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Little Ms Loony

A short play

By John Chambers

Cast:

Jane Loony	A woman, about 30. A Teacher.
Martin Coles	A Head Teacher. Jane's husband.
Dr Pallot	A female psychiatrist
2 Attendants	NS, played by Coles & Pallot.

Setting:

An observation room in a psychiatric unit. The only furniture is a stacking chair. We imagine there is a one-way mirror to the front of the stage so the occupant of the room can be observed.

SUGGESTED MUSIC "MULDER & SCULLY" – CATATONIA.
JANE SCANS THEN TEARS UP "QUALITY" WEEKEND NEWSPAPERS.
AT FIRST SHE'S SYSTEMATIC BUT BECOMES MORE FRANTIC.
PARTICULAR THINGS SHE SEES WILL BE REFLECTED IN HER
SPEECH. SHE'S SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH.
TWO WHITE-COATED, SHADE-WEARING ATTENDANTS STAND TO
THE REAR OF THE STAGE, FACING AWAY FROM HER. ONE HOLDS A
STRAIGHT-JACKET BUT WE WON'T SEE IT YET.

JANE: Supplements / supple-mental / stacks of paper / torn down trees / life's a breeze, once a tease / deep unease / please, miss / want to, please / label-wearing miss / Miss missed the point...
Midnight dreads, petrol heads, nob-heads, talking heads, Mock concern / Idolatry / celebrity / fallacy / trying to be / society / solitary – alone / Clever words / spouting turds / Knighthoods / shitehoods / 'hood hoods / Experts / Fame clutchers / crutch thrusters / myth-busters / myth-makers / myth-buyers

THE TWO ATTENDANTS COME FORWARD & PUT THE STRAIGHT JACKET ON HER. THERE IS NO OTHER INTERACTION BETWEEN THEM. THEY EXIT AS SHE CONTINUES.

JANE: (CONTS) Bang to rights / out of sight / In a plight / Feeling shite / Feeling shite shite shite shite / Feeling nothing / top down / veil drawn / re-born / forlorn / Hype / tripe / Believing lies / Believe me / I couldn't... wouldn't... shouldn't. / No matter how I tried. / It's very trying. / Jane, Jane, Jane. Hid her pain. / Became insane. / She's to blame / Loony, loony, little Ms Loony / The missionary position. / Liberally deny / demean / dehumanise / patronise / the age of reason / Hostile mobiles / Juvenile bile / cosmetic smiles / No but / yes but / No but / yes but / Is me? / Init is me? / Init is me? / Bovvered. / Bovvered. / Bovvered. / Bovvered. / Am I?
(BEAT)

Yes, I fucking am – bothered...

DR PALLOT CARRYING A FILE & COLES WITH A BAG (CONTAINING UNSEEN GRAPES) ENTER. THEY WATCH HER UNSEEN, THROUGH THE ONE-WAY MIRROR. JANE UNAWARE OF THEIR PRESENCE.

JANE PACES AS SHE WAITS FOR SOMEONE TO ARRIVE. SHE STUDIES HER REFLECTION AT FIRST ASSUMING IT'S JUST AN ORDINARY, ALBEIT LARGE, MIRROR – OBLIVIOUS TO ANYONE WATCHING HER. PALLOT & THE EDGY COLES TALK, JUST CENTIMETRES AWAY FROM HER.

JANE: (RE HER REFLECTION) What a fucking mess... (PACES) The first sign of... talking to myself... first sign... hardly.

PALLOT: The recording you saw Mr Coles was when Jane was at her most disturbed. It's sometimes called a "word salad".

COLES: A technical term for demented ramblings?

PALLOT: Possibly.

COLES: Poor girl...
(BEAT)
Is the straight jacket necessary, Dr Pallot?

PALLOT: I had to reduce her medication to prepare my report.

COLES: Of course.

PALLOT: She seemed to be functioning quite well- considering.

COLES: Oh... (THEN) Good, good, good, good...

PALLOT: Until I told her you were visiting.

COLES: Oh lordy.

PALLOT: You don't have to see her.

COLES: Oh lordy. (BEAT) No – it's my duty.

PALLOT: I'll prepare the ground... Are you sure?

COLES: It's the least I can do.

PALLOT GOES INTO THE ROOM AS HE WATCHES THROUGH THE ONE-WAY MIRROR.

COLES: (TO HIMSELF) Oh lordy.

