

Genna Gardini
GRDGEN003
MA in Theatre and Performance

HANDSOME DEVIL: DRAFT FIVE



A play by Genna Gardini

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For Rosa Carlyle-Mitchell

*but in my sleep I see small hands
and in the dark your teeth's white fire*

Ingrid Jonker, 'Puberty'

*There's more to life than books, you know,
but not much more.*

The Smiths, 'Handsome Devil'

CHARACTERS:

The Girls:

REBECCA: A girl, black, 17 years old
HANNAH: A girl, coloured, 17 years old
SARAH: A girl, white, 17 years old
LILLY: A girl, black, perhaps a year or two older than the others. It should be noted that the actor playing LILLY also plays EVE in the Prologue

The Teachers:

MISS: A woman, white, in her late twenties or early thirties
THE HEAD: A man, white, in his fifties

SETTING:

The play is set in an all-girls academy in contemporary South Africa.

NOTES ON THE TEXT:

When - is used at the end of a line, it is to indicate that the text is being interrupted by the line below it.
When / is used, it is to demonstrate **that the rest of that line is spoken over. When ... are used at the end of** a line, it is to denote a trailing off of the sentence.

NOTES ON STAGING:

Most of the action of the play takes place in a single classroom. In it, there are four small desks. Whenever the bell rings, the girls jump up and scramble to swap places, often elbowing each other (sometimes accidentally, sometimes on purpose) in the process. They (almost) never leave the classroom but make a great show of switching their positions in it. In the first four scenes, there is one seat left vacant – usually that which is closest to Rebecca, who pushes away whoever moves to occupy it. After the fourth scene, Lilly takes this place.

There is a TV monitor that The Head appears on at the beginning of each scene he is not physically present in to announce the lesson.

PROLOGUE:

The stage is lit the way classrooms usually are, fluorescently. A hand appears from behind a slightly ajar door and gropes for the light switch. The only illumination comes from behind the opened door. The rushing sound of many stockinged feet shuffling into the space is heard. This is followed by the hysterical, hissing noises of girls whispering to each other, something along the lines of:

REBECCA: You go!

HANNAH: No, it's not even my turn -

SARAH: It's definitely your turn, I already went –

REBECCA: Not you two, man, shut up, I said *you*. (*Her tone changes*) It's your turn.

The girl Rebecca is addressing sighs as she is pushed to the middle of the space. Although we cannot see her properly, this is EVE. The others scramble to get into position: Hannah at a small podium, Rebecca next to her, and Sarah crouching behind the television monitor.

HANNAH: (*in an approximation of a masculine voice*) Good morning.

SARAH & REBECCA: Good morning, sir!

HANNAH: Lesson Naught-

REBECCA: (*snorts*) Lesson naughty! -

HANNAH: Lesson Naught! Pronunciation Anxiety.

Rebecca elbows her.

HANNAH: Oh but sorry but first, a word from our sponsor.

Hannah pretends to click a remote at Sarah, who makes exaggerated static noises. Hannah clicks the imagined remote again and Sarah falls silent.

HANNAH: (*clears her throat*) Technical difficulties. Let us continue.

REBECCA: The topic is 'Pronunciation Anxiety'! Do not make me tell you again!

Eve nods. Rebecca, Hannah, and Sarah descend on Eve, fixing a school tie around her eyes. She is spun around by the group. They then surround her in a circle. Eve tries to regain her composure before she begins counting.

EVE: One...

REBECCA: If you don't

SARAH: know how

HANNAH: to pronounce

EVE: Two....

REBECCA: this word.

EVE: **Three...**

SARAH: Which word?

HANNAH: Witch word?!

SARAH, HANNAH & REBECCA: Witch! Witch! Witch!

REBECCA: Cough it out to cast the spell!

HANNAH: Imply its incantation!

REBECCA: No, man. **Which** word?

HANNAH: Oh, sorry. This word.

EVE: Four!

SARAH: This strange and foreign,

EVE: **Five...**

REBECCA: this airport-frisked,

EVE: Six!

SARAH: this passport passed-over,

EVE: Seven!

SARAH: this moving and migratory,

EVE: **Eight....**

REBECCA: thumb-hitching,

HANNAH: Flank flashing

SARAH: Electric fence escalating

REBECCA: remaining-rand rummaging

EVE: **Nine....**

REBECCA: word. This word!

EVE: TEN! Come out, come out, wherever you are!

Eve begins to move, arms outstretched, as if to find the people speaking. They elude her, flitting around the room, taunting her.

REBECCA: This word, wandering around the strange terrain of your sentence, its eyes

HANNAH: **(and E's and O's and U's!)**

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SARAH: raised to the sky, scratching for any hint of manna

HANNAH: **that even with your Myschool card you couldn't be bothered to buy**

REBECCA: because your own manners tell you to never eat *their* food.

HANNAH: This word that follows your fingers which you raise as you pay

SARAH: **staring at the digit like a tree you'd have to saw in half to sleuth its age**

REBECCA: (I can never tell how old *they* are, it's because they don't get wrinkles like us and it confuses everything, and it isn't racist if it's true, so).

SARAH: This word which is one, but could be more, because you cannot weigh or count it, you cannot determine its amount.

HANNAH: This word that you refuse to take through customs for fear of the customary strip search,

SARAH: the x-ray beeping at its baggage,

REBECCA: the guard smacking gloves on a fist raised in protest,

HANNAH: **but you shouldn't bother because you've heard** it can travel other ways,

REBECCA: **that it doesn't need your SAA boarding pass,**

HANNAH: your e-Toll cents

REBECCA: your first-class ticket

Eve almost catches someone but they manage to duck in time. This hangs in the air for a moment.

REBECCA: So you resent it.

SARAH: **And you won't pronounce it.**

HANNAH: But you know how

REBECCA: **If you don't know how to pronounce**

HANNAH: this word.

SARAH: Which word?

GIRLS: Witch, witch, witch!

REBECCA: This word.

SARAH: But you know how

HANNAH: they always say

REBECCA: (*mimicking a teacher's tone*) If you are unsure of a word, girls, you should just:

HANNAH & SARAH: Sound. It. Out.

On these last words, Eve manages to catch Rebecca. She takes off her tie.

REBECCA: *(hissing)* Eve, you're meant to go "Got you!"

Eve drops the tie. She runs for the door, closing it behind her. Rebecca watches her.

SCENE ONE:

THE HEAD: Lesson One: Indirect Speech.

The Head stands in a hall, with Rebecca, Sarah and Hannah facing him. We can see the back of the girls' heads, alert, trained towards him. On one side of The Head is an empty chair, on the other is Miss. A large screen blinks behind him.

He consults his notes and then, after a moment:

THE HEAD: *(quietly)* Good morning.

