

Trial of the Year: Child vs. Teacher

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A Play in Two Acts

By

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## **Trial of the Year: Child vs Teacher**

### **SYNOPSIS**

Mitch Robbins, a four-time Teacher of the Year award winner, and Gwen, his successful author wife, are celebrating their 42nd anniversary. During their anniversary dinner, District Attorney Jordan James has Mitch Robbins arrested for unspeakable acts towards a child. The tragedy begins as Mitch's life is laid before his family in court. There are no winners when it comes to children. The court of public opinion assumes you are guilty even if you are not. Mitch and Gwen try to hold on to each other and their marriage as Mitch's life unfolds. Their daughter, Zoe, is tasked with defending her father against the allegations. Trial of the Year: Child vs Teacher takes you on a pain-filled journey of truth, lies, and loss.

## Cast of Characters

<u>MITCH ROBINS:</u>	64-year-old ninth-grade science teacher. Very married to Gwen. Wise, strong, fun, loving, handsome, and charismatic.
<u>GWEN ROBINS:</u>	65-year-old attractive writer and wife of Mitch. Dogged, loving, strong, and religious.
<u>ZOE ROBINS-SAWYER:</u>	41-year-old daughter of Mitch and Gwen. Married mother. Strong, no-nonsense, smart Attorney.
<u>JORDAN JAMES:</u>	53-year-old any race, male or female. Hard driving district Attorney. Educated, a strong-willed fighter for justice.
<u>CAROLYN JENKINS COURT REPORTER:</u>	65-year-old gossipy next-door neighbor. Dresses garishly. Race open. The court reporter is non-descript.
<u>MAYA PARK:</u>	15-year-old girl. Student of Mitch. Street smart. Race open.
<u>JUDGE MATTHEWS BAILIFF:</u>	60. Strong, slim no-nonsense Judge with white hair. Bailiff has a large belly and black hair. Male. Race open.
<u>POLICE OFFICER REPORTER MAGISTRATE BALIFF 2:</u>	Mid 40's. Slim, tall. As the Police Officer, Reporter, and Bailiff 2, he is non-descript-looking. Magistrate wears a mustache and combs hair differently. Male. Race open.

Scene

A three-set split stage set in Harrisburg Pennsylvania.

Time

The present.

SET VISION

Three-set split stage style. Each set is angled. The living area, on a higher level, is the largest section. It's centered and is a middle-class kitchen/dining room/great room. The front door is on the stage-right wall. It opens hinges upstage. There is a hallway on the upper stage left wall. The lower level stage right is the smallest set section - The interrogation room will double as ZOE'S office. There are no windows and furnished with a table and hard chairs. The courtroom is the second largest set on the lower level stage left. The judge's bench backs up against the living area. The upper stage left wall has a double door and an American flag next to it. A witness stand is downstage of the judge's bench. The defense and prosecution tables and chairs face the Judge's bench. Behind the defense table, farthest downstage left is a small row of seats. This would be the gallery.

Act I

Scene 1	Living area	End of March, evening.
Scene 2	Interrogation room	After midnight, the same day.
Scene 3	Living area	Dawn, the next morning.
Scene 4	Courtroom	Three-forty-five PM, same day.
Scene 5	Living area	Six-thirty PM, same day.
Scene 6	Living area	Eight PM, Monday.
Scene 7	Living area	Ten-fifteen AM, Tuesday.

INTERMISSION

Act II

Scene 1	Living area	Eleven AM, six-months later.
Scene 2	Living area	Evening, same day.
Scene 3	Courtroom	Two-thirty PM, a couple of days later.
Scene 4	Living Area	Five PM, same day.
Scene 5	Zoe's office	Sunday 11 AM
Scene 6	Courtroom	Nine AM Tuesday.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: End of March, evening. Harrisburg Pennsylvania. Living area. The dining room table is set for a romantic dinner. Candles are lit. Soft music plays and open wrapping paper is on the coffee table. A prominent large framed photo with a bow is leaning against the furniture. It is a photo of MITCH and MAYA in the school lab. MITCH has his arm around MAYA and they are laughing at a failed science experiment. They are covered in powder.

