

The Secretary

By Kyle John Schmidt

Characters

Ruby – the owner of a gun company, late 60s

Janelle – an office manager, 30s

April – a college drop-out, 20s

Lorrie – a farmer, 40s-50s

Brandy– a dishwasher, 30s-40s

Shirley – a killer, late 60s

Setting

Ruby's executive office in a small town in rural America.

A Note on Guns

All of the firearms depicted in this play are customizable semi-automatic assault weapons similar to an AR-15. They may be stylized however the production sees fit, but they must be big enough for two hands and look as merciless as possible.

"Guns don't kill people, people kill people."

Fred A. Roff Jr.
President, Colt Patent Fire Arms Company
1959

Scene 1

An executive office in rural America.

RUBY, late 60s, holds a large semi-automatic assault weapon.

RUBY

This is **The Lone Widow**.

I named her after Francene Maplewood. You ever heard of her?

Francene was recently widowed and living alone out in the country. One night, three men came in off the highway, broke into Francene's house, and they ripped her apart. Broken jaw. Dislocated shoulder. Torn scalp. Threw her down the basement stairs and left her to die. But Francene—never been on a plane, bursitis in both knees—she crawled up those stairs holding one of her husband's guns. Three bodies left the farm that night. None of them hers.

I heard about Francene and thought everyone should know about her. So I built this gun to tell her story. **The Lone Widow: A gun for women who live alone**. This gun transformed a little hobby I shared with my daughter into the booming business you see today. Now we ship our guns across the country and around the world. **The Bridesmaid. The Babysitter. The Mallwalker**. Each named for a woman who stood up, used a gun, and saved a life.

(So that's Ruby—the weathered, tough-as-nails founder and CEO of a gun company. If there was ever anyone who you wanted by your side when the world fell apart, it would be Ruby.)

What are you doing?

(APRIL, 20s, is sitting across from Ruby and tapping on her phone.)

APRIL

Looking up Francene Maplewood.

RUBY

Why?

APRIL

To see if it's real.

RUBY

A story doesn't have to be real to be true.

APRIL

Actually—

RUBY

And the truth is if you have a gun, you have safety. It doesn't matter how big you are. How old you are. If you're a man or a woman. The gun is the Great Equalizer.

APRIL

There aren't any stories about Francene Maplewood.

RUBY

Then you're not looking in the right place.

(As you might be able to tell, April is a bit of a foil for Ruby. To some, April is smart, strong, and capable. To others, she's a bit smug.)

RUBY

(Yelling offstage:) JANELLE!

JANELLE

(From offstage:) WHAT!

RUBY

(To offstage:) GET ME SOMETHING TO DRINK! *(To APRIL:)* Our intercom broke.

JANELLE

(From offstage:) WOULD APRIL LIKE SOMETHING?

RUBY

Would you like something to drink?

APRIL

I'm not thirsty.

RUBY

(To offstage:) SHE'S NOT THIRSTY!

JANELLE

(From offstage:) WHAT?

RUBY

(To offstage:) SHE'S NOT THIRSTY!

JANELLE

(From offstage:) WHAT?

APRIL

(To offstage:) WATER'S FINE!

JANELLE

(From offstage:) OKAY!

RUBY

(To APRIL:) There's a guy in town who's supposed to fix the intercom. He's in his 80s, hands shake, has tremors—not ideal for fixing small electronics. But he needed the job. His wife worked here for 20 years. She had the stroke in the seat you're sitting in. That's why I'm hiring a new secretary.

(So that's why these two seemingly opposite people are together: it's a job interview. April's not the type of person you'd typically find interviewing for a job at a gun company. So why is she there? We'll get to that...)

APRIL

Did you have any questions about my resume?

RUBY

I was a little confused.

APRIL

Because I'm overqualified?

RUBY

No. Because your resume is confusing.

APRIL

What part did you find confusing?

RUBY

Under special skills you list "Facilitating Action." One of your hobbies is "Interrogating Power Structures." And you lived in a coop. Is that with chickens?

APRIL

It's co-op. I lived in a co-op.

RUBY

Can you type?

APRIL

Yes.

Use a copier?
RUBY

Of course.
APRIL

Then why didn't you list those skills? Instead of "Dialoguing" and "Agitating"?
RUBY

I thought you'd want to know what I'm passionate about.
APRIL

Are you passionate about guns?
RUBY

Is that important to the position?
APRIL

This company sells guns. That's our business. How we make a profit. Under the "Moral Opposition" section of your resume, the first item you list is guns. The sixth is business. And the last is profit.
RUBY

Most organizations appreciate different perspectives.
APRIL

Not this one.
RUBY

Then why are you recruiting me?
APRIL

Excuse me?
RUBY

I was told you were recruiting me—to help with corporate responsibility and create a forward-thinking ethical culture alongside light administrative duties . . .
APRIL

Who told you that?
RUBY

The office manager.
APRIL

Your sister? RUBY

Half-sister. APRIL

*(April's half-sister, **JANELLE**, enters. Janelle is an office manager in her 30s, who's always looking on the bright side. She's a bit of a dingbat, but means wells . . . usually.)*

JANELLE
I put ice in your water like you like, April. How's the interview?

RUBY
Did you tell April I was recruiting her for some corporate responsibility culture thing?

JANELLE
No.

APRIL
Janelle.

JANELLE
(To APRIL:) She was asking about you.

RUBY
No I wasn't.

JANELLE
(To RUBY:) She needs to feel wanted.

APRIL
No I don't.

JANELLE
I thought you two would get along. Are you not getting along?

APRIL
Can I be excused to the bathroom?

RUBY
This isn't school.

JANELLE

(Whispering to APRIL:) You don't need permission.

APRIL

I was being polite.

(APRIL exits.)

JANELLE

April is so bright. Don't you think she's so bright? She could read before I could and I'm like ten years older.

RUBY

She reminds me of my daughter.

JANELLE

Has April told you about her college? She knows languages, can talk about art, loves to protest. She would make an amazing secretary.

RUBY

(Changing subjects:) Did you contact the high school?

JANELLE

Not yet.

RUBY

I asked you to contact the high school an hour ago. Were you on that dating website?

JANELLE

I am not on a dating website. At work. Anymore.

RUBY

Janelle.

JANELLE

I called the high school, but they didn't pick up. It's that school secretary, Shirley. She doesn't pick up the phone because she's too busy bribing the students with candy bars so they'll gossip at her desk and call her Grandma. She's a bad secretary and I've given up dating.

RUBY

I drove by the high school this morning to check out the football field I bought them.

JANELLE

Doesn't it look amazing?

RUBY

The sign says: "Ruby Ruth Memorial Field."

JANELLE

(Smiling:) I know.

RUBY

Memorial means dead.

JANELLE

(Not smiling:) Oh.

RUBY

Call the high school. Make them change it. "Ruby Ruth Champion Field." Why aren't you writing that down?

JANELLE

I'll remember. *(She probably won't.)* Here's your messages.

RUBY

Why do I have so many messages?

JANELLE

People are calling to see if we're hiring. They cut another shift at the muffler factory.

RUBY

How many?

JANELLE

At least 40. How many do you think we can bring on?

RUBY

None.

JANELLE

I was thinking more like 40.

RUBY

We don't have the orders coming in for all the people we have now.

JANELLE

Maybe something will happen. We're praying for it at church. A big event. With lots of casualties.

RUBY

What are you talking about?

JANELLE

Just something people notice. Whenever some place gets shot up or some guy goes on a tear, you come out with a new gun, we get busy, and lots of people get hired. Like the guy last year who killed all his neighbors over losing the Christmas lights competition.

RUBY

The Christmas Miracle.

JANELLE

It was a Christmas miracle.

RUBY

No, that was the name of the gun. For that woman who took out the shooter then went into labor.

JANELLE

But that was a miracle. We were so busy with all the overtime and bonuses.

RUBY

It was a good Christmas.

JANELLE

You have that new gun in the workshop. You should put it online. Maybe it would get sales going again.

RUBY

That gun's not ready. It doesn't have a name.

JANELLE

Well, it's really quiet so how about you name it **The Wallflower: a gun for shy people.**

RUBY

No.

JANELLE

Why not?

RUBY

Because stupid names don't sell. And every gun we can't sell is another person we didn't protect.

JANELLE

We're gonna get more calls with people looking for work. Why don't I let April take care of it? She can start now.

RUBY

I want you to hire Lorrie.

JANELLE

I'm sorry?

RUBY

Lorrie Bernum. Hire her for the secretary position.

JANELLE

But we didn't like Lorrie Bernum. Remember? She lives on a farm. Doesn't have experience.

RUBY

She's got a secretarial diploma.

JANELLE

Her interview was disgusting. Rubber boots. No bra.

RUBY

Give her the talk about what to wear when you hire her.

JANELLE

But April already knows what to wear.

RUBY

I am not hiring April.

JANELLE

Why not?

RUBY

She picks fights, talks back, she's just like my daughter, and doesn't like guns. She's wasting my time. I'm not like her. I did not major in Social Justice, so I'm not accustomed to wasting my time.

JANELLE

But there are no other jobs in town. If you don't hire April, she'll go back to the city—And her husband. He made April quit college and stop talking to her friends. I had to pick her up in the middle of the night on a street corner so he wouldn't know she'd left. April has nowhere to go. She's only got her sister.

APRIL

Half-sister.

(During Janelle's speech above, APRIL has snuck in.)

JANELLE

April.

RUBY

Janelle, I think you have work to do.

JANELLE

(To APRIL:) I didn't tell her everything.

RUBY

Janelle.

JANELLE

(To RUBY:) He's going to hurt her.

APRIL

Janelle.

JANELLE

Okay. I'm butting out. Doing work. Contacting the high school secretary about a football sign because that's what's really important here.

(JANELLE exits.)

APRIL

I'm sorry that I'm such a waste of time.

RUBY

Sit down.

APRIL

I don't need a lecture.

RUBY

I'm not giving you a lecture. I'm giving you a job. But I have a concern.

APRIL

I'll stop picking fights and talking back—

RUBY

It's your husband. I don't want it affecting your work.

APRIL

It won't.

RUBY

He drink?

APRIL

No.

RUBY

On medication?

APRIL

That's none of your business.

RUBY

You ever have to call the police?

APRIL

No.

RUBY

Your neighbors call?

APRIL

He's a professor. He has two doctorates. We live in a nice building.

RUBY

Mean doesn't stop when you get a degree and crazy doesn't quit when you live in a city. So before you can work here, I want you to get a **Restraining Order**.

APRIL

I've already filed for a restraining order.

RUBY

No. I want you to get **The Restraining Order**. That's one of our guns.

APRIL

I think a restraining order from the courts will be enough.

