

THANK YOU FOR FLUSHING MY HEAD IN THE TOILET
and other rarely used expressions

by
Jonathan Dorf

Cast of Characters

Achilles, early to mid-teens and a target of bullies
Helen, female, not so different from Achilles in that she's a target
Glinda, female, coolest of the cool
Prometheus, male, even more bullied than Achilles
Bully, male, big enough to scare his victims
Ismene, Helen's friend
six Salespeople
Bully Girl
Bully Girl's Friend
Bully Girl's Second Friend
Seizure Student
Tragicomic Interlude Student
Reporter
One, a popular girl
Two, a second popular girl
Three, a third popular girl
Girl at the Desk
Bluebird Student
three Spellers
Teacher, something of a caricature
three Audience Kids

With the exception of the Teacher, all of these characters are meant to be school-age, and the Teacher is more of a caricature and is meant to be played by an actor from the play's ensemble.

Achilles, Helen and Glinda should not be doubled. Prometheus should not be doubled either, but he could also be one of the spellers in the bee. A flexible-sized ensemble of students portrays all other characters. They are also the members of the Pyramid of Popularity, audience members at the spelling bee, and create the "choral" moments in scenes 3, 4 and 10.

Setting

Settings such as the various school venues and the "bully store" and training room are meant to be suggested, making use of lighting and minimal set pieces.

Author's Notes

It's best for continuity if the play can be performed without blackouts between scenes unless specifically called for.

In Building a Better Bully, Part I, "faggot" may be substituted for "freak" to make the line harsher.

SCENE 1: THANK YOU FOR FLUSHING MY HEAD IN THE TOILET

(ACHILLES, early to mid-teens but definitely one of the less imposing boys at his school, his hair wet with the water probably dripping onto his shirt, stands up. A BULLY, bigger and tougher and either the same age or slightly older, is in front of him.)

ACHILLES

Thank you.

BULLY
(beat)

What?

ACHILLES

Thank you.

BULLY

For what?

ACHILLES

For flushing my head in the toilet.

BULLY

What?!

ACHILLES

I loved that.

(hugs the Bully, dripping water on him)

That was definitely your best one ever.

BULLY
(backing away)

What are you--some kinda' freak?

(The Bully hurries away. Beat.)

ACHILLES

That's how it goes in my mind. He shoves my head in the bowl, flushes, and I pop up, jack in the box: thank you!
(beat)

The problem is that in real life, I never get past choking on the bowl water. My brain is trying to say "thank you," and the rest of me is gagging, and if the toilet wasn't flushed before I--let's not even go there.
(beat)

Since "thank you" doesn't seem to be happening, I'm working on another strategy: vomiting. I'm optimistic about vomiting, because it's all I can do not to vomit already, so this would be like going with the flow, and even better: his legs are right there.

ACHILLES (cont'd)

(demonstrates by getting on his knees
and swiveling to one side)

It's just point and shoot. And if you knew that every time you gave me a swirly you were gonna' have to go home and change your pants, you'd think twice. It's the power of retaliatory vomiting.

(beat)

And that's just the beginning. They say that the best defense is a good offense, which is why I'm taking it to the next level: preemptive vomiting.

(beat--meaning not the time but the
position)

Trouble at four o'clock. Fire projectiles on my mark.

(feigns vomiting)

We've got on 'em on the run. I repeat. The enemy is in full retreat.

(beat)

I hate vomiting. It's the worst feeling in the world. Almost as bad as having your head stuck in a flushing toilet.

(Exit Achilles.)

SCENE 2: THE UNBEARABLE LATENESS OF BEING

(Morning. Before school. HELEN holds her bookbag. Her friend, ISMENE, also female, carries one as well. They're on their way out of Helen's house-- which can be suggested by lighting or by a door frame or something similarly minimal--when Helen stops.)

HELEN

Hold on--I forgot my homework.

(Helen goes back inside. Ismene waits. Beat. Helen returns.)

ISMENE

K?

HELEN

Yeah.

(They take a few steps, but Helen stops again.)

Wait. I forgot my homework.

