



WATER. GUN. ARGUMENT.

by Alan Haehnel

**Sample Pages from
Water. Gun. Argument.**

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WATER.
GUN.
ARGUMENT.

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT BY
Alan Haehnel



Water. Gun. Argument
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Cast

4M + 8W + 37 Any Gender

Using doubling, the play could be performed with as few as 18 actors.

- Michael:** Male. The curator of the play.
- Jennifer:** Any Gender. Reporter for WCYA. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9, as Morgan, Brigid, Shelly or Anna.
- Jason:** Any Gender. A none-too-bright member of Michael's Assassin team. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.
- Girl:** Female. A single-line character squirted by Jason. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.
- Melissa:** Any Gender. Principal of Ratherford High School.
- Mr. Hudnor:** Any Gender. Argumentation teacher at Ratherford High School.
- Captain Meeks:** Any Gender. Chief of Ratherford Police Department.
- Tommy:** Male. Cocky member of an Assassin Team opposing Michael's. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.
- Jake:** Male. Teammate with Tommy. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.
- Various Protestors:** Any Gender. 8-20 people carrying signs and chanting protests.
- Elise:** Female. An Assassin judge with a crush on Michael.
- Officer Kline:** Female. A member of the Ratherford police force.
- Questioner:** Any Gender. A faceless voice who questions Officer Kline.
- Mrs. Gray:** Female. An old widow who feels threatened by the Assassin game.
- Complaint 1-9:** Any Gender. Various off-stage voices representing players of the Assassin game with complaints for the judges.
- Cara:** Any Gender. An Assassin player on a team opposing Michael's.
- Toby:** Any Gender. Team-mate to Cara.
- Morgan:** Female. Member of the final-round Assassin team. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.
- Brigid:** Female. Captain of the final-round Assassin team. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.
- Shelly:** Female. Member of the final-round Assassin team. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.
- Anna:** Female. Member of the final-round Assassin team. Could double as a protestor, as one of the Complaints 1-9.

Bare stage. MICHAEL enters.

MICHAEL: Hi. I'm Michael, your... curator. I have gathered together a bunch of related moments and put them in a particular order. We have about 40 minutes. Limitations, boundaries, rules, deadlines—we encounter them everywhere, don't we? Even here. Regardless. Here is... . (*JENNIFER enters, carrying a microphone*) WCYA, Jennifer Nelson reporting.

JENNIFER: Spring is in the air, birds chirping, grass growing, and, at Ratherford High School, squirt guns squirting in an annual tradition for Seniors called Assassin.

JASON enters. JENNIFER crosses to him.

JASON: I mean, it's really kind of the oldest game in the world, kids trying to shoot each other with play guns. But we get into teams and have a bunch of rounds and stuff. Plus a pretty sweet pot of money for the winners, not gonna lie.

JENNIFER: Do you plan to win?

JASON: Oh, yeah.

MICHAEL: Jason Stillman. Of the 256 Seniors at Ratherford, I would put him as the 252nd worst choice to represent us on television, but what can you do?

JENNIFER: How much is the prize money?

JASON: Sorry, Dude. Classified info.

JASON exits.

JENNIFER: While Ratherford Seniors find Assassin an enjoyable, harmless tradition, some have expressed concern that its effects are not entirely positive. (*MELISSA enters. JENNIFER crosses to her.*) Ratherford High Principal Melissa Sweitzer says that, while the game is not a school-sponsored activity, Assassin still has an impact on the students' studies.

MELISSA: As you can imagine, this time of year is not necessarily conducive to academic focus, especially for Seniors. The squirt gun game doesn't help matters. Students tend to stay out late, sometimes all night, trying to get other players out, and I often find them strategizing more about the game than about their school assignments. I'd love for them to come up with an alternate activity, but I'm afraid the squirt gun game has become a national phenomenon.

JENNIFER: I notice you don't refer to the game as Assassin.

MELISSA: I try to have a sense of humor, but let's just say I'm not comfortable with my students talking about killing one another, regardless of the context.

She exits. JASON enters just long enough to speak his line.

JASON: Dude, the adults hate it, but that's part of the fun, right?

JENNIFER: Perhaps the debate over Assassin is nothing more than an aspect of an even older tradition: what's fun for the young is annoying for the old.

A GIRL goes running across the stage, screaming, JASON in hot pursuit, squirt gun blazing.

GIRL: I'm unarmed! I'm unarmed!

JASON: You're fair game!

He inadvertently squirts JENNIFER.

JENNIFER: Oh!

JASON: Sorry!

He exits.

