

TR ONE

By Jerold London

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TR ONE

TIME AND PLACE

Present (post-Covid). Wisteria County Junior High. Warm spring afternoon.

Stage left is a brick or stone wall, which stands roughly three to four feet high toward upstage, but which abruptly increases in height to six to eight feet running toward downstage. It is comfortably wide enough to sit upon.



Stage right is a junior high school nurse's office.

CHARACTERS

CLAYTON. Boy, 15, 9th grader at Wisteria County Junior High. Chess player. Wearing a sweatshirt, jeans, and scuffed loafers.

SHAWN. Trans girl, 15, 9th grader at Wisteria County Junior High. Chess champion. Wearing a denim shirt with a silver medallion on a chain around her neck, distressed jeans with a high waist, and boots.

GRAHAM. Boy, 15, 9th grader at Wisteria County Junior High.

Two other female students and a Nurse (non-speaking parts).

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

... // in the dialogue indicates interrupting (but **not** overlapping) text.

If you are on this Earth, you are part of the trans story.

– Nicole Maines, 2016.

SCENE

Outside Wisteria Junior High CLAYTON (**stage left**) is sitting on the wall.

He is reading Chess Life, his back resting up against the J of the wall, feet stretched out before him, his backpack resting on the ground.

As CLAYTON is reading, SHAWN (stage right) is assisted into the Nurse's office by two other female students. Her wrists have been cut and are bleeding (not life-threatening). The Nurse bandages them. The two other female students walk with her out of the Nurse's office, and then exit the stage. SHAWN walks slowly in Clayton's direction.

Meanwhile, GRAHAM comes running up to CLAYTON, panting, waving one arm in the air (books under the other).

GRAHAM

Let me tell you, Clayt.

[beat, out of breath] You won't believe it!... *You won't believe it!*

[beat] What just happened.

CLAYTON

[uninterested] What, Graham?

GRAHAM

[still catching his breath] Shawn....

In the girls bathroom.... Slit his wrists.

CLAYTON

What??

GRAHAM

Yeah, right there.... With a box cutter.... Blood everywhere.

CLAYTON drops the Chess Life and jumps down.

CLAYTON

She what?...

Oh my God!

In the girls bathroom?

GRAHAM

That's what I just said, isn't it?

The fairy boy.

SHAWN approaches the two of them from stage right.

GRAHAM

Goddamn it, here he comes. Here the freak comes. See ya later.

GRAHAM exits. CLAYTON runs to SHAWN.

CLAYTON

Jesus Christ! Shawn.

SHAWN

I

CLAYTON takes SHAWN into a hug.

CLAYTON

What the shit did you do, Idiot?

SHAWN

I don't know.

CLAYTON steps back, out of the hug.

CLAYTON

You might be dead.

SHAWN

I know.

CLAYTON

What for Christ's sake for?

SHAWN

I don't know.

CLAYTON

You don't know?? The Hell you don't. Why? Tell me why.

SHAWN

[*pause*] Pawn, e4.

CLAYTON

[*pause*] Pawn, e5.

As they play the game in their minds, a chessboard is projected onto an appropriate space on the stage, showing the moves to the audience.

SHAWN

Pawn, f4.

CLAYTON

Pawn takes pawn.



SHAWN

Knight, f3.

CLAYTON

Pawn, g5.

SHAWN

Bishop, c4.

CLAYTON

Pawn, g4.



SHAWN

Castle.

CLAYTON

The Muzio. It's been refuted, you know. Pawn takes knight.

SHAWN

We'll see. Queen takes pawn.

CLAYTON

Queen, f6. The fort will hold.



SHAWN

Pawn, e5.

CLAYTON

Queen takes pawn.

You're not going to get your piece back that way.

SHAWN

Bishop takes pawn, check.

CLAYTON

Another sacrifice?

What planet are you on?

King takes bishop.



SHAWN

Pawn, d4.

CLAYTON

Queen takes pawn, check.

You're going to run out of things to sacrifice.

