

WOUND

by Alan Haehnel

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WOUND

A Dramatic Ensemble One Act Play

by Alan Haehnel

SYNOPSIS: This play consists of scenes in a psychologist's office. Terri is the patient due to her increasingly anti-social behavior, culminating in a faked attack on the school. Terri claims to love winding other people up but takes pride in being emotionally invulnerable herself. At the end of the play, we learn that Terri was sexually assaulted by her neighbor. Her final words show she is ready to begin working through this trauma: "I think I need some help."

DURATION: 30 minutes.

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: Bare stage with one chair.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females, 3 males, 10 either; 0-10 extras)

TERRI (f)..... A troubled teen. *(62 lines)*
 MOTHER (f)..... Terri's excitable mom. *(5 lines)*
 FATHER (m)..... Terri's financially-worried father.
(10 lines)
 VOICE (m/f)..... Telemarketer. *(9 lines)*
 SARAH (f)..... Terri's feminist friend. *(6 lines)*
 ERIC (m)..... Terri's girl-crazy friend. *(10 lines)*
 JANA (f)..... Terri's grade-obsessed friend. *(3 lines)*
 UNCLE HARVEY (m)..... Terri's kind uncle. *(14 lines)*
 TEACHER 1 (m/f)..... Terri's teacher. *(3 lines)*
 TEACHER 2 (m/f)..... Another of Terri's teachers. *(3 lines)*
 TEACHER 3 (m/f)..... Another of Terri's teachers. *(3 lines)*
 TEACHER 4 (m/f)..... Another of Terri's teachers. *(3 lines)*
 THE PRIEST (m/f)..... A priest. *(1 line)*
 TEAMMATE 1 (m/f)..... Terri's fellow sports player. *(1 line)*
 TEAMMATE 2 (m/f)..... Terri's fellow sports player. *(1 line)*
 COP (m/f)..... A cop. *(1 line)*
 BOSS (m/f)..... Terri's boss. *(1 line)*

EXTRAS (m/f).....Up to ten other characters can be cast. They appear and speak during ad-lib sections when we get a sense for the numerous voices weighing in on Terri's life

PROPS

- cardboard box
- various toy tops (enough for every member of the cast)

COSTUMES

All of the costumes should be present-day. Most would be fashionable for average teenagers. Some of the characters should be readily identifiable based on their uniforms—the cop and the priest, for instance. Whenever possible, added characters (*Extras who contribute to ad-libbed sections*) should wear costumes that provide visual cues as to their roles in Terri's life since they won't have specific lines or in-script references.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

This will be a challenging acting piece, especially for the person playing Terri. We must get a clear sense that she is trying desperately to protect herself. At times, we must get glimpses of the hurt she protects so the ending feels justified. Technically, the show should be quite straightforward—no set requirements to speak of; no fancy lighting nor sound required. The hardest challenge might be in establishing that the play is a series of therapy sessions taking place over several weeks. If the brief blackouts don't do the trick, a projection indicating dates might be needed.

AT START: *Open stage except for mid-stage chair and a top, the kind with a push-down handle, resting downstage left. TERRI enters, sits in the chair. Her eyes settle on the top.*

TERRI: You must see little kids here too; you've got those toys. Do you mind if I...? (*Crosses down to the top, sits down on the floor and pushes on its handle several times. She watches it spin until it stops.*) I like tops. I don't know. They're simple. You push on them like this one, or you wind the string around them, or you twirl them with your fingers, and... off they go. No offense, but the action on that one is not great. Takes too much work. (*Goes back to the chair, sits heavily.*) Yeah, I guess so—they are like people. If you figure out the mechanism, you can wind up just about anybody. In some cases, to be honest, it's too easy. My mother, for instance.

MOTHER enters.

TERRI: Mom, do you ever have these times when you just don't feel like eating? Like it's just, why bother?

MOTHER: Theresa...

TERRI: (*Aside.*) See, right there, I know I got her. She called me Theresa, with that tone, right? The little lift of the "uh" at the end (*Demonstrating.*) TheresUH. I'm Terri, but the second she's wound up, it's TheresUH.

MOTHER: Theresa, you have been eating, haven't you? Because you know how vulnerable we women are to the false messages out there surrounding us, telling us these terrible lies about what our bodies are supposed to be. You like your body, don't you? Because there is an epidemic out there, an epidemic, of young women with eating disorders. What do you mean when you say you don't feel like eating? How long has this been going on?

TERRI: (*Aside.*) See, that doesn't even take talent. I mean, when the woman is made of buttons, it doesn't take skill to push one. (*To MOTHER.*) Mom, do you think teen pregnancy is really such a bad thing?

MOTHER: Theresa...

TERRI: (*Aside.*) TheresUH. See, this isn't even fair.

MOTHER exits. FATHER enters.

