

Ms. Perkins  
(a stage play)

by  
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Third Draft

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**ETHAN FALCONE:** *The new high school English teacher. He talks at you not to you. He's cynical not because he's bitter but because he finds being cynical ironic.*

A CLASSROOM with a teacher's desk in the front.

A young, snappily dressed ETHAN stands in the middle of the room, holding a copy of *Anna Karenina*, dressed like he's going to the club after class.

He's wearing a watch and one of those button-down, silky, Italian shirts.

He is SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE as if they were his students.

He doesn't walk -- he struts, he glides, he strolls, and he dashes.

ETHAN

Hey everybody, welcome to 'Freshman English' -- no fancy title or anything. I hope you all are enjoying your first day of high school.

He moves front left side of the class -- close to an audience member in the front.

ETHAN

It's a pretty big deal. Greatest years of your life, or whatever. I dunno. If you could all pass the summer reading essay to the front of the room...

Perplexed that no-one from the audience is turning anything in.

ETHAN

The essay on the *Anna Karenina* -- the heartbreaking story of tragic romance by the great Russian master Leo Tolstoy? The one that you all were supposed to have written about over the summer? Double spaced? 5-8 pages?

No reaction.

ETHAN

You mean none of you did it?

He pauses. His scowl turns up into a smile.

ETHAN

Alright, you all can stop panicking. I was just joking. There was no essay... And you, yeah you over there, raising your hand about to make an excuse about why you didn't do it. Yeah, you're a liar.

He struts back over to the middle of the classroom.

ETHAN

As you probably already know my name is Mr. Falcone. Call me Ethan if you want to be ballsy. After hearing all the stories about me that *I'm sure* the students have been going around telling, I'm guessing some of you hoped you'd gotten into *Ms. Perkins's* Freshman English class instead of this one. That doesn't bother me. Ms. Perkins and myself have two different ways of looking at the world.

He puts his *Anna Karenina* down on his desk.

ETHAN

We're gonna talk about the summer reading in a few minutes, but I wanted to take about five minutes to introduce you all to who *I* really am.

Ethan gets into monologing position. He's obviously rehearsed this:

ETHAN

I'm fresh out of grad school. Got my MFA in creative writing at Columbia. That's in *New York* if you're wondering. I got a full ride scholarship all three years, they even paid for my apartment in the middle of Manhattan. As you can see, I've got a bit of an attitude, and I'm proud of it. No-one's ever really done what I'm gonna be doing here before.

He leans back on his desk checking the length of his nails.

ETHAN

Honestly, I wanted to teach Senior English, but they said I couldn't my first year. It's a bunch of seniority, old-boys-club, first-come-first-serve, political BS going on in this school system. Don't tell anyone I said that.

He sighs slightly.

ETHAN

But whatever. Maybe I'll get to like Freshman English sooner or later, but I'll probably be long gone by next year -- hopefully -- when a publisher picks up my memoir.

He pauses, considering whether he should say something or not.

ETHAN

Don't tell anybody I told you this, but there's an entire chapter in there on Ms. Perkins. She was the one who got me the job here, that bastard.

He second guesses himself.

ETHAN

I can say that, right? Bastard?

(back to main thought)

She graduated in the MFA class ahead of me. She thinks she's some --

Interrupting himself, because he saw a hand raised.

ETHAN

Yes, a woman can be a bastard. Put your hand down please.

He waves the students down, dismissive.

ETHAN

This is my time to talk. Just assume I'm speaking in rhetorical questions from now on.

He begins pacing.

ETHAN

How many of you kids have had your heart broken before? You're what? Thirteen, fourteen, right?

He tries to divine something from the blank stares and silence.

ETHAN

I was in *love* with Ms. Perkins. You don't know what that is.

He freezes his body in position, looks at himself, and realizes how fired up he's gotten himself.

He sits at his desk for the first time.

ETHAN

You know what? How much time do we have?

He checks his watch and holds up the book for a moment.

