

*To His Coy Mistress*

*by*

*Daren Foster*

THE SOUNDS OF A SHOWER.

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

A cramped but comfortable space in a pleasantly rambling old Victorian house, littered with books. The shower continues, off.

WARREN (O.S.)

.. an age at least to every part/And  
the last age should show your heart.

ANNIE (O.S.)

I'll come back when you two--

JACK (O.S.)

No, no. Have a seat, Annie.

INT. FACULTY OFFICE -- DAY

PROFESSOR JACK ROCHESTER, a youthful man in his early-50s, sits behind his desk in a book littered office. WARREN, his black-clad teaching assistant, lounges in a chair across from Jack.

ANNIE, a female undergrad a few years younger than Warren, holds the office door open, on the verge of fleeing.

JACK

Warren likes having an audience.

WARREN

For, lady, you deserve this state/Nor,  
would I love at lower rate.

ANNIE

I'm sorry, Ja--Professor Rochester.  
I thought we--

JACK

We do, yes. But Warren insists on  
correcting my interpretation of  
Marvell.

WARREN

Not correcting, per se. I just think  
Jack's grasp of the carpe diem theme  
isn't.. thorough enough.

Warren's dig at Jack peaks Annie's interest. Closing the door, she crosses to Jack's desk and takes a seat beside Warren. Annie smiles at Jack, awaiting his response.

JACK

The editors of my last book on the Metaphysical Poets would be dismayed to hear that.

WARREN

The concept of carpe diem or seize the day as it's more commonly--

JACK

We've all seen Dead Poets Society, Warren. Hopefully you're going to be a little more trenchant than some Robin Williams movie.

Jack rolls his eyes at Annie who remains quiet, a neutral presence.

JACK (CONT'D)

A little before your time, Annie?

WARREN

Robin Williams? Who's Robin Williams, grandpa?

Only Warren laughs at his joke. Annie maintains a tight, sphinx-like smile, keeping equal eye contact with both men.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Annie enters the room, dressing as she goes.

JACK (O.S.)

You're actually going to go through with this, huh? Despite the voice of experience, telling you that no good can come of it.

ANNIE

The voice of experience? Of the two of us, who's had dinner with my parents and boyfriends before?

Jack appears, immodestly, as Annie finishes dressing.

JACK

At least let's go to a restaurant, a neutral site.

ANNIE

I don't want to go to a restaurant, Jack. I want to cook my mom and dad a nice meal here, show them how grown up their little girl is.

JACK  
Hopefully closing the age gap between  
us in the process?

ANNIE  
Don't go projecting your insecurities.  
My parents could care less. Dad's  
almost 10 years older than mom.

Jack finds the comparison funny.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
If you're not even going to try and  
make this work..

As she turns toward the door, Jack takes hold of her arm and  
pulls her close to him.

JACK  
With all my heart and soul, love, I  
will endeavor to wow the folks.

Annie searches Jack's face for cracks in his sincerity.

ANNIE  
Making you that much more the tragic  
figure when they cruelly reject your  
overtures.

With a quick peck of a kiss, Annie slips from Jack's hold  
and crosses to the door.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
You're so obvious.

Annie exits, leaving Jack shaking his head as he turns back  
toward the bedroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Jack enters, wearing a bathrobe, toweling his hair dry. He  
disappears into the kitchen. The SOUNDS of a DRINK BEING  
MADE.

WARREN (O.S.)  
The thing is, the idea of carpe diem  
comes from Horace, a poet Marvell  
clearly knew and admired as shown in  
his poem, *A Horatian Ode*--

JACK (O.S.)  
*To Cromwell's Return From Ireland.*

WARREN (O.S.)  
*Upon Cromwell's Return From Ireland,*  
 I think it is.

Jack reappears from the kitchen with a drink in his hand. He stands, contemplative, distractedly adjusting his hair.

INT. FACULTY OFFICE -- DAY

Jack is slouched in his chair, tiring of the conversation, while Warren paces the room, invigorated. Annie remains seated, making a point not to look at either of them.

JACK  
 I stand corrected.

Jack turns his attention to Annie who doesn't meet his look.