GIRLS: *(they speak in enthusiastic and chirruping unison, almost interrupting him)*
Good morning, sir!

THE HEAD: At the start of each new term it falls upon me as your Principal, as the Head of this school, to prepare a commencement address.

The word address, here, means to present a report or, perhaps, to put it more circuitously - and mark that word in your vocabulary books

There are hushed whispers amongst the girls who forgot to bring their vocabulary books.

- a speech of sorts. But, as our current Homograph Honours Society members could surely attest, an address is also the place where one lives. And who knows better than you, Boarders Grade 0 through 12, that defining that place may **prove... inconclusive?**

Because, as I am sure you are all well aware, you live here. This school is your address. It is stamped at the front of your overdue library books. It is tipexed across bags that are more stain than material. It is marked on you. You mark it back.

GIRLS: *(panicked whispers)* Our marks!

THE HEAD: But one, but many, also reside in the body. The body is, as our best Biology enthusiasts may concur, the ultimate address, the location from which we conduct our great business, our living.

If this school is our body, then perhaps it is no coincidence that I am called its Head. And, as you know, students are often referred to as pupils. For those of you not in the Extra-**Anatomy tutorials, the pupils are the dots in one's irises which,** although stuck in place, can become bigger or smaller. They may seem less interesting than their colourful surroundings but they are, of course, the parts which see.

You should keep that in mind.

And who is more your minder than your teachers, who tell you to mind your manners, mind your lessons, mind yourselves? While the body may need eyes to observe, those eyes need the mind to understand, and the head to work at all. And you are enrolled here, if I am not very much mistaken, to work.

But, of course, we must ask ourselves: how would you do that work without some divine assistance? That assistance is the blood that runs through the body, to the eyes, the mind, the very head itself. If not for blood we would not breathe, we would not think, we would not move. We have our generous Donor, whose donations are the lifeblood of our school. Never forget that without her kind and annual infusions into the very marrow of our school, we would be leached dry. It is a debt that courses through our institution and one which we will honour now with a word from our Donor.

The girls all check their hair, readjust their postures, and smile towards the monitor. The Head presses the remote. The screen turns blue. He punches at the remote, but this does not yield any results. He tries again. Nothing.

Well.

And now let us leave and dilate in the light of the day, which I am sure you will agree is currently what a poet who, like us, dedicated his life to the will of a Higher Power might have deemed dappled. Meaning, of course, to appear painted in specks and not in uniform, a tradition adopted by the Grade 9 class, some of whom I see have, today, deigned to attend assembly without their blazers and will, therefore, also deign to attend detention. We shall meet at 8pm where you will assist me in cleaning up the perimeters of the school.

GIRLS: *(collectively gasp)* No, sir!

When The Head speaks again, they immediately become quiet.

THE HEAD: As the poet almost said, gory be to God for dappled things.

SCENE TWO:

THE HEAD: Lesson Two: Past Participles.

A small classroom, with four desks angled towards a larger one at the front of the room. Hannah, Sarah and Rebecca sit in three of these. The fourth is empty.

The girls speak to each other in hushed tones and, at first, it is difficult to tell what they are saying, but hissed snatches become audible at intervals. Finally, we hear:

HANNAH: How do you mean ripped off? Like, off-off?

REBECCA: How do you think I mean, man?

SARAH: Please stop talking about this.

HANNAH: No, but, ok. But no, just wait. I mean, think about it, how would that even work?

REBECCA: **It wouldn't, obviously, that's what I'm telling you. How's it going to work if it's torn off?**

HANNAH: **No, I don't mean, like, *physically* –**

REBECCA: Seriously. Is this Remedial Biology or what?

SARAH: We have to finish this exercise before she gets back. **That's what she said. And we haven't -**

HANNAH: **No, I don't mean the –** I mean the idea -

REBECCA: Are you for serious asking me how *ideas* work? How the fuck should I know? Check your philosophy reader -

HANNAH: **No, ok, I don't mean the idea, I mean the -**

SARAH: Question one looks easy, I think. I can start. It says: What part of the sentence -

HANNAH: I mean the *thing* -

SARAH: **Stop it! She'll hear you!**

HANNAH: **Don't be so stupid, she can't hear us, she's in The Head's office, that's like two prefabs away. (to Rebecca) Just tell me now!**

REBECCA: **(to Hannah)** Hey! Hey, remember when we used to have sex ed there? It was always before April holidays and Miss would force us to go treasure hunting for Sarah.

HANNAH: Ok, yes, but what about –

REBECCA: And **she'd be locked in the toilet, no worse, on top of the toilet. And we'd have to peel her off like a old ball of prestick when it's gone hard.**

SARAH: I needed the loo –

REBECCA: **Oh please, don't lie. You daygirls shit at home, everyone knows -**

SARAH: **I haven't been a daygirl since before junior primary! I wish you'd stop saying that all the time-**

REBECCA: **(to Hannah)** And then she'd just sit in the back with her eyes shut so she couldn't see the diagrams –

HANNAH: Yes, ok, I remember, haha hilarious, but what about the ripping –

REBECCA: – and whenever The Head would say the word *ovary* she'd start humming with **her hands over her ears. She knew zero. I'm surprised she even figured out how to go to the toilet for anything but hiding -**

SARAH: That was in Grade 6, I know lots more now –

REBECCA: **Oh, ja? Ok, what's a fallopian tube?**

Pause.

SARAH: ... just a very full pipe in there.

Rebecca and Hannah laugh.

HANNAH: Ok, but you said they said it was ripped off...

REBECCA: What? No, I never, I said -

SARAH: You did! She's right. You definitely said that. *I've* won the Intraschool Memory Competition for three years in a row, I did don't laugh, and I remember -

HANNAH: -and wait, but that doesn't make sense, because it's... it's not an exam pad. I mean, it's not like... perforated. You can't just rip off a page and then throw it in the recycling box -

SARAH: Perforated. That's a good word. That's a gold medal English Olympiad word-

REBECCA: (*snorts*) Oh please, stop showing off, The Head's not here -

HANNAH: Shut up, or did you mean ripped off like stolen? Like they pinched it off her?

SARAH: She's right, that term has a lot of colloquial associations-

REBECCA: You have a lot of colloquial associations! (*to Hannah*) Stop pestering me now, man, and use your brain. How can they pinch *that* off her?

HANNAH: I don't know, obviously! That's why I'm asking you.

REBECCA: Urgh, you never know anything, it's really boring -

HANNAH: Well, then, tell me so I can get a bit more interesting -

SARAH: She said she'd be back in five minutes and we haven't finished one question -

HANNAH: Just tell me!

REBECCA: Urgh, fine, if it'll shut you up.

Pause.

The Grade 9's said you couldn't even tell it was from a person. They said it looked like someone'd knocked over a bowl of spaghetti bolognaise on the grass. And that's all that was left of her.

