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A full-length play in one act

Characters

HAROLD ARRINGTON, 58, African-American male, Chief of Groundskeeping at Crenshaw Academy.

LAQUAN MONROE, 28, African-American male, a new employee in the Facilities Department at Crenshaw Academy.

HAM DUGAN, 52, White male, Head of School at Crenshaw Academy.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS, 18. African-American female, student at Crenshaw Academy.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS, 48, African-American female, Trustee of Crenshaw Academy and Molly Claire's mother.

Time

A Friday morning in late May, this year.

Place

Crenshaw Green, the lawn of Crenshaw Academy, an independent school in Maryland

Synopsis:

On the eve of the Bicentennial anniversary of the founding of Crenshaw Academy, student Molly Claire Williams discovers information and experiences a frightening event, both of which upend her school's long-cherished narrative. Molly Claire confronts Ham Dugan, Head of School, demanding to reveal both important discoveries during the highly-anticipated Bicentennial celebration. Their power struggle culminates in a revolutionary reversal.

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Rep and Rev

A wide, expansive, green lawn.

HAROLD ARRINGTON, 58, African-American male dressed in work clothes is there wheeling or lugging a speaker's podium/lectern across the lawn.

LAQUAN MONROE, 28, African-American male dressed in similar work clothes helps HAROLD ARRINGTON center the podium.

HAROLD ARRINGTON places a microphone on the podium. HAROLD ARRINGTON then instructs LAQUAN MONROE about the lawn.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Three inches.

Cut every third day.

Cut it dry.

Sharp cuts are even cuts.

Crenshaw Green is Maryland tall fescue.

Apply crabgrass herbicide when soil temp hits 55.

Green products only.

This is a green school.

We're blessed.

Reseed bare spots every March 15.

Core aerate and overseed if needed every September 15.

Today is Founder's Day.

Bicentennial Founder's Day.

Two hundred years of Crenshaw Academy.

Everyone here on Crenshaw Green.

The lawn itself, could it take voice, might speak aloud and plain.

But we're blessed.

Soon is the time I cut this lawn.

Right after Dawn's rosy fingers caress it and dry up its morning tears.

You will watch.

Any questions, LaQuan?

LAQUAN MONROE

Why is this lawn called Crenshaw Green?

Who named it?

And why?

Why is it so big?

Who is allowed on this lawn?

Who is not allowed on this lawn?

What is allowed to happen on this lawn?

What is not allowed to happen on this lawn?

Are the people who maintain the lawn treated differently from the people who are allowed to use the lawn?

What goes on in the buildings that surround this lawn, and who are those buildings for?

What was here before this was a lawn?

What important events happened in this place?

And how many people know of those?

Why is this lawn called Crenshaw Green?

Because I see it as Red.

Who named it?

And why does it weep?

HAROLD ARRINGTON

No questions?

Then you come gas the mower so you can watch me cut this lawn.

HAROLD ARRINGTON and LAQUAN MONROE are gone. There is no one on stage for a while.

We hear birds.

We hear a strange noise.

The world tilts.

The world returns to the way it was before.

HAM DUGAN, 52, White, is there, with a sheaf of maybe twenty pages of paper and a pencil. He is dressed in a suit. His right hand is bandaged, and he continually favors his right hand. He places a pencil on the podium and it rolls off, sideways, clearly in a way it shouldn't. It looks like it should stay, but it doesn't. He picks it up and tries again – the same result. He picks it up and tries again – the same result. This may continue for some time.

HAM DUGAN speaks into his phone.

HAM DUGAN

There's something irregular happening here on the Green.

Something that I've never seen.

This is our Billion dollar day.

Pencils should not be behaving this way.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS, 18, African-American female, is there. She wears a Crenshaw Academy blazer and skirt. She carries a single piece of paper.

Molly Claire Williams, you've shown up exactly on time.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

You said Seven Thirty.
 I'm actually early.
 What happened to your hand?
 I'm certified in First Aid.

HAM DUGAN

I hope it won't rain. If it rains then we'll have to go in
 to the Gym and you know what it's like in the Gym in late May.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

It won't rain today.
 My mother knows.

HAM DUGAN

Have you seen any sign of your partner in crime yet today?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

My mother should be here soon.
 She's just taking a call.
 She told me you want her to announce
 The Billion.

HAM DUGAN

I meant Justin who's cast next to you in the play.
 In the Founder's Day play we're presenting today?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

He tends to be late.

HAM DUGAN

I don't think of him as a person who's late, since he's there
 With his stick at the face-off of every lacrosse game we play.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Dawn's rosy fingers have just about soaked up the dew off this Green.
 And T. Justin Crenshaw the Fourth is nowhere to be seen.

HAM DUGAN

Can you text him or snap him? Whatever it is you all do?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

He Snapchatted all of us screenshots
 From Midnight 'til Five Forty-Five.
 Successively higher high scores
 in White Warrior Three.
 I'm just seeing them now.

HAM DUGAN

I honestly don't understand most of what you just said.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

The chances are slim that he'll post.
 But I'll try.

HAM DUGAN

I printed a copy for both of you. Here, here is yours.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I don't need that script.
 I won't read that script.

HAM DUGAN

You've seen this performance so often you know it by heart?
 Of course. You're a lifer. You've been here, what now...thirteen years?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Yes, longer than you.
 That centuries old script is in my head,
 In my lungs, in my kidneys,
 In my thyroid, in my bladder,
 In my ovaries.
 I sometimes feel that I am in a play here every day.
 But that script won't work today.
 There's another story we should tell today.
 Of something that happened just yesterday.

