

SCOOTER THOMAS MAKES IT TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD

by Peter Parnell

Scooter (various ages) - Dennis (various ages)

The Play: Peter Parnell often deals with the loss of the magic of youth as one grows into adulthood (see the scene and introduction from *The Rise and Rise of Daniel Rocket* in the first section of this book). In *Scooter Thomas Makes it to the Top of the World*, Mr. Parnell examines what leads to the suicide of a young man who seemed to have started life with so much to offer—so much to live for. This play, presented as a memory from Dennis's point of view, reconstructs a series of life-moments shared by Dennis and Scooter as they grew up as best of friends. When the play begins, Dennis has just received the news of his friend's suicide. The theatrical device of flashback, showing various scenes from the two friends' lives, allows us to look at a delightful, often touching, journey from youth through adolescents. Along with Dennis, we see, little by little, Scooter's fragile collapse. We know at the beginning where his life is going, but somehow, as the play progresses, we hope for a change in the outcome. In this, Mr. Parnell has given a truly affecting drama, filled with humor, but clearly a statement about the loss of our dreams.

The Scene: One of many scenes in the play where Scooter and Dennis are together, recreating a number of events shared in life.

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SCOOTER: Pizarro discovered the Inca Indians... Ponce de Leon discovered Florida looking for the Fountain of Youth...! Florida...is where my uncle Simon lives... John Smith discovered Pocahantas and married her... Miles Standish asked Priscilla Armstong to... Give me liberty or give me death...?

DENNIS: Psst! Hey, Scooter! Psst!

SCOOTER: Eddie! Whadda you doin' here?

DENNIS: I'm lookin' fer PeeWee. We're goin' out drivin' an' I figgered we'd take him along.

SCOOTER: You cuttin' class in *high school*?

DENNIS: I gotta be back by lunch.

SCOOTER: Is Wally goin' with ya?

DENNIS: He's waitin' outside.

SCOOTER: Oh boy, I'm comin' too.

DENNIS: You can't, ya little creep. Your brother told me definitely no.

SCOOTER: Look Eddie, I gotta go Wally never takes me out drivin' an I'm sicka studyin' stupid history for this stupid test an...

DENNIS; N-O.

SCOOTER: I'll tell my Dad that you an' he...

DENNIS: You say anything to anyone an' I'll personally drive a Mack truck over your face, understand?

SCOOTER: Eddie, lemme come with ya!

DENNIS: Just SHUT UP, ya little moron, OKAY? Nobody'd want to go drivin' with you! You're just your brother Wally's creepy kid brother, ya little creep! (*Dennis turns and Scooter plows into him from the side. Dennis goes to the floor, and Scooter pummels him about the head and waist. Breaks.*) Okay man, that's enough, enough!

SCOOTER: Sorry. I got carried away.

DENNIS: I'll say. Nearly fractured my skull.

SCOOTER: He really got me angry when he said that. About me being my brother Wally's kid brother. I mean, who did he think he was? I should have busted his—agh, knocked his block off!

DENNIS: (*Adult, authoritarian voice.*) ...And the nurse seems to think you might have even broken one of his ribs. Do you have any idea

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what that means?

SCOOTER: He might be permanently paralyzed from the neck down?

DENNIS: This isn't something to laugh at, young man.

SCOOTER: Sorry Mr. Greenbaum, sir.

DENNIS: Naturally I can't have too much pity for Mr. Marcus either. He's going to have to answer some serious charges once he gets up from that hospital bed. But as for you, Scooter. What seems to be the problem?

SCOOTER: Problem? There is no problem, sir.

DENNIS: Let me tell you something, Scooter. You are a very bright young boy. You could go far. But when will you learn to follow instructions? Sixth grade isn't the end of the line. After you graduate—if you graduate—you will have three years of junior high school to face. And believe me, they won't take any fooling around in junior high, Scooter. Then there'll be three more of high school, and *that* will be more difficult and disciplined than anything you will have encountered before. High school is going to make you into a responsible person, so that you will go on through four rigorous years of college and emerge—we hope—as something resembling an adult. And being an adult, Scooter, will be the toughest, most demanding thing of all. A job, a house, a wife, a little Scooter of your own. So I ask you: how are you ever going to expect to get anywhere, son, if you can't even make it through the sixth grade? You've got a long hard road ahead of you. Why do you want to blow it all now?

SCOOTER: I didn't start that fight, Mr. Greenbaum.

DENNIS: But you certainly finished it, didn't you?

SCOOTER: Eddie Marcus started it. And he should know better. He's a lot older and a lot smarter than me. I'm just my brother Wally's kid brother.