Pause.

SARAH: But we *did* have spaghetti bolognaise on Monday, I wrote about it for Home Ec, so it was probably just leftovers -

HANNAH: Also, also, the Grade 9's all kotch after break, everyone knows. But actually that still doesn't explain where she-

REBECCA: **It was her, I'm telling you. She had her intestines and her organs and her, her** vag and the whole thing just ripped out and left there on the hockey field and-

SARAH: **That's biologically impossible. Also it's disgusting.**

REBECCA: **No one's asking you to listen!**

Miss enters the room. The girls move away from each other quickly.

MISS: Well, that is not true at all, girls. I think you will find that I am asking you to listen, just to me and not each other.

GIRLS: Sorry, Miss.

MISS: I apologize for having to step out, but we should still have enough time to **complete a quick bit of revision, don't we? Yes? Wonderful. Now, who can** remember what section we were looking at?

SARAH: *(immediately)* Past participles!

MISS: Yes, Sarah, that is right, although technically they are called past participle adjectives. Let us indulge in a little recap. What do we know about them?

HANNAH: *(interrupting Sarah, who has already opened her mouth to respond)* They are passive.

MISS: Very good, Hannah. What else?

SARAH: **They don't mean to effect, they mean to be *affected*** in a specific way.

MISS: Yes, Sarah, thank you. Now, who can provide me with an example of one?

HANNAH: Amused?

MISS: Excellent, Hannah. Another?

SARAH: Horrified?

MISS: Good, Sarah. Anymore? *(Both Hannah and Sarah put up their hands. Miss ignores them. Pause)* What about you, Rebecca? Can you think of a past participle adjective to share with the group?

REBECCA: A..?

MISS: A past participle adjective, which is what we have been discussing for the past half hour.

REBECCA: I got lost when you left for so long, Miss.

MISS: I am your teacher, not your goatherd, Rebecca. You are in Matric now; I should not have to guide you through basic grammar.

REBECCA: Sorry, Miss.

- MISS: Alright, let us reverse a little. What is a past participle?
- REBECCA: Hey?
- MISS: It is a very irritating habit to ask someone to repeat themselves when everyone knows you heard them. And please do not say hey, hay is for horses. You are a person, you say pardon.
- REBECCA: **Pardon me, Miss. I don't know.**
- MISS: Well, then hazard a guess.
- REBECCA: **I... I'm not sure. Ask the others, they know.**
- MISS: Are you going to rely **on the others knowing when it's exams? What about your trials?** Are you just going put your hand up in the big hall and whisper to The Head, **"Oh, I'm sorry, sir, I'm not sure, you should ask the others" and still expect to pass?**
- REBECCA: **...No.**
- MISS: Then what is a past participle?
- REBECCA: Is that like Eve, Miss?
- MISS: Excuse me?
- REBECCA: I said, do you mean like Eve, Miss?
- MISS: Honestly, how on earth is Eve like a past participle? And you are well aware that Eve -
- REBECCA: Because of how she used **to be here with us in class and now she's gone. Past** participant.
- MISS: It is participle, not participant.
- REBECCA: Well, what if a pupil participates? Like me, now, answering this question? A participating pupil. Participle.
- MISS: That is not funny.
- REBECCA: Maybe it also means for when a Principal does what you want him to. Like if The Head came in and took your quiz on the concord. Participle. Or if he told us what happened to Eve when we asked during assembly instead of just making us sing the school song twice. A Principal who, in recent history, participated. Past Participle.
- MISS: Rebecca, you clearly think you are very clever. It is a pity none of your examiners mirror that sentiment.
- REBECCA: **It's just a joke.**

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MISS: I have always been of the opinion that jokes are how the cowardly articulate what they truly believe but are too afraid to take responsibility for.

REBECCA: Is that going to be in the paper, Miss?

MISS: You are assuming that girls who speak to their teachers as you do will be allowed to sit for their papers, Rebecca.

REBECCA: But, Miss, this is the only way you taught me to speak.

MISS: What is that supposed to mean?

REBECCA: **You're the teacher, Miss, you should tell me.**

HANNAH: **Miss, I've got cramps. Can I quickly run and get a disprin?**

MISS: No, the lesson is almost over.

HANNAH: **But they're bad!**

MISS: Well, I am sorry, but there is no time, you shall have to ignore them.

REBECCA: Miss, you said, when reading aloud one should never ignore the significance of a period.

SARAH: *(puts her hand up)* **We don't call it that here! We call it a full stop.**

The bell rings.

SCENE THREE:

THE HEAD: Lesson Three: Reported Speech.

A second bell rings. As soon as it finishes, Sarah thrusts her hand in the air.

SARAH: **That's the second bell, Miss!**

MISS: Yes, thank you, for the update, Sarah, but my hearing remains intact despite the **choir's best attempts against it.**

SARAH: **We're the only year with just sopranos ever, Miss!**

MISS: Congratulations. Now, can anyone tell me why Hannah is not on time today?

SARAH: **... I think maybe she's on *her* time, Miss.**

MISS: Again? Honestly, I do not understand how Hannah manages to keep her marks up with all this relentless menstruation. It must be like trying to complete a crossword puzzle under a waterfall.

REBECCA: She probably uses a different end for homework, Miss.

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MISS: I should hope so, I have to mark her assignments. Well, there is no point in waiting for the flood to wash us all downstream, as it were. What are we looking at today?

SARAH: Orals, Miss.

MISS: Of course. The dreaded orals! The great and final test where you are presented to The Head and he asks -

Hannah rushes in.

HANNAH: **Sorry, sorry, Miss! I wasn't feeling right so I quickly had to go to the san-**

MISS: Hannah, I am not going to tell you this again! You need to ask the sister to give you proper medication. This affects the entire class. We cannot all live roofless under a constant downpour, if you follow my meaning.

SARAH: **That's an extended metaphor, Miss!**

MISS: Yes, well done, Sarah, two ticks. Which, Hannah, is how long it should have taken you to get here. Did you have to alchemize the disprin yourself?

HANNAH: No, they ran out but its fine because I saw The Head and he gave me rescue remedy-

SARAH: **That's a placebo, they don't work,/ it's just to buy time**

REBECCA: Did he tell you to put it under your tongue? -

HANNAH: Shut up, but no, but sorry, but Miss, he also says please can you come see him now?

MISS: Did he happen to mention why?

HANNAH: **...I can't ask The Head *why*, Miss, he'll give me a detention!**

REBECCA: **He'll give you something, alright.**

MISS: Rebecca, your attempts at subtlety are, as ever, unfortunately lost on no one. The three of you, practice your orals here, I shall return shortly.

The three crane their heads to watch as Miss exits. As soon as she closes the door behind her, they shift in their seats.