PALLOT ENTERS TO SEE JANE. JANE TURNS AWAY, A MOMENT.

PALLOT: Jane, alright if we have a talk?

JANE: (RE STRAIGHT JACKET) I'm a bit tied up at the moment.

PALLOT: You've still retained your sense of humour.

JANE: "Laughter's a great healer."

PALLOT: We aren't going to get very far if you simply resort to cliches - again.

JANE: I hate cliches – they're a way of avoiding the truth.

PALLOT: And the truth is?

JANE: You've got my file.

PALLOT: Tell me.

JANE: You tell me.

PALLOT: (SCANS FILE) Assault, criminal damage, breach of the peace, threatening behaviour, theft, behaviour likely to incite racial hatred, misappropriation of your employers property, language likely to cause offence, endangering life, arson...

JANE: That's telling me alright.

PALLOT: Not to mention gross indiscretions in your professional life.

JANE: So don't - mention them.

PALLOT: Do you dispute any of it?

JANE: I know I didn't end up in this fetishistic fashion accessory for no reason.

PALLOT: I'm sorry about the restraint...

JANE: It's over-rated – restraint.

PALLOT: (CONTS) ...given your record of breaching the peace, causing actual bodily harm, threatening behaviour...

JANE: Don't forget the arson... Got a light?
(BEAT) I've already had one shrink do a report.

PALLOT: And you cliched them so it was pointless.

JANE: But you aren't working for the Court, are you?

JANE PACES THEN LOOKS AT HERSELF IN THE "MIRROR" SO HER FACE IS ONLY SIX INCHES FROM THE INVISIBLE COLES LOOKING IN.

A MOMENT.
AS A COMFORT THING, HE PUTS HIS HAND DOWN THE FRONT OF
HIS PANTS AND HOLDS HIS DICK.

COLES: (TO HIMSELF) Oh love a duck. So intelligent. So lovely...

JANE: It's that twat, isn't it.

COLES: Oh lordy.

PALLOT: Who, Jane?

JANE: If you want me to be straight with you...

PALLOT: (GLANCES IN MIRROR) Yes, it's (CHECKS FILE) Martin's here to see you.

JANE: I knew it was that twat.

COLES: Oh lordy.

JANE: (RETURNS TO MIRROR) He's there now, isn't he?

PALLOT HESITATES THEN PALLOT NODS TO COLES THROUGH THE
"MIRROR" TO COME IN.

HE COULD LEAVE BUT DECIDES HE CAN'T. HE REMOVES HAND
FROM TROUSERS AND COMPOSES HIMSELF. THEN ENTERS. A BIG
MOMENT.

COLES: (BRIGHT) Hey guys.

JANE: What's your game, you fucker?

COLES: (OFFERS BAG) I've brought you grapes...

JANE: Stick them up your arse.

COLES: I thought they'd remind you of our "gîte", "en France" - of happier times...

JANE: That's when it started – no, when everything became clear.

COLES: Cloudless skies of "bleu"...
(TO PALLOT) Sitting by the pool, at our renovated summer bolt hole in
Anjou.

PALLOT: Anjou? We've got a place near Cholet.

COLES: Really... Where... We could have you over... dining en plein air... If Jane
gets better – when, of course...

PALLOT: (TO JANE) So – last summer you were enjoying the good life – by Guy
Fawkes night you'd lost your job...

COLES: Technically she's suspended on full pay.

JANE: And separated from my husband.

COLES: Only in a technical sense. I'm still here for you.

JANE: Why are you here?

COLES: I'm your husband.

PALLOT: (TO COLES) And her boss.

COLES: We don't go in for all that status stuff - we're a team. At home. And in our professional situation. Me "Big Chief". Jane "Big Head of History Department". Youngest on record to boot no less. Thanks in no small part to "moi".

PALLOT: (RE FILE) Ok Jane – you started as a newly qualified teacher at Joshua Brookes High School about eight years ago.

COLES: (PROUD) And she never let me down.

JANE LAUGHS.

PALLOT: Until last autumn term.

COLES: Well, of course, it was embarrassing – and that's being frank.

JANE: That being a first.

COLES: Sorry?

PALLOT: (TO COLES) Go on.

COLES: Well, we all know about Jane's "breakdown".

JANE: Is that what it is?

