

DESTITUTE

By Bradley Walton

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DESTITUTE*A Dramatic Monologue***by Bradley Walton**

SYNOPSIS: Max's father was fired for sexual harassment, and when the bank foreclosed on their house, Max left with his mom and wound up homeless. Now, Max is living with his grandmother and trying to keep his grades up, with an eye towards college and the future. But when his dad turns up at school wanting to apologize and start over, can Max forgive his father for making their family *Destitute*?

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(1 either; gender flexible)*

MAX (m/f).....A teenager from a broken family.

TIME: Present day.**SET:** Bare stage.**COSTUMES:** School clothes.

MAX: I'm listening to my teacher review for a test in U. S. History class when there's a call for me to come to the front office. The teacher frowns—he doesn't like interruptions and asks if it can wait until class is over. Apparently, the answer is no, because he hangs up the phone with an annoyed expression and writes me a pass. He doesn't offer any kind of explanation and I don't ask. I hate to leave the room because I bombed the last test and I need to do well on this one, but I take the pass and head down the hall, wondering what they've called me for.

My suspense ends 30 seconds later when I walk into the office and my dad is standing there. He looks almost sheepish, like he's afraid of how I'll react. Good. He should be. He attempts a weak smile and says, "Can we talk?"

My two-word reply prompts the office secretary to look up from her computer, but she doesn't tell me to watch my language.

"Max, can we please not do this here?" Dad says.

It's the stupidest question I think I've ever been asked.

"You came here. To this school. And pulled me out of a test review to come to this office—and you don't want to do this here? What were you expecting!?"

"For you to be a little more rational. And if I showed up at your grandmother's place, she never would have let me in the door."

The secretary is looking at us nervously, like she's expecting a full on fight to break out in the office. She asks if we'd like for her to call an administrator. We both say "no" at the same time. Dad looks at me hopefully, like he's discovered some sort of common ground between us. I try to shoot daggers at him out of my eyes.

Then the secretary offers us a conference room down the hall. Dad accepts. I shrug. She mentions that the school resource officer and one of the assistant principals will be within earshot, if either of us

needs anything. She says it with a gentle smile and in a helpful voice, but her implication is clear: Both of us had better behave.

The walls of the conference room are painted a warm gray. There's a large wooden table and sixteen padded chairs. Neither of us sits. Dad closes the door and exhales audibly.

"What do you want?" I say.

He looks at the floor, then up at me. His eyes move slowly, like the effort is difficult and painful.

"I want to apologize."

He sounds like he means it. And I really don't care.

Once upon a time, I had a pretty nice life. Upper end of upper middle class. Lived in a big house. My parents didn't pay a whole lot of attention to me, but they didn't neglect me, either. Dad had a good job as a manager at a tech company and mom made jewelry and sold it at craft shows. Dad was definitely the breadwinner, but we weren't hurting for money. They had their lives and I hung out with friends and listened to music and things were okay.

Then a new employee, really pretty and fresh out of college, started at dad's company. Apparently, he told her some dirty jokes. She laughed, so he kept on telling them. As time went on, his jokes got dirtier and she kept laughing, and the dirty jokes evolved into dirty conversation and it never once occurred to him that she might be playing along because he was her supervisor and she was afraid of getting in trouble if she complained. The day she was standing at the coffee maker and he rubbed up against her backside in a suggestive and not-work-appropriate kind of way was the tipping point. She complained to his boss. He got fired. And things got ugly between him and mom at home. A few months later, we lost the house when dad couldn't make the mortgage payments. Mom left dad and took me with her, then handed me off to her mom when she couldn't afford to pay for both me and the drinking problem that

she'd developed. And now I'm trying really hard to keep my grades up so I can score some scholarships to pay for college, but I'm struggling in U.S. History, which is the class dad just pulled me out of because he wants to apologize.

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