

“SHOOTER”

A PLAY BY SAM GRABER

PRODUCTION – MARCH 2018

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 90 MINUTES

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SUMMARY

Shooter explores the correlation of our gun culture to the fragile state of the male identity. *Shooter* tells the story of three long-time friends and a prevented high school shooting.

On a sunny weekday afternoon, Jim Bender sees a teenage boy approach the entrance of the local high school carrying rifles beneath a trench coat. Jim pulls his own firearm, stopping a shooter-massacre before it happens. Jim Bender is a hero. But as the full story is revealed, this truth becomes a lot less clear – and that is not what people need it to be.

Shooter asks: are today’s shooter-massacres the result of a malformed and destabilized male identity?

With each violent shooter-massacre carried out by a man, *Shooter* questions the relationship of not just our gun culture to the male identity but also of how men fail each other when they need each other most.

CHARACTERS

JIM, male, 40s

BEN-DAVID, male, 40s

ALAN, male, 40s

TROY, male, 50s

GAVIN, male, 17

VARIOUS VOICES, female

TIME

Then and Now.

THE STAGE

There are two desks on stage. Both desks are downstage and face the audience.

The rest of the stage serves the action as one unbroken, interconnected playing area, such that changes in literary scenes do not require aesthetic alteration to provide a shifting sense of location.

To support this continuity, all other stage properties are fluid and moved by actors In Actu as warranted.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Shooter received its world premiere at TheaterLab (NYC) on March 10, 2018, as produced by ManyTracks, directed by Katrin Hilbe, assistant directed by Chava Curland, and with following cast:

JIM, Ean Sheehy; BEN-DAVID, David Perez-Ribada; ALAN, CK Allen;
TROY, Michael Gnat; GAVIN, Nicholas Tyler-Corbin.

Shooter received its initial presented read at The Workshop Theatre (NYC) on January 8, 2017, as arranged by Michael Gnat, directed by Katrin Hilbe, and with following cast: JIM, Ean Sheehy; BEN-DAVID, Michael Gnat; ALAN, CK Allen; THERESA, Annemarie Hagenars; TROY, James Armstrong; GAVIN, Adam Perabo; VOICES and Stage Directions, Anne Fizzard.

ACT ONE.

SCENE 1.

Then.

House lights are up as TROY appears. It should not be entirely clear to the audience as whether this is the play or a pre-curtain speech.

TROY

Al-right! Well! Guess it’s just gonna be us.

TROY goes to one of the desks.

On that desk before TROY are: a pair of shooting eyeglasses, a package of foam ear plugs, heavy ear protectors and a single ammo magazine.

TROY

First thing: Troy McDaniel, city police fourteen years, five years regional SWAT, final year patrol task force, don’t bother hitting the internet I’ll tell you now I was discharged for complications in connection with the administration, they didn’t appreciate my results-oriented methods, I didn’t appreciate their lack of values, no matter!, I’m here now as senior trainer and range supervisor, I appreciate the referrals.

As TROY continues he takes the pair of shooting eyeglasses, unfolds them and places them over his eyes.

TROY

If any of you! Happen to be carrying personal firearms or live ammo please signify as such so we can get those stowed at front counter, without names or IDs, and we only take cash, all for reasons that’ll become obvious later.

As TROY continues he unpacks foam ear plugs and lodges them into each ear, and then cups over his ears a set of heavy protectors, and adjusts to snug fit.

TROY

We'll be covering! Lots of important information and with all the bang-bang racketing 'round this place I'd like to not repeat myself over and over and over so please keep your ears more receptive than usual, my vocal cords and patience ain't what they used to be.

As TROY continues he palms the ammo magazine.

TROY

And before it happens! Turn off your damn phones, no one wants to hear how important you think you are, and do NOT ask whether we're gonna shoot the assault rifles, I know everybody sees 'em hanging up front and gets all excited but we'll be sticking to handguns as this firing range course is designed to arm you, *arm you*, with the fundamentals of both defensive shooting and the deployment of lethal force in a real-world fight under a variety of stressful scenarios.

As TROY continues he spreads his body holster vest and brandishes a 9mm Glock handgun, racks the slide, locks to the rear.

TROY

So most important and fin-al-ly! Bathrooms are down the hall and I suggest you go now because people with minimal firearm familiarity, no matter how tough they think they are, still demonstrate a tendency to drop bladder with the shock of the first shot.

Immediately we are assaulted by the shouting of Men. They are the gun.

MEN

Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!

TROY

Now!...

We hear emergency sirens, distant.

TROY

...let's get started.

All goes dark.

SCENE 2.

Now.

From darkness, a single light develops on JIM seated by the second desk. His focus is fixed. We see his hands are cuffed.

BEN-DAVID enters.

BEN-DAVID

Hey. Um...

BEN-DAVID takes a chair from behind the first desk, unsure if he should drag it to a position near JIM.

BEN-DAVID

You okay?...I mean, not physically, or...

JIM: no movement.

BEN-DAVID

You haven't talked to anybody? Here? Or at the scene, you haven't said anything?

JIM: no movement.

BEN-DAVID

I was in court, a case, and one of my associates bust in, basically screaming about what went down, and everyone just got up and ran out, right in the middle of...it's alright I sit here?

JIM: no movement.

BEN-DAVID

I would've come sooner but I went to the school first, that's why it took so long. Thought I might catch your car or gather additional—don't say anything. I don't want *you* to say anything, especially here, unless there's a specific—no, don't say anything. Alright, I have to ask. It's okay? The lawyer thing?

JIM: no movement.

BEN-DAVID

Look, I’m here, the old Ben-David, just like things used to be. And I realize what you’re probably going through, *what you did*, but it’s important to get this now, to capture as close to the event as possible, so that memory doesn’t corrupt later. I need you to tell me exactly what you said when the cops first arrived at the scene. Can you do that?

JIM: no movement.

BEN-DAVID

Not what you saw, not what you thought, definitely not *what you did*, nothing about the event itself, it’s not safe to talk about that here, just what you said when the cops, sheriffs, fire, whoever first approached you.

JIM: no movement.

BEN-DAVID

Alright, you know?, don’t worry about it. And about before. You and me, that’s over, that’s done. Why I called Alan. Driving from the scene to here I let Alan know I was coming to you. I’m sure he doesn’t even know the extent of what happened, all the attention this is going to get, already the lead story everywhere, I mean just from what I’ve gathered, *what you did*.

JIM: no movement.

BEN-DAVID

So I’m going to try and help the best I can. If you want me to. If not, I get it, you don’t want me to be involved because of where we kind of left off and that’s fine...but this is very serious. Now, it’s very serious. The best thing you can do is not answer any questions. I can’t answer any questions unless my attorney’s present. They ask your name, they ask your age, they ask if they can ask something, not unless my attorney’s present, whether or not that’s me. My clients, after catastrophic events, get overwhelmed, distraught, and they speak, they utter statements they don’t even realize they’re saying that can be harmful later. We don’t know every everything at this point. I mean this is barely a couple hours old.

ALAN [OFF]

Ben-David!

JIM

He’s dead, isn’t he.

BEN-DAVID

Jim, PLEASE.

ALAN

Ben-David!

BEN-DAVID

...the hell are you doing here.

ALAN

You called me.

BEN-DAVID

To tell you not to come here.

ALAN

He okay?

BEN-DAVID

I already got my staff grabbing everything they can on stand your ground, culpable negligence, you name it. In the meantime, I'm working on getting him released.

ALAN

Not *where* is he, *how*.

BEN-DAVID

How he is, is...he's the shooter still alive to talk about it.

ALAN

Got your number on the backseat of every cop car? If you throw your life away and then shoot up the high school, Ben-David's your guy?

BEN-DAVID

I didn't chase anything down.

ALAN

Last time I saw Jim you told him we wanted nothing to do with him.

BEN-DAVID

Your being here is dangerous.

ALAN

We're friends.

BEN-DAVID

The three of us grew up together, that’s it.

ALAN

Playing guns in the forest?

BEN-DAVID

Well it sure wasn’t in front of the high school.

ALAN

And Jim called you.

