

MYSTERY IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM

Sérgio Roveri

**Inspired in an idea by journalist Gilberto Dimenstein
English version by Sérgio Gabriel*

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This play was written specially for the schools participating in the
Conexões Youth Theatre Project Brazil
and it was part of its portfolio in 2009.
Any performances outside this Project will need to
be negotiated with the writer's agent.

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CHARACTERS

MS. ANDERSON – headmistress

MR. WILLIAMS – Arts teacher and show director

MR. SMITH – School’s caretaker

JASON, or J.J. – Student with a stutter

YVONNE, called IVY – Poor student who dreams about being rich

ALICE – Pregnant student

RYAN – The nerd

SEAN – The student who does not know his father

MIRIAM – A manicure, and Sean’s mother

AUGUSTA – Miriam’s client

NICK – Student who likes graffiti

AUTHOR’S EMISSARIES – several characters

TWO ROBBERS

SCENE ONE

In a classroom. Nick, Sean and Ivy are lounging on their desks. Jason comes to the door.

JASON - Is it...he..re...

NICK - Yup, J. J., it is here. Sit down and wait, that there are people missing

JASON - Yo..You...You...didn't ev...ev...even know... what ..I ... was g...go...going ...to...ask

NICK - We knew what you are going to ask just by looking at your face

SEAN - Right. Any if we had to wait for you to ask the full question, it will already be night and we would be saying good morning...

NICK - I just don't know what you're doing here

IVY - He is exercising his right. It was an open invitation to the whole school. We are not to blame if...

JASON - I...if...if...w....what, ...I...vo...ne...

IVY - I was going to stand by you, J. J., but if you call me Yvonne again. I'll stand by them. My name is Ivy. Don't you see it's even easier?
The shorter the word, the sooner you get round to it.

JASON - The.. then...ca...call...me...me....J... J...

SEAN (interrupting) - J. J., we'll call you de J. J.

JASON (making an effort) - Ja...son. It's so ha....rd to say... Ja...

IVY - Sit down and be quiet, J. J.. The whole thing is already late.

JASON (sitting down and to himself) - I...I...vo...vo...ne...

IVY - I am beginning to think that you were right, Nick. This is going nowhere. Can anyone take part? How many have put down their names?

NICK - O Sean was the one who counted.

SEAN - Five plus J. J...

IVY - That's it? Six students in the entire school?

SEAN - I didn't say it was six. I said it was five plus J. J...

JASON – The..n...that... makes.....si...x...

SEAN – Only two girls. You and Alice.

IVY – Alice from the fifth form? I don't like her very much.

NICK – I already do.

SEAN – No, Alice from the seven form. The one who nearly got expelled last year

IVY – That's a little better. I don't think she's right, though. She's too shallow. What we're about to do requires a little more class

SEAN – And who is not shallow in the school, Yvonne?

JASON – Hum...hum

IVY – Did you say 'hum hum' twice because you are stuttering or because you're mocking me?

SEAN – Forget it, Ivy. Is it better like that?

IVY – I am not shallow. "Shallow" is something you were born with, understand? It is like having wavy hair. You can try to make it straight your whole life, but it will still come out wavy. This is something that won't let go until the day you die. You can even become rich, but you will always be shallow. I am past that. Alice, however, the poor thing..

SEAN – What are you past? Being born rich?

NICK – Are all the meetings going to be like that?

SEAN – What meeting? The fucking meeting hasn't started yet.

IVY – Listen, are we going to get anything out of this?

JASON – Get...any...anything? Mo...mo...ney?

IVY – Yes, money. Will there be some for us in the end?

NICK – The poster didn't mention any money.

SEAN – But if we hang around here every day after class. It wouldn't be bad if there were some money, would it?

IVY – My fear is that we get into this in exchange for another meal here. Have you thought about that?

Mr. Williams comes in

MR. WILLIAMS – Good afternoon, everyone (Looking at the class) Just you? I have a list here that says six...

SEAN – Five plus J. J....

JASON – Fuck...fuck...fuck....you

MR. WILLIAMS – Excuse me?

IVY – We are six, really. The other two are not here yet

MR. WILLIAMS – Okay. I would like to make the introductions and talk a little bit about the project. But it would be better if everyone were here. Could someone go and get them?

NICK – if we knew where they were, we would have gone already...

SEAN – Right, it's a good thing around here not to go out looking for a anyone. You never know how you are going to find who you are looking for. If you're at all...

MR. WILLIAMS – What do you mean?

SEAN – Once Bacon did not show up at two days. We went looking. And you know where we found him? In jail.

MR. WILLIAMS – Bacon?

IVY – That's because of his pot-marked face. But he was dumb, poor thing. He was asked to make a delivery downtown... I think he couldn't even get there. He was caught on the way, that simpleton.

MR. WILLIAMS – When you say a delivery... is it what I'm thinking it is?

NICK – We don't even know who you are, sir. How are we going to know what you're thinking about?

MR. WILLIAMS – From now on, drop the sir. Better yet, call me Mr. Williams.

The headmistress, Alice and Ryan come in.,

HEADMISTRESS – From what I can see everyone is getting along! I'm sorry I'm late.

Alice e Ryan find their way among the other four friends.

ALICE (in a low voice to Ivy) – Has anything happened?

IVY (in a low voice) – Nothing worth mentioning...

HEADMISTRESS – Well, every time I speak as the headmistress, I usually say I have two pieces of news: good and bad. Which would you like to hear first?

JASON – Makes.. makes no.. differ... difference...It's al...ways....

HEADMISTRESS – No, it's not always the same thing, Jason. This time we have a chance to make things better around here.(To Mr. Williams) – Have you introduced yourself, Mr. Williams?

MR. WILLIAMS – Not yet.

HEADMISTRESS – Let's start, then. I'll make the introductions and then I'll explain to you a little bit about the project. Here we have Mr. Williams, our teacher. He teaches arts and is specialized in drama, right, Mr. Williams?

ALICE – Are you an artist? A famous one?

IVY – When I say someone dies shallow, nobody believes me... Have you seen his face anywhere, Alice from the seventh form? How could he be famous if no one around here has ever seen him anywhere?

HEADMISTRESS – Yvonne, please...

JASON – Y...you're...fu...ck...fucked.

IVY – Shut up, stutter boy.

HEADMISTRESS – Yvonne, if you go on, I'll be forced to exclude you from the group.

MR. WILLIAMS – Please, Ms. Anderson, that's all right. I'll talk to them. We are already so few around here. Anyone leaving might jeopardise the work.

HEADMISTRESS – It's your decision, but would really like to be able to assure you that your work will be easy, honestly. But I am almost sure it will not be.

RYAN – Do you already know if you going to start with the good or the bad news?

SEAN – Haven't you started yet?

HEADMISTRESS – I'll start with the bad ones, which are actually not that bad, only slightly disappointing. I was hoping a larger number of students would become interested in this project as many things are at stake. Unfortunately,

among all the classes at school, only the six of you have decided to take up this challenge.

SEAN – We are not six, we are five plus...

NICK – That's not funny, anymore, Sean. Shut up that the good news should come now.

IVY – Do the good news include money?

HEADMISTRESS – Money? What do you mean, money?

NICK – I knew it, we're going to work in exchange for another meal, you want to bet?

HEADMISTRESS – There is no money involved in this, everyone. The good news is about the survival of the school. This project, this play which you are going to put on, is the way that we found, Mr. Williams and myself, to bring the community to our school, to make people realise that this school can still offer good things to the neighbourhood, even to our town. Proving this to the population now is your mission. We would like to start saving this call through art. And the first step is to invite the community to come over here and see your work.

SEAN – How is this supposed to be the good news?

RYAN – Yes, Ms. Anderson, I didn't get it. What is the good news?

ALICE – If Ryan, who's Ryan, is not getting it, then we are all screwed.

HEADMISTRESS – It's a lot less complicated than it seems. Now, here with you, we start a drama group. Maybe tomorrow we'll start a music group, then a painting group, and so on. In a short time, this school, which is only in the newspapers because of the drug dealers and the stray bullets, will become known because of the young artists who studied here.

IVY – Then you can wait all you like Ms. Anderson. The more people come here, the more targets for stray bullets there'll be. The drug dealers and the police will be celebrating.

MR. WILLIAMS – I think that what the headmistress is trying to say is that this thing here could mark the beginning of a new phase for the school...

SEAN – Hey, you Mr. Williams...

MR. WILLIAMS – Just Mr. Williams...

SEAN – Then, you Mr. Williams, look at our faces. You really think someone will leave their houses to see someone who stutters acting in a play, a 14-year-old girl who is pregnant again...

ALICE – I don't even know if I am pregnant yet... Just because someone saw me puking in the toilet, the whole school thinks I'm pregnant again.

