

# DARK AT THE CENTER

by

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## CHARACTERS

- JANE       vulnerable, warm, happy in her marriage,  
                  unaccustomed to misfortune,  
                  optimistic, the mother of a teenager
- OLIVER     Jane's husband, a charismatic professor of  
                  Philosophy at an Ivy League  
                  university, 40's. Vigorous,  
                  charming.
- TINA       Jane's friend (doubles as MOLLY, a  
                  television reporter, as the Voice of  
                  Jack's Secretary and as Voice of the  
                  Social Worker)
- JACK       an attorney, beguiling, especially toward  
                  Jane, (doubles as voice of the  
                  District Attorney and as the  
                  Cameraman.)
- SIMON     a teenager. Sometimes he is the ideal son of  
                  Jane's imagination. At other times  
                  he is surly, taciturn, defiant.

### Note to Actors

Slash marks (/) indicate the point at which the next speaker begins.

## SCENE ONE

*A breeze is blowing white curtains, inward. HE is dressing. SHE is waking up.*

JANE

Ohhhhh. It's so delicious not to have to wake up to an alarm clock. To be able to wake up and see you there. Looking soooo good.

OLIVER

Hi.

JANE

Wow! What time is it?

OLIVER

It's early for you and late for me.

JANE

*Alice In Wonderland ?*

OLIVER

You can go back to sleep. I have a meeting before my 9:55.

JANE

You've already had a shower?

OLIVER

Ta da!

JANE

Not enough time to come back to bed?

OLIVER

"Had we but world enough and time."

I was trying to just evaporate so you could /go back

JANE

I'm celebrating being a lady of leisure after /  
all the

OLIVER

You make a fine Lady of Leisure.

JANE

Maybe I could make THAT my thesis topic.  
Leisure, an Analysis.

OLIVER

Leisure, a Dissection of its Roots and Origins.

JANE

Leisure, an Experiential Treatment

OLIVER

Including an Articulation of its Fundamentals  
with emphasis on Predisposition, Practices and  
Principles.

JANE

I'm beginning to think this has real  
possibilities. Is there any precedent for a  
faculty wife to choose her husband as a thesis  
advisor?

OLIVER

Not really my field

JANE

*(provocative)*

I could help you expand into that area.

OLIVER

*(crossing to the bed)*

I bet you could. Unfortunately, duty in the

OLIVER CONT'D.

form of my department chair, calls.

JANE

You had to draw the one chairman in all of academia who believes eight-thirty in the morning is a time of day?

OLIVER

Something is Up. He was very cryptic on the phone.

JANE

If they want you to host the department volleyball tournament, tell them it's against your religion.

OLIVER

I dunno. It might be worth it to see some of those guys out on a court.

HE laughs. SHE joins him.

JANE

You mean what's his name, the bald Renaissance guy? Cornfield? In little gym shorts?

OLIVER

Korngold.

JANE

*(imitating a fastidious pedant)*

"The ball is in your court.' Is that metaphor?"

OLIVER

*(giving her credit)*

I'm using that.

JANE

The copyright is yours.

OLIVER

Can you go back to sleep?

JANE

Not me. I am "roused."

*HE kisses her.*

If you're serious I'll brush my teeth.

OLIVER

No. No time. Do we have any bagels?

JANE

In the blue bin. I'll come downstairs with you.

OLIVER

That's okay. Go back to sleep. I'll call you later.

*HE exits.*

JANE

*(calling after him as lights fade)*

I'll be working on my thesis proposal: Leisure,  
An Insider's Perspective.

*Lights up on a lectern at left.*

*OLIVER walks into the light.*

## SCENE TWO

*OLIVER, an engaging speaker, is at the lectern, midlecture.*

OLIVER

...We'll take up some of those gray areas - partial truth, selective truth - when we get to Alfred North Whitehead. He's the guy who said, way back in 1953, "There are no whole truths; all truths are half-truths."

Will someone let me know if we're about to run overtime again? I want to be sure to have enough time to hand back your papers.

Now, we've come up with a couple of models for truttelling:

First: "Tell the truth, all the time."

But that leaves us with this question: What do you do when a murderer comes to your door, demanding to know the whereabouts of your best friend... who is hiding in your bedroom?

"Nothing but the truth, all the time?" Can we agree that this is not the best strategy here?

So how about: "Tell the truth, all the time, except when someone is hurt if you tell the truth?"

Does anyone want to share a thought on this one?