JENNIFER: Reporting from the Assassin battlefield where I just became collateral damage, this is Jennifer Nelson, WCYA News.

She exits.

MICHAEL: And now, Mr. Hudnor, my favorite senior-year teacher on the first day of my favorite class.

MR. HUDNOR enters.

MR. HUDNOR: This class is called Argumentation. Oddly enough, in this course, we study arguments: what they are, what makes a good one, what makes a bad one, and what elements are needed to create and maintain strong ones. Most of all, in Argumentation, we practice the verb form of the word: We argue. Let's get right to it. Take out some paper. I am going to give you a quote, and then I am going to give you 30 minutes to write your opinion about it, with evidence. Be prepared to have others read and comment on your writing. Here is the quote: "We judge others by their actions, ourselves by our intentions." — Ralph Waldo Emerson. Begin.

MR. HUDNOR exits.

MICHAEL: So that was one middle-aged, pontificating adult. Why not bring on another?

CAPTAIN MEEKS enters.

CAPTAIN MEEKS: Assumptions kill.

MICHAEL: Captain Meeks, chief of our local Ratherford P.D.

CAPTAIN MEEKS: I'm going to say that again: Assumptions kill. You hear them all the time after something has gone terribly wrong: "I assumed he was going to yield." "I assumed he was sober." "I assumed he didn't have a weapon on him." "I assumed the community was safe." Now that last one is a biggie, people. Around this area especially, citizens are the first to tell you how safe their community is. So they assume. But let me tell you something.

OFFICER MEEKS pantomimes continuing their speech as MICHAEL interrupts.

MICHAEL: While Captain Meeks was talking to all of his officers, I want to point out one particular person in that audience: Officer Christiana Kline.

OFFICER KLINE enters, then sits as if listening.

CAPTAIN MEEKS: In that gorgeous, gated neighborhood, guess what? You have theft. You have drugs. You have guns. You have rape. You have murder. How do we know this? Because you have human beings.

MICHAEL: Officer Kline is new to the job here and is doing her best to look attentive and respectful. But during the next part of her Captain's speech, as he talks about an incident that happened in a neighboring town several months previous...

CAPTAIN MEEKS: Routine traffic stop. I hate that phrase. Get it out of your vocabulary. There is no such thing as a routine anything. Tail light is out. He figures, he assumes, he's going to issue a warning. He walks up on the vehicle.

MICHAEL: During this part of the speech, Officer Kline does all she can do just to keep from throwing up her breakfast.

CAPTAIN MEEKS: Next thing he knows, he's down, blood pouring out of the wound in his head as the car goes speeding off, driven by a 16-year-old kid, high on crack, wearing a wig so he would look

like an old woman to avoid suspicion. Fortunately for the officer, the shot wasn't fatal. Unfortunately, because of his series of assumptions, he will never work again. We stay alert, people. We stay objective. We stay fact-based. We follow protocol. We do not assume, because assumptions kill.

MICHAEL: Thank-you, Captain. Thank-you, Officer Kline. (*MEEKS and KLINE exit*) Now, I am going to challenge you to consider two things simultaneously. First, my buddies Tommy and Jake are going to present the YouTube video they made about why they are supremely equipped to win the game of Assassin. By the way, they were not on my team. To date, their video has gone practically viral; it has had about 38 views. Second... well, you'll see.

TOMMY and JAKE enter, carrying various squirt guns.

TOMMY: All right, people, Assassin time is here, and so are we.

JAKE: This year's winners. You might think it's a little early for us to claim victory since the game doesn't start until tomorrow, but considering how skilled we are...

TOMMY: And that our other two team members, Gavin and Ricky, are just as good...

TOMMY & JAKE: We're gonna win.

TOMMY: Why? Number one, weapons. Of course, we're each equipped with the major tool of destruction, the big gun, each with a carrying capacity of at least a gallon of water.

JAKE: Accurate up to forty feet, these babies will probably be responsible for most of the carnage.

A group of people enter, carrying signs with nothing on them. They move their mouths as if they are shouting, but we hear nothing. They circle TOMMY and JAKE, still going with their presentation.

TOMMY: In addition, we each have a variety of other killing tools for more up-close work and for situations that may, shall we say, vary from the set plan.

JAKE: Small guns, easily concealed in pockets, for stealthy situations and up-close assassinations.

TOMMY puts a small gun to JAKE's head.

TOMMY: The mafia hit. Very effective. Poo!

JAKE: Oh! Brains blasted, lights out.

TOMMY and JAKE keep showing their guns, water balloons, etc., as the PROTESTORS continue to march, all silently.

