

the shooters of an american president

by Matthew Paul Olmos

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New Dramatists' Play Time Development Program.
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Lights up on a small living room, dimly lit by a large window with the drapes pulled.

There is a 1961 Zenith television on a stand, as well several folding chairs randomly put.

This living room is not lived in.

A main door leads to the outside, while another leads to an immediate restroom; a third doorway has a foggy, clear tarp hastily taped over it. A vague light penetrates the edges of tarp as part of the tape has come off, leaving a vertical opening.

We hear boots walking to the house.

A key into the lock and enter SHOOTER; he is later 20's/early 30's, with a two-day stubble, wearing a dingy brown coat, with a white collar-shirt, and pants caked with mud at the bottom. His fingernails are unclean.

SHOOTER quickly flips on the TV and stares.

We hear "As The World Turns"

MAN: "Well, I must say, I'm surprised."

WOMAN: "Well, frankly, I was a little suspicious."

MAN: "Of what?"

WOMAN: "Well, grandpa, there has to be a reason why Bob asked Lisa, because this is the first time he's invited her here or anywhere else, as a matter of fact, since they've been divorced."

MAN: "Did you ask him *why* he asked her?"

WOMAN: "He said something about not wanting her to have Thanksgiving dinner alone. He didn't think it was right. "

MAN: "Well, that was real nice of the boy."

WOMAN: "And I've thought about it, and I gave it a great deal of thought, grandpa—"

VOICE OF WALTER CRONKITE:

“Here is a bulletin from CBS News.

In Dallas, Texas, three shots were fired at President Kennedy’s motorcade in downtown Dallas.

The first reports say President Kennedy has been seriously wounded by this shooting.

More details just arrived.

These details about the same as previously.

President Kennedy shot today, just as his motorcade left downtown Dallas.

Mrs. Kennedy jumped up and grabbed Mr. Kennedy, she called “Oh no!”

The motorcade sped on.

United Press says that the wounds for President Kennedy perhaps could be fatal.

Repeating a bulletin from CBS News, President Kennedy has been shot by a would-be assassin. Stay tuned to CBS News for further details.

COMMERCIAL: “It takes more than an instant to make a real cup of coffee...”

SHOOTER lowers the set to a murmur. He secures the room, checks the time on a wrist-watch and then carefully walks to the window to peek out: sees nothing.

He paces the room; full of energy but with nowhere to put it. He tries to settle at one of the folding chairs, but it is hard for him to sit amidst his adrenaline. Finally, a noise from beyond the tarp.

SHOOTER jumps up and pulls a revolver; he walks professionally towards the tarp; he notices the part of the tape that is untaped. He opens the flap and peeks inside, then moves in.

Offstage we hear a few boot’s steps of confusion, and then...

SHOOTER

(intense, but clearly conscious of being heard)

(offstage) I got you! I got you right on, motherfucker. Do Not Move. (pause) Now, walk with your hands still held, backwards towards my voice. And don't you make a fucking sound.

(We hear boots walking slowly)

That's it. Backwards still, backwards more, backwards all the way till me. Alright, face your face towards the tarp.

(We see somebody standing from beyond the tarp)

Now, step your left foot in, then hold, now the other. Go.

(We watch as NON-SHOOTER steps into the room with his hands held. He wears a grey workman's jumpsuit, with boots; he is less unkempt than SHOOTER, who steps in behind him with his revolver pointed)

To the chair. Face the wall.

(NON-SHOOTER walks slowly towards the wall)

Where's your—

(SHOOTER frisks NON-SHOOTER)

NON-SHOOTER

I don't—

SHOOTER

I ain't ask you to speak. Now, where is your—

(NON-SHOOTER indicates he has nothing)

I ain't goin'ask you again—

(NON-SHOOTER indicates he has nothing, SHOOTER finishes frisking)

Alright, with your right hand raised, slowly with your left, unzip yer front.

(NON-SHOOTER does)

SHOOTER(cont)

Now, pull it down; left hand only.

(NON-SHOOTER attempts to pull down his jumpsuit with one hand, but then indicates that he doesn't know how to do that)

Figure it out.

(NON-SHOOTER struggles awkwardly as he pulls his jumpsuit down to his knees; underneath he wears a rather comically mundane undershirt and boxers with black socks pulled up)

Lift yer pant legs.

(NON-SHOOTER lifts enough to see his ankles)

Alright, zip up.

(While NON-SHOOTER zips up, SHOOTER begins rechecking the room)

Where'd you stash it. Point.

(NON-SHOOTER waves his hands again that he is unarmed. Beat. SHOOTER stops looking, he places a chair behind NON-SHOOTER)

Sit down.

