Forgive me, Father

WRIT2120

Brooklyn-Jade Senhenn

INT. INSIDE OF A CHURCH - EVENING

Jesus on the cross. The quiet crackle of candles burning.

The sound of a door slamming open. Footsteps.

JONATHAN DARCY (17) from behind, on his knees on the stairs of the sanctuary. His shoulders heave. His hands shake. Red liquid spills down the back of his neck.

He places his reddened palms together.

We don't see his face. Not yet.

JONATHAN
Forgive me, Father. For I have sinned.

EXT. A GRAVEYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Jonathan's fists meet the dirt in front of a grave over and over. He screams. We don't hear it.

FATHER (V.O.)
Hey, Johnno. It's me. It's Dad. You left your jumper in the car. Just so you know.
(a pause)
Drove past that fish and chip place on Hewitt today. You and me used to go Fridays, remember? You always got the potato cakes even though I told you they'd kill ya.
(a small laugh)
Stubborn little thing.

His bracelet bursts and flies across the dirt.

FATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(quieter, like it costs him)
I'm proud of you, you know. I don't say it enough.

Jonathan falls to the dirt.

FATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I know I'm not always -

Jonathan shoves his face into his palms.

FATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Anyway. Dinner's at six. Bye.

The message ends. Static.

The grave reads: SIMON DARCY. BELOVED FATHER.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Dyed red hair now visible in the moonlight. Waves in the distance, glistening.

FATHER (V.O.)
Forgive me, Jonathan. For I have sinned.

Jonathan screams. Visceral. Alone. Before throwing his phone into the ocean.

His knees give way and he falls into the sand. A pair of hands wrap around his shaking body. A matching friendship bracelet catches the light.

CUT TO BLACK:

OVER BLACK:

Birds in the trees. A car backfires. Flies buzz. Distant chatter.

A fence shakes.

Waves crash over and over.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
(whispering)
Forgive me- forgive me. Father… fuck.

Silence.

A deep, shaky inhale.

EXT. COASTAL PROPERTY - AFTERNOON

Jonathan is sitting on a swing rocking back and forth. His shoulders slope, face unseen. His hands are in his lap. He's turning something over between his fingers. We can't see what.

The land is scrub and dust. The ocean glints.

GRACE (O.S.)
Johnny?

Jonathan tilts his head slightly towards the camera. His black tie is crooked, and a bruise across his neck catches the sunlight where it isn't supposed to. He tugs at his crumpled collar.

His eyes catch the camera for an instant.

The sound of small feet on dry grass. Heavy breathing. The kind kids do when they've been running.

GRACE (6) climbs onto the swing beside him. Her feet don't reach the ground. She kicks them uselessly for a moment.

Jonathan reaches over without looking. His hand finds the back of her swing. The bracelet catches the light.

He pushes her. Steady. Rhythmic. They rock. Back and forth.

GRACE
Where do you think Dad is now?

JONATHAN
I got no clue, kiddo.

GRACE
Mum says he's in Heaven. With Jesus.

JONATHAN
(mumbling)
Doubt it.

GRACE
I wanna be with Jesus.

JONATHAN
Guess I'll have to swing you higher then.

Jonathan pushes her harder as she screams.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Jesus on the cross.

Close up shot of Jonathan staring at it.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNSTAIRS CLOSET - NIGHT (MEMORY)

YOUNG JONATHAN (6) cradles his reddened face in the dark. Staring up at the camera.

A yell. Something shatters.

His lip puckers.

A tear drops onto his dinosaur shirt.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jonathan stares at the cross.

JONATHAN
What're you lookin' at?

He growls at Jesus.

His MOTHER (35) opens his bedroom door and sees him perched on his bed, staring at the cross. The wedding ring around her neck catches the faint light.

She watches him for a moment.

JONATHAN
Mother.

MOTHER
Bedtime. Back to school tomorrow.

She flicks the light off. Closes the door.

Jonathan doesn't stop watching the cross.

In the dark now.

Just the two of them.

EXT. HEARTHAVEN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE - MORNING

The school sits on the edge of the cliffs. Teenage boys hurry past, pushing each other and laughing. A sign reads "*Honour God in All Things.*" A bell echoes.

JONATHAN
How are we on this fine morning, Father?