BEN-DAVID

I don’t think what’s in dispute here is this Gavin kid. Walking towards the high school with the trench coat on, the rifle underneath. Jim happened to be standing outside. By the front pull-up area. Waiting for his daughter. Right place at the right time.

ALAN

I’m hearing Jim fired something like fifteen shots.

BEN-DAVID

He was startled. A stampede of emotions.

ALAN

Are you serious.

BEN-DAVID

Hey, as far as anyone knows, Jim doesn’t have any priors. He’s a townie, right? Basic education, boring job, your average nobody from nowhere with nothing much to show for it.

ALAN

Now you want to stick up for him.

BEN-DAVID

He just saved the high school. A preempted shooter-massacre? How many kids could’ve died? If Jim hadn’t intervened how many teachers might’ve been slaughtered? This kind of thing has never happened before. This is already one of those first-time-ever major international events.

ALAN

And he called you and asked you to come here.

BEN-DAVID

Look, once the cheering fades he’ll be thrown under a pretty high-powered microscope. His past associations, his recent history. You get what I’m saying?

ALAN

Man, you’re acting like...

JIM

He’s dead...

ALAN

Like we don’t have anything to do with this.

JIM

...isn’t he.

BEN-DAVID

PLEASE. Jim. Please. If there’s one thing you can do it’s to *say nothing*.

JIM

I shot him.

BEN-DAVID

[Pauses, then moves close] Two people.

JIM

...

BEN-DAVID

You shot...two people.

ALAN

He shot two kids.

BEN-DAVID

See. This is why...don’t say...another thing.

Lights shift.

SCENE 3.

*We hear an emergency call recording,
screams and noises in the background.*

DISPATCH
9-1-1 emergency.

VOICE, GIRL
Police! They're shooting!

DISPATCH
What's the address?

VOICE, GIRL
Right in front!

DISPATCH
Where are you?

VOICE, GIRL
Behind a desk. I see one of them!

DISPATCH
Police and medics en route.

The call fades.

SCENE 4.

Then.

TROY and JIM at the desk. TROY holds the Glock.

TROY

Let's get! Your first lesson going. You own one?

JIM

No.

TROY

Ever use one?

JIM

No.

TROY

No never?

JIM

No.

TROY

Glock 34! Single-stack nineteen cal locked breech semi-auto. Most police departments: standard. Mom and Dad home use: popular. You at least familiar?

JIM

Not really.

TROY

How not really.

JIM

Aim and fire.

TROY

Yeah, before this goes any further let's yank that from your head socket. This ain't just aim and fire. Like driving a car for the first time, you just plop the seat and floor the pedal!, hit the highway!

JIM

I’m a pretty good driver.

TROY

Motor vehicle fatalities: in this country: how many last year?

JIM

I don’t know.

TROY

Thirty-three thousand. Now how many gun deaths: this country: last year.

JIM

A lot more?

TROY

Same number, thirty-three thousand. Most of ‘em suicides. And more guns out there than cars.

JIM

Seems, you know, thirty-three thousand more than zero.

TROY

...you trying to be funny with me.

JIM

No?

TROY

What’s not funny is we’re only teaching driving in schools. *Rule number one!* The basis of all that is holy and good in this world: point the muzzle where you want to point it, do not point it where you don’t want to point it.

JIM

Is this loaded?

TROY

Repeat the holy.

JIM

Point where I want to point it, don’t point where I don’t want to point it.

TROY

That’s your new daily prayer, your personal mission statement, keep your finger OFF the trigger.

JIM

Sorry.

TROY

OFF the trigger until the sights are aligned.

JIM

Which sights?

TROY

We got a ways to go before that. Let’s start with loading.

JIM

So it’s unloaded.

TROY

And we’re gonna load it.

JIM

With bullets.

TROY

As opposed to daffodils, yes. Magazine cradled like this, finger against the long, palm smack to ensure it’s locked. You righty?

JIM

Lefty.

TROY

My luck...[moving the Glock to JIM’s left hand]...active grip, firm handshake.

JIM

So this is loading.

TROY

[Performing the task] Jack the slide then release by coming underneath with your right hand and press check to make sure your round’s in the chamber.

JIM

AHHH, damnit!

TROY

Yeah, that slide coming forward can snag like a mother but I feel there’s only one true way to learn and that’s—KEEP YOUR FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER.

Pause.

JIM

I’m just saying my driver’s ed teacher was a lot nicer.

TROY

Bad guys don’t have time for nice. Nice is a town in France. France limits how many guns you can have.

JIM

It’s a little confusing.

TROY

You think? Hell, anything’s simple ‘til you work at it. Then the simple becomes unlimited. [Pause] I got this course at sixteen weeks. I got us drilling proper procedure over and over and over so it becomes like reflex. So it becomes an ingrained part of your bodily fight system. And as a result you’ll get trained more than some cops in their entire career. Because cops don’t get jumped. You know who does? You do. You get accosted on the street. Your house gets invaded. A threat presents itself on its timing. You don’t get to decide when or where or how. And the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy. With better training. That’s why this is far beyond aim and fire. This...is membership. And that’s why you’re here, right?

We hear store shopping music.

ALAN

Jim?

TROY

Right?

ALAN

Jim?

TROY

Then keep your finger OFF the trigger. And let’s try it again.

Lights shift.

SCENE 5.

Then.

ALAN carries a grocery store hand basket, filled with cheese and wine.

JIM carries a similar basket, his filled with canned food and duct tape. JIM now wears some defense-style, Guns-&-Ammo type attire.

Jim.

ALAN

Pause.

Alan.

JIM

Hey.

ALAN

Pause.

Hey.

JIM

Good to see you.

ALAN

Yeah.

JIM

Pause.

What's going on?

ALAN

Good.

JIM

ALAN

Yeah.

JIM

Yeah. Fine.

Pause.

ALAN

You been okay? I mean, you, you're...

JIM

What.

ALAN

It's just, you know, I saw you.

JIM

Where.

ALAN

Here. I saw you, here. Shopping.

JIM

Oh. Right.

ALAN

I haven't talked to you in a while. Been wondering how you're doing.

JIM

A-plus.

ALAN

Great, good, I'm glad, because...

JIM

What.

Pause.

ALAN

It's just that I heard. From Ben-David.

JIM

You talk to Ben-David.

ALAN

Don't you?

JIM

Not since Miriam left.

ALAN

Right. I mean I guess I don't *talk* to Ben-David like the three of us used to. He's always in court. But when we did see each other, recently, and we were sitting around like old times he told me about...

JIM

What.

ALAN

...your job. Hey, some of my patients tell me these online companies wait for the slightest excuse to shrink payroll. Even my clinic, doesn't matter you write the prescription or file claims, it's like everyone's worried about downsizing.

JIM

It wasn't downsizing. I let them know they had no values.

ALAN

...oh.

JIM

Besides, I'm shifting industries.

ALAN

Well, you're like a transferrable skill, right? There's got to be other places looking for...

JIM

Pulling boxes from shelves, putting 'em on a conveyor?

ALAN

Right.

JIM

S'not what I do anymore.

ALAN

Oh.

JIM

I’m switching careers.

ALAN

I guess this is what happens when I don’t call. I should’ve called. It’s my fault. I’m going to call, from now on.

JIM

I got a new line, military grade. Regular cell’s like holding up a welcome sign for hacking your personal defense.

ALAN

Well, look, I’m just glad you came out this way, otherwise //I would have--

JIM

I’m not allowed here?

ALAN

No. No-no. It’s just not your, you know...where you live.

JIM

I’ve been hanging at a new spot. Near here. Changes the way you look at the world. Gives you the ability to feel a part of something bigger than yourself.

ALAN

Does it involve hymns and a plate getting passed?

JIM

Makes you realize the holes you’ve fired into your life. The danger you didn’t even realize is all around you. And since it’s just me in the house, since Sophie left with Miriam, I’ve given myself an important project. The kind of thing every American should have.

ALAN

[JIM’s basket] A wholesale business?

JIM

Being prepared.

ALAN

Uh-huh.

JIM

A biometric door. For the backyard. Something a friend could help me install.

ALAN

Yeah, well, shoot me a shout and...

JIM

That a yes?