(NON-SHOOTER does. SHOOTER puts his revolver away)

Alright, with as few words as possible, how long have you been—

(NON-SHOOTER makes a "5")

An how did you get here?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates driving)

Describe it. With words. The vehicle.

White. NON-SHOOTER

What make? SHOOTER

Impala. NON-SHOOTER

Year? SHOOTER

'61? '62? NON-SHOOTER

How many doors? SHOOTER

(NON-SHOOTER makes a "4")

Where is it now?

(NON-SHOOTER shrugs)

You drove?

(NON-SHOOTER shakes his head)

Describe the person who drove you.

NON-SHOOTER

...

SHOOTER

How long were you in the vehicle?

(NON-SHOOTER raises his head a bit, indicating he is considering answering)

Hour? Hour and a half?

(NON-SHOOTER shakes his head)

SHOOTER(cont)

Half-hour?

(NON-SHOOTER shakes his head)

Fifteen minutes?

(NON-SHOOTER points down: less time)

Eight minutes and forty-five seconds?

(NON-SHOOTER nods his head: "About that")

Where did you get that jumpsuit?

NON-SHOOTER

...

SHOOTER

Do you work at the Dal-Tex building?

(NON-SHOOTER shakes his head)

Were you at the Dal-Tex building today?

NON-SHOOTER

...

SHOOTER

Have you ever gone inside the Dal-Tex building?

(NON-SHOOTER considers, then indicates once)

Have you ever gone across the street to the Book Depository?

(NON-SHOOTER shakes his head)

Can you hear the television?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates: a little)

SHOOTER(cont)

Do you know what they're talking about?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates: a little)

Who did you vote for last election?

NON-SHOOTER

...Nixon.

SHOOTER

What were you able to hear, from the television?

NON-SHOOTER

...Kennedy.

SHOOTER

Are you concerned?

NON-SHOOTER

...

SHOOTER

Tell me how come you voted for Nixon. Short words.

NON-SHOOTER

Eisenhower.

SHOOTER

Did you see my face, in the other room?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates yes)

Had you ever seen my face before?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates no)

You know that?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates yes)

SHOOTER(cont)

Did you see what I was wearing?

NON-SHOOTER

Brown coat. Collar shirt. Pants mud at the bottom.

SHOOTER

Have you seen anybody in this outfit before?

(NON-SHOOTER takes a moment, then nods)

Have I ever seen *your* face before?

(NON-SHOOTER shakes his head)

You know that?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates yes)

When you visited the inside of the Dal-Tex building, that one time, what floor did you visit?

(NON-SHOOTER makes a "2")

Were you alone?

NON-SHOOTER

...

SHOOTER

What were you doing back there in the other room?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates thinking, walking)

Stop it. You're not very good at that. Speak.

NON-SHOOTER

I was *thinking*. Of *walking*.

SHOOTER

Walking where?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates outside)

Talk, motherfucker.

NON-SHOOTER

Outside.

SHOOTER

Yea, I got that. Why.

NON-SHOOTER

...

(Beat)

SHOOTER

Where have you seen somebody in my outfit before?

NON-SHOOTER

Downtown.

SHOOTER

More specific.

NON-SHOOTER

In the railway yard.

SHOOTER

What were you doing before you decided to go into the back room?

NON-SHOOTER

Waiting. Here in the front room.

SHOOTER

Waiting for what?

NON-SHOOTER

...

SHOOTER

Did you use the restroom?

(NON-SHOOTER shakes his head)

NON-SHOOTER

But if I had, I would've left the door wide open.

SHOOTER

When you did, go inside the Dal-Tex building, second floor, was it daytime or night?

NON-SHOOTER

Day.

SHOOTER

Morning or afternoon?

NON-SHOOTER

Afternoon.

SHOOTER

Before or after 12 o'clock?

NON-SHOOTER

Just after.

(Beat)

SHOOTER

Why do you suppose I have mud on my pant legs today?

NON-SHOOTER

Maybe you had to stand somewhere where the dirt got wet. Maybe you had to stand there for awhile. And when you left, maybe you walked quickly so it kicked up on you.

Maybe when you left, you left in a hurry.

SHOOTER

Yea, maybe.

NON-SHOOTER

I guess you an God will only know.

(Beat)

SHOOTER

Two things. A) Do you know what a spotter is?

(NON-SHOOTER nods)

B) What is it then?

NON-SHOOTER

...in short words: more eyes, more aim. Also,

SHOOTER

Also what.

NON-SHOOTER

depending what you're shooting at, if a shot misses, a *spotter* can see where the shot went and help the shooter with the correction.