SARAH: I can start -

REBECCA: **No. Hannah must go first. She loves giving orals. Everyone says she's the best at giving orals in our whole year.**

SARAH: **Who says that? I'm the only one who got full colours for debating last term! I have braiding on my blazer and everything!**

REBECCA: **She just can't wait for an intra-school competition so she can show us all just how good she is at it.**

SARAH: What do you mean an intra-school competition? Miss never said –

REBECCA: **But there's no one, and I mean no one, she likes giving an oral to more than The Head.**

SARAH: **(to Hannah) What? You didn't tell me he was giving private tutorials!**

REBECCA: Oh yes, Hannah gets a big, fat private tutorial from him every day.

HANNAH: **You're just jealous because you know I'll do better than you.**

REBECCA: **Oh, ja, that's it, I want to be just as good at orals as you are. (imitating Hannah's voice) Oh, sir, am I clicking out my consonants? Do I have the right resonance? Is my mouth opening wide enough not to err on my onomatopoeias? Am I licking at this alliteration the way you like it?**

Pause.

SARAH: **It feels like you're being rude. Anyway, Miss said we have to practice our orals on each other -**

HANNAH: Rebecca and Eve are the only ones who practiced their orals on each other, everyone knows.

SARAH: What? Eve and I were always in pairs for public speaking, not –

REBECCA: Shut up.

HANNAH: **(to Rebecca) Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that, I –**

REBECCA: Go practice on yourself.

SARAH: **I don't think you're talking about orals anymore.**

HANNAH: You know what **I** think? Maybe The Head heard about two of you. you know, **co-practicing** from someone -

REBECCA: Oh ja, I wonder who that was -

SARAH: **I don't understand, we're usually encouraged to practice -**

HANNAH: - and you know The Donor probably doesn't approve of that stuff so he moved her to another class and that's why she's not here -

REBECCA: I told you already. She's gone.

The bell rings.

SCENE FOUR:

THE HEAD: Lesson Four: Irregular Plurals.

Miss re-enters the room. Rebecca, unlike the others, hesitates and does not sit down.

HANNAH: *(whispering to Rebecca)* Move it!

MISS: Rebecca, what paralyses you? Have Hannah's cramps migrated?

HANNAH: No, Miss, they're still here in me. Actually, can I—

MISS: Absolutely not. Rebecca, take your seat please, the bell has sounded.

REBECCA: Why?

MISS: ...**Why? Is that meant to be** a great existential cry into the void or would you care to be more specific?

REBECCA: Why does the bell still ring?

MISS: Surely you mean for whom does it toll? It tolls for thee, Rebecca, to take thine seat and quick.

REBECCA: Ok, ja, but it sometimes rings twice and sometimes just once. And sometimes it rings after a long time and sometimes after like no time, so why -

MISS: The bell functions as sonic punctuation and, as you should know by now, punctuation comes in various forms. The last bell served to tell us that one sentence is done and another is about to start. For example: Sit down **NOW**, Rebecca, not a semi-colon but a full stop.

Sighing, Rebecca does.

SARAH: Did it still ring when you were here, Miss?

REBECCA: **Use your eyes, man, she's right in front of us -**

SARAH: **Yes, I know that! But she's not here now like she was here before -**

HANNAH: She was here when we were here -

SARAH: **Yes, I know that too! But she wasn't Miss then, she was -**

MISS: Thank you for catching us all up on my past, Sarah, but I fear this is Advanced Language and not your History lesson.

REBECCA: We never go to History anymore.

MISS: Well, perhaps The Head and The Donor feel you have learnt all of it.

SARAH: **When we're grown up, will we all become a Miss like you?**

REBECCA: *(whispering)* Or amiss, like Eve.

MISS: Sarah, you do not just **become** a Miss. You must understand that it is a highly coveted and contested position. Many, veritable queues upon queues of girls try to become teachers and fail.

SARAH: **But I've never failed, I'm always top of the class!**

REBECCA: *(under her breath)* At kissing Miss' -

MISS: Rebecca, do you have something you want to share with the class or are you content to just speculate about my anatomy all day?

REBECCA: Yes, Miss, I have a question.

MISS: Is it going to be a continuation of your constant query about Eve?

HANNAH: *(whispering)* Do you think maybe she was abducted by aliens for, like, body experiments and that's why -

REBECCA: *(to Hannah)* Grow up, man! No, Miss, it's something else.

MISS: Well, go ahead then, but make it quick.

REBECCA: The Donor built the school and then The Head picked us so we could come to the school and learn, that's right, isn't it?

MISS: Yes, of course, Rebecca, everyone knows that.

REBECCA: **And then when we've finished** with learning we leave –

MISS: **Are you trying to show me you've memorized the school's mission statement? This isn't your dictations session –**

REBECCA: **So if that's true, Miss, why are *you* still here?**

A shocked silence.

HANNAH: *(under her breath)* Sjoe, you're going to get it.

MISS: I am here because somebody has to teach you how to be better, Rebecca, not that my efforts seem to be making any difference.

REBECCA: Better than what?

MISS: Enough! *(Pause)* Now. Where were we?

HANNAH: *(speaking quickly, before Sarah can)* Irregular plurals!

MISS: Excellent, as usual, Hannah. Irregular plurals. Who can explain them?

HANNAH: **Most nouns, when they become more than one, add an 's to the end of the word.**
Like pens or books.

REBECCA: *(whispering)* Or suck-ups-

SARAH: *(immediately)* But irregular plurals are different. There are many but they don't follow the same pattern as the other groupings. For example, in a sentence, you can say one child, many children.

MISS: Good, Sarah, and excellent, Hannah! Can either of you think of another?

HANNAH: One man, many men.

Rebecca snorts.

MISS: Perfect. Rebecca, I shudder to imagine what your contribution might be, but do you have an irregular plural noun you'd like to share?

REBECCA: One knife, many knives.

MISS: I'm sure that is a veiled reference to your current preoccupation, but it is correct. Anyone else?

LILLY: *(from the doorway)* One tooth, many teeth.

MISS: Yes, absolutely right, well done. Anymore?

A stunned pause from the girls.

MISS: No?

SARAH: Miss?

MISS: ...Yes?

HANNAH: ...Who is that?

MISS: Oh, forgive me, girls! This is a new addition to the class who I will thank you to treat with kindness and respect. She comes to us as on the Donor's special Gifted Girls Scholarship and her name is Lilly. Lilly, you may sit next to Rebecca, perhaps you will prove a positive influence on her. Move up a seat now, girls.

No one moves.

HANNAH: What?

MISS: Hannah! I beg your pardon! It's not like you to forget your manners.

HANNAH: Sorry, Miss, I mean ... what?

SARAH: We haven't ever got even one new girl before, Miss.

MISS: Nonsense, of course we have. What about you, Sarah?

