

RACHEL MELENDEZ

JESSICA

BILLY CONN

MR. FINKEL

(We hear Nina Simone's "Children Go Where I Send You," then a recess bell and sounds from an elementary school playground. Lights up.)

(Three fourth grade girls and a tetherball pole. CHRONICLES SIMPKINS, all pigtails and attitude, eating Fun Dip. RACHEL MELENDEZ, pre-pubescent, gum-chewing hoochie mama. JESSICA, barely coordinated, plays with her iPhone. She is burdened by a backpack and dental head gear [which also makes it impossible to understand anything she says.]

CHRONICLES. Sydney Burrows gonna get hers.

RACHEL. Walking around in them cute little boots like she's someone.

CHRONICLES. Did you see the way she gave up Reggie?

RACHEL. Saying he copied her long division.

CHRONICLES. The girl's a snitch.

RACHEL. She's got to get got.

CHRONICLES. That's right I'm talking at you, Sydney.

RACHEL. Don't pretend like you ain't hearing her.

CHRONICLES. That's right. Walk away.

RACHEL. Walk away.

JESSICA. *(Unintelligible.)* Walk away.

CHRONICLES. She just jealous 'cause her mom packs her them natural snacks. Carrots and celery.

RACHEL. She wants your Fun Dip.

CHRONICLES. And my ever-lasting lick-a-stick. Who don't?

RACHEL. What flavor you on?

CHRONICLES. Cherrybomb. Saving the aren't you glad you eating orange for after.

RACHEL. For after what?

CHRONICLES. For after I cut her ass. *(To SYDNEY:)* That's right, pretend like you deaf.

RACHEL. You still going get got, Sydney.

CHRONICLES. What time is it?

RACHEL. What time is it, Jessica?

JESSICA. (*Unintelligible.*) 10:42.

CHRONICLES. What?

(*JESSICA shows RACHEL her watch.*)

RACHEL. (*To CHRONICLES:*) 10:42.

CHRONICLES. Running out of time. Recess gonna be over soon.

RACHEL. How 'bout it Billy Eugene? Wanna get your ass whooped?

CHRONICLES. (*Watching him walk on.*) Didn't think so.

RACHEL. Katrina Cook?

CHRONICLES. Ain't she retarded?

RACHEL. Nah, just a slut.

(*Enter BILLY CONN, a sixth grader. A large boy.*)

BILLY CONN. I'll play you.

CHRONICLES. And who are you?

BILLY CONN. I'm Billy Conn.

CHRONICLES. I don't know no Billy Conn.

BILLY CONN. I'm a sixth grader.

CHRONICLES. Big whoop.

RACHEL. Billy Conn runs with that dirty boy, Kennard.

CHRONICLES. Ah, that boy is nasty. Always trying to sneak a look at my boobs.

BILLY CONN. What boobs?

RACHEL. I know you did not just say that.

CHRONICLES. Say it again I'll cut your ass.

BILLY CONN. With what knife?

CHRONICLES. I don't need no knife. I got a rope and a ball. I'll slice you back to Miss McKinley's room and your head can read *Wrinkle in Time* to your neck.

RACHEL. You a punk.

JESSICA. (*Unintelligible.*) You a punk.

BILLY CONN. Freaks.

CHRONICLES. A punk with no game. You need to learn. (*To RACHEL:*) Make it happen.

RACHEL. Alright, Billy Conn of the sixth grade, whatcha got to put up? The champ don't ball for free.

BILLY CONN. Huh?

RACHEL. What's in the sack lunch?

(*BILLY CONN hands RACHEL his sack lunch. JESSICA peers over RACHEL's shoulder.*)

CHRONICLES. Count it down.

RACHEL. Half a Subway. Bag of Fritos. Juice box. Pickle.

(*JESSICA likes pickles.*)

CHRONICLES. Not bad.

RACHEL. Seen worse.

JESSICA. (*Unintelligible.*) Pickle. Pickle.

CHRONICLES. You gonna put up the whole bag?

BILLY CONN. You gonna put up your Fun Dip and everlasting lick-a-stick.

CHRONICLES. What did he say?

RACHEL. You did NOT just say that.