RUBY

I got an e-mail from a lady just last week. She had one of those pieces of paper from a judge, but her ex kept walking past it. So she got **The Restraining Order** from us. And when her ex swung by in the middle of the night, drunk and holding a tire iron, guess which restraining order stopped him.

APRIL

I don't need a gun.

RUBY

I am not comfortable with you working here without a gun, so I'm making that a condition of your employment.

APRIL

You can't do that.

RUBY

I am not getting a call at five in the morning saying one of my girls can't come to work because her educated husband from the city broke in and strangled her.

APRIL

I'm not carrying a gun. It's not negotiable.

RUBY

Then I can't let you work here.

(A silent stand-off. Neither woman breaks. Then:)

APRIL

I didn't want to work for a terrorist anyway.

RUBY

Excuse me?

APRIL

Your company is a terror organization that sells fear and panic—

RUBY

I sell peace of mind.

APRIL

You scare people with impossible stories—

RUBY

Those stories are real—

—of violence and mutilation. APRIL

—more real than you know. RUBY

Francene Maplewood? APRIL

She's real. RUBY

She's a marketing campaign so you can sell murder weapons. APRIL

I am PROTECTING PEOPLE. RUBY

Were you protecting your daughter when she shot herself? APRIL

(Ouch. April went there. But Ruby's a heavily armed fortress and wouldn't show that she was hurt this early in the play.)

Have you ever needed a gun? RUBY

No. APRIL

You've never needed a gun? RUBY

Of course not. APRIL

You've never had a car breakdown at night? Got caught in a dark alley? Found yourself in a small room with a total stranger? You've never needed a gun more than anything else in the world? RUBY

Have you? APRIL

RUBY

Yes. April. Yes, I have.

*(This hangs in the air a bit. April wants to ask, "What happened to you?" But before she can, the office door flies open. In an instant, Ruby has **The Lone Widow** aimed, cocked, and ready to protect herself.)*

JANELLE

Ruby.

(But it's just Janelle with the phone in her hands, looking scared as hell.)

RUBY

How many times do I have to tell you not to barge into my office?

JANELLE

Ruby. It's the school.

RUBY

Did they fix my sign?

JANELLE

I tried calling, but one of the kids picked up. He's locked in the principal's office. He said there was gunshots. And I don't know what to do.

RUBY

Is the shooter down?

JANELLE

He's scared.

RUBY

Find out if the shooter is down.

JANELLE

It was in the next room.

RUBY

IS THE SHOOTER DOWN?

JANELLE

He says there's a body. It's not moving.

RUBY

Get my coat.

JANELLE

Why?

RUBY

Because I'm going down there.

(RUBY and JANELLE are suddenly in flow. They've most definitely trained for this kind of situation and know exactly what to do. JANELLE exits for the coat. RUBY gets all the things she might need to save the day: her purse, her sunglasses, a baseball hat, etc.)

RUBY

(To APRIL:) You know what? I never really wanted to hire you anyway.

APRIL

Because you don't hire people smarter than you?

RUBY

No. Because April was my daughter's name.

(RUBY marches to the door with her gun like she's Rambo or Arnold Schwarzenegger. JANELLE enters, still on the phone.)

JANELLE

The secretary. Ruby, the school secretary.

RUBY

Hit or dead?

JANELLE

No. He said it was her. The secretary.

RUBY

Shirley?

JANELLE

Yes. Shirley. The secretary. She took down the shooter.

END OF SCENE

(During scene changes, pre-recorded gun commercials should play over the loudspeaker.)

“The Mallwalker”

GUN COMMERCIAL VO

The best part of getting older is knowing your routine. What you like to eat, who you like to see, and where you like to walk. That’s why we built **The Mallwalker**. It’s the gun you can take with you on your morning exercise so you can keep vigilant while staying active.

The Mallwalker. The gun for those who know what they like. And want to keep it that way.

Scene 2

Weeks later. Ruby's office.

*The new secretary, **LORRIE**, 40s-50s, stands next to the chair where the old secretary had a stroke.*

There's a Midwestern archetype of a farmer who doesn't express much emotion. They stay pretty flat, so it's hard to tell if they're angry or happy or telling a joke. Now, imagine this farmer was a woman who's working inside for the first time in her life. So, as you get to know Lorrie, remember that she's trying to navigate a world that is completely foreign to her. She's wearing business casual from Goodwill—she's trying, but the look is still a little off.

*A good distance away from Lorrie is **SHIRLEY**, 60s. Shirley is a school secretary whose desire to be liked is only superseded by her need to be loved.*

Right now, SHIRLEY is doing her exercises. These are light stretches and aerobic motions. It's a little bit strange, but she's an elderly woman who shot a teenager. What else is she supposed to do with her body? Try to wash the imaginary spots of blood off her hands? Maybe in another play . . .

LORRIE

Now I was told that it started in the chair. But that most of the stroke happened on the ground there. So this chair is completely fine to sit in.

SHIRLEY

I'm okay.

LORRIE

It's not contagious. Strokes. They're not—

SHIRLEY

I know.

LORRIE

They said the old secretary hasn't had a stroke on any of the other chairs in the office if want me to haul in one of those—

SHIRLEY

I need to do my exercises. It's important to stay active.

LORRIE

But they taught us in my courses that a secretary is supposed to make visitors to the office feel comfortable.

SHIRLEY

I'm comfortable.

LORRIE

You sure? Because I can't lose this job.

(This hangs in the air a bit. Was it a threat?)

SHIRLEY

Is Ruby on her way?

LORRIE

She's in a meeting.

SHIRLEY

Do you know when she'll be free?

LORRIE

No.

SHIRLEY

Can you ask Janelle?

LORRIE

Janelle's in the meeting, too. And she said I'm not supposed to interrupt meetings with my stupid questions.

SHIRLEY

It's Lorrie?

LORRIE

Lorrie Bernum.

SHIRLEY

Can you tell Ruby that it's Shirley? That her friend Shirley is here.

LORRIE

I know who you are.

SHIRLEY

Can you tell her I'm here?

LORRIE

I let you in without an appointment. Why would I do that if I didn't know who you were?

SHIRLEY

I didn't know I needed an appointment.

LORRIE

Janelle said no one gets in without an appointment on the calendar. NO EXCEPTIONS.

SHIRLEY

But Ruby called me. Left messages.

LORRIE

And there you go.

SHIRLEY

What?

LORRIE

That proves it.

SHIRLEY

Proves what?

LORRIE

Janelle doesn't know everything. Just like I've been saying this whole time. *(Confidentially:)* You don't need an appointment when I'm in charge.

SHIRLEY

Thank you, Lorrie.

LORRIE

Lorrie Bernum.

SHIRLEY

Thank you.

LORRIE

I can't believe you would think I didn't know who you are. Do you think I'm stupid?

SHIRLEY

No.

LORRIE

Janelle thinks I'm stupid. Day 1 she shows me my desk and says, "Just so you know, I think you're stupid."

SHIRLEY
Working in an office can be very stressful.

LORRIE
He was my cousin.

SHIRLEY
Excuse me?

LORRIE
That kid you shot. He was my cousin.

(SHIRLEY stops exercising.)

SHIRLEY
My sister's outside.

LORRIE
I'm not mad, Shirley.

SHIRLEY
She'll be worried.

LORRIE
I'm not mad.

SHIRLEY
I should tell my sister what's taking so long.

LORRIE
His mom is mad. She calls me at all hours. Crying. Carrying on. Trying to get me to burn down your house. I had to stop answering the phone. But someone gave her my work number. Then Janelle's cracking my nuts about personal calls.

SHIRLEY
I wanted to call her. I did. I know what it's like to lose a child.

LORRIE
It's all for the best. That's what I keep saying, because you know he had problems.

SHIRLEY
Dustin.

LORRIE

Dustin was his school name. But we called him Dusty on account of his never showering. Did you know about his problems?

SHIRLEY

I file the records at the school. I know about all the problems.

LORRIE

When he was little, he jumped off the tractor on my grandpa's farm into the disk and the blades tore him up. That's why he had a limp and those scars all over. Why he could barely read or do math. Was that in the records?

SHIRLEY

No.

LORRIE

His mom hid a lot of things. They were living out of a camper in a cornfield. She was always bragging about having a house built with their government money, but her boyfriends were always running off with it. We were going to let them stay at our place. But you know how that goes.

SHIRLEY

Am I keeping you from your work?

LORRIE

Oh no. This is part of my job. Talking. Having conversations. Making visitors comfortable.

SHIRLEY

I don't want to keep you—

LORRIE

How many guns did they let you bring to your job? I asked Janelle about getting me some protection for the office and she said that's a stupid idea. But the secretary is the first line of defense.

SHIRLEY

Lorrie.

LORRIE

Lorrie Bernum.

SHIRLEY

I don't feel very comfortable right now.

LORRIE

That is why I do not exercise. It does not feel good.

SHIRLEY

It's not that.

LORRIE

Can I get you something to drink?

SHIRLEY

No.

LORRIE

I've got some liquor in my desk.

SHIRLEY

It's this conversation. It's not making me feel very comfortable.

LORRIE

I understand. When people talk about their jobs, my eyes glaze over too. You should see me when Janelle talks.

SHIRLEY

I should come back—

LORRIE

We can talk about something else.

SHIRLEY

—and make an appointment—

LORRIE

Like how many shots you need to take him down? I heard it was six.

(If this were a bar, Shirley might get decked right about now. But it's an office at a job Lorrie's trying her best to keep, and RUBY just entered the room.)

RUBY

Shirley. I didn't know you were coming in. Why didn't you tell me she was here, Lorrie?

LORRIE

I was just making her comfortable first like Janelle said to do.

RUBY

We don't make Shirley wait.

LORRIE

She wasn't waiting. She was doing her exercises. (*Aside to RUBY:*) I think she's scared of catching a stroke from the chair.

RUBY

Will you remind Janelle to order a new one?

LORRIE

I can take care of it.

RUBY

Janelle's the office manager. Ordering supplies is her job.

LORRIE

Of course. I forgot. That was stupid of me. (*To SHIRLEY:*) It was good talking, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Lorrie. Bernum.

LORRIE

(*Confidentially:*) I was just kidding about having liquor in my desk.

(*LORRIE exits.*)

RUBY

I'm glad you're here, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry I didn't come earlier. I wasn't getting your messages.

RUBY

I was worried about you.

SHIRLEY

I'm staying at my sister's. She's not letting me talk to anyone because my lawyer said not to and my sister says we have to do what he says. Or else. That's why I can't talk about what happened at the school. It's not personal. It's my lawyer.

RUBY

Are you sure you don't want to sit?

SHIRLEY

I'm fine.

RUBY

I can have Janelle bring you a coffee.

SHIRLEY

I'm okay.

