

Closing Doors

A ten-minute play

The Assistant Principal's office in a contemporary American elementary school. Assistant Principal VALERIE is seated behind the desk. Fourth grade teacher SANDRA is facing her.

SANDRA

You're looking at it the wrong way.

VALERIE

I'm not. There are procedures in place.

SANDRA

I know there are / pro—

VALERIE

And teachers have to follow the procedures.

SANDRA

Every other drill, I did exactly / what—

VALERIE

We're talking about yesterday.

SANDRA

The other drills were announced in advance.

VALERIE

Sandy—

SANDRA

I know, but Solomon was in the bathroom when it started.

VALERIE

It doesn't matter where he was.

SANDRA

It matters. Just because a kid has to go to the / bathroom—

VALERIE

The door has to stay closed until the drill is over.

SANDRA

Every other time, I kept the kids in the classroom because I knew it was coming. You used to do the same thing. You kept the kids in the classroom so / when—

VALERIE

We have to have surprise drills, too. They're more realistic.

SANDRA

Realistic.

VALERIE

The rest of your class thought you were opening the door to let the shooter in.

SANDRA

I figured it had to be a drill, and Solomon was / standing in—

VALERIE

Officer Harmon could have walked right / in and—

SANDRA

He didn't walk in. I let Solomon back in and I closed the door.

VALERIE

Once you lock the door, it stays that way until Richard gives the all-clear. That's the protocol. What you need to do is write a letter of apology so Richard can let the parents / know—

SANDRA

You didn't see his face. He was knocking on the door, trying to turn the handle. I took the paper off the glass and there he was, looking up at me. Crying. He knew it was up to me to let him in or leave him out there. What's the protocol for that? Cover the glass again and go shelter in place with the rest of the class?

VALERIE

This is why you put the paper on the glass.

SANDRA

So the shooter can't see in, I / under—

VALERIE

So you can't see out. We put the rules in place—

SANDRA

Because the research says we'll save more lives that way.

VALERIE

No.

SANDRA

No?

VALERIE

We put the rules in place so you don't have to decide, if a student is in the hall, whether you open the door or not, because that choice has been made for you.

SANDRA

By you?

VALERIE

Not by me.

SANDRA

By Richard?

VALERIE

The principal, the school committee, the superintendent, working / with—

SANDY

Then why am I talking to you this morning, not him?

VALERIE

You're not talking to Richard because he's spending his morning on the phone with a lot of angry parents. Parents whose children told them you opened the door for the shooter.

SANDY

Then he can explain to / them—

VALERIE

It was all over the parent Facebook group last night. He had seven emails and I don't know how many voice-messages by the time he got to school, so believe me: You don't want to be talking to Richard this morning. You're talking to me because I told him I would handle this as a matter between friends.

SANDRA

I see.

Beat.

Thank you for doing that.

VALERIE

Of course. I know yesterday must have been hard.

SANDRA

It was.

VALERIE

I'm glad to be able to help you through this. It's a simple ask. You get Richard your apology, he'll send an email out to the / community—

SANDRA

That's not a simple ask. I'm not sorry for letting—

VALERIE

He needs to assure the parents that—

SANDRA

I'm not going to lie.

VALERIE

Don't think of it as a lie.

SANDRA

How should I think of it?

VALERIE

These parents send their kids to us five days a week; they need to know we're doing everything we can to keep them safe.

SANDRA

I do.

VALERIE

No, you took a risk / that—

SANDRA

Val, every Tuesday morning, when Marilou is in doing music with the kids, I sit out at the desk, by the front door. "Front desk duty."

VALERIE

I know.

SANDRA

To keep the kids "safe." That's what we say, right? We're doing all we can to keep them safe. You used to be more upset about that than I was. You had the union file a complaint.

VALERIE

I see the purpose of it now.

SANDRA

Now that you're out of the classroom and in the Assistant Principal's Office, you see the purpose of making teachers sitting ducks in case a shooter walks in.

VALERIE

You're not a sitting / duck.

SANDRA

To "slow the shooter down."

VALERIE

After Sandy Hook, schools have to...

SANDRA

"Have to" what?

VALERIE

Parents feel better knowing a staff member will be the first encounter.

SANDRA

You mean, "First Victim."

VALERIE

No one's going to be a victim. Schools are still among the safest places you / can—

SANDRA

If we're safe, then why am I sitting at the front door every Tuesday morning?

VALERIE

It's "theater." It makes the parents feel better. To know we're taking action.

SANDRA

So this is your new job. Bull****ing parents so they feel like school is a safe place.

VALERIE

It is safe. We're just reinforcing, / for—

SANDRA

It wasn't safe for Solomon. He heard Officer Harmon coming down the hall, shouting, "You're dead now. Lie on the floor and don't move." He would have been one of the bodies. How does he get over that? He's ten years old. How does he come back into my room after the drill, open a book, take out a pencil, and trust me / enough to—

END OF SAMPLE