DENNIS: Then why don't you start acting like him, young man? Wallace was always one of my favorite students.

SCOOTER: *(Breaks.)* Jesus, why couldn't they have nabbed him, too! He was standing right outside the building!

DENNIS: *(To audience.)* Years later—after he'd told me all about the particulars of that interview—Scooter confessed to having wanted to ask

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Mr. Greenbaum something, but failed to find the courage or even—so rare for him—the sheer audacity. It was:

SCOOTER: When did *you* start to blow it, Mr. Greenbaum?

DENNIS: I beg your pardon?

SCOOTER: You couldn't have been very happy in the sixth grade.

DENNIS: Well, I—don't know. I don't really—remember...

SCOOTER: Are we all through now?

DENNIS: All...? Er, yes, I suppose we— Naturally, I'll have to call your parents and tell them...

SCOOTER: Naturally. Good afternoon, sir.

DENNIS: Good afternoon. And. Take care, son. *(Scooter has turned away. Dennis stands and blows a whistle.)* All right you guys, I want you doin' jumping jacks high into the air! On the double! One-two-three-four, One-two-ready-begin... *(Scooter starts jumping.)* Side-up-side-down, side-up-side-down, side-up-side down, one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four, one-two-ready-stop... All right, now listen up, you guys. This is a junior high gym class, not a sewing class for pansies and queers. In this class we are here to develop sound bodies, because a sound mind must have a sound body to go with it, or else it shrivels up and turns to jelly and you find yourself dead before you're thirty. And that is the simple truth, you understand? Now I take it that nobody here wants to die before they're thirty. Is that right? Is there anyone here who wants to be dead before they are thirty? I didn't think so. So what this means is I want you all to bust your asses in this class. You'll be thankful for it later. Twenty years from now you'll see me on the street and you'll say, "Mr. Tartarian, I never realized how important it was for me to keep in shape. I'm glad you scared the piss outa me when you did." And believe me, I'll understand. But right now I don't want to hear a sound out of any of you, got me? Not a sound. Okay. Now when I blow this whistle—and not before—I want you to get down on the floor and do twenty push-ups on the double. *Quietly.* Okay.

SCOOTER: *(Falsetto, between his teeth.)* Okay.

DENNIS: Who said that? Who just opened his—Pee Wee, was that you? Who just said okay?

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SCOOTER: I did. I cannot tell a lie. It was I, Mr. Tartarian, sir.
 DENNIS: And who are you, shrimphead?
 SCOOTER: Scooter Thomas, sir.
 DENNIS: Thomas. Thomas. You have an older brother?
 SCOOTER: Always have, sir.
 DENNIS: He was a good man. Ran a good mile, Scooter. He'll be a tough man to follow—even tougher to beat.
 SCOOTER: Then I won't plan on trying, sir.
 DENNIS: What's that, Scooter?
 SCOOTER: Nothing, Mt. T. Sir.
 DENNIS: I bet you must think you're pretty funny, don't you?
 SCOOTER: Not especially, sir.
 DENNIS: Oh yes. I think you think you're very funny. Well let me tell you something Scooter Thomas: you may think you're funny, and everybody else may think you're funny, but I don't think you're funny, and you know what that means? It means you don't ever do that again, okay?
 SCOOTER: Okay.
 DENNIS: Or else you may just find yourself dead before you're thirty. And *that* would be just about the un-funniest thing of all. *(Blows his whistle.)* Ready, AND—One-two-three-four, One-two-ready-begin... *(Scooter gets down and starts doing push-ups. After several, he rolls over onto his stomach. He looks out into the audience a moment. Then he takes a pea-shooter, aims it out and starts firing, still on the floor. Dennis stands watching him for a moment, then walks over to him.)* Hey there. Whaddya doin'?
 SCOOTER: Watching for puffins.
 DENNIS: Oh. Yeah?
 SCOOTER: Yeah. Puffins. You know. Little seabirds.
 DENNIS: Puffins. Yeah. *(Scooter fires pea-shooter. Beat.)* Didn't year hear me? I kept calling and calling down there. *(Scooter fires.)* Nobody knew where you—figured I'd try Hatch's Cliff.
 SCOOTER: I thought it'd be nice to come up.
 DENNIS: Then why you weren't at practice?
 SCOOTER: I didn't even know there was a game.