HANNAH: Sarah was always with us, she only started boarding late.

SARAH: That's true, Miss, I was always here. I'm just more here now.

MISS: Well, Lilly is on the exact same scholarship as all of you-

SARAH: But we always had ours, right from—

HANNAH: **That's also true, Miss, I can't even remember getting my scholarship -**

REBECCA: Is it because –

MISS: Do not start that with me, Rebecca. I am not going to tell you again.

SARAH: Did you have lots of new girls when you were here, Miss?

MISS: You do not need to be concerned with what I had, Sarah. Now, where were we?

REBECCA: Where did she come from?

MISS: Girls, I am your teacher, not your tour guide. If you would like to know something about Lilly, you are perfectly capable of asking her yourself.

Pause.

Oh, honestly. Lilly, where are you from?

LILLY: Here.

MISS: Berea?

LILLY: Here.

MISS: **...How do you mean, 'here'?**

LILLY: **...How many meanings does this word, does 'here', have?**

SARAH: Miss, should I answer?

MISS: No. Lilly, I am not sure I understand what you are saying –

LILLY: **...Is how I speak unclear? Maybe there's something wrong with your hearing.**
Does your ear now go, what's it called, does it go queer when you hear me saying here?

Silence

MISS: On second thought, you can sit next to Sarah.

SARAH: No, Miss! What did **I** do?

MISS: Sarah, I weary of your constant backchat! Move up now or I will be forced to write a minus on your report!

Sarah gasps and moves. Rebecca pinches her. Lilly does not sit.

Now, we should still have enough time to complete an example sentence -

REBECCA: Doesn't that mean this sentence is done. Miss? Not a semi-colon not a full stop but an exclamation mark!

SCENE FIVE:

THE HEAD: Lesson Five: The Oblique Stroke

Hannah, Sarah and Rebecca participate in their usual scramble for a new seat. Lilly watches until they are settled, and then slides into the chair next to Rebecca. Miss is writing on the board. A second bell shrills. Hannah, Sarah and Rebecca all put their hands up.

GIRLS: MISS!

MISS: *(starting)* Girls! If you would like to speak to me, kindly adjust your decibel level to something that does not compromise the window panes.

GIRLS: Sorry, Miss.

MISS: Are you all beset by cramps now?

HANNAH: Still just me, Miss, can I –

MISS: No. Well, out with it, what has occurred?

The other two nudge Hannah to speak.

HANNAH: Sorry Miss, but... she can't sit there.

MISS: That is uncharacteristically cryptic of you, Hannah. Who cannot sit where?

HANNAH: *She (gestures to Lilly) can't sit there (gestures to the seat).*

MISS: While I appreciate your ambitious use of the semaphore, I suspect the fact that Lilly is sitting there quite neatly dispels your theory.

REBECCA: Eve sits there.

MISS: Rebecca, you have eyes with which to see, do you not? I am sure you are aware that Lilly occupies that chair now, not Eve.

HANNAH: *(whispering)* Maybe she's invisible and she actually *is* in the chair and we just can't see her –

SARAH: *(whispering back)* But we learnt in science that there's no such thing as invisible, it's all just perception-

REBECCA: God, you two are SO boring -

MISS: Enough! Rebecca, resign yourself to reality, it has already resigned itself to you. Lilly, please take a seat.

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Lilly sits down. She shyly smiles at Hannah. Hannah glares at Rebecca first and then makes a big show of smiling back at Lilly.

HANNAH: *(whispering to Lilly)* Did you ever meet The Donor? Is it true she lives in a mansion made of money?

REBECCA: *(under her breath)* This is bullshit.

MISS: Rebecca!

The TV monitor flickers on and the Head's face appears. Everyone, except for Lilly, stops and looks up at him.

THE HEAD: *(as if addressing an assembly)* At the urging of our illustrious Donor, we place a great focus on language here. In her, in my, in our opinion, language is a study of its own, just as important as other subjects, like Religious Studies. In her, in my, in our opinion, language has a similar purpose, to elevate. It is a spirit level keeping you straight as you move yourself higher. Curse words are handsome devils – they may look appealing, but their intention is to wrench you down.

Without the help of a Higher Power, you would not be here, reaching towards your bright futures. We show that gratitude by refusing to descend to the depths of depravity. If language is the vast ocean, then swear words are the bottom feeders.

In short: detention.

The monitor turns off. Rebecca sighs loudly.

MISS: Well, there you have it. Now, if your seating plan has finally been resolved, I would like to begin the class.

LILLY: What class is this one?

MISS: ...It is Advanced Language, of course, Lilly-

LILLY:What language?

Pause.

MISS: I beg your pardon?

LILLY: Uh, which? Which language is, what do you call this, um, advanced?

Pause.

MISS: The word 'which' implies there is more than one, Lilly.

SARAH: *(thrusting her hand up)* Irregular plurals!

MISS: Well, yes, I suppose so, Sarah, but you are a lesson behind. Now, let us begin with today's -

LILLY: **What's this word, 'advanced'?**

SARAH: **It means higher, as in higher grade, doesn't it, Miss? Or improved. Or, or! It could also mean to move forward! Or -**

MISS: **Yes, thank you, Sarah. Lilly, I am quite perplexed that you aren't familiar with this word, I am sure it was covered in your entrance exam -**

LILLY: **But how does a language move? Words can't run after you.**

Pause.

MISS: Well. Who can tell me what we are looking at next? Sarah?

SARAH: **Um! I think it's ... sorry, I lost my place when I had to, uh, to lose my place but let me just check the textbook -**

LILLY: The oblique stroke.

Pause.

MISS: **Well...yes. Yes, that is right, Lilly. Now, who can explain what the term 'oblique stroke' refers to?**

Hannah, Sarah and Rebecca all stare blankly back at her. Pause.

LILLY: **It's that thing you put here, here between words, so you know you can use them both or just pick one. It's called the oblique stroke because oblique means to, um, to slant between.**

Sarah double-checks her vocabulary book.

SARAH: **She's right, Miss.**

MISS: How do you know that Lilly?

LILLY: I learnt it at my other school.

REBECCA: What other school—

MISS: Be quiet, Rebecca.

REBECCA: **But Miss, what did she mean when said 'which language'?**

MISS: How on earth should I know -

REBECCA: **Isn't it your job to know?**

MISS: Honestly! I am your teacher, not your medium!

HANNAH: *(whispering)* Maybe Eve was a witch and she cast a spell and it went wrong and now –

SARAH: **There's no such thing as witches, that's just another word for *homosexuals*, we learnt that in Religious Studies-**

HANNAH: **Well then Eve was definitely a witch and Rebecca's probably the head of the coven -**

MISS: Girls! Would all of you kindly just sh –

The bell rings.

SCENE SIX:

THE HEAD: Lesson Six: Present-tense Preparation.