ALAN

I'll check with Tina, you know, she's gets into something new, and it's all boating all the time.

JIM

You got a boat.

ALAN

We're moving to a new dock. Today.

JIM

[ALAN's basket] Making a year-long cruise of it?

ALAN

No, there's...other people.

JIM

Ben-David? Miriam?

ALAN

...look, give me your new number, I'll—

JIM

Forget it. See you 'round, Alan.

JIM goes to off, leaving ALAN standing there.

Lights fade.

SCENE 6.

From darkness, an emergency call.

DISPATCH

9-1-1, what's the emergency?

VOICE, FEMALE

I need an ambulance! There was shooting!

DISPATCH

Where are you?

VOICE, FEMALE

There's a girl bleeding!

DISPATCH

Where is this?

VOICE, FEMALE

Front parking lot! We're behind a car!

DISPATCH

Alright, ambulance on the way.

VOICE, FEMALE

Why is this happening!

Noise fades.

SCENE 7.

Then.

TROY stands behind the first desk with JIM who is extending the Glock.

Both wear protective eyewear and ear cups, the latter causing them to speak louder.

TROY

Thumbs up! On the trigger hand, you’re giving thumbs-up to the bad guy. And turn your support wrist.

JIM

Like...?

TROY

How many times we drill this? Now we’re finally on first shoot and you’re getting range brain on me? Finger OFF the trigger.

JIM

Sorry.

TROY

No more *sorry*, okay, just get your stance right: hips back, chest forward.

JIM

Okay.

TROY

Are your sights aligned?

JIM

I think so.

TROY

You can’t *think* you’re going to win the encounter, you have to *know* you’re going to win. Now: sights aligned, yes or no?

JIM

Yes.

TROY
Is your finger ON the trigger?

JIM
Yes.

TROY
Are you breathing?

JIM
Not really.

TROY
Breathing’s overrated, large muscle groups take over during crisis anyway, but *fin-al-ly!* The fun begins! Give me one shot to the target!

No movement.

TROY
One shot, center target!

No motion.

JIM
Is my chest forward enough?

TROY
Pull the trigger, Jim.

JIM
Yeah, no, I’m...um...

TROY
Put the gun down.

JIM
Yeah, that’s...this is good, the range, the whole...target. Once I get accustomed I’ll feel more comfortable.

TROY
Why are you here.

JIM
To...the gun.

TROY

Why. Are. You. Here.

JIM

I told you.

TROY

No, you didn't. You haven't said much of anything at all. Which I appreciate 'cuz most everyone comes here just to yammer my ears off 'bout how much they hate their boss, how much they love their gear, how much they're gonna need their off-the-grid survival compound once the gun grabbers take our freedom. Irritating as hell 'cuz it gets in the way of shooting. But you're different. So I'm curious, I'm actually interested: why are you here.

JIM

How'd you first get into guns?

TROY

To hunt for food but we're not talking about me.

JIM

...defensive shooting.

TROY

And what if the bad guys have a gun.

JIM

...

TROY

How 'bout we chalk this up as simple misalignment of values. It happens. Been nice, alright?

JIM

Don't do that.

TROY

Listen: this place is for joyless fanatics.

JIM

That's fine.

TROY

It’s not fine. Because for the first time I really don’t know why one of my devotees is here. You’re a man, right? It’s like learning this stuff is somehow foreign to you.

JIM

A lot of things have become foreign. My wife.

TROY

She doesn’t want a gun in the house.

JIM

She didn’t want *her* in the house. My friends now live on the good side of the lake, alright? And my wife never got over I wasn’t some lawyer or doctor that //also had the—

TROY

//Hey-hey-hey. I’m not really the guy //who—

JIM

You asked why I’m here. I never thought she’d leave. For some guy she met through my two friends. Driving the fancy whatever at his fancy lakeside place. My daughter decided to walk out as well. That was the real kicker, when Sophie decided to go. And friends aren’t supposed to take sides but my two close buddies, the ones I grew up with...I guess it’s been a long time they’ve all been walking out on me. Because the thing is, the real thing is, every day you feel less a man. And what is being a man today, what is that? I know what it used to be.

TROY

You ever hit her?

JIM

I mean, I guess when I realized when they were walking out on me, how being a man didn’t just walk out on me, it was full-on *running away* from me and it’s never coming back, and that was it, like something right here finally collapsed, like the last piece of whatever was holding me together fell out, and I wanted so very badly to grab, in my hands, to fire back, to *squeeze*, and...

TROY

You’re not the only one.

JIM

What’s that mean.

TROY

It means I'd like to take you further but not if it's for something you don't really want or for something you're never gonna get over. Taking people halfway here is dangerous. You think you're the only one that's had the sanctity of his being threatened?

JIM

That's...that's what I'm saying.

TROY

And I know what you're saying. And I'm saying what you see here isn't a gun. I mean it may look like a gun but that's not what it is. What this is...is purpose. Purpose never is halfway. Not here. Purpose here is all or nothing. And that kind of *all*, that kind of *commitment*, carries the potential to *belong*. And once you belong...well, I've seen it. A man can get back whatever he feels he's lost.

Long pause.

JIM picks up the gun and moves into proper posture.

JIM

Hips, chest, grip, wrist, sights...finger ON the trigger.

TROY moves behind JIM, into observer position.

TROY

I want one shot. Center target.

The MEN buzz.

MEN

Shoot it shooter, one time shooter, fire shooter, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!

JIM

Hey. Look at that! You see that!

TROY

Keep your sights downrange!

JIM

Dead center! Tell me that wasn't right in the middle!

TROY

Okay, Wyatt Earp, settle down.

JIM

That was loud! Is it always that loud?

TROY

My God.

JIM

Can we do that again?

Lights shift.

SCENE 8.

Now.

We hear a muffled noise, what could be a lock getting picked, and what could be pushing against a door.

JIM still holds the gun but now hearing sound moves to grab a tactical flashlight, holds underneath the 9mm, both beam and gun aligned and pointed.

JIM

Get back, I’m armed!

ALAN

[Whisper shout] Jim!

JIM

You’ve entered a private residence and I’m armed!

ALAN enters. He holds an assault knife. JIM lowers the gun. They stare at each other.

ALAN

Doesn’t matter how good you seal one of these biometric doors, you leave sharp tools lying around your backyard...

JIM

What are you doing.

ALAN

You know. Just in the neighborhood. [Pause] No, I was at the high school. Standing before the main doors with everyone and you can’t help but see the light from miles away, all the podiums, vans, crews on your front yard. Oh...[withdraws from his scrubs a sub wrapped in foil, tosses to JIM]...from NBC.

JIM

What.

ALAN

FOX was leftover Chinese.

JIM

You just walked around back.

ALAN

I used to be great at this, remember? Besides, they’re all covering the peace walk. Didn’t think I’d get this big a turnout.

JIM

What are you doing.

ALAN

Me? You should see mean old Miss Mosser. Used to get furious when I’d sneak in her house and steal her cats. You, me and Ben-David would throw the cats onto telephone pole wires? Saw her just now, in a wheelchair, getting pushed by that guy who used to sell your Dad his paint. Even Tina’s Dad is walking. All these years and he’s still pissed about catching me with Tina on the counter of his fillet station. You and Ben-David were supposed to be lookout but having your first experience with that God-awful stuff I stole from his liquor trunk. We tried to make it up to him by bringing Ms. Mosser’s cats to his house to eat his fish bones.

JIM

Get out, Alan.

Pause.

ALAN

Ben-David would have an aneurysm if he knew I was talking to you.

JIM

Go out the way you came in.

ALAN

The girl you shot, she’s supposed to live. But the liver, you know, the largest organ. Still no clue about this Gavin.

JIM

Don’t speak his name.

ALAN

You know Gavin’s parents?

JIM

What’d I just say.

ALAN

All I can think about is if you weren’t there. What would’ve happened. I think everyone would feel a lot calmer if they heard from you.

JIM

Is Sophie walking?

ALAN

She hasn’t left her house, either.

BEN-DAVID [OFF]

[Entering] Hey.

ALAN

Her new house.

BEN-DAVID

Listen, we’re uh, we’re gonna need a little shift in strategy.