COLES: I'm no psychiatrist. But even pupils and parents could hardly ignore it. You're tabloid fodder for heaven's sake. (RUEFUL) So am I.

JANE: Why are you here?

COLES: The same reason as Dr Pallot – to try to help. We know you think the world's against you.

JANE: I'm in here because I'm against the world.

COLES GIVES PALLOT A KNOWING LOOK – WHICH IRRITATES PALLOT & JANE.

PALLOT: I sense some antagonism between yourself and Mr Coles...

JANE: You must have got top marks in shrink classes.

PALLOT: (COLLECTS HERSELF) You were on an idyllic holiday...

JANE: Lying on a lounge in France, reading a tree's worth of weekend qualities...

COLES: It's a tradition – stop off in Dover and buy all the weekend newspapers we always buy but never get to read. Our little vacation indulgence.

JANE: So I read, trying to ignore Big Chief rearranging his testicles on the adjacent lounge, waffling on about getting the school "Academy Status" now he'd become Head. "A centre of excellence - in environmental studies". Our Navara parked just by.

COLES: We'd never have got our luggage in your MG.

PALLOT: So this stems from you being irritated by your husband fiddling with his genitalia.

COLES: I wasn't.

JANE: That's the least of his objectionable habits.

COLES: (ASIDE TO PALLOT) She's obviously... (TAPS HIS HEAD)

JANE: (CONTS) Playing with his penis...

COLES: I am not standing here listening to this.

PALLOT: (BEAT) Sit down then, Mr Coles.

JANE: No, piss off...
(TO PALLOT) The worst present I ever bought him was a hands free mobile.

PALLOT: I really didn't come here to be libelled.

JANE: Slandered – I'm only saying it. Now if I was to publish a memoir – that would be libel.

COLES: Oh lordy.

PALLOT: Please, Martin – calm down.

COLES: Alright, Doctor - as a caring husband and concerned employer. But you can see, it's not been easy for me...

HE FINDS A CHAIR.

PALLOT: You'd worked together for 7 or 8 years, yet you only got married a couple of years ago.

JANE: Your point is?

PALLOT: You must have known him very well. Yet now you've got total antipathy.

COLES: It's obviously a symptom of her "complaint".

JANE: I married you, you prick - because you're a liar.

COLES SIGNALS TO PALLOT - NEED I SAY MORE.

JANE: An inveterate, pathological liar. Who would say black's white if it made life easier. Or gain some advantage.

COLES: Who's in the dock here - me, a well-respected professional who has recently heard I might... (STOPS HIMSELF) This isn't about me.

BEAT.

PALLOT: Jane?

JANE: When I started as an NQT - feeling useless, he made me feel better about myself.

COLES: I'm not all bad then.

JANE: Then I slowly realised he'd do it in every situation – lie to make people like him.

COLES: Being diplomatic is an essential string to any senior public servants bow.

PALLOT: I suppose diplomacy is a way of lying.

JANE: I'm not saying we should all be "brutally frank" - which can be just a cruel power trip. Or the odd porky to save someone's feelings. This is lying on a grand scale...

COLES: You're paranoid.

JANE: ...on a monumental scale. To the point of saying one thing, to one person, one minute - to something totally opposite a minute later. I think you even believe it.

COLES: I suppose that's how I became a respected Head who might become... who ratcheted us up the school league tables.

PALLOT: (TO JANE) You married a person you believed to be a liar...

COLES: I'm not.

JANE: There's another one.

PALLOT: (CONTS) ...with unsavoury habits.

COLES GETS UP TO GO.

JANE: (QUICK) Which makes me an even bigger phoney...

HE SITS.

JANE: Entering into something eyes wide open. I bought into it. If someone tells you you're fantastic, it's hard not to be swayed. Even when you see them shitting on other people. I realise now I was living my own lie. (BEAT) I became a teacher because I couldn't think of anything else. History because I can remember things. It was comfortable – at first.

PALLOT: You progressed though.

JANE: Because the boss wanted to get inside my knickers...

PALLOT: ...which was preferable to him getting into his own.

COLES: Thanks a very big bunch.

PALLOT: Yet you weren't comfortable, lying on the lounge in France?

JANE: Lying on the lounge, next to a liar, flicking through the news print...

PALLOT: Hardly a bad life. Isn't it what all of us lucky enough to be able to, do - travel, leave reality behind.

JANE: No matter how far you travel the truth doesn't change. You can't leave your true self at home.