SEAN – Moving on... a mad graffiti artist, who is always running away from the police, with a can of spray...

NICK – Yes, and a bloke who doesn't even know who his father is... and for a start, graffiti is art. Not this stupid shit, we are going to be doing here...

IVY – Wow, it's getting better, it's getting better...

SEAN – Yes, and a very poor girl who doesn't have a penny to her name and thinks she's all that...

JASON (pointing to Ryan) – And...a...a ...n...ne...nerd...nerdy... b boy...wh...who's d... du...dull

NICK – Ryan, did you hear that? I'd break him.

HEADMISTRESS – No-one is going to break anyone...

NICK – There is always someone telling Ryan what to do. When it's not a girl, it's his mother. When it's not the mother, it's the headmistress... someone is always making his decisions for him...

HEADMISTRESS – Exactly, that's why he has time left for studying. Why don't you try and do the same thing every once in awhile?

NICK – Too much studying makes you a nerd. You have to go easy on the books.

MR. WILLIAMS – Ms. Anderson, if I can...

HEADMISTRESS – Sure, go ahead

MR. WILLIAMS – I'll consider this our first meeting. What I needed to know about you, up to now, I've learned. Even if that's not the usual way. I propose we meet again tomorrow, same place and time to start the rehearsals

ALICE – Why at this time? Couldn't it be earlier?

HEADMISTRESS – You have classes earlier.

ALICE – That is exactly why. You dismiss us from the lessons, and we stay round here, just rehearsing,

HEADMISTRESS – Stop talking nonsense, girl.

RYAN – What's all this talk of rehearsal? We don't even know what we are going to do.

MR. WILLIAMS – The Board promised me I would get the text of the play today, but it must have been delayed for some reason. They commissioned a playwright to write the text. But that's not a problem, we'll start tomorrow, even without a text.

ALICE – When you say text, do you mean we'll have to learn things by heart?

MR. WILLIAMS – That's how it is in the theatre.

NICK – So apart from all the shit we have to learn by heart at school, there's more?

HEADMISTRESS –
But what were you thinking of when you put your name down for the project?

NICK – That I would be paid.

IVY – He was not the only one, everybody thought the same thing.

JASON – Ex...cept...for me...

ALICE – So you mean will have to stay here after school, there will be no money, and we will still have to learn our text by heart? Do we still have time to get out of this trap?

MR. WILLIAMS – I would ask you to stay at least a week. If after a week you are not happy with the work, we'll stop everything.

SEAN – This theatre thing you say you want to do here, is it like the theatre that I've seen once?

HEADMISTRESS – How is he supposed to know the kind of theatre you saw?

SEAN – It was so dull. A stinking place, with lots of people on the stage screaming at the same time until we were all bored. We either could not hear what they were saying or could not understand anything they said

IVY – And do we have to rehearse to do this? From what he is saying, theatre sounds like a regular day at our school. On one side there are people screaming, and on the other, people who can't understand anything.

Someone knocks at the door, which is half-open. An emissary comes in.

EMISSARY (could be a man or a woman) – I have a delivery for a Mr. Williams.

MR. WILLIAMS – That would be me. Is it the text?

EMISSARY – They asked me to deliver this to you.

Mr. Williams opens the envelope and glances quickly at the delivery.

MR. WILLIAMS – But... is that all?

EMISSARY – Well, that's what they told me to deliver. If it's not much for you, have some patience...

The caretaker comes in running

CARETAKER (to the headmistress) – Ms. Anderson, this boy came in running with a package. I went after him, but I stumbled and fell. You know what my knee's like, right? It wasn't a bomb, was it?

HEADMISTRESS – No, Mr. Smith, it was not a bomb. You can relax now.

MR. WILLIAMS – No... it was not really a bomb. At least not until now...

SCENE TWO

The rehearsal room. Just a table and some chairs in the environment. The students are dressed with black pants and T-shirts. Only Ivy, trying to be different, sports several accessories all over her body, such as bracelets, scarves, earrings, and whatever the director deems necessary.

ALICE (to Ivy) – Won't you take this rag off your neck?

NICK – Maybe her character hangs herself right on the very first day of rehearsal

IVY (to Alice) – Maybe in your house this is a rag. This is actually called a scarf. Artists wear them to protect their voices

JASON – Ar...ar...tis...tis...t? Sin.....since...when...did...did you...be...become....

RYAN (interrupting) – If this is the rehearsal, shouldn't we know what we're going to do?

SEAN – Why the hurry? I've been in this school for six years and I still don't know what I'm doing here.

NICK (can of spray in his hand) – This shared has no personality. (Starts shaking the can of spray to graffiti the wall) – When this Mr. Williams arrives, the whole place will look just right.

Mr. Williams arrives and interrupts Nick before he starts spraying the walls.

MR. WILLIAMS – This is not what we are here for, is it, Nick?

ALICE – Shit, caught red-handed. Not even the police do that.

Mr. Williams places some papers on the top of the table

MR. WILLIAMS – Let's bring the chairs to the centre and form a circle.

The students obey and start to form a circle with the chairs, which is at first, too wide.

MR. WILLIAMS – Not so far, Ivy. Let's close this circle a little more.

A smaller circle is formed. Everybody sits.

MR. WILLIAMS – Everyone, here is the deal. I thought I would have the whole text with me today. But the author has not sent it yet

SEAN – Who is this guy? If you want, we can put the moves on him.

ALICE – I am not in any hurry. If he doesn't send this text soon, then nobody is going to say it is our fault. And as there is no text, can we go home?

MR. WILLIAMS – He was commissioned by the board of education. I don't know who he is, but he promised he would meet our deadline.

IVY – Deadline? At this school? Do you know how long it took them to fix the girls' toilet?

SEAN – Yeah, but when the time came for them to destroy everything, they were much faster.

RYAN – If this guy doesn't send anything, what are we going to be doing here? Looking at each other?

MR. WILLIAMS – Who says he didn't send anything? He had sent something. It is not the whole play, but... you saw that guy who was here yesterday, didn't you? So, he brought a delivery from the author

RYAN – if he has sent half of it, that's okay...

IVY – In that part he has sent, does it say what I am going to do? I was wondering: is there a role for a rich woman, one who owns a lot of factories and lives in a major mansion?

ALICE – Great, if there is, Yvonne can play her maid.

JASON – Lo...loved...it... You...we...were... great, Ali..ali...Alice.

IVY – Why don't you check if there are jobs for telephone operators who stutter...

MR. WILLIAMS – Everyone, if you want to crack any other jokes, let's do that on the stage, okay? I don't think you have realised, but we have already started working.

SEAN – What do you mean working? We haven't read anything yet. Give us this text this guy has sent.

MR. WILLIAMS – That is what I've been trying to say, since the time I arrived. What he did send was not exactly a text, it was a proposal.

NICK – Proposal? Like a job offer? Sir, wake up. No one gets a job around here. When we say where we live, they say that the position has been filled.

MR. WILLIAMS – It is another kind of proposal. It is a proposal for an exercise, a kind of make-believe. He suggests we try out a **SCENE** . A kind of improvisation.

NICK – This guy is high, or something, isn't he? He doesn't do his share, and he wants us to do ours? How?

Mr. Williams opens an envelope he has in his hands.

MR. WILLIAMS – He sent this suggestion for a **SCENE** , together with a request. I'll read the request to you: “Dear director, I need some kind of stimulation to write the play which was requested. That is why I sent a suggestion for an exercise. Your understanding and the students’ co-operation are essential for me. Thank you. The author”.

ALICE – This is rough. We are not making shit for money, and we still have to inspire this lunatic?

MR. WILLIAMS – He has sent the idea, Alice, we just have to act it out.

RYAN – Then tell us what this idea is, mate.

Mr. Williams stands up and looks at the group with a serious expression on his face.

MR. WILLIAMS – Proposal for **SCENE** number one: Sean meets the father who left him when he was a boy.

SEAN (visibly upset) – What the fuck is this? Let me see this shit (He stands up and grabs the piece of paper from Mr. William's hands)– What kind of a joke is this? Who is the bastard that's making fun of me?

MR. WILLIAMS – Calm down, Sean . No one in here sent this. Everyone here saw when the boy delivered me the envelope yesterday. It was sealed, and it had my

name on it. None of you knew who I was. This was sent by the author, I checked that.

IVY (to Sean) – Shit, this guy knows you?

SEAN – I don't know any fucking author.

IVY – Well, but he knows that you haven't met your father.

RYAN – That's hardly a secret to anyone, is it? The whole school knows that.

MR. WILLIAMS – Here's the problem. I talked this morning with the people at the Board. They told me that the playwright has complete freedom to write what he likes. That is, he has the right to do this.

