.

Alex secretly texts Lashawn, "EMTs are here."

One EMT checks his airway while one checks his pulse.

EMT #1  
His airway is unobstructed. Shallow breathing.

EMT #2  
Pulse is 55, weak. Grab the O-2 and the gurney. We gotta bring him in. We'll grab the BP on the way.

Alex sends a text to Lashawn, "Mr. Simms, not breathing enough. Taking him to the hospital."

Herb sends a similar text to Principal Martin.

Herb stares at his phone.

HERB

Principal Martin says after Mr. Simms goes to the hospital, we are to barricade the door again, and I'm staying with you in place of Mr. Simms until we get the "all clear."

EXT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The students hear the Ambulance SIRENS taking away Mr. Simms.

LASHAWN

The lights and sirens are meant to scare away any shooter.

WILL

(angry)  
Or hunter.

JIMMY

Or cherry bomber.

MICHELLE

Damn it, Jimmy! This could be serious! You don't know!

Lashawn reads another text from Alex.

LASHAWN

Alex snuck out of the math room when the EMTs carted away Mr. Simms. He's peeking out the front door and watching Silvia's mom --

MICHELLE

Deputy Martinez?

LASHAWN

Yep. Alex said she crouched low and returned to her patrol car. Get this! She unlocked her trunk and took out an AR-15 rifle.

Michelle and Jimmy look over Lashawn's shoulder at her phone. They read Alex's next text message.

JIMMY

Her hands were shaking.

MICHELLE

Mine would be, too.

WILL

They must have verified a shooter.

LASHAWN

Or the threat of a shooter. That's not the same thing, Will.

JIMMY

Chill, Will.

LASHAWN

Alex says she's checking to see if it's loaded.

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

The Deputy moves to the side of the car for protection, offering ALEX a better view of the AR-15 from the school's front door.

Deputy Martinez checks the weapon while glancing intermittently for a shooter. She loads the clip and pulls on it, pulls the bolt back, and pushes it forward. She takes out the clip and examines it before putting it back in the rifle, assuring it's ready.

She pounds her chest to check her bulletproof vest and shakes her head in disgust.

INT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lashawn stares at her phone and then reads the next message.

LASHAWN

Alex says she looks scared.

Michelle looks sadly at Will.

MICHELLE

Join the club.

LASHAWN

Wouldn't you be? Her daughter's inside!

WILL

With us.

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Deputy makes a short call on the radio and walks carefully around the school like a combat veteran.

From inside, Alex follows her every move from the door until the Deputy disappears out of view.

INT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lashawn goes back to the window and peeks out.

LASHAWN

Her life is on the line. If we see anything suspicious, we'll need to call it in.

MICHELLE

Doesn't she get backup or air support?

WILL

It's a rural county. They're understaffed and underfunded.

JIMMY

That sucks for her.

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Deputy continues around the school.

INT. LUNCHROOM - SAME TIME

The students look worried.

MICHELLE

I hope Silvia's okay.

JIMMY

Yeah. What's the matter with her anyway?

Lashawn gets in Jimmy's face.

LASHAWN

Nothing that ain't the matter with you. She's an underachiever like all of us, but she was also born with Lazy Eye syndrome.

JIMMY

How do you know?

LASHAWN

I asked her mom at the store. She told me straight up. It's where one eye didn't develop normal vision, even though it appeared healthy.

JIMMY

So, no reason to act weird!

LASHAWN

So, people reacted weirdly to her. They assumed she was mentally disabled just because her brain suppressed signals from the weaker eye and relied on the stronger eye.

MICHELLE

That's awful.

LASHAWN

As she got older, more kids teased her, especially Jason Wiley.

WILL

He bullies everyone.

JIMMY

Such an ass.

Lashawn pushes Jimmy.

LASHAWN

Like everyone who doesn't treat Silvia like a regular kid!

Will stands with a half-smile.

WILL

Alex sent me the text this time. The Deputy's done with her sweep of the grounds.

Lashawn puts an arm around Will.

LASHAWN

Alex must have sensed you'd be worried.

MICHELLE

Now what?

LASHAWN

We wait for the Principal to call  
off the active shooter protocol.

EXT. SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

From the door, Alex watches as Deputy Martinez lays her AR-15 in the trunk of her patrol vehicle, although her body is obscured by the lid of the trunk.

Alex disappears from the front door of the school.

INT. SCHOOL, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Alex takes a few steps from the door.

BAM!

He ducks when he HEARS a gunshot from outside.

He takes off running to the bathroom.

He makes it to the bathroom before Herb leaps from the Math room, out to the hallway.

Herb creeps toward the front door as if he were in a war zone.

He peeks out the front door to see Deputy Martinez on her back beside her patrol car.

He sees blood dripping from the side of the Deputy's head.

Herb calls 9-1-1.

HERB

This is Herb Smith from the  
Continuation High School. There's  
been a shooting outside the school,  
and Deputy Martinez has been shot.  
Send an ambulance and shitload more  
officers!

Herb ends the call.

INT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lashawn, Jimmy, Michelle, and Will crouch and huddle in a corner of the kitchen.

LASHAWN  
That was no cherry bomb.

WILL  
No.

MICHELLE  
No.

JIMMY  
This is crazy!

They all freeze.

LASHAWN (V.O.)  
I distinctly remember not thinking clearly during my one active shooter protocol. We didn't joke about the old saying of shooting fish in a barrel because we were the fish! Society's love for guns, disregard for mental health screening, and easy access to guns by unstable gun-nuts put us fish in that goddam barrel.

Seconds pass like hours on the student's faces.

Lashawn sees that Will is shaking, and she moves to hug him.

Lashawn's phone gets a text.

LASHAWN  
It's Alex from the bathroom. He thinks he heard Herb's boots running to the front door.

EXT. SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Herb takes out a cleaning rag to apply pressure to the outside of the Deputy's head. There is a lot of blood.

They HEAR SIRENS in the distance.

Two more Sheriff's vehicles and an ambulance are on their way.

INT. SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

From the front door, Principal Martin sees Herb attending to Deputy Martinez.

She locks the door.

The SIRENS sound closer.

The principal cautiously unlocks the door, peeks out, and scans the landscape for an active shooter. She stays close to the door.

She turns to see that Silvia and Alex are directly behind her. As curious students crowd up behind her, she spreads her arms to prevent them from exiting.

EXT. SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

The principal leans her face out the door.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Is she okay, Herb?

Herb glances all around in a panic.

HERB  
Stay back! She's breathing but  
unconscious.  
(angrier)  
Two gunshots in one morning. They  
don't pay me enough for this shit!

The students behind the Principal gasp, and the Principal begins to push students back.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Get back to your classrooms  
immediately. Get going!

In the chaos, Silvia and Alex crawl through the crowd at the door and spring past the Principal and run to the Deputy.

SILVIA  
Mom! Mom! Are you okay?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
(yells)  
Silvia Martinez and Al-Hakim  
Muhammed, get back here this  
instant!

The principal turns to yell at the students clogging the doorway.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)  
All of you, get back to your  
classrooms. Now!

Herb sees the ambulance and two sheriff's vehicles skidding to a stop.

HERB

Silvia, Alex, get back in the classroom. It's not safe out here!

Three Sheriff's Officers in full riot gear and fully armed, exit their vehicles and pan out to find the shooter. They talk into their radios to add to the chaos.

Silvia panics, looks around, and sees her mother's service pistol slightly under the vehicle.

Alex sees the pistol too, but he's distracted by blood dripping from Herb's cleaning rag covering the Deputy's wounded head.

While two EMTs (same ones) surround Herb and the Deputy, the SHERIFF (50s, male) steps out of his car and recognizes Silvia.

Silvia is sobbing and flailing her arms, so the Sheriff moves to comfort her.

SHERIFF

We'll find the person who did this to your mom, but you and your friend have to get out of harm's way and let these fine people do their work.

The Sheriff begins to guide Silvia and Alex back to the school, but Herb takes over.

HERB

I'll take them back, Sheriff. It ain't safe for me neither!

