

When John Moore Shot Carl Bell  
By  
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**SCENE i:** On the left side of the stage a man and woman in their late twenties or early thirties eat breakfast. They are each dressed for work. She wears a business suit and looks over some papers as she sips her coffee. The man is dressed a little less formally. He sugars his coffee and spreads Jelly on his toast. At the same time, stage right, two people, male and female sit somewhat formally at a dining room table. They eat in measured bites in silence. They are dressed in clothing from the early part of the century. The action of these two scenes runs concurrently. Only the couple on the left actually speak. As the scene begins, the woman on the right rises and exits only to return with more coffee in a pot which she pours for the man and for herself before sitting down again.

Did you mail those invitations?  
Deborah

Hmmmm?  
Jack

Did you mail the invitations? I gave you the invitations to mail.  
Deborah

Yes. (Pause.) I mailed them.  
Jack

You left them at school, didn't you? You forgot.  
Deborah

I mailed them.  
Jack

(The man on the right finishes his coffee and pushes back in his chair. He watches the woman across from him. She does not return his look. She sips her coffee.)

Well. That's all right then.  
Deborah

(Pause.)

Jack

Are you coming on Saturday?

Deborah

Coming where?

Jack

With mother and me. I told you last night. I promised to take her to the cemetery.

Deborah

Oh, Jesus. We just went there.

Jack

It's been six weeks. Adam took her last time.

Deborah

I can't. I have to work.

(The man on the right stands. He puts on his coat and exits past the woman who continues to sip her coffee in silence.)

Jack

On Saturday?

Deborah

That's how you get ahead. Apologize for me.

Jack

She'll understand.

Deborah

Right.

Jack

I told her I would take her to Mr. Allworth's afterwards. She hasn't been for a while.

Deborah

Who's that? (He reaches for more toast and jelly.) How do you eat that stuff?

Jack

He was at the funeral. He's pushing a hundred.

Deborah

And he goes to funerals? You'd think he'd avoid them.

Jack  
He's a lawyer. He still has a part-time practice.

Deborah  
People go to him? He tries cases?

Jack  
He knew my father's father. They were friends.

(The woman on the right stands and begins to clear the table.)

Deborah  
(Gathering her papers.)  
Your father's father? Why don't you just say grandfather? It's always your father's father or your mother's siblings. Don't you have any relations of your own?

Jack  
It's just a habit of speech. (Pause.) My *grandmother's* going too.

Deborah.  
How peachy for you. Well. I've got to go.

Jack  
Already?

Deborah.  
I don't teach a late class, Jack. I work in a law firm. I have obligations.

Jack  
Yeah.

Deborah  
Don't wait dinner for me. I may be late. Bye.

(Kisses the air by his head and exits. He slowly eats his toast. The woman on the right sits suddenly, folds her arms on the table in front of her and lays her head down on them. BLACKOUT.)

**SCENE ii:** The front parlor of a house. Mr. Allworth sits comfortably in a rocking chair. Jack and his mother sit on a settee. Jack's grandmother sits on a chair closer to Mr. Allworth.)

Mrs. Allen

Can I pour you another cup of tea, Mr. Allworth?

Mr. Allworth

I'm fine. Just fine.

Mrs. Allen

Mother? Would you like some more tea?

Mrs. Bryan

(Ignores her daughter, but not the cookie in her hand.)

These are lovely. Did we bring these, Delores?

Mrs. Allen

No, Mother. Mr. Allworth had them ready for us.

Mr. Allworth

You like those? I get 'em at the bakery.

Mrs. Allen

Jack?

Jack

What?

Mrs. Allen

Don't say "what," dear. It's impolite.

Jack

Yes, ma'am. I didn't hear what you asked.

Mrs. Allen

Tea. Would you like more tea?

Jack

I'm fine.

Mrs. Allen

You were going to tell us something, Mr. Allworth.

Mr. Allworth

Beg pardon?

Mrs. Allen

You were going to tell us a story.

Mr. Allworth

Oh, yes. We were talking about your father, and I thought of something.

Mrs. Bryan

Which bakery?

Mr. Allworth

I remembered that he was the Grand Marshall.

Jack

Grand Marshall?

Mr. Allworth

That was in '47 not long after the war—the second war, and that got me to thinking about the first. It's was the fourth of July, you see. Both times.

Jack

I don't follow.

Mr. Allworth

It was the Fourth of July! I was telling your mother. It was the fourth of July when your Grandad was Grand Marshall, and it was the fourth of July when John Moore shot Carl Bell. I wouldn't have thought of it, but my sister Flora's boy was driving the car. And I couldn't remember whether he was older or younger than your Grandad, then I remembered he was born almost seven years to the day after John Moore shot Carl Bell.

Jack

Oh.

Mr. Allworth

That's how we measured time then.

Mrs. Bryan

Do you think the rain will let up soon? I can't remember such a rainy May, can you?

