

Scene One

Gym. A large, aging, over-weight man heavily armed. Heavy weapons with straps. Camouflage clothing. He clicks a trigger. Quiet.

Gunn Strategically determined room. No windows. All right, a few, but high up, small. Sun through them doesn't even touch the floor they're so high. Like a clock watching the sunlight move down the brick. And echos. You stamp a foot in a gym and the city hears you. Like the sound of airport engines miles away. And sprung floors that make you feel you could leap. Even those as fat as cattle. Like me.

He stops and listens.

I'm waiting for saturated news coverage. For choppers at sunrise. For SWAT teams on hydraulic platforms. I stay out of the sun.

Looks to audience.

I can't apologise enough. Can I ! Look. At least you'll be able to say you were there. It'll become a commanding bar-room standard. Not to mention an interesting curriculum opportunity for the English Department. I'd count myself lucky.

I wanted us to be alone. Just the 600 of us. I sent the staff away. You saw. I won't allow them in. I'm taking today's assembly. I wanted you to know me. It's gotten to be so hard to really know people. When I'm taken or dead we know what they'll say. They'll grub for nonsense to prove me a monster. But I wanted you to know..... before anything else.... I shaved this morning, I brushed my teeth. My cheek cut and my gums bled.

Quiet.

I was born Gunn. Always just a matter of taking aim. A baby finger touching trigger. Twisted like new wood around a city sick on fizz. A stupid child. That wouldn't learn. Made up the numbers. Unable to count. This self-made man. Tutored in the book of life. Wide-eyed and wise. Said I couldn't count.... I counted myself to the end of the world... and jumped off. Said I couldn't count.... I counted a million bullets. I sort my bullets.... teams of bullets standing like girls in the playground. I test myself: "Ones seven is seven, two sevens are fourteen...." I'm no mad-man. My bullets are my counting bricks. My teaching aids. Look (Points guns) No bullets gone. Barrels as full as barrels of black stout.

He is becoming agitated.

These bricks should add up to a castle. A garrison of soldiers of sense....for the truth. I remember : "Chaos ruled in the classroom as bravely the teacher stepped in, surveyed the scene around him. His voice was lost in the dim." I learnt it by heart. I announced it with joy. How could the world catch up with that happy imagining? Why can't I say it ? Why will they be removing it from anthologies? Why can't we laugh?

Our schools are murder scenes. Blood on every blackboard. Guns in every gym. Cancer is the modern death. This is the cancer. This is the knot of teak at the core of the malignant heart. This 'place of learning'... what can it teach? What can it teach?

He stops himself. Takes time to compose.

But you already know.

He begins removing guns. Clicking catches. He removes several in silence. Slightly embarrassed.

Before he has removed the final one Saunders, the Head-Teacher enters behind.

Gunn senses him. He glances back then turn briefly to the audience with a smile.

Gunn Fifteen minutes of Siege Management Training. Let's see.
Saunders Do you mind if we talk? I've just been talking to your mum. Lovely lady. Sent you her love. Said for you not to do anything.... silly.

Quiet.

Gunn You got them?
Saunders Kitkats
Gunn Six hundred
Saunders Yes.

Quiet.

Saunders So. How are we doing ?
Gunn As well as can be expected. In the circumstances. At the mercy of a volatile lunatic with high-velocity weaponry.
Saunders It's a very impressive collection
Gunn You joking
Saunders No. No. You're obviously a man who knows his guns.

Gunn And his triggers.

Quiet.

During the following exchange Gunn replaces the guns he had removed.

Saunders **(Gesturing to audience)** I'd just like a word. The police are very impressed with the mature and sensible manner in which you have conducted yourselves during this difficult time.

Gunn Don't

Saunders Parents have all been contacted. And the week's extra-curricular activities have been put on hold....

Gunn Don't

Saunders till things....

Gunn I said.

Saunders ...blow over.

Gunn Won't you even listen to a man with a gun

Saunders Try to remain calm,

Gunn You talk and talk.

Saunders Do you know any breathing exercises ?

Gunn Talk and talk.

Saunders What you don't want....

Gunn For god's sake !

Saunders is to become hasty.

Gunn turns a gun on Saunders.

Quiet.

Gunn You've been talking to them a thousand years. Used up a million words. For what ? Can you explain me to them? Explain why the soft eye is only ready for stabbing... and never seeing.

What is it you can give to them? What?

Saunders Please. Stay calm.

Gunn You're a hole.

Saunders **(To audience)** Remain seated.

Gunn You're a hole

Saunders I'm a hole.

Gunn Don't mess.

Saunders You don't want to hurt me. I have children. A mother.

Gunn A hole

Saunders Like you're mother

Gunn They're falling into you.

Saunders Yes. That's right.

Gunn This weight I carry

Saunders Yes.

Gunn

I'm fat with the weight of a bitter belly. Fat on the fizz. Fat on the poison meat that should sustain but only rots the gut. Fat on the vulgar. On failure. Fat on crumbling brick. Fat on empty life. Empty. Empty fat.

**As he has been speaking Saunders has backed away to the door.
He exits.**

Lights fall on Gunn.

Sound of tyre on tarmac.....