

Mr James

By

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FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

The CHILDREN, all around 15 years old, shout and laugh. They congregate around desks in large groups.

MR. JAMES (early 50s) stands at the front of the classroom. His face is red. Sweat covers his brow.

Mr. James' wide eyes dart around the room, they beg for help or a symbol of hope from anywhere.

MR. JAMES
(barely audible)
Please... please, children. Be
quiet.

Mr. James watches them as they ignore him.

MR. JAMES
For goodness sake...

A GIRL looks over to Mr. James and laughs hysterically.

Mr. James mops his brow with a handkerchief.

A MATURE BOY, stubble, tall, muscular, stares at Mr. James with menace.

Mr. James stumbles forward. His hand clenches around the edge of a desk. He steadies himself then takes a deep breath.

The sound of children's chatter and laughter surrounds Mr. James. Engulfs him.

Mr. James' right hand trembles as he stands in front of the mature boy. A face off.

Silence...

MATURE BOY
What you lookin' at?

MR. JAMES
Get back to your desk.

The boy looks around him and laughs.

MATURE BOY
Are you going to fuckin' make me,
like, old man?

A chorus of gasps and laughter from all around.

Mr. James looks around the classroom. Panic in his eyes.

MR. JAMES
All of you. Get back to your desks. Right now.

Mr. James claps his hands loudly in a last ditch effort to create some sort of order. He walks in a small circle around the room.

A rolled up piece of paper hits Mr. James on the side of the head.

Mr. James lunges in the direction that the projectile came from. His arms wide open in an effort to grab the child, or any child.

The children run away from him with ease. Some giggle. Some scream.

Mr. James lunges in the opposite direction and bumps into the mature boy.

The mature boy squares up to Mr. James.

MATURE BOY
Calm down, man. Just -

Mr. James pushes the mature boy with both hands.

The mature boy falls backwards on to the floor.

Mr. James stares down at the child. Closes his eyes.

INT. SCHOOL WAITING ROOM. DAY

Mr. James' blank eyes stare straight ahead.

Dressed in a crisp white shirt, tie and suit, he is the only person waiting in the room. The only other person present is the RECEPTIONIST, sat behind her desk.

The shiny shoe of Mr. James' right foot taps an abstract rhythm on the hard wood floor.

Mr. James looks to the door marked 'HEADMASTER', then to his wrist watch.

He looks directly at us and lets out a long, exhausted sigh. He breaks the fourth wall.

MR. JAMES
I suppose you're thinking I'm a
monster.

He pauses for a moment, as if he is waiting for a reply. Finally...

MR. JAMES
Or a maniac, perhaps? Someone
should lock me up and throw away
the key, no?

He reaches into the inside pocket of his suit jacket and pulls out a piece of paper. His eyes scan it.

MR. JAMES
An assault. That's what they're
describing it as. Do you believe
that?

He folds the paper back up with care and returns it to the inside pocket of his jacket.

Mr. James looks to either side then lowers his voice conspiratorially with a hint of a smile.

MR. JAMES

He had it coming to him if you ask me. I think you'd agree with me too if you'd been around here for the amount of years I have. Seeing the place slide into the swamp. Seeing society slide into the swamp. You should hear what the other teachers say about the little bast -

Mr. James stops himself. A guilty expression appears upon his face.

MR. JAMES

No, a little discipline never did me any harm.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

The shape of a small figure, covered in a duvet, lies on top of the bed.

Just the red, teary eyes of a YOUNG MR. JAMES (12) can be seen as they stare out of a crack in the duvet.

The door opens and MR. JAMES SNR (mid 40s) strides into the room.

Mr. James Snr pulls the blanket from his son and yanks him from the bed.

MR. JAMES

(V.O.)

We had a little thing called respect. You would never catch me backchatting, or swearing, or...

On a desk in the room, a child's painting of a sunny day. Grass, blue sky, the sun...

The sound of a leather strap hitting with a thud.

A child's cry.

INT. SCHOOL WAITING ROOM. DAY

A bright sun in the blue sky is visible through a window. A perfect summer's day.

Mr. James looks at the window. His gaze distant.

MR. JAMES
And they call this an assault?

He returns his attention to us. Focused. Certain.

MR. JAMES
If anything they should be
congratulating me for giving the
boy what he's needed for some
time.

He keeps an intense stare on us for a long beat.

Finally, his gaze softens. Mr. James shakes his head and chuckles.

YOUNG BOY
(O.S.)
Who are you laughing at?

Mr. James snaps his gaze to his right. A YOUNG BOY (12), in a school uniform, sits in the seat beside him. The child looks angry and defensive.

YOUNG BOY
Come on, who are you laughing at?
Are you laughing at me?

