

TEACHERS ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By **Bradley Hayward**

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**TEACHERS ON THE VERGE
OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN**

By Bradley Hayward

SYNOPSIS: Five high school teachers find themselves at the end of their rope...and it's only the first day of school! From an English teacher with mood swings and a math teacher in the middle of a divorce, to an elderly chemistry teacher with back pain and a geography teacher with a whip, the semester gets off to a rocky start. Add to the mix a drama teacher who sleeps on his desk, and it only becomes a matter of time before one of them snaps. As the students navigate this bumpy road, they begin to realize it may have been their behavior that pushed these teachers perilously close to the edge. Will they be able to make things right before it's too late, or has this faculty completely lost its faculties?

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(10 EITHER, 0-20 EXTRAS)

TEACHERS

MISS PAT (m/f) Moody English teacher. (60 lines)
MRS. RIESENBACH (m/f) Frazzled algebra teacher. (59 lines)
MR. TREMBLAY (m/f) Elderly chemistry teacher. (53 lines)
MS. FRITZ (m/f) Strict geography teacher. (50 lines)
MR. WIENS (m/f) Exhausted drama teacher. (62 lines)

STUDENTS

JORDAN (m/f) Troublemaker. (39 lines)
LOGAN (m/f) Know-it-all. (46 lines)
TARYN (m/f) Teacher's pet. (36 lines)
CAMERON (m/f) Heartbreaker. (39 lines)
KYLE (m/f) Thespian. (49 lines)

CASTING NOTES

All of the characters are gender flexible; simply change the names, pronouns, and gender specific dialogue as necessary. For a larger cast, extra (non-speaking) students may be added to each classroom. For a much larger cast, each teacher could have a completely different set of students.

RUNNING TIME: 30-35 minutes.

SETTING: The present.

SCENE

A classroom. There are five teacher desks on raised platforms (upstage) and five student desks scattered in front of them (downstage).

PROPS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coffee mug | <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Dew |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stack of papers | <input type="checkbox"/> Paper airplanes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Notebooks | <input type="checkbox"/> Pen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two shoulder bags | <input type="checkbox"/> Donut |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wal-Mart bag | <input type="checkbox"/> Twizzlers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pill bottles | <input type="checkbox"/> Tortilla chips |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Briefcase | <input type="checkbox"/> Tube of foot cream |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Whip | <input type="checkbox"/> Mouthwash |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large eyeglasses | <input type="checkbox"/> Maalox |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pillow | <input type="checkbox"/> Five cell phones |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comforter | <input type="checkbox"/> Gum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Five bookbags | <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Disturb sign |

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Keep the play moving swiftly by avoiding blackouts, unless otherwise noted.

The scenes should run smoothly from one to the next, with very little movement required during the scene changes.

Feel free to experiment with the set design. If you'd rather have all of the teachers share one desk, go for it. However, I feel strongly that the teachers should be on a raised platform, giving them a “great and powerful Oz” advantage over the students.

All of the props that are not carried on could easily be stored in the desk drawers and under desk tops.

Have fun with the play, and more importantly, your teachers!

Perusal Only
Do Not Copy

AT RISE:

The LIGHTS RISE on five teacher desks. They are perched on raised platforms, facing front. MISS PAT enters, clutching onto a coffee mug for dear life. She's already had a horrible day, and it's only eight o'clock in the morning. She arrives at her desk and collapses into her chair. She blows on her coffee, takes a sip, and then slams the mug down on the desk.

MISS PAT: Kill me now.

She slumps over her desk and freezes. MRS. RIESENBACH enters. She's in a tizzy, as usual, carrying two huge shoulder bags that are stuffed to overflowing with papers and notebooks. She's completely disorganized, with frizzy hair and mismatched shoes. She scurries to her desk and swings both arms, hurling the bags onto her desk. They land with a thud and papers fly everywhere.

MRS. RIESENBACH: For the love of Peter, Paul, and Mary!

On her hands and knees, she scrambles for the papers and freezes. MR. TREMBLAY enters, carrying a plastic Wal-Mart bag. He's an old man with gray hair and wrinkles. He hobbles toward his desk and has a seat. He takes a pill bottle out of the bag and sets it down. Then another. Then another. He keeps pulling out pill bottles, one bigger than the next, until he has an entire row lined up across the front of his desk. He speaks frankly to the bottles.