Jack

Who killed Carl—what? Bell? I don't remember hearing anything--

Mr. Allworth

Well, you weren't born yet, were you? Neither was your mother. It was 1920. Ten o'clock in the morning and 85 degrees out. I remember that because my father had gone out as soon as the sun came up and raised the flag. He said it was 70 degrees already then. Then he sent me out again to look after breakfast and again just before it happened.

Jack

Now who was. . .?

Mrs. Allen

Mama, do you remember that? Do you remember what Mr. Alworth is talking about?

Mrs. Bryan

Of course I do, dear. I must have been there. When was it, Mr. Allworth?

Mr. Allworth

Wouldn't have done to talk about it in front of a young girl. Wouldn't have done at all.

Jack

Perhaps I will take some more tea, Mama.

Mr. Allworth

It was eight months since the war had ended. And this was the first parade to have all our veterans marching, don't you see? It was a very grand thing. Main street was draped in red, white and blue. The parade was scheduled for noon. And at ten o'clock it happened.

Jack

What happened?

Mr. Allworth

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

Mrs. Allen

You put your own sugar in, dear. I never put in enough.

Jack

That's fine.

Mrs. Bryan

I remember now. I remember my mother and Aunt Merrilee talking about John Moore. Carl Bell was "seeing" his wife. Moore's wife. I heard them talking about it. But that was years later, I think

Mr. Allworth

Folks suspected as much at the time. 'Course no one would say a thing like that. It wouldn't do.

Jack

So who got shot? You said someone got shot.

Mr. Allworth

Sordid affair. I'll have another one of those cookies myself. I'm glad you wore a tie, son. Young folks today don't take enough care for their appearance.

(Lights Fade)

**SCENEiii:** The front porch of a Victorian house. It is draped in flag bunting. A black woman in her forties is sweeping the steps. From off-stage is the faint sound of an irregular drum beat. A young man comes out the door.

Young Allworth  
Abby, where's Thaddeus? Dorothy wants him to change now.

Abby  
I expect he's out back somewheres. He had that drum your Daddy give him.

Young Allworth  
Could you call him in?

Abby  
When I finish this here porch, I got to go in and fix the lunch baskets.

Young Allworth  
Dorothy wants him in the house right now.

Abby  
He'll be comin' around here directly. He's marching up and down like he was a parade hisself.

Young Allworth

Doesn't seem like it ought to be the fourth of July already, does it? Seems like I just got home.

(The woman makes no reply. There is no reply to make. Young Allworth sits on the railing.)

It's eighty-five degrees on the back porch.

Abby

Reckon it's eighty-five degrees out here too.

Young Allworth

I'm glad I don't have to march in a uniform.

Abby

I expect you is.

Young Allworth

I think Daddy's ashamed I wasn't old enough to go off in the war.

Abby

Enough folks went off in that war. Not enough come back.

Young Allworth

Or they came back damn Bolsheviks, or worse! That's what Daddy says. (Pause.) People are dying up north now. In the cities. The influenza. They say the soldiers brought it back.

Abby

Ain't all some of them brought back.

(She rests her broom against the railing and wipes her brow with her apron.)

Young Allworth

Did Daddy give you the afternoon off?

Abby

What for?

Young Allworth

It's the fourth of July.

Abby

Ain't no nevermind to me. My family's goin' down to the lake day after tomorrow. We have a big do then. We have the place all to ourselves. Ain't no white folks gonna go down there and bother us tomorrow.

Young Allworth

(There is a muffled "bang" in the distance.)

Is that Thaddeus? He'll break that drum if he hits it that hard.

Abby

Firecrackers, I expect. Them boys all got firecrackers.

Young Allworth

Maybe it's the Bolsheviks, Abby. Maybe they're blowing up the courthouse. Daddy says he might vote for Warren G. Harding, but Col. Lereaux says Cox'll keep the Reds out of the country and the ni. . . (He stops himself.) Col. Lereaux does not like Warren G. Harding. He's a yankee *and* a republican. Col. Lereaux told Daddy--

Abby

I got to go see to the baskets.

(She exits into the house. ALLWORTH looks off down the street. Something apparently catches his eye. He calls in the house.)

Young Allworth

I might just go on down and see what's going on, Abby. You tell Mama--

(A man enters. It is the man from stage right in Scene I. He sits on the porch steps and takes his handkerchief out of his pocket and wipes his face.)

Mr. Moore

Well. That's it then.

Young Allworth

Mr. Moore? You all right?

Mr. Moore

It's damn hot.

Young Allworth

What's going on? We heard a noise from along that way. It sounded like a pop.

Mr. Moore

I said I would do it, and I did.

Young Allworth

Abby thought it was fireworks, but the more I think about it, the more it sounded like a gunshot or something.

Mr. Moore

Do you think I might trouble you for a glass of water?

Young Allworth

Yes sir, but don't you want--

(c) Jeanne Beckwith

Mr. Moore

And you may as well go on then and tell your Daddy to call the high sheriff to come and get me. I just shot Carl Bell.

(c) Jeanne Beckwith