

A BITTER TASTE
a play in two acts by
Kevin Christopher Snipes

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Cast of Characters

JOHN an adjunct professor, 30
THE KID a male prostitute, 16
TALKER a divorce lawyer, 30

Setting

Chicago

Three Days in October and One Night in January

The Present

"They say that love hath a bitter taste."

~ Oscar Wilde, Salome

[BEGINNING OF SAMPLE]

SCENE 2: A UNIVERSITY OFFICE, 9:00
A.M. JOHN smokes in silence. TALKER
paces.

TALKER

And I tell Catherine I'm not up for a night out, which after eight hours in court I think I'm entitled to feel. So she makes her "Catherine Face" and goes out with a friend, and I kick back and try to relax. Figure I'll have a beer, watch some TV, get a good night's sleep for my closing. So I'm flipping through the channels and some station's showing late-night reruns of *The Golden Girls*. There's nothing better on so I start watching. Now this, this is where things get interesting. I sit through six maybe seven minutes tops of these women talking about cheesecake and suddenly: I'm hard. And I don't mean the normal late-night tension. I'm talking "Caution: Avoid Contact With Eyes, May Cause Blindness Hard." And you know me. It's no secret I like older women, but five, ten years older. Not sixty. Not geriatric. But I swear, every time Bea Arthur's on screen, it's like a bolt of lightning caressing my dick. And the thing is: I would never, never have sex with a woman that old. I mean, physically, if you put Grandma Moses in front of me: nothing. But the idea? Man, the idea! There's something about the possibility: inter-generational sex in the abstract. So I start gratifying myself. And it's heaven. Just me, myself, and the girls. Which is the cue, of course, for guess who to come home? That's right: Catherine! She's standing there with me spread eagle, stroking myself with Betty White on the screen, and she - Catherine, not Betty - demands to know why I'm jerking off to four women who hit their sexual peak during the Eisenhower administration. We get into this huge fight. It lasts all night. I'm exhausted for my closing. And when I get home from court I find that Catherine has taken down all the pictures of her grandmother, and is insisting that "we" get therapy, by which she means I get therapy. And I'm like: am I the only person who thinks she's overreacting? I mean, yeah, it's a little weird. But at least I'm not into little girls, like eighty-five percent of the population. I mean, I could've been jerking off to "Punky Brewster" or "My Little Pony." But does Catherine care? You know what she did? She cut off our cable. What am I supposed to do with someone like that? I'm stumped. I Am Stumped. But I thought: you study cultures or mating rituals. Catherine respects you; you have your little "smart people club." Maybe you could talk to her, you know? Tell her it's not so abnormal. Buddy?

(JOHN stubs out his cigarette.)

JOHN

I had sex with a prostitute last night.

TALKER
Oh.
 (pause)
An old one?

JOHN
A kid.

TALKER
Oh.

JOHN
It was only oral sex. The whole thing lasted ten minutes.
Please don't tell Catherine.

TALKER
You're not about to say "kidding," are you?
 (JOHN shakes his head.)
Wow.

JOHN
It was a lapse in judgment.

TALKER
Hey, no, I'm not - I mean - congratulations!

JOHN
Congratulations?

TALKER
It's about time you joined the world of the living. Catherine
and I were starting to wonder whether you still liked girls.
Don't look at me like that. It's my job to think bad things.
So, you had a prostitute. Was it good?

JOHN
It was a mistake.

TALKER
Absolutely, bad man. Was she hot?

JOHN
Of course not.

TALKER
Was she dirty?

JOHN
Filthy.

TALKER
Nice.

JOHN
It was disgusting.

TALKER
You wanted a clean one?

JOHN
I wanted an interview.

TALKER
An interview? Was she one of your research subjects?

JOHN
Keep your voice down.

TALKER
Did you charge a hooker to your University account? Oh, say "yes." Say "yes" and you will be my new god.

JOHN
I paid with cash.

TALKER
How much?

JOHN
A hundred.

TALKER
A hundred? For a blow job? Isn't that a bit pricey? I mean, if she was dirty?

JOHN
I wasn't in a position to haggle.

TALKER
Did she swallow?

JOHN
Talker-

TALKER
Don't tell me she spit.

JOHN
Yes.

TALKER
Yes, she spit?

JOHN
In my face.

TALKER

Your face? You paid her to do that?

JOHN

No.

TALKER

Oh.

JOHN

The kid hated me.

TALKER

She didn't hate you. I'm sure if you stop and consider what her nights are normally like, you were probably the nicest customer she's had all year. I mean, she's probably used to real sickos, you know? Guys who like to tie her up and shit all over her. Which, if you did, is cool. I'm not judging.