CROSSFADE

LIGHTS UP ON TINA who looks toward JANE.

TINA

Is it true, Jane? Jane, is it true?

## SCENE THREE

*LIGHTS change. A breeze is blowing white curtains, inward. HE is dressing. SHE is waking.*

JANE

Ohhhhh. It's so delicious not to have to wake up to an alarm clock. To be able to wake up and see you there. Looking soooo good.

OLIVER

Hi.

JANE

Wow! What time is it?

OLIVER

It's early for you and late for me.

JANE

*Alice In Wonderland ?*

OLIVER

Go back to sleep.

JANE

What are you getting all spiffy for? A faculty meeting? Lunch with what's-his-name? Oliver? O? What is his name?

OLIVER

*(distracted, slightly crabby)*

What?

JANE

The new dean. Dr...whosamajig, who announced your appointment.



OLIVER

Schiullo. What about him? I hope you're not going to do that on campus.

JANE

Do what?

OLIVER

Forget the key names.

JANE

*(making it a caress)*

Schiullo. Schiullo. I promise never to forget dear dear Dr. Schiullo again.

OLIVER

Good.

JANE

He is The Man. Thank you Dr. Schiullo. Thank you. Thank you for recognizing my husband's genius. Because of you, dear Dr. Schiullo, I am OFF the Substitute list. Yayyyyy!

OLIVER

*(as Scarlett O'Hara)*

We'll never eat cat food again.

JANE

The postage alone. How many resumes did we put in the mail? Five Billion? And then not even interviewed by half of the...? And after all that. Bingo! Tenure track. We get to stay.

OLIVER

Hooray, hooray,  
We get to stay.

JANE

The most beautiful words in the language.

OLIVER

"Cellar door" and "tenure track."

*THEY laugh.*

What are you going to do today?

*HE dons cufflinks.*

JANE

I'm going to be a Faculty Wife. I'm going to ride my bike to the tearoom and hear a scholarly discussion on the symbolism in Beatrix Potter's PAT THE BUNNY.

OLIVER

Beatrix Potter didn't write PAT THE BUNNY.

JANE

Eureka! I'll bet there's a paper in that. Maybe an article. Maybe a dissertation. PAT THE BUNNY, influences and antecedents.

OLIVER

Have you got time to take a look at the rewrite on my journal article?

JANE

Sure.

OLIVER

*(giving her the article)*

Just for clarity. I already spell checked it.

JANE

No problem. I'm yours.

OLIVER

*(mock lascivious)*

I'd take you up on it, but I've got an advisee in my office before my 9:55.

JANE

*(glancing at the journal article)*

You know what I hate about teaching sixth grade?

OLIVER

Sixth graders?

JANE

Sixth graders think that Anything you say is an intrusion into their personal lives.

OLIVER

It's a performance. A teacher can be a God. It's the same with college teaching.

JANE

Right. I learned that in Pedagogical Methods 101.

OLIVER

How to be a God?

JANE

The little ones are the worst. *(syrupy, phony voice)* "If you hit or pinch or kick, you're going to have to take a Time Out." I bet you never had to say to a college student, *(stern teacher voice)* "Biting is not allowed."

OLIVER

Only to some of the more aggressive females.

JANE

What are you doing today? You look très élégant.

OLIVER

I just thought I'd give the department secretary a thrill.

JANE

Tell her to keep her hands off. You're spoken for.

OLIVER

You don't say?

*HE crosses to her. Kisses her.*

I'm out of here.

JANE

When will you be back? Are you tutoring today?

OLIVER

No. That program is...over. I'll be back around...seven or eight.

JANE

I don't know why I ask. I know you can't tell time.

OLIVER

I tell time beautifully. I'm just not sure how long I'll feel / like spending

JANE

It's okay. Just call me / when you

OLIVER

It'll be seven or eight, I'd say. I'll call you.

JANE

Fine. Dinner at eight then unless I hear from you.

*HE is exiting.*

*Singsong:*

I don't have to get uh-up. I don't have to get uh-up.

CROSSFADE

SCENE FOUR

OLIVER

*(At the lectern)*

To tell "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," is, of course, an impossibility. "The whole truth," as Pagano says, "is infinite." We are selective in the truths we choose to tell. When a defendant is asked to tell "the whole truth" he or she is, necessarily, selective in what he tells. How can I tell you the whole truth? If you say, "How are you feeling?" Do I tell you? Exactly how I am feeling? Is what I had for breakfast part of the Whole Truth? Do I need to tell you that a certain red-haired student reminds me of my cousin? That is part of the Whole Truth. No. I tell you a carefully selected piece of the truth.