FATHER ELIAS
Jonathan. If you were on time for once, my morning would be wonderful.

JONATHAN
Prayed for me to show up on time, did ya, Father?

FATHER ELIAS
(a beat)
Every morning.

JONATHAN
(moving past)
How's that working out for ya?

FATHER ELIAS
(letting the door close behind them)
Tomorrow. On time.

Jonathan laughs.

The door closes.

EXT. COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Jonathan approaches a group of four teenage boys. NATHANIEL (17) drags him into a sideways hug.

NATHANIEL
Oi, Johnno. How ya going?

MATTHEW (15) slaps Nathaniel's arm.

MATTHEW
(whispering even though Jonathan can hear him)
What're you doin'? His dad just died, ya idiot. You can't ask how he's doin.

NATHANIEL
Yeah, says the kid who still can't grow a beard. How's year nine treating ya?

MATTHEW
(scoffing)
You've got a really punchable face, you know that?

NATHANIEL
Talk to me when you've finished puberty, mate.

MATTHEW
(muttering)
God, I hope you get hit by a car.

XAVIER (17) flicks through a prayer booklet, permanently unimpressed. He doesn't look up.

XAVIER
Mortal sin.

MATTHEW
Oh, piss off.

XAVIER
Blasphemy. Should tell your mum.

MATTHEW
You don't even know what that means.

NATHANIEL
Pretty sure it means you're screwed. Right, Xav?

Nathaniel snatches Matthew's book. Matthew grabs it back. They wrestle while Xavier sneaks into a bag to steal some chips.

MATTHEW
Oi! Mortal sin!

XAVIER
Oh, come on-

Their voices blur together. Jonathan's gaze drifts.

He's watching the fifth member of the group, CHARLIE (17), as he throws his head back, chuckling. Jonathan can't help but watch the way he licks his blueberry-stained fingers.

Golden hair sticking to sweat, Charlie registers Jonathan's gaze with a small smile. He doesn't meet Jonathan's eyes though.

INT. CHAPEL - MOMENTS LATER

Boys file into the Chapel for morning prayer. Jonathan and his friends squeeze into a pew.

THE TEACHER (40s) moves along the far aisle. Jonathan clocks him across the room. His knee — which has been bouncing since he sat down — goes still.

Father Elias eyes their dishevelled state. They attempt to straighten up. Xavier begins to wipe his eyeliner off.

MATTHEW
Why do you even bother wearin' it? Ya know you'll always have to wipe it off, anyway.

XAVIER
It's called rebellion, child. Try it.

Matthew rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE
Here, let me help.

Jonathan glances up, smiling as his best friend takes the seat beside him. Their knees touch.

Charlie reties Jonathan’s tie, his fingers brushing Jonathan’s collar.

Jonathan holds still.

A beat too long.

CHARLIE
There. Perfect.

Charlie smooths the knot before sitting back.

The boys reach for the Bibles tucked beneath the peeling wood. They stand to read a hymn with Father Elias.

Charlie's shoulder brushes Jonathan's. He holds his breath.

A beat.

CHARLIE
Hey, Jo.

JONATHAN
Hey, Char.

CUT TO:

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (MEMORY)

TEEN JONATHAN (13) and TEEN CHARLIE (13).

Shirts unbuttoned. Breathing hard.

The door flies open. Jonathan screams, a shadowy fist raised — face unseen.

Charlie huddles in the corner, shirt still open, golden hair catching whatever light there is, making himself as small as possible.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

The boys sing. Nathaniel and Xavier sandwich Matthew between them. Jonathan starts to laugh. Charlie covers his mouth to stifle the noise.

Jonathan's laugh dies as his eyes find the Teacher across the room again.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - LATER

Footsteps squeaking on linoleum floor. Unhurried. Practiced.

Jonathan stops at a classroom door. Knocks once.

A beat.

The door opens.

INT. EMPTY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Blinds down. The room dim and warm.

Jonathan steps inside. The Teacher closes the door behind him. Locks it.

We never quite see the teacher's face. His glasses catch whatever light is in the room and throw it back. Two white circles. Watching without being watched.

Jonathan slides onto the desk and swings his legs back and forth.

The Teacher moves towards him. A hand at his shoulder. Brief. Familiar. The Teacher smiles. Jonathan goes very still beneath the touch.