(Beat)

SHOOTER

Turn around.

(NON-SHOOTER turns his chair around, they look each other over)

Now, why the fuck would you be thinking of walking outside for on a day like today???

NON-SHOOTER

May I—

SHOOTER

Speak.

(Finally, assertiveness from NON-SHOOTER)

NON-SHOOTER

Because do you really think this is a good idea???

SHOOTER

I'm sorry and who ordered you to think?

NON-SHOOTER

...

SHOOTER

Think what a good idea?

NON-SHOOTER

Us here.

SHOOTER

There's no "us here." Me, I'm here and you apparently are too.

NON-SHOOTER

May I speak...freely?

SHOOTER

So long as you don't say anything I don't wish to hear.

NON-SHOOTER

They told us we'd be taken immediately out from the area. They said by plane or by rail.
Out of the area.

(Beat)

SHOOTER

Where in your instructions did it say you could *ever* dispose of your weapon?

NON-SHOOTER

While we were driving, in the Impala, I was in the backseat so I slipped my piece in the rifle bag.

SHOOTER

And the bag?

NON-SHOOTER

Spotters, we leave the bag in the vehicle.

SHOOTER

Does anyone know you slipped it in there?

NON-SHOOTER

May I speak freely—

SHOOTER

Talk, Jesus.

NON-SHOOTER

When I saw us pull into Oak Cliff, when I saw we weren't getting on a highway, I knew I was being dropped off someplace. Someplace I wasn't expecting. So, what would I want a revolver on my person for?

SHOOTER

Because that's what you were ordered to—

NON-SHOOTER

They said we'd be taken to a plane or by rail. Out of Dallas. Out of Texas. (pause) I mean, what is this place anyways, you been here before?

SHOOTER

None of your goddamned business if I been here before. (pause) ...I think some of them mighta used this place for...meetings or... (pause) Did you notice your driver, taking all these side roads, like he knew his way here real good?

NON-SHOOTER

What took you so long then, to get here?

SHOOTER

...cuz it was fucked actually. Right after job was done, like right after, all these motherfuckers started running up the grass right towards me, right towards the fence.

NON-SHOOTER

So what did you—

SHOOTER

Handed the rifle for my spotter to disassemble, and I walked. Right back towards the train car I was told. Got in.

NON-SHOOTER

Just you?

SHOOTER

Nah, was a few of us. An then, motherfucking patrolman—

NON-SHOOTER

Police???

SHOOTER

Single officer. He rounds us up, walks us towards the top of the Triple Underpass, says ta stay put.

NON-SHOOTER

Who were the other—

SHOOTER

Dealey Plaza team I figured, they's dressed same like me. *So*, we're standin'there, out the open. But then, real quick, wagon pulls up—

NON-SHOOTER

Wagon???

SHOOTER

Not police—a regular, a station wagon—*the car I was assigned*. So I got in, an we drove here.

NON-SHOOTER

What about the other—

SHOOTER

Not my care.

(SHOOTER looks NON-SHOOTER over. Beat)

Where was you goin' walk to? If I hadn't shown up.

NON-SHOOTER

Well, out of Oak Cliff.

SHOOTER

You know Dallas?

(NON-SHOOTER indicates: some. SHOOTER immediately kicks at
NON-SHOOTER's legs)

You answer me a personal question again, I'm goin' send your ass outside back *into* Dallas. (pause)
Out of Oak Cliff why?

NON-SHOOTER

May I—

SHOOTER

We already talking, Jesus!

NON-SHOOTER

Well, the kid...

SHOOTER

What about him?

NON-SHOOTER

Kid's rooming house is in Oak Cliff.

SHOOTER

So.

NON-SHOOTER

So what would they be sending us to that exact same area???

SHOOTER

This is where they had a spot, this is where they—

NON-SHOOTER

I think we're *being held* here—

SHOOTER

We're not held, this ain't some—

NON-SHOOTER

Being forced to remain here until—

SHOOTER

Talk!

NON-SHOOTER

If that kid Oswald is gonna be dealt with in Oak Cliff and we're being held in Oak Cliff—

SHOOTER

I swear to God if you don't stop saying stuff I already know—

NON-SHOOTER

It must be in case things don't work out with the kid.

SHOOTER

What you mean, "Don't work out?"

(Beat)

NON-SHOOTER

Your spotter. He could shoot, yes?

SHOOTER

What would I know anything about my spotter for?

NON-SHOOTER

He could handle a rifle. You said he disassembled—

SHOOTER

So what.