OLIVER CONT'D.

Let's talk about the press. We could devote an entire course to "What is True?" Versus "What it Says in the Newspaper." Has any of you had the experience of being quoted in a newspaper? Or being involved in a news item? On campus or elsewhere? Hands?...Uh hunh. Then you understand that the more you know about a story the harder it is to find the Truth of that story in the press.

Let's take this up via e-mail between now and Thursday. Include your response to the quote for the day. This one is from the French writer-philosopher, Henri Amiel:

"An error is the more dangerous, the more truth it contains."

That's pretty much it for today. I need your papers in my mailbox by 5:00. Read my lips. Five o'clock. I realize I didn't get to my mailbox til 7:45 last time. But you can't count on that kind of lapse. Late papers will be treated with...disdain. *(He looks up and smiles, acknowledging the laughter.)*

On Monday we take up Fleming's "The Problem of Evil."

CROSSFADE

*LIGHTS UP ON TINA, looking at Jane.*

TINA

Is it true, Jane? Is it?

CROSSFADE.

## SCENE FIVE

*Sound of a tape rewinding.*  
*LIGHTS change. White curtains are being blown, inward. SHE is waking up. He is in shadow.*

JANE

Ohhhhh. It's so delicious not to have to wake up to an alarm clock. To be able to wake up and see you there. Looking soooo good. Oliver?

*OLIVER steps out of the shadows.*

What's your day going to be like? You look...good.

OLIVER

A day that will live in infamy.

JANE

No it's not.

OLIVER

What?

JANE

That's sometime in December.

OLIVER

December 7<sup>th</sup>. God! Who did I marry? Do you know a single date in history?

JANE

1066.

OLIVER

That's a year.

JANE

July 4, 1776.

OLIVER

Good. Very good.

JANE

What's the matter?

OLIVER

Nothing

JANE

Nothing?

OLIVER

Nothing.

JANE

You certainly got up on the wrong side / of the

OLIVER

Cliche. Hackneyed. Try for a more original /  
use of metaphor

JANE

Okay...okay. I just meant, is something  
bothering you?

OLIVER

Yes.

JANE

What?

OLIVER

I can't go into it now, Jane. You'll just have  
to bear with me.

JANE

I'd rather "bear you than bear / with you..."



OLIVER

No jokes, no quotations from obscure / sources

JANE

By definition, nothing from Shakespeare can be considered obscure. (*amiable squabbling*) Lord knows I put up with an awful lot of your / obscure

OLIVER

Cut it out Jane. I'm in a rush. I'm seeing Schiullo before my nine / fifty five

JANE

Schiullo, Schiullo. He must have a mad crush on you. The way he's / always

OLIVER

(*a flash of anger*)

You don't know what you're talking about, / Jane.

JANE

Okay...okay...

*HE is absolutely still for a moment.*

OLIVER

There's been...there have been...

JANE

What? What? God, you're scaring me.

OLIVER

There's been some sort of investigation...going on.

*The phone rings.*

JANE

What kind of investigation?

*The phone rings again.*

OLIVER

An investigation of computers.

*Phone rings again.*

JANE

*(relieved)*

Oh. Computers.

OLIVER

Some of the computers in *(the phone rings again.)* the department. You'd better get that. If it's for me. I've already gone.

*HE exits.*

*SHE moves*

*toward the*

*phone which*

*rings again.*

JANE

Wait a minute, Oliver? ..Hello...Oh, Hi Tina.  
Can you hang on a minute? *(Calling)* Oliver?

*A distant door slam. Then:*

CROSSFADE

## SCENE SIX

*OLIVER is at the lectern, mid-lecture.*

OLIVER

If someone asks you your age, or what is your political affiliation, or if you are HIV positive you might not feel like answering. But you might not feel like telling the questioner that it's none of his or her business. Is the truth necessary in those circumstances? Is this an exception to the Tell the Truth maxim?

I see that a couple of you are staring anxiously at the door. Which probably means I've run overtime again. But before you go: *(Trying for a light tone, but HE is shaken.)* Someone left a quotation in my mailbox. I don't know the intent. Perhaps it is a suggestion for a lecture topic? I'll read it to you and if anyone wants to claim it... and to explain him...or her...self. That would be fine. It's from Ecclesiastes. *(Trying for a light tone.)* Maybe a Religion major is weighing in on some of the themes of this course?