WARREN  
 Carpe diem, quam minimum eredula postero. Seize the moment, place the least possible trust in the future. So, it's not so much take a risk because soon we'll be dead. It's more, take a risk because only in that moment do we truly control our lives. The future? Who knows.

The pause in Warren's lecture draws Jack's attention back to him. Warren waits for a response from Jack.

JACK  
 (finally)  
 Ignoring Warren's somewhat exhibitionistic use of Latin and classical name-dropping, what do you think about his contention, Annie?

ANNIE  
 I'm.. not really.. much of an expert on Marvell.

JACK  
 Neither's Warren but that doesn't seem to stop him from pontificating on the subject.

ANNIE  
 I should really get going.

Annie stands and crosses to the door.

JACK  
 Hold on. We're done here.

ANNIE

I'll come by later, Professor  
Rochester. When you two are finished  
comparing.. notes. See you, Warren.

WARREN

Hope so, Annie.

With a quick, not overly friendly look back at Jack, Annie  
exits.

Warren sits back in his seat, satisfied with the turn of  
events.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a.. I guess it would  
be part professional and part personal  
question.

Jack gets up from his desk and starts packing up his satchel.

JACK

As long as it's brief and you don't  
recite any more poetry.

WARREN

Do you think it's unethical for a TA  
to date one of his undergrads?

This stops Jack in his tracks. He levels a less than  
agreeable look at Warren.

WARREN (CONT'D)

.. I wouldn't be the first.

Jack finishes packing up and he crosses to the door.

JACK

You'll find, Warren, ethics to be  
elastic. But I would highly recommend  
surreptitiousness. You never know  
whose nose you'll get out of joint.

Jack opens the door and gestures for Warren to leave. Warren  
bounces up from his chair and crosses to the door. They  
exit the office with Jack closing the door behind them.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- EVENING

PETER, Annie's father, a slightly tipsy, pudgy man about  
Jack's age enters the living room with a snifter of cognac,  
holding hands with Annie's mom, FIONA, an exquisitely polished  
woman a decade younger than her husband.

Annie and Jack follow, playfully groping each other. Jack's careful not to spill his drink.

PETER

.. there we were, the four of us,  
blind drunk.. Or was it five of us?

FIONA

Doesn't matter, Peter.

Peter drops down onto the sofa, bringing Fiona down beside him.

PETER

Set up like one of those cheerleader  
pyramids, trying to unscrew the stop  
sign. Next thing you know, a cop  
car appears, pyramid crumbles. I  
don't make it four steps before blue  
knocks me down and tosses me into  
the cruiser. I spent the next six  
hours in the drunk tank.

(to Annie)

Of course, we worked our tails off,  
too. Worked hard, played hard.

Fiona pats the cushion beside her, signaling Annie to sit on the couch with them.

ANNIE

Sermon duly noted.

Annie squeezes in beside her mom, leaving Jack to find his own seat.

FIONA

I always thought Peter should've  
become a professor instead of a  
sporting goods executive. He would  
never have had to leave his university  
days behind.

Jack takes up pose by the mantelpiece across from the others.

JACK

Although, the administration frowns  
on faculty toga parties and keggers  
in the university club. That is  
what they're still called, isn't it,  
love? `Keggers'?

ANNIE

Don't ask me.

(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

All my spare time is spent diligently studying, especially for the tyrant who teaches my 17th-century English lit course.

FIONA

I imagine you weren't the same kind of student Peter was, Jack. I don't see you as one of those hail-and-well-met, frat boy types.

JACK

And what kind of student do you image I was, Fiona?

FIONA

I'd say you were something of a dashing young man -- not that you weren't dashing, I'm sure, darling.

PETER

Dashing, ruggedly handsome--

ANNIE

Modest?

FIONA

A head of tousled hair, studiously unkempt. Deliberately Byronic.

(on Jack's reaction)

What? A little close to home?

JACK

No, it's just.. I don't hear the term `Byronic' used nearly enough for my liking.

FIONA

From those of us without a university education?

JACK

From anyone. Please. Continue.

FIONA

I'd say, and forgive me if I sound harsh, you were an appealingly pompous youth who cleverly flaunted his knowledge.

ANNIE

Mom! How could that be taken as anything but harsh?

FIONA

Oh come on, love. I'm simply describing any number of English lit undergrads, wouldn't you say, Jack?