*We hear the strange noise.
 The papers from the script fly all over the place.
 HAM DUGAN scrambles to pick them up. HAROLD
 ARRINGTON and LAQUAN MONROE are there.*

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Mister Dugan.

HAM DUGAN

Good morning to you, Mister Harold. I'm so glad you're here.
You'll never believe what's been happening here on the Green.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Mister Dugan, this is LaQuan Monroe.
New in facilities.

HAM DUGAN

I wonder if you could repeat that for me one more time.
These middle-aged ears aren't as sharp as they once used to be.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

LaQuan Monroe.
L-A-Q-U-A-N.
M-O-N

HAM DUGAN

The last name I got, like the actress and fifth President.
"LaQuan." I will not forget that. Have I heard it before?

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Mister Dugan is the Headmaster.

HAM DUGAN

We just call me "Head". There's no "Master" attached anymore.

LAQUAN MONROE

Where I went we had a "Headmaster".

HAM DUGAN

But everyone here should feel free, free to just call me "Ham."

My name is James Hamilton Dugan the eighth.
And who were the others? I'll tell in good faith.
James One? He set sail from the Emerald Isle.
James Two grew potatoes 'til he was senile.
James Three was a baker, rye bread did he bake.
James Four was a tailor, fine suits did he make.
James Five sold insurance in case that the health
Of his friends ever faltered. He started our wealth.
James Six? He was Jimbo, a doctor by trade.
James Seven was "Doogie" a fortune he made.
I'm James EIGHT. But I've always been known just as Ham
To remind you how humble and salty I am.

LAQUAN MONROE

(rapping from the Jay Z/Kanye West song, maybe underlapping HAM's poem?)

I'm about to go HAM

Hard as a mothaf***er let these n****s know who I am

I'm about to go HAM

Hard as a mothaf***er let these n****s know who I am

HAROLD ARRINGTON

What can we do for you?

HAM DUGAN places the pencil on the podium, and it rolls off.

HAM DUGAN

And now Founders' Day is just hours away, do you see?

A chorus rehearses and we hear them offstage. HAM DUGAN repeatedly places the pencil on the podium, and it rolls off.

SINGERS

Within these timeless granite walls
 Hearts and minds alive with youth!
 We hear our nation's humble call:
 "Lead this world and Strive for truth!"
 Crenshaw, Crenshaw, we adore thee,
 Dearest mother of us all.
 Though we'll leave we always know we
 Have a home in Crenshaw Hall!

LAQUAN MONROE takes a piece of paper from his pocket. He folds it and shims it under one leg of the podium. He places the pencil on the podium. It stays put.

HAM DUGAN

Brilliant, LaQuan! We're so awfully glad that you're here!

LAQUAN MONROE

Hamhock. Hambooger.

HAM DUGAN

I feel like I've heard that name somewhere before, have I not?
 Are there famous LaQuan's? One or two? There must be some somewhere.

LAQUAN MONROE

Hambone. Ham and Cheese sandwich.

HAM DUGAN

I know that I've heard it at least four or five times before.
 But where have I heard it before? On the news, maybe? No?
 Gentlemen, this is a senior of ours, Molly Claire.
 She's such a hard worker and wonderful athlete, to boot.
 She shines on our fields and on Marshall Performance Court, too.
 She's been here at Crenshaw forever and she gets to play
 Lucy Crenshaw on this Founder's Day since she's a lifer.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Yes, I am a lifer.

LAQUAN MONROE

What does that mean?
 "Lifer"?
 What does it mean?
 "A person serving a life sentence in a prison."
 Is this a prison?
 Or is this a place where people mock people who are in prison?
 I have known a lifer.
 Is Harold Arrington, who has worked here for thirty-five years, a "Lifer"?
 How will Molly Claire Williams here wear her Crenshaw Student "Lifer" status?
 Does Harold Arrington here get the same Crenshaw "Lifer" status for working here?
 Am I a "Lifer" if I work here for my entire career?
 Why did I even take this job?
 What is Molly Claire Williams's relationship with this lawn?
 What is Harold Arrington's relationship with this lawn?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Why don't you ever speak?

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Sometimes it takes a while to get heard.
 But we're blessed.
 What happened to your hand?

HAM DUGAN

Have you noticed a smell here today?
 Like there's something that's died on the Green?
 It can't smell when the Trustees arrive.
 We're announcing The Billion today.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

I'm going to cut Crenshaw Green
 Just as soon as Dawn's rosy fingers finish drying up the dew.
 Then there'll just be that fresh cut grass smell.
 Pleasure and pain both cut from a sharp blade.
 Always make sure to bag the cut grass
 So there's nothing left to rot.
 Nothing to create a stink over time.

HAROLD ARRINGTON's walkie-talkie crackles.

All hands on deck.
 We need to be getting over to Marshall.
 (to LAQUAN) That's the Gym.
 MPC's buckling again.
 Marshall Performance Court.
 State's largest Versaturf surface.
 Soft yet hard.
 Supple yet firm.
 Subtle yet stiff.

Hoops.

Then I got to cut this lawn for Founder's Day.

Any questions, LaQuan?

