

DAN O'BRIEN

## Newtown

*For the children.*

EDITORS' NOTE: *Newtown* is commissioned by American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and the Public Theater. This excerpt consists of the play's first act. Punctuation and capitalization choices indicate rhythm and pacing.

Characters:

NANCY (52)

ADAM (20)

Place & Time:

I: A house. December 14, 2012.

II: The White House.

I: ADAM'S MOTHER

---

NANCY: Adam. Why won't you speak? You're dwindling away to nothing. You don't eat. You sleep half the day. At least I think you're sleeping in your room. What else could you be doing in there? You tell me. On your computer, I suppose. Playing games that teach you things like how to insert a new magazine before the first magazine is empty by ejecting with the hand that's holding the Glock 20 G3 or what have you, while simultaneously preparing with your free hand the fully loaded mag before insertion. Click, click. Now that skill, which you may or may not know is known as

the Tactical Reload, is exactly  
the sort of thing a Green Beret or cop  
knows how to do. My brother, your uncle,  
he could teach you. And I approve of that  
skill, learning it. But I cannot condone  
violence. As you know. All this easy talk  
of death. How you exclaim, I died! I'm dead!  
and then just press a button and begin  
again. It's a fantasy. Remember  
how you used to like theatre? Rehearsing  
your expressions in front of the mirror  
for hours on end. You were sociable once,  
in your way. What happened? I know you hate  
sunlight on your skin. It burns and itches  
and makes your eyes ache. So I tape trash bags  
all over your windows. I am nothing  
if not accommodating, submitting  
to your every whim. I try not to touch  
doorknobs, don't wear high heels, and never lean  
against anything because you've told me  
you find it improper. For some reason.  
There's something of the Puritan in you,  
isn't there, Adam? Ha ha ha! Even  
me homeschooling you was in order to  
protect you, your mind. But you act as if  
you don't need any help. You like to claim  
you taught yourself chemistry, but I know  
your father did. And you have to admit  
you learned a few things from me. History  
is my *métier*, as you know. Why life  
happens as it does. What circumstances  
bring us to this time and place. How to change  
circumstances in order to avoid  
their repetition. If we can. Now, when  
I was your age, I wanted to grow up  
to be Joan Didion or somebody

equally thin, this kind of chain-smoking  
intellectual. But circumstances  
changed. And here we are. Can you tell me how  
this has occurred? What has brought us to this  
time and place? Because you used to go out  
when you were young. You used to like hiking  
with your father through the mountain forests  
of New England. Used to enjoy going  
to Red Sox games with me. Now most children  
would be overjoyed to have a mother  
who's a rabid baseball fan, but not you  
anymore. Apparently. We could go  
shooting. How about that. You love shooting  
with me at the gun range. Just say the word  
and we'll go this morning! We can dust off  
the old .45. Or your .22  
-caliber Savage Mark II rifle or  
my Glock 20, or your Sig Sauer, or  
we could chew through some ammo with our new  
AR-15 semiautomatic  
.223-caliber Bushmaster  
XM-15. I mean you're certified,  
aren't you? Why go through the rigmarole  
of those NRA classes if you won't  
go shooting anymore? Remember how  
good it feels holding a gun? so heavy  
and cold. Till you tickle the trigger and  
pop like a pulse. Wouldn't you like to feel  
alive again? Not cooped up inside here  
with your sick mother. —Now I won't tell you  
what's wrong with me, I won't do that to you.  
But as you know, it is a disorder  
affecting my movements. I won't tell you  
the gory details, but it's genetic,  
I carry in my blood the DNA  
of our family disease. It's a matter

of time, they tell me. I'm sorry. I hope  
you'll be spared, Adam. We should test your blood  
when you're ready. And still I go outside  
when I am able. And do you know why?  
I need to survive, I need to stay here  
in the world of the living. In order  
to teach you how to live when I am gone.