

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

SEVEN SHORT PLAYS

BY

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ONE

A SCHOOL STAFF ROOM.

TWO DOORS, ONE TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, ONE TO THE KITCHEN.

SHEILA AND MILES ARE SITTING IN ARMCHAIRS SET AROUND A LOW TABLE. THERE IS ONE EMPTY CHAIR. MILES IS DOING A CROSSWORD, SHEILA IS READING A CELEBRITY MAGAZINE.

SHEILA: I have no idea who any of these people are. (PAUSE.) Genuinely. Not the foggiest.(PAUSE.) I mean, what are they for? (PAUSE.) Why am I supposed to care if she's got wonky toes or that she sweated a bit in a nightclub?

MILES: Over-exposed.

SHEILA: They certainly are.

MILES: (LOOKS UP.) Pardon?

SHEILA: This lot.

MILES: What?

SHEILA: Over-exposed.

MILES: No. 'Does pox ever upset those who are too familiar?' Nine down. Anagram. 'Does pox ever', upset. Do you see?

SHEILA: No. I was talking about this lot.

MILES: Sorry. I wasn't listening.

SHEILA: That's alright. Neither was I.

PAUSE.

SHEILA: I'll tell you what's really depressing. This lot are virtually indistinguishable from year eleven. I would never have dressed like that when I was their age. Brown Owl wouldn't have stood for it. (PAUSE.) I had proper role models then. Heroic types with a bit of mystery about them. (PAUSE.) I mean, if Edith Cavell had pierced nipples she kept them to herself. (PAUSE.) Sometimes it feels as if the battle's

already lost. What's the point in trying to educate a generation whose idea of career advancement is to wank a footballer.

MILES: Pardon?

SHEILA: And then I think, no, we mustn't give up on them. They deserve better than to be written off and fed on a diet of pap.

PAUSE.

MILES: Sorry, did you just say that one of the year elevens had wanked a footballer?

SHEILA: What?

MILES: Becky Milligan, I bet. Wouldn't surprise me. Have you seen the skirts she wears? Little more than belts.

SHEILA: Miles! You can't talk about the pupils like that.

MILES: But I thought you said..

SHEILA: No! God.

MILES: Sorry.

SHEILA: No. You've given me the creeps a bit, Miles. You shouldn't be thinking about Becky like that.

MILES: I'm not! God, no. She terrifies me. Most of them terrify me, to be honest. They may not be able to spell or count, but they know more about life than I ever have.

SHEILA: That's not all that difficult, though, is it?

MILES: True. But, I mean, take Becky, for instance..

SHEILA: Miles, where are you going with this?

MILES: ..she could be any age between thirteen and thirty. She's completely..you know..and all that make up. I mean, it's hardly surprising that some people get into trouble.

SHEILA: Yes it is. It doesn't matter how old they are, pupils are a no-go area.

MILES: I know that, but what if you meet them socially? How are you supposed to know then?

SHEILA: Big problem for you, is it, Miles? Young girls throwing themselves at you.

MILES: No. Thank God. It's a great comfort to know that in the whole history of teacher-pupil love affairs, no-one has ever wanted to sleep with a physics teacher.

SHEILA: In the whole history of love affairs full-stop, I would have thought.

MILES: That's a very wounding remark, Sheila. The fact that it happens to be true only makes it doubly so. Can I let you into a little secret?

SHEILA: If you think it's wise.

MILES: Every morning, the physics department gets together and thanks God for providing the economics department for us to look down on.

A BELL RINGS.

SHEILA: Break time. Thank God I didn't waste another free period.

SHE TAKES AN APPLE FROM HER BAG AND STARTS TO EAT IT. SHE RETURNS TO HER MAGAZINE AND MILES GOES BACK TO HIS CROSSWORD.

TERRY ENTERS WITH A GREAT FLURRY OF ENERGY, AND SLAMS HIS BRIEFCASE DOWN.

TERRY: I swear I'll swing for that little fucker.

THEY IGNORE HIM. HE EXITS TO THE KITCHEN.

TERRY: (OFF.) I say I'll swing for that little fucker.

