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Dramatic Publishing



THE BULLY PLAYS

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(THE BULLY PLAYS)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-723-1

The Conundrum

By Brett Neveu

CHARACTERS

KEN..... a 20-year-old

TONY a 14-year-old

SETTING AND TIME: Bare stage with props. The present.

(LIGHTS up on KEN and TONY. KEN wears slacks and a button-up shirt. He is rather tall. TONY wears gym clothes and dribbles a basketball. He is rather short.)

KEN *(to audience)*. Here's what happened:

TONY *(angry, to KEN)*. What're you scared or somethin', shrimp?

KEN. And that is where the conundrum began.

TONY. What conundrum?

KEN *(to TONY)*. You calling me a shrimp.

TONY. How's that a conundrum?

KEN. First off, I'm taller than you.

TONY. I wasn't referring to height when I called you a shrimp.

KEN. "Shrimp" always refers to height in this context. Gym class. Basketball. "Shrimp." Me, tall. You, short.

TONY. I was referring to your entire state of your whatever when I called you a shrimp.

KEN. My state of whatever?

TONY. Yeah. Your shrimpy actions. Your shrimpy body language. Your shrimpy everything.

KEN. You mind if I give this whole thing some context?

TONY. If you feel like you should so you can explain your stupid self, then go for it.

KEN (*to audience*). This is the context. Tony Baker. Six years ago. Eighth grade. In gym class. Basketball. He'd been hassling me for months, with gems like:

TONY. Hey dog face.

KEN. And:

TONY. I hear you eat puke.

KEN. And my fave:

TONY. Look at me one more time and I'll punch your guts out your butt.

KEN. Out my *butt*.

TONY. And I'll do it, too.

KEN (*to TONY*). You're fourteen. You can't punch that hard.

TONY. Try me and see.

KEN (*to audience*). And right there, *that* was the problem. "Try me and see." In my mind, no matter what, I always imagined the consequences of what Tony might do to me.

TONY (*angry, to KEN*). What're you scared or somethin', shrimp?

KEN. That was the one that got me thinking, though. Him saying that. The "shrimpy" thing. And, now, at age twenty, I still think about it. I think:

TONY. "What exactly could have happened if I had questioned the ridiculousness of the statement?"

KEN (*to TONY*). Right.

TONY. But you understood the consequences.

KEN. Did I?

TONY. Gut punching.

KEN. But I'd never even see you even hit anybody. Ever.

TONY. But I might. You never know.

KEN. So you hit me. Then what?

TONY. I'd probably have gotten into big trouble.

KEN. And you would have blamed me for the trouble.

TONY. And then, later, you would have gotten punched even harder.

KEN. And then the same thing would have happened on and on and on, again and again, until each punch got worse and worse until I was one, big, fist-marked bruise. (*A pause.*)

TONY. You've got an active imagination.

KEN. So what.

TONY. I'm saying your description seems a little extreme.

KEN (*to the audience*). Back to my *conundrum*.

TONY. Your conundrum.

KEN. The *consequences* of me calling Tony out, right there in gym class, about the whole "shrimp" thing. Of course, being the age I am now, I see all the alleys I could have taken. I could have said (*to TONY*) I'm taller than you.

TONY. You said that already.

KEN. No I didn't.

TONY. Yes you did.

KEN. Anyhow. Something else I could have said to him would have been...

TONY. Harder than you thought, isn't it?

KEN. No.

TONY. Then what else would you have said?

KEN. How about, "Nice shoes."

TONY. "Nice shoes"?

KEN. Yeah. Those gym shoes you had were pretty scuffed up.

TONY. "Nice shoes" has no affect on me whatsoever.