SHERIFF

Thanks, we'll talk later to all of you.

The Sheriff returns to the scene of the shooting and looks around as the EMTs check the Deputy's vital signs.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Can I get her patrol car keys?

The Sheriff searches the Deputy's vehicle.

EXT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The teens look on and whisper as Lashawn stares at her phone.

LASHAWN

Where would we be without Alex's updates?

JIMMY

Whoa. Alex said Silvia looked psycho-like unhinged!

LASHAWN

Wouldn't you if your mother were shot?

MICHELLE

She's more fragile than we know.

Will speaks in a sad voice.

WILL

Last week, she came into our inconvenience store and...

JIMMY

(interrupts, laughing)

Bro, that's a hilarious name for it. They got salty snacks, beer, and caffeinated buzz drinks.

Will stares sadly at Jimmy, so he turns serious.

WILL

Silvia wandered around like she was lost. It was sad. Other kids were in the store, and they...

JIMMY

Bullied her?

Michelle gets in Jimmy's face.

MICHELLE

Let him finish.

Will looks away.

WILL

Worse than bullying. They totally ignored her.

Lashawn puts an arm around Will.

LASHAWN

I hear you. It's like a step below  
not including her. It's not  
acknowledging that she exists.

Lashawn looks away.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

We make that mistake every day with  
lots of people.

Jimmy finally gets it.

JIMMY

Like she's invisible. Like, I  
didn't know she was here all last  
year.

LASHAWN

Exactly. We suck!

Jimmy turns away sadly.

EXT. SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

The EMTs load the Deputy onto a gurney.

INT. LUNCHROOM - SAME TIME

Lashawn texts a message to Alex, which she whispers while she  
types.

LASHAWN

Can you bring Deputy Martinez out a  
water bottle and find out what's  
going on, and let us know how  
Silvia's doing.

JIMMY

I wouldn't go out there.

MICHELLE

That's why she didn't ask you.

EXT. SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Alex crouches and runs past the Principal with a water bottle  
for the Deputy on the gurney.

The Sheriff intercepts Alex and guides him back into the  
building.

Silvia tries to race out to check on her mom again, but the Principal and the Sheriff shield her from escaping.

Silvia is violently angry and yells at the Principal.

SILVIA

Somebody wanted to kill you, and they shot my mom instead.

SHERIFF

We know nothing of the sort, Silvia. Let us do our investigation.

The angry Sheriff guides Silvia and Alex inside the school.

INT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Moments later, Lashawn receives a text from Alex, "I'm in the bathroom. Call me."

Lashawn calls Alex, who whispers, but Alex is on speaker, and the other students hear him.

ALEX (V.O.)

A bullet scraped the Deputy's head. The hospital will fix her up, but Silvia had a total meltdown. We both heard the Sheriff tell the Principal that the death threat that was called targeted the Principal, not the students or faculty.

LASHAWN

What happened to Mr. Simms?

ALEX (V.O.)

How the hell should I know?!

LASHAWN

Thanks, Alex. Keep me posted.

Lashawn ends the call.

WILL

Call the hospital.

LASHAWN

They don't give out information to anyone.

MICHELLE  
I'll say I'm his wife.

LASHAWN  
He's gay.

JIMMY  
I'll say I'm his partner.

Michelle, Jimmy, and Will look over Lashawn's shoulder as she looks up the number for the hospital.

LASHAWN  
Okay, Jimmy. You're on.

Jimmy grabs Lashawn's phone.

JIMMY  
Hi, may I please have Leonard  
Simm's room? He was admitted  
earlier with difficulty breathing.  
(pauses, turns)  
Yes, I'm aware of the policy. I  
believe that long-term gay partners  
have a right to know.

Jimmy smiles at the teens.

Suddenly, Jimmy looks stunned. His eyes open wide, and he collapses to the ground.

Jimmy ends the call and has difficulty speaking.

Lashawn pressured Jimmy.

LASHAWN  
What did they say? What did they  
say?

JIMMY  
They asked me to contact the police  
(beat)  
or the coroner.

Everyone is stunned, but Jimmy and Will freeze.

MICHELLE  
The coroner?

Lashawn paces and speaks in a foreboding tone.

LASHAWN  
The police?  
(beat)  
(MORE)

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

They must think he was murdered,  
but Alex said there was no blood.

JIMMY

(angry)  
You're jumping to conclusions.

Will keeps his head down as he speaks sadly.

WILL

He wasn't a gunshot victim, but an  
Active Shooter Protocol is  
stressful to the max. Heart attack  
or stroke?

MICHELLE

If it were a heart attack, you  
wouldn't call the police.

LASHAWN

My point exactly.

JIMMY

And if he wasn't dead, you wouldn't  
call the coroner.

Everyone tilts their head and stares at Jimmy.

Lashawn gets an urgent text message. She reads it.

LASHAWN

The bully didn't change rooms at  
the bell. He looked sick, too, Alex  
said!

MICHELLE

What's that disease they get aboard  
cruise ships that kills everybody?

Lashawn and Michelle conduct research with their phones.

WILL

COVID?

LASHAWN

That doesn't kill many people now.  
You might be thinking about  
Legionnaires' disease.

JIMMY

Ebola?

Everyone ignores Jimmy as Michelle reads from her phone.

MICHELLE

Legionnaire's disease kills 10-15%  
if treated, 30-80% if untreated.

WILL

That sucks.

Lashawn reads.

LASHAWN

It's not contagious from person to  
person. That's not what Jason the  
Bully has.

JIMMY

How do you know?

LASHAWN

Occam's Razor: The simplest  
explanation is usually the best  
one. It's probably the flu, COVID,  
or food poisoning.

Lashawn speaks as she types.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Alex, we'd better monitor the  
situation.

INT. SCHOOL, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Alex sees the Sheriff speaking to the Principal as he turns  
toward the Math room.

SHERIFF

No shooter has been found in the  
area now. Probably got away.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Silvia Martinez is having a  
particularly difficult time.

SHERIFF

I suggest you keep everyone on  
lockdown until we can get help from  
the air.

The principal sees Alex and yells at him.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

You were told to get back to your  
classroom, Mr. Muhammed.

Alex turns with an innocent expression.

ALEX

I had to go... ya know, go!

He turns and walks fast to the Literature room, but looks back at the front door when he hears the ambulance drive away with SIRENS.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I hope Roxanne will be okay.

INT. LITERATURE CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

Alex enters to see the students standing around Jason in the back of the room. Jason's head rests on his desk.

Alex takes out his phone and takes a photo of Jason. He sends it to Lashawn.

ALEX

Eww. What's the matter with him?  
He's drooling all over!

Ten Students (various types) look on. One of them shakes Jason, but most students look unsympathetic - some smirk.

SILVIA

He looks sick. Maybe everyone is dying!

Alex SNEAKS out of the room as the Principal races in.

ALEX

I'm in the wrong room, sorry.

The students hide their phones immediately while Silvia is in a state of shock.

The principal sees that Jason is unresponsive.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Students, please barricade the door. You're in the wrong room, too, Mr. Wylie.

(to the students)

How long has he been like this?

The students shrug - some turn away.

SILVIA

Everybody's dying!

Principal Martin leaps toward Jason and shakes him, as other students rebuild the barricade at the door.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Mr. Wiley, are you okay? Speak to me!

(to the class)

When was the last time any of you saw him move or heard him speak?

Again, everyone shrugs.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Some of you bigger boys, help me get him down to the nurse's room.

The principal turns to see that the barricade at the door is built back up. She's annoyed.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Remove the barricade, please!

The students remove the barricade, and the Two Students drag Jason toward the door. His legs move a little, but he needs help.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Barricade the door when we're gone.

EXT. LUNCHROOM - SAME TIME

Lashawn is alarmed, reading a text.

LASHAWN

Drooling? What the hell kind of diagnosis is that!

MICHELLE

Who's drooling?

WILL

Jason the Bully.

JIMMY

Good. I hate that kid!

WILL

He bullied me, Michelle, and Silvia all last year.

MICHELLE

(to Lashawn)

Shoved me into a locker twice.