MR. TREMBLAY: Okay, fellas. What's it gonna be? Nitroglycerin or Xanax? *(He listens to the bottles.)* What's that you say? ...It's Monday? ...Good call. Both it is.

He picks up two bottles, flicks off the lids, and tosses back some pills. He freezes. MS. FRITZ enters on a mission, carrying a briefcase. She wears a blazer, short skirt, black nylons, and high heels. She also sports an absolutely enormous pair of glasses. She arrives at her desk and slams the briefcase down like a member of the Mafia. She flicks open both locks with her thumbs and flips it open. With great dramatic flair, she pulls out a bull whip and snaps it on the floor.

MS. FRITZ: If they think they can mess with me, they have another think coming. Just go ahead and try, kiddos. *(She slams the briefcase shut.)* Bring it.

She snaps the whip and freezes. MR. WIENS enters, completely disheveled, wearing a bathrobe and slippers. He carries a pillow under one arm and a huge comforter under the other, which drags on the floor as he slowly saunters to his desk. With one arm, he swipes everything off his desk and climbs on top. He puts his head down on the pillow and curls into a cozy ball.

MR. WIENS: Wake me when it's over. *(He yawns, pulls the covers over his face, and freezes.)*

MISS PAT: *(Unfreezes, checks her watch.)* Oh, no. It's almost time.

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Unfreezes, puts her hands together in prayer.)* Dear Lord, see me through one more day.

MR. TREMBLAY: *(Unfreezes, closes his eyes.)* Take deep, calming breaths.

MS. FRITZ: *(Unfreezes, snaps her whip.)* Batten down the hatches!

MR. WIENS: *(Unfreezes, pokes his head out from under the covers.)*
Is it three o'clock yet?

MISS PAT: Five.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Four.

MR. TREMBLAY: Three.

MS. FRITZ: Two.

MR. WIENS: One.

The SCHOOL BELL rings and the LIGHTS RISE on five student desks that are scattered downstage, facing front. The STUDENTS pour onto the stage, screaming and yelling at the top of their lungs. It's mayhem as they push each other, slam down their bookbags, and take their seats. The TEACHERS cringe.

MISS PAT: My head.

MRS. RIESENBACH: My ears.

MR. TREMBLAY: My heart.

MS. FRITZ: My nerves.

MR. WIENS: My brain.

TEACHERS: (*Shouting.*) My God!

The STUDENTS instantly pipe down. They sit quietly, trying not to giggle.

MISS PAT: (*Whispers.*) Thank you. Now, listen up. It's time for roll call. And I'm only going to do this once, because I have a headache.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Because I haven't lost the register yet.

MR. TREMBLAY: Because I'm still coherent.

MS. FRITZ: Because I have my eye on you.

MR. WIENS: Because I'm required to by law.

TEACHERS: Got it?

STUDENTS: Got it, Teach. (*They salute, giggling.*)

MISS PAT: Taryn Freemantle.

TARYN: Here.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Kyle Morris.

KYLE: Here, here.

MR. TREMBLAY: Cameron McCrae.

CAMERON: Here, here, here.

MS. FRITZ: Logan Shortt.

LOGAN: Present.

MR. WIENS: And Jordan Wouters.

JORDAN, clearly much older and much larger than the others, takes a swig from a Mountain Dew and belches.

TEACHERS: Let's get this over with.

The SCHOOL BELL rings and the LIGHTS FADE from all the TEACHERS, except MISS PAT. The STUDENTS freeze as she speaks to the audience.

MISS PAT: First period. Why, oh why, do I always get saddled with first period? It's the second-worst kind of period for a woman. You'd think the kids would be tired and cranky after having been ripped from their beds. You'd think they'd be sluggish and slow from the long bus ride to school. But no. Quite the opposite. They come racing in here, fresh off their Fruit Loops, and bounce off the walls like bloody ping-pong balls. If only I had a paddle. And to make matters worse, this is English. You try explaining *The Grapes of Wrath* to a bunch of sugared-up teenagers at eight in the morning. Many's the day I sit back in this very chair, look up at the sky, and pray to God that I could go back in time and shoot John Steinbeck. But since I can't do that—at least not yet—I'm forced to cram literature down the throats of sniveling snot boxes who don't know the difference between their butts and their foreheads.