LAQUAN MONROE

Who gets buildings named after them?
 What do those people do to get a building named after them?
 What was there before the buildings were erected?
 Did what was there before have a name, too?
 If so, why was that name erased?
 Who is the school for?
 And why does the lawn weep?
 And why does it stink here?
 What happened to your hand?
 And what exactly is a "Performance Court?"
 And what is "Versaturf"?

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Sure wish you'd say something.

HAM DUGAN

Did you say the floor's buckling in Marshall? How can it?
 The contractor guaranteed perfect performance.
 Is Maintenance keeping it up as instructed?

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Pressure beneath.
 Something seeping.

LAQUAN MONROE

Something weeping.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Stink in that Gym.

HAM DUGAN

If it rains today we have to move everyone to that space.
 We're announcing The Billion. We can't have the floor buckling up.
 And we can't have the Trustees in there with that smell, with that stench.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

It stinks out here.
 My mother has said it will not rain.
 She is not often believed, but she is right.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

I bag the cuttings so my lawn will not stink.
 That is hard work on such a large lawn.
 A time-consuming practice others say is obsolete.
 But I do it regardless.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Who says it is your lawn that stinks?
 Who says it is your lawn?

HAROLD ARRINGTON

I trim my shrubs.
 I mulch my flowerbeds.
 Thirty-five years I have made this campus
 My canvas.

HAM DUGAN

I wonder where Justin can be? It is time to rehearse.
 We'll have to get started. Here, Molly Claire, here is your script.
 And here is your bonnet for when you play Lucy Crenshaw.
 And here is the hat for when Justin gets here later on.

HAM DUGAN produces a bonnet for MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS. There is also a man's hat.

We just need a Thomas for now until Justin gets here.

HAM DUGAN extends a script to LAQUAN MONROE.

LaQuan, can you read Thomas Crenshaw's part starting right here?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

He does not seem to speak.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

He speaks but he is not heard.

HAM DUGAN

Can you read a script? I don't mean can you literally read.
I mean can you just play a part for us, just for right now?

LAQUAN MONROE

Can I stand in for T. Justin Crenshaw the Fourth ?
Great-to-the-seventh-power Grand-nephew of Thomas Crenshaw,
Which is how he defines himself online?
My Snapchat Bud of two days.
Can I read the part of the school's founder and great benefactor?
And if I read it well, can I keep it?
Can I play it this afternoon? For real?
With the cameras rolling and the announcement of the Billion?
What if I knock it out of the park right now?
What if old Ham Booger Hammock says "That was the best reading of Thomas Crenshaw I have ever seen"...and means it?
Can I play Thomas Crenshaw on my third day of work at Crenshaw Academy?

No.

No matter how well I read this part now just after dawn, it will never be my part to play at high noon.

Even if T. Justin Crenshaw, asleep after eight addicted hours playing White Warrior, never shows up at all.

The role of Thomas Crenshaw has always been played by a Senior Boy.

White, nondescript, Lacrosse team

Not that Thomas Crenshaw the Founder played lacrosse

But there's always a lacrosse jock in this role each Spring

With the dirty blond hair and the dirty blond skin and the jeans and the genes and the scruff

And the look
 And the “now”
 That was the “now”, then
 Cuz u know it wuz,
 So he doesn’t have to be Justin Crenshaw at all.
 Just a reasonable facsimile.

And that ain’t LaQuan Monroe.

Even if I did go to a place like this that had a “Headmaster.”

But, you say, they have given the part of Lucy Crenshaw to a girl of color,
 To Molly Claire Williams,
 Whose name printed in the program does not suggest she’s a girl of color,
 And that is a whole ‘nother thing, as we say.
 So why would they not give the part of Thomas Crenshaw to a man of color who has been here
 only three days and takes care of the weeping lawn and the buckling floor and the rolling pencils
 When he was so good at it?

And we all know the answer to that.

Im’ma knock it out of the park anyway.

LAQUAN MONROE takes the script and the hat.

LAQUAN MONROE

“Young Tom Crenshaw was born in Bath, England.
 At seventeen he fled his native land.”

HAROLD ARRINGTON

He does speak after all.

HAM DUGAN

That’s wonderful! But that’s the part that I read. You just read
 “Thomas Crenshaw” and Molly Claire Williams reads “Lucy Crenshaw”.
 And no need to put on the hat. That is just for the show.
 Get close to the mic so we make sure it’s working, OK?
 Now Harold, can you read the audience portion? Do you
 Need a script, or do you also know it by heart?

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Thirty-five Founder’s Days.
 I have it memorized.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

There's something else that needs to be read instead.
A new scene.

HAM DUGAN

"Young Tom Crenshaw was born in Bath, England.
At seventeen he fled his native land.
For he loved peace and England wanted war."

LAQUAN MONROE

"I will obey this evil King no more!
I'll sail to Maryland where I can be
At home with people brave and land that's free."

HAROLD ARRINGTON

(singing?) "Thomas Crenshaw sailed the sea.
Came to serve both you and me.
Thomas Crenshaw sailed the sea.
Came to serve both you and me."

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

That boring repetition
Feeds hardcore reputation
No more.

HAM DUGAN

"Arriving alone, Thomas went into the woods.
A comb and spoon were his only worldly goods.
With these he tilled a rough acre of soil
And made it sprout tobacco from his toil."

LAQUAN MONROE

"The richness of this soil has made me wealthy
But the crop I grow does not make people healthy.
Since I don't want to be recalled with scorn
From now on I will grow nothing but corn."

HAROLD ARRINGTON

"Thomas tilled the land and grew
Food to nourish me and you."

