THE CRUELEST MOTHERFUCKER
a new play by Gary Jaffe

GLORIA, a math team teacher and mother. Eldest.
BRITTANY, a math team teacher and opera singer. Middle.
MEGAN, a math team teacher and very new to it. Youngest.
LEG, the detached leg of Deandre, a student.

**PROLOGUE.**

*Dark. Sound of running. Sound of bus. Splat.
LEG lands on stage. Silence.*

**PLAY.**

*The teachers’ lounge portable, lunchtime.* BRITTANY, GLORIA *and* MEGAN*.*

BRITTANY
The heart is the cruelest motherfucker of all, man.

GLORIA
Right? My daughter teaches me that like every day.

MEGAN
Deandre too! That look in his eyes while he was hitting himself in the face with the math book? Broke my heart.

BRITTANY
Yeah, shit’s rough. Gloria, can you hand me the – thanks. So this guy, right? We had a date Sunday and—

MEGAN
Wait, guy?

BRITTANY
Yeah. Guy. This time’s a guy.

GLORIA
Hey Brittany, what’s the breakdown of messages you get on OK Cupid, guys vs. girls?

BRITTANY
Um. Maybe about 70-30?

MEGAN
70-30 … girls being 70?

GLORIA
No, Megan, clearly guys. Girls don’t message. We’ve been brainwashed to wait in our four-poster beds till prince charming arrives. So with *two* girls, you get two sleeping beauties and no fricking initiative.

MEGAN
Gloria, we could totally design a math problem for our kiddoes with Brittany’s OKcupid dating statistics! Like… “On Sunday, Ms. Adams received 10 messages on OKcupid. 7 of them were from guys. What percent were from girls?” It’d be progressive *and* instructive.

 *Awkward silence.*

 … How do we stop Deandre from stabbing himself with safety scissors?

BRITTANY
So yeah I went on this date. And he’s all talking to me and interested in me and I’m like mutual affection! Great! Then we’re in his car and we’re making out –

GLORIA
Ooh! Ow ow!

BRITTANY:
-- and my heart’s singing La Traviata, you know like “amami alfredoooo!” but the whole rest of this week I barely get a text out of him –

MEGAN
I hope Dee’s okay. In the office, he called Ms. Serna a cunt bitch and tore posters off the walls.

GLORIA
Megan—

BRITTANY
There’s a time to talk about self-destructive problem students. And there’s a time to talk about making out with dudes in their cars. What time is it now?

GLORIA
What Brittany’s saying to say is we’re exhausted. So let’s just talk about dating and stuff. Cool?

 …

MEGAN
You know what? This portable is a little stuffy, I’m gonna take a walk.

GLORIA
Okay, see you!

 *MEGAN leaves.*

GLORIA
Bless her heart, she needs a thicker skin.

BRITTANY
So this guy, what do I do?

GLORIA
Don’t date dudes, duh! If it’d been a girl, you’d be texting right now.

BRITTANY
I don’t know.

GLORIA
A girl gave me cookies on our first date once.

BRITTANY
God, that sounds like an STD. She gave me cookies, Doc, cephalosporin, fast!

GLORIA
Cephalosporin? What is that?

BRITTANY
Antibiotic for gonorrhea!

GLORIA
Oh, shit!

*Laughter.
Meanwhile, MEGAN takes a walk.
She finds the LEG.
Shock. Horror.
She picks up the LEG.
She listens to it.
Sound of running. Sound of bus.
Her eyes widen. Sound of splat.

She brings it back to the table.*

BRITTANY
And all he said was, “sorry, girl, didn’t know I had it.”

GLORIA
Fuck him!

BRITTANY
Yeah, fuck him! But don’t actually cause he’s got gonorrhea.

 *MEGAN puts the leg on the table.
 Silence.*

GLORIA
Megan. Whose leg is that?

 *Silence.*

GLORIA
Megan, you put a leg on the table. Whose leg is that.

 *Silence.*

BRITTANY
Goddammit, Megan!

MEGAN
Deandre’s.

BRITTANY
Oh fuck.

GLORIA
And where is the rest of him?

MEGAN
Smeared on Doris Street. With tire treads. From a city bus.

 *Silence.*

BRITTANY
 … should I write an incident report?

MEGAN
We followed protocol, didn’t we? We did exactly what we were supposed to.

 *GLORIA begins to heave.*

BRITTANY
Gloria, are you—

MEGAN
He was going crazy. We took him to the office. He was their responsibility, right?

 *GLORIA’s heaving something big.*

BRITTANY
Gloria?

MEGAN
He was going to hurt someone, or himself. And now he’s—

BRITTANY
Megan, shut up. Gloria, what’s going on—

 *GLORIA vomits up a rope ladder.*

BRITTANY
Oh, jeez.

GLORIA
God that sucked.

BRITTANY
Uh… what is …?

GLORIA
It’s an umbilical cord rope ladder. Brings kids back from the dead if used soon enough. All mothers get one. I got super sick when I was four and Mom used her ladder to save me. They teach you all this in maternity class.

MEGAN
Oh yeah. My mom used hers on me when I was three. I drowned. But your daughter isn’t here, so what does it mean?

GLORIA
We can save Dee. If we want to.

 …

MEGAN
We want to.

 …

GLORIA
In theory.

 *BRITTANY has returned to the table and begins to eat.*

BRITTANY
I am eating lunch. We are talking about whether I should date girls or boys. And on we go, hoo-ray.

MEGAN
Excuse me?

BRITTANY
We took him to the office. He ran into the street, got hit by a bus. Nothing to be done. Back to lunch.

MEGAN
But Gloria vomited up an umbilical cord rope ladder! We *can* do something.

BRITTANY
He wanted out. Who are we to make him come back in?