RUBY

I just got my intercom fixed.

SHIRLEY

I have to stay busy. My sister doesn't think so. She makes me sit in a chair all day with a puzzle book. But I need to be working. That's why I'm glad you called. Because you'll help. Won't you? With work.

RUBY

You always have a place at my company.

SHIRLEY

No. Ruby. I need my job at the school. Those are my kids. And I have to be there to hear about prom, see who's dating, take tickets at the basketball games. That's who I am and I won't give it up.

RUBY

You're not being fired.

SHIRLEY

They put me on administrative leave.

RUBY

That's just until the investigation is complete.

SHIRLEY

They're advertising for my position. My sister saw it. Online. She won't quit bringing it up.

RUBY

It's probably for a temp.

SHIRLEY

My sister thinks there could be a trial.

RUBY

You won't go to trial.

SHIRLEY

I could. Even jail.

RUBY

The facts speak for themselves.

SHIRLEY

They don't, Ruby. That's the problem. Facts never speak. Only people do. And people lie.

RUBY

Would you like me to call my lawyer?

SHIRLEY

No. That's not. Ruby. I was thinking you could call the school and tell them I'm coming back to work. Immediately.

RUBY

Shirley, I don't run the school.

SHIRLEY

Anytime they want something, they call you. A new gym. Call Ruby. New windows. Call Ruby. We all know who runs this town. Owns everyone. Even me. You call and I'm here.

RUBY

Okay, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

You'll do it?

RUBY

I'll get the principal on the line this afternoon.

SHIRLEY

Thank you, Ruby. Thank you.

RUBY

But I need you to do something for me.

SHIRLEY

I am not going to therapy.

It's not that.

RUBY

SHIRLEY
They make you talk. I'm not talking. I don't like talking. I'm not good at talking.

(JANELLE enters.)

JANELLE
Ruby, you have an appointment.

RUBY
With who?

JANELLE
With me. It's on the calendar.

RUBY
I'm talking with Shirley.

JANELLE
She doesn't have an appointment.

RUBY
She doesn't need an appointment

JANELLE
Then what's the point of keeping a calendar?

SHIRLEY
I can go.

RUBY
(To SHIRLEY:) No. Stay. *(To JANELLE:)* We can reschedule.

JANELLE
But you said we'd discuss the problem. *(To SHIRLEY:)* Lorrie Bernum.

RUBY
Janelle's territorial.

JANELLE
I am not territorial.

RUBY

Yesterday, I caught her crying in the breakroom because Lorrie used her favorite coffee mug.

JANELLE

As a spit cup for her chewing tobacco. You promised we'd talk about it.

RUBY

After Shirley leaves.

JANELLE

I'm putting it on the calendar.

(JANELLE exits.)

RUBY

Shirley. Ever since this all happened, I've wanted to make sure you knew that you're brave. You know that, right? You're very brave to carry a gun.

SHIRLEY

I'm not supposed to talk—

RUBY

You're not talking. I'm talking. And I haven't been able to stop thinking about kids and schools. It breaks my heart. But if every secretary carried a gun—

SHIRLEY

I wasn't supposed to have my gun at school.

RUBY

But lucky for us, you did. Because when that danger came, you stopped him.

SHIRLEY

I didn't want to.

RUBY

Of course not. You had to. We had a company meeting. I told your story. Kid comes to school—our school—with a gun, thinking it was open season. Until he meets a secretary who came to work prepared. So we didn't have a school shooting, because we had a Shirley.

SHIRLEY

That's not what happened.

RUBY

People cheered, Shirley. “We need more Shirley’s.” That’s what they yelled. “We need more Shirley’s.” And we do. The world needs more Shirley’s. That’s why I want to name my next gun after you.

SHIRLEY

After me? Why?

RUBY

I’ve had a new gun ready for production. But I’ve been waiting for something that would give people hope—and backbone—to act when they must. And it’s you, Shirley, it’s you.

SHIRLEY

It’s not me. I broke the rules.

RUBY

There is a woman out there right now sitting in an office, drinking Coke, eating crackers, sending e-mails, and she was too afraid to bring her gun to work. Then something happens. A kid. A crazy. An old boyfriend with a score to settle. How many people need to lose their lives because some woman in some office thought it was better to sit quiet, say nothing, follow the rules?

SHIRLEY

I’m really not supposed to talk about this, Ruby. My doctor specifically said talking is not good for me.

RUBY

Then let’s stop talking and get Janelle in here so you can look at your gun.

SHIRLEY

Am I going to be able to work at the school if I tell you no?

(RUBY presses a button on her intercom.)

RUBY

Janelle.

(But the intercom is still broken. It plays loud Muzak.)

Janelle?

(Another button. Different Muzak.)

I think the intercom—

(Another button. More Muzak.)

Janelle, the intercom—

(RUBY hits the intercom.)

(Yelling offstage:) JANELLE!

(The Muzak is now blaring.)

(To SHIRLEY:) ELDON SNOOK SWORE HE FIXED MY INTERCOM BUT DOES THIS SOUND LIKE A FIXED INTERCOM?

(JANELLE enters.)

JANELLE
DO YOU KNOW WHAT LORRIE IS DOING?

RUBY
TURN THIS THING OFF.

(JANELLE unplugs the intercom. The loud Muzak stops.)

JANELLE
Lorrie is ordering a new chair.

RUBY
Shirley wants to see her gun.

JANELLE
But Lorrie.

RUBY
Get Shirley's gun. Then call Eldon and make sure he fixes my intercom.

JANELLE
I can't call Eldon.

RUBY
Why not?

JANELLE
He can't hear.

RUBY

Then write it down and hand it to him.

JANELLE

(Exiting:) But he lives across town—

(JANELLE exits.)

SHIRLEY

Dustin hit a girl. But the principal was busy. That's why they put him in my office. He was kicking my desk because he wanted a candy bar. But that candy is for good kids, so I ignored him. But then he said, "If you don't give me a candy, I'm going to rape you." He said it was a joke, but it wasn't a joke to me. So I told the principal and they expelled him saying I could press charges. I wasn't going to. I would never.

But an hour later he was back with a rifle. And I can't stop thinking that the whole situation wouldn't have happened if I had just given him a candy.

I only pointed my pistol at him. That's it. I said I cared about him, that he was beautiful and I loved him. I don't know if I meant it, but he started crying.

And then my gun went off. Over and over. It kept firing. And he fell to the ground.

RUBY

You didn't do anything wrong. Don't let anyone tell you that you did anything wrong.

SHIRLEY

That's what I've been trying to say, Ruby, but no one wants to hear it. I didn't do it. I didn't pull the trigger. I would never pull the trigger. It was the gun. The gun killed Dustin. The gun went off on its own.

(JANELLE enters carrying a large assault weapon with the excitement of a neonatal nurse.)

JANELLE

Here she is.

SHIRLEY

It's so big.

JANELLE

Would you like to hold her?

SHIRLEY
No. Janelle. No.

JANELLE
Shirley, you should hold her.

SHIRLEY
I don't know how.

JANELLE
Take your arms. Like this. Hold the head up. Support the body. Gently. Gently.
Gentle. There. There you go.

*(SHIRLEY cradles the **gun**.)*

RUBY
The Secretary. This is The Secretary.

JANELLE
We named her after you.

RUBY
She's going to save a lot of lives.

JANELLE
And make a lot of money.

*(SHIRLEY gives **The Secretary** back.)*

SHIRLEY
Get the school to bring me back and you can use whatever story to sell whatever you want.

RUBY
Of course, Shirley. You'll get your job back this afternoon.

SHIRLEY
My sister didn't want me to come here. Said to leave everything to the lawyer. But I can't sit around the house. I need to keep busy. Because when you're not busy. It goes. It all goes. And I'm not ready to go.

(SHIRLEY goes.)

JANELLE
Shirley can't go back to work at the school.

RUBY

She didn't do anything wrong.

JANELLE

But they're already advertising for a replacement. It's online.

RUBY

I'll talk to the principal. He'll take it down.

JANELLE

But April is putting in an application. She would make a great school secretary.

RUBY

I've never killed anyone. But I imagine there's a kind of guilt where your brain has to justify to your heart why you did what had to be done. Or you can't live with yourself.

When my daughter died, my brain tried a million different ways to tell my heart what happened and why. Because I needed to find a way to forgive myself for not being able to help her.

I can't tell Shirley what to do to survive this, just like no one could tell me what to do to survive after my daughter. But I can help Shirley get back to her life.

So get the high school on the phone. Now.

JANELLE

First, we have an appointment. It's on the calendar. After Shirley leaves, we talk about Lorrie.

END OF SCENE

“The Farmhand”

GUN COMMERCIAL VO

The Farmhand is a gun for a gal who’s not afraid to get dirty. Whether you’re tossing hay, building a lean-to, or shearing the sheep, **The Farmhand** is built to be go-to gun for your barn or tackroom.

The Farmhand has a silky grip for calloused hands, night vision for killing critters that get into your cat food, and a detachable unit that doubles as a hoof pick in a pinch.

When you need a little help on the farm, get your **Farmhand**. And get work done.

Scene 3

The next day.

LORRIE and RUBY in Ruby's office.

*The large assault weapon from the last scene, **The Secretary**, is lying across RUBY's desk.*

There is a new chair replacing the one where the former secretary had a stroke.

LORRIE
Am I in trouble?

RUBY
No, Lorrie, no.

LORRIE
Janelle said I was in big trouble.

RUBY
You're not in trouble.

LORRIE
Is this because I ordered a new chair? I can't help it if Janelle had a "deep, personal attachment" to the old chair.

RUBY
I just wanted to see how your first couple of weeks have been. And talk about your desk.

LORRIE
Janelle said I could bring things from home and put them on my desk.

RUBY
I think she was talking about pictures, figurines, little toys, things that make you think of home.

LORRIE
Is this about my saddle?

RUBY
Yes.

LORRIE

Normally, I wouldn't keep a saddle on my desk.

RUBY

I see.

LORRIE

But I had to sell the land with the good barn to get the bank off my back, and my roof is leaking, my basement has mold, my husband can't fix any of it because of his disability, which all the doctors say is him "being lazy," and if my saddles get wet, they'll be ruined and they're expensive. Janelle said to treat my desk like my second home and if I had a second home, I would use it to store my saddle.

RUBY

Why don't you leave your saddle in your truck?

LORRIE

I already got two saddles in my truck. There's not room for a third. Does Janelle have a problem with a saddle on my desk?

RUBY

No.

LORRIE

Then I don't see what the problem is.

RUBY

I have a secretary to make my life easier. One way to make my life easier is to keep your desk organized so I feel organized—making sure you have small things on your desk.

LORRIE

(*Pointing to **The Secretary** on Ruby's desk:*) You have big things on your desk.

