

A SERVICE FOR JEREMY WONG

A Play

By Daniel S. Kehde

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STORY OF THE PLAY

When Jeremy Wong, a 15-year-old gay student, is savagely beaten and killed by two fellow students, the whole school reels from the blows. Reporters from all over the country descend on the town. Deep divisions among the students emerge as the student council debates whether or not to hold a memorial service. The brutal murder forces each student to search his or her own conscience and beliefs. Some react with denial, some make excuses, some are outraged, some are frightened; others respond with courage and caring; and a few start to question and change their points of view and values.

In a series of monologues, a cross section of the student body shares reactions to the hateful crime. As the students struggle to come to terms with murder, prejudice, hatred and fear, a complex portrait emerges of a school and community. This powerful drama doesn't allow for easy answers. It challenges and teaches us to examine our own hearts and minds about difficult issues that deeply trouble our society.

Note: This play contains strong language.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 m, 9 w)

DEBBIE: 12th grade, student council president.

BILL: 10th grade, Jeremy's locker partner.

JEREMY'S MOM

ANGELA: 11th grade, Butch's girlfriend.

BUTCH: 12th grade, Jeremy's murderer.

CLAM: 12th grade, Butch's accomplice.

SYDNEY: 11th grade cheerleader.

SAMANTHA: 12th grade, student council member.

DENISE: 10th grade, Bill's girlfriend.

BUTCH'S FATHER

SARAH: A state trooper.

MARY: 10th grade, president of the school Bible club.

PHIL: 11th grade, band member.

TIMMY: 11th grade, friend of Jeremy's.

VERONICA: 12th grade, friend of Jeremy's.

GREG: 12th grade, student council member.

JOSH: 12th grade, chorus member, son of the local pastor.

JEREMY'S FATHER: (non-speaking role)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set: Five platforms of varying heights, painted black and arranged around the stage. Far downstage right, off the front of the stage where possible, is an empty area lit by a single spotlight – this is the media area. There are 2 chairs on platform 4, "the jail." All other platforms are bare; except for a small set of steps leading from platform two up to three, used in the last act as the dais for the service.

Lighting: Key to keeping the pace of the play and the interest of the audience. The stage can be divided into twelve areas, each area lit individually, starkly, with little or no gel. Scenes are changed quickly, cast is pre-set in most instances, and lights are cross faded where appropriate. The use of houselights during the monologues by Sydney and Greg help break the monochromatism of the piece and serve to place the audience in a more realistic high school setting.

Costumes: Most of the cast is dressed according to their own interpretation or that of the director. The only real requirements are as follows:

SYDNEY is dressed as a cheerleader for Act I, in shorts or athletic wear for the remainder of the play.

JEREMY'S MOTHER is dressed as described: an ex-hippie from the sixties. Full-length skirt, peasant blouse.

SARAH: Police uniform.

BUTCH'S FATHER: Flannel shirt, or work shirt and jeans.

STUDENTS wear clothes appropriate for school. It is October, warm in the south, cool in the north. Dress accordingly.

ACT I
Scene 1

DEBBIE: *(Walks out center, from between platforms 2 and 4.)* What am I supposed to do, you know? I mean, I know I'm president of the student council. I know that I'm supposed to lead the school. But ... I mean, I didn't know him. Most of us didn't know him. Those of us who did didn't like him. Chapman wants me to lead a service. *(Pause.)* Butch and the Clam shouldn't have done it. I mean everybody knows Butch and the Clam shouldn't have done it. And now we can't even come to school without having to go through those damned reporters. But the thing is ... and I know it's wrong. I know it's all wrong to think this but ... I mean, this is West Virginia, you know? It doesn't get any more redneck than this. And Jeremy Wong was gay. And not a closet case either. But right out there, in-your-face gay. And I know this is wrong but ... it was only a matter of time, wasn't it? I know I'm supposed to be outraged at what Butch and the Clam did, you know? And I am. It was cruel and inhuman and awful and I hope, really, that they're put away for a million years. But ... this is hard stuff for us, you know? And now I have to put a service together? I mean, I know why Chapman's doing it, it's because he needs to show the kids that they do all care, or at least should. And because of the rest of the world, you know, they need to see that we can deal with this with some kind of dignity, but ... I mean, it's Jeremy Wong, you know? This would be a whole lot easier if he'd been a football player.

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 2

BILL: *(Seated on end of platform 5.)* He wasn't such a bad kid. Look, shut up, okay. I didn't ASK to be his locker partner. *(Pause, stands.)* They came and got his stuff out this afternoon. It was weird. Chapman called me to the office and there were his parents. His dad's Chinese, you know, some kind of genius chemist for Carbide and his mom's really normal, like an old hippie or something – you could tell she was really beautiful back in the sixties or maybe later, maybe the seventies. You know, long brown hair and, I don't know, that look, like she wasn't really there, just kind of listening to music that no else could hear? His dad had been crying when I came in, but his mom was real cool about it. *(SHE crosses to HIM. He pantomimes opening his locker.)* It's ... it's a little messy. It's hard to keep things neat when there are two people sharing one locker. There never seems to be enough room somehow.

MOM: You were his friend?

BILL: I don't know ... I, uh, I guess. I mean, we saw each other every day. We were in the same homeroom.

MOM: That's good. He didn't seem to have many ... friends. *(Hands HIM a bag. Bill takes it and begins to put Jeremy's things in it.)*

BILL: Look, Mrs. Wong, I'm really sorry about what happened to Jeremy. I ... I didn't ...

MOM: Did you know them? The one they called Butch?

BILL: Yeah. Everyone knew them. This is a small town, you know. We all grew up together ... well, most of us.

MOM: I like it here.

BILL: What?

MOM: This school. This is a good place. Good teachers. Good students.

BILL: I ... I think this is about all. He always took most of his books home with him.

MOM: We found them ... out there. The police did. The books ... they're in Mr. Chapman's office now. Thank you. I think I can find my way back. You go back to class.

End of Freeview

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