AT RISE: MITCH and GWEN are eating a romantic anniversary dinner at home. Dinner is just over.

MITCH  
You are the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes on.

GWEN  
You say that to all your wives.

MITCH  
Only when I want to get lucky!

GWEN  
Wait till your other wives see my stunning ruby necklace.

MITCH  
It was either the necklace or the earrings. If you'd rather have...

GWEN  
This is perfect! Such extravagance I feel like a queen! Are you sure we shouldn't get that fridge instead?

MITCH  
Never! What kind of anniversary gift would that be? You deserve the whole set. Maybe next year I can add the earrings. I love my picture! How in the world did you get that?

GWEN  
Ned gave it to me. I wanted something special of you at work. This was the best photo I found! Tell me, oh King-of-the-lab, who is the girl and what happened in that picture?

MITCH

That's Maya Park. I was helping her make cornstarch fireworks and she accidentally set them off. The powder went everywhere! I thought I told you!

GWEN

I missed that one!

MITCH

I'm sure I told you! I came home covered head to toe... Oh, wait, you were in Ohio on your book tour.

GWEN

Sounds like a mess. I'm glad I missed that one. I'll bet the kids got a good laugh!

MITCH

It was after school. The other kids weren't there. Ned happened to be walking by and heard Maya and me laughing. It's a great picture! And my new watch will be the envy of all the teachers!

GWEN

It won't replace your dad's Cartier, but it's a nice one.

MITCH

(kisses GWEN)

I love it! I sure wish I knew who took my old one. I wanted to pass it down to my grandson someday.

GWEN

I'm glad they didn't get your wallet too.

MITCH

It was in my sock.

GWEN

So, my love, what masterful idea do you have for the sophomore science fair this year?

MITCH

We're going to build a mechanical articulated hand.

GWEN

Ha! I found one of your hands in my underwear drawer. I thought my glove was haunted!

MITCH

(laughing)

The look on your face, priceless!

GWEN

I still owe you for that!

GWEN (CONT'D)

Seeing a disjointed glove crawl across the drawer cost me ten years!

(laughs)

Sleep with one eye open.

MITCH

I had to see if it worked! Most of the kids are angling to build a battle-bot. This will be a great start.

GWEN

Battle-bots? Your two derelicts will be happy. They can finally destroy something with permission.

MITCH

Hugh and Nathaniel? I flunked them a couple of weeks ago.

GWEN

Well, it's about time! I thought you were getting soft. What tipped the boat?

MITCH

Marshaling and mentoring sixteen-year-olds is hard enough without extortion, bullying, cheating, and dirty pranks. Several kids were scared to come to class. Hugh and Nathaniel were threatening kids for money and their phones. I caught them red-handed and after all their ditching I failed them.

GWEN

Gang member wanna-be's and now angry? That's not a good combination. Aren't you worried?

MITCH

I wouldn't be any good as a teacher if I let them get to me. I feel bad flunking them - as a teacher I mean. I wish I had been able to get through to them!

GWEN

You know what the bible says; those who love their children care enough to discipline them.

MITCH

True but it also says to love. I can't help thinking I let them down. Gwenny, they're good kids at heart just messed up. When I flunked Hugh, he was almost in tears. I felt sorry for him. He is a brilliant kid! If he'd just apply himself, he could discover a cure for cancer. Nathaniel would do well in music, but money, violence, and the pressure to join that gang make that impossible.

GWEN

Don't beat yourself up.



GWEN (CONT'D)

If I know you at all, you will find a way to still make a difference in their lives.

MITCH

Doubtful. Hugh and Nathaniel are being courted by the King Kasper gang. I saw Hugh in the courtyard with that gang leader and his crew. They were laying it on thick.

GWEN

I'm glad you didn't go all macho and get yourself knifed for your trouble!

MITCH

I ran off the gang.

GWEN

Mitch! What were you thinking? You could've been hurt!