MEGAN
He’s a sixth grader, he has a future!

BRITTANY
Does he?

 …

MEGAN
Gloria. Say something.

*…

BRITTANY begins to sing opera to herself.*

MEGAN
Gloria, tell Brittany she’s wrong. Tell her there’s always a better future. Always.

 …

MEGAN
Gloria! What if he were *your* kid?

GLORIA
He’s not.

MEGAN
He could be.

GLORIA
I wouldn’t – I wouldn’t have raised him like – it wouldn’t have come to this.

MEGAN
So it’s his mom’s fault?

GLORIA
I don’t know, Megan, don’t push me on this.

MEGAN
Nature versus nurture, yeah? Well, here’s a percentage question for you: What percent of your daughter are you responsible for? Ten? Twenty? Seventy? Put that on a math quiz.

GLORIA
Here’s the ladder, why don’t you do it? Go down and *convince* him to reach up and grab the bottom rung. See if you can.

 …

MEGAN
Fine. I will.

 …

MEGAN
Um. What do I do?

GLORIA
Take the leg. Climb down the ladder. Ask him to come back up.

MEGAN
Okay.

*She lays out the ladder.
She begins to climb.
She pauses.*

MEGAN
Is it easy to come back up?

GLORIA
Don’t know. I’ve never done it.

MEGAN
Okay.

*MEGAN descends.
BRITTANY and GLORIA sit.
They don’t eat.*

GLORIA
So … this guy?

BRITTANY
I don’t know.

*Lights shift.*

*MEGAN arrives in the Underworld or wherever Dee’s soul is lurking.*

MEGAN
Hello? Deandre?

 *The LEG begins to talk, voiced by GLORIA and BRITTANY.*

LEG (GLORIA)
Oh fuck you.

 *MEGAN yelps and drops the LEG.*

MEGAN *(after calming herself.)*
Hi, Dee.

LEG (BRITTANY)
Go away.

MEGAN
No, Dee, I’m not going to do that.

LEG (GLORIA)
“No, Dee, I’m not going to do that.”

LEG (BRITTANY)
Fucking cunt bitch.

MEGAN
Dee! That is very inappropriate language.

LEG (BRITTANY)
I don’t care. Cunt bitch motherfucker cunt.

MEGAN
Please, Dee! I’m here to help. I can take you back up. Isn’t that great?

LEG (GLORIA)
Don’t want to.

MEGAN
Why not?

LEG (BRITTANY)
Came down here. Staying down here.

MEGAN
Please don’t say that. You’ve got so much future, Dee.

LEG (GLORIA)
Your mom has so much future.

MEGAN
Come on, Dee. Enough. Let’s go, I’m trying to help you.

LEG (BRITTANY)
I’m confused. Every day you try to make me do my math.

LEG (GLORIA)
And every day you say you’re trying to help.

LEG (BRITTANY)
And every day I don’t let you.

LEG (BRITTANY & GLORIA)
How is this any different?

MEGAN
Because… it’s not just math, Dee, it’s life and death!

LEG (GLORIA)
Yeah. Okay.

MEGAN
So it’s a real opportunity to – to come back and do it again!

LEG (BRITTANY)
Do you watch movies?

MEGAN
Yes.

LEG (GLORIA)
I do too. I watch them when I’m home.

MEGAN
I love movies.

LEG (BRITTANY)
There’s this movie, it’s always on at Christmas.

LEG (GLORIA)
And it’s got this guy with a weird voice.

LEG (BRITTANY)
And he jumps in the river. What’s it called?

MEGAN
*It’s a Wonderful Life.* I used to watch it every Christmas with my family.

LEG (GLORIA)
Yeah. I always thought he shoulda stayed in the river.

MEGAN
But … he made such a difference in other people’s lives!

LEG (BRITTANY)
Yeah. But he had a funny voice.

MEGAN
Dee … is there any way I’m going to get you to come back up?

LEG (GLORIA)
No. Don’t think so.

MEGAN
What about your mom, don’t you want to see your mom again?

LEG (BRITTANY)
See your mom again.

MEGAN
Dee…

 *She sits with the LEG.
 A silence.*

MEGAN
… is there anything I can do?

LEG (GLORIA)
Just …

MEGAN
Yes?

LEG (BRITTANY)
Just a …

MEGAN
Just a what, Dee?

LEG (BRITTANY & GLORIA): Lullaby.

LEG (GLORIA): Please.

LEG (BRITTANY)
So I can –

LEG (GLORIA)
-- go to sleep.

MEGAN
No, I’m not going to let you –

 …

 … yes, Dee. If that’s what you want.

 *She looks up.*

MEGAN
Brittany! I need you!

BRITTANY
*(still at the table)* What for?

MEGAN
Give me a lullaby? Sing it so we can hear it down here, yeah?

BRITTANY
Um. Okay!

*BRITTANY sings a lullaby.
MEGAN cradles the LEG and rocks it to sleep.*

GLORIA
Megan? Honey? Time to come up, lunch is almost over. And that, of course, means the umbilical cord rope ladder which I vomited up and you climbed down to the afterlife to bring a troubled child back to the realm of the living is going to disappear soon. Megan!

 *MEGAN continues to rock the LEG to sleep.
 The ladder begins to vanish.
 BRITTANY continues singing.*

GLORIA
Megan! The ladder! It’s time!

 *MEGAN continues to rock the LEG to sleep.*

GLORIA
Megan! Seriously, time’s almost up, you’re going to get stuck and we have to get to class!

 *The ladder is almost gone.*

GLORIA
Megan!! What’s the matter? Can you reach the ladder? Reach!

*The ladder is gone.
The lullaby continues.
Lights dim on everything except MEGAN and the LEG.
Rocking the LEG to sleep.
Blackout.*