ETHAN

(setting his watch)

Great. Instead of getting into our summer affair with Anna and Alexi Karenin right away, I want to do an in class thing. For the next two minutes, I want you to write about the one thing you think you can't live without. Could be your mom or your dog or some movie -- I don't care... I want you to really try as hard as you can to impress the hell out of me.

Ethan leans back in his chair and watches them write for a moment silently.

He leans forward, speaking almost confessionally.

ETHAN

We broke up right after she got me the job here. She said it would be alright for me to work here if I was able to 'maintain a level of professionalism'.

He gets thrown off by a student in the back.

ETHAN

(to the student)

Don't look up at me, keep writing. You only have a minute left.

He contemplates in silence again while watching the students write.

ETHAN

Who does she think she is giving me permission to take this job? Like that makes her a bigger person? I don't think anyone has to worry about maintaining a 'level of professionalism' except maybe herself.

He almost decides against saying something. It comes out of his mouth anyway:

ETHAN

You know Ms. Perkins used to be a Hooters waitress. Yeah, all through grad school, no lie. She worked at the only Hooters restaurant in Manhattan.

He laughs.

ETHAN

Tell all your friends who have her for English that one. If they look hard enough, they might be able to find that calendar they put her in about 2 years ago.

His smile fades as he sucks the last bit of enjoyment he could get out of the comment. He checks his watch.

ETHAN

Has it been two minutes? Whatever. Just turn your papers in. Whatever you have written down, just pass it up.

He eyes a student in the back corner with his hands raised.

ETHAN

No, I don't care if you put your name on it or not --

He starts collecting papers from the students up front.

ETHAN

-- just pass it up.

He collects the papers quickly and leafs through them skimming first lines.

ETHAN

So here's your first lesson.

He strolls over to the trash can next to his desk, and tosses the pile in.

ETHAN

You see all those things that were the most important things in the world to you? Somebody you don't even know can take them away from you. When you least expect it, they just disappear.

He's thrown off when someone raises their hand.

ETHAN

Don't worry. You're all getting hundreds, alright? You can put your hands down.

(trying to get back on track)

The best things in life can all just get ripped from you like --

He's interrupted again.

ETHAN

I see the way you're looking at me. No, I'm not just bitter. This has to do with class...

(trying to synthesize an idea on the fly)

What I also want you to learn is that you shouldn't write to impress any one --

(beat)

Yeah I know I said that I wanted you to try to impress me, but --

(starting another thought)

If you write with the sole purpose of trying to impress other people and you're not writing for yourself, the only thing you make is garbage. You have to enjoy what you're writing because really, in the end, not even your girlfriend who you waited for every night in the Central Park subway terminal until she got off work is going to read your memoir.

He looks down at the floor collecting his thoughts and starts laughing like he knows a joke no-one else does.

ETHAN

Have any of you seen the principal before? Oh man...

To a student in the front:

ETHAN

Oh, I see you over there smiling. You know what I'm talking about. He's nothing but hair. Like his whole body is a mustache.

ETHAN

(to all the students)

This guy is such a joke. He's this big, oaf, James Bond-y type Russian guy. He doesn't even have a Masters degree... His entire body is like an overactive pituitary gland... It's unbelievable -- Ms. Perkins is actually dating him now.

He stops laughing when he says the last sentence. The joke is over.

ETHAN

I could speak two languages too if I was *from* Russia. Maybe in about 15 years when I'm forty years old like him, I'll know two languages, too.

He pauses abruptly, and checks his watch.

He trudges back to his desk, sits down, and flips through the pages of *Anna Karenina* for a moment.

ETHAN

I guess there's no better segue into our discussion of *Anna Karenina* -- Tolstoy's heartbreaking commentary about doomed romance and the difficulty of being honest to oneself when the rest of society accepts falseness.

(beat)

So what'd you think?

Silence.

He flips through the pages, puts the book down, and picks it back up, unsure.

ETHAN

So...

(pause)

You can raise your hands now if you want.