JACK

There are some that fit that description, sure. Undergrads, TAs.

ANNIE

You're just jealous because Warren knows more Latin than you do.

Off a discreet prod from Fiona, Peter stands up.

PETER

Before this comes to blows, we really should be getting back to the hotel. Early start tomorrow at the conference.

(extending a hand to Jack)

By all accounts, as Annie's father, I should be laying down the law, pointing out the age difference, blah, blah, blah. But you seem like a decent enough fellow, Jack. Somebody who'll put Annie's interests first, regardless of what happens between the two of you.

JACK

(with an awkward shake)

Thank you. Let me get your coats.

Jack exits toward the bedroom.

ANNIE

I'm going to stick around for a bit. Help Jack clean up.

FIONA

I imagine he's plenty used to cleaning up after himself.

(before Annie can respond)

You don't mind giving Annie up for one evening, do you, Jack? A little mother-daughter catching up?

JACK (O.S.)

Not at all. I've got some papers to mark..

Jack enters from the bedroom with everyone's coats.

JACK (CONT'D)  
 .. and a talk to prep anyway.

Jack hands Peter's jacket to him, tosses Annie's at her but holds Fiona's for her to get into.

FIONA  
 Thank you, m'sieur.

JACK  
 De rien. It was a pleasure to meet you both. Hopefully, we'll chat again.

FIONA  
 I'm sure we will.

Jack and Annie exchange an awkward peck.

JACK  
 Thanks for a lovely dinner, Ms. Gregory. Told you it'd be better than eating at some lousy restaurant.

Annie gives him a 'Very Funny' face as Jack opens the door. Peter, Fiona and Annie file out into the hallway. Annie casts a look of helplessness back at Jack before she disappears, her mother still holding her hand.

Jack closes the door and stands still, contemplating the evening before he crosses to the mantle and retrieves his drink. He then walks to the window, pushing the curtain aside and looks out.

He hears the others before he sees them, TALKING INDECIPHERABLY. They appear outside the building and make their way to the sidewalk with Fiona still holding Annie's hand. As they walk away, Annie looks back and up at Jack, more helplessness. She turns away but Jack continues to watch them. Fiona now turns to look back at him. She smiles but not in a particularly friendly way. Jack can only wave meekly before letting the curtain drop.

A little unsettled, Jack turns and crosses toward the kitchen, loosening his tie as he goes.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Later that night, Jack sits reading a surprisingly fluffy detective novel with a drink in hand.

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

Jack looks at his watch and judging from his reaction, some time has passed since his guests left.

ANOTHER KNOCK.

Jack gets up and crosses to the door.

JACK

After safely tucking her dear old  
mom and dad into bed, naughty daughter  
Annie sneaks back to enjoy--

He opens the door to find Fiona standing there.

FIONA

Please, continue. I'm curious to  
know what my daughter enjoys. She  
refuses to let me be her Facebook  
friend. Enjoy.. ?

JACK

(regaining his  
composure)

.. an invigorating stroll in the  
night air. Please, come in.  
(she enters)

Can I get you a nightcap?

FIONA

What are you having?

JACK

Bourbon, on the rocks.

FIONA

(turning up her nose)

You wouldn't happen to have any  
sambuca, would you?

JACK

I would, indeed.

Jack exits into the kitchen.

JACK (O.S.; CONT'D)

Care to try it with some ice?

FIONA

Sambuca and ice?

JACK (O.S.)

When I was on sabbatical in Italy,  
they loved--

FIONA

Flaming with a couple coffee beans,  
if you have them. Straight up, if  
not, thank you.

Fiona wanders around the room, looking at book titles.

JACK (O.S.)

Needless to say, this is rather unexpected. Annie know you were coming back or is this the obligatory mother-boyfriend, 'What Are Your Intentions with My Daughter' tête-à-tête?

Fiona doesn't respond until Jack reappears with her drink and matches.

FIONA

I left Annie with her father in the hotel lobby bar, dutifully listening to more of his fraternity hijinks.

(taking the drink)

Thank you.

Jack strikes a match and lights the drink.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Said I was tired and off to bed but slipped out and caught a cab.

JACK

And how do you know she won't eventually follow?

FIONA

I don't. Will she?

