

COULD YOU PROOFREAD MY GRAFFITI?

By Bradley Walton

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A Comedic Duet

By Bradley Walton

SYNOPSIS: Dakota has written something, but he's not sure about the spelling, so he goes to his English teacher for help. Mr. Marks is happy to assist... at least until he finds out that what he's agreed to proofread is a bad word on the bathroom wall. Can Dakota convince Mr. Marks to not tell the administration? Can Mr. Marks hold Dakota accountable without losing his trust? And what's the bad word that Dakota is so worried he's misspelled?

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: A high school English classroom.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 males)

MR. MARKS (m) An English teacher. *(110 lines)*

DAKOTA (m) A student who doesn't always
make good choices. *(111 lines)*

SET

A simply-suggested school classroom with a teacher's desk, a few student desks, and accompanying chairs. (Bare stage if performed for forensics competition.)

PROPS

- Cell phone (DAKOTA)
- Items commonly found on a teacher's desk: papers, a cup of pencils and pens, stapler, coffee mug, computer, etc.

COSTUMING

DAKOTA – Jeans, a hoodie, and sneakers.

MR. MARKS – A polo shirt or a dress shirt and tie. Dress pants and shoes.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Despite vandalizing a bathroom, Dakota is not a bad kid at heart. The things he's *really* after are attention and affirmation. Dakota has come to Mr. Marks because he looks up to him, and although Dakota really does want to be sure he spelled his graffiti correctly, he's also proud of it and wants to show it off to someone whose approval makes him feel good.

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AT START: *A teacher's desk in a classroom. MR. MARKS is seated at the desk, working. A few student desks and chairs may be situated nearby. DAKOTA enters and approaches MR. MARKS' desk.*

DAKOTA: Hey, Mr. Marks.

MR. MARKS: Hi Dakota.

DAKOTA: How ya doing?

MR. MARKS: I'm fine.

DAKOTA: Good.

MR. MARKS: I'm not used to seeing you this late in the afternoon. Did you have a club meeting or a practice for something?

DAKOTA: Nah. Just hanging out.

MR. MARKS: You didn't just get out of detention, did you?

DAKOTA: Um...

MR. MARKS: If you did, you don't have to tell me. You've served your time and I'll let that be the end of it.

DAKOTA: Right. Thanks. So... um, can I ask you a question?

MR. MARKS: Sure.

DAKOTA: Is teacher/student confidentiality a thing?

MR. MARKS: Up to a point. If it was something involving drugs, or if I thought you or someone else was in danger, I'd need to report that. Is anything wrong?

DAKOTA: No, I just need a little help with something.

MR. MARKS: What kind of help?

DAKOTA: Could you proofread something for me?

MR. MARKS: Of course! I'd be happy to.

DAKOTA: And then could you not tell anybody that you proofread it?

MR. MARKS: Depends on what it is.

DAKOTA: Okay. That's cool. Never mind.

MR. MARKS: Is it something personal?

DAKOTA: Kind of. Not really. But... if you hear about something being spelled wrong, could you maybe not tell anybody we had this conversation?

MR. MARKS: Not knowing how to spell a word is nothing to be ashamed of.

DAKOTA: Okay. I appreciate that. *(Turns and starts to exit.)* Thanks! Bye!

MR. MARKS: *(Standing.)* Dakota...

DAKOTA: (*Stopping.*) Yes, Mr. Marks?

MR. MARKS: (*Crossing towards DAKOTA.*) I feel like there's something you're not telling me. Did you make a poor choice?

DAKOTA: Maybe.

MR. MARKS: What was that choice?

DAKOTA: (*Turning to face MR. MARKS.*) I wrote a word that I wasn't sure how to spell. I should've picked a word I was sure about.

MR. MARKS: That's all?

DAKOTA: Yeah.

MR. MARKS: You shouldn't feel that way. We have to try new things in order to grow and learn. I'm proud of you for making that stretch. If you spelled a word wrong, that's okay. You can learn from the mistake so you'll always spell it correctly from now on. What was the word?

DAKOTA: I'd feel weird saying it out loud. My dad says it's the most vile word there is.

MR. MARKS: Is the second letter a "u"?

DAKOTA: Yeah.

MR. MARKS: I think I know the word you mean.

DAKOTA: So I don't need to say it?

MR. MARKS: No. Please don't. What were you writing that you needed to use that word?

DAKOTA: It was a—what do you call it... a critique.

MR. MARKS: A critique of what?

DAKOTA: A person.

MR. MARKS: What kind of person?

DAKOTA: A bad person.

MR. MARKS: How bad?

DAKOTA: Really bad.

MR. MARKS: What class?

DAKOTA: History.

MR. MARKS: Okay... there are some very, very bad people in history. No argument there.

DAKOTA: So it was okay to use that word?

MR. MARKS: Well, not really.

DAKOTA: But they're a bad person.

MR. MARKS: Just because someone is a bad person doesn't mean we should use bad words when we're writing about them.

DAKOTA: Oh.

MR. MARKS: But it's not a big deal. If you haven't turned in the assignment yet, you can just fix the word.