JOHN

Of course I didn't.

TALKER

Because you're a decent guy. I bet you even tipped her.

JOHN

Tipped her?

TALKER

You're supposed to tip twenty percent, like in restaurants. It's okay if you didn't. You'll know for next time.

JOHN

There's not going to be a next time.

TALKER

You never know where your "research" might take you.

JOHN

What does that mean?

TALKER

Buddy, you applied for a grant to study whores. Are you telling me, in the back of your mind, you weren't nursing a certain "Pretty Woman" fantasy?

JOHN

You think I applied to the university for a grant so I could get laid?

TALKER

I think the University doesn't know my buddy the way I do.

JOHN
The way you do?

TALKER
Uh-huh.

JOHN
Talker, my grant is to study male prostitution.

TALKER
So?

JOHN
So what do you think most of my research subjects are?

TALKER
Men.
(Silence.)
No. Buddy. No. I know you. You're not - I've known you for seventeen years. I mean, hell, we used to jerk-off together - Oh!

JOHN
Talker-

TALKER
No, it's cool. I mean, I get off strolling through nursing homes. If you like boys-

JOHN
I don't like boys.

TALKER
You had sex with one.
(Pause.)
This explains why you haven't had a serious relationship since Catherine.

JOHN
This explains nothing about me. Last night... Last night...

TALKER
What?

JOHN
You weren't there.

TALKER
If I had been I wouldn't have had sex with a child.

JOHN
He wasn't a child. And it was a fucking blow job that lasted all of five minutes.

TALKER

So you're defending your actions?

JOHN

No. No. You want to know what happened? I lost my mind. For five minutes I went off the deep end and I seriously fucked up.

TALKER

Buddy, forgetting to pay your taxes is seriously fucking up. Forgetting you like women-

JOHN

Jesus Christ, could you not do this?

TALKER

Do what?

JOHN

Regress to Neanderthal mode.

TALKER

No, I'm sorry. I can't. My best friend is telling me - telling me - what exactly are you telling me?

JOHN

That I made a mistake. And I need your help.

TALKER

What? You want a number of a good support group?

JOHN

Last night I showed my faculty ID to the kid.

TALKER

So?

JOHN

This morning when I looked in my wallet it was missing. I think, based on how we left things last night, I think he might cause some trouble.

TALKER

What's he going to do? Go to the police?

JOHN

He's sixteen. Who do you think would be in more trouble if he did?

TALKER

Lots of people get accused of stuff. I spend half my day defending my clients from the trumped-up charges of their spouses. This Kid would need hard evidence. Physical proof.

A DNA sample, a witness, a fucking recording.

(JOHN looks away.)

You taped yourself having sex?

JOHN

I had a tape recorder for the interview. It might have been recording in the alley when we - when I-

TALKER

What do you mean "might have been?"

JOHN

The kid took it.

TALKER

Oh.

JOHN

This isn't good, is it? Talker, if this gets out my career is over.

TALKER

I'll take care of it.

JOHN

How.

TALKER

By doing what I do. Negotiating. You try and make my life easier and stay off the streets until I find the little shit. No more interviews. Tell the Dean or whoever you're not feeling well, you've got midterms, whatever. Just try not to fuck anyone else.

JOHN

Thank you.

(JOHN moves towards TALKER. TALKER backs away.
Awkward silence.)

TALKER

What's the kid's name?

JOHN

The interviews are anonymous. He never said.

TALKER

Address?

JOHN

I picked him up outside a club on Belmont. I don't know if he even has a place.

TALKER

Phone number?

(JOHN shakes his head.)

Let me get this straight: there's a hustler who knows who you are, where you work, and how to find you, and the only thing you know about him is that he works somewhere around Belmont? No offense, but who was interviewing whom?

SCENE 3: AN APARTMENT, 2:00 A.M.

The KID lies on a mattress. He removes his shoes. TALKER enters, wringing out a damp shirt in his hands.

KID

Get it all out?

TALKER

Most of it.

KID

Yeah, sorry 'bout that. Darryl doesn't got a toilet so when he has to piss, he goes out the window. He's always hittin' cops and poodles and shit.

TALKER

Maybe you should put up warning signs.

KID

Yeah.

(The KID drops his pants.)

TALKER

Whoa, whoa, whoa!

KID

What?

TALKER

That's not what I'm here for.

(The KID pulls his pants up.)

KID

No problem, Johnny. We can do whatever you want.

TALKER

I'm married.

KID

And your wife doesn't understand you?

TALKER

No, actually, but that's not the point.

KID

Hey, relax, Johnny. I get married guys all the time.

TALKER

You do?

KID

Yep.