Waiting for Jack to respond, she blows out the flame in her sambuca, and takes a sip.

JACK

(grabs his drink from the coffee table)

Perhaps we should get right down to it, then. So, let me guess. I'm an old lech, preying on the unsuspecting ingenuousness of your precious--

FIONA

Using a rather uneven balance of power to bludgeon your way into her affections?

JACK

Doesn't that diminish Annie's judgment? She's twenty, not twelve.

FIONA

It's not Annie's judgment that I'm questioning.

JACK

Although, by questioning mine, doesn't that reflect negatively on hers?

FIONA

Still unable to step back from the collegiate debating stance, I see.

JACK

You know, Fiona, I'm puzzled by your confident referencing to my past. Is it simply a generalized 'I Know Your Type' or have you put a private detective on the case?

Fiona looks at him for a long time. Jack waits her out.

FIONA

You really don't remember at all, do you?

JACK

Remember what, Fiona?

Fiona knocks back her drink.

JACK (CONT'D)

Another?

FIONA

No, thank you.

(sits on the couch)

1988. Trent University. I'm not sure the exact name, number of the course. Let's call it English 101. 'Beowulf', Chaucer, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'.

JACK

But you said earlier that you never attended university.. ?

FIONA

I wouldn't count a couple months one fall as 'attending university'. You were a brand spanking new assistant prof. A 'glorified TA', I think you called it at the time.

Jack sits down, attempting to fit the pieces together.

FIONA (CONT'D)

I wasn't Fiona Gregory, then. Fiona Stapleton. Angles, now a little softened, I'd say, but not unrecognizably so.

JACK

Fiona Stapleton... ?

FIONA

I guess I shouldn't be surprised I made so little an impression on you but still, it's.. sad.

JACK

Come on, Fiona. I get anywhere from forty to sixty students a year. Over the course of twenty years, that's--

FIONA

Jack, we slept together.

This initially stops him up, but he quickly recovers, laughing at Fiona's `joke'.

JACK

I must say, of all the mother bear approaches I was anticipating, that wasn't one of them. I don't even know how to respond.

Jack stands and crosses to the kitchen.

FIONA

Are there many options?

JACK

Depends.

FIONA

On?

JACK

Well, for starters, do I even believe you.

Jack exits into the kitchen.

JACK (O.S.; CONT'D)

Frankly, I have no memory of a Fiona Stapleton, and certainly not one I had any sort of relationship with. However, and I take no pride in this, there's been enough time past and sufficient number of..

FIONA

Gullible undergrads?

JACK (O.S.)

Liaisons, I was going to say, that I can accept the possibility of..

Jack reappears with a freshened-up drink.

JACK (CONT'D)

.. one or two slipping my memory.

FIONA

And so?

JACK

What do you say we tell Annie all about our sordid past? My guess is she's far more open-minded than you might think.

This doesn't sit well with Fiona.

JACK (CONT'D)

Your move, Fiona.

FIONA

(finally)

I left school because I was pregnant.

Jack laughs a little less convincingly.

JACK

We had some brief encounter and you're telling me you got pregnant?

FIONA

Maybe no one's explained it to you but it only takes the once.

Jack paces the room, trying to think on his feet.

JACK

OK, OK. Fine. An interesting twist. Still. I remain convinced that Annie should be told all about it.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Let her make an informed decision.  
Whatever else you might think of me,  
Fiona, my relationship with your  
daughter is one that.. I feel very  
strongly about.

Fiona looks at Jack for an uncomfortably long time before  
proceeding.

FIONA

I kept the baby, Jack.

Jack's knees go weak, all possible implications racing through  
and short-circuiting his brain.

FIONA (CONT'D)

A little girl.

Jack wavers but remains upright.

JACK

Annie has a.. sister?

FIONA

I named the baby, Anne, after my  
grandmother.

Setting his drink down on the nearest surface, Jack turns  
from Fiona, for the first time, speechless.

FIONA (CONT'D)

(sitting back, her  
job done)

Doesn't take a university education  
to see the Greek tragedy-like  
implications of this, let me tell  
you.

Jack looks at her, almost completely undone.

