

THEY FAKE BEING OKAY

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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."

(MORE)

LASHAWN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
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 is to look 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. The 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 the 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 on
board 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 back.

The teens obey.

LASHAWN

We're students.

SWAT COMMANDER

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

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 the 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 your 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 on 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 counselor 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 head 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's 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 the accidental overdose that 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 right-wing 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