ALICE – I really don't see what the problem is. Sean keeps saying that he would like to meet his father.

SEAN – But not like this, fucking be around. I would like to meet him for real.

MR. WILLIAMS – Sean, if you let me, you can meet him for real. I want everyone to move their chairs away, except for Sean and Ryan. Open up the circle. Sean and Ryan will remain in the centre.

The circle opens up, leaving the two students in the centre. Mr. Williams is standing by, outside the circle

MR. WILLIAMS – Sean, I would like you to imagine that Ryan is your father.

RYAN – Why me, for God's sake?

MR. WILLIAMS – Ryan, I have already said that we are working and I don't want to have to repeat it all the time. Do you understand? I want you to imagine that he is the father who left your house many years ago. Now he's back and you'll be able to talk.

SEAN – I won't say anything. I want to stop this shit right here

MR. WILLIAMS – It is just an exercise, Sean. When we finish, we'll stop. But now I would like you to think of something you would like to say to your father. What was his name?

SEAN – That's none of your business.

MR. WILLIAMS – Please, Sean. What was your father's name?

SEAN (reticent) – Tom.

MR. WILLIAMS – Did you hear that, Ryan? From now on, your name is Tom. You are Sean’s father, who came back after a long time to meet him. Are you ready? Sean, whenever you’re ready.

RYAN – Can I ask something first?

MR. WILLIAMS – Of course.

RYAN – Is it Tom or Thomas?

MR. WILLIAMS (nervously) – But what difference does that make?

RYAN – It is just that I have an uncle and his name is Thomas. He makes it a point to say that he is not Tom. He said that if he were Tom, he would be another person.

SEAN – I think my father is a Thomas.

MR. WILLIAMS – That doesn't have any importance, Ryan. Now let's begin. Who wants to go first?

Sean and Ryan remain quiet, much like everyone else.

MR. WILLIAMS – I'll start it, then. Sean, I wanted you to get close to Ryan, who now is your father, Thomas, and say something to him, which you have been keeping with you for a long time. Go ahead.

Sean rises very slowly from the chair, walks up to Ryan and observes him carefully.

SEAN – Hi, can you stand up?

Ryan begins to rise, a bit apprehensive. As soon as he is standing, Sean hits him in the face. Ryan falls down. All the other students rise, somewhat scared.

SEAN – That is to teach you to never abandon a woman with a young child, you bastard.

Mr. Williams runs to hold Ryan back, who has now risen and charges against Sean.

RYAN – You son of a bitch, you are so fucked, man.

MR. WILLIAMS – Calm down, Ryan, calm down.

Sean is one of the corners of the room, out of breath. The other students help contain Ryan.

IVY – Is theatre always like that?

JASON – F...f...fu...ck...

MR. WILLIAMS – Every one calm down, let's all calm down. How are you feeling Ryan?

The caretaker comes in.

CARETAKER – What's happening here? What's with all the noise?

MR. WILLIAMS – It was nothing, Mr. Smith. Just a small scuffle.

ALICE – That's right, Sean, hit his father on the face. And he deserved it too.

NICK – It was not exactly his father's, at least that's what we can see now. Will you let it slide, Ryan?

MR. WILLIAMS – Everyone, let's all calm down. Mr. Smith, thank you. We can work things out here ourselves.

CARETAKER – The boy is hurt. I'll call the headmistress.

MR. WILLIAMS – There's no need, Mr. Smith. We are...

The caretaker leaves the room.

MR. WILLIAMS (Pulling up a chair) Sit down, Ryan. How are you feeling?

RYAN (hand on his nose) – I am saying this is not going to be like this, I'm going to get this *sonofabitch* too.

IVY – Ryan, I think it makes sense. Why did you expect Sean to do? To give you a hug and said he missed you? I would have done the same thing. Being left behind is tough, mate.

The headmistress and the caretaker come in

HEADMISTRESS (looking around) – Can you excuse us for a second? I need to have a word with the professor. (To the caretaker) – Mr. Smith, can you please take Ryan to the teacher's room? Check if he needs something like water, a Band-Aid, anything.

CARETAKER – Yes, ma'am. Come over here Ryan. Let's look at this nose. It's begun to swell, uhn?

The caretaker takes Ryan out of the room, the other students follow.

MR. WILLIAMS – Ms. Anderson, let me explain. Something unexpected happened, we were...

HEADMISTRESS – Mr. Williams, you might not have paid attention to one detail. Things in the school are not easy. What have to deal with the drug dealing in the neighbourhood, the families are deprived, we have almost no money, no computers, and the board has already threatened to close the school. The students barely attend any classes, I keep seeing 14-year-old girls getting pregnant and 12-year-old boys who think it's more interesting to sell drugs than to study... the last thing we need at this moment is a teacher who comes here and puts one student against the other.

MR. WILLIAMS – I know that, Ms. Anderson.

HEADMISTRESS – I'm sorry, Mr. Williams, but I don't think you do. I believe that when you came here the students would be more motivated, that we would be able to assure the community that it's possible to do something worthy at the school. How am I supposed to fight to keep you here, if, on the very first day, the students are killing each other?

MR. WILLIAMS – You are right, but I did not count on Sean's reaction. We were playing a **SCENE** in which he was supposed to meet his father again and, all of a sudden, he charged against Ryan. I had never seen a thing like that; I had no time to stop it.

HEADMISTRESS – I understand that you have to do your work. But take my advice: you won't be able to do in here everything that you are used to doing out there. Be careful when you play again with these children, that is all I'm asking you.

MR. WILLIAMS – I wasn't playing, Ms. Anderson.

HEADMISTRESS – Very well, but be careful anyway. Now I'm going to let them go. I don't think you have any more atmosphere to go on, do you? Tomorrow they will be here at the same time.

The headmistress leaves the room. Mr. Williams sits down, feeling discouraged.

SCENE THREE

Sean's house. Miriam is doing the nails of her client and friend Augusta.

AUGUSTA (looking at her nails) – Miriam, don't you think this looks rather pale? Looks like the hand of a sick person.

MIRIAM – Pale, Augusta? Are you mad? This colour is a shade of orange, it is almost a red.

AUGUSTA – I don't know, I think we should have used red right from the start. You know, lighter shades don't go with me. I think that everything which is too light reminds me of a hospital.

MIRIAM – Thank God I haven't seen a hospital and a long time. But I doubt sick people have nails with this shade. Look at this, Augusta. Only if it's a hospital for burned people. This shade of orange makes your hand look like it's on fire.

AUGUSTA (wickedly) – Honey, everything here is in heat, thank God. And not only the hand, no. With Jack things are like that: like a house on fire, or we part ways. With him, there's no time to talk, or anything like that. When he is around, see, we only open our mouths to kiss. If I want to talk, I can talk to you, right?

MIRIAM – Who is this Jack now?

AUGUSTA – What do you mean, who is this Jack?? How many Jacks have I talked about? It's the Jack I met dancing last Saturday, the one who brought me home, didn't I tell you? Of course I did. He stayed over and on Sunday, he ate a whole chicken.

MIRIAM – Now, I remember. I didn't remember his name; I only remembered the story of the chicken. If you keep seeing him, you will need to open a chicken farm.

Sean comes then, schoolbag on his back, looking gloom. Walks past the two and heads to his bedroom

MIRIAM – Boy, don't you see anyone around here?

AUGUSTA – I told you Miriam, no one can see this shade. If it were really red, the boy would have noticed. If I trust you, I'll end up invisible.

MIRIAM – Sean, come back here, son. What's this now? Don't you have a mother any more?

AUGUSTA – That is right. Don't you have an auntie anymore?

MIRIAM – Well, you're not his auntie, Augusta.

AUGUSTA – I know, but now he will be even more embarrassed.

Sean comes back into the room, his left his schoolbag in the bedroom

MIRIAM – What's with the long face? Weren't you supposed to arrive home later today because of the rehearsal?

AUGUSTA – What are you rehearsing, boy? Did I tell you that Jack is a musician, Miriam? He plays in the rail workers' band. He rehearses twice a week too. He doesn't make a lot of money, but I think he gets free train rides.

MIRIAM – And where does he take the train to anyway?

AUGUSTA – I don't know, but if he ever needs to, he can ride for free. That's what he told me.

SEAN – The headmistress dismissed us earlier.

AUGUSTA – And you look like that? When I was at school and was dismissed earlier, my God, it was as if I had won the lottery. Things are changed nowadays, right, Miriam? The headmistress dismisses them and they come home like that, nearly crying

MIRIAM – What happened Sean?

Sean remains silent.

MIRIAM – Spill the beans, boy. Augusta is a friend. I was bound to tell her later anyway.

AUGUSTA – Ah, that you would.