COLES: The truth is, for all my faults - real and mostly imagined, I get on with it. I make the most of difficult situations – I sat through that blasted video of you the Doctor showed me, for Christ's sake.

JANE LOOKS.

PALLOT: Mr Coles...

COLES: No - I've been in the firing line for long enough. I've seen her - ranting on, spouting gibberish.

JANE LOOKS AT PALLOT.

PALLOT: It's usual practice when I admit a patient. We video you – for your own protection as much as anything.

JANE: Bull shit.

PALLOT: And for me of course, to assist me professionally. I had it transcribed.

JANE: Tell me.

BEAT.

THEN PALLOT GETS A REAM OF TYPED PAGES FROM THE FILE. SHE'LL DIVE INTO THIS AT RANDOM, THROUGH ALL THE PAGES SHE'S OBVIOUSLY STUDIED. SOME WE WON'T HAVE HEARD YET. SHE'LL HAVE THE COURT CHARGES ON ANOTHER PAGE.

JANE: All that!

PALLOT: (READS) "Loony. Loony. Little Ms Loony."

COLES: That's easy. That's her name. Ms Jane Loony. A disadvantage being a teacher - up there with "Shufflebottom" and the unfortunate "Mr Dickie." But even then she could have been "Mrs Coles" - when I made an "honest woman" of her.

JANE LAUGHS.

PALLOT: Maybe he has made an "honest woman" of you.

COLES: (CONTS) But no – she wanted to keep her maiden name. (IDEA) Maybe, Doctor, her name was a self-fulfilling prophecy. "Loony by name, loony by nature..."

JANE: (CUTS IN) If that was true yours would be "Mr Lying Bastard, Wand Fondler."

PALLOT LAUGHS.

COLES: I thought you were supposed to be objective. Trying to decipher all that verbiage isn't going to help. She's a psychiatric case full stop.

JANE: Maybe I am a psychiatric case.

COLES: Very good darling – admitting the problem is partway to being cured. Rest and medication will do the trick.

JANE: (TO PALLOT) Am I insane? Mad?

PALLOT: (SHRUGS) Basically mental illness is a rent – a split between the individual and the world. A schism.

COLES: (PLEASED) What – as in "schizoid"?

PALLOT: That's just a label.

COLES: The Court are going to need a label, Doc – the more technical the better.

PALLOT: (TO JANE) The pile of news papers?

JANE: It was a reality check.

COLES: (TO PALLOT) She did that on holiday too - tearing them up. I said "think about the environment".

PALLOT: Why?

JANE: I clocked the papers and thought this is tomorrow's history. And being a history teacher wondered if it made any more sense than the regurgitated dates I was dishing up.

COLES: (TO PALLOT) I could see she was losing it.

JANE: There was a photo piece – child labour. Then in an even glossier section, it interviewed a millionaire sports star who was hawking the produce. "A tick on your hat doesn't stop you being a twat." Do you see? Angsty environmental articles – then whole supplements on cars, foreign holidays, make-overs, starving kids, luxury restaurants...

PALLOT: "Supple-mental".

COLES: Pots calling kettles, me thinks.

JANE: Yes. Headline – "A Billion Hungry", then a two-page spread on the 40 mile jaunt to sample "local produce" in a celebrity eatery. And so it goes on... and on.

PALLOT: (RE TRANSCRIPT) "No but, yes but... bovered am I bovered. Innit."

COLES: "Popular culture." Little Britain, Catherine Tate, "Da Ali G show."

JANE: The stuff I steered myself for every new school year... Intelligent comics portray morons on TV, then intelligent kids think it's cool to act the moron.

COLES: "Today I have been mostly eating yoghurt."

JANE & PALLOT LOOK.

PALLOT: Catchphrases are a poor substitute for wit...

COLES: (MUSING, SCOUSE) "Yeah – I know."

PALLOT: (CUTS IN, READS FROM TRANSCRIPT) Lifting the veil...

JANE: That'll be the racism rap.

COLES: (GROANS) I thought I was going to have a fatwa on my hands.

JANE: I was placing religion in context. Our history is riven with it – brutality in the name of every god. Downing – who Downing street is named after, had a spike nailed through another Christian's tongue.

PALLOT: Really!

JANE: So when I asked a pupil if it was really a sin if she showed her hair or legs if she wanted to...

