

## Adult Rules

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A short play

By Mark Chrisler

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MS. WILLOW

Now Billy...

WILLIAM

William.

MS. WILLOW

Yes, well... *William*, then: I know that this is an... awkward period. For you.

WILLIAM

Yes.

MS. WILLOW

At this age...

WILLIAM

Particularly.

MS. WILLOW

But, you have to understand, as you... come of age, so to speak... You have to, let's say, oblige yourself to certain *adult* rules of conduct...

WILLIAM

I know, but...

MS. WILLOW

And one of those rules is that you don't kiss your teacher. Tell me you understand, Billy.

WILLIAM

William. And I do.

MS. WILLOW

Because what sort of world would this be if every sixth grade boy went around kissing his teacher? That's why we have these rules, Billy.

WILLIAM

William. And, Ms. Willow, of course I understand, but you have to admit that my case is... a little... exceptional?

MS. WILLOW

Why would that be?

WILLIAM

Ms. Willow... can I call you Barbara?

MS. WILLOW

No.

WILLIAM

Surely you've noticed that I'm a little different from your other students...

MS. WILLOW

I'm not sure what you're talking about...

WILLIAM

I've *noticed* you noticing...

MS. WILLOW

And what have I noticed, Billy?

WILLIAM

Well, for instance, as opposed to, say, Kenny...

MS. WILLOW

Yes...

WILLIAM

Who is a normal, healthy, and--let's be frank about it--rather precocious 12 year old boy...

MS. WILLOW

Yes...

WILLIAM

I am... more... a middle aged man.

MS. WILLOW

A middle aged man?

WILLIAM

Well, early middle age, really. 37.

MS. WILLOW

37?

WILLIAM

So, while I respect your... position--and the authority it brings--I've got to say I'd much prefer if you treated me a bit more like the man I am. The man I know you see in me.

MS. WILLOW

Uh huh. Well, Billy...

WILLIAM

William.

MS. WILLOW

William. Let me ask you: if that's all so, why would it be that you're in this class among the other twelve year olds?

WILLIAM

I've been trying to work that out for a while now. Best I can tell is it's some sort of retribution. Payback for some crossing of the powers that be. I worked for seven years in H.R. at Hamlin and Associates, and one day I showed mercy on an employee I was meant to sack. Next day, I get a transfer from the higher ups to William Harrison Middle School. I went along, thinking it was a clerical error that would work itself out--no need to rock the boat--but, obviously, as the months have progressed, I've come to doubt that a correction is in the works.

MS. WILLOW

That's a very vivid story, Billy...

WILLIAM

Please: William.

MS. WILLOW

But let me ask you, if you're an adult, how do you explain your unexceptional score on Tuesday's fractions quiz?

WILLIAM

Considering I haven't used fractions in the last twenty years or so...

MS. WILLOW

And your report on The Napoleonic Wars...

WILLIAM

It's not like I've given that a lot of recent thought, either...

MS. WILLOW

I think you're a very bright little boy, with a touch too much imagination, who's grown a totally natural crush on his teacher. But while natural, it can't be acted upon.

WILLIAM

No?

MS. WILLOW

No, Billy. See, as we get older we have to oblige ourselves to...

WILLIAM

Look at this chest, Barbara:

MS. WILLOW

Billy...

WILLIAM

Does this look like the chest of a boy?

MS. WILLOW

Please, don't...

WILLIAM

(pulling her close to him)

Feel these arms. Are these the arms of a boy?

MS. WILLOW

I don't know, Billy...

WILLIAM

How about this kiss:

(he kisses her)

Is this the kiss of a boy, or of a man?

MS. WILLOW

A man!

WILLIAM

Yes, Barbara: treat me like a man!

MS. WILLOW

I will, I will!

WILLIAM

And what do you call a man?

MS. WILLOW

William! William!

WILLIAM

And what has a man seen?!

The world! Everything!

MS. WILLOW

And how does a man act?!

WILLIAM

He follows the rules of conduct!

MS. WILLOW

Oh.

WILLIAM

Which say, among other things, that he will not kiss his teacher.

MS. WILLOW

Of course.

WILLIAM

Prove to me you're a man, William.

MS. WILLOW

I will.

WILLIAM

Then that's how I'll treat you.

MS. WILLOW

Thank you.

WILLIAM

Not at all. Take the rest of the recess to study for your geography exam, William.

MS. WILLOW

I will.

WILLIAM

Good. I'm glad we had this little talk.  
(exits)

MS. WILLOW

Sometimes I wish I still *were* a kid.

WILLIAM

Black out.