SEAN – I had a fight.

Miriam stops working on Augusta's hands and comes close to Sean.

SEAN – Who did you fight? And why, this time?

AUGUSTA – Miriam, Jack has got a short temper too. When we left the dance, he thought that a bloke was looking at me. He went up to him and wanted to sort him out. Can you believe that?

MIRIAM – Augusta, will you let the boy talk?

SEAN – I had a fight with Ryan.

MIRIAM – Ryan? But why Ryan? Didn't you use to say that Ryan was the best student in the school?

AUGUSTA – Maybe that was the reason, right Sean? I don't know what things are like today, but in my day the best student was such a bore...

SEAN – It wasn't even his fault, I think. Something strange happened at the rehearsal.

MIRIAM – Something strange, how strange? It doesn't involve drugs, does it?

SEAN – No, mum. During the rehearsal, our teacher asked me to imagine that he was my father.

MIRIAM – What? What's the story with your father?

SEAN – That's exactly what I said. But the teacher said that I had to think that Ryan was my father who had returned. And then I had to say something to him.

MIRIAM – Right. And what did you say?

SEAN – I called him a bastard and I broke his nose with a punch.

AUGUSTA – Good God! So that means that if your father ever decides to show up one day, that's what he's going to get.

MIRIAM – Sean, sit down here, son.

Sean sits close to his mother

MIRIAM – Tell me something: did they humiliate you?

SEAN – What do you mean, humiliated me?

MIRIAM – I mean, I want to know if anyone offended you in this drama class, if any anyone made fun of you, something like that.

SEAN – No, they didn't. They only told me to imagine that Ryan was my father.

MIRIAM – And then you punched him right in the face? Was that it?

SEAN – Yeah. Yeah

MIRIAM – Then, everything is all right. You sorted things out with your father, and let's not talk about this anymore. It's a pity you broke the nose of the wrong person, but we don't always get things right in life, do we, Augusta? That good-for-nothing deserves something like that. I myself got even with this story. But that's enough, right? If all the people who were abandoned by the fathers walked around the Earth punching everyone half of this world would have a broken nose.

SEAN – Do you really think it's all right? What about Ryan?

MIRIAM – Tomorrow, you'll apologise to him and say this: Come on, Ryan, so many people for you to be in this life and you decided to be my dad?

Sean and Miriam laugh and hug each other. Sean is about to leave and Miriam interrupts him.

MIRIAM – Hey, can we watch these rehearsals? Do you want to come along, Augusta?

AUGUSTA – I don't know. Isn't it too violent? I don't like to see people punching each other.

SEAN – I'll ask the teacher. If it's okay, I'll let you know

Sean leaves. Augusta remains silent.

MIRIAM – What happened? Why are you looking like that?

AUGUSTA – I don't know. I'm just here thinking about what you said to the boy.

MIRIAM – Did I say anything stupid?

AUGUSTA – I don't know. I just thought that you were going to say something more serious

MIRIAM – What I said was very serious, Augusta. We don't need to cry to be serious, do we?

AUGUSTA – I don't think so. (Looking at the hands) – Speaking of serious: Miriam, please take off this drab colour from my hands and choose something red hot, please. Tonight, Jack won't know what hit him.

The two of them start laughing.

SCENE FOUR

Next day. Rehearsal room. Mr. Williams, the six students, plus the caretaker. Students are lying on the floor, relaxing. Mr. Williams walks among them. The caretaker sits in the corner, looking bored.

MR. WILLIAMS – Easy, easy... there's no hurry, I be. Breathe in, hold the air for as long as you can, and then let it out slowly, very slowly... Alice, make sure your back touches the ground for you to feel the floor with your whole body... Close your eyes, Nick, you're not missing anything...

NICK – I know but we've all been afraid of Sean since yesterday. If he hits people with their eyes open, what won't he do if we are like that, unaware?

The students laugh

MR. WILLIAMS – Silence, no more jokes. What happened yesterday has been solved. Take a deep breath, come on...

Someone knocks at the door. The caretaker stands up and opens it. A new emissary from the author appears, bringing a big box in his hands.

EMISSARY – Good afternoon. I am looking for Mr. Williams. I was told he was here.

The caretaker points to the teacher. The students stand up

EMISSARY (walking towards the teacher) – I was asked to make this delivery to you.

MR. WILLIAMS – Who did?

EMISSARY – My boss.

MR. WILLIAMS – And who is your boss?

EMISSARY – He owns the delivery service. I am only a delivery boy

MR. WILLIAMS – And where is this delivery service?

EMISSARY – Across town. Look here, I am sorry. I am paid to deliver, and I have delivered. Goodbye

The emissary leaves the room. The caretaker closes the door;

CARETAKER – Now we're getting all kinds of people at the school. Dear me. You're not going to open up this trouble, are you? I think that any day now some crazy person will send us a bomb. I'll call the headmistress.

MR. WILLIAMS – You don't need to call anyone, Mr. Smith. It's only a box and I am going to open it.

CARETAKER – I'll call the headmistress anyway. If this thing explodes, no-one is going to say that I didn't warn you

The caretaker leaves the room

MR. WILLIAMS (*opens the box, takes a note out and reads it to the students*) – First, I apologise for the trouble yesterday. Sometimes things happen. I hope you're feeling better, Ryan. And I hope that Sean is calmer today

RYAN – Who is this guy who knows our names?

SEAN – I was calm before that. But this guy pisses me off

MR. WILLIAMS – Can I go on? There you go. The play is nearly ready, at least in my head, but you, the cast, are still not ready.

NICK – Why doesn't he come here himself to say that to us?

MR. WILLIAMS – He is right about that, Zack. We're not really ready. We started working yesterday. What am I, a miracle worker? Can I finish the note?

JASON – I...I...do... don't... don't... like... th...this... one... one bit...

ALICE – Relax, J. J.. Now it is the point of honour for us to discover where this will lead. I must confess I am having a bit of fun with everything

RYAN – You say that because your nose is still whole. Don't think I forgot, Sean, I still don't know how, but there'll be a payback.

MR. WILLIAMS – Can I finish reading the note or not?

NICK – Go on.

MR. WILLIAMS (reading) – Inside this box, you will find a very elegant dress, some jewellery, which are fake but look very good, and a maid's uniform. The elegant dress and the jewellery are for Ivy...

IVY – I love it! This guy's the best. I was sure I'd be recognised, but I didn't think it would be so fast.

MR. WILLIAMS – Going on... and the maid's uniform is for Alice.

ALICE – Can I take back what I said? That I was enjoying this game? I'm beginning to think the whole thing is a bore.

MR. WILLIAMS – Together with the clothes, you will find another section of the play, with three copies. One is the Ivy, another for Alice, and the third one will remain with Mr. Williams, to direct the **SCENE** . As it has become clear that improvisation exercises will not work with you, this time I'd rather they play the **SCENE** reading the text.

Williams looks inside the box and finds three copies of the text. He keeps one of them and hands out the other two to the girls.

IVY – First I want to see my dress and my jewellery.

ALICE (reading the **SCENE** s) – He is asking Nick to draw the plan of a house on the floor, with large rooms, which will be Ivy's house.

IVY – Mr. Williams, could you please, hand me my elegant dress? My God! I don't think you're supposed to disobey the author like that.

Williams hands the more elegant clothes and jewellery to Ivy and the maid's uniform to Alice. He starts to read his text.

MR. WILLIAMS – He says here that you have to go to the dressing room, put on these clothes quickly and come back to play the **SCENE** .

ALICE – Nobody asked me if I want to wear this maid's uniform.

IVY – Darling, we are getting the character that fits us best. It's like that on the soaps, and it seems is going to be like that here too. Thank God there is some justice in this school.

JASON – B...but...we...do...don't...have... a...dr...dress....dressing room at the ...s.....school.

MR. WILLIAMS – You can change in the toilet. Alice, if you think you don't want to play the **SCENE** , I'll understand.

IVY – She is not supposed to want anything, Professor. Since when do maids think? Come on, Alice. The man said we're to change quickly and come back to play the **SCENE** .

The two of them leave taking their clothes; Alice is visibly upset.

NICK (with his can of spray) – Well, I'll do my part, which is by far the best of them all.

Nick begins to draw on the floor the rooms in Ivy's house.

MR. WILLIAMS – Wouldn't it be better to ask the headmistress if you can do that at the school floor?

NICK – If we do ask, she'll say no. Leave it to me.

Nick, with great ability, begins the spray on the floor.

RYAN – Mr. Williams, are you sure everything is all right?

Knocks on the door.

SEAN – Blimey, I have never seen women change so quickly.

MR. WILLIAMS – Come in.

Miriam and Augusta come in

MIRIAM – Excuse us?