(MORE)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

(to the group)

Still nothing compared to how he  
picked on Silvia.

JIMMY

What's the matter with him? Did  
they say?

Lashawn stares at her phone.

LASHAWN

Alex isn't a doctor.

MICHELLE

So, is there an external threat or  
not?

Will sadly looks at his phone.

WILL

We're still on an Active Shooter  
Protocol, and the website says the  
doors are barricaded.

(angry)

As if a shooter with an AK-47 is  
insane enough to check our website  
during a mass school shooting.

Will pushes his phone away.

In a sad moment, the others look compassionately at Will.

Lashawn paces and thinks.

LASHAWN

Why only one shot at the deputy?

MICHELLE

What do you mean?

JIMMY

From the sniper who hit the Deputy?

MICHELLE

Or from a deranged hunter? Will  
might be right.

LASHAWN

But either one would finish the  
Deputy off in case she saw  
something. That doesn't make sense.

MICHELLE

And the other officers left.

LASHAWN

And what are the odds that Mr. Simms and Jason get crazy sick on the same day, and one dies?

There's a loud BANG in the back of the kitchen, and the emergency fire exit door bursts open.

The teens dive to the floor in pure fright. They cover their heads.

A SWAT team infiltrates the lunchroom in seconds. The SWAT COMMANDER (female, 40s) in full tactical gear and an AR-15 swoops in with three other SWAT Team Members.

SWAT COMMANDER

Stay on the ground. Spread eagle, hands behind your backs.

The teens obey.

LASHAWN

We're students.

SWAT COMMANDER

Shut up and show me your IDs. Nice and slowly.

The teens produce student IDs, and all but Michelle show driver's licenses.

The SWAT commander matches IDs for faces, while the SWAT Team searches them.

The SWAT team members shrug when they find no weapons.

The SWAT Commander gets on her radio.

SWAT COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Sheriff, we're clear in the Lunchroom. I have Lashawn Jackson, Michelle Li, Will Carson, and Jimmy Shea.

The Sheriff's voice sounds annoyed.

SHERIFF (V.O.)

The principal tells me those are student body officers, and they are approved to work in the lunchroom.

SWAT COMMANDER

Yes, Sir. This is where the mid-elevation drone sent us.

SHERIFF (V.O.)

Your mission was to intercept a single shooter or any hunters in the area.

SWAT COMMANDER

Yes, Sir. The drone, Sir.

SHERIFF (V.O.)

Any single shooter would have had ample time to disengage by now!

LASHAWN

Can we sit down? This is uncomfortable.

SHERIFF

While you're here, sweep the hallways, bathrooms, library, offices, closets, and any non-classroom areas. Then exit the way you came in and sweep the environs before heading out.

SWAT COMMANDER

(angry)

Fine. Move out, team.

The SWAT team removes the barricade to the hallway and disappears.

MICHELLE

Good luck in your search.

WILL

Assholes.

JIMMY

(laughs)

I feel so violated.

Lashawn glares at Jimmy.

LASHAWN

Nothing's going to happen to us while that SWAT Team is here. Let's write our goals and objectives for the year, and eat lunch!

JIMMY

Can we eat lunch before the goals? My stomach is acting up.

LASHAWN

Business first. I also have an essay to start.

MICHELLE

Too bad that Atticus Finch dude wasn't black.

LASHAWN

I thought of that, but it wasn't possible back then to have black lawyers in the South, and it wouldn't have changed the class struggle.

WILL

What do you mean?

LASHAWN

It wasn't just about black and white, it was about rich and poor, and the educated against the less educated.

Jimmy shakes his head in disgust.

JIMMY

You're making that shit up.

LASHAWN

Open your eyes, Jimmy. What's the percentage of whites in the big high school?

Will and Michelle are researching on their phones.

WILL

Almost eighty percent, one website says.

MICHELLE

Mine says about 18-20% are people of color.

LASHAWN

And our continuation school?

MICHELLE

Oh, shit, it's the opposite.

WILL

I never noticed.

MICHELLE

There aren't many Asians here! Duh!

JIMMY

Who gives a shit?

LASHAWN

I'm just saying, I bet this pattern repeats itself all over, and maybe worse in the South if you factor in the kids who drop out.

Michelle and Will are on their phones conducting research again.

MICHELLE

Okay, girls had an 89% on-time graduation rate, compared to 83% for boys.

WILL

Asian and White students tend to graduate at higher rates than Black and Hispanic students. It doesn't mention Native Americans.

MICHELLE

Uh-oh, Will. It's 74% -- lower than all the other groups.

JIMMY

Looks like you're screwed, Will.

Will turns angry and sarcastic.

WILL

Are you trying to cheer me up, Jimmy?

LASHAWN

Those are stupid averages, and you all know about the statistician who died in the river that averaged two feet deep.

Michelle and Will laugh. Jimmy shakes his head.

JIMMY

I don't get it.

LASHAWN

It's not about the average depth.

(to Jimmy)

(MORE)

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Never mind, Jimmy. Rise above the average.

JIMMY

(laughs)

Duh! I get it now. But what does this have to do with that stupid book?

LASHAWN

That's what pissed me off. The educated whites in the book were more civilized and empathetic than the other characters.

MICHELLE

The Finches versus the Ewells, the prejudiced bastards.

WILL

And the blacks were still like slaves. I got that!

LASHAWN

That's what I said in my essay that Martin hated.

Lashawn turns angry at the group.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Things haven't changed! I don't want to talk about it. I need tunes.

She turns up the SoundCloud music in her EarBuds.

Everyone is happy to be distracted by their tunes.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

The principal and the Sheriff have an intense conversation in her office. They talk softly.

SHERIFF

I'm sorry my deputy didn't relay that information to you personally.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

She was on the other side of the barricaded door. She would have needed to yell. The students would have heard her, too.

SHERIFF

She should have texted you.

Principal Martin is shaken.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Are you certain the death threat  
was against me, and me alone?

SHERIFF

It came from a disguised male voice  
and an untraceable burner phone.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Can I... Can I hear it?

The Sheriff nods his head, sadly.

He finds the recording on his phone and hands it to her.

She presses "play" and holds the phone to her ear.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

I'm going to kill Principal Martin  
today.

Principal Martin's eyes open wide.

SHERIFF

That was at 6:05 AM. That was it.  
We couldn't tell you until we  
verified it. We get a lot of crank  
calls on the first day of school,  
but never before Christmas Break.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

It's called Winter Break, now.

SHERIFF

Like the Gulf of America. Got it.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

We sometimes get a fire alarm  
pulled, but we have never had a  
bomb threat, active shooter, or  
anything like this before.

SHERIFF

Burner phones are all the rage, and  
there are apps for disguising your  
voice. Now, I have to ask you some  
tough questions.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I'm ready.

SHERIFF

Can you think of anyone who would want to harm you?

The principal is defensive.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I have multiple jobs here. I'm the principal, the disciplinarian, the literature teacher, and I supervise the teaching staff. I'm stern with parents and students because I have to be. I've made enemies in the past and present, and no doubt will in the future.

The Sheriff is stern.

SHERIFF

Janice?

Principal Martin looks around to see if anyone heard the Sheriff. She's perturbed and whispers.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Sheriff?

The Sheriff steps closer and smiles.

SHERIFF

To do my job, I'll need a list of names of any teachers, parents, or students who have recently expressed disapproval or resentment of your interactions with them.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

There's nothing recent from parents. Last year, I had some real losers. Convicts! This year, nothing yet. Knock on wooden heads.

She pauses to think.

SHERIFF

Teachers?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Mr. Simms, the math teacher who was taken ill this morning, and I had a minor disagreement last week in our training and sensitivity training.

SHERIFF

What happen?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

We exchanged views about the diversity, equity, and inclusion principles that were recently expunged for our training, curriculum, and website.

SHERIFF

Expunged?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Completely wiped out. School board and Governor's orders. Mr. Simms promised to defy the order. I had to threaten to fire him.

(whispers)

And, he's gay.

Principal Martin sits up proudly.