SHEILA AND MILES GLANCE AT EACH OTHER AND ROLL THEIR EYES. TERRY ENTERS WITH A MUG OF TEA. HE JOINS THEM AND SITS.

SHEILA: Not for me, thanks.

SILENCE.

TERRY: Did you hear what I said?

SHEILA: You're going to swing for a little fucker. Miles, I think Terry wants you to ask him which little fucker.

MILES: Sorry, Terry, actually that's my mug. I'd really rather...

TERRY: Jenkins in 8C. Little fucker.

SHEILA: He's quite a big fucker. Taller than Miles.

MILES: Terry, really...

TERRY: Fucking little sociopath.

MILES: Terry, I'm sorry, but I don't want you to use my mug.

TERRY: For fuck's sake, Miles. There are children all over the world who die never having known what it's like to have a full belly, or wear shoes, or see the sea. Children who have never held a book, or seen a film, or tasted an apple. Our school, meanwhile, is packed full of overfed, ungrateful, ignorant little fuckers who really would be vastly improved by death. But does any of this matter? Does it fuck. Sound the alarms. Someone is using Miles's mug.

TERRY DRINKS.

MILES: Actually, Terry, my wife bought me that mug when we were on our honeymoon. Shortly after she bought it, she posed for a photograph, standing on a rock beside some rapids. The rains had come early to the mountains that year, although we didn't know that. She's smiling in the photograph, oblivious to the wall of water which swept her away, seconds after I took the picture. I still have it in my wallet, if you'd like to see it.

TERRY: No. It's fine.

TERRY PICKS UP THE MUG AND TAKES IT TO THE KITCHEN. SHEILA LEANS OVER AND PUTS HER HAND ON MILES' ARM.

SHEILA: Miles, that's a really sad story.

MILES: Yes.

SHEILA: It's bollocks, isn't it?

MILES: Total bollocks. Never been married in my life.
Can't even get a girlfriend.

SHEILA: That's what I thought.

MILES: Thanks.

SHEILA: I didn't mean...

MILES: I don't suppose there's any chance..?

SHEILA: Don't be ridiculous.

TERRY ENTERS WITH A DIFFERENT MUG.

TERRY: There. Happy now?

MILES: Yes. Thank you, Terry. It's all I have left of her,
you see. Her body was never found.

TERRY: (NOT SURE IF HE'S BEING WOUND UP.) Yes. Well. Best
not to dwell on it, eh?

SILENCE.

TERRY: My only consolation is that that little fucker will
spend the best part of his adult life in prison. I
might become a prison officer, and make his life as
miserable as he's making mine.

MILES: I should think you'd make a good prison officer.

TERRY: I don't know why they don't just imprison the whole
of 8C. It'd be cheaper than keeping them in school,
and save a lot of trouble in the long run.

SHEILA: Why not flog them?

TERRY: Sheila, I know you're trying to wind me up, but I
would dearly love to flog Jenkins until the little
fucker begged me to stop.

SHEILA: Have you met his father? Very big man. Done time
for GBH. Still, I'm sure he'd be no match for our
Head of English.

TERRY: That's the trouble. Like father like fucking son.
They're a pair of fat-necked thugs.

SHEILA: Exactly, Terry. He's a product of his background. He's been bullied and beaten at home; he needs nurturing and encouraging at school.

TERRY: Oh Jesus. Here we go.

SHEILA: No, I'm serious, Terry. I think he's been misunderstood.

TERRY: Misunderfuckingstood, my arse.

SHEILA: Have you ever stopped to consider that our job is not to shout and swear and condemn, but to try, however hard it may be, to unlock their potential.

TERRY: What potential? You tell me what potential a violent, foul-mouthed ape like Jenkins could possibly have.

MILES: He could become Head of English.

PAUSE.

TERRY: Fuck off, Miles.

SHEILA: You're such a wanker, Terry. How dare you write off your pupils without lifting a finger to try and help? I think that deep down, Jenkins is a good kid. Anyone you hate that much must have something going for him.

PAUSE.