The STUDENTS unfreeze and they all toss paper airplanes in various directions.

STUDENTS: Wheeeeeeeeeee!

MISS PAT: Stop it.

The STUDENTS toss more airplanes, in different directions.

STUDENTS: Woooooowoooo!

MISS PAT: I mean it.

The STUDENTS toss more airplanes, straight up.

STUDENTS: Haaaaaaaaaaa!

MISS PAT: (*Jumps up and loses her temper.*) Enough, already! (*The STUDENTS toss more airplanes directly at her face. After they've all ricocheted off her head, she stares blankly.*) Every day. (*The STUDENTS giggle.*) How would you all like to make a trip to the principal's office? (*They laugh even harder.*) I mean it!

KYLE: He doesn't want to see us.

MISS PAT: Why do you say that?

KYLE: Because of the sign on his door that says, "I don't want to see you."

MISS PAT: Crap, I forgot about that. Then I'll send you all to the janitor's office! And believe me, I've seen the bathrooms around here. You do not want to end up on the receiving end of a plunger.

The STUDENTS instantly stop laughing. JORDAN speaks out of the corner of his mouth.

JORDAN: Someone sure woke up on the wrong side of the bed.

MISS PAT: What did you say?

JORDAN: (*Shouts.*) I said, "Someone sure woke up on the wrong side of the bed!"

MISS PAT: Jordan?

JORDAN: Yo.

MISS PAT: Jordan Wouters?

JORDAN: That's my name. Don't wear it out.

MISS PAT: What are you doing here?

JORDAN: Did you miss me? (*He puckers his lips and kisses the air.*)

MISS PAT: Don't tell me you're back again.

JORDAN: In the flesh, Miss Pat.

MISS PAT: This is your third time in the ninth grade.

JORDAN: (*Proudly fist pumps the air.*) Nine squared!

MISS PAT: You mean cubed.

JORDAN: Huh?

MISS PAT: Never mind. Don't you think you're a little old to be here?

JORDAN: What's it to ya?

MISS PAT: Besides, you passed last year.

JORDAN: No, I didn't.

MISS PAT: Yes, you did.

JORDAN: No, I didn't.

MISS PAT: Yes. You did. After spending two years with you, I made extra sure of it. I specifically remember "accidentally" setting your final exam on fire with a blowtorch so that I had no choice but to give you a passing grade.

JORDAN: (*Fist pumps again.*) Brain dead bonfire!

MISS PAT: You're a smart kid. Why can't you pass?

JORDAN: You must be real bad at your job.

The STUDENTS laugh. MISS PAT shakes her head.

MISS PAT: Moving on. For the next three weeks, we'll be reading *The Grapes of Wrath* together in class. That's right. Three weeks. Three long, excruciating weeks. So I'd like you all to take out your books and turn to page one.

The STUDENTS don't move, they just give each other concerned glances. MISS PAT grabs a pen, taps the end, and then speaks into it like a microphone.

MISS PAT: Is this thing on? I said I'd like you all to take out your books and turn to page one. (*JORDAN raises his hand.*) Yes, Jordan?

JORDAN: We can't.

MISS PAT: Why not?

JORDAN: We just can't.

MISS PAT: Listen up! This isn't happening a third year in a row! I'm the boss here, and you'll do as I say! So turn to page one! Now!

JORDAN: (*Shrugs his shoulders.*) If you say so. (*He turns to the others.*) You heard what she said, guys. Turn to page one.

The STUDENTS nod and quietly get out of their desks. They each collect a paper airplane from the floor and return to their seats. They carefully unfold the pages.

MISS PAT: What are you doing?

JORDAN: You told us to turn to page one.

MISS PAT: Yeah. So?

JORDAN: (*Holds up his airplane.*) So this is page one.

MISS PAT: (*Slumps down and starts banging her head on her desk.*) Why, God? Why me?

JORDAN: Sorry, Miss Pat.

MISS PAT: You ripped the pages out of your books?

JORDAN: We did, Miss Pat.

MISS PAT: You took one of the most cherished novels of all time, not to mention school property, and tore it to shreds?