MICHAEL: Tommy and Jake, cute as can be, fully confident millions will tune in to watch them brag about their water gun expertise. But what about these folks, obviously protesting? Why the angry faces? What's written on the signs? What are they chanting, and where are they marching? This, people, is what we call building suspense.

MR. HUDNOR enters.

MR. HUDNOR: An audience will stand for not knowing everything short-term, but if you leave them hanging for too long, or if you never satisfy their curiosity, they will not forgive you.

MR. HUDNOR exits.

MICHAEL: That sounds bad, not being forgiven. I hereby promise, as your friendly neighborhood curator-not-narrator, that I will not leave you forever frustrated. For the moment, however, this: unhappy people with signs are part of this collection. Thank you, unhappy people.

The PROTESTORS exit as we tune back in to TOMMY and JAKE.

TOMMY: So, I hope we've answered all your questions as to why we, Tommy and Jake...

JAKE: Jake and Tommy, remember the names.

TOMMY: Are sure to claim the prize money for this year's game of Assassin.

JAKE: We've got the weapons, we've got the plan, we've got the strategies, so...

TOMMY & JAKE: We will get the win!

MICHAEL: And thank you, my egotistical classmates.

TOMMY and JAKE exit. MR. HUDNOR enters.

MR. HUDNOR: And the one thing you must never, never, never leave your audience wondering is this: What is your argument?

MICHAEL: I hear you, Mr. Hudnor. Go away, Mr. Hudnor.

He does. ELISE enters.

ELISE: I come from a long line of Assassin judges. I am the youngest of six kids—three brothers and two sisters, none of them more than two years apart, most of them only a year apart. My parents were talented that way. My oldest brother, Justin, was a judge for the very first game of Assassin at the high school, eight years ago. They only had four teams that year, and the game lasted for just a week. Nothing was off limits because the school didn't even know the game was happening. You could shoot people in class, in the hallways, on the sports fields, in their cars—wherever and whenever you wanted to. It was the Wild West of Assassin back then.

*OFFICER KLINE enters with a chair, sits, facing front.
THE QUESTIONER's voice is heard.*

QUESTIONER: Officer Kline, you joined the police force three years ago.

KLINE: Yes, that is correct.

QUESTIONER: How long ago did you come to work for the Ratherford PD?

KLINE: Approximately five months ago.

QUESTIONER: And before that, you were an officer in Bluesport, Pennsylvania.

KLINE: Yes.

QUESTIONER: And how long were you there for, Officer Kline?

KLINE: Approximately two and a half years.

QUESTIONER: Why did you leave the Bluesport PD?

KLINE: I... uh, felt that I could use a change.

QUESTIONER: Was there anything in particular that precipitated this desire to leave Bluesport, Officer Kline?

KLINE: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Could you please explain?

OFFICER KLINE takes a deep breath, then exits with the chair.

ELISE: By the next year, when my sister became judge, things started to tighten up. The Ratherford High administration came out with an official statement saying it did not sanction the game and that it was prohibited on school grounds. Since then, year by year, the rules have become more and more complicated to the point that someone felt we had to designate, for instance, that you are safe from being killed if you are riding a horse or other similar riding animal, but dogs of any size are not considered riding animals. In a pinch, your Shih Tzu cannot save you.

PRINCIPAL MELISSA SWEITZER enters.

MELISSA: I am less than pleased to announce, in case you haven't heard, that the senior spring squirt gun game has begun again.

MICHAEL: You remember Principal Sweitzer, the one afraid to say the "a-word?" Here she is at a faculty meeting.

MELISSA: But I do want to commend Jack Hudnor for his creativity and initiative in his argumentation course. He invited me into his class the other day to act as a judge for a heated and very erudite discussion of this assertion: "Given today's political and social climate, Ratherford seniors should discontinue the game of Assassin."

MICHAEL: She's about to read something that I want you to hear, but it's a bit on the long side. So I'm going to do some fancy-dancy interspersing to keep things interesting. I'm going to bring in Tommy, one quarter of the "we-are-so-going-to-win-this" squad (*TOMMY enters*) and Mrs. Gray (*she enters*) our resident sweet, widowed little old lady.

TOMMY and MRS. GRAY enter.

TOMMY: Dude, people have to just get over themselves.

MRS. GRAY: I have lived in this same neighborhood, in this same house, for 50 years.

TOMMY: Can't they take a joke?

MRS. GRAY: My late husband and I raised four children here, and we always felt safe.

TOMMY: Everybody's so sensitive all the time, it's ridiculous.

