

II Dennis

by

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Title: JJ Dennis
Author: Logan Rodgers
Draft: 3
Date: 09/27/2022 - 09/30/2022

CHARACTERS

JASON

He/Him. Gay. Son of JILL. Survivor and escapee of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

JILL

She/Her. Mother of JASON. Survivor and escapee of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints?

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SETTING

16922 State Hwy 39, Aurora, MO 65769. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
Aurora, Missouri location. A hallway adjacent to the wake of Jason's Grandfather, or Papa.

TIME

Morning.

(JASON has a cigarette lighter and program in one hand, arms folded.)

JASON

Hi, Mom. Funeral going okay? I missed the program on my way in.

JILL

Well. I see you got one. Was that what you needed?

(JASON flicks open and closed a cigarette lighter in one hand.
Thunder crack.)

JASON

Rainy day for a funeral... Was just talking to Dennis and-

JILL

Put that thing away. Please. We're in a church.

JASON

Remember when I was four and you grabbed my wrist to stop me pretending that a McDonald's French Fry was a cigarette?

JILL

This is why you called me over? Jason, not n-

JASON

You know why I called you over.

JILL

...

JASON

Fine. It's ten percent heavier now. You did that.

JILL

...please.

JASON

Now the first time I ever tried smoking anything was when I was ten. I went out on Nana and Papa's porch, lit a match, and put it in my mouth while it was on fire and tried to smoke it. Nothing happened. I felt so guilty. Internally praying for Heavenly Father's forgiveness.

JILL

...okay... Yeah. Dad's gas station sold them. It's where your uncle would sneak

'em.

JASON

I always forget that's where he got his money. Oil. The American Spirit. Ten percent of all that gas and tobacco went to this place.

JILL

Stop smoking. They're just getting your money. My money.

JASON

So you knew what I was buying with that debit card.

JILL

Of course I knew.

JASON

American Spirits. With Dennis's money.

(JASON pulls out a pack of Paul Mall cigarettes and pops one out, places it in his mouth and flicks open the lighter - thumb ready to make a spark)

JILL

What are you doing?

(JILL snatches the cigarette from JASON's mouth with one hand, with the other goes for the lighter. JASON moves his hand away but she grabs his wrist.)

JASON

...it was somehow angrier than that in my memory...

(JILL looks at where she is grabbing.)

JILL

When did you get a tattoo?

JASON

Tattoos. Like your sister.

JILL

Please stop wasting my time.

JASON

Yeah, you've asked me to do that before. Fine. I'll stop bothering you...

(JILL turns to walk away.)

JASON

...but I did hope you'd be too busy to pull anything.

(JILL stops.)

JILL

...

(JASON holds up the funeral program)

JILL

...

JASON

I found the programs.

JILL

Get to the-

JASON

Shut up!

JILL

Okay. Wait. Just... I'm sorry.

JASON

Guilt?! We're estranged. I thought we got that. This? This is an insult. You did this on purpose.

JILL

Sorry.

JASON

I believe you feel that sentiment. We both know it doesn't translate to compassion. In fact, it feels like rage.

JILL

I send you money when you are in a pinch.

JASON

There it is. The reason why you do it at all. To help dig me out of my hole by being in your debt. How'd it feel to look at all the stupid things a twenty year old buys?

JILL
Why are we talking about that?

JASON
I think that it is a piss poor excuse for a relationship with my Mom.

JILL
...You need to-

JASON
Stop?

JILL
What?

JASON
Stop speaking like this at Papa's funeral? What does this program say next to my name?

(JASON holds up program.)

JILL
...

JASON
You put it together. I shouldn't have to show this to you in print.

JILL
...

JASON
Just fucking say it!

JILL
Pallbearer.

JASON
Pallbearer! When were you going to tell me that?

JILL
It's my Dad!

JASON
Exactly!

JILL

The next of able bodied kin is assumed to-

JASON

Able bodied men, Mormon Mom?

JILL

You know where we are. You know who is here.

JASON

Just expected me to carry the casket with Uncle Jack Ass, Uncle Sociopath, and Cousin No Shit? Well, you'd have to burn all the programs and reprint them. Because the record is still going to show my name after Dennis carries the casket.

JILL

We both know you are asking too much.

JASON

Then who else we got on deck? The bishop?

(Silence.)

JASON

You didn't notice that my cigarettes were Paul Mall. This guy I used to hook up with started me on American Spirits as my first, cigarette not guy. He had religious trauma too. Whatever. Turns out I'm a Paul Mall Bearer.

JILL

I'm sick of you.

JASON

Dennis is a good sport. Foots the bill for your kids when you ask and carries your Dad's dead body.

(Silence)

JILL

I can only explain it so well... you were not me. You didn't know what I was...

JASON

Yeah, that's good, another 'version' of the truth.

JILL

You brood instead of growing up. I'm barely keeping it together right now, Jason. Don't.

JASON

...you're sick of me... What about this place? Papa Patriarch and Heavenly Father made you here. Is this where you bury them?

JILL

Why did you come?

JASON

And miss my chance?

JILL

To say goodbye?