DAKOTA: It was kind of for an... artistic project. And it's pretty much done. It's going to be really hard to change.

MR. MARKS: If it can't be changed, then why are you asking me to proofread it?

DAKOTA: I was hoping you'd tell me I spelled the word right, and then I wouldn't have to worry about it.

MR. MARKS: I see. Well, if you show it to me and it's right, I'll tell you so. But if it's wrong, I'm not going to lie.

DAKOTA: So you won't tell anyone that I wrote it?

MR. MARKS: No, I won't. I'll let your history teacher make that call.

DAKOTA: Awesome!

MR. MARKS: You think your history teacher will be okay with it?

DAKOTA: He's not gonna see it.

MR. MARKS: I'm confused.

DAKOTA: He never uses that bathroom.

MR. MARKS: What?

DAKOTA: I'm pretty sure Mr. Johnson only uses the bathroom in the history office.

MR. MARKS: What does that have to do with it?

DAKOTA: I painted on the wall in the bathroom next to the cafeteria. He'll never see it there.

MR. MARKS: Why would you paint a history project on the bathroom wall? Especially if your teacher is never going to see it? Did you get permission from the administration?

DAKOTA: Well, no. It's not for class.

MR. MARKS: I asked what class and you said history.

DAKOTA: I thought you were asking what class the person is in that I was writing about.

MR. MARKS: You were writing about another student in your history class... and not a historical figure you've been learning about?

DAKOTA: Right.

MR. MARKS: (*Putting fingertips of one hand to his forehead as if he has a headache.*) Oh boy.

DAKOTA: Are you all right?

MR. MARKS: The thing you want me to proofread is graffiti... about another student... in the boys' bathroom?

DAKOTA: Is that okay?

MR. MARKS: No, it's not okay!

DAKOTA: But you won't tell anyone I did it, right?

MR. MARKS: Of course, I have to tell someone. It's vandalism.

DAKOTA: You said that you wouldn't!

MR. MARKS: I didn't know it was graffiti!

DAKOTA: You still said you wouldn't. You gave me your word. Doesn't that count for anything?

MR. MARKS: I didn't...

DAKOTA: I thought I could trust you.

MR. MARKS: You can. But it wasn't clear to me what we were talking about. This changes things completely.

DAKOTA: So, I'm going to get in trouble?

MR. MARKS: Probably so.

DAKOTA: I thought you were cool.

MR. MARKS: Dakota, I'm your friend, but I'm also your English teacher, and being your teacher takes precedence over being your friend. And even if I wasn't your teacher, vandalism and bullying are still wrong.

DAKOTA: I'm not bullying anybody.

MR. MARKS: Writing graffiti disparaging another student is a form of bullying.

DAKOTA: But he deserves it! He bullied me first!

MR. MARKS: This is not the way to resolve it.

DAKOTA: So now I'm going to get in trouble and look stupid for misspelling the word that everybody will know I misspelled because I got in trouble! I should've kept my mouth shut!

MR. MARKS: Maybe you spelled the word right. You said you weren't sure.

DAKOTA: Would you at least still look at it for me?

MR. MARKS: I'm really not sure I should be giving feedback on vandalism.

DAKOTA: I just want to know if I spelled the word right.

MR. MARKS: It's not a difficult word to spell.

DAKOTA: Are you trying to make me feel stupid? That's really not cool.

MR. MARKS: No, that wasn't my intention at all. I was trying to be reassuring... that you probably spelled it right.

DAKOTA: But if I did spell it wrong, now I'll feel even dumber.

MR. MARKS: I'm sorry. I didn't think through what I was saying. So, to apologize, I will proofread your graffiti for you.

DAKOTA: If you want to apologize, I'd rather you not turn me in.

MR. MARKS: Sorry. Not an option.

DAKOTA: I guess I'll take what I can get.

MR. MARKS: Shall we go look at it?

DAKOTA: *(Pulling a phone from his pocket.)* I have a picture on my phone.

MR. MARKS: Of course you do.

DAKOTA: What's that supposed to mean?

MR. MARKS: This is why you wanted me to proofread it. So you could share it through social media, but first you wanted to make sure nobody would laugh at you.

DAKOTA: Maybe I just felt proud of my art and wanted to save a copy of it for myself.

MR. MARKS: Maybe you felt proud of your art and wanted to share it on social media.

DAKOTA: Let's just say... I think it turned out pretty good and leave it at that.

MR. MARKS: You realize if you post a photo, it could make its way to the administration and you'd get in trouble even if I wasn't involved?

DAKOTA: I wouldn't say I was the one who did it.

MR. MARKS: You'd be making yourself a suspect and the person you wrote the graffiti about would know it was probably you.

DAKOTA: He wouldn't tell the principal.

MR. MARKS: But he might tell somebody else. And word might get around.

DAKOTA: So even if I spelled the word right, you don't think I should post the picture?

MR. MARKS: No.

DAKOTA: Well, that was a huge waste of time.

MR. MARKS: Was your entire reason for doing the graffiti so you could post it online?

Beat.

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