JORDAN: You have that exactly correct, yes.

MISS PAT: And then used those shreds to hurl paper planes at my head?

JORDAN: Are you angry, Miss Pat?

MISS PAT: Angry? *(She chuckles in spite of herself, then goes stone-faced again.)* No. I've wanted to rip up that sucker for years. But the fact that you did it yourselves and denied me the pleasure of seeing Tom Joad and company torn into bits really burns my biscuits!

JORDAN: It's not too late, Miss Pat.

MISS PAT: Not too late for what?

JORDAN: *(Raises his page in the air.)* Here's a grape. Show us your wrath!

MISS PAT: I can't.

JORDAN: You know you want to.

MISS PAT: I won't.

JORDAN: *(Reads from his page.)* "To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently—"

MISS PAT: Stop! Stop! I can't take it anymore! *(She laughs maniacally as she yanks the page from his fingers and rips it up into little bits.)* I'm so sick of this book that I could spit! *(She hurls the wad of confetti into the air and it rains down on top of her.)* Go on, kids! Unleash your wrath! *(The STUDENTS happily rip their pages into little pieces. As MISS PAT rattles off character names, a different STUDENT tosses confetti into the air.)* Take that, Tom! Suck it, Ma! Quit your whining, Pa! Get a grip, Jim! And what the heck kind of name is Rose of Sharon?!

JORDAN: That's right, Miss Pat! You show those grapes who's boss!

STUDENTS: *(Chanting.)* Grapes! Wrath! Grapes! Wrath!

They continue chanting as MISS PAT pants wildly. Her panting slowly subsides as she returns to her desk and absorbs the reality of what she's just done.

MISS PAT: Oh my word. What have I done? I don't know what came over me. I'm so sorry.

JORDAN: What for? That was awesome, Miss Pat!

MISS PAT: No, Jordan. That was not awesome. That was horrible. That was animal. That was insane.

JORDAN: (*Fist pumps.*) Psycho teacher!

The STUDENTS gasp.

MISS PAT: Go to the janitor's office at once, young man, and wash your mouth out with Drano!

JORDAN: But I'm not a young man. Let me show you my chest hair!

Just as he's about to lift his shirt, the SCHOOL BELL rings.

MISS PAT: Saved by the bell. But before you go, I have one thing to say. Now, listen carefully. Nobody finds out what just happened in here. And I mean nobody. The faculty has a pool going as to when I'm going to snap. I've got my money on Thursday, so not a word. Got it?

STUDENTS: Got it.

MISS PAT: What happens in English stays in English. Class dismissed.

She lowers her head as the LIGHTS FADE from her desk. The STUDENTS collect their belongings, switch desks, and freeze. The LIGHTS RISE on MRS. RIESENBACH's desk. She speaks to the audience, flustered.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Second period. Uh...what class is this again? (*She rifles through her bags, pulling out piles and piles of paperwork.*) Is it biology? No, that's not it. Chemistry? Can't be. Not after the Bunsen burner incident. Physics, maybe? I don't know. Whatever. It has something to do with numbers... Oh, look! A donut! (*She pulls a smashed donut from the bottom of her bag and gobbles it down as she continues.*) The truth is, my head has been screwed on sideways ever since the separation. Fourteen years we were married. That's right. Fourteen years down the drain! So what if I put on a few pounds? So what if I snore? So what if I lost all my charm, charisma, and skin elasticity? "Till death do us part," he said. Liar! Now he wants me to sign the divorce

papers. One signature, and it's all over. "Fine," I said. "I'll sign your stupid papers!" And I will. I just need to find them. *(She sticks her head all the way into the bottom of her bag. Suddenly, she remembers something and looks up excitedly, the bag still on her head.)* Algebra! That's it! Algebra!

The STUDENTS unfreeze.

LOGAN: Uh-oh.

TARYN: What?

LOGAN: *(Points at MRS. RIESENBACH.)* Check out Mrs. Riesenbach.

TARYN: What's that about?

LOGAN: Class hasn't even started, and she's already in the bag.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Is everyone ready?

LOGAN: Are you okay, Mrs. Riesenbach?

