

Jade

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a short play

By

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Characters

CRAIG – a High School English teacher

BRYAN – the Principal

Time

Afternoon.

Setting

Craig's office.

Jade

Craig's office. Cluttered, untidy.

CRAIG, sits behind his desk, marking some papers.

After sometime **BRYAN**, enters, without knocking.

BRYAN: ... You're here?

CRAIG: Yes.

BRYAN: What are you doing ?

CRAIG: Marking.

BRYAN: I thought you'd be at home.

CRAIG: No. I'm here.

BEAT.

BRYAN: They're on their way.

CRAIG: Thanks for letting me know. (BEAT) Can I help you?

BRYAN: I just thought I'd come and ...

CRAIG: Tidy up?

BRYAN: It's been awhile since I've been in here. I was unsure what I'd find.

CRAIG: Some kiddie-porn on the walls.

BRYAN: How can you be so blasé ?

CRAIG: How else would you like me to be ?

BEAT.

BRYAN: I think I came in here looking for ...

CRAIG: What?

BRYAN: Answers. (BEAT) Craig – we are friends.

CRAIG: Thanks for acknowledging that.

BRYAN: And I'm trying to understand how my friend – my good friend – could ...

CRAIG: Do what he's done.

BRYAN: *Alleged* to have done. (BEAT) Are you sure you wouldn't rather be at home?

CRAIG: And be arrested in front of my wife and child? Much rather they arrest me here.

BRYAN: Poor Katherine. How will she ...

CRAIG: I'm not sure.

BEAT. **CRAIG** CONTINUES MARKING.

BRYAN: I wish you would stop that.

CRAIG: They need to be marked. Some of them are quite good actually. The romantic period of Keats.

BRYAN: I supposed that's going to be your excuse. Romance, love.

CRAIG: Love – no. (LAUGHS) Not love.

BRYAN: You're laughing ?

CRAIG: It's funny so I'm laughing. Then I guess when you find yourself in the position I find myself in – you don't know why you do anything any more.

BRYAN: Or did?

CRAIG: No. I know exactly why I did what I did.

BRYAN: So you don't deny it?

CRAIG: Is there any point?

BRYAN: You committed this act on school grounds. They have security cameras. How could you be so ...

- CRAIG: You were going to say 'stupid' but that doesn't quite cover it does it? (BEAT) Is she ...
- BRYAN: The student in question has been taken home by her parents. Unfortunately she'll have to go undergo a full barrage of tests. If she hasn't been through enough already.
- CRAIG: I'm sorry to hear that.
- BRYAN: Not as sorry as you will be.
- CRAIG: Or am.
- BRYAN: Craig – she's ...
- CRAIG: Age can be deceptive.
- BRYAN: Try to rationalise it all you like – but I can not understand why a teacher in my school, a friend, could do something so hideous – so unspeakable. (SUDDENLY) Is this the first time? I desperately hope this is the first time.
- CRAIG: The first and only.
- BRYAN: You can't say that though, can you? People like you. You can't help yourself.
- CRAIG: Bryan – I'm not a paedophile.
- BRYAN: Jade Robinson is twelve years old!
- CRAIG: So you keep saying.

BEAT. **CRAIG** PICKS UP A PIECE OF PAPER ON HIS DESK.

- CRAIG: (READING) "Sweat on your forehead
Glistening in the creases of your skin
Your eyes wary
Look at me
Why won't you look at me?
I hunger for you.
For your gaze
Your scent
Your touch
You can not escape me."

CRIAG: (CONT) It's beautiful, don't you think ?

BRYAN: Did you write that about her? Sick.

CRAIG SHAKES HIS HEAD. BEAT.

BRYAN: Don't you - is that your defence? A mixed up little twelve year old gets a crush and writes you a tawdry little poem so you ...

CRAIG: (SMILING) Take advantage of her?

BRYAN: This isn't a joke Craig. And if I were you I'd stop treating it as one. The court looks very coldly on unrepentant souls.

CRAIG: I imagine they aren't going to look too warmly on me already.

BRYAN: Then don't make it any worse. Admit what you've done and accept your punishment.

CRAIG: I'm happy to do that.

BRYAN: So you acknowledge what you've done is wrong?

CRAIG: Completely. I was the adult, I had the duty of care - Jade was vulnerable, 'mixed up', she came to me and I should've turned her away.

BRYAN: Referred her to a female teacher. Followed school protocol.

CRAIG: You know what it was about? You'll find this funny.

BRYAN: Nothing about this is funny.

CRAIG: Corey. Corey Turner. Greasy little shit.

BRYAN: What does Corey Turner have to do with this?

CRAIG: He knocked her back. Can you believe it? He said no to Jade.

BRYAN: She tried to seduce him.

CRAIG: God no. She wouldn't know how to. She liked him and in a foolish moment of honesty she told him. You know what he said: "Fuck off." "Fuck off slag" and then told the rest of the class. Jade was devastated.

BRYAN: That's unfortunate.

CRAIG: So she came to my office.

BRYAN: When was this?

CRAIG: Three weeks ago. Lunchtime. She was crying. She didn't have a hankie so I put up my hand to wipe away a tear from her cheek –

BRYAN: Male staff may not make physical contact with female students – under any circumstance.

CRAIG: I know. But she was crying – so vulnerable, so delicate.

BRYAN: Please Craig. This is inappropriate.

CRAIG: I'm just trying to make you understand.

BRYAN: I'm not sure I *want* to understand.

CRAIG: Or are you scared that maybe you will understand?

BEAT. **BRYAN** IS SILENT.