JESSICA. (*Unintelligible.*) You did NOT just say that.

CHRONICLES. Billy Conn of the sixth grade, what makes you think I'm gonna give up my ever-lasting lick-a-stick?

RACHEL. You lucky she even letting you look at her.

CHRONICLES. Do you know who I am?

RACHEL. Doubtful.

CHRONICLES. Tell him who I am.

(*CHRONICLES SIMPKINS starts to warm up in the circle. She smacks the ball clockwise, lets it wind and then smacks the ball counterclockwise. JESSICA swats at it hopelessly. CHRONICLES is simply the fiercest fourth-grade tetherball player in the world.*)

RACHEL. This is Chronicles Simpkins, Billy Conn. This is the Woodlake Avenue Elementary Recess, Lunch and After School Undisputed Unified Tetherball Champion.

CHRONICLES. Tell Billy Conn about the streak.

RACHEL. Seventy-eight games in a row, Billy Conn. You're standing outside a circle of pain.

CHRONICLES. You're standing there with your half a Subway, bagga' corn chips and a pickle thinking you're all that, but all I see on your forehead, in bright Technicolor Crayola is the number seventy-nine.

JESSICA. *(Unintelligible.)* Seventy-nine.

(JESSICA hands RACHEL the Hannah Montana Trapper Keeper of World Records from her backpack.)

RACHEL. This is the Hannah Montana Trapper Keeper of World Records. Do you know what we write inside here, Billy Conn?

CHRONICLES. The names of seventy-eight victims.

RACHEL. The grade they were in when they died and how long it took Chronicles Simpkins to send their butt back to hopscotch...

(CHRONICLES catches the ball.)

CHRONICLES. ...Or kickball or Pokémon or whatever irrelevant shit is going on outside my sacred ten feet. You lucky my girl Jessica likes pickles or I wouldn't waste my time. *(CHRONICLES smacks the tetherball.)* Feel the breeze.

(CHRONICLES walks away and takes off her glove.)

RACHEL. *(To BILLY CONN:)* It's on, Billy Conn.

(RACHEL hands JESSICA the Trapper Keeper, CHRONICLES hands RACHEL the glove. RACHEL holds the glove up high and circles walks around announcing. CHRONICLES blows on her hand [it's hot].)

RACHEL. *(To the schoolyard:)* Alright recess. Gather around. Circle it up. The Woodlake Avenue Elementary Unified Tetherball Championship is about to drop.

(KIDS gather around [or sounds of kids gathering around].)

RACHEL. Chronicles Simpkins versus Billy Conn. Lunch sack for the Fun Dip. No Ropies. No Catchies. No Blind Willies. And no chance you gonna win Billy Conn.

CHRONICLES. What's my record time against a sixth grader?

(JESSICA shows the Trapper Keeper to RACHEL.)

RACHEL. January 24th, 2007. Chronicles Simpkins versus David Gardley. 6 point 3 seconds.

CHRONICLES. You ready to make history, Billy Conn.

BILLY CONN. Yeah, like I'm gonna let some fourth-grade girl beat me. Bring it on.

CHRONICLES. Clock this shit.

(She serves the ball. BILLY blocks it and begins hitting it his way. CHRONICLES quickly takes out a pepper spray shot and sprays BILLY CONN in the face. BILLY CONN falls to his knees, clutching his eyes, screaming. CHRONICLES stops the ball, smacks it over his head. It winds around the pole at a blinding speed. Smack, smack, game.)

RACHEL. Five point two four.

(CHRONICLES takes a victory strut around the circle. She blows on her hand [it's hot], puts her glove back on, picks up her Fun Dip. JESSICA grabs the pickle out of the sack lunch and begins licking it. RACHEL drops the Hannah Montana Trapper Keeper of Records and gives the blind, screaming BILLY CONN the world's most intense wedgie.)

RACHEL. See that's how it rolls here, Billy Conn. You tell that to all them sixth graders. And tell your nasty friend to stop looking at my bra.

(She takes her foot and shoves BILLY CONN's butt all the way back to sixth grade. Exit a forever-altered BILLY CONN.)

CHRONICLES. What you all looking at? You move along Joy Grinell.

RACHEL. Ain't nothing to see here.