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Enough rehearsal.
Time for revision,
Reversal.

HAM DUGAN

“He then met Lucy Smith and fell in love,
Their union blessed by God himself above.”

LAQUAN MONROE

“My dearest Lucy, will you be my wife?”

HAM DUGAN

That’s you, Molly Claire.

Molly Claire?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I have a different script.

HAM DUGAN

I thought that you knew it by heart, or you said that you did?

LAQUAN MONROE

“My dearest Lucy, will you be my wife?
(*as Lucy Crenshaw*) I will, and we shall live a blessed life.”

HAROLD ARRINGTON

“Tom and Lucy farmed this land
Not all went as they had planned.”

HAM DUGAN

It’s your turn to read, Molly Claire, to read Lucy Crenshaw.
I picked you from all of the seniors to portray the part.
Your parents will be here to watch you, you need to rehearse.

LAQUAN MONROE

(*as Lucy Crenshaw*) “While we have tamed this land that once was wild.
It seems that God won’t bless us with a child.”

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I am here to reveal.
To revise.

HAM DUGAN

There’s other girls envying you, wishing they were up here.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

To reverse.
To revolt.
And LaQuan Monroe knows exactly why.

LAQUAN MONROE

(as Lucy Crenshaw) “While we have tamed this land that once was wild,
It seems that God won’t bless us with a child.
And so when we are buried, dead and gone,
How can the Crenshaw name still carry on?”

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

(to LAQUAN) How can you do that, spew that?

HAM DUGAN

He’s actually quite a good actor! I’m so impressed!
Articulate to a degree I would not have supposed!

LAQUAN MONROE

(as Thomas Crenshaw) “Although we can’t have children of our own,
The Crenshaw name shall be forever known.
We’ll turn this farm into a school for youth
And it will be a bastion of truth!”
(as Lucy Crenshaw) The fortune that we toiled so hard to build
Will to the people of this state be willed.
So children far and wide can learn and grow
And as ye reap, remember we who sow.

*The world tilts.
It almost returns to the way it was before.*

HAROLD ARRINGTON

“Living by the Golden Rule
Tom and Lucy built this school.
From their hard work grew this place
Built from love and humble grace.”

HAROLD ARRINGTON AND LAQUAN MONROE

“Living by the Golden Rule
Tom and Lucy built this school.
From their hard work grew this place
Built from love and humble grace.”

*MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS approaches the
microphone.*

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

This term I take a class called Crenshaw Roots.
We are charged with reaching deep into the Crenshaw Academy Archives
In honor of our Bicentennial.

*MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS is drowned out by
HAROLD ARRINGTON, LAQUAN MONROE and
HAM DUGAN.*

HAROLD ARRINGTON, LAQUAN MONROE and HAM DUGAN

(singing) “Within these timeless granite walls
Hearts and minds alive with youth!
We hear our nation’s humble call:
“Lead this world and Strive for truth!”
Crenshaw, Crenshaw, we adore thee,
Dearest mother of us all.
Though we’ll leave we always know we
Have a home in Crenshaw Hall!”

HAM DUGAN

The seeds that were planted by Thomas and Lucy Crenshaw
Have sprouted a Billion new buds these past two hundred years!

*The microphone explodes and falls from the
podium. CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS, 48,
African-American female, is there. She owns a Real
Estate Brokerage and is dressed professionally. She
wears a prominent flower-shaped pin on her blouse
or blazer.*

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

That was quite a mic drop.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

We’ve got several others in Facilities.
Don’t touch that one.
It might be hot.
Everyone all right?
We’re blessed.
Come on, LaQuan.
Any questions?

LAQUAN MONROE

Do I get the part this afternoon?
 Where is T. Justin Crenshaw the fourth and why doesn't anyone care that he's late anymore?
 Why is Ham Dugan's hand oozing?
 What is his wound?
 Why is CasSandra Fox-Williams always seen wearing a flower-shaped pin?
 Why does a microphone suddenly –

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Never mind.

*HAROLD ARRINGTON and LAQUAN MONROE
 are gone.*

HAM DUGAN

Your timing is perfect, CasSandra. That's where you come in.
 Announcing the greatest achievement that Crenshaw has had.
 Endowment has grown to a Billion. A Billion! Let's see.
(consulting his phone) The futures are up, so by noon we should be higher still!

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

What happened to your hand?
 And why does it stink on this lawn?

HAM DUGAN

(consulting his phone) More than a million above where we were yesterday!
 CasSandra, the roars that will come from the crowd when you speak!
 A Billion! And growing! It just cannot rain or we'll have
 To go into the Gym where it stinks worse than here, worse than now.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I told him, Mommy, that you said it would not rain.
 And I offered him First Aid.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Have you not told him what you are going to say?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I tried to speak,
 But he would not listen to me,
 Just as you said he would not.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

When Harold Arrington replaces that microphone.
 Molly Claire, you will have your say.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

He seems to think it will go
Just as he wants.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

There is no special prophecy in foreseeing that.

HAM DUGAN

Not that I want to put words in your mouth, but I wrote
Part of a speech you can give to the people who've come.
"The seeds that were planted by Thomas and Lucy Crenshaw
Have sprouted a Billion new buds these past two hundred years!
Our Endowment has blossomed to One Billion Dollars today.
The annual interest will pay for our budget in full.
That means that the school need no longer charge tuition fees.
All are welcome at Crenshaw no matter how much they can pay.
Our dream of a true meritocracy is finally here."