Mr. James gives us a puzzled look then turns his attention back to the boy.

MR. JAMES
Can I help you, young man?
Shouldn't you be in class?

YOUNG BOY
Shouldn't you be in class?

MR. JAMES
Don't be cheeky, boy.

Mr. James stands and looks up and down the corridor.
His stature one of supreme confidence and superiority.

MR. JAMES
Now, which class should you be
in? I'll take you there my-

Mr. James turns his gaze back to the boy but he is no longer there.

He squints his eyes in an act demonstrating his confusion then looks back up the corridor.

In the distance, the boy stands with his middle finger raised and his tongue poking out of his mouth.

Mr. James' face grows red and his brow lowers into a scowl. He marches towards the boy.

As Mr. James walks past the receptionist's desk she raises her head.

RECEPTIONIST
Mr. James, can I help you?

Mr. James marches on, his eyes only focused on the boy ahead of him.

The receptionist comes out from behind her desk and approaches Mr. James.

RECEPTIONIST
Whatever is the matter? You look positively fuming.

MR. JAMES
The boy.

The receptionist follows Mr. James' gaze.

RECEPTIONIST
... boy?

MR. JAMES
The boy who is not in class. The
boy who is showing me no respect.
The boy... the boy...

Mr. James stops walking and stares into the distance.

The hallway is empty. The boy is nowhere to be seen.

The receptionist puts a reassuring hand on Mr. James'
shoulder. Concern on her face.

Mr. James instantly pushes the hand away.

MR. JAMES
Nonsense. Nonsense, I tell you. A
boy cannot simply disappear -

RECEPTIONIST
Perhaps you would like to sit
back down, Mr. James? I could get
you a glass of water?

Mr. James raises his hand to his brow.

HEADMASTER
(O.S.)
Mr. James...

Mr. James turns sharply to face the HEADMASTER (mid
fifties).

The headmaster stands in the threshold of his office. A
solemn expression on his face - disappointment and
concern for his senior staff member.

HEADMASTER
If you don't mind...

The headmaster gestures to his open door and then walks
inside his office.

Mr. James lowers his eyes to the ground.

He takes a deep breath then readjusts his tie and a determined expression appears on his face.

INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE. DAY

The headmaster sits behind his desk. A large window behind him shows the exterior of the school - a large playing field.

MR. JAMES
(O.S.)

Absolutely preposterous. The boy is a menace, a bully and a vacuum of every teacher's patience and every student's attention.

Mr. James sits on the edge of his seat. Upright and alert. An energy in his eyes that makes him look considerably younger.

MR. JAMES
Sir, honestly, this boy - if you can call a six foot two inch male, with a beard, a boy - is the one that should be in this office, not me. He grabbed my arm. I merely pulled it away.

HEADMASTER
The boy's father has made a complaint, Edward.

MR. JAMES
Well, he would, wouldn't he? That doesn't make him right or me wrong. The boy has most likely told his father some cock and bull story in an effort to gain his...

Mr. James' attention moves from his conversation with the headmaster and to the window.

The young boy from the waiting room stands outside the window with a big cheesy grin on his face.

Mr. James' face darkens. His eyes rage.

HEADMASTER
(O.S.)

I do hear what you're saying,
Edward, I really do, but there
has been a complaint. Procedures
must be followed. Investigations
made.

The young boy puts his nose against the window whilst staring in at Mr. James.

Mr. James' face in a grimace. The headmaster continues speaking but his words are merely a murmur in the background. Mr. James' breath, his heart-beat, are the predominant sounds.

EXT. GARDEN. DAY

The young Mr. James stands in the middle of the lawn and kicks a football against the wall of a brick outhouse. (Note; it is now revealed that the young Mr. James and the Young boy are the same person).

The rhythmic thud of the leather football hitting the brick wall is almost hypnotic.

The smile on young Mr. James' face as he controls the ball then kicks it back against the wall.

Suddenly, and breaking the trance like state, a door flies open and Mr. James Snr darts out.

MR. JAMES SNR
What the bloody hell do you think
you're doing?

Mr. James Snr grabs his son forcefully by the arm causing him to cry out in pain.

MR. JAMES SNR
You need to learn a little thing
called respect, my boy.

He throws him into the house then follows inside.

The football lies abandoned on the lawn.

INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE. DAY

Mr. James stares blankly out of the window.

HEADMASTER
Mr. James... Mr. James, are you
alright?

Mr. James blinks his eyes in quick succession and looks to the headmaster. Embarrassment and confusion show on his face.

HEADMASTER
Kind of slipped away on me there,
Edward. Are you okay?