MRS. GRAY: Never locked our doors.

TOMMY: Assassin. It's a game. With squirt guns. With water.

MELISSA: I got permission from one of Jack's students to read to you what I thought was a particularly compelling part of his presentation. He states, "Let's say, the day before Assassin is supposed to start, we have a school shooting here. Several of our classmates die. Forgive me for presenting such a horrific scenario, but please follow my logic. Would Assassin continue? Of course not. It would be unthinkable for us to continue a mock game involving guns and murder when we are grieving the real thing."

MRS. GRAY: Until the other night. I walked out of my house to check the mailbox. For some reason, I forgot to get the mail in the morning.

TOMMY: So maybe, while we're playing the game, we crouch behind somebody's hedges. We're not digging them up. We're not lighting them on fire.

MRS. GRAY: I'm walking back up to my house—I didn't have any mail, after all—when I think I see some movement behind the lilac bushes.

TOMMY: We're waiting to make a kill.

MELISSA: "All right. Let's say the situation is not quite so grave, but close. Say, the day before Assassin is supposed to start, there is a school shooting at a neighboring school—Grace Memorial, for instance. Would we play Assassin in that case? Again, of course not."

MRS. GRAY: I thought it might be a cat, but it seemed like the movement was higher up than that. I started to get a little worried. I mean, things have changed in the neighborhood over the years. You hear about burglaries now.

TOMMY: But you gotta remember, Assassin is basically a joke, right? See, a joke is when you do something for fun, when you don't actually mean harm, even though it might seem like you do at first.

MRS. GRAY: "Hello?" I called out. Whatever was behind the lilac bush stopped moving. That's when I really started to get worried, because then I knew it probably wasn't an animal. A cat or a woodchuck or, heaven forbid, a skunk will usually run away when you call out. But this froze. So did I.

TOMMY: Sometimes, maybe you even get a little frightened by the joke. That's part of the fun, like being on a roller coaster, right? You scream, but you're fine. It's what we call funny. F-U-N-N-Y. Yeah. Funny. Cool concept, right?

MELISSA: “Out of respect for the tragedy at Grace, we here and, most likely, every high school within a fifty-mile radius would suspend the game for the year. It would be immoral for us to be running around trying to ‘kill’ each other when others close by had actually been killed.”

MRS. GRAY: I started to walk up my driveway as quickly as I could. I wanted to get indoors and call my son. He lives just down the street, and he’s awfully good about coming over when anything is the matter. I try not to call often, you know, but sometimes, when you live alone, you just need to call somebody.

TOMMY: So maybe, some night, when you’re waiting to make a kill, with your water gun, and some lady calls out to you because you’re hiding behind the bushes next to her house... maybe you don’t want to wait around and have a conversation. Maybe you just decide to book it out of there.

MRS. GRAY: Suddenly, this boy, this teenager, came rushing out from behind my lilacs. And he yelled at the top of his lungs!

TOMMY: And maybe you yell “boo” for the fun of it, for the joke of it!

MRS. GRAY: I was so frightened that I fell right over. It’s a wonder I didn’t break anything, but my knee swelled up something awful. Not to mention my heart was beating a million miles a minute. It must have taken me 15 minutes to calm down and hobble into the house. My voice was shaking so badly my son could hardly understand me.

MELISSA: “But I put this to you, fellow classmates and guest judges, when school shootings happen, which is far too often in this day and age, do we not claim to feel solidarity with the victims? After the Parkland shootings, didn’t some of us wear T-shirts proclaiming, ‘We stand with Parkland’ and even ‘We are Parkland’? How close does the event have to be to us, either in time or in physical proximity, for us to feel that a game mocking the real tragedy is grossly inappropriate?”

TOMMY: The next thing I know, this fat, middle-aged guy has me cornered up against my truck, and he’s screaming at me because I gave his mother a heart attack or something. “Dude,” I’m trying to tell him, “it’s a game! It’s a game with squirt guns!” But he’s yelling about trespassing and harassment and how he’s going to call his lawyer and the cops and frigging National Guard on me.

MRS. GRAY: My son was none-too-happy about the situation, and he found the young man and brought him over to the house to apologize. He was from the neighborhood; I’ve watched him

practically grow up, you know. He did say he was sorry, but I don't think he was very sincere, to tell you the truth.

TOMMY: I did my civic duty; I apologized to Mrs. Gray. Not like I had any choice with her fat son behind me ready to call the Governor if I didn't. I told the old lady I was sorry for going on her property without permission, for frightening her and making her fall down.

MRS. GRAY: Ever since that night, I've started locking my doors.