Hannah plonks herself next to Lilly. She begins to whisper to her. Rebecca watches them.

MISS: What are we looking at today?

SARAH: Prep orals, Miss.

MISS: Ah, yes. As you know, the time to take your orals is drawing nearer. Lilly, to clarify, we practice possible orals because no one knows when she will be called or what topic she will be presented with, except The Donor –

HANNAH: And The Head!

MISS: **And The Head, yes, very good, Hannah. Why don't you start us off?**

HANNAH: *(gesturing to Lilly)* **We don't want to go first.**

MISS: **Well, I don't recall requesting you to recite it in tandem, but suit yourselves. Rebecca, dare I ask?**

REBECCA: **Ja but I obviously don't want to go first either, Miss.**

MISS: You do not have to go first but you do have to go eventually, Rebecca.

REBECCA: **It's not like I don't go, Miss. I go to the dining hall. I go to the common room. I go outside.**

MISS: Well, your final point is completely fabricated. The only way to go outside the confines of the school is by completing your oral, as you are well aware.

REBECCA: There are lots of other ways to go, ask Sarah, she broke the toilet while she was going this morning –

SARAH: No, I never, Miss!

MISS: Enough, now. Rebecca, your diversion tactics are, as always, tiresome. Now, are you ready to practice your oral?

Pause.

REBECCA: **... No, Miss.**

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MISS: Fine. Sarah!

Sarah scrambles up.

Your topic is.... 'the word'.

After a moment.

SARAH: Uh. Ok. Uh! They say, "In the beginning there was the word". And I guess I've always thought that it's strange that you have to say 'they said it'. Because I always wonder who *they* are, sorry, were. All those anonymous theys.

Sorry, Miss, but more than that, mostly, I wonder about the word. That word is more interesting to me than who wrote it. Because, um, because whoever wrote it needed words to know how write anything in the first place, right, Miss? So the word had to come before the writing and maybe before even the person. But it **wasn't just there before people, it was there at the real beginning. It was there** before dinosaurs and planets and continental shifts and before, like, maps. So, if you had to use one word, powerful enough to construct the whole world, to create everything, what would that word be? And, and! Why was it just the one? We know it was just one word because the word word is singular, right, Miss?

MISS: Correct, yes.

SARAH: So that means it had to be really important, that one word, because all the other **words came from it. Like the ones I'm saying to you, all those words had to come** out of that first word. And maybe that means it had to be, uh, really long. In terms of letters. Like Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious or xylophone. Or maybe it was a metaphor. Like a word with so much meaning implied in it that other meanings were created. Maybe they all crawled out of that word and straight into **the dictionary where they've been ever since.**

But those are **only theories. I don't, I don't remember what *my* first word was and I also don't know where it was because I could already talk when I came here, not like -**

MISS: Sarah!

SARAH: Sorry, Miss. So, to conclude. I still wonder what that word, the very first word ever in the world, could have been.

Pause.

REBECCA: Fanny.

MISS: Honestly, Rebecca! That is not funny.

REBECCA: *(mumbling)* I know it's not funny, I said fanny.

LILLY: God.

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HANNAH: *(whispering to her)* Exactly, God, these things are so lame, **what's the point** -

LILLY: The Bible says the word was God and God was the word.

REBECCA: *(hissing)* I don't believe in god.

MISS: Rebecca!

The TV screen blares on and the Head's voice is emitted from it.

THE HEAD: Detention!

Rebecca sighs loudly.

HANNAH: *(to Lilly)* Don't even listen to her, she thinks she's so cool because she's ad nauseum or whatever -

SARAH: Agnostic-

REBECCA: No, I'm not, I'm full atheist -

The TV comes on again.

THE HEAD: Detention!

Rebecca puts her head in her hands.

MISS: Rebecca! Unless you want to spend the rest of your school career in detention, I would advise you to keep quiet. Now, where were we?

HANNAH: *(speaking before Sarah can)* The word

MISS: Yes, well done Hannah, thank you for introducing such an interesting topic. Now, which word -

Lilly starts laughing under her breath.

LILLY: Which word?

They all consider her.

REBECCA: *(to Hannah)* It looks like your new bestie is just as cool as you.

HANNAH: Shut up, man *(she moves away from Lilly)*

REBECCA: Hey, Miss, is she cooked or what?

MISS: **It's not polite to talk about your peers like that, Rebecca, but maybe, I'm not sure.**

LILLY: Which word? *(Giggling)* Which word!

MISS: Lilly! That is enough. Honestly, you are almost as bad as Rebecca. I do not understand how a girl who speaks such nonsense ever managed to get a special scholarship.

LILLY: **But you have to say this word, sense, to say the word nonsense. That's how your language works.**

MISS: It is not my language, it is language! And please do not address me so informally. **You should say, "that is how language works, Miss".**

LILLY: But it does miss. So do you.

The bell rings.

SCENE SEVEN:

THE HEAD: Lesson Seven: Abstract Nouns.

Hannah stands in a room, with Miss and The Head sitting at one side. The monitor flickers on to a blue screen. Miss looks up at her and nods.

HANNAH: Sorry, sir, you said...? Oh yes, sorry.. Abstract nouns? Uh, well, ok, so. The well-known abstract nouns are, uh, are... beauty, courage, fear and – what's the last one?

She directs this last line to The Head, who does not respond. Miss, however, mouths a word.

HANNAH: Oh, ja! Sorry, and joy. And those are all good words, right? I mean, I, at least, I think they are.

The Head gestures for Miss to leave which she does, reluctantly. Once she does, Hannah begins to speak again, more conspiratorially.

I know Rebecca, Rebecca who's this girls in my class, she's going to make fun of me because I asked to do my oral early and I got abstract nouns for it. I bet she **thinks they're the same thing as common nouns because they're "so obvious".** That's how she'll say it, "so obvious". I mean. I don't, I don't think they're obvious. Not that there's anything wrong with things being obvious, or whatever. Because obvious means, uh, it means... clearly perceived. Easy to see through, easy to understand. I mean, that's the whole point of school, right, to teach me how to understand everything? And if the thing is obvious it does half the work for me and thanks a lot, that's great.

But I like the idea that there's some stuff I can't know about from, like, from reading and memorizing and denominating or whatever, because they're, you know, they're abstract. Like what happened to Eve.

Pause.

Anyway, I'm actually so tired of common nouns, I just decided. Like, like girl, book, desk, friend, food, poo, whatever. There has to be more to life than that. It, it's just actually the most boring kind of noun, I think, even though it is what it says it is. And collective nouns, urgh, I don't know. Team, club, choir. To be in them, you have to work with other people, and sometimes those people know more than you but mostly they actually don't, and I've figured that out now.