The Sheriff looks down at her as he takes notes in a notebook.

SHERIFF

I see.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I was saddened to see him ill this morning.

SHERIFF

It's not public knowledge yet, but I should tell you that Mr. Simms was pronounced dead...

Principal Martin looks away in grief, but only for a few seconds.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Oh my God.

SHERIFF

It was soon after he arrived at the hospital.

Principal Martin turns angry.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Where am I supposed to find a substitute teacher for Algebra, Geometry, and Trig in this one-horse town by New Year's?

The Sheriff ignores the question.

SHERIFF

Any other difficulties with teachers?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

All of them were upset about removing certain books from the library.

The Sheriff glares at the Principal.

SHERIFF

Book burnings are the rage these days. Did anyone threaten you?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

No. But if looks could kill...

SHERIFF

How about students?

Principal Martin is defensive again.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

As the disciplinarian, I get a lot of pushback from students every day, but it's been a quiet school year.

SHERIFF

Any issues this morning?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

One student with a history of deviant behavior, Jason Wiley, was tardy and never showed any remorse.

The Sheriff takes notes.

SHERIFF

Jason Wiley.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

He's a bully. He picks on two students relentlessly. Your deputy's daughter, Silvia Martinez, and Al-Hakim Muhammad.

SHERIFF

I know Silvia, a shy kid. Tell me about Al-Hakim.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Al-Hakim Muhammed prefers one name, Alex, but the school board won't allow it.

The Sheriff takes notes with a surprised look.

SHERIFF

Okay.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

We have a newly mandated policy that doesn't allow the use of pronouns or nicknames, so I informed Alex that this year, he would be referred to as Mr. Al-Hakim Mohammed. He was furious and started sobbing before school this morning.

SHERIFF

He was worried about being bullied.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I'm not a babysitter, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

And Jason Wiley, a young man who also took ill this morning...

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

He's resting in the nurse's room, but I must warn you, he'll do anything to get out of class.

SHERIFF

I'd like to ask him a few questions, if you don't mind. First, do any other students have disciplinary problems?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

We have several students who are one suspension away from being expelled. Al-Hakim and all our student body officers.

The principal is proud of herself.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

If I give at-risk students more responsibilities, they respond positively. I'm thinking about writing a book on the subject.

Principal Martin has an epiphany.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Lashawn Jackson! I shouldn't tell you this, but Lashawn's mother called me last week. Lashawn is exceptionally bright but chooses to be an underachiever. She's a two-striker for getting in fist fights, more than a few times, with Jason Wiley after he picked on Al-Hakim or Silvia. Her single mom is beside herself and is planning on making a formal complaint to your department to force her to move out after graduating in June -- if she does graduate.

SHERIFF

Those "Beyond parental control" affidavits are rare, harsh, and can cause mental health issues.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

To be honest, there may be more to it than behavior; her mom was laid off at the factory due to the recession.

The Sheriff is more curious.

SHERIFF

Does Ms. Lashawn Jackson hold a grudge against you or Mr. Simms?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Math, no! Lashawn did great in math. I'm failing her in literature this semester, but --  
 (stands and glares)  
 (MORE)

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Why do you keep bringing up Mr. Simms?

SHERIFF

We're treating it as a suspicious death.

The principal is stunned and collapses into her chair.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Murder?

SHERIFF

We're waiting on the Tox Report, but that's all I can say now. Who else interacted with Mr. Simms daily?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Herb, our janitor with anger issues. But he had lunch with Mr. Simms. Al-Hakim Muhammed and Silvia Martinez spoke to Mr. Simms, but he kept to himself.

Alex KNOCKS on the door.

Principal Martin opens it up a crack.

ALEX

I checked on Jason, and he don't look good.

She snarls while correcting him.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

That's, doesn't look well.

Alex shakes his head in disgust.

ALEX

I'm sorry, but his health may be a higher priority than my grammar.

The Sheriff chuckles.

The principal angrily turns to the Sheriff.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

If you'll excuse me for a moment. I need to check on a student.

The principal leaps out, and the Sheriff waves Alex in with his finger.

SHERIFF

Alex, is it?

Alex is taken aback.

ALEX

The dictator changed my name back to a name I never used. Even my parents called me Alex.

(laughs)

Never Alexander, like Alexander the Great. Although my favorite Grandma in Syria called me Alexander the So-So to make me laugh.

The Sheriff laughs.

SHERIFF

Come in. Take the big chair. I've got a couple of questions for you.

Alex smiles and takes the Principal's chair. He pretends to be the Principal.

ALEX

There's going to be some changes around here.

The Sheriff sits back to enjoy the conversation.

SHERIFF

Like what?

ALEX

We're going to be all-in for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Only banned books will be assigned, and the school day will end at lunchtime.

The Sheriff smiles.

SHERIFF

Alex, do you know anyone who would want to hurt Mr. Simms?

Alex pauses to think and then answers sincerely.

ALEX

No one that I can think of. Maybe Jason the Bully.

The Sheriff checks his notes.

SHERIFF

Jason Wiley? The sick kid?

ALEX

He looked drugged to me!

The Sheriff leans in.

SHERIFF

Why do you think that?

Alex uses air quotes as he speaks.

ALEX

I was in Mr. Simm's class this morning, and he looked "out of it," and when I saw Jason, he looked the same way -- "out of it."

SHERIFF

Did you see either of them eat or drink anything?

ALEX

Never saw Jason this morning, but Mr. Simms always has a thermos of coffee at his desk. He calls it the "magic elixir of life."

The Sheriff laughs, but turns serious quickly.

SHERIFF

Can you think of anyone who would want to harm either of them?

ALEX

Nobody likes Jason the Bully, but not enough to hurt him. Everyone knew Mr. Simms was gay, but loved him, except for some "right-wing Evangelical bible thumpers," who gave him dirty looks, like they do me," but that's about it.

SHERIFF

Can you provide me with some names?

ALEX

I'm not a talker, Sheriff, but Angry Herb may squeal if you lean on him.

The principal barges into the room and glares at Alex.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

You get out of my seat and out of  
my office.

(to the Sheriff)

I have to call for an ambulance!

The Sheriff's eyes open wide.

Outside the door, Alex turns his head with his eyes wide  
open.

EXT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The SWAT team barges in, anxious to go out the same way they  
came in.

SWAT COMMANDER

We're out of here. I suggest you  
barricade both doors after we  
leave.

LASHAWN

Is that supposed to make us feel  
safer?

SWAT COMMANDER

(angry)

It's supposed to make you not feel  
bullets while we sweep the  
landscape!

The SWAT team exits by the back door to the lunchroom.

The students rebuild the barricade in silence.

They trudge back to the tables.

WILL

Every time I rebuild a barricade,  
I'm forced to think about being  
gunned down in school.

Will keeps walking, but the others stop.

MICHELLE

Like soldiers digging foxholes.

WILL

That would suck, too.

Jimmy starts to speak, but Lashawn stops him with a look.

Jimmy flashes a look back and shrugs.

Lashawn gets a text from Alex and reads it to the group.

LASHAWN

I was interviewed by the Sheriff. He didn't say it, but I think someone meant to harm Mr. Simms and the Bully. The ambulance is coming for the asshole now. He looks like shit.

MICHELLE

That's what you thought, Lashawn.

WILL

And Alex doesn't know Mr. Simms is dead. Maybe we should tell him.

JIMMY

We don't have proof!

Lashawn speaks to the group as she types.

LASHAWN

What about the Principal?

She waits for a response.

She reads the next text.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

She's still a turd.

Everyone smirks, like they agree, as they begin to push tables to barricade the door to the hallway.

Alex bursts into the lunchroom and scares the others half to death.

ALEX

I watched to SWAT team leave this way.

LASHAWN

Did they see you?

Alex helps them barricade the door.

ALEX

They found me putting a cold towel on Jason's head. Somehow, I didn't look like a mass murderer. Good thing I didn't have to show my ID that says, Al-Hakim Muhammed, or I'd be dead.

JIMMY

Speaking of the dead, did you hear about--?