JIM

[To ALAN] She say anything about me?

BEN-DAVID

I went ahead and met with a very discreet and connected PR firm.

ALAN

She’s still trying to accept this as a real event. We all are.

BEN-DAVID

I think it’s time we end your silence and make some preemptive media strikes.

JIM

Why are you doing this?

ALAN

All we have is our childhood.

BEN-DAVID

Heroism. We spin heroism on our terms.

JIM

Why are you helping me?

ALAN

Because you saved all those people, their childhood.

BEN-DAVID

I’m a little involved in this, too.

JIM

As my friend?

BEN-DAVID

As your lawyer.

JIM

One became a lawyer and the other a doctor and I became something they were embarrassed about so they introduced my wife to one of their fancy new friends.

BEN-DAVID

That doesn’t matter right now. What matters is the County Attorney and the Governor, the state’s chief legal enforcement officer herself, are getting hit with calls. Amazing how many people out there don’t want Dads saving kids, huh? I told them they’re crazy if they want to take court action against you. I told them Gavin Stewart was a psycho with a death wish. I got troubling school reports, damning student testimony, Gavin’s online rants outlining intent, all about the *mundane* and *extra-large*. On the other hand, I got Jim Bender, suburban Dad. I got video of the shooting, conclusive footage from school cameras, I got witnesses. I told them they’re about to rename main street and the goddamned football stadium after you. But since there hasn’t been one word from you since the shooting, the prosecutors were wondering out loud, to me in fact, whether your silence isn’t because you’re distressed or unaccustomed to attention. They’re wondering if there isn’t something more to the story.

JIM

Do you want to know?

BEN-DAVID

Not really. No. I asked you not to say anything. The more I know the worse off we both are. Besides, I know enough, don’t I? I’m thinking released statements, closed interviews because you’re against the thought of taking a public lap while an innocent girl caught in the legally justified crossfire still suffers.

JIM

No.

BEN-DAVID

PR says there’s money involved.

JIM

So I can pay you?

BEN-DAVID

Would you believe gobs of dough are getting collected for your legal defense fund? The gun people. No, this is about us dodging a bul—...I’ll make it like a little microwave meal, alright? Prepared, nice and easy, so nothing gets said that might come back later to shoot us <<in the>>...

JIM

Miriam walked out. Then Sophie. Then you and Alan.

BEN-DAVID

The prosecutors want to know the minutes, days and years leading to the shooting. Had Jim Bender shown a recent change of personality? Any history of aggressive behavior? What do his former coworkers say? *And what the hell was he doing at the front of the school?*

JIM

It seems simple to you, doesn’t it.

BEN-DAVID

No. It seems simple to them. The people who want you in jail. The rest just want to hear from the guy who stopped a massacre, even if a stray bullet might have almost killed an innocent girl.

JIM

I’m sorry about that but I’m not gonna go on TV so those manipulators //can twist my words into some kind of—

BEN-DAVID

//Hey-Hey-HEY! You know what! I don’t think we should use that word!

JIM

What word.

BEN-DAVID

Sorry. [Pause] I’m your lawyer.

JIM

You used to be my friend.

BEN-DAVID

I’m your lawyer facing facts, most of which aren’t in dispute, but the big ugly fact that’s gonna stick out and wave its dirty little hands is that you didn’t then and don’t now *seem sorry*. And that’s the brush by which certain people can paint some grey. Which is why I advise PR.

JIM

Why are you doing this.

ALAN

Because I didn’t say anything before.

BEN-DAVID

Because of the last time we saw each other.

JIM

You tossed me out.

BEN-DAVID

After that. You tried to tell me...?

JIM

...

BEN-DAVID

Yeah. I’m doing this because I’m torn between what you did and what I did. I raced to the cop station as fast as I could after the shooting because if I wasn’t your lawyer there’d be no attorney-client confidentiality...

*We hear singing, a large group singing,
faint, angelic.*

BEN-DAVID

...which means I’d have to tell everything I know.

BEN-DAVID goes.

*ALAN pulls from his pocket an envelope,
hands to JIM.*

ALAN

From Sophie.

ALAN goes.

JIM alone, reads the greeting card, reacts.

The singing fades to party music as...

Lights shift.

SCENE 9.

Then.

Party music.

JIM in camouflage hooded jacket, green gloves, and ammo belt. He also has a bottle in hand, drunk.

JIM

Al-right! Yo Alan! Alan, baby! Open up, man! Let me see you! Get your skinny doctor ass out here!

ALAN enters.

ALAN

Jim.

JIM

Alan! It's your old friend Jimmy Jims!

ALAN

Shit.

JIM

A-l-a-n!

ALAN

What's going on.

JIM

Bud-dy! My bud-dy! Buddy buddy.

ALAN

You okay?

JIM

You okay?

ALAN

You're here.

JIM

Straight damn I’m here. Ready to have a good time! Good time Jim, that’s who I am!

ALAN

I’m kind of having a little social gathering.

JIM

Need some help? ‘Course you do, I can help liven some shit up!

ALAN

That’s okay.

JIM

Because you got a party. I said: you got a party.

ALAN

Yes.

JIM

And what party is that?

ALAN

It’s a party.

JIM

No shit it’s a party. We already said it’s a party.

ALAN

Jim.

JIM

Wait-wait, lemme guess: Tina. Got fancy paper envelopes. And mailed ‘em out and said bring your summer finest but SHHHHH, don’t tell! And those losers reached out to their *friends*, and said HEY. We are having a very secret and very special SURPRISE for...

ALAN

Jim.

JIM

MIRIAM!

ALAN

Look, it’s probably not the best time.

JIM

For what. What’s it not a good time for?

ALAN

Getting together like this.

JIM

With my old friend Alan? Cuz I got a *real* nice present. I got...shit, I left it in the car, come on.

ALAN

You drove here?

JIM

No, I pushed my Ford to your ugly-ass lake house. C’mon, let’s go.

ALAN

It’s okay.

JIM

I said let’s go.

ALAN

I should have told you. That wasn’t right of me, okay?

JIM

You always were weak, Alan, trying to make everyone *get along*. You still want me along, right? I’m along now.

JIM moves off.

BEN-DAVID is on.

BEN-DAVID

Hey. We’re about to do cake.

ALAN

Problem.

BEN-DAVID

Candles?

ALAN
Jim.

BEN-DAVID
Jim what.

ALAN
Bender.

BEN-DAVID
...where.

ALAN
Here.

BEN-DAVID
Drinking?

ALAN
What do you think.

BEN-DAVID
You invited him?

ALAN
He just showed up.

BEN-DAVID
I can't believe this.

ALAN
He's a little not happy.

BEN-DAVID
You know what, I'm done with him.

ALAN
Please, not my house.

BEN-DAVID
No, I'm saying something.

ALAN
Maybe we get Miriam to come out and—

BEN-DAVID

Definitely not. I’m sick of it. He needs to know this is over.

JIM [OFF]

Check. This. Shit. Out!

JIM is back on, carrying a sparkling revolver.

JIM

Limited edition! Drove to three shows and three more shows after that before I found somebody who knew somebody who’d sell it to me. Fuck blowing out candles, we’re gonna fire this baby out back forty-five times.

BEN-DAVID

Jim.

JIM

Ben-David! What a surprise.

BEN-DAVID

What are you doing here.

JIM

What a lovely little law question. What am I doing here. Well...let’s see...my ex-wife’s inside my ex-friend’s shitty lake house with my other ex-friend to show off her new stud so I thought I’d stumble on by and wish her a really happy birthday.

BEN-DAVID

You’re putting me in a tough spot.

JIM

I’m putting you in a tough spot. What kind of tough spot am I putting you in?

ALAN

Jim, let’s talk about this.

JIM

Oh, yes! Talking With Alan! How about: no more talking and you and the rest of your weak pussy friends get my wife out here so I can give her her present.

BEN-DAVID

Jim, maybe you didn’t hear me but this is no longer a place for you to just—

JIM

Don't fucking TOUCH ME.

JIM pulls out another gun, from concealed holster, two guns in two hands.

ALAN

Whoa. Easy.

JIM

Don't fucking *easy* me. Don't...

ALAN

Please.