TERRY: Sheila, are you shagging him?

SHEILA: You shit. You fucking shit. How dare you speak to me like that.

TERRY: Oh, yeah, that's right. The Berlin Wall was still standing when you had your last orgasm.

MILES STANDS UP.

MILES: You apologise..

TERRY: Sheila, do call off your little white knight before he knocks himself out.

SHEILA LAUNCHES HERSELF AT TERRY, KNOCKING MILES OVER IN THE PROCESS. SHE RAINS BLOWS ON TERRY, WHILE HE DEFENDS HIMSELF, LAUGHING. A BELL RINGS AND THEY STOP. MILES PICKS HIMSELF UP.

TERRY: Right. Better go and unlock some potential. See you at lunch.

HE GOES. MILES APPROACHES SHEILA AND TRIES TO COMFORT HER.

MILES: Sheila...

SHEILA: Oh don't be such a drip. I'm alright.

MILES: But...

SHEILA: What are you going to do about it? He'd eat you for breakfast. Now go and bore some children.

HE GOES. SHEILA SLOWLY SINKS INTO A CHAIR AND WEEPS.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK.

SEVEN

A PUB. TWO TABLES AND A FEW STOOLS.
MILES SITS AT ONE, NURSING HALF A PINT
OF BITTER.

SHEILA ENTERS CARRYING TWO GINS AND TONIC.
SHE SITS AT THE OTHER TABLE, PUTS HER
CHANGE IN HER HANDBAG, AND DOWNS ONE OF
THE DRINKS IN ONE GO.

MILES: Hello Sheila.

SHEILA: What? Oh God. Miles. Didn't notice you.

MILES: Thought I'd better get in quickly. Avoid the rush.

SHEILA: Good idea. I should have got another one in. (PAUSE.)
You're going to town.

MILES: Pardon?

SHEILA: A whole half. Steady. You're not going to get hog-
whimpering drunk and start waving your cock about,
are you?

MILES: No, I..

SHEILA: No. I know you're not.

PAUSE. THEY DRINK, SHEILA DEEPLY, MILES
JUST A SIP.

SHEILA: You know what? I've just noticed something really
depressing.

MILES: Oh? What?

SHEILA: This shit heap of a pub smells exactly like the staff
room.

SHE FINISHES HER DRINK.

SHEILA: Same again?

MILES: Oh, I'd better not.

SHEILA: Oh go on. Knock yourself out.

MILES: That's the trouble. I probably will.

SHEILA: That's more like it.

SHE GOES. MILES TAKES A SIP OF HIS BEER.
TERRY ENTERS.

TERRY: Fuck me. You don't hang around.

MILES: I wanted to beat the rush.

TERRY: Well done. Same again.

MILES: No. Thank you. It's fine.

TERRY: Wasn't a question, Miles. Did you detect a hint of an interrogative upward inflection?

MILES: No.

TERRY: No.

MILES: Thing is..

TERRY: Fuck off, Miles. You're having a drink with me. Back in a minute. Just need a quick chat with the new Head of English.

HE GOES.

MILES: Right. What?

HE SHAKES HIS HEAD AND TAKES A SIP OF BEER. SHEILA COMES BACK WITH A HALF FOR MILES AND THREE GINS AND TONIC FOR HER. HE LOOKS SLIGHTLY ASKANCE.

SHEILA: What? This is an investment in my future.

MILES: Terry's here.

SHEILA: How many units does the Chief Medical Officer say is too many for a woman?

MILES: I don't know.

SHEILA: Nobody does. The bastard keeps changing it. No normal person can keep track of it. That's why I thought you might know.

MILES: I should think that five G & Ts might be..

SHEILA: They're doubles.

MILES: I think that might be close to the limit.

SHEILA: My liver's probably already the size of the Gucci handbag I'll never be able to afford. Fuck it. (SHE DRINKS.)

MILES: He said something about talking to the new Head of English.

SHEILA: What?

MILES: Terry.

SHEILA: No, don't try and cheer me up.

PAUSE.

MILES: Anyway. Good health.

THEY RAISE THEIR GLASSES AND DRINK.