Lashawn steps to Alex and interrupts Jimmy.

LASHAWN

We're not certain, but we think Mr. Simms died this morning.

Alex looks away, depressed.

Alex pulls Will away from the barricade-building exercise and over to a back table.

ALEX

Come on, Will. Let's take a break.

Alex and Will trudge to the far table, while Lashawn, Michelle, and Jimmy complete the barricade.

JIMMY

Let's drop the talk about the Principal, Mr. Simms, and the Bully, and talk about us and our stupid assignment.

Lashawn is suspicious.

LASHAWN

Since when do you care about our assignment?

Jimmy yells and waves his hands.

JIMMY

I don't usually care, but it bugs me when people call us underachievers and losers, and you do it, too, and it keeps my mind off this stupid active shooter protocol.

MICHELLE

Where did that come from, Jimmy? You don't give a shit about school. You never mentioned plans to go on to community college or a trade school.

Meanwhile, Will and Alex whisper at the back table.

WILL  
Maybe you'll join the army, like  
me.

Alex snaps at Will.

ALEX  
You never talked about joining the  
army!

WILL  
I thought about it last summer.  
Three meals a day, free health  
care, and nobody will give a shit  
that I got dyslexia.

ALEX  
What if they send you to Iran, but  
you think it says Nari?

Will turns sad.

WILL  
That's the meanest thing you've  
ever said to me, Xela!  
(beat)  
I don't see words backwards, only  
mixed up sometimes, hole-ass!

Alex laughs as Jimmy disappears into the kitchen.

Back by the barricade, Lashawn gazes into Michelle's eyes.

LASHAWN  
I'm sorry this makes you think  
about dying.

MICHELLE  
This makes every student think  
about dying. It's so unfair.

LASHAWN  
What's the most unfair thing to  
you?

Michelle pauses to think.

MICHELLE  
We should be able to come to school  
every day without thinking about  
guns or mass shootings.

LASHAWN  
I get that.

MICHELLE

But you're smarter than all of us.  
(giggle)  
You're the only student in this  
dump who has read every banned book  
imaginable.

LASHAWN

I wanna know what they're keeping  
from me.

MICHELLE

But you're still too dumb to stay  
out of fights, including your war  
of words every day with Principal  
Martin.

LASHAWN

I speak my mind.

Michelle moves in closer to whisper.

MICHELLE

I don't want anything bad to happen  
to you.

LASHAWN

It won't. I'm bulletproof.

Michelle looks away.

MICHELLE

I wish that I were bulletproof.

LASHAWN

You are. We all are.  
(smirks)  
Until we're not! Until we get shot  
by some lunatic we don't see coming  
for us in a store, a cinema, or at  
school. When you're time is up,  
it's up. Until then, I plan to  
treat every day as a toy!

They smile and share a moment.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Sheriff is casually interviewing Herb, who sounds angry,  
as usual.

SHERIFF

How long have you worked here,  
Herb?

HERB

Twelve years, three months, and  
four days, if you don't count last  
summer.

SHERIFF

That's precise. What happened last  
summer?

HERB

The principal laid me off.

SHERIFF

Aren't you usually off in the  
summer?

HERB

No, that's when the floors get  
stripped and re-polished, two or  
three rooms get painted, and  
lockers get disinfected. None of  
that got done!

SHERIFF

Why were you laid off?

HERB

Told me I wasn't getting my work  
done, but that's because they ask  
me to babysit in classrooms about  
three hours a day when teachers get  
sick, like today, or bug out for  
some stupid reason or another.

SHERIFF

Did that make you mad?

HERB

Mad and broke all summer!

SHERIFF

Mad enough to hurt the Principal.

Herb pauses and then glares at the Sheriff.

HERB

No.

SHERIFF

Do you like your job?

HERB

What do you think? This morning  
felt like my two tours in Iraq.

SHERIFF

Do the students like you?

HERB

I don't care. The thing is, we have  
something in common.

The Sheriff smiles.

SHERIFF

Continuation school?

HERB

(smiles wryly)

No. We all hate authority.

Herb looks away as the Sheriff examines his notes.

SHERIFF

I had time to check your rap sheet.  
Petty theft, three offenses,  
earlier in life, and a little time  
for the third offense.

HERB

Hungry people do stupid things,  
like join the army.

Herb looks the Sheriff in the eyes.

HERB (CONT'D)

That was a long time ago.

SHERIFF

Do you drink or do drugs?

HERB

I have beer when I get home from  
work. Never done drugs, if that's  
what you're insinuating! I can tell  
you that black workers are drug  
tested more than whites.

The Sheriff ignores the comment.

SHERIFF

Do you see evidence of drinking or  
drug use by others on the job?

HERB  
Kids will be kids.

SHERIFF  
Do you report it?

Herb looks away again.

HERB  
Busy cleaning toilets and mopping  
floors.

SHERIFF  
How well did you know Mr. Simms?

Herb stands in anger.

HERB  
Did I know? What happened to him?  
He was slow of breathing. That's  
all.

The Sheriff cringes.

SHERIFF  
I'm so sorry. I should have told  
you. Mr. Simms passed away this  
morning.

Herb gets angrier.

HERB  
How? Why?

SHERIFF  
The doctors did everything they  
could. There's no official cause of  
death.

Herb is stunned and shakes his head in disgust.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)  
The principal said you ate lunch  
with him often.

Herb sits down, but one leg bounces up and twitches. He's  
sad.

HERB  
He ate lunch with me. None of the  
other teachers and staff would join  
us at our back table.

SHERIFF  
And Principal Martin?

HERB  
Told you before, "No."

SHERIFF  
Do you know anyone who would want  
to harm Mr. Simms?

Herb pauses and thinks.

HERB  
Arthur was a gentle, caring  
teacher. He loved seeing kids  
happy, and that was tough with  
algebra and geometry, 'cause they  
hated it.

SHERIFF  
Did any students hate him?

HERB  
Not as bad as the Principal.

SHERIFF  
Why?

HERB  
He hated to flunk the worst of  
them, so he always gave them  
chances to retake the tests. Even  
came in some Saturdays.

SHERIFF  
Any names that come to mind?

HERB  
Last year, there were only three I  
remember: Ms. Martinez, Mr. Carson,  
and Mr. Shea.

The Sheriff takes notes.

SHERIFF  
That would be Silvia Martinez, Will  
Carson, and Jimmy Shea.

HERB  
But Will ended up passing his make-  
up tests. Arthur told me he was  
very proud of Will.

SHERIFF

One last question. What kind of kid is Alex Al-Hakim Muhammed?

Herb has a weak smile.

HERB

Good kid. Funny kid. Gets picked on a lot but uses comedy to deflect it, like Arthur did. He hated that Principal Martin changed his name back to Al-Hakim Muhammed. That made life twice as tough for him.

SHERIFF

Was he angry enough to threaten or harm her?

Herb gets angry.

HERB

I said he was funny, not mean.

The Sheriff studies Herb.

SHERIFF

I came to the same conclusion.

Herb snaps his fingers.

HERB

But any one of these at-risk kids could snap at any time. Like any of us!

The Sheriff gets a text message that reads, "All Clear."

The Sheriff smiles at Herb.

SHERIFF

Thanks for your insights, Herb. And thanks for helping my Deputy out there.

Herb stands to exit as the Principal pokes her head in the doorway.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Sheriff, do you think we can send the students and staff home now?

SHERIFF

You didn't tell me you let go of Herb for the summer. He hated that.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I have a school to run. I'm not a charity.

The Sheriff studies the mean woman.

SHERIFF

My team and the eye in the sky didn't find a continuing threat, but my Deputy's service revolver is missing. I need to talk to Silvia and Alex, but you can send the other students and staff home.

The principal speaks into the intercom system.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Silvia Martinez and Al-Hakin Muhammed, please report to the Principal's Office in ten minutes. All faculty and staff are excused for the day, including you, Herb.

Cheers erupt from the students and faculty.

SHERIFF

I'd like you to stick around, too. I'll follow you home. You might still be in danger.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

(angry, defensive)  
What kind of trouble could I possibly be in?