JIM

Fucking *please* me. You feel this? I want you to feel yourself.

BEN-DAVID

Fine. You want to feel me? Let's go.

ALAN

Ben-David.

BEN-DAVID

You think that's strength?

ALAN

He's kidding, Jim.

BEN-DAVID

I'm not kidding. That's weakness. But I don't really care anymore. Get out of here.

JIM

My name's Jim. You know me? You remember me?

BEN-DAVID

I remember the guy we grew up with. I remember the guy who was our friend, a bit out of place and out of sorts, but the guy who was our friend. And I remember the guy who got left by his wife. And I felt for you. But somewhere between getting dumped and getting canned at work came the attitude, the bad guys are out to get us, the riot gear. I don't know this guy. I don't know where he came from. And I'm *not* sorry to be the one to say it but nobody wants this guy around.

ALAN

Put those away before somebody gets hurt.

JIM

All of you walked out on me.

ALAN

Jim, *please*.

JIM

All of you...[aiming the gun at himself]...

BEN-DAVID/ALAN

Whoa! Put it down!

JIM

WALKED. OUT. ON—

VOICE, SOPHIE [OFF]

Dad?

Long pause.

VOICE, SOPHIE [OFF]

Dad?

JIM

Sophie.

VOICE, SOPHIE [OFF]

What are you doing?

JIM

Uh. Dad's here. With Mr. Ben-David. And Mr. Alan.

BEN-DAVID

[To off] Go back inside.

JIM

It’s okay, I just...brought a...it’s good seeing you, honey...it’s real good.

Immediately we are assaulted by the shouting of MEN. They are the gun.

MEN

Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!, Bang!

Lights shift.

SCENE 10.

Now and then.

*TROY parades to center stage, now wearing
camo vest, green gloves, night shades and
ammo belt. He also carries a modified
assault hand pistol.*

BEN-DAVID

My client is a longstanding member of this community who has always carried an obligation to serve the greater good of the community, like we all do, against those who bear the potential to perpetrate senseless acts and pose immediate and imminent harm to public safety.

MEN

Bang!

*JIM joins TROY, similar wardrobe and
weaponry.*

TROY

Fan-tastic! Good corner attacks, good crouch and cover. Still need better marksmanship.

JIM

Yeah, I was off balance.

TROY

Next time. Unload and prepare for debrief.

JIM

What?

TROY

Clear your weapon, disassemble.

JIM

C'mon Troy, it took forever to set the scenario room, I don't want to stop now.

TROY

We got someone new joining and I don't want him thrown to the heavy 'til I know he can shoot straight.

GAVIN enters, unsure.

TROY
Hey! You the new guy?

GAVIN
...

TROY
You registered for my course?

GAVIN
...

TROY
You got any weapons or ammo on you?

JIM
Troy, ease up huh?, he’s my kid’s age. [To GAVIN] Don’t worry, he tries to scare everyone off at first.

TROY
Be a safer world if I did.

JIM
Welcome. I’m Jim.

GAVIN
...

JIM
You got a name?

GAVIN
Um. Gavin. Gavin Stewart.

Blackout.

END ACT ONE.

ACT TWO.

SCENE 11.

Then.

Sitting at one desk is JIM, attentive, almost vibrating. JIM writes down everything TROY says into a military-style field notepad.

GAVIN sits at the other desk.

TROY stands, lecturing.

TROY

Death is! The absence of distance between you and a threat.

JIM

Yes.

TROY

Life is! The continuation of existence as long as you and that threat do not occupy the same space.

JIM

So true.

TROY

But!...routine threat.

JIM

Mmm.

TROY

We're not talking 'bout that, are we.

JIM

No.

TROY

NOOOooo. Because today's threats: sophisticated, coordinated and increasingly discharged FROM???

JIM

Firearms.

TROY

Fire-arms! Handheld, low-cost, widely accessible machines of projectile discharge all while the phe-nom-e-non known as popular entertainment suggests you can somehow *outrun* said projectiles. That fired at your personage you can magically *elude* or *repel*. Is this the CASE???

JIM

No.

TROY

The case it is not! So! When it comes to an actual firearm engagement. Say at the laundromat or local convenience. And a threat is PRESENTED???

Jim.

JIM

Announce in a loud voice you have a concealed weapon!

TROY

Negative.

JIM

Oh.

TROY

That’s gonna lose you the fight.

JIM

[Referencing his notepad] Body advantage through verbal judo?

TROY

Objective, yours, at this mortal moment is neutralize the threat. Objective, yours, at this moment is assure safeguarding of your assets.

JIM

[Writing] Mmm.

TROY

Objective, yours, is assure victory. This won’t be synthetic stress but the real thing. Hence, there is no time to contemplate. There is less than zero time to negotiate. You do not stop fighting until the threat is stopped. Yes, Jim.

JIM

Shoot first?

TROY

I like your thinking but, and this is the point of today’s lecture, we got ourselves The Law. That’s what we’re gonna talk about today. The Law.

As TROY continues, we see a few small postcard-sized envelopes have slipped from JIM’s notepad to the ground. JIM regathers them.

TROY

Up until today I’ve been training from a tactic survival standpoint. Three shots to end a threat. First two in the fire array, quick, bam!-bam!, Bullet One likely skips through the body, Bullet Two lands, you got at least one lung out. Bullet Three slams behind, boom!, instant nullification of life, avoids the whole death rattle thing. So unless you’re stopping a runaway rhino at ramming speed you deploy a three-shot burst center target. But all that, everything you’ve been working on up ‘til this moment now needs to reconcile with The Law. Yes, Jim.

JIM

Well. I...I have these.

TROY

What’s that.

JIM

Here.

TROY

[Taking, looking] What’s this?

JIM

Invitations.

TROY

To what?

JIM

To a party.

TROY

...a what?

JIM

Well, the address. At the bottom. That’s my house.

TROY

...

JIM

So you’re invited. I wanted to invite you.

TROY

...to your house.

JIM

And the date’s just a suggestion. If there’s a date better for you, that’s...unless tomorrow night works, then great! And we can start later, unless...[to GAVIN]...school...and not *outside*, we can just...inside! And I’ve got imported, *domestic*, I can get...[To GAVIN]...water! Oh, and the email, you don’t have to RSVP, that’s just a little email I made for the party. Well not a *party*, I don’t want to sound like it’s going to be some kind of crazy wild...just...a gathering.

TROY

At your house.

JIM

In my house room, like a room, with carpeting, and chairs, enough for...[grabbing another invitation, handing to GAVIN]...here.

GAVIN

...

JIM

And everyone can park in the driveway. Yeah, just park in the driveway and walk around back to the new door I installed. I can write that on the invitation.

TROY

No, that’s...

JIM

So tomorrow night?, unless, you know, whenever.

TROY

[Handing back the invitation] Let’s talk about this after class.

JIM

Oh, yeah, after. After’s great. After’s really perfect. Thank you.

JIM sits down.

TROY

Um...

JIM raises his hand.

TROY

Yes. Jim.

JIM

[Reading his notes] *Death is!* The absence of distance between you and a threat.

JIM clicks his pen ready.

TROY

Right. Right.

Lights shift.

SCENE 12.

From darkness.

DISPATCH

9-1-1 emergency.

VOICE, WOMAN

You got a stalker at the high school.

DISPATCH

Sorry, can you repeat?

VOICE, WOMAN

Weirdo at the high school.

DISPATCH

What’s the address?

VOICE, WOMAN

I’m at my house, where are you?

DISPATCH

Is there an emergency?

VOICE, WOMAN

Same car’s been cruising the lot, same weirdo getting out, staring towards my house.

DISPATCH

What’s the emergency?

VOICE, WOMAN

These days, who knows?

Lights shift.

SCENE 13.

Then.

*We hear soft background party music,
perhaps the dull thrum of reggae.*

JIM and GAVIN sit across from each other.

*JIM and GAVIN each hold bottled water.
Their plastic bottles are topped with a
colorful straw and drink umbrella.*

They make eye contact, look away.

This holds for a while.

Troy said he was coming.

JIM

Music continues.

I didn't hear him say he wasn't.

JIM

Long pause.