SEAN – Mum, what are you doing here? Are you crazy?

AUGUSTA – Hi, everyone. She is the mother. I am nothing, I just came along because she insisted.

MR. WILLIAMS – Good evening, I'm Mr. Williams. What's the matter?

MIRIAM – Nothing is the matter, no, sir. I'm Sean's mother, that one over there. He told me yesterday that you were rehearsing a play here, didn't you Sean? I

have something to confess to you. I've never seen a play in my life, let alone a rehearsal.

SEAN – Didn't I tell you that I was going to ask if you could come and watch? Would it have killed you wait a little longer?

AUGUSTA – You know what Sean? Yesterday your mother told me: if I know that boy, he'll never going to ask anything. Tomorrow we'll go to the school and we'll ask ourselves. I came along because I thought she was right.

MR. WILLIAMS – Look, I don't mind you being here. But it's just that, honestly, we have nothing to show yet. To be honest, we are about to make the first **SCENE**

MIRIAM – Well, if you don't mind, we'll stay around a little, right, Augusta? We are here anyway.

AUGUSTA – Sir, is this like those shows on television? Are we supposed to laugh at anything you say?

MR. WILLIAMS – That is what I'm trying to explain. We don't have much to say yet.

AUGUSTA – That's better. Today, I didn't wake up feeling like having a laugh. I said that to Miriam, didn't I? This is what I said: Miriam, I got off on the wrong foot today. If I have to laugh, I'd rather stay home

MIRIAM – But then I said that there would be nothing funny around here, because yesterday, a student broke another student's nose, right? Oh, dear me, Ryan, please don't mind what Sean did to you yesterday. I have talked to him already.

The caretaker and the headmistress come in. The headmistress sees the floor of all sprayed and gets really upset.

HEADMISTRESS – Mr. Williams, it seems will have a surprise every day around here, won't we? Yesterday it was a **SCENE** of violence between the students, and today, vandalism against public property. Where do you think this will end? Rather, how far do you think I'll let you go?

AUGUSTA (applauding) – Very good, very good. Look how well she speaks, Miriam. I don't really know you from television, but lady, you are very good. Blimey, it looked real.

HEADMISTRESS – Who are you?

MIRIAM – Augusta, for God's sake. This is Ms. Anderson, the school headmistress. Don't embarrass me.

AUGUSTA – Anyway, you deserve congratulations, okay? Sean didn't tell us that the headmistress was working on the play. But I was really impressed, wasn't I, Miriam? If today is the first day of rehearsals and you are that good, I can't wait for opening night. I feel sorry for those who sit on the front.

HEADMISTRESS – Ma'am, I don't work in the play. I am the headmistress of the school, and I'm trying to sort things out around here

MR. WILLIAMS – Ms Anderson, I can explain...

HEADMISTRESS – Have you noticed that since yesterday , this has become your favourite line?

MR. WILLIAMS – These two ladies are Sean's mother, and...

HEADMISTRESS – I know Sean's mother. I'm sorry, I just don't remember your name.

MIRIAM – It's Miriam.

AUGUSTA – And I am Augusta, her best friend. We have come to peek at the rehearsals.

CARETAKER – But can we bring people to watch? Tomorrow, then I'll bring my wife, Alison. Do you remember her. Mrs Anderson? She hasn't been to the school in a long time, ever since the party last year. She says she misses you.

HEADMISTRESS – Mr. Smith, it's better if you don't bring anyone. The fewer people know what's happening around here, the better for everyone

Ivy, in an elegant dress and jewellery, and Alice, dressed as a maid, come back to the room. Ivy, trying to look very posh heads to the stage walking on her high heels and not looking at anyone. Alice stands by the door.

IVY – Nick, do you call that an elegant house? Can you tell me where my living room is?

NICK – Right there, where you are.

IVY – Alice, don't just stand there, like an idiot. Come on, give me something to drink.

Alice remains still, not knowing what to do

IVY – Move it, girl. And bring me a chair too. Or do you think it's easy to walk on these shoes?

Alice, slightly confused, takes a chair to Ivy.

HEADMISTRESS – What's this now, Mr. Williams? Can you also explain to me why the students are dressed like that?

MR. WILLIAMS – This is the first **SCENE** that we're going to do with the text and the costumes. All of this has just arrived, the author has sent a delivery boy

HEADMISTRESS (more sweetly) – I know... I know, but why is Yvonne wearing this dress and this jewellery... we won't have to pay for these, will we?

AUGUSTA – Her name is Yvonne? That is so cute, it's my mother's name, can you believe that?

IVY – Mr. Williams, do these people have to stay in my house? If it is my house, can't I send them all away?

MR. WILLIAMS – Take it easy, Ivy. I see no problem if they want to see just a little of our work. It might even be interesting

HEADMISTRESS – Mr. Williams, you haven't answered me yet. We won't have to pay for any of that, will we? I think you should know that we have no money left in the school.

MR. WILLIAMS – I really don't think we'll have to pay for anything, Ms. Anderson. I guess the author is offering us that. Well, shall we start then?

SEAN – Why didn't he send me anything when it was my turn to be an actor?

RYAN – What are you saying? Didn't he tell you to punch me in the face, you bastard?

SEAN – I'm talking about the costumes, things like that.

RYAN – Oh, you're so gay, Sean.

SEAN – Shut the fuck up or I'll knock your teeth off this time.

HEADMISTRESS – Sean, aren't you embarrassed? Your mother's here.

MR. WILLIAMS – Relax, everyone. Let's play the **SCENE** . If you want to sit down...

Except for Williams, Alice and Ivy, everybody sits. Williams, Alice and Ivy pick their texts

MR. WILLIAMS (reading) – Ivy is comfortably sat in a large armchair, reading a book, when Alice comes to the door.

IVY – Where's the book?

MR. WILLIAMS – That doesn't matter now, Ivy. Let's start without the book, is that okay?

IVY – Either I do it the way the author wants me to or I don't do it at all. I want a book.

Ryan opens his schoolbag, takes a book out and takes it to Ivy.

RYAN – Here's your book, but please keep the bookmark in place.

IVY (with book in hands) – I'm ready, Mr. Williams. We can start.

MR. WILLIAMS – ... when Alice comes to the door. Your turn, Alice.

ALICE (reading the text) – Ma'am...

IVY (also reading) – Haven't I told you that I don't like to be interrupted when I'm reading? What is it now? Why do you insist on bothering me?

ALICE – The bank manager called again. It was the third time today

IVY – And what business of yours is that?

ALICE – None at all, Ma'am. It is just that he seems to get more upset every time he calls. He says he needs to speak you urgently

IVY – If he calls again, tell him that when I'm feeling like it, I might be able to think about talking to him. (To Williams) – Blimey, I love the way this woman talks, Mr. Williams...

MR. WILLIAMS – Shush, pay attention to the text, Ivy, to the text...

ALICE – Okay, but you know what? He said that if you don't show up at the bank until tomorrow, he will make an appearance.

IVY – What do you mean, make an appearance? What does that mean, make an appearance? I find it harder and harder to understand the language that you people use.

ALICE – Well, I guess it means that he'll come around here and all hell will break loose...

IVY – I don't think he will dare come over here. You can go now.

MR. WILLIAMS – Alice remains still, in the same place

IVY – What is it now, young lady? You're not only slow, but now you're deaf too? I said you can go now.

ALICE – it is just that the manager said something else...

MR. WILLIAMS – When she notices that her boss is not interested, Alice comes closer.

ALICE (closer to her boss) – He said he will cancel your credit card. As from tomorrow, you won't be able to spend a single penny.

IVY (standing, furious) – How come?

Mr. Williams and Alice, confused, look at the text

MR. WILLIAMS – Ivy, this line is not part of the text.

IVY – Mr. Williams, I don't give a shit about the text. I want to know if I'm really rich or very, very poor. First, the author says I'm rich and right on the first page, he comes and tells me I don't have a penny to my name.

MR. WILLIAMS – Relax, Ivy, we have to follow what he's written. Let's see what he reserves for you, relax.

IVY – Relax, you say. He didn't let me be rich, not even for five minutes. And if I have to become poor, the first thing I am going to do is to fire this stupid maid, who is pregnant by the way. If I have to become poor, she is out of a job. Everybody fires a pregnant maid. (To Alice). You can get your things and leave my house.

AUGUSTA – Goodness me, but it looks like real life. It is just like that, isn't it Miriam? Ms, Anderson, I don't know what to say, I swear to you. I know so many people like this Yvonne, who have no money whatsoever and keep pretending they are rich... Listen, dear, you can't fire the maid. Especially if she is pregnant (To Alice) – If she fires you, love, you take her to the court, see? You can take her to the court, and I'll be your witness.