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

I appreciate your efforts, Ham.
It must have been hard to type with your hand like that.

HAM DUGAN

Just one other matter, Cassandra. Your daughter so far
Has refused to portray Lucy Crenshaw. Will you speak to her?
I guess that it's stage fright. It is quite a very large lawn.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Molly Claire will not play that part today.

HAM DUGAN

She has to. I chose her from all of the Senior girls.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

She does not have to.
You are not Olorun or Athena pulling strings.

HAM DUGAN

(displaying a program) The programs are printed. The order is markedly clear.
 The Founder's Day playlet, *(indicating CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS)* a speech from a valued
 Trustee,
 Remarks from the students who play Tom and Lucy Crenshaw...
 If she won't play Lucy I won't let her make her remarks.
 You know that's an honor, CasSandra, your daughter up there
 On Founder's Day, and not just any old Founder's Day, too.
 Number Two Hundred. And you as the speaking Trustee.
 Just think of how proud the whole rest of your family will be.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

I am proud
 Of her refusal.
 Her recusal.
 And she will speak.
 Molly Claire Williams has something to say.
 Something to vary our play today.
 Lucy Crenshaw she will not be.

HAM DUGAN

The order's determined: The playlet, the Trustee, the kids.
 We've done it this way for a hundred and ninety-nine years!

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Hardly, Ham, hardly.
 Take, for example, Thomas Crenshaw's convenient switch from tobacco to corn.
 Clearly a twenty-first century revision.
 Today we wake from the feeble fable.
 Molly Claire Williams will not be able to play the play.

HAM DUGAN

And what is the problem with playing the play like always?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

New revelations.
 New information.

HAM DUGAN

And you are determined to ruin this ceremony?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I am determined to speak truth to legend.

HAM DUGAN

And once again, I do not have an idea what that means.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Revelations
 Revolutions
 Reparations

HAM DUGAN

So are you refusing? Just tell me in language that's clear.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I refuse to play Lucy Crenshaw.
 I insist on telling a different story.

HAM DUGAN

But why won't you...? Never mind. There isn't time now for that.
 Great. I'll need to find a replacement immediately.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

You will not need to find a replacement.

HAM DUGAN

Why not? You just said you're refusing to take on the role.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Because we will not be presenting that play here today.

HAM DUGAN

I thought Katie Miller would be a good Lucy Crenshaw.
 I'll send her an email. I'll bet she could be here by nine.
 She played Cleopatra a few years ago. She was great.
 If not her, then Emily Tucker. Now she would excel!

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

We're starting a new tradition!
 A brave, new world,
 That has much people in it.
 No playlet!
 No need to call for backup.
 Just let the new voices rise
 As you will.
 From this heap.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

This could be your best day, Ham.
 Though I am not often believed.

HAM DUGAN

I don't have a Lucy, I don't have a Thomas. I'm screwed.
 There's two thousand people expecting the pageant they love.
 That playlet, the Billion Announcement, remarks from our kids.
 It simply must happen, CasSandra! Or my world will end!!

*We hear the strange noise.
 The world tilts.
 The world returns almost to the way it was before.*

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

You asked me here to do a mic check
 For the words you had penned.
 But Dawn's rosy fingers have dissolved, dispersed
 And now Sun Goddess races to her zenith
 And your stakes are as high as September tobacco.
 I cede my time to Molly Claire
 Who has something to say.
 Listen, Ham. Listen and don't interrupt.
 There is still a chance that this could be
 Your best day.
 Look, our Harold has returned.

*HAROLD ARRINGTON and LAQUAN MONROE
 return with a new microphone and place it on the
 podium. HAROLD ARRINGTON does a mic check.*

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Check. Check.
 "Right's anvil stands staunch on the ground
 And the smith, Destiny, hammers out the sword.
 Delayed in glory, pensive from the murk,
 Vengeance brings home at last a child,
 to wipe out the stain of blood shed long ago."
 The Libation Bearers, Lattimore translation.
 Check, Check.
 You want to check, LaQuan?
 Seems to be in order.

*MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS speaks into the
 microphone.*

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

This term I take a class called Crenshaw Roots –

HAM DUGAN

I won't let you speak unless you have played Lucy Crenshaw!

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I promise you what I will say
Will involve Lucy Crenshaw in a very big way.
Although she is not the star today.

HAM DUGAN

If you won't play her in the playlet, then you can't be on stage.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

You're scrambling, Ham.
It's understandable.

LAQUAN MONROE

Scrambled eggs and Ham.
Underhandable.
UnderHamAble

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Hanging on.

LAQUAN MONROE

Hamming on.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Take eight minutes to listen to what Molly Claire has to say
And see if it doesn't change your opinion of what should happen today.
Eight minutes, Ham.
One minute of silence
By you
For every American James Hamilton Dugan there's been.
A minute of silence, Ham.
For every forefather.
If you can do that,
If you can be silent for eight minutes,
There is a chance -

HAM DUGAN

I think –

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I am going to say
What I am going to say!

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

You will be silent for a very little while, Ham.

*The strange noise.
The world tilts.*

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

This term I take a class called Crenshaw Roots –

HAM DUGAN

I think if you say “I am taking” instead of “I take”
It sounds more professional, and isn’t that what you want?

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Well, I was right about that!
That was a very little while.
Make this one longer!
This is your last chance!!