MITCH

I'm not letting anyone near my kids without a fight! Even Hugh and Nathaniel! I hope I get those two back next year.  
(smirks)

That gang scattered like roaches under a sink. The students saw them run. Score one for the good guys!

GWEN

Where is Ned in all this? What's he doing about the gangs?

MITCH

Not much. In his prime, the gangs wouldn't have stood a chance. He seems content to ride it out until retirement. He just wants to be Principal in name only.

GWEN

You should be the Principal instead of Ned's Assistant. If Ned won't do anything he needs to step aside! Gangs will run over that school if no one stops them.

MITCH

In the end, they're misguided kids! Kids! As long as there is hope, I will fight to get any kid out of a gang.

(laughing)

Now that they have lots of time on their hands, Hugh and Nathaniel are becoming legends with their pranks. They found a crawlspace above the ceiling in the second-story men's room. They started crawling around up there and ended up above Mrs. Canker's room. The crawlspace echoes so those boys began to boooo, ahhhh, ooooh, and, howl. Poor Mrs. Canker is quite fragile. She grabbed her cross and began chanting scripture trying to exorcise the demon in the ceiling. Her class laughed and carried on for what seemed like an eternity. I heard it downstairs.

GWEN  
(laughs heartily)  
Poor Mrs. Canker!

MITCH  
By the time Ned was called the kids were haunting the halls with toilet paper streamers, wearing their sweaters like ghosts, and holding makeshift crosses.

GWEN  
What did Ned do?

MITCH  
He was doubled over laughing when I saw him. Mrs. Canker had to be driven home. It was up to me to clear the halls and break up the melee.

GWEN  
I hope you kicked those two delinquents out of school!

MITCH  
I didn't have any proof and the kids sure wouldn't turn on them. They have intimidated all the kids into submission.

GWEN  
You need to be Principal. Fight for it! Ned needs to go!

MITCH  
Gweny, I can't do that to Ned!

GWEN  
You're doing all the work and he's taking all the credit! I want you to get what you deserve. I know who wears the cape in that school even if you won't fight for yourself.

(MITCH stands and takes some plates to the sink. GWEN grabs plates too following.)

MITCH  
Ned will be gone by the end of the year, besides, I have a bigger goal. What would you say if I threw my hat in the ring for Superintendent of the Harrisburg School District?

GWEN  
Oh, Mitch, You're exactly what the district needs!

MITCH  
It means a lot more of my time but I honestly believe I can make a difference especially where the gangs are concerned. Gangs provide a sense of family. I want to create a sense of belonging in schools. I know we can create a support structure that will fill the void in these kids' lives.

MITCH (CONT'D)

I want to give them a sense of purpose.

GWEN

You have my vote! Finally, you will have a position of power! Gangs won't stand a chance!

(lovingly hugs MITCH)

I adore power in my men.

MITCH

Oh you do, do you?

GWEN

Power is so...sexy!

(MITCH kisses GWEN. The MUSIC changes to a great romantic dance song.)

MITCH (CONT'D)

May I have this dance, Mrs. Robins?

GWEN

I thought you'd never ask, Mr. Robins.

(MITCH and GWEN dance.)

MITCH

Forty-two years.

GWEN

Seems like only yesterday.

MITCH

I love you, Gwenny.

(They stop dancing and kiss. GWEN puts her head on MITCH'S shoulder and they continue to dance.)

MITCH (CONT'D)

How about we go away this weekend? I'll take Monday day off to celebrate our anniversary. We could rent that cabin at Raytown Lake and spend our evenings in that amazing hot tub.

GWEN

Oh, how you tempt me! I can't go this weekend.

MITCH

What? Why can't you go?

GWEN

I sold 'Station Zero.' I have to meet with my publisher this weekend about a book tour.

MITCH

Gwen! I am so proud of you! You worked so hard on that!

GWEN

I couldn't have done it without you. All those lousy TV dinners and lonely evenings you had to endure. Have I told you how much I love you?

MITCH

Prove it!