RUBY

This is product. We're rolling out a new product and I need to look at all the materials before I send them into production.

LORRIE

Can I keep a gun on my desk?

RUBY

No.

LORRIE

But you said in the last meeting that every secretary should have **The Secretary**.

RUBY

You don't have room on your desk.

LORRIE

If I sell my saddle, I will.

RUBY

Let's ask Janelle.

LORRIE

But you said it yourself: If Shirley hadn't had a gun at work, there would have been a massacre. That's why we do what we do. That's why we're important. And if an intruder enters our building, what is the first thing they're going to encounter? A secretary. And who do you want out there? Janelle with her nagging, the attitude, thinking she knows everything, and we should just do what she says because she talks the most? Or me. With a gun.

(BRANDY, 30s-40s, enters. Maybe she was pretty once, but she learned long ago that looking nice is too much work for too much trouble.)

BRANDY

Excuse me. Do you have a minute of your time that I could have?

LORRIE

I told you not to stop by my work.

BRANDY

I'm not stopping by your work. My car broke down.

LORRIE

She don't have a car.

BRANDY

I do. It's borrowed. I'm Brandy.

LORRIE

She's my cousin.

RUBY

Did Janelle say you could come back here?

BRANDY
She didn't say I couldn't.

LORRIE
You are interrupting and we are busy.

BRANDY
You don't look busy.

LORRIE
I'm getting chewed out.

RUBY
You're not getting chewed out.

LORRIE
It's about my saddle.

BRANDY
I thought you got to bring things from home.

LORRIE
Me too.

RUBY
I'll be done with Lorrie in a second, if you want to wait outside.

BRANDY
Is that your new gun? Lorrie was telling me about it on the phone. The Shirley.

LORRIE
Secretary.

BRANDY
Lorrie said you're thinking it's going to be a big seller so you're hiring a lot of people.

RUBY
Janelle does the hiring.

BRANDY
I don't need a job. I got a job.

LORRIE
She's a dishwasher.

BRANDY

And waitress. They let me take tables when things get busy.

LORRIE

Which is never.

BRANDY

But it sounds like you're going to make a lot of money and I just thought you might want to talk to me.

RUBY

About what?

BRANDY

My son, Dusty. And doing stuff for me like you're doing for Shirley. I know you have other stuff going on and that's why you didn't reach out. Most of the time I'm too mad to talk or stuck at work, so it's probably hard to know when I'm available. But I made a list of stuff you can do for me.

RUBY

I'm sorry, Brandy, I'm very busy.

BRANDY

That's why I made a list of just the important stuff.

LORRIE

She doesn't want to hear your list.

BRANDY

One. Name the football field after Dusty.

LORRIE

She's busy, Brandy.

BRANDY

Two. A little assistance to help me move on.

LORRIE

She wants therapy.

BRANDY

Three. Make Shirley apologize.

RUBY

Brandy.

I'm not done.

BRANDY

I can't help you.

RUBY

But I worked real hard on this list.

BRANDY

I can't help you.

RUBY

BRANDY

I just think it's hypocritical of you to help Shirley. What kind of country do we live in where all the killers get rewards? I thought we were supposed to help the victims. Isn't that what this country was founded on? Helping out the victims?

RUBY

Your son was not a victim.

BRANDY

Can you explain that to me? Because out of everyone he really seems to lose out, while everyone else is cashing in.

RUBY

No one is cashing in.

BRANDY

When you sell those guns, how big a cut are you giving Shirley?

RUBY

Shirley is not getting paid.

BRANDY

That is the fattest lie I have ever heard. I work in the restaurant business and everyone gets paid over the counter or under the table. No one does things to be nice in business. So how much money is she getting?

RUBY

Lorrie, will you please see Brandy out?

BRANDY

No. Why don't I get a cut? He was my son. Don't you think I should get a cut? I put everything I had into that boy. He could have been a scientist. A racecar driver.

There's no telling. And Shirley swindled that from me. So now I'm going to be alone for the rest of my life and you're rewarding the person who done that.

RUBY

File a lawsuit.

BRANDY

That's really easy to say when you don't got warrants out. And how would I even pay for that? I've been on the phone all week with the ambulance company that took him. They sent me a bill—six hundred dollars—for transport to the hospital when he was already dead. Why do I have to pay six hundred dollars when they couldn't do nothing? But that's why I'll never be rich. Because I believe in sharing and helping and fairness. And if you want to get rich in this country, you can't want things to be fair. Because if things were fair, we'd all be rich and not just the greedy's, the hoarders, and the killers.

RUBY

Here.

BRANDY

What's that?

RUBY

It's a check to pay your ambulance bill. Because I agree—that is not fair. (*RUBY hands BRANDY a check.*) I'm sorry you lost your son.

BRANDY

Thank you, Ruby. I appreciate that. I do. But you're missing a zero. This check is missing a zero.

RUBY

You said it was six hundred.

BRANDY

No. I said six thousand. The ambulance cost six thousand. You weren't listening.

RUBY

Get out of my office.

BRANDY

Why? What did I do to you?

RUBY

If you come any closer—

I'm not doing nothing.

BRANDY

Brandy, you need to back up.

LORRIE

I'm just talking.

BRANDY

My boss doesn't want you that close.

LORRIE

You are on my property and I can legally—

RUBY

I'm always on your property, because you own *everything*.

BRANDY

*(LORRIE grabs **The Secretary** and points it at BRANDY.*

This is a big moment in the play and the way Lorrie handles this gun is vitally important. If she comes off as crazy or angry or anything else than supremely competent at the privilege of holding a gun, then Ruby is an idiot and the entire play falls apart. Remember, Lorrie is a farmer who is accustomed to operating heavy machinery that could easily kill or maim. So handling a gun is much more in her wheelhouse than anything else in the office.)

You need to step back.

LORRIE

You gonna shoot me?

BRANDY

Step back.

LORRIE

Or is your gun going to do it?

BRANDY

Brandy.

LORRIE

Because that's what I got told when I drove to see Shirley this morning and ask her why. But I couldn't say nothing because Shirley locked herself in a bathroom, while

BRANDY

her sister just kept screaming in my ear: IT WAS THE GUN. IT WASN'T SHIRLEY. IT WAS THE GUN THAT DID IT.

LORRIE

I killed a raccoon with a pitchfork this morning, so do not think I'm afraid to get blood on this blouse.

BRANDY

Alright. Okay. Cool your tacos.

RUBY

I know what it's like to be mad about losing a child.

BRANDY

I hope one day you need help so bad and you look around and there's nothing there. Because then maybe you'll know how it's like when you're me.

(BRANDY exits. There's a long pause.)

LORRIE

So. Can I?

RUBY

Can you what?

LORRIE

*(Indicating **The Secretary**.)* Have this. If I get rid of my saddle.

RUBY

Don't keep it loaded at your desk.

LORRIE

Okay.

RUBY

Good.

LORRIE

I'll only keep it loaded when I'm carrying it around.

END OF SCENE

“The Independent”

GUN COMMERCIAL VO

I've always been unstoppable. When I was driving the lane on my high school basketball team, when I juggled a career and five kids, and even when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, nothing's ever been able to stop me from living my best life.

But when I got mugged four times in three months getting my wheelchair out of my van at the grocery store, I knew I needed a little help. That's why I got **The Independent**.

The Independent is a gun for women like me—who are still unstoppable even after all these years.

Scene 4

Days later.

APRIL and JANELLE in Ruby's office.

JANELLE

So then Lorrie tells me that her friend Jim, who has a felony charge and a stupid mustache, wasn't getting dates with his online profile—until he starts posting pictures of his “fat gut.” Now he has three boyfriends and one lives in a mansion. So Lorrie says I might get dates if I would just post pictures of my “fat gut.”

APRIL

Where's Ruby?

JANELLE

She stepped out. Why would Lorrie say I have a “fat gut”?

APRIL

You said Ruby would be in her office and I could talk to her.

JANELLE

But I have never in all my life been told I have a “fat gut.”

APRIL

You said I was in the calendar. Am I in the calendar?

JANELLE

Yes. Of course. I put you in there myself.

APRIL

Janelle.

JANELLE

I haven't seen you in a week, April, and we live together.

APRIL

I'm busy.

JANELLE

Did you find a job?

APRIL

Yes. And if Ruby isn't here, I need to get back to work.

JANELLE

We have our new gun, **The Secretary**, going into production. So Ruby's at the plant, and I got to hire 40 new people because we think it's going to be a big seller. Do you want to hear the marketing?

APRIL

No—

JANELLE

But I helped with it.

APRIL

I don't—

JANELLE

"The Secretary is your quiet little companion who keeps the whole office in line—"

APRIL

Janelle.

JANELLE

Ruby's coming right back for your appointment. I promise. What's your job?

APRIL

I'm helping Brandy Ranfeld.

JANELLE

But she's the woman whose son—

APRIL

—was murdered?

JANELLE

Does it pay well?

APRIL

Not every job pays.

JANELLE

Then why would you take the job?

APRIL

Shirley's back to work, there's no charges, and your boss is celebrating the slaughter with a new murder weapon. Like nothing happened. So I got in touch with Brandy and said I could make things happen.

JANELLE

He brought a gun to school.

APRIL

That doesn't mean he should be shot.

JANELLE

It was loaded.

APRIL

He didn't fire.

JANELLE

Because of Shirley.

APRIL

There was mucus up and down the back of his coat when his body came back from the morgue. Kids were spitting on him in class, but he got in trouble for trying to make it stop. One of the girls spitting on him was one of Shirley's favorites, so Shirley told him that if he ever came after one of her kids again, she would kill him. And then she did.

JANELLE

Who told you that?

APRIL

Brandy. His whole life that boy was picked on.

JANELLE

That doesn't mean he can bring a gun to school.

APRIL

He went there to kill himself, Janelle. And he succeeded.

JANELLE

You don't know that.

APRIL

It's what Brandy says, if anyone would listen to her.

JANELLE

Brandy calls here every day trying to extort Ruby.

APRIL

She doesn't want money.

JANELLE

So she can get cosmetic surgery.

APRIL

She wants justice.

JANELLE

And rename the football field after Dusty.

APRIL

Dustin. He goes by Dustin now.

JANELLE

You'll never be happy if you spend all your time thinking about other people's problems, April.

APRIL

Do you trust Shirley with a gun? Ask yourself that, Janelle. Think of everything you know about her. She once told me I was going to rot in hell because I didn't thank her during my high school graduation speech. Should someone like that have a gun?

JANELLE

Shirley's a good person. We're all good people.

APRIL

Everyone said that about our dad. But do you think he was a good person? If he'd ever gotten a hold of a gun, do you think you'd be alive today? I wouldn't. I guarantee. I'd be dead.