HAM DUGAN

You’re right, I’ll shut up. As if twenty-eight years with my wife
Hasn’t taught me that I need to listen much more than I speak.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

I have a clear-eyed prophecy
And Sun Goddess races unimpeded to her perch.
You have a chance, Ham.
If you do not interrupt,
To know in advance what awaits you today.
But you must listen and think!

HAROLD ARRINGTON

The morning tears are gone.
Time to cut the lawn.
And that floor’s still buckling.
Let’s go, LaQuan

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

We will need LaQuan, Mister Harold.
To bear witness to this story.
There will still be time to cut Crenshaw Green.
The smell of fresh cut grass will help
Reduce the stink that’s in this air.
As for the buckling floor,
The Gym will not be needed,
It will not rain today.

But do go to the Gym, Mister Harold,
 And see that it is clear.
 Please do believe me.
 Clear the Gym, Mister Harold.

HAROLD ARRINGTON is gone.

Begin again, Molly Claire.
 This podium has power. Please let us hear truth.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

This term I take a class called Crenshaw Roots.
 We are charged with reaching deep into the Crenshaw Academy Archives
 In honor of our Bicentennial.
 Our teacher, Mr. Hutchinson, gives us keys to the Archives.
 He trusts us. Just us.
 “Discover something revelatory about our school.”
 Today I report to you two revelations.

So I’m foraging
 Yesterday
 In the musty crusty basement of Crenshaw Hall.
 Invoices and mildew and cancelled checks and mold and student transcripts.
 I must go deeper
 farther back into the Archives
 so far back I have to breathe through my blazer to endure the mold stench
 so far back I break the rules and take out my phone for its flashlight
 so far back I swear the concrete floor’s given way to marsh and swamp
 and then I see this leather box way back in the farthest corner
 begging me to liberate it, to emancipate it.
 I’m on my belly crawling to reach it,
 Crenshaw blazer and skirt covered with mud and rat piss and slime molds
 and bicentennial jelly two hundred years deep.
 My hand
 Its hasp
 Just out of my grasp
 I take my barette
 Just to get a little more reach
 And I hook it and grab it and slide it and drag it
 It’s practically dust but I must open it.
 Once out in the light, it’s red
 Crenshaw Academy Scarlet, the color of blood
 It’s soft and it’s hard
 It’s dust and it’s grit
 And it’s locked.
 I call for help.

And help is sent.
A silent messenger.
With a boltcutter.

We now see a scarlet box, in yesterday. LAQUAN MONROE labors with various tools to open the lock on the scarlet box.

It's a snap.

Another box inside.
A leather pouch inside that.
An envelope there in.
And finally...

A Journal.
More than two hundred years old.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS reveals a document.

HAM DUGAN

That can't be two hundred years old. It's today's kind of paper.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

You are interrupting again.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I made copies.
Yesterday.
Late.
In the copy room
Outside your office.
The original
Is safe and dry and warm and well-fed.

HAM DUGAN looks at the document.

HAM DUGAN

There is absolutely no way we can know this is true.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

You could not have possibly read that entire thing.

HAM DUGAN

I don't need to complete it to see that it's not relevant.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Mommy, just like you said.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Vulnerability is an untailored suit
Awkwardly worn as the cameras are rolling.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Read what it says.

HAM DUGAN

We haven't got time for this foolishness-

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

You said you would listen to me uninterrupted.
You said you would listen more than you would speak.

*HAM DUGAN reads the document.
The world tilts.*

HAM DUGAN

The original needs to be verified by an expert.
There are people I know, some alumni, I think, who're experts.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

You're interrupting again.
There is not much time.
A lawn must be cut,
This stench addressed,
Your hand...
And yet Molly Claire has just begun to tell you her story of yesterday
And you are not listening.

HAM DUGAN

There's no way I can verify any of this before noon.
And ev'n if I could there is just way too much to unpack.
Two thousand alumni will be gathered here on the Green.
This document will not be read from today. If it's real,
We'll look at it, process it, crash team it, in coming weeks.
It's a lot, you'll admit, to be forced to digest in one day.
This cannot be read here today. Maybe later, not now.
You say that the so-called original's safely preserved?

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I put it back in the Archives.

*HAM DUGAN tears up the copy of the document.
MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS produces another
copy of the document. HAM DUGAN tears it up.*

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

You fear this document enough to commit violence.
But what you do not know is that this document has already been
A conduit of violence.
Your assumption is that I want to read from this today.
That that is what I want to say.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

I knew that would be his assumption.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

And yet I have something else to say.
It is not our job to tell the painful history contained in that document anyway.
Are you surprised to hear me say that?
Knowing that Mr. Hutchinson said
“Discover something revelatory about our school.”
The discovery of that document was yesterday’s second biggest revelation.
I have something more urgent on which to turn on the light of truth.

*MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS is about to continue at
the podium, but LAQUAN MONROE looks at her,
shakes his head “No,” and removes the piece of
paper from underneath the podium that he had
earlier used as a shim. He unfolds the paper and
speaks at the podium.*

HAROLD ARRINGTON returns.

LAQUAN MONROE

From the Journal of Henry Smith.
May 24, 1810.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

You didn’t speak yesterday.
Why speak now?

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Molly Claire is here to speak about yesterday
Not yestercentury. That is a private -

LAQUAN MONROE

From the Journal of Henry Smith.
May 24, 1810.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

You do not have the right to –

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I am going to summarize what it says
Not read from it.
I will post it today.
I will tell them where they can find it,
And read it on their own.
And they all will read it,
Faces in their phones,
Truth instead of fiction,
Hard Work of Wrenching Revelation
Instead of Soft Play of Ridiculous Repetition.
But I am not going to dredge up the pain in that document,
I am not going to act it out for them
While they sit passive.