MIRIAM – But, God, who is pregnant? The maid?

SEAN – No, mum, Alice is pregnant.

MIRIAM – But is she really pregnant or just pretend pregnant?

MR. SMITH – This one doesn't like pretending much, let me tell you...

ALICE – I am really pregnant.

IVY – Mr. Williams, can you please make sure all these people leave my house? I don't want anyone to see my ruin.

MR. WILLIAMS – What ruin, Ivy, what are you talking about?

IVY – What do you mean, what ruin? Haven't you just heard? I owe the bank money and tomorrow I won't be able to use my credit card anymore

HEADMISTRESS – And since when do you have a credit card, Yvette? Mr. Williams, you're driving these students crazy.

IVY (pacing up and down the stage and looking desperate) – I can't let this happen, my God, I can't lose all my money, just like that. My family took such a long time to get this point. I have always been a rich woman, do you hear me? A rich woman!

Two robbers, carrying guns and wearing hoods, charge into the rehearsal room

ROBBER 1 – On the floor, everybody on the floor. If anybody makes a sound, they are dead. (To Ivy) – Except for you, you're rich. You stay here.

HEADMISTRESS – Now you've gone too far, Mr. Williams. I can't allow guns inside the school. Even if they are toy guns.

Robber 2 fires a shot to the sky. Everyone falls to the floor.

ROBBER 2 – Seen any toys that make this kind of noise, Ma'am?

AUGUSTA (throwing herself on the floor) – Miriam, why didn't you tell me that we would have to take part? I would have worn trousers. It would be much easier when the time came to fall down.

ROBBER 1 – Shut up, you with the red nails. Want me to blow your brains, do you?

AUGUSTA – See that, Miriam? If I had that colour you tried on me yesterday, no one would take any notice of me? Thanks a lot, lad. Artists notice everything, don't they, Miriam??

ROBBER 2 (to Ivy) – You, give us everything, move it.

IVY – Uhn?

ROBBER 2 – The jewellery, love, the jewellery. Take them all off.

IVY – Can you look at my text to see what I have to say now?

MR. WILLIAMS – Ivy, I think you'd better...

ROBBER 1 – Haven't I told everyone to shut the fuck up? You too, you poof. (to Ivy) – What are you waiting for, love, give him the jewellery.

IVY – But Mr. Williams, don't they know these are all fake? Look, if you want them, I'll give them to you. But don't come and complain later, because they are all fake. I am broke, I don't even have a credit card anymore

ROBBER 1 – Do have a credit card too? Give it to me.

HEADMISTRESS – Can't you see she is just a girl? She doesn't have anything.

ROBBER 2 – Girl? Dressed like that? No fucking way. We saw her coming out of the toilet, ordering her maid about.

ALICE – Your mum is a fucking maid.

ROBBER 1 – Which gang do you work for, eh?

IVY – I don't work for no one.

ROBBER 2 – You're the boss already, then? Fuck, there are girls who are already gang leaders. Didn't I tell you that we'd been wasting time?

ALICE – Mr. Williams, I think this text has too many twists. So she has become rich by selling drugs? And I work as a maid for a drug dealer?

IVY – How am I supposed to be a drug dealer, if I am broke, you idiot? Didn't you hear the bank manager say that he will be here tomorrow and all hell will break loose? I am worse than these two.

MR. WILLIAMS – Ivy, Alice... didn't you notice that this is not part of the text?

HEADMISTRESS – I'm glad it's not. That would be just it. Me inviting the students' parents to come here to watch a play it with a robbery and a drug-dealing girl.

ROBBER 1 – Ma'am, didn't I tell you to shut up?

CARETAKER – Ms Anderson, I think everything would be better if all of this was just a show, see. I'm beginning to think that things got out of hand...

Robber 2 picks up all of Ivy's jewellery

ROBBER 2 – What about the dollars?

IVY – What?

ROBBER 2 – The dollars, give them to me.

RYAN – Mate, please, this is just a play. Nothing that is happening here is for real. This girl over there, Ivy, this dress doesn't belong to her. She lives around the corner, the poor thing.

Robber 2 goes up to Ryan and holds him by the collar.

ROBBER 2 – Listen, I'm not going to break your face, because someone has done that before. When we say you have to shut up, you have to shut up, get it?

MR. WILLIAMS – Look, we're going to help. No one needs to be hurt. This is a school, look at them. They are just children.

ROBBER 1 – We know that's a school and they are children, you poof. But something weird is happening here. You don't belong here. And this rich woman doesn't either. We saw her and thought we could score.

HEADMISTRESS – If you really are “from the neighbourhood”, as you say, you should know this is a poor school. What are you going to steal from here? Toilet paper?

CARETAKER – Ah, by the way, Ms Anderson, I knew I had something to say to you... We are running out of toilet paper. There are just a few rolls

ROBBER 1 – This score is worth nothing, we know that. But the girl here, she's a gang leader. She has just said that. We can kidnap her and ask her gang to pay the ransom.

IVY – I know nothing about trafficking man. I only smoked pot once in my life

SEAN – Once in my life my ass!

MIRIAM – Shut up, Sean. Did anyone ask you anything?

IVY – I put on these clothes because they said I was going to be rich. But the jewellery was fake, and, five minutes later, I was back to the shit where I started. Do you want to take the dress too? Take it. I don't give a shit about that either.

ALICE – Can anyone tell me exactly what is happening here? Is this a hold up?

JASON – A...ho....hold...up...f... for...r...re...real...

ROBBER 1 – Mate, the bloke is shitting himself. He started to stutter.

JASON – I...I...I... didn't....st....start....I ...ha....have ...a...

ROBBER 1 – Shut up, you wanker. Let's put an end to this story.

ROBBER 2 – Everyone take off what they have and give it to me. Watch, money, credit cards, ring, whatever you have, very quickly. Give it to me and don't raise your heads.

Robbers pick all the objects, but everyone remains on the floor. Robber 1 comes to where Alice is.

ROBBER 1 – Maid, give everything to me.

ALICE – I don't have anything.

ROBBER 1 – Whatever you have, quickly

ALICE – I told you. I left my clothes in the toilet and everything is there. I came back here with his uniform. You can go there and check it out.

ROBBER 2 (to ROBBER 1) – Bad idea going to the toilet right now. We are wasting our time. All of this is worth shit.

ROBBER 1 (to Alice) – Girl, stand up

MR. WILLIAMS – Please, leave the girl alone.

ROBBER 1 – Shut up, no one is talking to you. Stand up, girl.

Alice obeys and stands up.

ROBBER 1 – There is something you can give me.

Robber 1 takes off his hood and forces Alice to give him a kiss.

ROBBER 1 – This time, I'll settle for that, but only this time, girl. Next time, if you don't have anything, you have to give me something else, something down below...

ALICE – You piece of shit.

ROBBER 1 (with hood back on his face) – Anyone follow us, you're dead. Understood?

Robbers leave the room. Everybody remains on the floor for a few more seconds.

RYAN – I think they are gone.

HEADMISTRESS – Mr. Smith, go to my office and call the police

Mr, Smith obeys. Little by little, everybody stands up.

AUGUSTA (taking her mobile from her pocket) – Let's see if it came out okay, Miriam...

MIRIAM – What are you talking about, Augusta?

AUGUSTA – I took a picture of the kiss without him seeing me. (Looking at her mobile). And it really looks good! Girl, you kiss like a television star.

The headmistress grabs the mobile phone from Augusta's hand

HEADMISTRESS – Let me see that. My God, she did take a picture of his face. This one has had it.

SCENE FIVE

Headmistress's room. Two days later. Headmistress, caretaker and Augusta. Headmistress and caretaker have a pile of newspapers on their desks. Augusta is on the phone.

AUGUSTA (on the phone) – Yes, of course. But I have to look at her diary. A moment, please.

HEADMISTRESS (to Mr. Smith, who has a newspaper in her hands) – Mr. Smith, what does this one say?

CARETAKER – Picture of kiss puts robbers in jail.

HEADMISTRESS – That's good, but I like mine better. Listen to this: brave students prevent tragedy in school.

AUGUSTA (on the phone) – I already have an interview scheduled for 11. Could it be at 12?

HEADMISTRESS – Who was that, Augusta?

AUGUSTA – It's a radio station. They want you to go in live to talk about the robbery.

HEADMISTRESS – What do I have scheduled for 11? Is it a newspaper?

AUGUSTA – No, the newspapers are scheduled for the afternoon. At 11 o'clock it's a television network that comes to talk to you... it's one of these women shows...

HEADMISTRESS – Yes, of course. Well, if these radio people can talk to me at 12, then that's okay. If not, patience. I'm only one person...