JASON

My whole life you all have been making scenes and hurting me. A life well lived is not the best revenge.

JILL

...life well lived... How you felt... how I did... there's two of those.
(silence)

JASON

What gets me is that you finally got out. That should make me happy.

JILL

Bear his grave. You're doing it.

JASON

After bearing my testimony?

JILL

You never received the priesthood!

JASON

Mom, he hurt you-

JILL

This is a funeral. You are in Heavenly Father's church.

JASON

We were in a cult!

JILL

Religion.

JASON

Why don't you just run free? He's finally gone. You got Dennis.

JILL

Dad died Mormon. We bury him Mormon.

JASON

There it is. Is the silence where you used to hear the still small voice of the holy ghost scaring you? I knew you hadn't really quit. I've been fighting it too. This place brings it out.

JILL

He's your Papa. You're not here without him.

JASON

You're right, Mom. Okay. Yeah. Just remember what I said... it's ten percent heavier now. A story for the town if I got butterfingers.

JILL

Acting out is going to help you?!

JASON

I acted out because of you. I mooned that girl from our ward when I was twelve because I wanted to see you're response. I didn't even think it was funny. Ended with zero consequence. I could talk my way out of it. Then and now. You want to play truth or dare?

(JILL in tears grabs JASON by the shoulders and shakes him.)

JILL

Just stop. You little shit. Why won't you just stop?!

JASON (calm)

Because I'm looking at the woman who took my Mom away from me. By choosing this...

(JASON points to the 'church' they stand in)

JASON

Over and over.

JILL

...

JASON

Your Heavenly Father and family demand drama. This is about you and me.
So, do we keep this between Mother and Son?

JILL

Please. Stop making fun of-

JASON

Whose side are you on? Is fire not fire to you?

JILL

I hate y...

JASON

Go on! Say it!

JILL

...

JASON

You're so close. For years I've been yelling at you, come on, just get it out.
(silence)

JASON

No. Not here, huh? Just can't cross the finish line. If I don't see Dennis waiting
with the casket...

JILL

Just. Can we agree this wasn't anything we could do.

JASON

About us?

JILL

Mom. Mother to Son.

JASON

Whose fault is it then?

JILL

I was afraid.

JASON

I would have been too if I were you. Look, just because... it just don't change everything. I wish, but I'm not ten. I don't hold my breath.

JILL

We change... we can just... hurt... Whoever carries the casket makes us all the more... You're here to hurt me and hope somehow it will make you feel okay enough to say that you love me. Then you wouldn't say it again. Just so that would have to be the last time I heard it.

JASON

Was your family worth losing me over? I can't figure out where the Latter Day Saints end and you all begin.

(The storm outside intensifies as JILL speaks.)

JILL

Stop! I've taken verbal lashings from everyone since Dad died. Let's go on all the ways I was horrible... every excruciating detail and what you did to me. And we'd argue. Over everything. We'll drive the tractor that killed Dad right off the diving cliff into the lake. You can tell I suck with money. I can tell you about the weekend you ate an entire box of oatmeal cream pies and then cried about being a fat loser who had to walk the mile in elementary school. I may have brought home McDonald's for dinner nightly, but at least you had food! I was eating it too! Which of us has the stapled stomach?! My life was round the clock bullshit! And you had a roof and food. Never thankful. Pain. All times. You just cried for your Dad. You know how that makes a Mother feel?! You had a Dad you loved... And I have been the one making this funeral happen! Dodging questions from the Bishop why I don't go here! So, you wanna fight? It's all I have ever done. My Dad made my life hell and you got away. And I wasn't happy. I wanted you. All of you... can't turn it off. I just wasn't ready for how Motherhood would smash into me. When I was you, I had two of you and another on the way. All I knew was life at home, six months of the closest thing I had to freedom... at BYU... then I'm nineteen and marrying your Dad. I was groomed! Have you seen the look on my face in those wedding photos? You think I smile like this because I'm happy? You don't know... I lost my kids... I never had just like Dad! And you got out. You. Jason. Got. Out. And, I bullied your Dad out. All. Gone. Over. Away. No longer Mormon. I impose a fraction of my Father and you believe I'm Satan and you don't think I agree? I never got out. And... Papa... The devout Mormon... Do you know how they treat people who don't get their whole family in here? Do you know how much worse it is if you're just a feeble woman? You manipulate. Like my Mom. And for what's non-negotiable, you don't give them a choice. And you don't think that scares me? Do you think I did what I

wanted? Guess what? I still want you. One day I will be where my Dad is.
You're here, and I know it's not for anyone else. So...

JASON

And we both just want to take it back don't we?

JILL

Yes.

JASON

And we can't.

JILL

Never?

JASON

Can we ever agree that rain is rain?

JILL

I think we were given different definitions to the same words, kiddo.
(silence)

JILL

Bear Papa's casket, Jason.

JASON

You already talked Dennis into it before I got here. So, not non-negotiable.
You'd have him swoop in last second, just to show me you can.

JILL

...

JASON

You have a good husband.

(JASON exits)

JILL

...fuck. Dennis!?