He's probably busy at the range.

JIM

Long pause.

Dealing with the whole suicide thing.

JIM

Long pause.

What suicide.

GAVIN

They get them.

JIM

GAVIN

They do.

JIM

I went to train and there were a bunch of cop cars. The place shut down. Everyone standing outside like it was normal. Apparently, it happens enough.

GAVIN

Oh.

JIM

Guys rent a lane. For some reason the...

GAVIN

Far lane.

JIM

Yeah.

GAVIN

Huh.

JIM

They buy hollow tips.

GAVIN

Messy.

JIM

Weird.

Music continues.

JIM

Still. Hoping Troy would come. You drive here?

GAVIN

Don't have a car.

JIM

Your Dad drive you?

GAVIN

Don't have a Dad.

JIM

Me neither. I mean, not anymore.

GAVIN

You throw him out or something?

JIM

No. He died when I was your age.

GAVIN

Was he an asshole?

JIM

He was...quiet.

GAVIN

Was he a quiet asshole?

JIM

He didn't talk, really.

GAVIN

S' nice.

JIM

Unless politics. Then he talked.

GAVIN

He have a job?

JIM

Commercial paint. He worked two, three jobs a time. He'd always come home covered with flecks in his hair. That's how I knew him.

GAVIN

Oh.

JIM

Yeah, he came home and seemed to disappear to whatever room I wasn't in. I grew my hair out because I thought someday I'd go into painting with him and catch the flecks and one night he came home and instead of disappearing he saw my hair. We just stood there for a bit, me looking at him, him looking at my hair. Went ballistic. Quietly. Held me down, knee in my back, took one of his wall cutters and slashed my hair. He was a man's man I guess. It was like a heart attack, or...

GAVIN

My Dad was an asshole. Mom threw him out.

JIM

So it's just you and your Mom.

GAVIN

[Looking around] It's just you?

JIM

You know my daughter? Sophie Bender?

GAVIN

Yeah.

JIM

You're at the high school.

GAVIN

Kind'a.

JIM

She used to live here.

GAVIN

I don't talk to her. I don't talk much to anyone.

JIM

Simpler being quiet.

GAVIN

Yeah.

JIM

Everything’s better when it’s simple.

GAVIN

Yeah.

JIM

The simpler you keep things the more successful you’ll be. So I’ve been working to simplify things. [Clutching his notepad] It’s all simpler once you have a plan. You got a plan?

GAVIN

I got a plan.

JIM

See, I’m always watching myself firing, from behind the barrel, staring at the target, when all of a sudden this bullet, bigger than the room, comes back at me from the end of the range. Sorry, it’s a dream, I forgot to tell you that. And when I wake up I’m like: I’m the one making the dream. I should know what’s coming. Like there’s two of me, fighting for control. So to sort out the two of me I’ve been working on a plan. You really don’t have a plan?

GAVIN

I got one.

JIM

You should. You think you’re a man right now but you don’t realize you have to fight for it. ‘Cause we sure aren’t born with it. You think it’ll just show up, all you have to do is be there. My Dad died and I kind of stumbled along and the whole time I was like what is it? Because what we read about and what we’re taught, and then what we see in the world? I’ll tell you. I’ll give the answer but you still won’t know, because the truth is...

GAVIN

Gavin.

JIM

Right, Gavin, the truth is: things have changed.

GAVIN

Mmm.

JIM

I mean some things haven't changed. Earn the money. Provide the house. And *discipline* and/and/and *consistency*. That's all the same. That's been for ages. But what's changed is now how *we're the joke*. All those shows telling now how *we're* stupid. You know what I'm talking about. You know. We're on the same team. See them come in here and tell us we're like that. Because we still know how to get it. And to get it, it has to be done! My ex-wife never understood that. So let me ask, how you getting to the range without a car?

GAVIN *shrugs*.

JIM

Exactly. *Independence*. No excuses, just getting it done. See, I'm glad Troy's not coming. I wanted to get us all here to talk about this. That's why I had the party. A place and time to talk about *brotherhood*. It's been so long. But it's good, you and me. We got the range. And the high school. We got that between us. My two buddies and I had that. When my Dad died they didn't even know how much I depended on them. How I needed to *struggle* it out with them. We'd go on midnight raids, breaking into random places and screwing around because it was more than harmless fun, it was to *become* and/and/and *rejoice* in the sense of *becoming*. And what was that? On the surface it's foolishness and/and/and little rites of revolt but what it was was/was/was CONQUERING THE MUNDANE.

GAVIN

Mmm.

JIM

Right? If you want *to be* these days you have to be GRANDIOSE.

GAVIN

Yeah.

JIM

That's what I'm saying. Everything we do, everything we've ever done to conquer the mundane is to become EXTRA-LARGE. It's like this: it's like: you're either EXTRA-LARGE or you're small.

GAVIN

Yeah.

JIM

Yes.

GAVIN

Yeah.

JIM

And do we really want to be small? I mean, really?

GAVIN

No.

JIM

No. I sure do not. Because this suit we were born into, this legacy we’ve inherited, we only know one size.

GAVIN

Extra-large.

JIM

And there’s joy in that. And we have to find it. But you’re finding it. I’ve seen you at the range, how you go for grip and then nestle into the extra-large by shooting and we don’t have to talk about it. Asserting *is*. Confronting the forces against us *is*. See, I like holding doors for women ‘cause I’m *strong*. I like not having to talk about it ‘cause I’m *individual*. But what’s changed is some jerk cuts us off in traffic and now we’re supposed to let it go ‘cause we’re *forgiving*. We can’t talk politics now ‘cause we’re supposed to be *accepting*. We can’t stick to what’s worked for all these years ‘cause we’re *adapting*. All the stuff to distract us from being EXTRA-LARGE. I mean, all we are trying to do is figure out how to *squeeze* our small bit of joy from the EXTRA-LARGE before/before/before/before/before—

GAVIN

Death.

Music continues.

GAVIN

I’m not afraid of death.

JIM

Good. I mean, it’s...

GAVIN

I want it. I want death.

Music continues.

JIM

Like...

GAVIN

...like simplifying...like a plan.

JIM

Oh...it's not...

GAVIN

The far lane? *Is.* But what you're saying. What you're talking about.

JIM

...

GAVIN

You ever think about shooting up the high school?

This holds.

JIM

Well. That's...

GAVIN

I was thinking.

ALAN

Jim.

GAVIN

But now.

ALAN

Jim.

GAVIN

Now I'm thinking.

Music fades as lights shift.

SCENE 14.

Now.

ALAN seated at a bar.

JIM moves to ALAN, holding his field notepad, possibly pulling up a collar, shielding his face.

ALAN

Worried everyone might want autographs?

JIM

Came in the back.

ALAN

Believe this place? Same men in their same seats. Trying to get away from their same wives. Probably still no phone line. But. Know what they do have? New drink special.

JIM

[Reading] The Bender Fender.

ALAN

We can go somewhere else, if...

JIM

S'alright.

ALAN

Wasn't sure you were coming. Haven't passed a secret note since we were in high school. Never got your new number so I almost did one of those RSVP emails. What.

JIM

Nothing.

ALAN

I just thought the same bar our Dads came to. They used to park us on the curb outside before the start of summer parade and retreat in here, probably these very seats.

JIM

They knew how to be men.

ALAN

Well hey, whatever you want, on me. The Bender Fender’s pretty good, actually.

JIM

I don’t drink anymore.

Long pause.

ALAN

Ben-David said no contact but I felt it’s important. Turns out one of the prosecutors got in touch. They must have learned about...they want me to talk in court about what I know. They want me to talk about you.

JIM

Should get a lawyer.

ALAN

I don’t want a lawyer. What I want is: I want to know what happened.

JIM

Forget it, Alan.

ALAN

I’m not talking about the shooting. I want to know what happened with you, Jim. I want to know what happened with *you*. We used to be like this. We used to do everything together. So career-wise, life-wise, we went different directions. I never cared about that. I cared about the guy I grew up with. I cared about the guy who was my friend.

JIM

Really.

ALAN

Yes.

JIM

What happened was: you decided my friendship wasn’t necessary.