NON-SHOOTER

So, we spotters were just as skilled to shoot as—

SHOOTER

That would be the fuckin' point—

NON-SHOOTER

Meaning if something happened to you—

SHOOTER

Nothing would happen to me—

NON-SHOOTER

Fine, but say in the Book Depository, if shooter from A-Team even started to sneeze from the dust, his spotter would have taken over that rifle without hesitation.

SHOOTER

Yea, back-ups.

NON-SHOOTER

For everything.

SHOOTER

Everything what!?

NON-SHOOTER

If things, right now, are not happening according to plan with their Oswald kid, who do you think their next in line is to take the—

SHOOTER

Sit the fuck down! Now.

(NON-SHOOTER sits)

NON-SHOOTER

What did you think, that they were just going to leave it to chance, that the kid would—

SHOOTER

How would the two of us be a back-up for him? We're two, he's one.

NON-SHOOTER

That is what I've been thinking about. And I believe that should something not go right with the kid, it doesn't just mean that he isn't picked up how he's supposed to, it means if something went wrong at the plaza.

SHOOTER

Dealey Plaza went as planned.

NON-SHOOTER

No, Kennedy went as planned. You and me have no idea how—

SHOOTER

Kennedy was all what matters.

NON-SHOOTER

If *the select* have to submit, that there were shots coming from more than just the Depository.

If *the select* have to submit, why people were running up that grassy knoll towards you.

If *the select* have to submit, that somebody saw *anybody* from my team leaving the Dal-Tex building. An, I mean—

SHOOTER

What.

NON-SHOOTER

If they have to submit, that that kid Oswald hasn't even fired a weapon today...then they submit us instead.

SHOOTER

No. No chance.

NON-SHOOTER

Isn't there???

SHOOTER

They've been working on the kid for how long? How would they even—what kinda story me and you even make???

NON-SHOOTER

Easy. Me, I'm a crazy gunman who stole this jumpsuit and snuck my way into the Dal-Tex building; while my crazy gunman friend, you, snuck onto the railroad yard. And the two of us, we had it all planned to be crazy gunmen together as soon as President Kennedy's motorcade pulled onto Elm right directly between us.

An look at that, we can't even remember where we stashed our rifles, can we.

An look at that, one of us even still has a revolver on their person.

NON-SHOOTER(cont)

An look at this, we even have ourselves this unflattering, up-to-no-good looking hideout, where we *both* fled immediately following the... (pause) *That* is what I was doing in the other part of the house, the part they told us directly not to go. Thought I might find something. Of mine. Yours.

SHOOTER

What you mean of mine?

NON-SHOOTER

I wouldn't have been surprised to find doctored photographs of me with a rifle in-hand, Communist newspaper in the other.

SHOOTER

But this is all just...we don't know what they—

NON-SHOOTER

You and me, we absolutely do *not* know what they.

SHOOTER

So what the fuck we do???

NON-SHOOTER

Only thing they've left us *to* do...

(NON-SHOOTER looks to the TV. SHOOTER raises the volume.

CRONKITE: "We're trying to get that connection to Dallas now. Just as soon as we, uh, can get Dallas on the air, you shall see the scene at the hotel where, we understand, that the audience is just being told about the incident in their city. The shooting of President Kennedy and of Governor Connally.

A word just in from Congressman Jim Wright of Fort Worth, says that he understands that both President Kennedy and Governor Connally, while seriously wounded, are still alive."

Dead space. New voice

"The uh safety precautions that were taken here at the Trade Mart—"

SHOOTER slams the TV set off, then walks away. NON-SHOOTER quietly turns the TV back on, but only to a murmur. SHOOTER begins laughing, more out of discomfort, than actual humor)

SHOOTER

...still alive...fucking...

NON-SHOOTER

What.

SHOOTER

Time, I guess.

NON-SHOOTER

How long it's taking for him to...

SHOOTER

Nah, not Kennedy. He already gone. Es past one. (pause) Maybe you couldn't see from your—

NON-SHOOTER

I saw.

SHOOTER

Maybe he mighta had his heart still beating when they drove him to Parkland, but...there's no way. Not after what I hit him with.

NON-SHOOTER

What was it about time then?

SHOOTER

You an me, we like time travelers. At least a half-hour, maybe more.

Can you even imagine out there, whole American public, what time it still is for them?

They got no idea what time it really is. Es only *the select* what do.

American public think what, that any moment Cronkite goin' look out from that screen and tell them their president is gonna pull through.

But we not in that time no more. You an me, we onto the next.

NON-SHOOTER

And what do you imagine for us is next?

SHOOTER

I mean, Oswald kid must be in Oak Cliff by now. An soon as they get him, we home free.

Our ride'll be pulling up.