*(LORRIE enters with **The Secretary** strapped to her chest.)*

LORRIE

Janelle.

JANELLE

How many times do I have to tell you: Do not point your gun at me.

LORRIE

I wasn't pointing it at you.

JANELLE

I saw you pointing that gun at me when you walked in.

LORRIE

I don't know what you're talking about.

JANELLE

Ask April. You saw her. Just now when she walked in pointing her gun.

APRIL

I didn't see anything.

JANELLE

April.

LORRIE

And there you go.

JANELLE

But she's always pointing her gun at me. When I turn my back. Or bend over. When I'm in the kitchenette. If I make popcorn.

LORRIE

Ruby called. You were supposed to be down at the plant twenty minutes ago.

JANELLE

I had a visit from my sister.

LORRIE

Half-sister. And she's not on the calendar.

APRIL

Janelle.

JANELLE

You were on the calendar, April. I swear. It's Lorrie. She gets on my computer, hacks my passwords, and changes the calendar behind my back.

LORRIE

Do I look like I know how to do that?

JANELLE

Stop pointing your gun at me.

LORRIE

If you don't quit accusing me of things
I didn't do so help me I will
file a complaint.

JANELLE

I don't
ACCUSE
you.

JANELLE
I've never accused her of anything.

LORRIE
Last week she told Ruby I used curse words to describe the fax machine.

JANELLE
I heard you.

LORRIE
I like the fax machine.

JANELLE
I heard her.

LORRIE
I am good at the fax machine.

JANELLE
She said it.

LORRIE
Why would I use curse words to describe the fax machine?

JANELLE
And then she smacked it.

LORRIE
It was beeping too loud.

APRIL
I need to go.

JANELLE
No, stay, I'll be right back. Ruby has me give our new hires a little training session.

LORRIE
About how to look busy.

JANELLE
Etiquette.

APRIL
Brandy is waiting for me outside.

JANELLE

She is not our kind of people.

APRIL

I can't sit around your house all day.

JANELLE

I'm sorry I don't have the things you like. Hummus—

APRIL

It's not that.

JANELLE

—or tempura.

APRIL

He drove by.

(This hits Janelle like a ton of bricks.)

JANELLE

Your husband? Are you sure?

APRIL

Yesterday, he pulled into your driveway. Smoked his pipe. And left.

JANELLE

April, call the police. You need to call the police.

APRIL

I already did. They said I should move.

JANELLE

There's nowhere else for you to go.

APRIL

Brandy said I could stay with her.

JANELLE

Why would you do that?

APRIL

She lives in the middle of nowhere. We're already working together.

LORRIE

And she has that extra bed now.

JANELLE

She's not family.

APRIL

It's already done. We moved my stuff this morning. So I'd like to make an appointment with Ruby for later if that's alright.

JANELLE

Okay. Great. I'll look at the calendar and set up another appointment when I get back, if my "fat gut" will fit behind the desk.

(JANELLE exits, slamming the door over and over.)

LORRIE

Well. It's true. What they said in my courses about the three kinds of people who create toxic work situations: The liars, the stealers, and your immediate superiors.

APRIL

Can you make sure Janelle puts me on the calendar?

LORRIE

I'm starting my own calendar that Janelle won't know about. If you would rather be on that.

APRIL

When is the next appointment?

LORRIE

Let me check my calendar.

(LORRIE pulls out a small calendar that she's hidden on her body.)

LORRIE

So you're the one helping my cousin.

APRIL

It's an important cause.

LORRIE

You think getting the football field named after Dusty is an important cause?

APRIL

His name is Dustin. And it's important to Brandy to have something good to remember him by.

LORRIE

If Brandy wanted to call him Dustin, she would have made him shower more.

APRIL

Maybe if her family would support her, Brandy wouldn't need to re-name a football field to get people to say nice things about her son.

LORRIE

Can I give you some life advice? It's something my grandpa told me when I was little that I never forgot.

APRIL

What?

LORRIE

Stay away from brandy—unless you want something to happen to that baby.

APRIL

I don't know what you're talking about.

LORRIE

We got our barn cat fixed last spring. And I been saying the vet didn't do it right for months. So what do you think I found under the porch last week? *(Pause.)* Kittens. *(Pause.)* I've got a gift. I can sense it.

APRIL

I'm not—.

LORRIE

Shhhhhh. *(LORRIE unplugs the intercom.)* They say the intercom is fixed, but that's just what they say so you don't think people are listening.

APRIL

I'm not pregnant.

LORRIE

If you're worried I'm going to tell Janelle, I won't. I feel bad enough stealing your job.

APRIL

You didn't steal my job.

LORRIE

That's not what Janelle says. Every day.

APRIL

I didn't want to work here.

LORRIE

I didn't want to make my husband hamloaf last night, but I did it anyway. Because I had to. And I had to get this job. (*Confidentially:*) I went to school with Ruby's daughter. You get what I'm saying?

APRIL

No.

LORRIE

I started my interview by saying I was sorry about what happened to her daughter. Then I gave her the look to say that I know what really happened.

APRIL

She killed herself.

LORRIE

But you know why? (*Confidentially:*) She got knocked-up. And no one knew. Besides me. Because like I said: I've got the gift. But I couldn't tell nobody, because when you have the gift, you don't spread it around or people think you're crazy.

APRIL

Or it's not true.

LORRIE

Her daughter was pretty, smart, going to college. She didn't have problems. Until she got pregnant.

APRIL

Did you find me an appointment?

LORRIE

Yes.

APRIL

What time?

LORRIE

Whenever you get here. In my calendar, you just show up.

APRIL

Tell Ruby that if we don't hear from her, something's going to happen . . .

LORRIE

Get as far away from Brandy as you can for the sake of that baby. Because she's like everybody else: filled to the brim with bees and honey. And when the nest gets kicked, there's no telling which of the two comes pouring out. (*LORRIE plugs the intercom back in.*) And I was just kidding about the intercom.

END OF SCENE

“Gunsy”

GUN COMMERCIAL VO

If you're a stay-at-home mom or just a gal who wants to make some extra cash, you should try **Gunsy**. **Gunsy** is the gun selling business you can do from home.

Every month we send you a curated selection of guns and gun accessories and you throw **Gunsy** parties for your friends to sell your new merchandise in a safe, fun, girls-only environment.

Soon you'll be the go-to gun gal in your own town. Low start-up cost and we'll buy back whatever you don't sell. Work the hours you want doing something you love.

Gunsy. Shoot for the moon.

Scene 5

Days later.

RUBY, JANELLE, and SHIRLEY in Ruby's office.

JANELLE hands SHIRLEY a cup of coffee.

SHIRLEY

You didn't have to do this for me, Janelle.

JANELLE

Yes I did. Ruby said.

RUBY

Janelle.

JANELLE

It's just that I'm an office manager.

SHIRLEY

I know: You don't bring coffee.

RUBY

I said Lorrie could do it.

SHIRLEY

But I had to be particular. Said I didn't want my coffee from Lorrie (*slight pause*) Bernum. I had to have Janelle bring it because we're old buddies.

JANELLE

I'm happy to help, Shirley. But you also didn't make an appointment—

RUBY

Janelle.

JANELLE

—and we don't allow people to just show up—

RUBY

Janelle.

JANELLE

But I understand, Shirley, because you are having an "emergency."

SHIRLEY

She's so pretty. I always say that about you, Janelle. I don't know why she's not married.

RUBY

She's trying.

JANELLE

Can I get you anything else?

SHIRLEY

I remember her in high school. I always said she was going to make something of herself because she always had a smile on her face. Even when your dad died. She just kept that smile on her face.

JANELLE

I should get back to my desk.

SHIRLEY

We never catch up, Janelle. She never visits me. I ask her. She never does.

JANELLE

Yes. Of course. Let's catch up. But after you're done with your "emergency."

(JANELLE exits.)

SHIRLEY

She was abused. Did you know that? Her and her sister with the father. I don't know if it was sexual. But we'd find her crying in the bathroom, and she would never say why. Just kept up with that smile.

RUBY

How's being back to work?

SHIRLEY

The school's great.

RUBY

Good.

SHIRLEY

We knew he hit Janelle a few times. And probably the sister. I remember once Janelle came to school on the bus and the principal had to drive her right back home because her sister was sick with the flu. And Janelle was so worried. I'd never seen

someone so worried. I always wondered if her sister actually had the flu or if something else was going on.

RUBY

But you're good?

SHIRLEY

Yes. Why?

RUBY

You said you had an emergency.

SHIRLEY

Yes. I'm not good.

RUBY

What's the matter?

SHIRLEY

My sister told me this morning—I hadn't even eaten breakfast—that I can't stay with her anymore. It's my cat.

RUBY

Is your sister allergic?

SHIRLEY

No, of course not. She loves cats. She has five. So she's been a wreck since my cat went missing and taking it out on me. "Where's your cat? Where's your cat?" You know how that goes: It's my cat, but her tragedy.

RUBY

How long has your cat been missing?

SHIRLEY

Only a few days. I didn't think anything of it. Cats are always running off. But then my sister found her this morning. She was run over. Then stuffed in the mailbox with a nasty note saying I'm next. So now I'm not allowed to live with my sister anymore because she thinks I'm a target.

RUBY

Did you call the police?

SHIRLEY

Yes. And they were very kind, until I asked to get my gun back. They won't let me have it. The sheriff did something in a database so I can't get a gun at a store or anywhere.

RUBY

But you're not being charged with a crime.

SHIRLEY

I reminded the sheriff of that, but he just doesn't like me. A few years back, I saw him take a candy from the concession stand at a football game. That money goes to the band boosters. Why would a forty-year-old man steal candy from the band boosters? So I told on him. But no one did anything and he walked away, scot-free, chewing his stolen candy.

RUBY

Do you want me to talk to him?

SHIRLEY

It was just a candy. He's probably forgotten about it.

RUBY

About your gun. Getting it back.

SHIRLEY

He'll think I can't stick up for myself. No. That's too humiliating.

RUBY

You have to let me help you.

SHIRLEY

Okay. Ruby. Fine. I'll let you help. **The Secretary**. I want one. I don't feel safe, Ruby. There's this old car that drives by every day and sometimes at night. My sister always said it was nothing. But I don't know. Now, I just don't know.

(JANELLE enters.)

JANELLE

Ruby, sorry to interrupt, but we don't have a **Secretary** in the office right now.

RUBY

Are you listening at my door?

JANELLE

No.

RUBY
Then how do you know what we're talking about?

JANELLE
Lorrie told me.

RUBY
How does Lorrie know?

JANELLE
It's not my job to watch Lorrie.

RUBY
Yes it is. You're her manager.