INT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michelle, Lashawn, and Will sit emotionless at a table in the corner.

Michelle leans in to hug Lashawn.

MICHELLE

Can I talk to you for a moment?

Lashawn glances at Will, who is depressed.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

In private.

Michelle grabs Lashawn's hand and guides her to the opposite corner of the lunchroom.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

There's something I gotta get off  
my chest.

Lashawn's eyes open up as Michelle surprises Lashawn with a  
soft kiss on her lips.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I wanted to thank you for remaining  
calm today and every day.

Lashawn smiles weakly, still stunned by the kiss.

Michelle slaps Lashawn on the arm.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Sorry to shock you, bestie. I've  
wanted to kiss for two years.

LASHAWN

(smirks)

Okay, I didn't get the memo.

MICHELLE

I'm not movin' in.

Lashawn finally relaxes and takes a half step back.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I came out to my parents last  
weekend.

Lashawn turns serious.

LASHAWN

I thought you would have told me  
sooner.

MICHELLE

You knew?

Lashawn laughs.

LASHAWN

This isn't why you ditch school so  
much, is it?

Michelle freezes and looks away.

MICHELLE

I like talking to you, but there's  
no one else I connect with here.

LASHAWN

That's because you're smarter than all of us, but you purposely bomb tests to avoid attention.

MICHELLE

(laughs)

"Cs" -- I like to get "Cs." When I want to piss off my parents, I tell them, "I set low goals so I can achieve them."

LASHAWN

That is mean.

MICHELLE

I don't care.

LASHAWN

I bet that pisses them off more!

Michelle laughs.

MICHELLE

Oh, yes, it does.

LASHAWN

So, let me guess. Will you be applying to Harvard over Christmas Break?

MICHELLE

Nope. I aced my SATs, but I'm going to community college for two years with a plan to graduate from a public university debt-free.

LASHAWN

(laughs)

See you there.

EXT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The principal is in tense conversation with Herb. The door is open a crack, and Alex and Silvia are about to sit down.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I told you to go home.

HERB

I can't go 'til I take out the trash in each room and sweep the lunchroom. You know that.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I'm not paying you overtime.

HERB

Didn't ask for it. I take pride in my work. Besides, it's your job to provide a clean, safe environment for kids to learn.

(angry)

How are you doing on that?

The principal shuts the door where they can't be heard, and continues scolding Herb.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Sheriff glares at Alex and Silvia across the principal's desk from him.

SHERIFF

We're talking about felony offenses here: impeding an investigation, obstruction of justice, theft of an officer's firearm.

He stands and leans toward them.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

You both were out there where Deputy Martinez was shot. Her service pistol is missing. I spoke with the other officers and EMTs at the scene, and none of them saw it. It's not in her patrol car or lock box in the truck.

Alex and Silvia hang their heads low.

ALEX

I hate guns.

Silvia speaks in a low, controlled tone and nods her head toward Herb, who is arguing with the Principal outside the office.

SILVIA

Shouldn't you be out looking for my mother's shooter?

The Sheriff walks around the desk to get in Silvia's face.

SHERIFF

If you have any reason to suspect anyone, you'd better level with me.

Silvia turns bold.

SILVIA

Nobody likes Principal Martin, especially Mr. Smith, Jimmy Shea, and the student body officers who got the school day off in the lunchroom.

Alex's eyes open wide in disbelief.

SHERIFF

What are you suggesting?

SILVIA

I think it was an outside killer who was aiming at the Principal, but my mom's head got in the way.

The Sheriff strolls back to the Principal's chair and sits down.

SHERIFF

Our drone in the sky didn't pick up a shooter or any hunters in the area.

SILVIA

I think Mr. Simms and Jason the Bully got a deadly disease meant for the Principal that could kill us all!

The Sheriff rolls his eyes.

SHERIFF

I'll have to think about that, Silvia.

ALEX

I think we're all going to die!

The Sheriff stares at his notebook, while Silvia glares quickly at Alex, and then at the Principal.

When the Sheriff looks up from his notebook, he sees Silvia gazing at him sadly.

SILVIA

All I know is someone who was after  
the Principal shot my mom!

The principal pokes her head in the door with a forced smile.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Sheriff, I need to release those  
student body kids from the  
lunchroom!

SHERIFF

I'll be along shortly.

Alex and Silvia look depressed.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

I'll call the hospital to check on  
my deputy. I'll be back here to  
drive you home.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I assume these students are free to  
go home?

SHERIFF

Yes. Go on, kids. Thanks for your  
time.

Silvia and Alex exit the room, and the Principal steps in  
with a flirtatious smile.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

So handsome, how's your  
investigation going?

She smiles and moves in for a kiss.

SHERIFF

I don't know what the hell's going  
on around here. I'm speculating  
that your death threat was a hoax  
early this morning, but it gave me  
another chance to see you. I think  
your math teacher and resident  
bully got food poisoning, and the  
gay guy's body couldn't handle it.  
And I think Silvia Martinez is  
unstable.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

Nothing new to me.

The Sheriff kisses Principal Martin on the lips.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)  
I knew you would rescue me. I'll  
cook you steak and potatoes if you  
drive me home.

The Sheriff slaps her butt.

SHERIFF  
What will I get for dessert?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Nothing if your wife calls and  
makes you go home.

The principal giggles while the Sheriff pouts.

The Sheriff turns before he exits.

SHERIFF  
I'd fire that janitor of yours. He  
seems unstable, too.

The principal laughs.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
He was a diversity hire, back when  
we had to do that.

The Sheriff laughs as he exits.

SHERIFF  
Maybe he'll be out of your hair  
soon.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Too much to hope for.

INT. SCHOOL, HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Silvia and Alex whisper in a deserted hallway.

SILVIA  
They never enforce the anti-  
bullying policies here.

ALEX  
It's not a school board priority  
like pronouns, proper names, and a  
strict two-bathroom policy.

SILVIA  
I hate it here. I hope they all die  
of the disease!

Silvia kicks a locker hard and dents it.

ALEX

They are the disease!

Alex kicks a locker harder and dents it.

INT. LUNCHROOM - SAME TIME

Lashawn and Michelle carry on their private conversation.

Lashawn steps close to Michelle.

LASHAWN

I agree. Silvia's still part of our sisterhood, and we have to watch out for each other.

MICHELLE

What kind of a future does she have?

LASHAWN

It's not her fault. As a group, at lunch, after school, or at parties, we never talk about that shit -- plans for the future. It's like an unwritten law.

MICHELLE

My cousin at the high school says they talk about that shit all the time. At continuation school, we don't.

Lashawn vents to Michelle.

LASHAWN

You see, you get caught up in it, too. You call their school "high school!" Our school is a high school, too!

MICHELLE

They have career week talks. We have suicide prevention talks. It's not fair!

LASHAWN

(sadly)

It's like they think we won't notice.

MICHELLE

That sucks. Is that why we hate our lives?

Lashawn glances at Will, who remains emotionless at the table. She puts an arm around Michelle and guides her back to the table.

Lashawn and Michelle gaze warmly at Will.

LASHAWN

How can we help, Will?

Will doesn't look up.

WILL

You can find Jimmy so he can drive me home.

Michelle slumps in anger.

MICHELLE

I hate this shit too, Will! This is why I don't come to school.

Will looks away.

WILL

I'm never coming back here.

MICHELLE

Come on, Will, let's find Jimmy and go home.

Lashawn looks around in panic.

LASHAWN

Where is Jimmy?

Will points to the back of the kitchen.

Lashawn RACES to a door with a unisex bathroom sign on it.

She KNOCKS on the door.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Jimmy? Jimmy, are you in there?

She tries the door, but it's locked.

She POUNDS on the door as Michelle joins her.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Jimmy? Open up?

No answer.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
Get Herb, calmly, without raising  
suspicion.

Michelle begins to dash away, but Lashawn reminds her.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
Calmly.

Michelle slows down.

Will peeks toward Lashawn from the far side of the kitchen  
and then collapses to the floor.

