

THE BUSH CLASSROOM

A one-act play of chapter seven from
Denis Wright's novel *Nanotech*

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Adapted for the stage by Alison Hodge

LOU Hey, boy scout. Outside, now! Get up
all of you and get outside! You too,
Meinhoff. *Outside!*

JOE We were dragged outside into the
freezing pre-dawn and lined up in front
of Marcus. A steady drizzle soon soaked
our clothes.

LOU Listen to me very carefully. Meinhoff,
you have information we need and very
shortly you will give it to us. All of it.
Drew has done lots of research and will
know if what you are telling us is real or
bullshit. For all of your sakes it had better
be real.

MEINHOFF I told you last night. You're wasting
your time. All I'm—

LOU Wrong answer, fat man!

Lou punches the Professor brutally hard in the stomach. He collapses fighting for breath.

LOU The next time you say something foolish one of your little admirers cops a bullet in the leg. Do you understand?

Meinhoff tries to grunt a reply. Lou pulls him to his feet and grabs him by his loose jowls.

LOU I said, do you understand?

MEINHOFF Yes, yes—I understand.

MARCUS Good. Shortly we will go back inside and you will begin to explain to Drew the most efficient and safest process for eliminating Afro-Americans from mainland United States.

JOE There. It was out. The big, fat, ugly words hung in the air like helium balloons.

BERNIE Excuse me Drew, but the word ‘safest’ seems a little out of place in this conversation, don’t you think?

JOE Lou moved forward quickly, fist raised but Bernie took a step forward, bringing him to a sudden halt. Her eyes flashed

and rain glinted off her pale cheeks. I had never seen her look more beautiful.

BERNIE I presume you mean safe for white Americans?

LOU More like us dummies, you mean.

BERNIE All I'm saying is that I can break it down so you can understand it more easily.

MARCUS Half the day's gone and we've got nowhere. How much longer?

*Marcus had been pacing the floor
for the past half hour.*

BERNIE I can't say exactly. I need to get Drew up to speed on the basics of molecular biology before we return to the exact information you want, but by this time tomorrow I think you will have the general picture.

MARCUS Lady, if we're still here this time tomorrow, I swear I will let Lou shoot holes in every goddamn one of you! Jeez, are you lot lucky Tommy ain't here!

JOE Thus began what had to be the strangest science lesson in the long and torturous

history of science teaching. Professor Meinhoff and Bernie spoke for about thirty minutes first, and while they talked Bernie wrote notes and made various diagrams. When she was sure she had the gist of the Professor's ideas she spoke to the group.

BERNIE Okay, people, gather around—and yes, that includes the students.

LOU What? We ain't in school now, lady. Just tell Drew and stop wasting time.

BERNIE Lou, this will be a lot faster, believe me.

JOE Bernie stood by the table and we gathered in front of her. Me at the back with Andy, Toke off to one side near the window, Eve just across from him, and Moira and Indya directly in front of Bernie.

LOU Hey, lady. What are you tryin' to do here? How come the girls get to sit in the front? That's favouritism, just like every class I was ever in. Always the girls in front sucking up to the teacher and us guys in the back, and the teacher going nuts because we don't know shit.

MOIRA The reason you ‘don’t know shit’ is because you couldn’t be bothered concentrating in class. I can see it now—you probably sauntered in late to class, sat there clowning about or daydreaming and did the bare minimum of work.

LOU Oh, you were there? Like, you were in my Alabama classroom? Yeah, maybe you was that fat suck-up kid in the front row answering every damned question and treatin’ me and my buddies like somethin’ you stood on in the park!

MOIRA And then, I imagine when your complete lack of learning was laid bare you and your pals played the anger card or the everyone’s-picking-on me card

TOKE Aah, of course Moira. If everyone just concentrated and behaved themselves the disparities in educational achievement would disappear overnight. I mean socio-economics has got nothing to do with it, right?

MOIRA Of course it does, you idiot, but my point is still valid. You have to admit that the worldwide underachievement of boys is—

- LOU What the fuck? You saying all boys are dumb?
- BERNIE Stop bickering please everyone. Moira ... we are in class now, dear, so do what I say please. Move aside and let the men sit in the front.
- MOIRA Excuse me? (*A smile from Lou*)
- BERNIE *Now* would be good!
- MARCUS Oh yeah, like we're so stupid we're gonna sit with our backs to Mike Tyson and his mates. No way, lady.
- BERNIE Two issues here, Marcus. Firstly, I am getting tired of being addressed as 'lady'. My name is Bernie, or if you like, Miss O'Shaunessy, and I certainly am not a dame. Secondly, I am becoming increasingly annoyed by all these rude interruptions. From everyone. Drew, will you please sit up here beside Indya? Marcus and Lou, why don't you be my class monitors and sit at the back. I promise that I will give you all the attention your behaviour warrants. Everyone happy now? Good, let's begin.
- BERNIE Now, back to today's lesson—ethnically specific genocide. It is obvious that

we don't want a neurotoxin that kills everyone in the population, we want one that zeroes in on black-skinned people. Um, Drew, slight problem ... are talking only African Americans, or are we including all dark-skinned people? How about darker-skinned Asians, like Indians and Pakistanis? I mean where are you drawing the line here? Do we include lighter brown-skinned people like Mexicans or Puerto Ricans?