ISMENE

But you just--

HELEN

That was math. This is English.

ISMENE

Hurry or we'll miss the bus.

(Helen goes back inside. Beat. She returns waving the missing homework. They turn to leave again, but after another few steps...)

HELEN

Wait--sorry. I forgot my homework.

ISMENE

But--

HELEN

This is history. Mrs. Paul is my favorite teacher. There's no way I could bring all my other homework and not hers.

ISMENE

We're going to miss the bus.

HELEN

It's OK. You go. I'll just be a little late.

(The scene rewinds itself to the same starting point as before, with the two girls toting their backpacks.)

HELEN

Hold on--I forgot my wallet.

(Helen goes back inside. Ismene waits. Beat. Helen returns.)

ISMENE

K?

HELEN

Yeah.

(They take a few steps, but Helen stops again.)

Wait. I forgot my cell phone.

ISMENE

But you're not even allowed to--

HELEN

I'll want it for after. It'll just be a sec.

ISMENE

Hurry up.

(Helen goes back inside. Beat. She returns waving the missing homework. They turn to leave again, but after another few steps...)

HELEN

Wait--sorry. My socks don't match.

ISMENE

But--

HELEN

Everybody'll see. I can't have everybody see me with these socks.

ISMENE

We're going to miss the bus.

HELEN

It's OK. You go. I'll just be a little late.

(Once again, the scene rewinds to the beginning: the two girls and their bookbags. They take a few steps, but Helen stops again.)

HELEN
Wait. I forgot my lucky penny.

ISMENE
But--

(Before Ismene can say another word,
they freeze and the scene rewinds
itself yet again.)

HELEN
I have to go to the bathroom.
(Before Ismene can say a word, they're
already rewinding and starting the
scene over.)
I forgot to say bye to my Mom--
(Helen starts to go back inside, but
doesn't get that far before they freeze
and rewind.)
I forgot--

(Ismene drops Helen's bookbag.)

ISMENE
You can't go to school late forever.
(beat)
They probably moved on to somebody else by now.

HELEN
Just a few more days.
(beat)
I think I forgot my...I just want to be late again today.

(Beat. Ismene exits. Lights slowly
fade on Helen, just waiting.)

SCENE 3: YOUR BULLY BUDDY

(GLINDA, "in" in every way, appears across the stage from Helen.)

GLINDA

Hey.

(Helen keeps her head down.)

I said hey.

(This time Helen, her head still down, looks discreetly around her, to see if there's anyone else around.)

I'm talking to you.

(Helen finally looks up.)

HELEN

Sorry.

GLINDA

What are you sorry for?

HELEN

You said--

GLINDA

No wonder you're on the ignore list.

HELEN

What's the--

(Glinda holds up a hand for silence.)

GLINDA

A picture is worth a thousand words.

(She snaps her fingers, and STUDENTS representing a variety of social groups enter and set up the school cafeteria.)

FIRST PYRAMID STUDENT

The Pyramid of Popularity: A Dramatic Interpretation.

(Using tables or blocks or another creative design, the students at the top of the school food chain set themselves up at the top of the pyramid, and other students fill in the subsequent blocks as they work their way down: feel free to craft the pyramid and its components--jocks, preps, skaters, goths, nerds, etc--as best fits your school.)

Each new block of the pyramid pushes Helen further down, until she's on the floor at its foot. At precisely that moment, the Bully from the opening scene--or any other student, most likely male--unceremoniously dumps Achilles on the floor, as the Pyramid Kids begin exiting.)

HELEN

Hey--where's everybody...

(The Pyramid Kids are gone. Beat.)

ACHILLES

This is my spot.

HELEN

It's the floor.

ACHILLES

Yeah?

HELEN

You don't own the floor.

ACHILLES

Possession is nine-tenths of the law.

HELEN

What is that supposed to mean?

ACHILLES

It's a common expression.

HELEN

I've never heard anybody--

ACHILLES

It's a common--

HELEN

Maybe if you didn't talk that way you wouldn't get your head flushed down the toilet.

ACHILLES

(beat)

In.