MRS. RIESENBACH: I'm fine. Why do you ask? *(She takes the bag off her head and has a few Twizzlers dangling from her lips.)*

LOGAN: No reason.

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Grabs a stack of papers and holds them out.)*

Let's jump right in. Everyone take an exam and pass it back.

LOGAN: *(Takes a page, passes the rest back.)* An exam on the first day?

MRS. RIESENBACH: You got a problem with that?

LOGAN: No. No problem.

MRS. RIESENBACH: I didn't think so.

LOGAN: Is that your breakfast?

MRS. RIESENBACH: Is what my what?

LOGAN: You're having licorice for breakfast?

MRS. RIESENBACH: How do you know what I had for breakfast?

LOGAN: You're eating it now.

MRS. RIESENBACH: I am? ...Oh, I am. Well, don't look at me like that.

LOGAN: Like what?

MRS. RIESENBACH: With those beady little eyes. I can't take it!

LOGAN: Are you sure you're okay?

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Goes limp.)* No. I'm not even sure what class I'm teaching.

LOGAN: Algebra.

MRS. RIESENBACH: If you say so.

LOGAN: Why don't we just start the exam?

MRS. RIESENBACH: Good idea. And while you're doing that, I'll sit here and eat my feelings.

She takes a big bag of tortilla chips from her bag and starts eating. As she crunches on one chip after another, the STUDENTS look over their papers, confused. LOGAN raises his hand.

LOGAN: Um, Mrs. Riesenbach...

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Her mouth full.)* What now?

LOGAN: I thought this was Algebra.

MRS. RIESENBACH: It is. I think.

LOGAN: *(Points at his paper.)* Then what does this mean?

MRS. RIESENBACH: What does what mean?

LOGAN: "Irreconcilable differences."

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Spits out some chip bits.)* Oh, phooey! Give that back!

LOGAN: What is this?

MRS. RIESENBACH: Nothing! Now give it back!

LOGAN: Are you getting divorced?

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Defensive.)* Why? What have you heard?

LOGAN: Nothing.

MRS. RIESENBACH: It's none of your business!

LOGAN: Okay.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Get off my case!

LOGAN: Sure.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Stop hounding me!

LOGAN: I'm not.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Fine! You dragged it out of me! Yes! I'm getting divorced! My husband of fourteen years is leaving me all alone to wither away and turn into an old maid. Soon I'll be beached on a sofa, knitting booties for the children I'll never have. There! Now you know the truth! Are you happy now?

LOGAN: Happy? No. Scared? Yes.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Those are my divorce proceedings. I have to sign them before the U-Haul arrives to pack up my sad, pathetic life.

LOGAN: Who's your lawyer?

MRS. RIESENBACH: I don't know. I saw his ad on a bus.

LOGAN: I think you need a better lawyer.

MRS. RIESENBACH: I can't afford one.

LOGAN: Then you're screwed.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Why?

LOGAN: It says here that your husband gets to keep the house, the car, the boat, and the cat.

MRS. RIESENBACH: What do I get?

LOGAN: Three plates and a litter box.

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Bursts into tears, crumbles to the floor.)* My life is falling apart.

LOGAN: There, there, Mrs. Riesenbach. Don't cry.

MRS. RIESENBACH: *(Weeping.)* Am I crying? I do it so much these days that I can't tell the difference anymore.

LOGAN: You should talk to the principal. I'm sure he'd give you some time off while you go through this difficult time in your life.

MRS. RIESENBACH: No, he won't.

LOGAN: How do you know?

MRS. RIESENBACH: Just who do you think I'm divorcing?

LOGAN: *(Grabs the chip bag and offers it to her.)* Here. Have a chip.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Thank you.

Without using her hands, she sticks her head in the bag and grabs a chip with her teeth. He continues to feed her this way throughout.

LOGAN: Things will get better, Mrs. Riesenbach.

MRS. RIESENBACH: You think?

STUDENTS: *(Overlapping.)* Sure./Yes./Of course./You bet.

LOGAN: You'll be happy again.

MRS. RIESENBACH: I will?

STUDENTS: *(Overlapping.)* Sure./Yes./Of course./You bet.

LOGAN: Someone will fall in love with you.

MRS. RIESENBACH: You really think so?