LAQUAN MONROE

“Miss Lucy had this pin, looked like gold and diamonds –

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

What’s more important is what happened later in the day!
What happened to both of us!

LAQUAN MONROE

“Miss Lucy had this pin, looked like gold and diamonds –

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I am the one who gets to speak today!
And I will speak in my own way!

LAQUAN MONROE demands to be heard.

LAQUAN MONROE

“Miss Lucy had this pin, looked like gold and diamonds, shaped like a flower, like a Black-Eyed Susan.
Lilly admired it.
I said I would make a pin for Lilly.
Didn’t have any gold or diamonds.
But I had plenty of tin scraps left over from all the cups and the linings of the copper pots.
So I fashion some of those scraps into a flower pin for my Lilly.

She pins it on, and we dance a little.
 “You should make one for Harriet, too,” Lilly says, and I plan to.
 Next day Miss Lucy sees Lilly wearing that pin and flies into a rage.
 “You devil! I’ll show you how to mock your betters.”
 She picks up a piece of stove wood and flails it against Lilly’s head.
 “Where did you get that?”
 Lilly says, “My husband Henry made it from scraps.”
 “Scraps he stole from us,” says Miss Lucy.
 Miss Lucy says “Mister Thomas will teach you not to steal.”

Next morning I’m making a kettle in the storehouse
 And I hear Lilly wailing outside.
 I go out.
 There’s two wagons.
 Lilly is in one.
 Our daughter Harriet in the other.
 I see Lilly give Harriet the flower pin.
 Tosses it to her.
 I run up to the wagons and hold their hands.
 The wagons pull away.
 Pull my hands from theirs.
 I run after them as long as I can.
 And in the heat and the dust and the horse stench and the tears
 I can say nothing.
 And they are gone.

I turn around and walk back to the storehouse.
 There’s Mister Thomas.
 He’s got a bandage around his right hand, dripping blood.
 He says, “N****, I lost an hour’s time and a good cook because of you.”
 I think, “Thomas Crenshaw, what have I lost by you?”

There might be a very long pause here.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

There’s two thousand chairs to set.
 Lawn needs to be cut before that happens.
 So that needs to happen now.

HAROLD ARRINGTON is mowing the lawn. We hear the engine of the lawnmower. As he mows, questions are projected to the audience.

Why is this lawn called Crenshaw Green?
 Who named it?
 And why?

Why is it so big?
 Who is allowed on this lawn?
 Who is not allowed on this lawn?
 What is allowed to happen on this lawn?
 What is not allowed to happen on this lawn?
 Are the people who maintain the lawn treated differently from the people who are allowed to use
 the lawn?
 What goes on in the buildings that surround this lawn, and who are those buildings for?
 What was here before this was a lawn?
 What important events happened in this place?
 And how many people know of those?

*After some time, there is a sharp noise and
 HAROLD ARRINGTON stops his mower and
 dismounts. He finds a small shard of metal. He
 pockets it, remounts the mower, restarts it, and
 rides off.*

HAM DUGAN

I thought when I woke up today that my hand was the most
 Ugly thing I would have to address. I can cover that up.
 It's been weeping all night, just a cut that won't close, no big deal.
 It'll stop soon. It will. I think "Stress, it's the end of the year.
 My immune system's low, I just need beach time in Hilton Head.
 Mini-golf with the kids, and a hot tub – just Ellen and I,
 And I'm back to one hundred percent, up for year twenty-nine.
 The Billion's secure, it's a thing, the Trustees can high five.
 Some alums will freak out there's a black girl as Lucy Crenshaw,
 But the Billion announcement will show them we're on the right track."

The Billion, you see, it's something that no Head has yet done.
 For a school of our size to achieve such a goal, well, that's huge.
 After twenty-nine years I have something to make Doogie proud.
 He said, "Teaching's a waste of your talents!" I said, "But I'm called!"
 I taught twelve years of English, then nine years a Dean, and then here.
 And for eight years as Head here at Crenshaw I've strived to achieve
 Something notable, noteworthy, tombstone-errific – and now,
 On what should be a glorious day you come forth with this...thing.

I can't let this color this day we've so carefully planned.
 There's no guarantee that this page is authentic at all.
 And ev'n if it is, it could not have come at a worse time.
 It cannot be made public today. It will be on the news.
 That's all anyone will be talking about, will recall.
 There are over two thousand alumni who've gathered to sing

Within these timeless granite walls
 Hearts and minds alive with youth!
 We hear our nation's humble call:
 "Lead this world and Strive for truth!"

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

But Ham, today we must repair a corrupt script.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

"Strive for Truth" is our motto.
 And you have not even heard the whole truth.

HAM DUGAN

I will let you speak. Not today, but I will let you speak.
 You'll speak to your class, and I'll come and I'll listen, take notes.
 And then, when we're ready, we'll publish this on the website.
 You know, as a trustee, CasSandra, the delicacy
 Of the message we send, how it reads, how it feels, how it lands.
 She can't speak today. Not today. We're not ready today.
 The Billion allows us to finally bring to this school
 The best and the brightest regardless of family wealth.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

The Billion
 For what it's worth
 And it's not worth much
 Because it's not what this is about
 Really
 But the Billion
 was started with stolen funds
 Stolen labor from the enslaved Henry Smith
 Stolen dirty money from the sale of his wife and his daughter.
 What grew to a Billion was borne out of a family's pain.
 The whole thing's a lie.
 A sham.
 A theft.
 Kleptocracy.
 Which we already knew
 Or should have known.
 And we'll discuss that in due course.
 But that is not all that will be added to the festivities today.