HELEN

What?

ACHILLES

In. Not down. If I had my head flushed down the toilet, I wouldn't have a head anymore. It would be in the sewage system by now or part of a landfill: my head gets flushed *in*.

HELEN

I thought we were in the cafeteria.

(Helen starts looking for a door.)

Where are we?

(Achilles gets up and starts looking as well.)

I was talking to this girl.

ACHILLES

What girl?

HELEN

I don't know. Just this girl.

ACHILLES

Did she look like a supermodel?

HELEN

What does a supermodel look like?

ACHILLES

Was she hot?

HELEN

More like tough.

ACHILLES

But in a hot kinda' way?

HELEN

She's a girl. I don't like girls.

ACHILLES

I didn't say you did.

HELEN

Some people say I do, but I don't.

ACHILLES

So why do they say it?

HELEN

(shrugs)

'Cause they can?

ACHILLES

(beat)

So did she look like a supermodel? Black leather jacket, tight--

HELEN

Can you get to the point?

(Helen continues futilely to look for a door.)

ACHILLES

I was talking to her too. She comes up to me, and she says she knows about the toilet.

(Enter Glinda.)

And I'm like what toilet? And she says:

GLINDA

The toilet closest to the wall in the boys bathroom by the main office. The far wall. The second toilet to the right when you walk into the boys bathroom on the second floor by Mr. Dobranahan's math room. And the third toilet to the right. The one closest to the wall. The near wall. There must be something about standing next to a wall when you flush someone's head in the toilet. I'll have to try it.

(to herself, as if she were them)

But Glinda, why are we here?

(Helen searches the area where Glinda entered, looking for a way out, but there is none.)

Why are we here in this place with no doors or windows or means of escape of any kind? Are you going to kill us, eat us, force us to watch reality television 24/7 until we beg and drool at your feet for mercy?

(beat--as herself)

You're here because you've been recommended.

ACHILLES

For what?

GLINDA

A special program.

HELEN

Special special, or special retarded?

GLINDA

Remedial.

ACHILLES

But I'm ahead in all my--

GLINDA

Who are you ahead of? Most of the time I see you, you're upside down or flat on your face. How many people does that get you ahead of?

(beat)

Don't you get tired of being the butt of every joke and--

HELEN

Those dirty looks every time I sit in the wrong seat or how when I walk by they all stop talking--

ACHILLES

Being checked into the lockers--

(The CHORUS OF STUDENTS forms gradually, with students entering and becoming lit just before they speak. The speaker should change after every line unless otherwise noted, but depending on the production, the chorus could be anywhere from a handful of actors rotating quickly to a large group. Achilles and Helen could pick up lines here, but Glinda should not-- nor should any student who is obviously playing a bully at that moment.)

CHORUS OF STUDENTS

The dog turd in my lunch bag.
 The foot that trips me in the aisle every time I get on the bus.
 Hearing about all the parties I didn't get invited to.
 How they make fun of my weight.
 And my height.
 And my pants being too short.
 And the car my parents drive.
 And my skin problems.
 And the way I talk.

(beat)

The panic attacks in the middle of the night.
 The text messages in the middle of the night saying "you're gonna' get it tomorrow."
 Stealing my clothes while I'm in the showers at gym.
 Taking my pencil.
 Taking my homework so they can copy it.
 Making me do their homework.
 The stuff I told her about my brother going in her blog.

(To make this next line stronger, use AIDS instead of herpes. If absolutely necessary, the line can also be cut completely.)

Him spreading this rumor that I have herpes.

CHORUS OF STUDENTS (cont'd)

All the people I thought were my friends laughing when I got my shirt caught in the car door--pretending they didn't see me.

FINAL STUDENT

And this feeling that no matter what I do, it will never, ever stop.

(Lights dim on the chorus of students:
it's just Glinda, Achilles and Helen.)

GLINDA

(beat)

Do you wanna eat lunch or be lunch?

(Glinda holds out her hand to Achilles and Helen. A light appears, as if it's a door, behind her. Achilles and Helen step toward her. Blackout.)

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