JANELLE
Well, we just don't have a **Secretary** in the office for Shirley.

SHIRLEY
There's one in the display case.

JANELLE
I can't get it out.

RUBY
Why not?

JANELLE
I've lost the keys.

LORRIE
(Over the intercom:) Keys are on my desk.

(Pause.)

RUBY
Is Lorrie listening in?

LORRIE
(Over the intercom:) No.

(Pause.)

JANELLE
(Taking Ruby aside:) Ruby, I don't think this is a good idea.

RUBY

Why not?

JANELLE

When April was here, she made a really good point that maybe Shirley—

(SHIRLEY spills her coffee on the floor.)

SHIRLEY

Oh my lands.

RUBY

Are you okay?

SHIRLEY

I'm so sorry, Ruby. The coffee was too hot.

JANELLE

I'll have Lorrie clean it up.

SHIRLEY

I don't want to be a bother. You can help me.

JANELLE

But I can't manage an office if I'm cleaning things.

RUBY

Clean it up, Janelle. I'll be right back, Shirley. We'll get you set up.

(RUBY exits.)

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry I made you get coffee in the first place, Janelle. You must think I'm a birdbrain.

JANELLE

It's perfectly fine.

SHIRLEY

But I'm glad we can talk. I brought you some candy.

JANELLE

No, thank you.

It's your favorite.

SHIRLEY

I'm on a diet.

JANELLE

Maybe you can give it to your sister. How is she?

SHIRLEY

Good.

JANELLE

She hasn't come to see me since she moved back, so I don't know how she's doing.

SHIRLEY

She's good.

JANELLE

When she was in school, we were very close. Did you know that? She called me "mom." And gave me a Mother's Day gift her senior year. A little swan. It's still on my desk. Did you know she did that?

SHIRLEY

No.

JANELLE

So I was very hurt when I heard she got married to her college sweetheart.

SHIRLEY

Professor. College professor.

JANELLE

I wasn't invited to the ceremony.

SHIRLEY

It was at a courthouse.

JANELLE

I could have been invited. I would have come.

SHIRLEY

She didn't tell anyone.

JANELLE

SHIRLEY

When my girls get married, I make them a quilt. Always. When you get married, you'll get a quilt, Janelle, but only if I'm invited. I couldn't do that for April, because she never invited me.

JANELLE

If it makes you feel better, they're getting a divorce.

SHIRLEY

I don't believe in divorce.

JANELLE

You don't know her husband. He has kids my age. April was his student. They caught him sleeping in her dorm room. He said getting married was the only way to keep his job, but he was already fired. It was all a lie.

SHIRLEY

Is he why April has been so nasty?

JANELLE

I don't know what you're talking about.

SHIRLEY

She used to be sweet, gentle, calling me mom. But now . . . did you know April has been saying things about me?

JANELLE

No. I didn't.

SHIRLEY

Terrible things. All around town.

JANELLE

I'm sure she didn't mean it.

SHIRLEY

She told my dentist that I'm going to kill someone again. *Statistically speaking*. I will murder again. I've been going to that man for forty years. But this time he was rough with me, Janelle. I walked out of his office and my mouth was still bleeding. I am not going to be treated like an animal because your sister has a loose mouth.

JANELLE

Half-sister.

SHIRLEY

It has to stop.

JANELLE

I'll talk to her.

(SHIRLEY grabs JANELLE's arm.)

SHIRLEY

I need you to do more than talk to her.

JANELLE

Shirley. You're hurting me.

SHIRLEY

None of the kids at school will talk to me. I have to sit at my desk, alone, all day without any visitors. Last week I stayed up all night making cookies for my birthday and no one would eat them. I won't live like this. I can't. Do you understand?

JANELLE

Please let go of my arm.

SHIRLEY

I need you to stop her.

JANELLE

I'll talk to April.

SHIRLEY

No. Janelle. You need to stop her. Because if you don't, I will.

*(RUBY enters with **The Secretary**. SHIRLEY releases JANELLE's arm.)*

RUBY

And here you go Shirley. Your very own **Secretary**.

SHIRLEY

Thank you, Ruby. Thank you. *(SHIRLEY takes **The Secretary**.)* This should keep me safe.

END OF SCENE

“The Toilet Holster”

WOMAN

If your husband is like mine, he spends a lot of time in the bathroom. *(To her husband in the bathroom:)* What’s going on in there?

MAN

(From the other room:) I’m reading the paper!

WOMAN

Luckily, we’ve got that second bathroom I can use when my husband’s hogging ours. But what if someone breaks into our home when we’re otherwise occupied?

That’s why I got **The Toilet Holster**. It’s a little holster that fits snugly around your tank to hold your favorite gun. It’s a great comfort for those with IBS, diverticulitis, or if you’re just a man who likes to read the paper on the pot.

MAN

(From the other room:) Are you talking about me out there?

WOMAN

(To her husband:) No honey! *(To us:)* **The Toilet Holster**. For when you’ve got to go, so you won’t be all alone.

Scene 6

Days later.

RUBY and JANELLE in Ruby's office.

JANELLE is trying not to cry, but she's not doing a very good job.

JANELLE

The Secretary was launched this morning. It's not selling at all. The marketing department suggested that we emphasize how quiet **The Secretary** is. Or how she's always ready to lend a hand when you need extra assistance around the office—

RUBY

Do you have something you need to talk about?

JANELLE

No. No. No. It's nothing.

RUBY

Why are you crying?

JANELLE

I can't talk about it.

RUBY

Did you go on a date last night?

JANELLE

No.

RUBY

How many times have I told you that if they ask to meet at a motel off the interstate, they're not looking for a relationship?

JANELLE

I didn't go on a date last night.

RUBY

Then why are you crying?

(JANELLE puts a finger to her lips. Then unplugs the intercom.)

RUBY

What are you doing?

JANELLE

Lorrie listens to what's going on in your office through the intercom. Yesterday, she listened to you eating your lunch. The whole time.

RUBY

Is that why you're crying?

JANELLE

No.

RUBY

Then what?

JANELLE

I can't.

RUBY

Janelle.

JANELLE

Lorrie broke the copier.

RUBY

I'm sure she didn't mean to.

JANELLE

It's shattered.

RUBY

Shattered?

JANELLE

Completely shattered. There are pieces everywhere and it's giving off sparks. I had to unplug it. I think Lorrie shot the copier.

RUBY

I didn't hear anything.

JANELLE

That's because **The Secretary** is so quiet.

RUBY

Why would Lorrie shoot the copier?

JANELLE

I don't know. I told her to make some copies and went to the bathroom. When I came back, the copier is all over the room and there's a little trail of smoke. And all Lorrie says is: "copier's busted." And I'm upset, Ruby. I spent a lot of my life with that copier and I don't like that someone just took that away.

*(LORRIE enters with **The Secretary** strapped to her chest.)*

LORRIE

Ruby.

JANELLE

We are in a meeting. What did I very clearly tell you to do if you needed something when we are in a meeting?

LORRIE

Use the intercom.

JANELLE

Then why aren't you using the intercom?

LORRIE

Looks like somebody unplugged it. Ruby, I need to run out.

RUBY

Can you hold up a minute?

LORRIE

I'm on the volunteer fire department and my emergency pager's going off. They said if I don't show up faster, I won't get to drive the fire truck anymore and that'll really piss me off.

JANELLE

Ruby. Talk to her.

LORRIE

What's Janelle's problem?

RUBY

She's upset about the copier.

LORRIE

Yeah, looks like something happened to it.

JANELLE

Ruby.

RUBY

Janelle, will you contact Eldon and get our intercom fixed?

JANELLE

I can't go back in there.

RUBY

Go.

JANELLE

But—

RUBY

Now.

JANELLE

Every time I walk into that room, I have to look at the copier and remember what it was like when I first saw it: the smoke and the sparks. It was a warzone. Ruby. A warzone.

(JANELLE exits.)

LORRIE

Last time I didn't show up, they let Bill Gorsch drive the fire truck and he hit a parked car.

RUBY

Is that loaded?

LORRIE

What?

RUBY

The gun. Is it loaded?

LORRIE

No.

RUBY

Lorrie, is it loaded?

Let me check. Yes. LORRIE

Unload it. Now. RUBY

Am I in trouble? LORRIE

How about you tell me? RUBY

No, I'm not in trouble. LORRIE

Did you shoot the copier? RUBY

No. LORRIE

You didn't accidentally shoot the copier? RUBY

No. LORRIE

I can see into the office right now. There's a bullet hole in the copier. There are pieces of copier all over the floor. A piece of plastic from the copier is in your hair. Someone shot the copier. I didn't do it. Janelle didn't do it. Did you do it? RUBY

No. LORRIE

Then how did the copier get shot? RUBY

The gun did it. LORRIE

The gun did it? RUBY

Uh-huh.

LORRIE

It just fired on its own?

RUBY

Yes.

LORRIE

You didn't pull the trigger?

RUBY

No.

LORRIE

Can you explain that to me?

RUBY

LORRIE

It was just lying on my desk like I like it. I was writing an e-mail not even being near it. And it just shot and hit the copier. So don't get mad at me. Get mad at the gun. It did the shooting.

RUBY

I understand that accidents happen. That stupid people get guns and they do stupid things. But don't blame the gun when you're the STUPID. You could have killed someone.

LORRIE

I could not have killed someone, because I didn't do it. The gun did.

RUBY

You're fired.

LORRIE

What?

RUBY

I said, you're fired.

LORRIE

But if I don't have my job, how am I supposed to afford to feed my animals? And take my husband to his doctors? And pay my dues to be a volunteer fire fighter?

RUBY

You should have thought of that before you shot the copier. Now get out.

LORRIE

You're going to be sorry.

RUBY

Are you threatening me?

LORRIE

No. I am not threatening you. I am saying that one day you'll see I'm right and that the gun shot your copier and you'll be sorry for how you treated me today.

RUBY

Do not point that gun at me.

LORRIE

I am not pointing it at you.

RUBY

You're pointing it at me right now.

LORRIE

If I was pointing it at you, I would do this. (*LORRIE raises the gun to her shoulder.*) But I'm not doing this. I'm just holding it. Like this. (*LORRIE brings the gun to her side.*)

RUBY

I do not allow anyone to threaten me with a gun.

LORRIE

I'm not threatening nobody. Is that what you think I'm doing? Just because I'm holding a gun while we're having a conversation. I'm letting you know that I do not want to leave my job. You're the one who's talking about shooting people. Not me. I'm having a rational conversation about an office disagreement.

(JANELLE enters, not crying.)

JANELLE

Ruby. There's ambulance and firetrucks and police outside. They'd like to talk to you.

RUBY

Did you call them about the copier?