TOMMY: Mainly, I wanted to say to both of them, I'm really sorry you don't have a life and you can't understand the concept of a joke.

MELISSA: "We know the answer. Of course we do. We know that playing the game of Assassin is tantamount to putting on a minstrel show wearing blackface. Society has changed. A thing that may once have been innocent is no longer innocent. It takes courage to overthrow outdated traditions. Ratherford seniors, let's show that courage." I read you that response not only because I agree with it, but mainly because it shows what can happen when we challenge our students to practice higher-order thinking about things that really matter to them. Thank you, again, Jack, for your good work.

MICHAEL: And thank you, Principal Sweitzer, and thank you, Tommy, and thank you, Mrs. Gray for being here, not that you have any awareness that you're being thanked by an unknown curator; regardless, I appreciate your contributions. (*MELISSA, TOMMY, and MRS. GRAY exit*) And now, back to Elise, our esteemed judge.

ELISE: As a result of the increased number and complexity of the rules, two things have happened. One, the number of players who get eliminated not because they were assassinated, but because they ignored a technicality, has shot way up. And two, we judges have become far more influential. Now, some claim these outcomes are not in keeping with the spirit of the game. I, to be totally honest, like them. Players call me, they stop me in the halls, they text me, they insist that I come to the scene, and then they present their cases.

The COMPLAINTS come from various places onstage, though we don't see who says them. ELISE listens, occasionally cocking her head in deep consideration.

COMPLAINT 1: His gun was visible in the back of his car—that's against the rules!

COMPLAINT 2: I had a five-minute grace period to get to the bus after tennis practice.

COMPLAINT 3: He poured a glass of lemonade on my head. That does not count!

COMPLAINT 4: My parents told her to get off the lawn. She only got me by disobeying the rules.

COMPLAINT 5: The water balloon he hit me with was partially frozen. He could have knocked me out with it!

COMPLAINT 6: I killed her!

COMPLAINT 7: I am not dead!

COMPLAINT 8: This isn't fair!

COMPLAINT 9: You cannot use your baby sister as a shield!

ELISE pauses briefly, then issues her verdicts, pointing in various directions as she does so.

ELISE: In, out, out, out, in, out, in, in, out! (*We hear ad libbed protested from around the stage.*) And that is final! (*The protests stop. ELISE speaks to us.*) Power has its privileges.

MR. HUDNOR enters.

MR. HUDNOR: "Fashion is more powerful than any tyrant." That is a Latin proverb. You have 30 minutes. Go.

CARA and TOBY enter. MICHAEL joins the scene.

CARA: (*to MICHAEL*) What do you mean, it's not about that?

ELISE: All right, lay out the dispute.

MICHAEL: It shouldn't even be a dispute.

CARA: You're out, Michael. I got you. Your shirt is still wet. Elise, his shirt is still wet where I got him.

TOBY: She got you, Dude.

MICHAEL: Yes, my shirt is still wet. I admit that. I admit that it is wet from water from your squirt gun.

CARA: End of story.

ELISE: It seems pretty...

MICHAEL: No, no, no. This is about fair territory.

TOBY: What?

MICHAEL: The rules clearly state that kills cannot be made on school grounds.

CARA: We're not on school grounds.

MICHAEL: But we were when you shot me.

CARA: How can you say that?

TOBY: No way.

ELISE: Where did the shot happen?

MICHAEL: Right over there, on the other side of the road.

ELISE: I don't see how that's school grounds.

TOBY: The fence around the field is, like, 20 feet away.

MICHAEL: Yes, the fence is 20 feet away, but the school's property extends beyond the fence, all the way to the edge of the road.

CARA: How do you know?

MICHAEL: Well, we can go down to the town clerk's office and look at the deed, Cara, but I pretty much doubt that the school enclosed a playing field on a piece of property they did not entirely own. The whole field belongs to the school. On this side, no; on that side, yes. It's an invalid kill.

CARA: This is stupid. The whole point of the rule is so kids can do school activities and not be worried about getting shot. If you were on that field over there, within the fence, you wouldn't have had to worry. That fenced-in area is protected. What school activity would you be doing outside the fence?

TOBY: You don't even do one inside the fence. You don't play a spring sport.

MICHAEL: It doesn't matter. The rule is about school grounds.

CARA: School grounds does not necessarily mean all school property.

MICHAEL: I would love to hear an attorney argue that one. I'll sell you my grounds, but I'm keeping the property.

CARA: Elise, this is a spirit-of-the-law, letter-of-the-law thing. You need to make a judgement.