HAM DUGAN

Which we knew?

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

That the Billion's been built from stolen hours
 From stolen lives
 From stolen loves?
 Please.

HAM DUGAN

You chose this place for your child.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

I choose to live in the world as it really is
 Not as I wish it were.
 And I choose to change it when the light of Truth shines the way.
 As it did yesterday.
 So much was revealed yesterday.

HAM DUGAN

I cannot believe that that Journal is a real thing
 That sat in the basement of Crenshaw Hall two hundred years
 And suddenly your daughter found it in History class?

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

I suppose it is the curse of one named CasSandra to be forever not believed.
 For the eleventy-leventh time, Ham,
 There's more to Molly Claire's yesterstory and don't get stuck here.
 But since you appear fixated on the veracity of this document,
 Consider this.
 We have a tradition in our family.
 When a Daughter and Mother part for any real length of time
 The Mother makes a flower for the Daughter out of scraps of whatever.
 Orange peels, leaves of grass, wax paper,
 Old rags, a failed wallet,
 Book covers, cancelled checks,
 Worn out shoes.
 Soup can labels.
 The longer the separation
 The more durable the materials.
 A flower.
 From Mother to Daughter.
 I did not know why until yesterday, when I read the Journal unearthed by Molly Claire,
 And then I began to understand.
 I need to sit with that for a while.
 You need to sit with that for a while, Ham.
 But not for too long right now.
 That Goddess...she chariots on.
 And Molly Claire has not finished her story from yesterday.

*The world tilts. We hear the strange noise.
It almost returns to the way it was before.
A pencil falls off the podium.
LAQUAN MONROE shims the podium with a piece
of paper.*

LAQUAN MONROE

Why did I start to work here this week?
Why did the Journal reveal itself to Molly Claire Williams yesterday?
Why did I shim the podium with the page photocopied from that Journal?
Why did Molly Claire Williams not want me to read Henry Smith's pain aloud?
Why did CasSandra Fox-Williams not want me to read Henry Smith's pain aloud?
Why did I need to read Henry Smith's pain aloud?
Why are CasSandras not ever believed, when we know they are gifted with prophecy?
Are their visions of truth just too much for us to take in?
Who is the school for?
And why does it stink here?
What happened to his hand?
Why every time she calls him Ham do I think
I'm about to go HAM
Hard as a mothaf***er let these n****s know who I am
I'm about to go HAM
Hard as a mothaf***er let these n****s know who I am
What is Ham Dugan going to say next?
What white sensitivity will he next display?
And will he never let Molly Claire Williams finish her story?

HAM DUGAN

This is all so unfair. Not to me, but to all those who've come
From so far and so wide to partake in this beautiful day.
The events you say happened are more than two hundred years old.
Don't you think that it's time to move on, to get past this, to grow?

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

You say you are not ready today.
And Molly Claire
Who we named Molly Claire and enrolled here at Crenshaw
So her resume would rise to the top
(think on that)
(think on that)
Agrees you are not ready
And that is not the point.
And the point is that we may need to school the veteran teacher.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Respect us.
Listen to us.
Believe us.

HAM DUGAN

I do –

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Don't interrupt us.
Don't own the stage.
Let us speak.
Let us tell our truth.
Don't take it personally.
It's like you're Thomas Crenshaw!

HAM DUGAN

You're getting all -

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

Don't be afraid of our anger!!
You are not going to break!!!!
Continue, Molly Claire.

MOLLY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

I'm reading the Journal.
Careful to separate the pages from each other
With the delicate, thin, firm, edge of my student ID
Gently nuzzled in between the leaves,
My gloved fingers being far too fat
To separate those dry relics from each other
Without lasting fracture.
LaQuan Monroe, boltcutter savior,
Reads with me.
He says nothing.
We both say nothing.
I see it's past four.
The copy room door will locked.
I ask LaQuan if he has a key to the copy room
So I can make copies.
He takes me there,
And I lay down the Journal on the machine.
I am scared that those flashes of light
Will be too much for the ancient paper.
That the letters and words will ignite

Incinerate
 Eradicate
 Vaporize
 And then where would we be?
 But the paper survives.
 The Journal feels warm
 Feels alive
 Not as dry as I feared.
 And now copies exist
 In the world.
 And just then -

HAROLD ARRINGTON interrupts.

HAROLD ARRINGTON

Outside chairs unfolded.
 First guests arriving
 Claiming their space
 Staking their claim
 Jackets
 Programs
 Umbrellas
 Cousins
 Dogs
 Strewn on the chairs to save seats,
 Half the audience is here.
 Many on walkers
 Needing special assistance.
 But they're blessed.
 They have survived the journey back.
 Though they left they always knew
 They had a home in Crenshaw Hall.
 And on Crenshaw Green.
 Which looks magnificent
 If I do say.
 "The richness I achieve comes from nature,
 The source of my inspiration."
 Claude Monet.
 There's still time to unfold the indoor chairs.

CASSANDRA FOX-WILLIAMS

It will not rain today.