Like Rebecca, she pretends she knows about everything, she pretends that I'm so nosy and so lame and she isn't because she understands it all already, but, but,

actually, she's the one always asking Miss stuff, but she just doesn't put her voice up at the end of a the sentence so you can't always tell that it's a question, and it took me ages to click, but then I did and now I know, so. She doesn't know anything the same way I don't know anything.

She checks to see if Miss has lingered.

And actually, Miss, Miss, also. I thought she knew the answers to everything, but now I'm starting to think maybe she doesn't. She just knows how to say all these words. Like 'abstract nouns', she made me learn them, but for what? She can't tell me how I'll ever even know them when I feel them, and what I should do about them because she doesn't know. She can't grab them and give them a detention and a disprin and a tampon and two ticks. Because she can't get her hand around them, abstract nouns. Like, pity, beauty, fear, relief. And, and, you know what's also an abstract noun that I just learnt? Fact. Fact! That means that every fact, everything she tells us, you tell us, is really abstract. Think about that!

Pause.

Anyway. Sorry. Thank you.

After a moment, The Head speaks quietly into the monitor, nods and shakes his head. Finally:

THE HEAD: Pass.

Hannah, beaming, leaves.

SCENE EIGHT:

THE HEAD: Lesson Eight: Interrogative Adverbs.

Hannah is missing from the class. Sarah sits quietly. Rebecca eyes Hannah's seat

MISS: Now, who can tell me what today's lesson is?

Rebecca looks at Sarah expectantly. She doesn't speak.

LILLY: ...Language lesson?

MISS: Incorrect. Sarah?

LILLY: *Advanced* language lesson?

SARAH: ...Interrogative adverbs.

Miss, furious, begins to scrawl on the chalkboard and does not hear Sarah.

MISS: It is interrogative adverbs, Sarah, as you are well aware. Please do not sit there mutely while I ask you to answer such simple questions.

REBECCA: I don't understand what the point of going through these things is, Miss.

MISS: It doesn't matter if you understand it, as long as you can repeat it. Now, interrogative adverbs. What are they?

Sarah slowly puts her hand up, but Miss ignores her.

MISS: Oh, honestly, what does interrogative mean?

LILLY: **To ask something when you're angry?**

REBECCA: *(sighs)* ...to interrogate is to question with great determination. And a verb is a doing word. And add means to do more, so these words have really been around. Like Hannah. Did she pass – **that's the verb** – her oral with distinction – **that's the add** –question mark – **that's the interrogative**.

SARAH: **She didn't get a distinction, The Head would have announced that, wouldn't he, Miss?**

MISS: Rebecca. Your undoing is that you refuse to attach yourself to the importance of your education. Unlike Eve. Eve knew the importance of her education

REBECCA: What does that mean?

MISS: Well, maybe if you paid more attention to your lessons you would be able to find out for yourself.

REBECCA: If you tell me what happened to Eve-

MISS: You have such potential, Rebecca. I have always thought so. We are not dissimilar, you and I. But you cannot stick to anything and that is why you will not pass.

Pause.

REBECCA: Miss, all I ever do is pass. I pass back and forth, between the first bell and the second bell, between Netball and Hockey and choir and House Plays and Home Ec and Bio and Sex Ed and big break and best friends and tests and tests and **tests like old gum between braces. I can't get attached to anything because you sucked all the sticking out of me when you passed me around.**

Pause.

SARAH: **...Miss, do you want me to give a definition of interrogative adverbs now?**

MISS: *(to Rebecca)* You have clearly learnt nothing from me.

REBECCA: Maybe not, Miss. But I learnt something about you

MISS: Unless it is about interrogative adverbs, I have no interest in hearing it.

REBECCA: Not everything is learnt through interrogation, Miss. Some things you find **out from what people don't write on the board.**

MISS: What on earth are you talking about?

REBECCA: **You didn't do your oral. You tried to take it and you failed and that's why you're still here.** Not because teaching is a calling, not because you were the best in the

class but because you were the worst, not because The Head asked you specially to stay, but because you had nowhere else to go.

A shocked pause.

SARAH: Miss, they told us in Religious Studies that lying is amoral so why isn't she getting detention?

MISS: You just shut up, Sarah!

Sara, Rebecca and Lilly all watch Miss. The bell rings.

SCENE NINE:

THE HEAD: Lesson Nine: The Subjective Choice.

Sarah is standing in front of The Head and Miss. She ignores the latter.

MISS: *(whispering back)* You have to choose your topic, Sarah. You're clever, you don't have to worry –

The Head shushes her and gestures to the door. Miss exits.

SARAH: ...Um. Well. It's difficult for me to pick my own topic for this oral because, well, because it feels incorrect to call it an oral. It's more like an impromptu speech. And it's difficult to impromptu yourself. I mean, that's like giving yourself a fright, it's basically impossible. Because you have to be surprised to be scared and what can be surprising about you? Usually, Miss gives you a topic, and then you have to talk about it. And that used to be fine with me because I thought if she chose it that meant it's been approved. I can prepare as much as I want, I can learn all the points and theorems, I can tell you how many molecules there might be in this, and all the dates that lead to that, as long as it was verified, you know. As long as someone saw and wrote it down with another person to play signatory. As long as it was peer reviewed. Peer reviewed is a funny term, isn't it? I guess, I guess it's a sort of euphemism, that's a good word. And if the topic is subjective choice maybe I can choose, subjectively, to talk about this. .

: So, peer review, it firstly, it firstly means for your peers, the people who are at the same institutionalized level as you, to review your work. But it also means other things if you break it up, maybe, if you look at each word's associations. So, peer. Let's begin with that, peer. To look, to gaze, with great intent, with focus. To stare at something for so long and hard that it has to tell you what it is. I like that.... Sorry, sir! Um, ok, but where was I? Review? ...Well, review means to consider that which has happened and say what you thought of it. Because everything asks you something, even if you can't understand its language, I think. And she's always asking...Rebecca's always asking and by asking she's saying that she owns the question, that she owns the history behind the question, that no one can ask it but her.... but Eve was my friend, my peer. I didn't even know they - And now Rebecca acts like, like it was something else. Like I can't understand, and she mutters all these phrases I can't quite hear underneath her breath and she makes Miss angry and then that used to make me angry. But now I think

maybe it doesn't matter if something has been approved, has been peer reviewed.
What does it really mean anyway?

The Head: Pass.

The bell rings.

SCENE TEN:

THE HEAD: Lesson Ten: Unfamiliar Grammar Rules.

The only students left in class are Rebecca and Lilly. The second bell rings for an extended beat. No one says anything. Finally, Lilly puts up her hand. It takes a moment for Miss to register this.

MISS: What?

LILLY: The oral.

MISS: What about it?

LILLY: **I haven't done mine yet.**

MISS: Lilly, you have not been trained the same way as the other girls. I suspect we cannot hold you to the same standards.