COLES: All hell broke loose. Like the time you told the pregnant 13 year old that... she still had a choice...

JANE: I asked her if she knew she had a choice.

COLES: Or describing a world-renowned rapper as a Belle Air millionaire pimp. We had a crew of hoodies up our avenue.
(BEAT) The point is, Jane, and we know even if no-one else does, it's part of your "condition". If we can tell the world that – or the court does, we can "move on", "get on with our lives".

PALLOT: (READS COURT LIST) "Wilful damage - to a 42 inch TV."

JANE: That was simply pastoral care...

COLES: No, no, no...

JANE: Trying to help a bright kid who never did his homework. I went round to discuss it to find two parental cabbages watching even larger cabbages slugging it out on a Gerry Springer repeat. I tried to explain my concern in vain. They wouldn't take their eyes off the gruesomely hypnotising screen.

COLES: She yanked the plasma TV off the wall.

JANE: My pelvic floor nearly went.

COLES: And threw it through the window.

JANE: I think I made my point.

PALLOT: (RE CHARGE SHEET) "Damage to twenty five mobile phones."

JANE: I was wound up...

PALLOT: You destroyed 25 mobile phones.

JANE: Two silly cows were crying over some D list reality celebrities splitting up – their tacky wedding had been sold to the highest bidder, so was the divorce. Yet in the same class there's a kid who'd tried to top himself. E mail and phone bullying – the usual shit. Add to that the bright and potentially brighter – wittering – if not twittering - away non-stop about what they weren't doing with their lives. I asked if we could all see all their mobile phones. They laid them on the floor – some smug, some shame-faced cos they were last year's "bricks" - then I tap danced on them. It was a great leveller.

COLES: If thinking you're the only one in the world who's right isn't that a sure sign.

JANE: I was asking the question. All the questions I'd never asked myself. It was

my job, my duty, to get them to ask questions... If not, we're all cabbages – fertilised by shit from "experts" of the intellectual, celebrity or media kind. We're fucked.

COLES: No, Jane – you're the one who's "fucked". (TO PALLOT) Pardon my French.

PALLOT: (READS CHARGES) "Actual Bodily Harm..."

JANE: The Board of Governors meeting I was asked to attend.

COLES: Don't I know it. I, as Head, of course attended – and as an act of support for Jane. Naturally I declared a personal interest.

PALLOT: Seeing as you were married to the person on the disciplinary charge.

COLES: ChargeS.

JANE: Proven. I owned up.

COLES: (GROANS) You didn't just own up. You lectured them. "What we need is more morality." Hurrah, thinks I. "But a lot less religion," proclaims you. The Governors, especially the Right Reverend Wright, Mr Kanzai, Councillor Singh and Mrs Cohen were distinctly unimpressed.

JANE: They should read their history...

COLES: As I said – lecturing.

JANE: Then I saw you.

COLES: Of course you did – I was there.

JANE: Rubbing your groin under the table.

COLES: When?

JANE: At the disciplinary hearing.

COLES: Of course I didn't.

JANE: Listen Pinocchio – you fucking did.

PALLOT: That's when you committed the ABH?

COLES: She flew across the table, launched herself at me.

PALLOT: It must have been embarrassing.

COLES: Painfully embarrassing. Painful full stop. But the governors were very understanding.

PALLOT: (READS CHARGES) Arson?

JANE: I legged it from the meeting.
Got to my MG. I looked at the car, then all the faces, full of hope pressed against windows. I got a lighter off a sad excluded youth and impressed him and everyone else by torching the car.

COLES: The ensuing explosion took out all the windows of the science block. The governors still on site too boot. Mr Dickie is still on compassionate leave - again.

BEAT.

PALLOT: Why do you really want my “expert” opinion, Mr Coles?

COLES: Why? Why! You’ve read that file!

PALLOT: Is it for Jane, or you?

COLES: Jane, of course.

PALLOT: But if Jane is deemed mentally ill you could be a martyr to it. “Poor chap. What a great guy. How has he put up with it...”

COLES: And why the fuck not! (BLURTS OUT) I’ve been offered a job on a Governmental Education Think Tank – by a Junior Minister no less... She’s put it all in jeopardy.

A MOMENT.

PALLOT: Jane, are you mad?

BEAT.

JANE: Shouldn’t I be?

LIGHTS FADE.

MUSIC: “ROADRAGE” – CATATONIA.

END

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