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DENNIS: Whaddya talkin'. I told ya yesterday.
 SCOOTER: So maybe I forgot.
 DENNIS: So maybe you did. And then again, maybe you didn't.
 SCOOTER: What's that supposed to—
 DENNIS: You know what I mean—the gang's played four games in five days, and you haven't been to one of 'em.
 SCOOTER: I've been busy.
 DENNIS: Sure you have. Watching for puffins.
 SCOOTER: You wanna make something of it?
 DENNIS: *(Laughs.)* Sure. Why not? *(Beat. Scooter fires.)* Did Razorhead send you to Brownstein again?
 SCOOTER: What d'you think? Yeah, that Brownstein—he's worse than Greenbaum ever was.
 DENNIS: I see he didn't take away your pea-shooter.
 SCOOTER: He tried to. I told him I needed it for the All-State Championships next Saturday.
 DENNIS: *(Laughs.)* And he believed you?
 SCOOTER: That's why I hit Razorhead in the neck—needed the practice. *(They laugh.)* Razorhead didn't say anything after I left?
 DENNIS: *(Guilty.)* I don't think he felt the second one.
 SCOOTER: Yours was a direct hit.
 DENNIS: Yeah, I know, but...
 SCOOTER: It was an even better hit than mine.
 DENNIS: But yours came first.
 SCOOTER: *(Laughs.)* Yeah, we got him from both sides, didn't we!
 DENNIS: Look, I'm sorry I didn't raise my hand or anything when he asked who else—I mean, I wanted to go up to him after, I really did.
 SCOOTER: *(Shrugs.)* He likes you. He wouldn't have gotten mad.
 DENNIS: No, he'd have remembered from the last time. When we put chalk in his erasers.
 SCOOTER: *(Laughs.)* Yeah, what did he—
 DENNIS: *(Does Razorhead.)* I'm very disappointed in you, Dennis. Associating yourself with the likes of Scooter Thomas. I should think you'd be embarrassed... *(Scooter looks at Dennis. Dennis stops. Scooter smiles and turns out. Fires.)*

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SCOOTER: *Got the bastard! Got him again! (Pause.)* Y'know, the interesting thing about puffins, Dennis, is that for birds they're terrible flyers. Can't fly worth shit. They always end up crashing into things whenever they try to land. Sort of a funny little problem to have for a seabird, don't you think?

DENNIS: I guess.

SCOOTER: What'd you do with your shooter?

DENNIS: Threw it out with my lunch-bag.

SCOOTER: Oh geez. I'll have to make you another one. Take mine for now.

DENNIS: What?

SCOOTER: Take mine. I'll make myself a new one as soon as I get home. *(Pause.)* What's the matter? Not good enough for ya?

DENNIS: What? No, Scoots, sure I...

SCOOTER: Don't you want it?

DENNIS: Yeah. Thanks. *(Pause.)*

SCOOTER: I'll see ya later. *(He gets up to go.)*

DENNIS: Yeah, see ya. Hey, Scoots?

SCOOTER: *(Stops. Turns.)* Yeah?

DENNIS: See ya later. *(Scooter nods. Goes. Dennis looks out beyond the audience for a moment. Shouts.)* Hey, Scoots! Scoots! I think I just saw a puffin!

SCOOTER: *(Rushing in.)* Where? Where? *(Looks out.)* Nah. That's a Tibetan Spiny-babbler. It's not the same thing at all...

DENNIS: *(Reads.)* When walking in the wilderness, always relate your route to something else. If you walk in a circle, you'll only end up back where you started. Follow these simple rules and you should never get lost... *(Scooter points. Dennis follows.)*

SPRING AWAKENING by Frank Wedekind translated by Tom Osborn Melchior (15) - Moritz (15)

The Play: Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* is a pre-expressionistic tragedy about young people searching for knowledge about sex. Set in the bourgeois society of late 19th-century Germany, the hypocritical morality and stultifying attitudes of the children's parents and teachers choke them off in the very springs of their lives. The story focuses on two friends, Melchior and Moritz, who are just beginning to experiment with sexual activity. Like their fellow classmates, they only receive vague, foolish answers to their questions. Wendla and her girlfriends find it even more difficult to gain information. She and Melchior begin to fall in love, and, after succumbing to a moment of passion, Wendla becomes pregnant—yet she does not understand why. Her horrified mother arranges an abortion for the girl, and she dies. Moritz, confused by his sexual feelings, begins to fail in his studies and doesn't graduate. Troubled and disturbed, he commits suicide. There is no sympathy from his father and teachers, however, only contempt. Later, Melchior, who has been sent to a reformatory, is driven to escape and find Wendla's grave. The specter of Moritz appears and encourages the boy to join him in death, but a stranger—the force of life—intervenes.

The Scene: Sunday evening. Melchior and Moritz, bored with doing their homework, go for a walk.

Special Note: Students may want to look at Eric Bentley's translation of the play, as well as Edward Bond's.