No. JANELLE

Janelle. RUBY

I didn't. JANELLE

Then what are they doing here? RUBY

April shot herself in the parking lot. JANELLE

END OF SCENE

“The Commitment”

GUN COMMERCIAL VO

When you want to say I care, but you don't know how.

When you want to be there for her, even when you're not.

When you know it's going to last forever.

The Commitment. An engagement gun. For when you know it's right.

Scene 7

Hours later.

RUBY and APRIL in Ruby's office.

APRIL is covered in blood.

APRIL

It's called a die-in. You just pretend to die as protest. Usually people don't think it's real.

RUBY

You should have thought of that before the whole town came to look. A lot of people around here have never seen a dead body. Do you know how scary that was for people?

APRIL

No one was scared.

RUBY

I was, April. Terrified. And I've seen a body before.

APRIL

Then I made my point.

(Over the intercom: loud, heavy breathing.)

APRIL

What is that?

RUBY

Eldon Snook is fixing the intercom.

APRIL

WHAT?

RUBY

ELDON SNOOK. FIXING. THE INTERCOM.

APRIL

IS HE OKAY?

RUBY

WHAT?

APRIL
IT SOUNDS LIKE HE'S DYING.

RUBY
THAT'S JUST WHAT ELDON SOUNDS LIKE WHEN HE'S—

(The heavy breathing cuts off.)

RUBY
—FIXING THE INTERCOM.

APRIL
Are we done here?

RUBY
No. Because I can press charges for trespassing. Then you'll be in a jail.

APRIL
I'm fine with jail.

RUBY
Good. Then I'll know you're safe.

APRIL
It's fake blood.

RUBY
That's not what I'm talking about. Janelle saw your husband. He was in the crowd smoking a pipe and watching you "dying."

APRIL
He'll go away.

RUBY
They don't go away, April. Janelle told me why you left him.

APRIL
Janelle doesn't know.

RUBY
He said he'd kill you.

APRIL
That is not—

RUBY

He said he'd kill you and then himself.

APRIL

If I left every time he threatened to kill me I would have never gotten pregnant.
(Beat. April realizes her mistake.) Married. I would have never gotten married.

RUBY

April.

APRIL

It was going to be wonderful. The wonderful thing that would make everything better. But I couldn't tell him because he was reading and I'm not allowed to make noise when he reads. So I sat there waiting for hours without making a sound while he read. Wondering if my child would hate me if I died and left them alone in hell with a monster. Like I hated my mother for dying and leaving me in hell with a monster. But the only thing I could imagine worse than dying was living and explaining to a child why we always had to sit in silence too scared to move.

RUBY

Does he know?

APRIL

Of course not.

RUBY

He's going to find out.

APRIL

He won't.

RUBY

What if he does? What if he comes after you?

(Over the intercom: the loud, heavy breathing has returned.)

APRIL

I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

RUBY

WHAT?

APRIL

I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

RUBY

WHAT?

APRIL

(Regarding the intercom:) CAN YOU MAKE THAT STOP?

RUBY

THIS IS THE ONLY TIME ELDON HAD AVAILABLE TO FIX THE INTERCOM.

APRIL

I NEED TO GO.

RUBY

SIT DOWN.

APRIL

BRANDY IS HOME BY HERSELF AND CAN'T BE LEFT ALONE. LAST WEEK I FOUND HER CRYING IN A CLOSET BECAUSE SHE BORROWED HER FRIEND'S CAR AND RAN OVER SOMEONE'S—

(The heavy breathing stops.)

APRIL

CAT.

RUBY

Here's your choice: I press charges and you go to jail where your husband can't get to you. I know the sheriff. I'm friends with the judge. We can keep finding reasons to hold you.

APRIL

That's not legal.

RUBY

Or you take the other option. I've got a big house on an acreage outside of town. There's an apartment. Detached. All yours. You wouldn't even have to see me.

APRIL

I couldn't—

RUBY

I'm not finished. I make these cinnamon rolls—but I call them "stickies"—with the best frosting you'll ever have. My guests get those fresh every morning.

APRIL

Ruby—

RUBY

You'll be safe. My house is safe. There are cameras and fences and me with The Lone Widow. You wouldn't have to worry about anyone getting anywhere near.

APRIL

No.

RUBY

Please. April. Please. Just come home with me. Please. Come home, April.

APRIL

I'm not your daughter.

(Over the intercom: the loud, heavy, breathing returns.)

RUBY

April.

(APRIL exits.)

RUBY

APRIL.

END OF SCENE

“The Babysitter”

GUN COMMERCIAL VO

You were the best babysitter tonight. Everyone ate their dinner, no one cried for their mommy, and everyone was in bed by 8pm sharp.

But what happens when there’s a knock at the door that won’t go away? And the only thing that can protect those kids . . . is you.

Introducing **The Babysitter**. Because your job doesn’t stop when the kids go to sleep.

Scene 8

The next day.

RUBY and JANELLE in Ruby's office.

JANELLE

Eldon is the only one taking care of her since the stroke. All Marla can do is lay there and stare, so Eldon's not sleeping or eating right. I went over and found him in the garage. He was crying.

RUBY

That does not excuse the fact that my intercom still does not work.

JANELLE

It works.

RUBY

That button turns off my lights. That one turns off your lights. This button makes a horse sound. And when I pushed this, I heard a toilet flush. Get someone else to fix my intercom.

JANELLE

We can't do that to Eldon. We already got rid of the chair. Her chair.

RUBY

We can't keep calling him—

JANELLE

Marla was the one who always believed in me. She said I would make a good office manager and find love. If she found out that our copier got shot under my watch.

RUBY

Is that all?

JANELLE

And your next appointment is here.

RUBY

Which one?

(BRANDY enters.)

BRANDY

You're not the only one with things to do today.

RUBY

Come in, Brandy.

BRANDY

I'm not here just because you asked me. Lorrie wanted me to pick up her stuff. After the way you treated her, she won't get it herself.

JANELLE

She didn't leave anything.

BRANDY

Then why did I make this list? There's her secretary diploma on the wall out there.

RUBY

Janelle, will you get the diploma?

JANELLE

But that's all Lorrie left.

BRANDY

There's also a bottle of Jose Cuervo in the desk.

JANELLE

Ruby.

RUBY

Just give it back.

JANELLE

Lorrie wasn't supposed to have that.

BRANDY

And she wants her spit cup.

JANELLE

That's my coffee mug.

RUBY

Get everything on the list, Janelle.

BRANDY

You better get a box, because that there is a long list.

(JANELLE exits with the list, grumbling.)

BRANDY

I got my friend's car running outside and if I turn it off it might not start up again and I don't know how much gas it has, so you don't got all day.

RUBY

I was hoping we could talk about helping you grieve by giving you things.

BRANDY

And why's that?

RUBY

My company is my family. Janelle works at my company, so April is part of my family. She has a husband who is making her life unsafe, so I want her out of your house.

BRANDY

Camper.

RUBY

Excuse me?

BRANDY

I don't have a house, I have a camper.

RUBY

You want a football field? It's yours. You want an apology from Shirley? I'll get it. Here's my checkbook. How many zeroes do I need to write for you to disappear?

BRANDY

I appreciate you trying to help, finally, but I decided I don't need that stuff no more.

RUBY

Then what are you doing here?

BRANDY

Because, lucky for you, I found something I want more.

RUBY

I'm listening.

BRANDY

I saw Lorrie yesterday. Her husband's calling everyone for help because she's not feeding the animals and he can't do it because you know he's disabled. So I went over. We get to talking, and Lorrie mentions that you got a gun that malfunctions.

RUBY

We don't have a gun that malfunctions.

BRANDY

Yes, you do. The Shirley.

RUBY

Secretary.

BRANDY

Lorrie says it just goes off and you don't even have to pull the trigger. And I've been thinking I could use a gun like that. I've had a lot of people in my life that didn't treat me good and deserve to get shot. I made a list.

RUBY

I don't need to hear—

BRANDY

My mom. My pastor.

RUBY

Brandy.

BRANDY

All my brothers.

RUBY

Brandy.

BRANDY

Shirley. I underlined her twice—

RUBY

My guns are meant for protection.

BRANDY

I know. That's why I want the gun that's for getting back at people who have hurt you so you are protected from being hurt again. I am not the kind of person who would ever do the shooting. That's not me, Ruby. I'm sweet, kind, generous, a vegetarian. I couldn't handle knowing I killed someone, so your gun sounds perfect for people like me.

RUBY

We don't have a gun that goes off on its own.

BRANDY

I don't like when people hold out on me, Ruby.

(JANELLE enters with a box of Lorrie's stuff.)

JANELLE

Here's everything.

BRANDY

That don't look like everything.

RUBY

Janelle, can you show Brandy the door?

BRANDY

I know where the door is. I came in through the door. Do you think I'm stupid?

JANELLE

Right this way, Brandy.

BRANDY

April's husband isn't even the one you have to worry about. He doesn't even know me and he called to say he was sorry for what happened to my son. Did Shirley ever call? *(Slyly:)* Did Shirley ever stop by?

(The world stops. A thick wave of fear passes across Ruby's face.)

RUBY

(With dread:) What did you do?

BRANDY

I just told him that I hoped he had a son.

JANELLE

Why would you say that? Why would she say that?

BRANDY

Because a son is the greatest gift you'll ever know.

JANELLE

Ruby.

BRANDY

Don't get mad: April's husband didn't know either. She was keeping it from him and that should be a crime.

RUBY

Where's April?

BRANDY

Where she should be: Going home with someone who loves her.

JANELLE

He's going to kill her. Ruby, he's going to kill her.

RUBY

(Eerily calm:) Janelle, get your car and meet me in front of the building.

*(JANELLE exits. RUBY is in flow again. She grabs **The Lone Widow**, her sunglasses, her purse, and loads a magazine.)*

RUBY

I have three rules for using my gun. To save my life, to save my community, or—and this one's most important—to save someone I love. I don't make exceptions for being pissed off, fortunately, or you wouldn't be walking out of here today.

(RUBY, dressed to kill, exits.)

BRANDY

(To offstage:) Years from now, you're all going to thank me. Because when someone wants to be part of your life so bad you let them. I tried for years to get Dusty's dad to be part of our life and we got NOTHING. You know what that did to my son? Thinking that his dad don't like him? He was dead long before he got shot. HE WAS DEAD FOR YEARS. SO I WAS JUST SAVING APRIL FROM THAT. I'M JUST DOING HER A FAVOR.

(BRANDY looks at the box of Lorrie's stuff.)

BRANDY

And this isn't even all the stuff on my list.

*(SHIRLEY enters holding **The Secretary**.)*

SHIRLEY

Excuse me.