SHEILA: It's not just me, is it?

MILES: No. No. Definitely not.

SHE DRINKS.

SHEILA: What?

MILES: Pardon?

SHEILA: What isn't just me?

MILES: Er..what you said.

SHEILA: I didn't.

MILES: Right. No.

SHEILA: So why did you agree with me?

MILES: Well, I hope you won't mind me saying this, Sheila, but over the years we've shared a staff room, I've realized that it's generally just easier to agree with you.

SHEILA: Am I really such a monster?

MILES: No, it's not that.

SHEILA: Is it that you're totally spineless?

MILES: No. It's just that you're a strong-willed woman..

SHEILA: And you're a weak-willed man.

MILES: ..and I prefer a quiet life.

SHEILA: I must say, that's really very pathetic. Do you live with your mother?

MILES: (RISING.) I don't think I'll finish this.

SHEILA: Oh sit down.

HE DOES.

SHEILA: It's hard enough to like most of the kids as it is. Why do we have to meet their bloody awful parents? God knows, I try to give the kids the benefit of the doubt, but it's very hard not to get a bit Daily Mail when you see where they've come from. Half the parents harangue me for teaching French in the first place. "Why are my children wasting their time learning French?" I want to say, "They're not. They're wasting their time picking their noses and looking out of the window."

MILES: It's not just you.

SHEILA: The ones that really get on my tits, though, are the ones who demand to know why we're still on 'Cosette sur la plage' when their little darlings have been reading Racine since they were potty-trained. People who assume that you're only a secondary school teacher because you can't hold down a proper job. Although in your case I expect that's true.

MILES: Of course, your trouble is that you teach French.

SHEILA: What?

MILES: We don't have that problem. I rather enjoy Parent's Evenings.

SHEILA: You do live with your mother, don't you?

MILES: All we have to do is say, "Your child is exceptionally gifted and I can see a bright future for them as a teacher of physics, but they will need

a lot of help and support from you with their homework". You can see the colour drain from their faces. Can't get away quick enough.

ENTER TERRY, CARRYING A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE AND THREE GLASSES. HE PLONKS THEM DOWN ON SHEILA'S TABLE AND SITS.

TERRY: Sheila, you have never looked lovelier.

SHEILA: You're drunk.

TERRY: That is why you have never looked lovelier.

MILES: I didn't know they did champagne in here.

TERRY: There are more things in heaven and earth, Miles than are dreamt of in your fucking philosophy. Even this shit-pit can pull out the stops on high days and holidays.

SHEILA: It's called Nollinger. Do you think it's safe?

TERRY: At six quid a bottle, fucking lethal, I should think.

SHEILA: So what are we celebrating? You haven't finally got the sack, have you?

TERRY: I have not. I have merely come to the realization that the world of secondary education does not deserve me. Shall I be mother?

HE POURS.

SHEILA: What have you done?

TERRY: I have given several of the best years of my life to attempting to drum a love of our rich language and literary heritage into the skulls of imbeciles. Well, no more. That's it. Chapter closed.

SHEILA: So you're resigning, then.

TERRY: If I get in first.

SHEILA: What *have* you done?

TERRY: Jenkins in 8C. You're right, by the way. He is a big fella, Jenkins senior.

SHEILA: Oh God.

TERRY: I just told him that his son is a chip off the old block. What father wouldn't want to hear that?

SHEILA: In so many words?

TERRY: Not exactly one hundred per cent. No.

PAUSE. THEY WAIT.

MILES: It can't have been that bad.

TERRY: I said, "Mr Jenkins, your son is an ignorant cunt, and so are you."

HE DRINKS.

TERRY: This is fucking disgusting.

HE DRAINS HIS GLASS, POURS ANOTHER, AND DRINKS AGAIN.

MILES: What did he say?

TERRY: Do you seriously imagine that I stuck around long enough to find out?

SHEILA: What a bloody stupid thing to do.

TERRY: Here we go.

SHEILA: I bet it felt good.

TERRY: You have no idea.

SHEILA: God, I envy you.