TERRI: Now, my father, on the other hand, he tends to be more of a steady guy. In fact, he prides himself on it.

FATHER: I'm a fairly steady guy.

TERRI: (*Aside.*) Or at least he claims to be.

FATHER: Nothing much sets me off. I'm what you might call even-keeled. Your mother and I complement each other in that way, you see. While she tends to be a bit... excitable, I am more the calm type.

TERRI: (*Aside.*) Which is generally true. Generally. But, if you want to wind up my father, if you want to push his particular button, I've got just the topic: money.

FATHER: And just how much is this little field trip going to cost, Terri?

TERRI: I don't know, not too much. What difference does it make?

FATHER: What difference does it make?

TERRI: (*Aside.*) Right there. That's the wind-'em-up question.

FATHER: What difference does the money make? Terri, we need to talk.

TERRI: (*Aside.*) And so he talks.

FATHER: Like it or not, money pretty much makes the world go 'round. Now, I realize that at this particular point in your life...

TERRI: (*Aside.*) Mom is kind of like that top you have over there. A few quick pushes to get her started, and she's off, but she doesn't go for long. She exhausts her energy pretty quickly. Dad, on the other hand...

FATHER: No, no, no—I think we need to revisit this topic. In fact, after supper, we're going to sit down and take a look at the monthly expenses needed to run our household.

TERRI: (*Aside.*) He's like one of those precision tops, the stainless-steel ones. You give them a spin and they go on and on and on.

FATHER: Tomorrow, we're going to talk about the job prospects for someone your age. Surprisingly enough...

TERRI: (*Aside.*) Yeah, so, if you wind up my father, you'd better be ready for a long haul.

FATHER exits.

TERRI: Yes, I know why I'm here. Do you know why you're here? Did you ever think about that, what sin you committed early in life that you might be paying for now? Or maybe you committed it in a previous life. Karma. Maybe you were a pig, and you broke out of your pen. Bad piggie. So now you're paying for it by having to sit in this little office and ask people like me questions and listen to people like me talk about what I'm talking about. Bad, bad piggie. Right, back to me. I am here because... I was naughty. *(Pause)* You know, you remind me of somebody.

Brief blackout to indicate time passing between sessions. When the lights come back on, TERRI is animated, walking around.

TERRI: My teachers, my friends, my relatives—except my grandmother. She gets all weepy. I leave her alone. But I could do it; she's as easy as my mother. My neighbors, my dog. Oh, yeah, my dog! Nobody's easier than my dog. All I have to do is grab this raggedy piece of sweater we have for him, and he's off! He's practically bouncing off the walls! My brother—piece of cake. Just have to insult [Insert name of a relevant sports figure.] or something. Anybody! Anybody and everybody! You can wind 'em all up! You just have to find their... their... mechanism! The thing that gets 'em going, right? Me? No, I don't get wound up. Do you know what's funny? I like words, right? And I didn't even think about it until just a couple days ago, but "wound" (*Rhymes with "sound"*) and "wound" (*Rhymes with "swooned"*.) are the same word—same spelling, different pronunciation. I get a kick out of that. Do I seem wound up to you? I'm not. To get wound up, see, somebody else has to be pulling the strings. That's the key. The other day, right, I'm home alone (*Sound of phone ringing.*) and this guy calls on the house phone. We still have a landline, you believe that? Hello?

VOICE: *(Off stage.)* Hello, is this Jennifer Tate?

TERRI: *(Aside.)* Immediately, I know what this is. The random phone number, the sound of other people in the background, the asking for my mother—it's a scam. But I'm bored. So... *(To VOICE.)* Yes, this is Jennifer. Who is this, please?

VOICE: I am calling from Microsoft, and we are concerned that your security has been compromised.

TERRI: Really?

VOICE: Yes. This is a very serious matter.

TERRI: It sounds like a serious matter. Can you help me?

VOICE: Yes, of course. That is why I am calling, to provide you with the help you need to solve this serious problem.

TERRI: Thank goodness. I'm always telling my husband that we need better security on our computer, gosh darn it.

VOICE: Indeed. You are right to be concerned. Are you at your computer now?

TERRI: Oh, just a second. I can be.

VOICE: I will be able, from my remote location, to aid you in removing any malware that might be on your computer as well as providing added security.

TERRI: That would be just terrific. *(Aside.)* So he's all wound up now, thinking I'm going to give him the keys to my personal computer kingdom, and he's probably going to get some sort of fat commission from whatever illegal gang he's working for, but all the time he's talking...

VOICE: Now, I am going to instruct you to go to our website. On it, you will find a place to enter a few details...

TERRI: I'm looking. I know it's around here somewhere. Aha! Top shelf, my brother's closet. *(Reaches into the wings and pulls out an air horn.)* Bingo! *(As if talking on the phone.)* Oh, yes, I see just where you mean. Are you sure it's okay to enter my social security number here? Isn't that dangerous?