(MITCH scoops GWEN up and begins to carry a giggling GWEN to the bedroom. The DOORBELL rings.)

GWEN

No, not now! Don't answer it!

(MITCH puts GWEN down and turns off the MUSIC.)

MITCH

It's just a brief intermission, my love. Prepare to be dazzled!

(Frustrated, GWEN opens the door. CAROLYN is there.)

GWEN

Carolyn, can we talk tomorrow?

CAROLYN

Hi Gwen, I'm sorry to interrupt your anniversary. I need Mitch's help.

MITCH

Come in.

CAROLYN

Ted's still out of town and I have the grandkids. Sandy put her head through the banister again and she's stuck.

MITCH

I'll grab my cape.

GWEN

Don't forget your cowl, Superintendent Man!

(MITCH exits.)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Mitch'll get her out. Can I get you a glass of wine?

CAROLYN

I'll take a vat to go, please.

GWEN

How did Sandy do it this time?

CAROLYN

Playing jail with her brother.

(pause listening as she  
takes the glass of wine)

Do you hear that?

GWEN

Hear what?

CAROLYN

Silence. I miss that! I'm sorry to mess up your night. It was either Mitch or the fire department. I was desperate! What did I interrupt?

GWEN

Our version of 'From Here to Eternity'.

CAROLYN

Such a romantic! You are married to the best of the best. Speaking of marriage, did you hear about Marisol?

GWEN

You know I don't listen to gossip.

CAROLYN

But this is so juicy! She got engaged... again to a real stud who's ten years younger than she is. Well, last Tuesday, Marisol was seen exiting the Notel Motel with a man, not her fiancé!

GWEN

You don't know that.

CAROLYN

It's true! It's not like it's her first time out of the gate. If she gets married, it will be her fourth. You know she got a boob job.

GWEN

Oh, Carolyn, where do you get your information?

CAROLYN

Sylvia Borden got it from Jane Doyle who heard it firsthand from Mavis Lipchitz. I hardly recognize Marisol with her nose job and that facelift. Now with the boob job, we'll see her coming well before we see that plastic face! Speaking of facelifts...

GWEN

How is your charity drive coming?

CAROLYN

We raised over six hundred thousand in the past two months.

GWEN

Bravo! The hospital must be very grateful!

CAROLYN

We could use you as a headliner at the next fundraiser.

GWEN

I will do what I can, but I am getting ready for another book tour. I sold 'Station Zero.'

CAROLYN

OMG! Congrats! My BFF on the Best Seller list again! When did you find out?

GWEN

This morning. I had just told Mitch when you came by. I was hoping Mitch could take some time off and join me again.

CAROLYN

If he doesn't go, can I?

GWEN

We'll talk.

CAROLYN

Ah, come on. It'll be fun! Remember when we hit New York?

GWEN

Hit it?

(laughing)

We annihilated it, but that was twenty years ago.

CAROLYN

The town hasn't been the same since. Neither has my liver. Ah, come on! It'd be a blast!

(MITCH enters.)

MITCH

Crisis averted. Sandy is out of jail and on her way to bed.

CAROLYN  
How can I thank you? I know, how about a couple of tickets to the charity event of the year?

MITCH  
Charity event?

CAROLYN  
And for you only three hundred dollars each!

(MITCH laughs)

CAROLYN (CONT'D)  
Well, I tried!

MITCH  
I've heard that about you!

CAROLYN  
Thanks for the wine and getting my grandbaby out of jail. Gwen, think about it! You and me leaving a skid mark on a city that...

(The doorbell RINGS.)

GWEN  
We are very popular this evening.

(GWEN opens the door. JORDAN and a POLICE OFFICER stand.)

GWEN (CONT'D)  
May I help you?

JORDAN  
Good evening. I am District Attorney Jordan James. I need to speak with Mitchell Robins.

MITCH  
I'm Mitch Robins.

JORDAN  
Mitchell James Robins, you are under arrest.

GWEN  
What?!!

POLICE OFFICER  
(cuffs MITCH)  
You have the right to remain silent.

MITCH  
What is this about?