Hello. BRANDY

Is Ruby in? SHIRLEY

She stepped out. BRANDY

I don't think we've met. Are you the new secretary? SHIRLEY

Yes. That's me. The new secretary. BRANDY

Nice to meet you. I'm— SHIRLEY

Shirley. I've heard a lot about you. BRANDY

Do you know when Ruby will be back? SHIRLEY

No. Can I help you with something? BRANDY

I need to return this gun. SHIRLEY

Is there a problem? BRANDY

Oh no. There's no problem. I just think I got a defective one. SHIRLEY

Did it go off by itself? BRANDY

Yes. SHIRLEY

I heard that happens. BRANDY

SHIRLEY

I saw it with my own eyes. I was at the school and a couple kids got into my purse and took my candy. So I told the principal on them. But he made me go home for the day because I was getting “too worked up over nothing.” So I went home and got my gun because I’m tired of people stealing and getting away with it.

BRANDY

Did you get your candy back?

SHIRLEY

No. Because when I was driving back to the school, the stoplight wouldn’t turn, which means don’t go. But someone honked at me to move and I think that is so rude. But then I saw it was one of my girls. April. I was her mom in high school.

BRANDY

Was she okay?

SHIRLEY

There was an older man beside her in the driver’s seat—April’s husband—the one who didn’t invite me to their wedding. And I didn’t know what to do because he popped her across the mouth when she tried to get out of his car to see me. And no one hits one of my kids. So I got out of my car to give him a piece of my mind—when my gun went off. And kept going off. I wanted to tell Ruby because she’ll understand. I’m Shirley. Sweet Shirley. Old Shirley.

BRANDY

I understand.

SHIRLEY

You do?

BRANDY

It was your gun. It does the shooting. Not you.

SHIRLEY

That’s it. You get it.

BRANDY

Let me help you. Take it off your hands. I know where we can put this gun.

SHIRLEY

Are you sure?

BRANDY

Of course. A secretary lives to help.

*(BRANDY takes **The Secretary** from SHIRLEY.)*

SHIRLEY

Thank you. Thank you so much— I'm sorry I didn't get your name.

BRANDY

I must have forgot to tell you. I'm Brandy. Brandy Ranfeld. I think you knew my son. His name was Dusty.

*(BRANDY points **The Secretary** at SHIRLEY. SHIRLEY doesn't move.)*

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry, Brandy.

(A flood of emotions washes over BRANDY's face. In her face we see a story that's ancient and persistent: a mother grieving for a child taken in the bloom of youth.

But then Shirley keeps talking:)

SHIRLEY

But it's out of bullets. The gun shot them all at April's husband.

END OF SCENE

“The Pink Pistol”

GUN COMMERCIAL VO

Introducing **The Pink Pistol**, a limited edition gun for breast cancer awareness.
Every dollar goes to finding a cure.

The Pink Pistol: a good gun for a great cause.

Scene 9

Weeks later.

RUBY and JANELLE in Ruby's office.

JANELLE

A woman from church was telling me that her son was running late for school this past week. And just as the bus was pulling away, the tire blew out so her son caught the bus. One of those everyday miracles you pray for. But when the bus driver was changing the tire, he said it looked like it had been shot. And even though my friend always carries **The Secretary**, she swore on her mother's bible that she did not pull the trigger.

RUBY

The Secretary does not go off on its own. We've done test after test after test.

JANELLE

But it's not just **The Secretary**, Ruby, it's all our guns. One of the lunch ladies at the school, her gun shot the hot bar. My neighbor's gun shot my other neighbor's gun. And someone's gun shot the ATM and money flew everywhere.

RUBY

Someone should call the police.

JANELLE

But their guns are going off too! Even though they're trying to fix that.

RUBY

Is everyone okay?

JANELLE

Oh. Yes. Except Brandy Ranfeld. She got a hold of a gun that goes off really bad. She showed up in the town square and her gun was shooting everything. Cars, signs, buildings, trees, birds. So the police had to put her gun down right there on the square in front of everyone. She was crying about it and yelling "why."

RUBY

What do you want me to do, Janelle? Shut down our plant? Lay everyone off?

JANELLE

Why would you do that? Sales are through the roof. The more our guns go off, the more we sell.

(APRIL enters.)

APRIL

The copier jammed.

JANELLE

You have to treat it gently, April. It's new.

APRIL

It's 5 o'clock. I'm supposed to be done for the day.

RUBY

Can you hold up a minute, April?

JANELLE

I'll go look at the copier.

(JANELLE exits.)

RUBY

So you had a good first day?

APRIL

It was fine.

RUBY

Did you learn anything new?

APRIL

No.

RUBY

Janelle told me you got an apartment. That will be nice for when the baby comes.

APRIL

Are we done?

RUBY

(Hard:) No. Sit. I know you think this job is temporary and that you're going back to college once you're back on your feet. But I have certain expectations while you're in my office.

APRIL

Okay.

RUBY

(Softening:) Pictures. I expect to see pictures. Janelle told me you got a sonogram and I expect to see it.

(APRIL pulls out a small picture.)

APRIL

Here.

RUBY

Oh look. That is adorable. Boy or girl?

APRIL

I've decided that I'm not revealing that yet.

RUBY

So it's a girl?

APRIL

I didn't say that.

RUBY

Look at her little fingers.

APRIL

I never said it was girl.

RUBY

She's making a gun. She takes after her Nana Ruby.

(APRIL takes back the picture.)

APRIL

I met another woman at doctor's office. She was pregnant, too. We talked. It was nice. And we weren't being loud, but the receptionist told us to shut up because her gun doesn't like noise. Then this woman I'd been talking with said her gun doesn't like being told what to do. I don't know what happened next because my name was called and the nurse said her gun doesn't like when people dawdle. But when I left the office there was glass all over and bullet holes up and down the wall. And everyone acted like it wasn't a big deal because it wasn't as bad as what happened at the grocery store, or the senior home, or what happened to Shirley's house.

RUBY

I can't control how people use our products.

APRIL

Guns are going off all the time.

RUBY

It's not my responsibility.

APRIL

How can you do nothing when it keeps happening?

RUBY

Because Francene Maplewood. There are people like Francene Maplewood who need my guns.

APRIL

Francene Maplewood isn't real. You made her up—

RUBY

It happened.

APRIL

—to sell the Lone Widow—

RUBY

It happened.

APRIL

—and get rich.

RUBY

IT HAPPENED.

(For the first time in the play, we see the fortress around Ruby fall. Beneath the titanium, she's raw and tender.)

RUBY

Except. Francene Maplewood wasn't her name. And she had a daughter. So she wasn't alone when the three men broke into her house. And after she was thrown down the basement stairs, she didn't come up with a gun because she didn't have one. So when she crawled up bleeding and broken, she had to sit there in the dark at the top of the stairs and watch the men while they took turns with her daughter. So you can imagine, I like Francene Maplewood's ending much better.

APRIL

I'm sorry.

RUBY

It's not your fault, April. It's mine.

(RUBY opens her jacket and pulls out a small gun.)

RUBY

This is **The Last Resort**. It's the gun I always keep with me. I want you to have it.

APRIL

I don't need a gun.

RUBY

I know: You're smart. You're strong. Nothing will ever happen to you. Until it does.

APRIL

I'm sorry. I can't.

RUBY

Please. April. It's a crazy world with bad people. And I don't want you to ever be in a position where you can't protect her.

APRIL

I'm never going to use it.

RUBY

Nothing would make me happier in all the world than if you never had to use it.

(JANELLE enters.)

JANELLE

Ruby, do you have a minute?

*(APRIL picks up **The Last Resort** and puts it in her purse.)*

APRIL

Have a good night.

RUBY

See you tomorrow, April.

(APRIL exits.)

JANELLE

I just got off the phone with one of Eldon's kids. He's not coming in to fix the intercom today.

RUBY

Why not?

JANELLE

It's Marla. She passed.

RUBY

Oh. I'm sorry, Janelle.

JANELLE

When they found her, she was slumped over in her chair. I saved it from the dumpster out back and brought it over so she could have something to remind her of us. She'd been shot in the head. Eldon kept saying he didn't know how it happened. But they found a gun hidden behind the refrigerator in the garage and when they asked Eldon what was going on, all he could say was, "Maybe the gun knew she wanted to go."

And I think that's kind of a lovely thought. The gun did it. It's the gun's fault. Not the person. Because that means everyone's good. And happy. And your daughter didn't kill herself. The gun did it. She was happy. And it was an accident. Like a tornado. Or cancer. Or love. It just happens.

RUBY

We should call it a day.

JANELLE

I'll go lock the door.

RUBY

Thank you, Janelle.

(JANELLE exits.)

(RUBY pushes a button on her intercom.)

RUBY

Janelle, can you send flowers to the funeral?

(Nothing.)

RUBY

Janelle?

(RUBY pushes another button on her intercom.)

RUBY

Janelle—

(The lights go out. RUBY pushes another button.)

RUBY

Janelle—

(A horse sound.)

(Another button: A toilet flushes.)

RUBY

(From darkness:) JANELLE. I PUSHED THE WRONG BUTTON ON THE INTERCOM.
JANELLE. THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE INTERCOM.

(If the play ended right now, it would end on a nice laugh.

But the play doesn't end right now.

RUBY hits the intercom and a red emergency light comes on.

This reveals LORRIE standing at the door.

She's bathed in red light.

She's wearing her farm clothes.

*And she's holding **The Secretary.**)*

LORRIE

Do you want me to call Eldon?

RUBY

Lorrie. What are you doing? You don't work here anymore.

LORRIE

My last paycheck never came and now my animals are out of feed. So I was coming to check on it.

RUBY

Did you ask Janelle?

LORRIE

She couldn't find it.

RUBY

We'll mail it. First thing tomorrow.

LORRIE

Do you have my address?

RUBY

It's on file.

LORRIE

Alright.

RUBY

It was good seeing you.

LORRIE

My husband didn't want me to come here. But I told him that a good secretary doesn't leave the office until her tasks are complete. They taught us that in my courses.

RUBY

Okay.

LORRIE

So I wanted to make sure that you knew it was the gun that did all the shooting.

RUBY

No. Lorrie. It wasn't a gun.

LORRIE

Ask my husband. Go look at Janelle out there. And then you'll understand: Sometimes your gun just goes off.

RUBY

Lorrie. Bernum. It's you. It's you. It's you.

LORRIE

It's not me. Ruby. It's the gun. And I am going to prove it to you if it's the last thing I do. Because we are going to sit here. And we are going to wait. Quietly. Not doing anything. Until this gun goes off. Because it will. You'll see. Again. And again. And again.

*(LORRIE aims **The Secretary** at RUBY.)*

Don't worry. It won't take long.

*(The lights don't go down.
The curtain doesn't close.
The audience waits for another gun to go off.)*

END OF PLAY