REBECCA: **But why would The Donor and The Head put her in the class if they didn't think she was ready, Miss?**

LILLY: I can do it.

MISS: **No, it's not your turn yet, Lilly.**

REBECCA: **Well, it's not my turn so why isn't it hers?**

MISS: Rebecca, listen to me –

REBECCA: **No, I already told you and I don't care that you can't leave the school if you don't pass the oral, I'll stay back a grade, I don't care, I'm not doing it till you tell -**

MISS: Eve left without completing her oral.

Pause.

REBECCA: What?

MISS: **Eve wasn't murdered on the hockey field. She wasn't a witch who cast an invisibility spell. She wasn't abducted by aliens, she wasn't expelled, she didn't take the oral early. She just left.**

REBECCA: **You can't do that.**

MISS: Perhaps not, but she could.

REBECCA: **I don't believe you.**

MISS: It freed up a space, I assume, for another girl to fill, a girl from the same place as Eve although of course, you must understand not with the same history. This school is our history. So, now I must ask you: Do you want to follow Eve? She **didn't bother to stay for** you.

Rebecca is silent.

MISS: Very well. Lilly, your topic is –

LILLY: Unfamiliar Grammar.

MISS: Honestly, there is no such thing –

LILLY: All grammar is unfamiliar -

MISS: Lilly, how on earth do you expect to pass? You have said just one sentence and already I know I cannot understand what you mean.

LILLY: You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
[In Afrikaans] You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
[In isiZulu] You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
You will never understand what I mean.
[In English] You can never understand what I mean.

Lilly begins to speak in tongues, sometimes using words from the speech above. Miss and Rebecca watch, helpless. Eventually, this stops and Lilly, standing in a clump, becomes quiet. The TV monitor switches on. The Head stares out.

THE HEAD: Pass, with distinction.

The bell rings.

SCENE ELEVEN:

THE HEAD: Lesson Eleven: Direct Speech

The Head is standing at a podium with all four girls in uniform facing him. On one side there is an empty chair. On the other, Miss is seated but with a new, unpersoned chair beside her. We can see the back of the students' heads, alert, trained towards him. The TV flickers with static. The Head consults his notes and then, after a moment:

THE HEAD: *(quietly)* Good morning.

GIRLS: *(they speak quietly)* Good morning, sir.

THE HEAD: At the end of each past term it falls upon me as your Principal, as the Head of this school, to prepare a closing address.

The word address here means to give a speech but, as our current Homonym History Junior Researchers may agree, it also means to take on a subject. As students at this school, you are tasked with encountering the most important subject of all with both aggression and reverence. Although we do not play contact sports here, I am sure our First Team Hockey champions could remind you that one assaults the opponent to wrestle it into submission. But it is not, as many have assumed, the students who tackle the subject but rather, quite the opposite. You, our wards, are the wall which the subject breaks through. You, the boarders, are the boundaries which the subject must knock down in order to pass. It marks you. You cannot mark it back.

Tackle, of course, as our keen Ichthyology Intellects may have already noted, refers to the bait which the fisherman threads through his hook and bobs in water to entice passing fish. The bait is you. You must allow yourself to be caught by learning, to let it swallow you whole so that you may eventually become the source of energy which keeps it, which keeps us all, moving. Like the tackle, you must squirm upon that hook until you are consumed completely. Do not be afraid. As the great poet almost said, one should carrion comfort.

And remember, that which is speared and consumed will of course, also bleed. This is but a small homage to the Donor whose own donations move you outwards. She gave of herself so that you could be remade in a similar image, **which you are, which you are. You are this school's, this country's rising stars.** She so wishes she could be with you today but of course she must stay far away in a place that perhaps the opportunities she has allowed for you will mean you can visit one day. But not today.

EPILOGUE:

The stage is fully lit. Miss and The Head are still seated at the front, flanked by two empty chairs. The lights suddenly darken. There is the sound of scrambling and whispering. Finally, we make out:

HANNAH, LILLY, SARAH: **It's your turn.**

Rebecca, with a school tie around her eyes, is spun around by the rest of the group.

HANNAH: Graduation Speech.

SARAH: Title: A Few Rules About How to Survive School!

LILLY: **Rule...**

REBECCA: One.

HANNAH: Expect a certain amount of proximity.

LILLY: *(sounding the words out)* Proxy, poxy.

HANNAH: Get off me!

SARAH: You sleep in rooms pushed together,

HANNAH: the drywall between them thin as a hymen and easier to snap;

SARAH: **youshit, yes, you shit in stalls stacked in streams! You eat the same breakfast**

HANNAH and puke it up in the same sanitary bins.

LILLY: So many bad eggs.

SARAH: Like an omelet!

HANNAH: You wear identical uniforms. You ignore matching homework assignments.

LILLY: **You don't admit that you're the same. Rule....**

REBECCA: Two.

SARAH: You pretend that your real life is something that will happen away from the others.

LILLY: **When they ask what you'll do when you leave,**

HANNAH: you give vague responses, eyes fixed as if on a TV so flat and wide it might as well be the horizon, murmur that your future is gonna be too cool, ah, man, too cool,

SARAH: to possibly share with them.

HANNAH: **Even though, really, you don't know.**

SARAH: **You don't know.**

LILLY: How to say.

SARAH and HANNAH: **I don't know. Rule**

REBECCA: Three.

HANNAH: Judge each other. Admire your nails as if they are the chips on a gavel. Too much filing. Say things like,

LILLY: **“gal, that shirt is two sizes too big and that means it's three sizes out of style!”**

SARAH: Do not point out that you all have to wear a similar shirt. Rule

REBECCA: Four.

HANNAH: **Don't forget how to learn like us. Rule**

REBECCA: Five.

SARAH: **Don't forget how to spell like us. Rule**

REBECCA: Six.

LILLY: **Don't forget how to speak like us. Rule**

REBECCA: Seven.

HANNAH: **But don't ever. Rule**

REBECCA: Eight.

SARAH: **don't ever say that you didn't know Rule**

REBECCA: Nine.

HANNAH: **that you don't know** how. Rule.

LILLY: to say. Rule.

SARAH: this word. Rule.

HANNAH: Which word? Rule.

GIRLS: Which! Which! Which!

SARAH: **This word. Don't. Rule**

LILLY: forget that you knew it before they taught you not to. Rule

REBECCA: Ten. Come out, come out wherever you are!

Genna Gardini
GRDGEN003
MA in Theatre and Performance

Hannah, Sarah and Lilly open the door and file out of it. As they leave, they turn the lights back on. Rebecca, who is wearing the same style of dress as Miss, removes the tie and sits next to her. After a moment, a row of new girls file into the room and sit in front of them.

THE HEAD: Good morning.

End.