SHAWN

It's all in the mind.

Bishop, e3.

CLAYTON

Queen, f6.



SHAWN

Bishop takes f4.

CLAYTON

[*pause, thinking*] Time to run home.

My king, I mean.

King, e8.

SHAWN

Knight, c3.

CLAYTON

And time to develop.

Knight, c6.



SHAWN

You're in trouble.
Knight, d5.

CLAYTON

You think so?
Queen, g6.

SHAWN

Rook a to e1, check.
Not long now.

CLAYTON

Bishop, e7.



SHAWN

Bishop, d6.

CLAYTON

Oh my God!
 I never
 What a move!
 Have you ever seen that before??
 [*beat*] King, d8.

SHAWN

Mate in two.
 Queen, f8, check.

CLAYTON

Bishop takes Queen.



SHAWN

Bishop takes pawn, Mate.

CLAYTON

Jesus ... Jesus ...

Jesus Christ, Shawn! That's the best damn game I've ever seen!

Might be one of the best freakin' games ever played....

SHAWN shrugs her shoulders.

CLAYTON

Can we talk about it?... Now?

SHAWN

[beat] When clouds get dark, chess is my escape. Always.

CLAYTON

And clouds make you a genius?

SHAWN

I get scared they're going to catch me.
And maybe beat me to death.
It's happened before.

CLAYTON

So you cut your wrists instead?
What kind of gambit is that?

SHAWN

I know. I don't know.
Things get so small, sometimes I can't see in my mind.

CLAYTON

Then, use a larger chessboard.... In your mind.

SHAWN

[*laughs, short*] It feels so helpless....
They want me to leave.

CLAYTON

Who? Who wants you to leave?

SHAWN

The school. The principal....
The school board, actually.

CLAYTON

Need I?

SHAWN

Same old. Same old.
Bathrooms, of course. It's always stupid bathrooms.

CLAYTON

Why not use the boys bathroom?

SHAWN

Like this??

CLAYTON

No, I guess not....
I just don't understand. I just *can't* understand.
What is it, makes us how we are, anyway?
The people we are?

SHAWN

Pawns and pieces.

CLAYTON

Yeah, pieces, I guess.

SHAWN

The first three months your mother makes a body for you.
And the next three months she puts your sex into your brain.
And when they're not the same

CLAYTON

Shawn, I, uh, I ... I need to tell you something....
I need to tell you something personal about myself....

SHAWN

[*beat, waiting*] What?

CLAYTON

[*changing the subject*] When did you first know? About yourself?

SHAWN

I don't know. Halloween maybe? When I was four, or five. Dressing as a girl.

CLAYTON

And when were you willing to fight for it?

SHAWN

I hate being behind walls.
I can keep my mouth shut. Really, Clayt, I can. But I can't sacrifice who I am.
Maybe not before now, but now ... yeah, I'm willing to fight for it.

CLAYTON

And die for it?

SHAWN

That was stupid of me. I know.

CLAYTON

Soooo stupid. Giving up being loved.

SHAWN

Being loved?

CLAYTON

To get out from behind the wall and be loved.

SHAWN

I don't know what you're talking about.

CLAYTON

I don't know either.

But how could you think of offing yourself?

A mind like yours?

You're the state chess champion, for God's sake.

Maybe national champion in a year.

Maybe, someday, the world champion.

SHAWN

Chess isn't my life.

My life's more personal than that.

CLAYTON

There's *nothing* more personal than connecting mind-to-mind, like *we* can.

The two of us, connecting through open space, where everything is free.

SHAWN

Who says?

CLAYTON

I say. That's what music. And poetry. And math. And Shakespeare are all about.

That's what they're trying to teach us here.

That's what chess is about.

Like, being effortless, connecting with a person you think the world of.

That's what I'm trying to tell you.

SHAWN

Those things aren't the meaning of *my* life, Clayt.

CLAYTON

They are when they connect people. It's everything.

SHAWN

You're wrong... How?

CLAYTON

It's what you feel, when the world gets cold.