CHRONICLES. You look somewhere else Roy Steinbock.

RACHEL. Move along. Here comes the po-po.

CHRONICLES. Play it right.

(They strike poses of innocence. CHRONICLES hides the pepper spray behind her back. MR. FINKEL comes running in blowing a whistle.)

MR. FINKEL. Where is it?

CHRONICLES. Where's what?

MR. FINKEL. The pepper spray, Chronicles.

CHRONICLES. I don't have any pepper spray, Mr. Finkel.

(She drops the pepper spray to the side.)

MR. FINKEL. And what's that?

CHRONICLES. What's what?

MR. FINKEL. That thing you just dropped.

CHRONICLES. Says who?

MR. FINKEL. Ms. Melendez?

RACHEL. I didn't see anybody drop anything, Mr. Finkel.

MR. FINKEL. Jessica?

JESSICA. (*Unintelligible.*) Mr. Finkel I didn't see nothing. I don't even see it now. I don't know anything about any pepper spray and even if I did, which I don't, there's a context to everything and...

MR. FINKEL. Enough.

(*JESSICA shuts up.*)

MR. FINKEL. Billy Conn is in the nurse's office right now, Chronicles. That boy can't open his eyes, he can barely breathe.

CHRONICLES. God must have done that to him, Mr. Finkel.

MR. FINKEL. There's an ambulance on the way. You, young lady, have terrorized for the last time.

(*He picks up the pepper spray and grabs CHRONICLES by the wrist. JESSICA takes off her head gear. She speaks clearly. Maybe a tiny lisp.*)

JESSICA. You can't do that Mr. Finkel. There's a context for these things.

MR. FINKEL. Save it, Jessica.

(*She gets in front of MR. FINKEL.*)

JESSICA. She'll be expelled. Principal Cody will ship her to another school and she'll rule the tetherball court there and the same jealousies will conspire to break her spirit. Pretty soon she'll be selling her body for crack. Is that what you want? You want Chronicles smoking crack? You want to ruin her life? Did you run out here to this small little bit of asphalt, blowing your whistle, making wild accusations because you're trying to justify your existence, Mr. Finkel? Because you have failed to prepare your students, students like Billy Conn, for the coming world? A world that is surprising, and scary and yes, occasionally unfair? It's something he can't find in the books you make us read. And the lessons you draw up on the chalkboard. You have to let children fall, Mr. Finkel. You have to let them fall and get back up on their own. Chronicles is an outcast here, Mr. Finkel. In exile everywhere she carries her Fun Dip. But from ten thirty-five to eleven o'clock and twelve thirty to one fifteen she feels safe. When Chronicles steps into this circle, when she's hitting her high arcing serves, and flying that ball over the heads of children more privileged than her, for a brief moment in space and time, Mr. Finkel, Chronicles Simpkins is immortal. And just witnessing it is a thing of beauty. And you want to take that away from her. From us. Shame on you, Mr. Finkel. Billy Conn was weak. That's what happened here.

(*She puts her head gear back on.*)

MR. FINKEL. What grade are you in?

(*Quickly CHRONICLES takes off her shirt and RACHEL puts MR. FINKEL's hands on CHRONICLES's breasts. JESSICA takes a picture of this with her cell phone. CHRONICLES puts her shirt back on. JESSICA throws the cell phone to RACHEL.*)

MR. FINKEL. Hey!

RACHEL. But then again. Maybe we could tell Principal Cody you're a pedophile.

MR. FINKEL. Huh?

CHRONICLES. I'll get expelled. But you'll go to jail.

RACHEL. And you know what they do to predators in jail, Mr. Finkel?

CHRONICLES. They fuck you in the ass and don't ask permission.

(*CHRONICLES returns to her Fun Dip, waiting for MR. FINKEL's next move. RACHEL waves the cell phone. MR. FINKEL begins to back off.*)

You might want to drop that.

(*He drops the pepper spray.*)

Walk away.

RACHEL. Walk away.

JESSICA. (*Unintelligible.*) Walk away.

(*MR. FINKEL runs off. The three of them watch him walk off. JESSICA hits the tetherball.*)

CHRONICLES. Feel that breeze.

End of Play