

Hamlet Exercise

By Jeff James

(The setting is the stockroom in the back of a toy store called "Gimme Toys." The room is full of boxes on shelves and various merchandise lying around – toys, board games, video games, everything, some broken, some unwrapped, etc. CHARLIE, one of the employees of the store (a cashier) is sitting in the middle of the room on the floor with his legs splayed out. He is wearing the store uniform, which is a solid-colored apron with the logo of the store on it. As he sits he is going through a pile of toy guns, taking them out of their packages, then tossing the guns onto a pile of guns already out of the package. He does this mechanically without apparent thought. After a few seconds, JANINE, another cashier, walks in the stockroom from a door in the back. We see her reaction to Charlie's strange behavior as she walks around to look at him from the front. After a pause of a second or so she speaks.)

JANINE

Charlie?

CHARLIE

...mm-hmm?

JANINE

What are you doing?

CHARLIE

Oh, I was just looking at these guns.

(Charlie continues removing the guns from their packages, obviously without looking at them.)

JANINE

Why are you taking them out of the packages?

CHARLIE

It's easier to look at them that way.

JANINE

Oh.

(Pause.)

JANINE

Um, well... Mr. Mason isn't going to be very happy with you when he sees what you've done... we can't sell those now if they're out of the package. *(Pause)* And you were supposed to be back up front a long time ago. They sent me to look for you.

(No response. Pause.)

JANINE

Charlie, did you hear me?

CHARLIE

(Holding a gun)

You know they really do make toy guns look very realistic these days. I never really understood how toy makers get away with that. I mean, I can understand a big orange Super-Soaker with all kinds of extra parts, but this... *(Pause)* If I didn't know better, I'd say this was real.

(He points the gun at Janine and pulls the trigger, which makes a small plastic projectile shoot out. Janine jumps a little, and then recomposes herself.)

JANINE

Charlie, you need to go back up to the front. We're getting really busy. *(Pause.)* You don't want Mr. Mason to come back here, do you?

CHARLIE

Fuck the old man. I was supposed to get a break two hours ago. *(Pause.)* I don't know if I like this job anymore, anyways...

JANINE

I thought you said you needed the money.

CHARLIE

It's not about money. *(He picks up another plastic gun.)* I know what you did, Janine.

JANINE

(Confused)

What? *(Pause.)* What are you talking about, Charlie?

CHARLIE

You and him? *(Pause.)* We all know. It's been the talk of the store. For weeks now.

JANINE

My personal life is none of your business, Charlie. *(Pause.)* Get back to work. I'm going to go back up to the front, and I would like you to not talk about this anymore with anyone.

CHARLIE

(Pointing the gun at her)

But it is my business. I'm making it my business. *(Pause.)* I should tell you something, Janine.

JANINE

What?

CHARLIE

One of these guns is real. The real deal. The rest just... look like the real deal. *(Pause)* Kind of reminds me of you.

JANINE

Charlie, what are you saying?

CHARLIE

(Brandishing the gun)

I'm saying you had no right!

JANINE

I don't understand why you're doing this, and I would like you to put down the gun. Real or not.

CHARLIE

I love you, Janine, I LOVE YOU! I've loved you since the day I met you, and I can't take you being so fucking cold anymore!

(Charlie takes the gun and sticks it in his mouth, and pulls the trigger. Janine tries to run to him and stop him.)

JANINE

CHARLIE, NO!

(However, nothing happens. Charlie just makes a face and spits out a plastic projectile.)

CHARLIE

That was a fake, see?

(He tosses the gun to the side. Janine slow backs away, then speaks.)

JANINE

Charlie, you need help. I'm going to go get some help, alright?

CHARLIE

No, you're going to stay right here. *(He picks up another gun. Pause.)* I'll find the real gun eventually. Until then you're going to talk to me.

JANINE

Charlie, don't do this. I didn't mean to hurt you... I had no idea!

CHARLIE

Exactly! You had no idea! You didn't care about me at all. *(Pause.)* You know, I thought about it for so long... whether or not I should just approach you and finally ask you out, get it all over with. I mean, I couldn't take the suspense, not knowing what you really thought of me. You have no idea how much I suffered. *(Pause.)* And when I heard about you and him, well... I wondered... I wondered if I even wanted to live at all anymore. That became the real question. *(Pause.)* Because, I mean... what keeps me here, in this minimum wage job, still living at home, not even using that college education of mine? I used to say to myself that I was just getting enough money to get myself started, that I was working my way out into the real world slowly. But I've been working here two years, and I'm still a fucking cashier! Head of the cashiers, but a cashier still! *(Pause.)* And then, you started working here... and a whole change came over me. I thought about you all the time. I treasured every moment we spent together, and I tried to read your every action only in terms of me: does she like me? Does she hate me? I was never really sure. *(Pause.)* But now I know. It's neither. The answer is, in fact, indifference. I don't matter.

JANINE

No, Charlie, that's not true! You mean a whole lot more to me than you...

CHARLIE

SHUT UP! *(Pause.)* I'm not done talking.

(Pause.)

CHARLIE

Do you believe in hell?

JANINE

What? Uh... I um... I uh... I don't really know, honestly... I don't really think about it.

CHARLIE

Yes or no. *(Pause. Brandishes gun.)* Give me a yes or no answer!

JANINE

Uh... yeah. Yes. I do.

(Pause.)

CHARLIE

That's fucking why. *(Pause.)* Why I'm doing this... this way.

JANINE

What? I don't understand...

CHARLIE

If I find the gun it'll be an accident. I won't be expecting it. *(Pause.)*
You don't go to hell if you die accidentally.

JANINE

Charlie, you're not going to go to hell. *(Pause.)* Please don't kill yourself, Charlie. Can't we talk about this first?

CHARLIE

No.

(Charlie takes the gun in his hand, points it in his face and pulls the trigger. Nothing. Distraught, he starts digging through the pile of guns trying to find the real one. At this point, Janine jumps on Charlie and tries to pry any guns out of his hands. They struggle for a few seconds. Suddenly Charlie manages to pull the trigger on the gun in his hand and it goes off, but it is pointed away from the two. We hear a gunshot and several toys across the room explode into shards. There is a sudden silence. Pause.)

CHARLIE

There was only one bullet. *(Pause.)* I'm such a fucking imbecile.

JANINE

(Hands on Charlie's shoulders)

No you're not, Charlie. You're not.

(Charlie grabs Janine and embraces her tightly. He begins crying and shaking.)

CHARLIE

(Sobbing)

I'm so... sorry! I... I... just love you so... so...

JANINE

(Soothing.)

Shhh... It's gonna be alright, Charlie... Everything's going to be alright.

(She rocks him in her arms. The lights begin to dim, until they black out. The end.)