CUT TO BLACK:

OVER BLACK:

TEACHER
You know you can talk to me, yeah?

YOUNG JONATHAN
(young, innocent)
Yeah. Nathaniel's nicked my lunch again. Third time this week.
(beat)
I'm actually gonna kill him this time.

The teacher laughs.

TEACHER
And… how are things at home?

YOUNG JONATHAN
(immediately)
I don't wanna talk about mushy stuff or anythin'.

TEACHER
(easy)
Your dad giving you trouble again?

A beat.

YOUNG JONATHAN
I said I don't wanna talk about it.

TEACHER
(a beat, then carefully)
This stays between us, you know that right? Just us.

YOUNG JONATHAN
I'm not very good at secrets.

TEACHER
I won't hold it against you. As long as you keep comin' back.

Silence.

Then, older. Something harder:

JONATHAN
I always do, don't I?

EXT. SCHOOL SPORTS FIELD - AFTERNOON

A WHISTLE shrieks. Sounds of bodies colliding mid-field, swearing and laughing.

Jonathan stands near the outer boundary, picking at the bib half-tucked into his shorts. Sweat beads at his temple. His knee bounces. Fast.

BOY #1
Johnno! Mark him!

A body slams into Jonathan's shoulder. Hard. Playful. Jonathan stumbles forward — straight into someone else.

Hands grab his forearms. Grip tight.

They steady him.

Charlie.

Charlie's chest is flushed, rising fast. Their faces are inches apart. Breath shared.

CHARLIE
(smiling, low)
Careful.

The touch lingers. Jonathan pulls back first.

The ball flies past. Another boy crashes into both of them, arms hooking around shoulders, dragging them down in a laughing heap.

They hit the grass.

Limbs everywhere. Someone’s thigh pressed against Jonathan’s hip. An arm slung across his chest.

BOY #2
Got him! Don’t let him up!

They wrestle. Grabbing, pushing, rolling. Jonathan's eyes find Charlie's collarbone. A drop of sweat. He looks away. Too late.

The whistle blows.

They peel off each other slowly.

Jonathan gets to his feet. His shirt rides up briefly.

A hand brushes the small of his back as they pass.

He's certain it's Charlie's.

BOY #2
(slapping Jonathan on the shoulder)
You’re weird today, Johnno.

Jonathan forces a grin.

EXT. BEACH - AFTERNOON

Nathaniel and Matthew shove each other into the waves. Xavier glides in on a chipped surfboard.

Charlie leans against the large boulders, chatting with a girl their age. He's leaning into her, and she's blushing. Jonathan is watching from the sand, rolling a cigarette.

His fingers still.

JONATHAN
(muttering)
Of course.

His pocket buzzes. Jonathan pulls it out.

INSERT — PHONE SCREEN

FATHER.

BACK TO SCENE

He flings it into the sand. The cigarette unravels, tobacco spilling out.

Jonathan looks at Charlie. Then, the phone.

He crosses to it slowly. Picks it up. Brushes the sand off the screen with his thumb.

The notification is still there. His thumb moves to it. Hovers.

Charlie laughs at something behind him. Loud. Easy.

Jonathan locks the screen. Shoves it back in his pocket.

EXT. COASTAL PATH - MOMENTS LATER

Jonathan and Charlie walk the coastal path, shoes off, sharing the cigarette Jonathan rolled.

The sun is going down behind Charlie. It catches the line of his jaw. Jonathan looks. Just for a moment. Then away.

Charlie takes a long drag. Blows the smoke sideways, directly into Jonathan's face. Jonathan bats it away. Charlie grins.

Charlie's hand finds the back of Jonathan's neck. Holds it there a moment. Then lets go.

Jonathan's shoulders drop half an inch.

CHARLIE
She’s starting at St Claire’s next term. Her dad’s on the council or something-

JONATHAN
Of course he is.

CHARLIE
-and her mum runs that bakery on Maxwell.

Jonathan tries not to roll his eyes.

JONATHAN
Small-town royalty.

CHARLIE
He wore his council lanyard to the school fete at the start of the year.

JONATHAN
Bet he fills lots of potholes.

CHARLIE
(completely straight-faced)
Shame. Could've filled mine.

Jonathan blinks.

His ears flush pink.

He flicks sand from his stray sock at Charlie and looks away.