ALAN

Man, that was a long time coming. You don't realize when things started going south in your house, instead of coming to me to talk about it, it was the silence, the I'm just going to deal with it on my own. But maybe you're right. I didn't say anything either. I guess we never tell each other what we should when we should. So I'm asking: what happened to you?

JIM

...I'm talking to the guy who was my friend?

ALAN

...okay.

JIM

I couldn't sleep. Wake up, stare at half an empty bed, be up the rest of the night wondering how it all went wrong. What I did, what I didn't do. The guilt, the shame, the loss. Now? Can't sleep at all. My neck's bad. My teeth rattle. Also, my right eye stings. One of the rounds from the chamber must've ejected back. On range you have eyewear. And ear cups. Nonstop ringing now. Whaddya think Doc, was it the fourteenth or fifteenth shot my neck flamed out?

ALAN

What happened to you, Jim?

JIM

That's why we're here.

ALAN

Because I didn't ask before. But I'm asking now.

JIM

You don't know, Alan. You have no idea what it's like to be bad at life. To get upset with what you are. To not be happy with being you. Every day. And then wait for bad things to happen to you so you have an excuse to lash out for everything that went wrong.

ALAN

Think it was my second day at the clinic as a full-time doctor. My first day was all nerves and excitement but second day was when I realized: this is it. No more months off, no more stealing my Dad’s car and picking you and Ben-David up and cruising on a whim. The new me is wake up, explore the prostates of men, one after another, in small and dark rooms, for the next forty years. Second day was when I realized I wasn’t going to be the superstar, earth-shattering hero, the special whoever we were all told we were going to be. Maybe men don’t know how to be men anymore. Maybe it’s because we got betrayed by everything we thought we’d become. Maybe we lost whatever it was we thought we had. But if you ask me, and in small dark rooms men actually ask me, I think it’s because at our core we’re assemblers. We assemble things. And I’m nothing but one man in the world but it seems that when whatever we’ve assembled starts to unravel how we’ll turn to anything to piece back the myth of ourselves. But what the humble urologist never says is: there is no resolution. There never will be. Because we’ll never really find out who it is we are or why we’re here from now until the hour of our death. So the myth remains a mystery wrapped inside something we can’t even begin to understand. But you know what? Even if I could I wouldn’t want to be the myth. Must be a terrifying feeling. Instead all I have is the crushing weight of something else. Because one thing I did assemble, a very important thing of my life, I let go. I let you go, Jim. I didn’t stay a friend. So now all I do with that is try and help the world along in my own small way. But not you. In front of that high school, you saved us from unraveling.

JIM

I didn’t even feel like I was holding a gun.

ALAN

If I have to say something in court, whoever I am now, I can’t lose that by lying. So I’m asking: what happened to you?

JIM

...

ALAN

Alright.

ALAN hands JIM a small packet of pills.

ALAN

To help you sleep.

TROY

Emer-gency!

ALAN

I'll go out the back.

ALAN exits.

Lights shift.

SCENE 15.

Then.

JIM still holds his field notepad.

TROY lectures.

TROY

Your 9-1-1 call is the culminating action to public resource after a firearm engagement and cannot have the slightest bit of contaminating or incriminating...

JIM

Sorry.

TROY

Every word will be recorded NOT for training purposes but use against you at court or...

JIM

You see Gavin around?

TROY

That's not what you say on a 9-1-1 call.

JIM

You haven't seen him.

TROY

Jim Bender, male, Caucasian, calling from the basement level at Wesson's Guns & Fun.

JIM

Gavin say anything?

TROY

You wanna focus here?

JIM

I'm a little worried.

TROY

I'd be worried, too, I wasn't prepared with the 9-1-1 call as the weapon.

JIM

Troy, listen, he...he came to my house. The other night, it was just me and him.

TROY

Personal social hour ain't my terrain. Sorry if I didn't make it clear before.

JIM

He was talking about shooting.

TROY

And let's get back to that.

JIM

No, he...said something. It was troubling.

TROY

He's a teenager. Teenagers are generally troubled.

JIM

He said he was thinking to shoot up the high school. [Going to his field notepad] He was talking time of day, method of entry, attack posture. He even gave me back my invitation with stuff written down. Maybe we should do something, you know? Maybe if we talked to his Mom, or //take away his—

TROY is closing the field notepad.

TROY

I don't harbor any negative feelings towards you. All I can do is give you the tools and training to protect you and yours.

JIM

Troy, you don't understand, he wasn't saying it like a joke.

TROY

I wasn't there so I didn't hear anything.

JIM

Shouldn't we do something?

TROY

Jim: I don't harbor any negative feelings towards you. All I can do is give you the tools and training to protect you and yours.

JIM

We’re talking about somebody who’s been training with us.

TROY

No, *you’re* talking about it.

JIM

He’s been part of this.

TROY

How many years you go to a place, like the gym or the coffee shop, and if all of a sudden you never showed again, after all those years, would anybody there ask where you’ve gone? Wonder how you’re doing? Say we miss you, come on back? You want community, start a book club.

JIM

He told me. It was almost like he was looking for someone else to do it with him.

TROY

Are you sure *he* was the one saying it?

JIM

...

TROY

Maybe it ain’t a senseless act when it happens all the time. Now averaging one a day, some whacko popping off with this thing? Maybe at the rate we’re going, maybe it makes sense.

JIM

...

TROY

The only reason you insert yourself in another man’s trauma is if he’s coming towards you and draws down first. And the only time you talk to police is a 9-1-1 call at the conclusion of a firearm engagement.

BEN-DAVID

[Entering, seeing JIM] Shit.

TROY

Got it?

JIM

...I came to talk.

BEN-DAVID

At my country club parking lot.

TROY

You understand?

JIM

Something's come up.

BEN-DAVID

I'm really not interested.

JIM

No, I know, but there's a terrible thing that might happen.

BEN-DAVID

Look—

JIM

I mean it could be bad.

BEN-DAVID

The divorce isn't my—

JIM

No, not that, it's...I thought you could help.

BEN-DAVID

Well you thought wrong.

JIM

People could be involved.

BEN-DAVID

Maybe you didn't get the hint before.

JIM

Hey, this is serious.

BEN-DAVID

No shit, it’s serious. It’s sad, actually, but like I told you, I’m over it, we’re all over it.

JIM

I think there’s going to be a shooting.

BEN-DAVID

...I don’t want to be involved in your life anymore. You get that? I’m done. You want to play gun club? Great, call 9-1-1 and say the word. Let the cops come get their kicks. You’ll be dialing my number, begging for help, and I won’t answer. I’m telling everybody from here on out, all my colleagues, the entire legal system: THIS GUY NEVER GETS HELP. How’s that gonna play when child custody comes around?

JIM

I’m asking for your help.

BEN-DAVID goes. JIM remains alone.

The MEN are the gun.

MEN

That you used every reasonable means short of deadly force.

TROY

All I can do...

MEN

That you did not create unreasonable risk to others in the course of your actions.

TROY

...is give you the tools and training.

MEN

That the level of force used was necessary and no lesser force would do.

TROY

That’s what we got today.

MEN

That the violence against you was unprovoked and without forewarning.

TROY

That’s where we’re at.

MEN

And that your role in society is clear to you and there is no confusion to you or others.

VOICE, DISPATCH

9-1-1 emergency.

TROY

The rest is up to you.

MEN

And that your role in society is clear to you and there is no confusion to you or others.

Lights shift.

SCENE 16.

Then.

The MEN watch, GAVIN is opposite JIM.

VOICE, DISPATCH

9-1-1 emergency.

JIM [RECORDED]

My name’s Jim Bender! I’m...

VOICE, DISPATCH [RECORDED]

What’s the address?

JIM [RECORDED]

There’s been a SHOOTING! Shit.

VOICE, DISPATCH [RECORDED]

We’re getting calls.

JIM [RECORDED]

I HAVE MY EQUIPMENT WITH ME.

VOICE, DISPATCH [RECORDED]

What equipment.

JIM [RECORDED]

Oh, God.

VOICE, DISPATCH [RECORDED]

Are shots still being fired?