*(Reading)* "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

*\ (HE looks up at them. Again, trying for a light tone)* I think many of you would share that sentiment. *(Reading again)* "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." *(He looks up, half expecting someone to claim responsibility.)* That's all for today.

*OLIVER exits.*

CROSSFADE

## SCENE SEVEN

*A doorbell. Repeated. At LIGHTS UP  
JANE is in the doorway, facing MOLLY  
and a man with a camcorder.*

MOLLY

Mrs. Crane?

JANE

Um? Not really.

MOLLY

You're not Mrs. Crane? *(SHE consults her notes,  
begins to turn away.)*

JANE

Um. That's my mother-in-law, really. I don't  
use it. But I am. I mean, it depends on who's  
asking... I'm sorry. Who are you?

MOLLY

Molly Freeman, KTV News.

JANE

Hi, Molly. What can I do for you?

MOLLY

It's about your husband. We want to get your  
reaction...May we come in?

JANE

Um, no. I mean if I haven't won the sweepstakes  
or something, I'd really rather you didn't.

MOLLY

*(MOLLY turns to the cameraman)*

Rolling.

CAMERAMAN

Yep.

MOLLY

Mrs. Crane, how did you feel when you learned of the... (to CAMERAMAN) Again. (Back to her) Mrs. Crane, how did you feel when you learned of your husband's arrest?

JANE

Is this a joke?

MOLLY

No, Mrs. Crane.

JANE

Will you excuse me?

*Jane tries to close the door, but Molly elbows her way into the opening, holding it open.*

MOLLY

I know this is a difficult time, Mrs. Crane, but I wonder if you would care to comment on the arrest of your husband?

JANE

I don't know what you're talking about...Now if you'll excuse me.

MOLLY

Your husband, Oliver Crane, was arrested this morning on charges of (*SHE consults her notes.*) "Endangering the welfare of a child," "promoting a minor in an obscene performance" and two counts of sexual assault. Do you have a comment on the charges?

JANE

I don't...You don't...Will you please take your camera and go?

MOLLY

What effect do you think this will have on his teaching?

JANE

He doesn't...I don't believe you / have the right person

MOLLY

Does your husband keep pornography in the home?

JANE

What? I don't know who you are or what you want... You obviously have the wrong...Will you please turn that thing off?

CAMERAMAN

Molly?

MOLLY

Keep rolling. (*Very concerned*) Does he have a history of child abuse or molestation?

JANE

You have the wrong...I don't know what you want, but please get off my porch and off my lawn and out of my house. Now.

CAMERAMAN

Molly?

MOLLY

Keep rolling. (*To Jane*) How do you feel about the / effect this will have on your

Please let me know if you would like to see the rest of this script. savadge@gmail.com

### **Development of *Dark at the Center***

***Dark at the Center* won the Playwrights First award, 2014-2015. As part of the prize, the play will be given a public reading, October 25, 2015, in New York City.**

***Dark at the Center* was one of ten finalists for the Woodward/Newman Prize for 2014.**

**The John Golden Prize for Playwriting was given to the playwright for *Dark at the Center*.**

***Dark at the Center* has been given readings by Julia Miles' Reading Room and Playwrights Gallery.**

***Dark at the Center* won the Regional Playwriting prize, presented by TheatreFest, Montclair, New Jersey**

***Dark at the Center* was a finalist for the Susan Glaspell Prize. As a finalist for the prize, the play was given a reading at Centenary Theatre.**

**“My South Coast Repertory colleagues and I admired the way the play delivers the full horror of Jane’s series of experiences – first that her husband would be so accused, then that she would begin to believe that he might have done it, third that she is forced to choose between custody of her son and her marriage, and finally that she might have chosen a pedophile as a spouse. The play twists in the reader’s guts, and never makes the mistake of coming out and telling the reader whether Oliver is guilty.”**

Megan Monaghan, Literary Manager  
South Coast Repertory  
Costa Mesa, California

**“I was truly haunted by it....It's quite a striking play....All kinds of original dramaturgical techniques focus us on perception. The scenes early on, for instance, between Jane and Oliver that virtually repeat themselves. Very exciting. And then the last few pages, where the truth starts to become so much more ambiguous, are really shocking.”**

Austin Pendleton  
New York City

**“It is a compelling, disturbing, well-written play...A helluva play.”**

Eric Peterson, Artistic Director  
Oldcastle Theatre Company  
Bennington, Vermont