VOICE: You are right to be concerned, but since I am an official representative of Microsoft and you are on our official website, this will be perfectly all right.

TERRI: If you say so. If I can't trust you, who can I trust, after all?

VOICE: Thank-you. That is correct.

TERRI: Oh, just one other thing.

VOICE: Yes, what is it?

TERRI: Screw you!

TERRI holds up the air horn and blasts it. VOICE yells in pain.

TERRI: Yeah, so that was a satisfying wind-up session. No, that wasn't very nice. But how nice was it for him to try to make me scared, to try to take advantage of me and break into my computer? He deserved it. (*Places finger on chin, as in deep thought.*) You know, when you sit there like that, with your finger on your chin... who do you remind me of? It's driving me crazy. It'll come to me.

Brief blackout. When lights come up, SARAH has entered and is onstage.

TERRI: (*Aside.*) My friends—I can get them going. Sarah? She's easy. (*To SARAH.*) You know, I'm not completely sure we wouldn't be better off going back to the way things used to be between men and women.

SARAH: What do you mean?

TERRI: (*Aside.*) You see, she's already there, already wound up. You can see in her face, her posture—she's a prairie dog on alert, right? Frozen and tense. And her "What do you mean?" That's her tell, right—just like my mother's TheresUH. That's not a question looking for information.

SARAH: What do you mean?

TERRI: (*Aside.*) That's a pretend question. It really means, "I dare you to keep going down that path." And for fun, I keep going down that path. (*To SARAH.*) Yeah, like, maybe men are just biologically designed to lead; women are biologically designed to be led.

SARAH: I cannot believe that any woman alive, not to mention a 21st century teenager, could even begin to think that what you just said is logical. Men are biologically....? Do you realize that what you said is exactly the justification men have used to keep women barefoot and pregnant and in the kitchen for centuries? Do you realize...?

TERRI: Yes, I realize. But does she realize that my point is not to make a statement about women at all? That my whole aim is just to wind her up?

SARAH: Are the exact sorts of ideas that have caused countless women to waste their lives...

SARAH exits; ERIC enters.

TERRI: No, she doesn't realize. But that's okay. I won. And then there's Eric. What? What winds me up? I think we've already talked about this. Nothing winds me up. Well, yes, it's possible, but it's a matter of choice. You just say to yourself, "Nope, never again. Nobody's going to do it to me." You have to pay attention, of course, but it's possible. Now, Eric, he doesn't pay attention, so he's highly susceptible. Just mention a girl and you've got him. *(To ERIC.)* Hey, do you know Bonnie Blake?

ERIC: Oh, sure, yeah. Yeah, I know Bonnie. Why?

TERRI: She's pretty cute, huh?

ERIC: Bonnie? Oh, yeah, well, like, yeah. She's definitely, I mean...

TERRI: She seems like your type.

ERIC: What? My...? I mean, that would be cool, but...

TERRI: I think she might think you're pretty cute, too.

ERIC: She... what? How did you, I mean, what?

TERRI: Bonnie.

ERIC: Yeah, right, Bonnie. I mean, did she say something to you?

TERRI: She says things to me every day.

ERIC: About me?

TERRI: Could be.

ERIC: Do you mean she...? I mean, like, I don't.... I mean, I never thought that....

TERRI: *(Aside.)* Isn't this great? He's like popcorn on a hot griddle.

ERIC: She's... she did? Bonnie? She is cute. I mean, she's definitely, like, even more than that. But she... she said stuff about me? Wow. Do you think I should...? I mean, I don't want to.... I mean, Bonnie? Wow. Wow!

ERIC exits; JANA enters.

TERRI: And he's off to fantasy-land. And then there's Jana. *(To JANA.)* Do we have a test in Bio today?

JANA: Wait, what? A test? I didn't hear about that. What do you mean, you think there's going to be a test? What's it going to be about? I didn't hear about a test. Did you? Where did you hear about it? When did she tell us? She can't just give us a test without giving us a reminder. Are you kidding? You're kidding. You are kidding, right? I always write down when we're going to have a test, and I don't have anything written down for today, so there's definitely not going to be a test. Is there? Because if there is, I am absolutely going to complain, because giving a test without warning is so against the rules. I can't believe this. I just cannot believe this.

JANA exits.

TERRI: (*Aside.*) Out of time already? That was quick. Sometimes, time just zips by like, like a zipper, you know? Other times, it's... That's my homework, huh, the last time I can remember being wound up? Fair enough.

Blackout. When the lights come back up, TERRI is sitting cross-legged, fiddling with the top.