JIM

[Now spoken live] Jim Bender. Male. Caucasian. Front pickup area at the high school. I need police and ambulance as I may be going into shock. I’m a licensed permit-to-carry holder and I have my equipment with me.

The MEN shift as GAVIN dissolves.

JIM [RECORDED]

I’m hanging up.

Lights shift.

SCENE 17.

Now.

JIM places clothes and supplies into a survival-styled duffel bag.

BEN-DAVID detaches from the MEN, approaches JIM.

BEN-DAVID

Well. This has all been...interesting.

JIM

...[continues]...

BEN-DAVID

Wouldn't you say?

JIM

...[continues]...

BEN-DAVID

Well, I don't know if you remember, because people, after catastrophic events, they forget what they say, the statements they don't realize they're making. But I asked you not to say anything. I said don't say anything.

JIM

...[continues]...

BEN-DAVID

Packing light?

JIM

Depends how long I got.

BEN-DAVID

The legal system moves slower than bullets but it still moves. Even if it hits an innocent bystander along the way, right?

JIM

Am I under arrest?

BEN-DAVID

Not right now.

JIM

...what about Alan.

BEN-DAVID

Yeah, it's called contempt of court.

JIM

That going to jail?

BEN-DAVID

When a judge says you have to talk and you don't talk you go to jail.

JIM

How long.

BEN-DAVID

'Til the court hearing gets rescheduled. Alan may think he's being loyal by keeping his mouth shut but all he did by refusing to answer questions was invite even more scrutiny to your past. First Alan's peace walk, now contempt of court, and I hear he's trying to organize some unity rally before heading to adult detention. You knew about this?

JIM

Surprised as you.

BEN-DAVID

I don't think you are, actually.

JIM

I need your car keys.

BEN-DAVID

For what?

JIM

I'm going to the lake house. Wait out front for Sophie. My car was at the shooting, she won't come out if it's my car.

BEN-DAVID

I don't think so.

JIM

Then we’re going, for one week, wherever she wants. By the time we get back Alan will be out.

BEN-DAVID

My grandfather taught me how to aim a gun. Unopened soda cans on log stacks, the fizz like blood. First and last time I ever touched one. That’s where I learned to shoot. What about Gavin?

JIM

One week, that’s all I’m asking. You work for the gun people the rest of your life. And I get a week with my family.

BEN-DAVID

What are the chances of a preempted massacre? Interrupted, sure, but intercepted? Right before it’s about to go down?

JIM

I need your keys.

BEN-DAVID

You’re not going to need my car when you take Alan’s place in jail. Only I bet you’ll be there a lot longer.

JIM

...you still my lawyer?

BEN-DAVID

That’s all I am. Because at this point I’m not sure what’s worse, Alan’s silence for guilt or mine for my job. But there’s a third silence. Isn’t there.

JIM

[Hands BEN-DAVID the invitation] Suicide note.

BEN-DAVID

...

JIM

Gavin’s.

BEN-DAVID

You bastard.

JIM

Could've been worse. He came here a second time, wanting to talk about fertilizer and diesel. Nipped the bomb from his plan.

BEN-DAVID

The number that could have died. That you protected. That you saved so they could praise you as savior.

JIM

I didn't want this.

BEN-DAVID

No? Who's little plan was this? Who put this all together?

JIM

It wasn't a...

BEN-DAVID

You knew about it. Didn't you. You knew about it and you tried to tell me. At the country club parking lot.

JIM

Can I have your keys?

BEN-DAVID

God, the things we said about you. The things I said about you. Did you want some kind of worship ceremony? Were you looking for a medal?

JIM

You can cover me, until I get back.

BEN-DAVID

You think Sophie will just get in the car? I told her I'd protect you. But the truth is...I've really been protecting myself. I guess I didn't want to accept what you were going through, *what you did*, what I did, what we all did, or didn't do, but now: I do, I really do, I want you to say something.

JIM

...

BEN-DAVID

Because all the people at all the gun ranges revere Jim Bender. I went and talked to them. Stand your ground champion!, our policy not to disclose customer records!, no firing range would ever give a positive ID!, but Jim Bender’s lawyer, well, we’re all so grateful for you representing a victim of circumstance. For understanding what he did was right and just and legal. Which is why one finally pulled me aside, mentioned this out of the way place, basement level of a half-empty strip mall behind the old tire dump. It was vacated. Nobody there. Litter and cartridges scattered.

JIM

They only took cash.

BEN-DAVID

God, I’m...sorry. I am. For all of it. [Almost chuckling] You believe this? It won’t happen here. It’s already happening everywhere. It’s already happening everywhere and people don’t know it.

JIM

One week.

BEN-DAVID

It’s over. This is the end. I’m wrestling with whether I should recuse myself as your attorney. I just...nobody takes responsibility for their actions anymore.

JIM now has the gun.

JIM

To tell me you were wrong about me. To welcome me back.

BEN-DAVID

Is it easier to say it with that? To feel like people will listen? To get them to pay attention? Whatever that is. I don’t know anymore.

BEN-DAVID gives JIM his car keys.

BEN-DAVID

I guess only you’ll know what happened.

BEN-DAVID goes.

JIM holding the gun.

JIM

I didn't want to kill him.

I just wanted to back him off. Make him run away.

I'll be there to stop it before it happens. My presence will scare him off. He couldn't see me and then follow through with his plan. He'll see me and stop and turn around and walk away. Nobody gets hurt.

And after that, after people hear about what I did, they'll come back. Sophie, maybe she's watching right now, yes, they're all watching and they'll come back. I'd come back.

Simple, right?

I'd stand by my car just off front pull-up area. No one said anything. I'd usually give it an hour. He said afternoon because there'd be more people, the heat highest, the sun...

When you're standing in the sunshine of your past it's hard to find the shadows. Warm. I tried to keep my eyes focused on the direction he'll show but still let myself observe the way the American flag slops back and forth in the breeze, the way butterflies skirt the pine bushes, the air its own kind of memory, the moments I'll never get back, the way life is made in one moment and the way one moment can make a—...and there he is.

What really threw me was seeing the rifle.

He seemed bigger, taller. He walked like he was taking a short and hard breath with each step. Very determined, very committed.

He saw me, I know he saw me, but he didn't stop walking. We're maybe a hundred yards. He never paused, keeping his stride straight. Guess I thought he would at least slow or reconsider. Never took his eyes off me as he started fumbling to make ready his barrel. And I saw ever so slightly his face change. It was this...raised edge to his mouth. Almost imperceptible. A smile. A knowing smile. Accepting. Forgiving. Affirming. Challenging.

A lot happened in that moment. Seeing him smile I think I smiled. In fact, I felt like I was laughing. The kind of laughter you can't remember the last time you went so long and hard. That *release*. I thought I might die here.

JIM [CONT.]

I saw me taking Sophie to the beach for the first time. Running into waves with her. I saw her in her little white Father’s Day dress. I saw her playing the violin. I saw her coming back home, to me, saying Daddy, I’m back. I saw Ben-David, Alan. I saw me.

The places we want to go. The places we want to take each other. You can’t remember where you’ve never been but I was there. I was there and everywhere. How easy it is to become death. I heard music. I heard bells. I came between morning and evening. I was every word that’s ever been spoken or written. I was never forgotten. I was eternity.

I didn’t have to reach for the holster because you were already in my hand, somehow ready, finger ON the trigger. You’re an amazing creature. You tell the hand there is no stalemate, no compromise. The hand doesn’t want to squeeze. You want it to squeeze. And the hand obeys.

As the hips go back and the arms come up I realized that once shooting starts it’s not going to stop until one of us can’t shoot anymore so I need to hit first. Three bursts low, wound the leg, he goes down, I remain, shoot low.

First shots went high. I heard nothing. Everything was sharp and shifting. I was swelling. I felt expanded. I was a monument. I was a mountain. A planet. A great and mighty sun. A black hole. Eating light. Becoming nothing.

I lost whatever life I had left in that moment. I destroyed it. What remains is something we’ll never have a word for.

But the thing is. The real thing is...

I might still be laughing.

The MEN shift into final position.

Lights fade...

VOICE, DISPATCH

Remaining shooter active in front of the building. I repeat, shooter remains.

...to blackout.

END OF PLAY.