LOU (*on his feet*) You tryin' to be clever, lady? I mean Bernie. You know *exactly* what we mean. Just Fros.

BERNIE Thank you, Lou, but I believe my question was addressed to Drew. Drew? Just African Americans?

DREW That's right, Bernie. Our target victims are Afro-Americans, or *Fros* as we call them. From President Obama down to the dumbest street corner dope dealer. We want a neurotoxin that will slowly but surely wipe out every Fro from mainland USA. However, we understand that a toxin this specific may be very difficult to manufacture and are reluctantly willing to accept large

numbers of other dark-skinned races being affected—as long as Fros are the target audience.

Toke laughs—Bernie looks at him.

BERNIE Right then. The Professor thinks you need to tie the neurotoxin to a protein that is more present in the target population. Now, who can give me the most obvious physical characteristics of African Americans?

LOU Thick lips!

MOIRA Oh, wow. Brilliant, Einstein. Very intellectual.

BERNIE Moira, please. Thank you, Lou, but ... What else? Yes, Marcus?

MARCUS Big, flat noses?

TOKE I'll give you a flat nose, you racist loser!

MARCUS Yeah? You and whose army, kid?

BERNIE That's a bit like the lips answer, isn't it? If the Professor excuses my saying it, he has a rather large and flat nose, but I don't think he has any Afro-American blood. I am thinking of something rather obvious

here, people. Ah, yes Lou, and thank you for putting your hand up.

LOU They've all got black skin?

BERNIE Exactly, Lou. Well done. So we need to tie the protein to something to do with the actual skin of African American people, and the most obvious idea, of course, is to link it to melanin or skin pigment

MARCUS Hey! Is that where the word melanoma comes from, like in skin cancer?

BERNIE Exactly, Marcus. And if I may say so, very good inference work and concentration skills.

Marcus looks at Lou, pleased with himself.

BERNIE African people, of course, produce truckloads more melanin in their melanocytes than Europeans—um, sorry, melanocytes are a type of cell in the skin. Ah ... what was I saying, Toke?

TOKE You were just explaining to our socially-enlightened school buddies here that darker-skinned people produce more melanin in their skin cells than honkies do, but what you haven't explained to

them is the cancerous effect on the brain of race hatred.

LOU Hey! What the hell you saying about brain cancer! And how come the kid gets away with saying ‘honky’? That’s not fair. That’s racism. You gotta tick him off!

BERNIE Good point, Lou. And I was about to do just that, but thank you for the reminder. From now on no one in my class— and that includes you, Toke—will use insulting names for any ethnic group at all. Is that clear?

Lou sits back with a satisfied smirk.

TOKE Sorry (*walks up to Lou and puts a hand on his shoulder*), Bernie’s right, of course. Insulting you is unfair because clearly your illness is too far advanced. The few remaining brain cells you have are atrophied through lack of use and *sadly* a brain transplant is beyond our present circumstances. I fear you are doomed to a slow and painful death. Sorry, man.

Andy claps. Students join. Drew sniggers.

Lou gets to his feet, fists raised. Bernie intervenes.

BERNIE Sit down please, Lou. And thanks for your concern, Toke, but please return to your seat.

Lou and Toke eyeball each other.

MARCUS (*to Lou*) Come on, man. We haven't got time for this henhouse shit. Deal with the kid later. Hurry up, teacher, get on with it.

Lou sits). Bernie connects with Toke (aside).

BERNIE Okay then. Full attention again, please. If we compared Brack Obama's skin to my skin we'd see that the abundance of melanin in his skin cells causes his skin to be a little darker than mine.

LOU That ain't the only difference between you and him! (*finds himself hilarious*).

MOIRA I think you may be proving the point I made a little earlier.

LOU What d'you mean? I'm paying real good attention. Shut up and let the teacher get on with it.

BERNIE Now, I don't want to get too bogged

down in genetics at this stage. But each gene is regulated in its expression, or protein production, by sequences preceding the genes called promoters. What Andre was trying to explain to you, Drew, is that although black people have the same melanin gene as white people, it's the promoter that is the differentiating factor.

The point is that the promoters are very efficient in the black population and so they produce a lot more of the protein than the white population. So what you have to do is link the neurotoxin to the promoter, and with all the extra protein black-skinned people produce they will get massively more of the toxin than white people. Andre thinks city water supplies are probably the most efficient way of introducing the toxin to a general population because even if people actively stop drinking public water, you can't avoid it altogether. Now, are there any questions?

LOU Yeah. Why the hell didn't Mr Bigshot scientist tell it like you just did? I mean even I followed most of that. Meinhoff, you're full of shit!

MEINHOFF I'm certainly not going to pretend
that I'm a better teacher than Bernie.

BERNIE I'll take that as a compliment, Lou. Any
other issues?

TOKE I've got a question for Drew.

MARCUS You shut your mouth, kid!