Mr. James takes his handkerchief from his pocket and wipes some sweat from his brow.

MR. JAMES
Yes... yes, I'm fine. Just a little
warm in here, that's all. A
little warm.

The headmaster lifts a jug of water and pours the liquid into two glasses. He offers one to Mr. James who takes it.

HEADMASTER
Has this been happening often,
Edward? These... blackouts?

MR. JAMES
I don't know what you're talking
about, Sir. It's just a little
warm. I went a little dizzy,
that's all.

The headmaster takes a sip of his water, deep thought show in a furrowed brow.

HEADMASTER

Edward... I would be lying to you if I said I hadn't heard the talk around school -

MR. JAMES

Talk? What talk?

HEADMASTER

Well, I had passed it off as just gossip, but -

MR. JAMES

But? But what? Sir, if you have something to say, I would appreciate it straight up.

HEADMASTER

Your behaviour. People have been talking about your strange behaviour. Talking to yourself. Sitting alone, staring into the distance. Your colleagues are concerned.

Mr. James shows a hint of embarrassment.

HEADMASTER

Like I say, I had passed it off as just talk but after seeing it first hand I can't ignore it.

MR. JAMES

Sir, please, this is all a misunderstanding. It was the boy.

Mr. James points to the window where the boy still stands. The headmaster turns in his chair with a puzzled expression.

MR. JAMES

He was outside in the corridor too. That is what all the commotion earlier was about.

The headmaster stands and walks to the window. He stares outside for some time - only the pane of glass separates him from the boy.

Finally, he turns around and faces Mr. James. The boy behind him is no longer there.

HEADMASTER
Edward. You've worked at the school for what... twenty years?

MR. JAMES
Twenty-two years, actually sir,
but I don't know what -

The headmaster raises his hand in a gesture asking for silence.

HEADMASTER
That length of service is commendable. You're a good teacher, but, things can get on top of all of us from time to time.

MR. JAMES
Sir, you can see the boy out there. Surely anybody would be distracted by that.

HEADMASTER
There's no one out there, Edward.

Mr. James shakes his head then gets to his feet. He walks to the window and points at the boy through it.

From the headmaster's point of view there is no boy.

The headmaster walks to his door and opens it.

HEADMASTER

Susan, could you come in here for
a moment please?

The headmaster turns back to Mr. James, still standing by the window, and watches him closely.

The receptionist walks into the office.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes, sir, how can I help?

HEADMASTER

Earlier, in the waiting room, who was present?

RECEPTIONIST

I'm not sure what you mean, sir.

Mr. James walks over to her.

MR. JAMES

The boy. You saw the boy that was there. The boy who is now outside that window.

Mr. James points behind him to the window.

The receptionist looks to the headmaster.

HEADMASTER

It's okay, Susan, just be honest.

RECEPTIONIST

I only saw you in the waiting room, Mr. James. I can't see anyone outside the window either.

Mr. James, still pointing behind him, stares in disbelief at the receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry. I don't know what else to say.

HEADMASTER

Thank you, Susan. That will be all.

The receptionist offers Mr. James a sympathetic smile and then turns to walk out the door. Before she exits she stops and turns back.

RECEPTIONIST

You've been decent to me over the years, Mr. James. I hope you get better soon.

She walks out of the office.

Mr. James slumps into his chair. Deflated. His gaze still on the window.

The headmaster walks back to his chair and sits down.

HEADMASTER

Now, this incident in your class, I want you to forget about it. Nobody was seriously hurt and I will take care of the boy's father. Under the circumstances I'm sure he will be understanding.

Out of the window, the boy moves onto the playing field and plays with a football.

HEADMASTER

A leave of absense is in order I believe. Time to give yourself a rest. I'm a strong believer in 'R and R' and I'm sure in a few weeks, or months, you'll be in a position to start thinking about coming back.

Mr. James' blank expression, looking out of the window, shows that he is not hearing the headmaster. He's in another place. Another time.

EXT. PLAYING FIELD / GARDEN. DAY

The young boy kicks the football in front of him. He chases after it.

Young Mr. James kicks the ball against the wall.

The young boy stops running. Looks up, fear in his eyes. He backs up a little.

Mr. James stands with his foot on the ball. He looks down at the boy.

A smile slowly grows on his face.

Mr. James kicks the ball back to the boy.

The young boy hesitates before kicking the ball back.

The two of them laugh as they kick the ball back and forth between themselves in the school playing field.

INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE. DAY

Mr. James, still slumped in his chair, stares straight ahead towards the window.

The headmaster stands over him, worry in his eyes.

He darts to the door.

Mr. James' glazed eyes reflect the scene of him and the boy playing football in the field.

FADE OUT.