TALKER

What percentage would you say are married?

KID

Percentage?

TALKER

Approximately. Ten? Twenty? A hundred?

KID

I don't know. A lot.

TALKER

I'm a divorce lawyer, and about sixty-five percent of my clients list adultery as the reason for dissolution of marriage. I thought there might be a similar statistic for your clients.

KID

Shit, you talk like your friend.

TALKER

Really? I remind you of him? Most people think we're nothing alike.

KID

You both talk a lot of shit.

TALKER

Well, we both have liberal arts degrees.

(pause)

That usually gets a laugh at parties.

KID

Must be some real hot parties, Johnny.

TALKER

What's with the "Johnnies?" I told you my name is-

KID

That's real interesting, Johnny. So we gonna fuck or what?

TALKER

I'm here for the tape, remember?

KID

What tape?

TALKER

The one you took from my friend who talks a lot of shit.

KID
Fuck, you were serious about that?

TALKER
About what?

KID
I thought that was your pick up line.

TALKER
No, I'd really like to get the tape and then get going.

KID
Why?

TALKER
Because it's after two a.m.

KID
Why do you want the tape?

TALKER
Because my friend doesn't like the idea of it floating around.

KID
Why?

TALKER
I think you're smart enough to figure that out.

KID
What if I say I don't got it?

TALKER
That's too bad because I've got a hundred bucks for the person who does.

KID
A hundred bucks? For a dumb little tape?

TALKER
It's not so dumb.

KID
You are.

TALKER
Why's that?

KID
'Cause if I were you, I could think of a lot better shit to spend a hundred bucks on.

TALKER
Such as?

KID
Me.

TALKER
You? A hundred bucks? Is that the going rate these days? I mean, I've heard of high-class call girls who charge by the thousands, but I've always wondered what the street price is. Is there a standard wage scale?

KID
Wage scale?

TALKER
Do all the prostitutes get together and decide on prices?

KID
No.

TALKER
So a hundred bucks, that's your price?

KID
Depends what you wanna do.

TALKER
I don't want to do anything. I'm curious what someone would have to pay for your services in general.

KID
What service?

TALKER
How much would a blow job be?

KID
Depends. I take a look at a guy, figure what he's worth, what I think he'll pay.

TALKER
So it's a case by case estimate?

KID
I guess.

TALKER
But, generally, what would you say the medium price of a blow job is for an average guy?

KID
An average guy?

A guy like me. TALKER

Like you? KID

Hypothetically speaking. TALKER

"Hypothetically" it'd cost you twenty bucks. KID

That's it? TALKER

You want to pay more? KID

I don't want to pay anything. TALKER

There's this drag queen upstairs who gives head for, like, five. KID

Really? TALKER

She's a real loony. Can't make more than twenty with bitches like that on the street. KID

That's the free market system. TALKER

Whatever. KID

So would a hand job be more or less than a blow job? TALKER

We still talking about you? KID

Me or someone like me. TALKER

Less. Maybe ten. KID

And sex. TALKER

KID
A hundred.

TALKER
A hundred?

KID
So, what's it gonna be? Ten? Twenty? Or a hundred?

TALKER
Once again: I'm married.

KID
I don't mind.

TALKER
Once again: still not the point.

KID
Tell you what. I'll give you a sample, on the house. You don't like it, I stop. You do, you pay me twenty bucks.

TALKER
That's not necessary.

KID
How do you know?

TALKER
Thirty years of experience.

KID
You ever had a blow job from another guy?

TALKER
I couldn't.

KID
You'd be surprised what you can do.

TALKER
No, I mean, if there's a drag queen upstairs giving them for five, I'd be stupid to pay you twenty.

KID
You want me to call her down?

TALKER
I'll pass.

KID
Good, 'cause she's like fifty. And crazy. Everyone calls her Maude 'cause she looks like some old TV broad.

Oh. TALKER

What? KID

She looks like Bea Arthur? TALKER

Who the fuck's Bea Arthur? KID

Bea Arthur: Dorothy Zbornak on *The Golden Girls*. You know *The Golden Girls*? "Thank you for being a friend." I have a picture. Here. In the middle. That's Bea Arthur. TALKER

You carry her picture in your wallet? KID

Sometimes at work I need to relieve a little tension. TALKER

Yeah. That's Maude. Maybe a little skinnier, you know. And a guy. KID

Really? TALKER

You interested? KID

It's late. TALKER

Cause she's just upstairs. KID

I'm here on business. TALKER

And "hypothetically" it wouldn't be too expensive. KID

Hypothetically? TALKER

[END OF SAMPLE. CONTACT AUTHOR FOR THE COMPLETE SCRIPT.]