MICHAEL: Actually, this is a letter-of-the-law, letter-of-the-law thing, and all you need to do, Elise, is stick to the rules. Please.

ELISE: (to us) One problem about judging the game. You could look all through the rules—which, as I mentioned, have become more complicated every year; you could check in with your sense of how to preserve the feel of the game; you could even call up your brothers and sisters and consult with them as past judges. But none of that is going to account for the fact that Michael Stebbins, the guy you have lusted after since eighth grade, is looking you in the eye with his gorgeous eyes and saying “Please.” (she turns back to CARA and MICHAEL, who have been frozen) I’m ruling in Michael’s favor. He’s still in.

CARA: Oh, come on.

TOBY: That is bogus!

MICHAEL: Thank-you, Elise. Well judged. So, that’s final then? We’re all set?

ELISE: The issue is settled.

MICHAEL: Cara, Toby... (he squirts them) You’re out.

CARA: No way!

TOBY: No freaking way!

CARA: Elise! He can’t do that!

MICHAEL: We all clearly agreed this is not school grounds. Elise clearly said the issue was settled. The game was back on.

TOBY: Elise, you’re not gonna let him get away with that!

MICHAEL: I don’t see how you can rule any other way, Elise.

ELISE: (to us) I admit, he could be a jerk, but what can I say? Justice is blind, but love is blinder. (to CARA and TOBY) Sorry, guys, you’re out.

CARA and TOBY stomp off.

ELISE: ‘Bye, Michael.

MICHAEL: See you later, Elise. (ELISE exits) Remember that famous tagline for Hairclub for Men, “I’m not only the hairclub president, but I’m also a client”? Well, as you just saw, I’m not only the curator, I’m a participant. And no, in case you’re wondering, Elise and I never hooked up. While we’re doing scenes involving me, here’s a brief blast from the not-so-distant past.

MELISSA enters.

MELISSA: Michael, I thought you did a great job on that debate in Mr. Hudnor's class.

MICHAEL: Oh, thanks, Mrs. Sweitzer. I worked hard on that.

MELISSA: I could tell. Do you have a copy of your speech? I would love to share it with the faculty.

MICHAEL: Oh, sure—I'll e-mail that to you.

MELISSA: I hope you can convince your fellow seniors to feel the same way you do about the game. There are certainly better uses of your time at this point in your high school career.

MICHAEL: Absolutely. I'll e-mail you that.

MELISSA: Excellent.

MELISSA exits.

MICHAEL: Yeah, so—there's what's required for school and there's what's required for life, right?

MR. HUDNOR enters.

MR. HUDNOR: What is your argument, right? Never forget that question. What is your argument?

MICHAEL: (*along with MR. HUDNOR*) What is your argument? Your voice echoes in my brain still, Mr. Hudnor. Thank you ever so much. (*MR. HUDNOR exits*) Oh, I have another bit coming up, but I need a couple props for it. I'll be back in a minute, but don't worry. Stuff will go on—disembodied interrogators, silent protesters, a celebration amongst friends—you'll be entertained.

MICHAEL exits. We hear the voice of the QUESTIONER. OFFICER KLINE enters and takes a seat. During the following exchange, the group of PROTESTERS enters and parades around OFFICER KLINE. The signs are still blank. The PROTESTERS pantomime shouting.

QUESTIONER: Was there anything in particular that precipitated this desire to leave Bluesport, Officer Kline?

KLINE: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Could you please explain?

KLINE: My partner was shot.

QUESTIONER: We are sorry about that circumstance.

KLINE: Thank you.

We hear one of the words the PROTESTERS are chanting.

PROTESTERS: Justice!

QUESTIONER: We understand your partner was permanently disabled due to this incident.

KLINE: That is correct.

QUESTIONER: It was a routine traffic stop?.

KLINE: It was a traffic stop, yes.

QUESTIONER: We don't need to go into great detail about the incident, Officer Kline.

KLINE: I appreciate that.

PROTESTERS: Unqualified! Unqualified!

QUESTIONER: Have you had conversations with your partner since the shooting?

KLINE: Yes, several.

QUESTIONER: Did your former partner have any particular advice he wanted to impart to you, given what happened to him?

KLINE: Advice?

QUESTIONER: Yes. I assume you and he were friendly.

KLINE: He was an excellent partner. And I consider him a good friend.

PROTESTERS: Profiled! Profiled!

QUESTIONER: Of course. I guess what I am asking is, given what happened to him, did your former partner want you to understand something about the job that might help you in the future?

KLINE: He did say, several times, that when it came to my safety, that I should keep one question in mind.