Lashawn is torn about who to help. She looks both ways and  
pounds on the bathroom door again.

Herb strolls in with Michelle in tow.

Herb glances at Will, collapsed on the floor, but sees terror  
in Lashawn's eyes.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
Jimmy Shea's in there. He's not  
answering.

Herb pounds on the door as he fumbles for his massive  
keyring.

HERB  
Open up, son!

Herb tries one key that doesn't fit. Then a second key. The  
third key fits, and he opens the door.

Herb, Lashawn, and Michelle see Jimmy on the floor of the  
bathroom with one shoe and a purple sock removed and a  
hypodermic needle sticking out from between his two biggest  
toes. A large spoon from the kitchen and a cigarette lighter.  
His EarBuds are blasting.

Herb swears as he feels for a pulse.

LASHAWN  
Naloxone helped him twice before.

HERB  
Initiating CPR. Call an ambulance,  
now!

Michelle calls 9-1-1.

Lashawn glares at the oversized spoon and the EarBuds in Jimmy's ears.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

Fucking Jimmy Shea wasn't only shooting up, he tuned out for the last time. And as much as I like EarBuds, they are one more way we isolate ourselves from others.

The scene goes DARK.

INT. LUNCHROOM - LATER

Every light is on in the lunchroom and kitchen. The barricades have been removed, and yellow police tape is across the entrance to the lunchroom.

It's an active crime scene investigation back at the bathroom where Jimmy lies on the floor with his EarBuds still in his ears.

The Sheriff stands over Jimmy and takes photos with his smartphone.

Principal Martin stands back with Lashawn and Michelle behind her.

SHERIFF

What time did he leave the group to go to the bathroom?

MICHELLE

I don't remember.

LASHAWN

Forty, maybe fifty minutes ago.

SHERIFF

What was his mood at the time?

MICHELLE

I don't remember.

LASHAWN

I could never tell with Jimmy.

The Sheriff turns to Lashawn with an angry look.

SHERIFF

You're not being helpful.

Lashawn gets angry in return.

LASHAWN

It was a stressful, chaotic day.  
Jimmy was a master at hiding his  
troubles.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

He acted fine this morning.

Lashawn glares at Principal Martin.

LASHAWN

That means absolutely nothing!  
Robin Williams said, "People don't  
fake depression. They fake being  
ok."

Silence.

Principal Martin turns to see Will at the table. He looks  
frozen. She whispers to Lashawn and Michelle.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

How long has Mr. Carson been like  
that?

MICHELLE

Since the SWAT Team broke through  
the back door with their weapons  
drawn at all of us.

The principal fails to sound overly sympathetic.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

He has seen it before. At his  
elementary school.

Lashawn gets in the Principal's face. She is angry.

LASHAWN

What?

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I'm not at liberty to discuss a  
student's mental issues.

Michelle and Lashawn pull out their phone immediately.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN (CONT'D)

Put those phones away!

MICHELLE

Up to 95% of students who witnessed  
a school shooting showed some  
symptoms of PTSD.

LASHAWN

And 12% of mass shooting survivors reported persistent PTSD. Get a goddamn councilor here immediately for Will.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

They were defunded last year, along with all the art teachers, music teachers, nurses, and librarians in the district.

Michelle and Lashawn leap to console Will.

SHERIFF

I have more questions for you three. What was his mood before...?

LASHAWN

With all due respect, Sheriff, and nobody means that when they say it, there is nothing you can do for Jimmy. Will, Jason, and probably Silvia need our attention.

Silvia storms into the lunchroom, waving her mother's pistol at Principal Martin.

SILVIA

My mom was shot instead of you!  
This is all your fault.

LASHAWN

No, Silvia.

The Sheriff reaches for his pistol, and Silvia fires a shot above Principal Martin's head.

BAM!

SHERIFF

Calm down, Silvia.

Everyone is in a state of panic. Will covers his face with his hands and drops his face to the table.

SILVIA

Take the Sheriff's gun, Michelle.

Michelle's hands shake as the Sheriff surrenders his gun.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I can explain.

Silvia points the pistol at the Principal's heart.

SILVIA

No, you can't. And you won't.

She stares at Jimmy and then glances at Will.

She fights back tears.

SILVIA (CONT'D)

First, Mr. Simms. Then my mom. Then Jimmy, and now my boyfriend, Will.

Will sneaks a peek at Silvia. Both are unable to speak.

Alex bursts through the yellow police tape on the door.

ALEX

The EMTs gave Jason a shot, and he's slowly coming to.

Lashawn races to Alex.

LASHAWN

Alex, help Will. I've got questions for Jason.

Lashawn leaps toward the door.

The Sheriff yells at Lashawn.

SHERIFF

Stay away from that druggie until I can arrest him!

Lashawn ignores the Sheriff.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

You heard the Sheriff, Miss Jackson!

LASHAWN

With all due respect, Principal Martin, and again, I don't mean that, you and the Sheriff are the least capable people on earth for understanding us.

Lashawn turns to Silvia compassionately.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Silvia, do you trust me?

Silvia weakly nods, "Yes."

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

I think I can explain this shit-show of a day if I can ask Jason the bully a few questions. Will you promise me not to shoot anybody until I get back?

Silvia weakly nods, "Yes."

Lashawn RACES out the door.

Alex puts an arm around Will and confides in him.

ALEX

Look at it this way, Will. You're having a bad day, but Jimmy had a worse day, and I have four or five bad days a week thanks to Principal Martin.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I heard that, Mr. Al-Hakim!

Will chuckles to everyone's amazement, but returns to a near catatonic state.

Silvia's pistol shakes nervously.

INT. SCHOOL, NURSE'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

The two EMTs (same ones) attend to Jason, who is groggy but can speak.

Lashawn races in and kneels by his side. She smiles.

LASHAWN

Alex told me you were coming around, but I had to see it myself.

Lashawn turns and winks at EMTs, then turns sternly to Jason.

Herb enters with a concerned look.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Jason, I have some sad news for you.

Jason's eyes squint like he's at least somewhat aware.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

I saw you licking off chocolate from the side of your mouth when you came to class today.

Jason weakly nods, "Yes."

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
What were you eating, Jason?

JASON  
A strawberry.

LASHAWN  
A chocolate-covered strawberry?

Jimmy weakly nods, "Yes."

Lashawn turns to the EMTs.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
May I borrow a latex glove from  
you? And, Mr. Smith, can you find  
me a clean plastic bag?

EMT #1 reaches into his first aid kit and hands Lashawn a latex glove.

She puts it on and reaches into Jason's shirt pocket and pulls out a strawberry stem with chocolate on the underside.

Herb opens a plastic bag for Lashawn.

HERB  
None of this is admissible.

LASHAWN  
This isn't about you, Mr. Smith.

Lashawn gets in Jason's face.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
The Sheriff knows you set off that  
cherry bomb this morning.

Jason's eyes open wide. So do Herb's eyes.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
(smiles)  
Clever! You must have a long fuse,  
so you could be in class when it  
exploded.

Jason looks down at the front right pocket of his jeans.

Lashawn reaches into Jason's front pocket and pulls out a cigarette lighter and an 18-inch fuse.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Two more plastic bags, Mr. Smith,  
if you don't mind.

Lashawn carefully places the fuse and lighter in separate bags.

She turns angrily to Jason.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

You didn't start the shit-show this morning, but you instigated more incidences of PTSD, and caused more nervous breakdowns today than anyone, asshole!

HERB

Wait a minute, Ms. Jackson...

LASHAWN

Not know, Mr. Smith! We have to check out Mr. Simms' math room.

HERB

Can't, it's got yellow tape.

LASHAWN

Fuck the yellow tape, Herb. Come with me.

Lashawn glares at the EMTs.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Keep Jason here. I'm not done with him yet.

Herb follows Lashawn out the door.

EXT./INT. MATH ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lashawn tears off the yellow tape and enters the room.

Herb stands outside and stares in.

HERB

What are you hoping to prove from all this?

LASHAWN (O.C.)

I'm hoping to save the Principal's life!