CARETAKER – Check out this one, Ms Anderson: robbers break into rehearsal and end up in jail.

HEADMISTRESS – That's good, it mentions the play right away

AUGUSTA (on the phone) – Love, she can only talk at 12. And is that okay for you? (Listens)
– Then you need to have patience. She is just one person (Hangs up)

HEADMISTRESS – Augusta, you're being too hard on them. You don't treat the press like that.

AUGUSTA – But you already have seven interviews, scheduled for tomorrow. I can't work miracles either. Besides...

HEADMISTRESS – Besides, what, Augusta? I am beginning to think that you're upset with something...

AUGUSTA – I know that you are the school headmistress, but I was the person who took the picture. And I only gave four interviews up to now. Everyone wants to speak to you and not to me, and I can't understand that...

HEADMISTRESS – Don't be unfair, Augusta. I mentioned you in every single interview.

AUGUSTA – I know, but it's not the same thing. When they talk to you, nobody wants my picture.

CARETAKER (showing all newspapers on the table) – Look at this, you have your face all over the newspapers...

AUGUSTA – I know, Mr. Smith, I know. But you can never be too famous. If you have a chance to keep appearing on newspapers, you can't waste it... because people forget everything very quickly. Tomorrow there'll be another robbery and nobody will ever mention me again. You always have to be in the news.

Mr. Williams comes into the room with a piece of paper in his hands.

MR. WILLIAMS – Ms Anderson, I think we'll really need a bigger room for the rehearsals now. Look, more than 15 students have joined the project.

HEADMISTRESS –
Mr. Williams, now this is a problem you'll have to take care of. At the moment I have to take care of the press, and then I'll think about the rest

The telephone rings

HEADMISTRESS – You see? Do you want to bet it's another request for an interview?

AUGUSTA (answering) – Yes, Headmistress's Office. (Listens) I can't believe it! I can't believe it!

HEADMISTRESS – What's happening now, Augusta?

AUGUSTA – It's from Newsnight. They want you there tomorrow

HEADMISTRESS – Newsnight? From TV? *The Newsnight*?

AUGUSTA – Well, I am always asleep at that time, but I don't know any other.

HEADMISTRESS – But tomorrow no one we'll sleep, can you hear me? That is an order. Tomorrow no-one we'll sleep! You can tell them I'll be there.

AUGUSTA (on the phone) – She will be there, of course

MR. WILLIAMS – And what do I do with all these students who now want to be part of the play?

HEADMISTRESS – Easy, Mr. Williams. Audition them. Let the best ones win. The world loves winners. Augusta, can you do me a favour, please?

AUGUSTA – Of course.

HEADMISTRESS – Can you call my hairdresser and make up an appointment for tomorrow?

AUGUSTA – My God, can I come too?

HEADMISTRESS – You don't need to, your hair looks fine.

AUGUSTA – I don't mean the hairdresser, I meant the television show. I'll be sitting on that sofa very quietly

HEADMISTRESS – Love, I need you here, answering the telephone.

AUGUSTA – But I can find someone to take my place...

HEADMISTRESS – Here, you hear me? I need you here. Mr. Smith, can you keep on clipping the news? I have to go shopping.

The headmistress stands up and begins to leave. She goes to the door and comes back.

HEADMISTRESS – Mr. Smith, I've had an idea. I'd like you to put several posters, all around the school, saying that tomorrow no-one will go to bed until Newsnight is finished.

MR. WILLIAMS – Ms. Anderson, you could take the chance that you will be on television and ask this damned author to send us the rest of the text...

HEADMISTRESS – Good God, I had forgotten all about it. If the play is this a successful as it is, imagine when it is all complete... it would become a new... a new what, Mr. Williams...?

MR. WILLIAMS – I don't know, a new Hamlet...

HEADMISTRESS – Yes, a new Hamlet would be fine for me...

SCENE SIX

The stage must be divided into two parts, a larger and a smaller one, to house two simultaneous actions. The headmistress's room should occupy the smaller area, where we can see the headmistress and the caretaker. The larger area of the stage will show the final rehearsals of the play – there, we have Mr. Williams and all the students who are taking part.

MR. WILLIAMS (sitting in a corner) – Everyone, let's try this sequence without interruptions this time, okay? We've been here for three hours and I still don't like it.

RYAN (wearing more formal and elegant clothes) – I think we could move further on, everyone is tired of this **SCENE**, Mr. Williams.

ALICE (visibly pregnant, wearing the dress and jewellery previously worn by Ivy) – ...Move further on to where is what I would like to know...

IVY (wearing the maid's uniform) – Everyone here is a witness that I helped, and I didn't create problems. I even accepted to wear this horrid dress. But it still happens...

MR. WILLIAMS – What happens, Ivy?

IVY – It so happens, that we have been rehearsing for two months, we open in two days and we still have not seen the last **SCENE**. I don't even know if the gardener is going to ask for my hand in marriage

MR. WILLIAMS – Is that very important to you, Ivy?

IVY – I don't know, I just would like to have some time to think.

MR. WILLIAMS – Why? Are you thinking about marrying the gardener?

IVY – Over my dead body, Mr. Williams. Are you mad? If I have to die poor, I'd rather be single

MR. WILLIAMS – Then, everything is all right. Shall we start the **SCENE** ?

NICK (paintbrushes in hand, before a canvas, where he adds some strokes to a painting) – We'd better. I can't kill any more time looking at this thing. Even the smell of paint is beginning to bother me.

Blackout in the rehearsal room. Light in the headmistress's room

HEADMISTRESS – You really think we're doing the right thing?

CARETAKER – What a silly question, Ms Anderson. We can't go back now, can we? There are no tickets left for the opening night. And the next two days are also sold out.

HEADMISTRESS – The neighbourhood haven't spoken of anything else in the last couple of months, right, Mr. Smith? You really think the Mayor will come? I think he doesn't even know where the school is...

CARETAKER – He might not have known before, but now I bet he can get here without looking at a map.

HEADMISTRESS – I'm a little scared, Mr. Smith. We have created so much interest with this theatre thing... what if nobody likes it?

CARETAKER – Well, there's a time we have to let God decide, there's no other way

HEADMISTRESS – And from what you're telling me, this time has arrived?

CARETAKER – Yes, sort of...

HEADMISTRESS – There are people from other neighbourhoods who are trying to make their children come to school here

CARETAKER – I'm sorry, Ms Anderson, but that's the third time you've told me that...

HEADMISTRESS – I know. But it is so hard to believe it that I keep repeating it myself to make it seem more real...

Blackout in the headmistress' room. Light in the rehearsal room. Alice is comfortably sitting in an armchair, reading a book. At her side, Ryan smokes a cigar and has a drink in his hands. Ivy comes to the door, wearing the maid's uniform.

IVY – Ma'am...

ALICE – Haven't I told you that I don't like to be interrupted when I'm reading? What is it now? Why do you insist on bothering me?

IVY – The bank manager called again. It was the third time today

RYAN – And what business is that of yours, young lady?

IVY – None at all, sir. It is just that he seems to get more upset every time he calls. He says he needs to speak to one of you urgently.

ALICE – If he calls again, tell him that when my husband feels like it he might think about talking to him.

RYAN – Darling, I wish you wouldn't make my decisions for me. What you have just said, for instance, is something I should have said, and not you.

ALICE – I know, but you always forget this line. This is the fifth time we run the **SCENE** and, if I didn't say it, you would forget it again, want to bet? And I can't take this any more, my feet are swollen, my legs hurt...

MR. WILLIAMS (impatiently) – Alice, Ryan, for God's sake. We open the day after tomorrow, and you still ad lib like that? That was the last time this has happened, okay? The last?

ALICE – So you can make him learn his lines. I can't believe it. He can remember every formula and equation, but he can't remember these lines. Even Ivy knows everything by heart

IVY – Listen, if I were not the maid in this house, you would hear a few things, see...

ALICE – And what would I hear? Come on, say it.

IVY – I would say that as well as not paying your bills, you two can't even raise a child. Dear me, why do you repress, the boy like that? (pointing to Nick) – The boy likes graffiti, he doesn't like to stay indoors, painting pictures. If you don't buy him a can of spray, I will buy myself with my own money.

NICK – Thanks a lot, auntie Ivy.

IVY – If you call me at auntie again, I'll break your face.

RYAN – My son will be an artist, and not a vandal who is chased by the police.

MR. WILLIAMS (confused, text in hands) – But... but... where are you getting all of this now?

IVY – I don't know, it just bothers me to see Nick with his mouth shut, painting these ugly things.

MR. WILLIAMS – You are here to follow the text, and not to be bothered by anything. In the play Nick studies fine arts.

NICK – Good riddance. It's a good thing, this has a time to end.