CRAIG: She was sitting there. Right beside the window – and she was crying – and I put out my hand to wipe away a tear and my fingers brushed her lips. Just brushed them – the slightest touch. Those moist, soft lips. And this shock went straight through my body – this red hot surge of energy, of adrenaline, of something – and when I looked back it wasn't Jade sitting there anymore. Not this timid little girl. It was this beautiful, young woman – sitting before me, looking deep into my eyes, my very being.

BRYAN: A stunning transformation. What did you do?

CRAIG: I asked her to leave.

BRYAN: As you should – and then you should've come and reported it straight to me.

CRAIG: And that was my mistake. But I was embarrassed. Ashamed. I couldn't tell you or Katherine or anybody. I just tried to forget it but the image of her sitting there – her lips, her eyes – I just couldn't get it out of my head. I thought about asking you to remove her from my class but that wouldn't be fair to Jade. She had done nothing wrong. So I took a week off.

BRYAN: Katherine said it was flu.

CRAIG: I thought if I stayed away for a week I'd come to my senses. I'd forget that stupid moment in my office. Forget all about Jade.

BRYAN: Have things between you and Katherine been –

CRAIG: No no. Same as always.

BRYAN: Then why did you develop this ...?

CRAIG: Attraction ?

BRYAN: Sounds more like obsession.

CRAIG: I don't know. I ask myself that again and again. But I've never felt anything like that before. Ever. With Katherine, with any woman. I wish I could make you understand. This awesome wonder.

BRYAN: Is this some kind of sordid justification?

CRAIG: No. Not a justification. Nothing can ever justify what I've done. What I have done is wrong – wrong! I deserve to be punished for what I've done. I must be punished. (BEAT) I came back to school the next week – desperately hoping, praying that I had returned to normal.

BRYAN: I'm sorry. I don't think I can listen to anymore of this.

CRAIG: Please Bryan. Let me finish.

BRYAN: Elena – your daughter - is eleven years old.

CRAIG: You don't think I thought of that. Used that. Kept reminding myself – trying to make myself realise how deeply wrong what I was experiencing was – but the

CRAIG: (CONT) minute I walked back into that class and saw Jade sitting beside the window – I was back in this office a week earlier. She looked at me and smiled, just a little. Her lips parted. It was like a drug, some kind of incredible overpowering smack coursing through my whole body. I knew I couldn't continue. I somehow got through the class. Then I came back to my office and began to type up my resignation. It's right here on my computer. I saved it. Dated three days ago. I was just about to finish and email it to you and there was a faint knock on the door. So soft I almost didn't hear it. I wish I hadn't heard it. I said: "Come in." The door opened. It was Jade – and in her hand she held this poem.

BRYAN: Please Craig. That is enough. I don't want to hear -

CRAIG: Let me finish. You have to let me finish. She asked me if I was feeling better. I said – "Yes", and then she told me she'd written me the poem. She came towards my desk. She held out the piece of paper. I wanted her to put it on the desk, just put it on the desk. I knew that if I touched her hand I wouldn't be able to – "Please just put it on the desk!" But she just held it in her small trembling hand, waited for me to take it. I reached out my hand, brushed her fingers – and I was lost. The surge went through my body – twice, ten times stronger than before. I was powerless. It felt like somebody else was controlling my limbs, my body, my mouth. I was still there but no longer in control. I took her in my arms.

BRYAN: Please Craig. I can not listen to this.

CRAIG: She melted, just melted into my skin. And then suddenly I was kissing her neck, her ears – those lips. Those sweet soft red lips. And then I was taking off her clothes. I was undressing her. A voice in my head was screaming: "Stop. This is wrong" but my hands kept moving. I knew what I was about to do was unforgivable, evil – but at that moment I didn't care. I didn't care about anything else. Not Katherine, not Elena, not my career, not the school, not even Jade – I had to have her. I lifted Jade up on to the desk, ripped down my pants and I ... I ... (BEAT) Sometime later – was it five seconds later, five minutes - I heard a voice and suddenly it was like waking from a dream. I opened my eyes to see this child's face in front of me screaming

CRIAG: (CONT) out in pain – “Mr Barratt. Stop – please stop!” – and in that instant I realised what I was doing. I let my hands go and Jade quickly gathered her clothes together and ran out the door.

SILENCE.

BRYAN: It was the blood. Jade’s mother saw it on the kitchen floor. At first she thought Jade must have cut herself. She went to her bedroom and found Jade huddling under the covers, crying. She removed the sheet and saw the blood. At first she thought it might have been Jade’s first menstrual cycle. She soon realised it was something else. (BEAT) Jade refused to say anything. Implicate you in anyway. At first we thought it had been one of the male students – then the security began reviewing the tapes.

BEAT.

CRAIG: Is she alright?

BRYAN: She’s badly traumatised and the physical injuries will take some time to heal. It’s difficult to know how lasting the psychological damage will be. She’s young – perhaps ...

CRAIG: Maybe in time she will heal, she will forget. Something good will come of this.

BRYAN: Nothing good can come from this! (BEAT) The police will be here shortly. I’ll leave you to collect your thoughts.

BEAT. **BRYAN** BEGINS TO LEAVE.

BRYAN: You’re not thinking of ...

CRAIG: Running ? How can I escape from this. (BEAT) I will go to prison.

BRYAN: Even without Jade’s testimony there’s the physical evidence and the security footage. Jade coming into your office and leaving.

CRAIG: I know what they do to men like me in prison.

BRYAN: You could try to concoct something.

CRAIG: No. It's what I deserve.

BRYAN OPENS THE DOOR.

BRYAN: Try to live through this. I know it will be hard but try.
When it's over Katherine and Elena will need you.
(BEAT) And Craig – good luck.

CRAIG: Thank you Bryan.

BRYAN EXITS.

CRAIG ALONE. HE PICKS UP THE POEM.

THE LIGHTS FADE.