CHARLIE
What? I have a lot of potholes, Jo.

JONATHAN
You're disgusting.

Charlie throws his head back and laughs.

CHARLIE
Betcha you'd like to fill some of mine.

He winks before racing off down the street, shoes hanging by the laces over his shoulder and shirt unbuttoned in the wind.

CHARLIE
(crying out behind him)
JONATHAN DARCYYYYYYY!

Jonathan hesitates half a second, then goes after him.

They disappear down the golden street.

EXT. CHARLIE'S FRONT LAWN - CONTINUOUS

Charlie climbs over the gate. Jonathan slides through.

Charlie spins around on the front path. Easy. Like he's about to say anything.

CHARLIE
I'm glad your dad's dead.

A beat.

Jonathan looks at him.

CHARLIE
I don't care if that's messed up to say.

Charlie takes a step closer.

Jonathan looks away.

The sun drops behind the house. The gold goes out of everything.

EXT. CHARLIE'S FRONT LAWN - DAY (MEMORY)

YOUNG JONATHAN (9) sits on the back step, a bruise blooming on his cheek.

YOUNG CHARLIE (9) kneels in front of him. Tongue between his teeth. Concentrating.

He presses a bandaid carefully over the bruise. It won't do anything. They both probably know that.

He smooths it down anyway.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. CHARLIE'S FRONT LAWN - CONTINUOUS

CHARLIE
Sorry. I don't- I'm not-
(exhaling)
Ah, fuck it. See ya tomorrow.

Charlie presses his fingers to Jonathan's cheek before turning and heading inside.

Jonathan stands on the path and watches Charlie leave.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jonathan's shoes hit the hallway floor. His socked feet slide up the stairs two at a time.

His palm slides along the wall, finding the door at the end of the hallway.

INT. FATHER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A large desk covered with papers. A worn bible next to a crystal glass with drops of whiskey. An ashtray.

Jonathan's fingers trail along the bookshelf spines.

He stops. Pulls one out. Peter Pan, with its cover worn and pages soft from being read.

CUT TO:

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (MEMORY)

YOUNG JONATHAN (11) flinches.

His favourite Peter Pan book raised above him. His father's face unseen.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. FATHER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A smack.

A child's scream.

The sounds fade. Jonathan stands very still.

His father kept it. After everything.

Jonathan opens the cover.

INSERT — FRONT PAGE

"FOR JOHNNY BOY. DON'T GROW UP TOO FAST, BUB. LOVE DAD."

BACK TO SCENE

He puts it back exactly where it was.

His eyes find the spine next to it: *How To Be The Father Your Child Needs.* Spine uncracked. Dust-covered.

Jonathan kneels at the record player, flipping through vinyls. Smiles when he finds it, slips it out and places the needle down.

A crackle.

Then - *Torture by The Jacksons.*

Jonathan stands. He doesn't decide to dance. He just does.

He spins. Kicks. Flings himself across the room. Hits every beat like it owes him something. Mid-spin, his eyes find the camera. Just for a second. Then, he's gone again.

He slides across the desk -

Papers everywhere. The crystal glass hits the floor. The ashtray follows.

The needle skips. SCREEEETCH.

A car door. Outside. Below.

Jonathan freezes.

He slaps his own thigh. Once. Sharp.

JONATHAN
(without thinking)
Jonathan.

Then moves. Fast. Papers back on the desk. Glass upright. Except the corner's shattered and he cuts his skin.

A small laugh. Then he sucks his thumb.

He lifts the needle and puts the vinyl back in its sleeve. Reaches for the door. Looks back at the room.

JONATHAN
(under his breath)
Thanks, Dad.

The door closes behind him.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jonathan is lying on his back with Grace pressed into his chest.

He opens his phone. Presses play.

FATHER
(through phone, distorted)
Jon. Hey. Me again. Forgot to tell ya. That show you like is on tonight. The stupid one about-
(he can't remember, or feels bad about calling it stupid)
Ah. You know the one.

Jonathan tucks Grace's hair back from her face. She doesn't stir.

FATHER
Anyway. I'll record it for you on the player. We can watch-
(sighing)
Well, one of these days we'll watch it. I promise.

Static.

The message ends.

Jonathan stares at the ceiling.

He presses play again.

FATHER
Jon. Hey. Me again.