TERRI: My Uncle Harvey, he collects tops. Or he used to, anyway. I haven't seen him in a long time. He had hundreds of them, all kinds, from all over the world. I remember this one time, I was about seven years old, he took out a bunch of his tops.

UNCLE HARVEY: (*Carrying a box.*) How many of these do you think I can get going at once?

TERRI: (*As a seven-year-old.*) Um... four!

UNCLE HARVEY: Four? Only four?

TERRI: Five!

UNCLE HARVEY pantomimes taking tops out of the box and placing them out on the stage.

UNCLE HARVEY: I don't know, Theresa; you don't have much faith in me.

TERRI: I like to be called Terri now, Uncle Harvey.

UNCLE HARVEY: And I like to be called Sir Harvey, King Top-Spinner of the Universe.

TERRI: That's kind of long.

UNCLE HARVEY: And Terri is kind of short, but I shall try to remember, from this day forward, that you are Terri and not Theresa.

TERRI: Thank-you, Sir Harvey, King Top-Spinner of the World.

UNCLE HARVEY: Actually, it's universe, but let's just stick to Uncle Harvey anyway. All righty, kiddo, have you been keeping track? How many have I put out here?

TERRI: Um... 10, 11... 12! You can't do 12 at once, Uncle Harvey.

UNCLE HARVEY: Is that so, Miss Terri? Is that absolutely, positively so, Miss Terri-Theresa-Terri-essa?

TERRI: You can't do twelve, Mr. Uncle Harvey-Smarvey of the Universe.

UNCLE HARVEY: Well, you'd better give me a ready-set-go because I am about to show you something amazing, Miss Terri!

TERRI: Ready?

UNCLE HARVEY: Oh, yeah.

TERRI: Set?

UNCLE HARVEY: Gimme the go; gimme the go!

TERRI: Go!

UNCLE HARVEY pantomimes going from top to top, getting them spinning.

TERRI: *(Aside.)* And then, he did it—he ran from top to top, spinning and pushing and twirling just as fast as he could. It was crazy. It was hilarious!

UNCLE HARVEY ad libs huffing and puffing and yelling how he's going to do it, he's going to do it, while TERRI ad libs "No you're not, no you're not," "That one's falling," "You're never going to make it," etc. After several seconds, TERRI ends up laughing uncontrollably and UNCLE HARVEY sprints out on the floor, pretending to be exhausted.

UNCLE HARVEY: Did you see that? I did it! I had them all going! A dozen simultaneously spinning tops, Theresa, Terri, whoever you are!

TERRI: No, you didn't!

UNCLE HARVEY: I didn't, huh? Well, I'm gonna spin you, you little Terri-top!

UNCLE HARVEY runs over and tickles TERRI. She screams and laughs some more. After a few seconds, UNCLE HARVEY exits, taking the box. TERRI watches him exit.

TERRI: Yeah, that was a great memory. I should go see him again sometime, Uncle Harvey. He really did get a dozen of them going at once. I wonder if he still has all those tops. I wonder.... *(Trails off.)* Oh, nothing. I just wonder why he did that, why he took the time to entertain me, to make me laugh like that. I mean, it's not like I was even his daughter—he had three of his own, my cousins. What was in it for him?

Blackout.

TERRI: Oh, yeah, the homework. We never got to it last time. Yeah, I've thought about it. Of course I've been wound up; it happens to everyone. But that was back before I paid attention. Even you have been, I bet. I mean, granted, you're pretty—there's a good word for what you are—unflappable! You're pretty unflappable, but I bet even you get wound up. What gets you going? Oh, right—we're not here for that. Let's see, the last time I was.... *(Pauses, gets distant, tears up slightly.)* What? Oh, just now, what was happening for me? *(Adopting a pseudo-intellectual tone, perhaps with a British accent.)* Well, I was deeply focused on your question, you see, and found myself contemplating a time a few months in the past, when, much to the surprise of both myself and my traveling companions, we encountered... really? You don't like that shtick? I thought it was decent shtick. It was a bit of selfie shtick. That was good! Selfie shtick is a decent pun, you have to admit. When was I last wound up? It's been a while. I have been in the winding position, shall we say, for quite some time now. That's why I'm here, right? Because

I've been making trouble, making waves. Because I used to be a good little soldier, all march here and march there and yes sir and yes ma'am and hop to it and finish this and finish that and on to the next required task. I was very good at being very good, very predictable, very people-pleasing, grade-grubbing, very lovely and staid and set-the-table proper, don't you know? Salad fork there, dessert spoon there, goblet placed just so. I was like that, like a nice place setting at the table, and when people needed to reach for me, I was there. Easily found, easily wound. Easily... (*The following word should rhyme with "pounded."*) ...wounded.

Blackout. When the lights come up, four teachers, TEACHER 1, TEACHER 2, TEACHER 3, TEACHER 4 have entered and are onstage.

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