MILES: What will you do now? About a job, I mean.

TERRY: Don't piss on my chips, Miles. Tomorrow morning, when I wake up with the motherfucker of all hangovers, there will be time enough for desperate self-loathing and regret. For now, wankered as I am, please allow me a moment of triumph, however fleeting it may prove to be. And please drink some of this shit. Six quid is a lot of money for a jobless man with no prospects.

THEY DRINK. MILES WINCES.

SHEILA: Jesus Christ.

PAUSE.

SHEILA: May I be frank?

TERRY: Fuck me, Miles. This must be serious. I've never known her to ask before. You normally just wade right in.

SHEILA: It's a special occasion. I never have to see your smug, arrogant, ugly face again, unless I choose to, which I won't, ever. You're a cock, Terry, a complete, twenty-two carat, bona fide cock. This is not a conclusion which I've come to slowly..

TERRY: To which I've come.

SHEILA: Fuck you. I thought you were a cock from the very first moment I met you, and how you ever managed to get appointed Head of Department in what is, to be fair, a reasonably good school, will forever be beyond me. You're a sexist pig, your attitude to the children is contemptible, you're a foul-mouthed bully..

TERRY: Sheila, I'm not going to fuck you. It doesn't matter how nicely you ask me.

SHEILA: ..you're disgusting, overweight, and your breath stinks. But still. I admire you.

TERRY: You what?

SHEILA: I wouldn't have done what you did, he (INDICATES MILES.) couldn't have done what you did, and you shouldn't have done what you did. Nonetheless, I'm glad you did. It's about time somebody told the truth at Parent's Evening. When you think of all the time and energy we spend making silk purses out of sow's ears, well, thank God for someone being brave enough to say, "You know what? This particular sow's ear is a horse's arse."

TERRY: Nicely put.

SHEILA: So well done you.

TERRY: Thank you.

SHEILA: And you're going to lose your job over it. A win-win if ever there was one.

TERRY: There's a woman lives next door to me. Great fat arse she's got, bottle-bottom glasses, hat like a tea-cosy, thick black moustache. Her back garden is so overgrown, she could die in it and no-one would ever know. Never has any visitors, never even gets any post. Goes out three times a day, regular as clockwork, clutching one of those big, red, white and blue laundry bags and muttering to herself. Sometimes I hear her through the wall, shouting. (HE DRINKS.) Good luck for the future, Sheila.

HE GOES.

SHEILA: God, I hope he never works again. The thought of that arsehole being let loose on my children.

MILES: I didn't think you had any children.

SHEILA: Oh, don't be so fucking obtuse, Miles.

PAUSE.

MILES: He'll be alright. Don't worry about him. There'll always be a need for English teachers. Not like us.

SHEILA: What?

MILES: Well, nobody wants to study physics anymore. Except the oddballs. It's all drama and media studies. And I can't see that there's much future in French.

SHEILA: You don't know what you're on about.

MILES: I mean, I would have thought that Mandarin or, I don't know, Gujarati or something would be more to the point, these days. Even Spanish. Nobody really needs French anymore, do they?

SHEILA: Oh God, Miles, you are, without doubt, the most lowering little man I have ever met. Just shut up. Do you know, whenever I'm listening to the weather and they say there's a small depression coming in from the east, I picture you walking into the staff room.

ENTER TERRY.

TERRY: Right. Miles. I need to swap clothes with you.

MILES: Pardon?

TERRY: Come on.

MILES: I'm not swapping clothes with you.

TERRY: Yes. It's a tradition. When a member of the Arts faculty leaves, he swaps clothes with someone from science. It's considered a great honour.

MILES: I've never heard of it.

TERRY: Look, every tradition has to have started somewhere. Give us your jacket.

SHEILA: He's waiting for you outside, isn't he?

TERRY: And Jenkins Junior. And Mrs Jenkins. Fuck me, have you ever seen her? You could knock Hadrian's Wall down with her face and it wouldn't affect her looks. So come on, Miles. Don't dick about. Do the right thing.

MILES: You must be joking. Why should I?

TERRY: You won't be missed.