It's what you remember, when you're afraid you're about to die.

It's what's with you in bed alone at night.

It's what cheers you up when you can't get to sleep.

It's like when you know you're in love.

SHAWN

How do you know all that?

CLAYTON

I read more than just chess magazines.
And I think about things.

SHAWN

You pray?

CLAYTON

Sort of like that, I guess.
How else can I say it?
When I'm with you, everything just falls into place for me.
When I'm with you, I'm completely comfortable.
When I'm with you I feel I can be cared for, and valued, and can think straight.
And I thought for awhile I must be queer, to feel like this.
But it's real. And I do. And I've had to tell you this for months.
And losing you, almost losing you today,
has given me the strength and courage *finally* to say it....
If you go, I'll find the way to go with you.

SHAWN

You're too young to say something like that.

CLAYTON

And *you're* too young, too; but there it is. The grizzly bear in our faces.

SHAWN

It's Graham, and Graham's parents. They want me out.

CLAYTON

Forget him. Forget them.
They live in a world where cheap runs fast and cheap.
Let me give you something that's valuable.

SHAWN

What?

CLAYTON

Give me a four-digit number. Any number, except four digits all the same.
Like 1 2 3 4.

SHAWN

Okay. Twenty, twenty-four.

CLAYTON

Now put them into descending order ... 4 2 2 0, and ascending order ... 0 2 2 4,
and subtract the smaller from the larger.

SHAWN

3 9 9 6.

CLAYTON

Do it again.
The same thing.

SHAWN

6 2 6 4.

CLAYTON

And again.

SHAWN

4 1 7 6.

CLAYTON

And again.

SHAWN

6 1 7 4.

CLAYTON

And again.

SHAWN

6 1 7 4, again.

CLAYTON

It always ends up 6 1 7 4.
It's Kaprekar's Constant.

SHAWN

Spectacular! Did you figure that out yourself?
While trying to solve Fermat's Last Theorem?

CLAYTON

No. I read it. I read more than just chess magazines, for your information.

SHAWN

Makes me think of sunflowers.

CLAYTON

To me it's like every person seems so different, from one another.
But applying a formula, we can see we're all connected and one at the soul.

SHAWN

What formula?

CLAYTON

Love....

[*beat*] Shawn. I can't fucking figure out how else to tell you this.

I've written it down. And shredded it. A hundred times.

Letters and poems.

Because I fought it, and denied it, before I embraced it.

What more can I say? It's killing me inside. I have to tell you.

Shawn, you're someone I can trust my heart and December to.

Shawn....

I love you. I'm in love with you.

SHAWN

What?? You must be kidding.

CLAYTON

With *you*.

SHAWN

Me. The person I am?

CLAYTON

You, the whole of you, you are. The sunflower you are.

SHAWN

A sunflower? That's made and remade every day? Like me.

CLAYTON

You can't deny your identity.

No person can.

It's what makes a person who she is.

It was *me* who had to understand.

It was *me* who had to find it.

It was *me* who had to find the change in myself. The love in myself.

And love's worth fighting for. But not worth dying for, because Well, duh!

SHAWN

You don't know what you're talking about.

CLAYTON

You get me. You understand what I need.
You connect with me, and me with you.
What is a person anyway, but the people they love and the people who love them?
May I kiss you?

SHAWN

Here?

CLAYTON carefully, almost tentatively,
approaches **SHAWN**, takes her into his
arms, and kisses her. Then, still
embraced –

SHAWN

What am I, to you?

CLAYTON

The girl you are.

SHAWN

Is that how I feel to you?

CLAYTON

What do you want me to say?

SHAWN

The truth. Always.

CLAYTON

That I can feel you?

SHAWN

This is the worst moment of my life; and you're trying to make it the best?
And make me feel sorry for myself?
Knowing it won't last forever.

END*

*** Chess imaging courtesy of CardGames.io. The game,
courtesy of Alexei Shirov vs. J. Lapinski, Daugavpils, Latvia,
1990.**