QUESTIONER: What was that question?

KLINE: "What is the very worst thing that could happen right now?"

QUESTIONER: Do you think this is good advice?

PROTESTERS: Justice! Justice!

KLINE: I think it's helped me stay alert.

OFFICER KLINE exits. The PROTESTERS exit also, except for MORGAN and BRIGID, who put down their signs and start the scene.

MORGAN: You did not.

BRIGID: Okay, then, I didn't.

MORGAN: Wait, did you?

BRIGID: If you're asking, "Did I kill Jake?" The answer is, "Yes, I did."

MORGAN: Oh my God! What?

SHELLY enters.

SHELLY: What happened?

MORGAN: She killed Jake!

SHELLY: So that means...

MORGAN: We beat them!

ANNA enters.

ANNA: Brigid, I just saw Jake, and he would not look me in the eye.

BRIGID: That could be because he is deeply ashamed.

ANNA: And why would he be deeply ashamed?

BRIGID: Maybe because after all his bragging that his team was going to win...

ANNA: You didn't.

SHELLY: She did!

MORGAN: They are out and we are on to the next round!

The GIRLS all scream joyfully.

SHELLY: This could not have been more perfect. I got Gavin.

ANNA: Then I got Tom.

MORGAN: I blasted Ricky with a water balloon, and then you, Brigid...

BRIGID: Killed Jake.

ANNA: Yes! When? How?

BRIGID: An hour ago. It was the craziest thing, too. After that stakeout we did last night...

ANNA: Four hours waiting for him to come home.

MORGAN: Four?

BRIGID: Behind his garage for four hours, until 2:00 this morning. I am so tired!

SHELLY: Did he ever come home?

BRIGID: Nope. His brother said he was going to, but he didn't. Do you know where he was?

MORGAN: Where?

BRIGID: At Tommy's.

ANNA: How did you figure that out?

BRIGID: I had to bring my sister to crew practice, and guess whose bright red sneakers were sticking out under Tommy's truck?

SHELLY: You are joking.

BRIGID: Nope. Tommy's got his head under the hood, and Jake is underneath the truck. I drove past, pulled over, told my sister to chill for a second, walked back to Tommy's driveway, crouched down, said, "Good morning, Jacob," and squirted him right on the forehead. It was perfect!

MORGAN: After all Jake's talk of his superior strategy and weaponry and tactical experience from playing so many video games.

SHELLY: "Good morning, Jacob." Squirt! I love it!

They laugh and high five each other. TOMMY and JAKE walk by.

ANNA: Hey, Tommy, how's your truck?

TOMMY: Shut up.

MORGAN: Jake, are you okay?

JAKE: What are you talking about?

MORGAN: I don't know. You just look a little... dead this morning!

The GIRLS laugh uproariously as they exit. TOMMY and JAKE exit in the other direction, shaking their heads. MR. HUDNOR enters.

MR. HUDNOR: “The less routine, the more life.”—Amos Bronson Alcott. 30 minutes. Go.

He exits. JASON and MICHAEL enter.

JASON: Dude, did you hear? It’s just us and Brigid’s team left.

MICHAEL: Considering I’m the team captain, yes, I heard.

JASON: What are you doing?

MICHAEL: What’s it look like? I’m duct-taping my gun.

JASON: Why?

MICHAEL: Camouflage. What’s the use of getting dressed all in black, blacking out your face and trying to hide in the dark if your gun is neon-colored?

JASON: That’s fair. I should do mine.

MICHAEL: Good idea. But you can’t use my tape.

JASON: Why not?

MICHAEL: Because it’s mine. Because I don’t have enough for my gun and your gun. Because you’re cheap and won’t go buy your own.

JASON: I’m not cheap.

MICHAEL: You’re cheap. You mooch off me every day at lunch. You don’t even help with the tip when we go to Denny’s. You’re cheap.

JASON: I’m not. Spray paint would work, too. Why didn’t you use spray paint?

MICHAEL: Because I had black duct tape and I didn’t have black spray paint.

JASON: I’m going to spray paint mine.

MICHAEL: Just don’t get it on the nozzle.

JASON: I’m not going to get it on the nozzle. I know enough not to get it on the nozzle.

MICHAEL: Do you have any black spray paint?

JASON: No.

MICHAEL: Then you're not going to spray paint your gun.

JASON: I just said I was going to. Why wouldn't I?

MICHAEL: Because you're cheap.

JASON: That doesn't mean I won't spray paint my gun.

MICHAEL: Yes it does.

JASON: No it doesn't. I'll just go ask Jonesy. He's got all kinds of spray paint in his garage.