SHEILA: Yes he will. His mother will be up all night, waiting for him to come home.

MILES: I do not live with my mother.

TERRY: Really?

MILES: No.

TERRY: You must do.

MILES: That's it. Now, I really have had enough.

HE STANDS.

TERRY: Oi. You can't go now. What about me? I can't stay in here all fucking night.

MILES: Why not? You usually do.

TERRY: They'll tear me limb from limb.

MILES: I hope they do. It's no more than you deserve.

TERRY: What did you say?

SHEILA: Oh, for God's sake. Stop behaving like babies, the pair of you. Bloody hell. Men.

SHE GETS UP AND STARTS TO GO.

TERRY: Where are you going?

SHEILA: To talk sense at the Jenkins.

TERRY: You can't.

SHEILA: You can't. I don't know why I'm bothering. I should let them pull your head off. You asked for it. Miles is right about that.

SHE GOES. SILENCE.

TERRY: I could almost fancy that woman. Although I suspect she eats her sexual partners after mating.

SILENCE.

MILES: Do you think you should go and see if she's alright?

TERRY: Yes, I'm sure my presence out there would help enormously. You go.

MILES: I'm not going out there.

TERRY: You'll be perfectly safe. They won't notice you.

MILES: I'm not going out there.

TERRY: Not that concerned about her, then.

MILES: It's not my skin she's trying to save.

TERRY: What the fuck has that got to do with anything? I can't go out there, can I? I'd just make it worse. But you would apparently rather sit on your skinny arse than offer assistance to a defenceless woman.

MILES: I'd hardly call Sheila defenceless.

TERRY: No wonder this country's fucked, with moral bankrupts like you standing in positions of authority over impressionable young people.

MILES: That's bloody well rich, coming from you.

TERRY: I'm not a teacher anymore.

MILES: You never were.

TERRY: Did you make it to Head of Department?

MILES: No.

TERRY: Imagine it. Not even cut out for Head of Physics.
Fuck off.

ENTER SHEILA.

SHEILA: Gin and tonic, Terry. Double. At the double.

TERRY LOOKS AT HER EXPECTANTLY.

SHEILA: For fuck's sake. They've gone. You're perfectly safe.
I must say I found them quite charming. I asked them
why they didn't just come in and kick your head in in
the warmth.

TERRY: Brilliant. Thanks.

SHEILA: According to the terms of Mrs Jenkins' ASBO, she'll
be arrested if she sets foot in any pub in town and,
bless her, she didn't want to break the law. Quite
sweet, really. It's all a matter of how you handle
them.

TERRY: How did you handle them?

SHEILA: I told them that in all the excitement of Parent's
Evening you forgot to take your anti-psychotic
medication and that now you have, you're truly sorry
and will be writing them a full and frank letter of
apology.

MILES: Will they be able to read it?

SHEILA: The Jenkins family are the salt of the earth. Keep
your snotty remarks to yourself, you crashing snob.
Terry?

TERRY: Thank you. I suppose.

SHEILA: Now do run along.

TERRY STOMPS OFF, SHAKING HIS HEAD.

MILES: And they bought it?

SHEILA: No, of course not. I mean, it's plausible enough, but those are not rational human beings. No, I just gave them his address and told them he'd be there soon after closing time. They toddled off very happily.

PAUSE.

MILES: Did you really?

SHEILA: Do you think I wouldn't?

MILES: No, but..they'll kill him.

SHEILA: No. He might never walk again, but they won't kill him.

MILES: But..

SHEILA: Don't give me that. I'm merely delaying the inevitable. He had it coming. You said so yourself.

MILES: I know I did, but..

ENTER TERRY, WITH A G & T, A PINT OF BITTER AND A PINT OF LAGER.

TERRY: Here we are. I've slipped Reg a tenner not to call time. Let's party.

THEY STARE AT HIM.

MILES: We both have to be up for school in the morning.

TERRY: And I have to be up early to sign on. So come on. After tonight, we never have to see each other again. Let us be of good cheer. To the future.

SHEILA/ MILES: To the future.

THEY DRINK.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK.