

Low Marks

A Short Play

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARK E, teen boy, a son of immigrants who cares more about academia than his wellbeing

TRACEY E, adult women, Mark's mom who cares about his future // Doubles: **MARK B**, **MARK D**

NICHOLAS, adult man, Mark's teacher // Doubles: **MARK A**, **MARK C**, **MARK F**

CLASSROOM-HOME

The setting is a mix of a small intimate house and a classroom.

MARK anxiously sits at his desk.

MARK A, labeled with the letter A, carries a packet with a hidden grade. They tower over MARK.

MARK A

Hi, Mark E.

MARK A plants the packet on top of MARK's face as MARK looks up.

MARK A (CONT'D)

I'm leaving you.

MARK A exits the classroom.

As his final grade plummets, MARK slouches in the chair.

MARK B enters, jolly.

MARK B

Hi, Mark!

MARK

What do you want?

MARK B

Same thing you do: I want to be.

MARK

Do I...?

MARK B

Yes, why...? Why would you say such a thing?

MARK

I'm something or I'm not. I am not something.

MARK B, labeled with the letter B, looks at the packet with the grade.

MARK B

Let it be.

MARK

My mom won't.

MARK B

Yes, she would.

MARK

Easy for you to say when you're not the son of immigrants.

MARK B

Your family came here without a care in the world about school or grades.

MARK

They did not know how big the world has become.

MARK B

The Earth has generally stayed at 6 times 10 to the 24th power kilograms for millennia. You would know that if you had studied.

MARK B immediately regrets what they said.

MARK

I know. You freakin' nerd.

MARK B

That would be *Mark A*.

MARK

I'm never seeing an A ever again.

MARK B

Who needs A when you have B!

MARK remains silent.

MARK B (CONT'D)

Before I go-

MARK

Don't-

MARK B never finishes their advice. They exit.

MARK C, labeled with the letter C, enters.

MARK C

Hi, Mark.

Beat.

MARK C (CONT'D)

Do you have a death wish?

MARK hides his face in the desk.

MARK C (CONT'D)

You can live an average life.

MARK

I cannot live a life if I am average.

MARK C

If you see only the best out of folks. Well, of course you believe you're nothing but average.

(to the audience)

Look to your left. Now to your right. Up. Down. See folks. Everyone here is average.

MARK

You cannot be average when you're me.

MARK C

(to the audience)

Who's a child of immigrants here?

If audience members raise their hands, MARK C points them out.

MARK C (CONT'D)

You're average! You're average! You are average! You're average-y. You, you got me. You're over the top.

MARK

"If I'm not on top, I'm at the bottom." My mom always say.

MARK C

Well...

MARK

That should be where I'm at the bottom of... A well.

MARK C

You'll see your way out of this. Be well.

MARK C exits.

MARK D, labeled with the letter D, enters. They resemble the Ghost of Christmas Future.

MARK D

Hi.

MARK

Hi-

MARK D (CONT'D)

Denied!

MARK (CONT'D)

What? Denied what?!

MARK D

College admissions. Job applications.
Relationships: friendship, business, romantic.
A future!

MARK D playfully exits.

MARK F, labeled with the letter F,
ghoulishly enters. They tower over
MARK. They nab the packet from
MARK and storm out.

MARK

Fuck-

TRACEY rushes in, carrying the
packet with an iron grip.

TRACEY

Mark E. You have disgraced our family with this
low mark.

MARK

It's just-

TRACEY

It's just? It's just your future, Mark.

MARK

Mom. I'd like to get passed it.

TRACEY

How could you if you are not present in class?

MARK

I have a perfect attendance.

TRACEY

Nicholas says that you insistently daydream.

MARK

I have a lot on my mind.

TRACEY

Yeah, an empty parking lot for a mind.

MARK

Mom, will you at least park a chariot
somewhere?

TRACEY

You're going to be feeding horses instead of
driving chariots at this rate.

MARK

If only I could dream.

TRACEY

Dream of what? Life outside?

MARK

Quite the opposite.

NICHOLAS (OFFSTAGE)

Dead inside. Your son seems dead inside,
Tracey.

NICHOLAS enters.

TRACEY

You did not help him.

NICHOLAS

I'm a high school teacher. I'm not licensed to
provide the help that Mark needs.

TRACEY

You're not licensed to kill either, but here we
are.

NICHOLAS

Our school would kill for perfect grades that's
for sure.

TRACEY nears NICHOLAS.

TRACEY

And I would, too.

NICHOLAS

Your son is still here. Breathing.

TRACEY

Breathing will not pay the bills when my son
owns a house and feeds his family.

NICHOLAS

Would it pay you to think over your parenting
skills?

TRACEY

Would it pay you to reevaluate your teaching
degree?

NICHOLAS

My degree does not pay me at all. In fact, no
American teacher.

MARK

Mom. Did you forget why you emigrated here?

TRACEY

To make sure you live a better life.

MARK

Is better *short*?

NICHOLAS

"Better" is certainly a longer word than
"best." You would know if you studied.

MARK

Mom. I want you to help me live longer. I now
hope to die younger.

TRACEY

Don't say that.

NICHOLAS

Madam. You want him to hope silently?

TRACEY

He hoped for a good grade. Loud and proud.

NICHOLAS

Despite this mark, I'm proud of you, Mark. You
could stay low, but you will bounce back with
extra credit, Mark.

MARK

It does not change how my classmates see me,
Mr. Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

Clarify, Mark.

MARK

Clearly, they and my mother see me as nothing
more than a robot.

NICHOLAS

Being called a "nerd" is a badge of honor.

TRACEY

Being anything else dishonors your ancestors.

MARK

Soon, I'll meet them.

NICHOLAS

Extra credit question: Who are the Founding
Fathers?

MARK

I know them. I don't care. I don't know mine.

TRACEY

You have your mother to care for you.

NICHOLAS

You care not for his wellbeing. But his grades.

TRACEY

Stop degrading yourself, son.

NICHOLAS

Our school would kill for perfect grades, but I won't.

MARK

I'd die for perfect grades.

NICHOLAS

No, you should not.

TRACEY

Wait. You're dying for what?

NICHOLAS

For your approval.

TRACEY

Don't kill yourself for that.

MARK

I'm a failed student, son of immigrants. What am I good for?

TRACEY

Good heavens. You're so low, Mark. You might as well feel hellfire.

NICHOLAS

Now, Ms. E. If you had studied the internal structures of the Earth, it goes crust, mantle, outer core, then lastly inner core.

MARK

You always know how to get to the heart of the problem, Mr. Nicholas.

TRACEY

School is your time to shine. In my home country, I never got this privilege.

NICHOLAS

And no matter where you're from or at, you'll have parents who'll ask of you to rise and shine.

TRACEY

You're going to get a shiner, Nicholas.

MARK

I don't feel the sunshine anymore.

NICHOLAS

Your son is no longer shining, Tracey.

TRACEY

Where did my son go?

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Where did the sun go?

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Trace your steps, Tracey.

TRACEY

Mark time, mark.

TRACEY slides the packet away from
MARK and traces her fingers across
it.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

The red marks... I know the ending will be
disappointing.

NICHOLAS

Stop following the red.

MARK

Mom, I know you are more well-read.

TRACEY

(Reading)

"Essay question: What is life after school?"

You left it blank?!

NICHOLAS

Mark answered nothing, so I gave an F.

TRACEY

An F?!

NICHOLAS

I gave a Fuck. Pardon my French. Which, Mark,
you should study up on cause your French finals
are *la semaine prochaine*.

TRACEY

F this. You won't deny a promising future.
You'll see the error of your ways. You'll be
the best. You will be a straight A student once
more.

NICHOLAS

Would it kill you?

TRACEY

Kill me?

NICHOLAS

Would it kill you to...?

TRACEY

Kill me, too?

NICHOLAS

Would it kill you to kill your son with expectations?

TRACEY realizes.

TRACEY

I came to this land to expect my son to care about the numbers of days ahead rather than the letters of grades below.

TRACEY drops the packet.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

I expect nothing more than Mark, whether high or low, to heal us with conversations.

TRACEY levels with MARK.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

Grades are not everything. You are everything, Mark. I don't want you to kill yourself over academics, like many in our community do. When we say "we want you at your best," we wanted your wellbeing at its best.

NICHOLAS

You studied that, Mark?

MARK

Yes, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

It'll be on the finals.

MARK

My finals...

NICHOLAS

Final are not your final days. It's just another day. *But today is your time.* And since this is now your time to shine, we might as well get fired up.

TRACEY and NICHOLAS become MARKS.

MARKS

Hel~~l~~o, Mark.

MARK C

You're average! You're average! You are
average! You're average-y!

MARKS burn up papers around MARK.

END OF PLAY