MICHAEL: Fine. Go ask Jonesy.

JASON: You sure you're not gonna have any tape left?

MICHAEL: Go ask Jonesy!

JASON: All right, all right.

JASON exits. BRIGID enters.

MICHAEL: So, I guess it's just you guys and us guys, huh?

BRIGID: That's the rumor.

MICHAEL: You know, I'm gonna be honest with you. This was a great time for the first three weeks or so, but I'm exhausted.

BRIGID: We accept your surrender. But we do insist on a firing squad to make it official.

MICHAEL: No, no, no. We're still going to win, but I've got a proposal for you. I'm guessing you guys are tired, too.

BRIGID: Actually, if I don't get some decent sleep before the next track meet, I'm going to be in serious trouble.

MICHAEL: I hear you. So how 'bout we make a deal? I mean, we're both good or we wouldn't have gotten to this level, right?

BRIGID: You cheated. I heard about that stunt at the field.

MICHAEL: That was not a stunt. That was attention to detail. Doesn't matter—the point is, this could easily go on for the full week, and we all have better things to do.

BRIGID: What are you thinking?

MICHAEL: Both full teams, midnight tonight. We meet at an agreed-upon location and have it out. Invite judges, invite witnesses...

BRIGID: We could set a time limit. By 3:00 a.m., the team with the most kills wins, takes home the prize money.

MICHAEL: Exactly.

BRIGID: Sounds good.

MICHAEL: Perfect.

BRIGID: If I didn't know you were full of crap and planning to ambush us.

MICHAEL: *(to us)* Frustrating, yes, because I really did want to have the game over with, and I wasn't planning to cheat. I was actually desperate for sleep. But, given my reputation for winning at all costs, I couldn't blame her.

MICHAEL: Brigid, swear to God, we're not trying to cheat.

BRIGID: You swearing to God doesn't mean a thing.

MICHAEL: I don't know what else to tell you. I mean, fine, if you want to go ahead and spend the rest of the week hiding in bushes, looking over your shoulder, arguing with the judges, arguing with your parents and teachers and coaches, fine, that's how it'll play out. That's how we'll win. Oh, by the way, the weather forecast for the rest of the week after tonight: pouring rain. 90 to 100% chance, every day, every night.

BRIGID: Give me your phone.

MICHAEL: What?

BRIGID: And whatever cash is in your wallet. Hand it all over.

MICHAEL: No way. What are you, crazy?

BRIGID: As the captain of my team, I am not doing this deal without collateral. Provided you don't cheat, you'll get it all back at three o'clock tomorrow morning, the latest.

MICHAEL: What are you going to give me?

BRIGID: My word, which, we all know, actually means something.

They stare at one another while MICHAEL speaks to us.

MICHAEL: She stared at me for several seconds. I stared back at her. She kept staring. She knew she was right. I knew she was right. I didn't want to look like I knew she was right. She still knew she was right. She kept staring. I kept staring... and then I gave her my phone and all the cash in my wallet.

*After getting the phone and the money, BRIGID exits.
The voice of the QUESTIONER comes. OFFICER
KLINE comes out.*

QUESTIONER: Why don't you relate to us now what exactly happened on the morning of April 15th, beginning at 12:30.

KLINE: Yes, sir.

MICHAEL: All right.

KLINE: Mrs. Winona Gray of 1211 Pleasant Street had called with a complaint that she thought someone was trespassing on the old railroad yard across from her house. Mrs. Gray said that this was not the first such incident recently, and that her son had advised her to call us if she felt any fear or suspicion.

MICHAEL: Brigid's team and my team decided to meet at the abandoned railroad yard. It was cold. I was glad to be wearing all black, including my face mask. And man, I was tired. Between keeping up with Assassin and school work, I hadn't had more than four hours of sleep in the last three days.

KLINE: As you're aware, Ratherford has been having an increased problem with the sale and use of opioids within the town limits. We had heard reports that the abandoned train yard was one area where these exchanges occurred.

MICHAEL: The moon was full, but sometimes the clouds would pass over the railroad yard. Bright, dark, bright, dark. It was a perfect night to end Assassin. I loved the plan we had put in place with the only other team remaining. Whatever happened right then and there, that would be the outcome. Whether we won or not, we could all get some rest.

KLINE: I decided to approach the train yard from a distance, without lights or siren, rather than alert any intruders of my presence. In this way, I thought I might be able to learn something about the drug activity, if that was the nature of the disturbance.

QUESTIONER: Had you been apprised of the fact that Ratherford students were playing Assassin?



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