Bernie raises a hand.

BERNIE While the lesson is still in progress I am
in charge, thank you, Marcus. And I
always encourage discussion, as long as
it is on topic and not phrased to cause
offence. What's the question, Toke?

TOKE Okay, Drew. Let's stretch our minds for
a minute and imagine that you and your
buddies manage to find a laboratory or
laboratories corrupt enough to produce
enough of this toxin to infect main city
water supplies— do you think the nation
is going to stand by and just let African
Americans die from it? If it can be made,
it can be traced. The whole thing is
pathetic.

DREW But it won't be traced. That's one thing I
could follow from Meinhoff. Bernie, did

he explain to you about the pseudo toxin that could be introduced at the same time? Exactly. Probably beyond your brainpower, kid, but Prof's got a way to completely camouflage the real toxin.

INDYA You're all talking about it as if it's a rainy day board game. What you're planning is disgusting and cruel. I just can't understand why you would want to do such a ... such a terrible, barbaric thing. These are real people you talk so casually about killing. Real men, women and children, with real lives and ... and real hopes and dreams. I can't believe that anyone would want to be so murderous and cruel.

DREW Listen, sweetheart. It's a racial purity thing. We believe that the mixing of the Fro and white races in the States is intellectually and morally weakening both racial groups, and it has to be stopped before we end up a caramel-coloured bunch of Third World losers. Why should today's generations keep on paying for the mistakes of the past? Listen. What if a couple of million educated Fros were to move back to Africa, back to their roots, back to where

they're supposed to be living. A win-win situation. The white man can reap the rewards of the wealthiest country on earth and the black man can rescue the failing African nations. Lots of opportunities there for smart Frogs to get those places up and running again.

ANDY Spiritual homeland? *Are you serious?*
Africa is no more home to black Americans than Scotland is my home—in fact a damn sight less so, because my dad went to Scotland last year and easily found quite a few of our distant relatives. And even if some blacks did go over to Africa, do you imagine the local rulers are going to welcome them like long-lost brothers and say, “Thank god you’re here! Please take over our failing nations, and while you’re at it have all of our money and power. We’re just going to blend back into the poor masses now and let you clever blacks from America take over.” It’s all racist wet-dream stuff. You can’t seriously believe this nonsense, surely!

MARCUS Shall I give you the truth then, sonny? We don’t really give a damn how they settle in. In fact I really hope it all goes

to total shit and they end up wiping each other out. Double whammy for us! And anyway, don't act all innocent with me. I've been in this arse-wipe little country long enough to pick up on the racial vibes. Only had to listen to your crazy talkback radio for an hour or two to figure out what's going on down here in paradise. Couple of the old boys who phoned in would fit in real well back home in Alabama.

TOKE I can almost see why you two could get caught up in this crap, but Drew, what's your excuse?

DREW Excuse? Don't need an excuse.
I believe in racial purity.

TOKE Are we talking Nazi-style racial purity or the Timothy McVeigh-style racial purity?

DREW Yeah, yeah, you're a clever kid I can see. Top of the class. Okay, I'll level with you. With me it's personal. It's the Drew-style of racial purity, the type where I got the shit beaten out of me by Māori and Island kids at school, and in the local neighbourhood, because my dad was in a white power gang and we chose to

shave our heads. We gave as good as we got, though, so the bastards burned our uninsured house to the ground and left my mother looking after five kids in a tiny flat. The type of racial purity where my father died in a Mongrel Mob versus Skins fight in Paremoremo prison.

TOKE The type, where poor little Drew is the only kid in the country to be brought up in hard times. Poor little Westie, white-trash Drew. So this is your therapy? Join up with these tossers and try to wipe out—

Drew grabs Toke by the throat. Lou steps in.

LOU See? All of us got our reasons, kid. But the bottom line is we all want the same thing. We want a fair go for the white man. We want to end the politically correct bullshit that protects blacks and discriminates against us. Like in my high school—seemed all a black kid had to do was spell his name right before a college scholarship was thrown his way, specially if he could pass a basketball or kick a football. Not us, though!

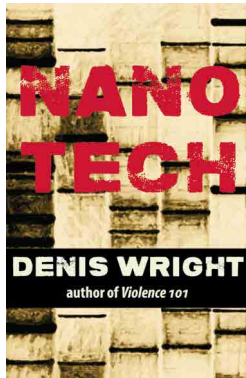
EVE Us being?

LOU Us being the white working man. Us being people brave enough to stand up to the corrupt politicians. Us being the people the land belongs to!

Eve points an outraged finger in Lou's face.

EVE The land? Surely the land really belongs to the Native Americans, the people your ancestors stole it from. The people your lot keep as pets on reservations. The people—

MARCUS Oh yeah? Like Toke's ancestors sent your ancestors special invitation cards to come and join them down here in the arsehole of the world? Like, 'Hey, you whities up there, we got this bitchin' place we can all share. Why don't you just pop on down and party with us?' Exactly. So don't go talking history lessons to me. Listen, bitch. God, guts 'n' guns made America free! And we're gonna keep it that way too.



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