MR. WILLIAMS – Enough now. I want everybody on the text. Come on, Ivy, go back to the line of the bank manager

IVY – The bank manager said that if no one calls them today, tomorrow he will be here and all hell will break loose...

RYAN – Funny, speaking of hell breaking lose... why are our dogs so quiet. For such a long time?

Sean and Jason come in, carrying guns and wearing hoods.

SEAN – Because they've eaten a meatball with tranquillisers and now they will sleep for a long time, stupid fools. On the floor, everyone on the floor.

ALICE – But what is the meaning of this?

JASON – Sh...sh...sh....ut the fu...fu... fuck up or...or... I.... I...will.... bl.... bl blow..

Ivy bursts out laughing.

MR. WILLIAMS – Can you tell me why you are laughing? The house is being robbed, the thieves have guns, they can kill you all... where's the fun in that?

IVY – I am sorry, Mr. Williams, but no one will take this robbery seriously. We have never seen a thief stuttering. Sean is doing fine, but J. J., poor thing...

MR. WILLIAMS – Everyone must have a role and Jason has turned out to be a wonderful thief, better than everyone around here...

ALICE – It is just that until he finishes his line, saying that he is going to blow her brains, the police will have come and gone at least three times.

MR. WILLIAMS – What I mean is that he can bring a thief to life, he is convincing, the public will be afraid of his attitude, his posture, won't they Jason?

JASON – I...I...gu... guess... s...s...so...

MR. WILLIAMS – That is exactly it. I want you to have that look, Jason, that angry look that only you can do, that look that makes everybody afraid.

IVY – But who is going to pay attention to his eyes if he is wearing a hood?

MR. WILLIAMS – Everyone will pay attention to Jason's eyes, do you hear me? Not only you here on the stage. The day after tomorrow, when this house is full, everyone will be afraid of Jason. I guarantee that.

A new emissary comes in, all sweaty. He has an envelope in his hands.

EMISSARY – Mr. Williams... who is Mr. Williams?

MR. WILLIAMS – That would be me.

EMISSARY – They said I had to deliver this to you today and they would break my neck.

MR. WILLIAMS (picking the envelope) – I know that you're not going to answer me. I've been in this school for two months, and no one ever answers what I ask. But, for the last time, who is going to break your neck?

EMISSARY – How am I supposed to know? I just run up and down all over the city. I don't even know what I deliver. Now, if you'll excuse me. There are more people waiting for me.

MR. WILLIAMS – Wait a second...

Emissary leaves in a hurry

MR. WILLIAMS – Son of a bitch.

ALICE – Oh my, Mr. Williams. We never heard you swear before.

MR. WILLIAMS (reading the pages inside the envelope) – There is a time for everything on this earth, Alice, everything. (Laughs) – My God... I can't believe it...

RYAN – What's the matter, Mr. Williams? Is that the end of our story?

MR. WILLIAMS – It could be, the hard part is for anyone to believe it...

SCENE SEVEN

Headmistress' room. Headmistress, well-dressed, touches up her make-up with a hand mirror. The caretaker comes in, also elegantly dressed.

CARETAKER – The mayor did come. He has just arrived. With a group of 10 people.

HEADMISTRESS – Dear God! Did you get him a good seat?

CARETAKER – We found him a seat in the first row. The rest of the group will have to fend for themselves. There are no seats left.

Mr. Williams comes in, looking very nervous

MR. WILLIAMS – Ms Anderson, everything is ready. They are only waiting for you to begin.

HEADMISTRESS – Let's go, Mr. Smith. Let's see what Mr. Williams cooked up with our kids...

Headmistress and caretaker start to leave. Mr. Williams remains in the room.

HEADMISTRESS – Let's go, Mr. Williams! The play should have started 10 minutes ago.

MR. WILLIAMS (nervously) – I think I'd better stay here.

CARETAKER – What? You worked all this time with these kids, and now you don't want to see it? What has got into you, are you mad?

MR. WILLIAMS – It's just that...

HEADMISTRESS – It's just that what, Mr. Williams?

MR. WILLIAMS – It is just that I get too nervous on opening nights, I can't control myself. I ran out of air and I... I have to run away.

HEADMISTRESS – What do you mean? You haven't learned to control that yet? Dear God! A theatre director who can not see his opening night.

CARETAKER – There's always something. Every time one of your play opens, you get like that?

Mr. Williams remain silent. The headmistress and the caretaker look at each other.

HEADMISTRESS – This silence of yours, Mr. Williams... does it mean what I think it means?

CARETAKER – Jesus Christ. Is this the first play your directed in your life?

MR. WILLIAMS – No one wanted to come and work in this school. Everyone at the Board started running just to hear its name. They were afraid of robbers, drug dealers, stray bullets. That is what they said: they will have to kill me first for me to go and work in that corner of the world. You should thank me for having come... I was the only one brave enough to come.

HEADMISTRESS – But you should have warned me that you had no experience, my God. In the last couple of weeks, I didn't even go to see the rehearsals, I trusted you. What if something goes really wrong?

CARETAKER – Relax, Ms Anderson, everything will be all right...

HEADMISTRESS – And tonight the Mayor is here. If we had an emergency exit, I swear I would use it.

Augusta comes in

AUGUSTA – Hey, what is happening here? The Mayor keeps looking at his watch. People are whistling and clapping.

HEADMISTRESS – Well, what are we to do now, right? If the worst comes to the worst, do you know what I'll do? I'll find myself a bar, just like the drunks in the neighbourhood, and I'll drink myself dead to forget everything.

The headmistress, the caretaker and Augusta leave. Mr. Williams remains in the room, pacing nervously up and down. Gradually, we can hear the laughter coming from the theatre. Little by little, there are more and more laughs. He opens the door a little and the noise from the laughter, powerful, invades the headmistress's room. Effects of light and sound indicate that time is running. And then the final applauses are heard, with screams and whistles. Mr. Williams is sitting at the headmistress' table, almost as if hypnotised at the success of his play. Ecstatic, the headmistress and the caretaker return.

HEADMISTRESS – If I were you, I wouldn't miss it for the world. Go on, Mr. Williams. I have never seen those kids so happy in my life. They want you on the stage...

CARETAKER – Stop being silly, Mr. Williams. How many chances in life do you get to be applauded? Go on, Mr. Williams.

MR. WILLIAMS (undecided) – Did they like it? Really?

HEADMISTRESS – What do you think you're listening to? They are not booing, are they?

Mr Whelan kiss the headmistress, hugs the caretaker and runs to the theatre. As he closes the door, the sound of applause is dimmed. The headmistress and the caretaker sit down and breathe a sigh of relief...

HEADMISTRESS – Ivy, dear me, who would have imagined, Mr. Smith? She finds out that she is the daughter of an American millionaire and an employee at the airport restaurant...

MR. SMITH – That's true, Ms Anderson, that's what passion is all about. Knows no money, no frontier... and when it comes your way, you can't stop it

HEADMISTRESS – And Jason, then... becomes a hip-hop singer in jail and then makes a lot of money...

CARETAKER – Well, that's only natural. This hip-hop thing, have you ever heard it? Everyone plays the record backwards and keeps repeating the same thing. It seems that you are training to stutter... and Jason was born with this gift, he just needed someone to point him the way...

HEADMISTRESS – I know that we are a school in the outskirts, but no one here knows anything about theatre, that there are people here who have never even been to a real theatre... but you really think they bought all of it?

CARETAKER – I'm sorry, Ms Anderson, but weren't you there to hear the applause? They loved all of it, it was plain to see...

HEADMISTRESS – Maybe, Mr. Smith, maybe...

Augusta comes in

AUGUSTA – Ms Anderson, I don't think I can come here again to call you. Help me out, for God's sake. The Mayor wants to take a picture with you. Hurry up, he still has to go to the opening of a supermarket today.

HEADMISTRESS – Tell him I'm coming, Augusta. I'm coming...

AUGUSTA – Please don't take too long... He has taken a picture with me.

Augusta leaves.

HEADMISTRESS (at the door) – I would like to ask you a last favour, Mr. Smith. Actually two.

CARETAKER – Of course, Ms. Anderson.

HEADMISTRESS – It's not that I didn't like the play, that's not it. But could you write a love story the next time?

CARETAKER – A love story? But they are still children...

HEADMISTRESS – And do you promise to finish the text sooner? There were times I thought Mr. Williams was going to have a heart attack, with all those kids you found to come over here, to deliver everything in small parts...

CARETAKER – It's hard to promise that, because I'm not in the business. But I'll try and make an effort... I think that now I even have a little practice, you see...

HEADMISTRESS – So let's go there, then, Mr. Smith, and take a picture with the Mayor. You will look good in the picture too.

The headmistress and the caretaker leave the stage.

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