STUDENTS: *(Overlapping.)* Well./Maybe./I dunno./lffy.

MRS. RIESENBACH: That makes me feel better. Thank you.

LOGAN: You're welcome.

MRS. RIESENBACH: I was talking to the chips.

The SCHOOL BELL rings. She grabs the bag and gets up.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Now, see here. I need you all to promise that you won't say anything to the principal about this. I don't want him to know how upset I am. At least, not until after I've punctured his tires. Okay?

STUDENTS: Okay.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Good. Now, remember. What happens in...what class is this again?

LOGAN: Algebra.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Right. What happens in Algebra—

STUDENTS: —stays in Algebra.

MRS. RIESENBACH: Class dismissed.

She pours crumbs from the bottom of the chip bag into her mouth as the LIGHTS FADE from her desk. The STUDENTS collect their belongings, switch desks, and freeze. The LIGHTS RISE on MR. TREMBLAY's desk. He speaks to the audience, obviously in a great deal of discomfort.

MR. TREMBLAY: Third period. Chemistry. You know, I don't know how much longer this old body of mine is going to hold out. Spending all day with teenagers really does a number on a person. I started out as the gym teacher, but that didn't last long. Instead of basketballs, the kids dunked me. It's been nothing but aches and pains ever since. Last semester was a doozy. They held a bottle drive and put the proceeds toward my new kidney. Now I just prop myself up near the blackboard and let my muscle spasms do the writing. The good news is, I've come up with a solution.

The STUDENTS unfreeze.

STUDENTS: (*Sarcastic.*) Hello, Mr. Tremblay.

MR. TREMBLAY: Yeah, yeah. Now which one of you is the brown-noser? ...Come on, fess up. Every class has one. (*TARYN enthusiastically raises her hand.*)

MR. TREMBLAY: Bingo. What's your name?

TARYN: Taryn, sir.

MR. TREMBLAY: Excellent. Come on up here, Taryn.

TARYN: At your service, Mr. Tremblay! (*She gets up and rushes over to him. He pats her on the shoulder.*)

MR. TREMBLAY: Good girl. So you really want to make a difference in the world? Isn't that right, Taryn?

TARYN: Yes, sir.

MR. TREMBLAY: You have ambition coming out of your eyeballs?

TARYN: Correct, sir.

MR. TREMBLAY: And you're up to whatever challenges I throw your way?

TARYN: You got it, sir.

MR. TREMBLAY: Good. Then rub my feet. (*He picks up his foot and slams it down on his desk.*)

TARYN: Rub your what, sir?

MR. TREMBLAY: You heard me. Now, get to it.

TARYN: What does this have to do with chemistry?

MR. TREMBLAY: Take off my shoe, and you'll find out.

TARYN: Take off your shoe?

MR. TREMBLAY: Is there an echo in here?

TARYN: I'm sorry, sir.

MR. TREMBLAY: No, really. I'm asking. My hearing aid has been acting up lately.

CAMERON: Go on, Taryn. Take off his shoe.

The STUDENTS laugh. TARYN reluctantly takes off MR. TREMBLAY's shoe. He lets out a sigh of relief.

MR. TREMBLAY: Ah! Much better.

TARYN: This is really gross.

MR. TREMBLAY: So is life. Get used to it.

TARYN: Yes, sir. (*She rubs his feet as he begins his lecture.*)

MR. TREMBLAY: I'm going to begin with a rudimentary lecture on the 118 elements of the periodic table and their corresponding atomic numbers. Hold your applause to the end. *(He clears his throat, which turns into the hacking of an elderly man. He opens his drawer and pulls out a bottle of mouthwash. He takes a swig and gargles, then spits into the drawer. He slams it shut and begins, slowly.)* Hydrogen...one. Helium...two. Lithium...three.

TARYN: Uh, Mr. Tremblay...

MR. TREMBLAY: Yes?

TARYN: I, uh, don't really know how to say this, but...but...

MR. TREMBLAY: Go on. You won't make it in this world unless you learn how to speak up.

TARYN: Do you have an extra toe?

MR. TREMBLAY: *(Laughs.)* An extra toe? That's funny. No, silly girl.

TARYN: *(Wiggles one of his toes.)* Then what's this?

MR. TREMBLAY: A bunion.

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