Lashawn peeks into the trash can by the desk and sees a few papers and a green strawberry stem.

She tilts the can to Herb so he can see the strawberry stem.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Have them bag this evidence by the book.

Herb nods, "Yes," as Lashawn bursts out of the room.

Herb follows her.

INT. LUNCHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lashawn walks slowly back toward Silvia, who points the pistol at her momentarily before aiming at Principal Martin.

LASHAWN

Silvia, please listen to me. I pieced together what happened today, and I think I know what happened to your mother.

Silvia's hand shakes as she aims at the Principal.

The Sheriff steps closer to Principal Martin, so Silvia points the pistol at him.

SILVIA

Don't move, Sheriff.

She points the pistol at the Principal.

SILVIA (CONT'D)

She got the death threat this morning.

LASHAWN

You're right, Silvia. And I know who called the school.

Lashawn points sadly to Jimmy.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Jimmy has a burner phone, and this past summer, he bought me a chocolate-covered strawberry in a pink box.

Herb enters the lunchroom nervously, carrying a small pink cardboard box.

He sees Silvia holding a pistol and backs up out of sight.

HERB (O.C.)

You were right, Ms. Jackson. It was in the lunchroom trash can. I don't get paid enough for this shit!

LASHAWN

Thanks, Herb. Right, you are.

Lashawn turns to Principal Martin.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)

I think Jimmy's burner phone will confirm he made the death threat, but all he wanted was to get Mr. Simms and you high. He laced two chocolate-covered strawberries with a small dose of heroin but an unknown amount of China Girl.

(glances at Michelle)

No offense, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Some taken.

SHERIFF

What's China Girl?

ALEX

Fentanyl. Forty times more potent than heroin.

Everyone stares at Alex, who looks away.

ALEX (CONT'D)

So I've been told.

SHERIFF

That hasn't been verified by the TOX report yet.

LASHAWN

It will be.

Silvia looks confused, and her hands are shaking more.

The two EMTs assist Jason into the room. Jason's legs wobble.

The EMTs see Silvia with the pistol, and quickly plop Jason into a chair, and exit.

SILVIA

What about my mommy?

Lashawn turns compassionate.

LASHAWN  
I'm getting to that, Silvia.

All eyes are on Silvia's shaking hands.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
Your brave mom responded to the report of a gunshot outside the school a few minutes after the bell.  
(points at Jason)  
We now have evidence that Jason Wiley detonated a cherry bomb with a long fuse.

Lashawn holds up her two evidence bags.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
Herb watched me collect the evidence.

SHERIFF  
Not admissible.

LASHAWN  
Not the point.

Jason hangs his head.

LASHAWN (CONT'D)  
Jason, the asshole, caused the active shooter protocol that wreaked havoc today.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN  
Mr. Wylie, you'll pay dearly for that.

LASHAWN  
Alex watched Deputy Martinez...

Silvia turns the pistol toward Jason.

SILVIA  
Mommy.

LASHAWN  
What happened next was an accident and not the actions of a sniper or wayward deer hunter.

SILVIA  
Accident?

LASHAWN  
I called the hospital before  
stepping back in the room, and your  
mom is recovering nicely.

Lashawn steps between Jason and Silvia.

SILVIA  
The safety isn't on. That pistol  
can go off any time. It happens  
more frequently than officers of  
the law report.

ALEX  
Your mom was stressed out, like us.  
Her hands were shaking too. I saw  
them, Silvia.

LASHAWN  
She was worried sick about an  
active school shooter while her  
only daughter was stuck in a  
classroom.

Jason drops his head.

JASON  
I'm so sorry.

LASHAWN  
We think her pistol went off as she  
was putting away her rifle and  
worrying to death about you.  
(louder)  
I imagine the EMTs would be happy  
to take you to the hospital to see  
your mommy.

EMT #1 (O.C.)  
We could do that!

EMT #2 (O.C.)  
Without the gun.

Silvia slowly hands the pistol to Lashawn and trudges to the  
exit.

She stops by Jason to kick him hard in the leg.

Jason winces in pain.

Lashawn hands the pistol to the Sheriff.

SHERIFF

I was reaching the same  
conclusions.

LASHAWN

I doubt it, Sheriff.

(to Alex)

Could you get Jimmy's keys and take  
the Sheriff with you to check  
Jimmy's glove box for his burner  
phone? The Sheriff needs it for  
his report.

Alex hops up while the Sheriff removes the keys from Jimmy's  
pocket, and he exits with Alex following.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

You can stay right here, Mr. Al-  
Hakim.

Alex ignores her and keeps walking.

Lashawn gets in the Principal's face.

LASHAWN

If you call him anything but Alex  
again, you'll regret it for the  
rest of your life. You are  
tormenting that poor boy because of  
some asinine district policy that  
puts right-wing politics before  
basic human compassion.

The principal glances at Will and then nods her head in  
agreement.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

I suppose I can make an exception.

(softly)

You showed excellent detective  
skills today, with the poise and  
compassion of Atticus Finch, while  
I made a dozen critical errors for  
the prosecution.

LASHAWN

And for education.

The principal turns defensive again.

PRINCIPAL MARTIN

What do you mean by that, Ms. Jackson?

Lashawn points to Jimmy.

LASHAWN (V.O.)

That's when I put on my big girl pants and told her Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." I think he meant, "Education in the right hands," because education by the wrong people fucks people up.

The Sheriff returns with Alex in tow. He carries one evidence bag with a burner phone and one with a handwritten note.

The Sheriff holds up the bag with the burner phone.

SHERIFF

Right again, Ms. Jackson. And we have a motive and explanation for Mr. Shea's accidental overdose.

The principal's eyes open wide as the Sheriff reads the note.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

I'll be in jail for a while for slipping Mr. Simms and Principal Martin a Mickey. They always get to school first, so I put two laced treats in the teacher's lounge. They should be high as kites all morning.

LASHAWN

Mr. Simms got one, and Jason snuck in and got the other.

The principal glares at Jimmy and then at Jason.

SHERIFF

(reading)

Will, you can have my truck until I get out of jail. It might take a while for me to dry out. Apologize to Mr. Simms, who flunked me, and the Principal, who hates me and everybody else. They won't believe me. Jimmy.

Will looks up slowly with light in his eyes.

Lashawn, Michelle, and Alex hug Will as Alex hands Will the keys to Jimmy's truck.

MICHELLE

Jimmy didn't plan on anyone getting hurt, including himself.

LASHAWN

Somebody sold him bad shit.

Will stares at Jimmy and bursts into tears.

The Sheriff strides up to Jason with his handcuffs in his hand.

SHERIFF

Mr. Wiley, you may be found guilty of a Gross Misdemeanor and Reckless Endangerment...

His voice fades out.

EXT. SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

SUPER: "Five Years Later."

Lashawn, now 23, strolls by the school dressed in a chic athletic suit and carrying a backpack.

LASHAWN

There were only four people at the funeral for Mr. Simms, outside Alex, Herb, and me. Silvia was with her mom, recovering at home.

(beat)

Jimmy's mom was so hurt by his accidental overdose, she didn't hold services for him, thinking he was a drug addict and a murderer. He gotta bum rap.

(beat)

I hated this school with a passion, and still do. They broke tradition by adhering to rightwing policies. They thought hiring three security guards was more important than a music teacher, an art teacher, and a counselor. Their graduation rate dropped, but they blame more immigrant students, which isn't true.

(beat)

(MORE)

## LASHAWN (CONT'D)

Herb and Principal Martin quit after we graduated. Silvia got counseling and is improving. Will still has PTSD, but watches out for her. Jason works as a mechanic in the next town, and Alex became a successful screenwriter of murder mysteries. Michelle and I see each other less often, but we text every day. She started showing up to classes, graduated, and is heading to med school.

(beat)

I finally learned to enjoy school in community college. I graduated with a pre-law degree to be the next Atticus Finch. I'd give back every good day I had in the past five years for the ability to help Jimmy and others who fake being okay while suffering from depression. Wouldn't we all?

FADE OUT.

SUPER: "For Bobby."

**THE END**