FIONA (CONT'D)

You will end your dalliance with  
Annie immediately. Under no  
circumstances are you to even so  
much as hint as to the actual reasons  
why. Go ahead and break my daughter's  
heart by playing the irresponsible,  
unrepentant Don Juan card but I will  
not allow you to fuck her up with  
anything I have told you tonight.

Still unable to speak, Jack looks at Fiona, no doubts about  
his agreement on the issue.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR

They both stop dead.

ANNIE (O.S.)

Jack?! Jack?! It's me. I finally  
escaped. Jack?! I saw your light.

There are a few more KNOCKS before Annie gives up.

ANNIE (O.S.; CONT'D)

Fine. This is why I wanted a key.  
Now I'm denied the pleasure of the I-  
told-you-so about tonight. Everything  
went off without a hitch. In fact,  
I have it from a very reliable source  
that my mom was quite taken by you.  
I Told You So.

Jack and Fiona continue to wait silently, holding their  
breath, not wanting anything to give their presence away.

When he figures it safe, Jack skulks toward the window and  
peaks out.

Annie reappears in the street. Turning, she looks back up  
at the window.

Jack, pressed back against the wall, out of sight. Waiting,  
he turns slowly back to look out the window.

Annie walks down the street out of sight.

FIONA (O.S.)

She gone?

Jack continues to look out the window, only a nod of the  
head to indicate she has.

FIONA (CONT'D)

I might need that drink after all.

Getting no response from Jack, she gets up from the couch  
and makes her way to the kitchen.

FIONA (CONT'D)

You could probably use a top-up too,  
yes?

Jack steps back from the window and drops down into the  
nearest seat.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Jack?

He waves her off. Fiona exits into the kitchen.

FIONA (O.S.; CONT'D)

I think for the first time in your life, it's a blessing you remained emotionally stunted, keeping your distance and refusing Annie a key. Imagine if she had walked in. A mess, an unmitigated disaster.

Jack remains sitting, staring off.

Fiona reappears with a drink, and sits back down.

FIONA (CONT'D)

I decided to give the sambuca with ice a whirl. You only live once, right?

(raising her glass)

To avoiding calamitous situations.

(taking a sip)

Hmmm. Nice.

She stares off into her own space, leaving Jack to his.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

With a slug of his drink, the bathrobe clad Jack moves to the couch, sitting down beside the phone. With a deep breath, he picks up the handset and punches out a number. He waits for an answer, taking another drink.

JACK

Shit!

(leaving a message)

Hi, you. Sorry to call so late, but I.. give me a call when you get this. Tonight, tomorrow morning, whenever.

Jack hangs up the phone, keeping the handset in his hand. He has another drink, slouching hard into the couch.

The PHONE RINGS almost immediately. Jack takes a surprisingly long time to answer it, actually looking as if he might not pick it up. He finally does.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hi.. Fine. Sorry to call so late. I just--What? You came back? When? Huh. I must've.. Listen, Annie. I think we need to talk..

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Peter sits up in bed, reading a file, a glass of wine beside him. Fiona enters.

PETER

Hey. Annie didn't show up, did she?

Grabbing a glass, Fiona pours herself some wine.

FIONA

You couldn't keep her occupied a little bit longer?

PETER

She was as determined as.. her mother can be. Short of tying her to the chair there was nothing I could do. I called but your phone was off. What happened?

FIONA

We didn't answer the door. She left.

Peter pours himself a refill of wine.

PETER

My, oh my. So? Aside from that, how'd it go?

FIONA

Not exactly as planned.

She sits on the bed, taking a sip of wine.

PETER

Meaning.. ?

FIONA

He wouldn't back off, no matter what I told him. He forced my hand.

PETER

Oh-oh. So what did you do?

FIONA

I improvised. Told him Annie was his daughter.

PETER

You didn't?!

FIONA

I did.

They both process the information in stunned silence for a moment.

FIONA (CONT'D)  
He caved in like his insides  
collapsed. You should've seen it.

PETER  
(shock turning to  
amusement)  
Oh, Fi, Fi, Fi.

They sit beside each other on the bed in silence, each drinking their wine.

PETER (CONT'D)  
And you think he bought it?

FIONA  
(pondering the question)  
Yeah. He bought it.

PETER  
No questions asked?

FIONA  
No questions asked.

They sit back, drinking more wine, unwinding.

FADE OUT:

THE END