

Cherries

A Short film

by

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JAMES (16), confident, good looking, leans against the wall, telling a story, showing off. He's surrounded by an audience, his friends, JAY, LEO, JAKE.

Next to James is his sidekick, NICK (15), dark hair and dark skin. They all react animatedly to the story.

JAMES

...he turned away and then BLAP
(makes gun gesture)
Sparked him right out bruv. No way
he was getting up after that.

Clint walks up from behind them and pretends to join in, mocking their actions and gestures. Robin smiles as he watches.

Some other boys next to James watch and laugh. James is distracted and stops his story. He turns his attention towards Clint annoyed.

Clint acts as if nothing happened hurries off and sits down next to Robin. James follows.

Robin takes one earphone out to acknowledge Clint.

CLINT

Alright Robin.

Robin nods.

JAMES

What's your problem?

Clint completely ignores James, his phone RINGS in his hand. Clint looks at his phone, as does Robin.

ROBIN

It's your Mum.

James loves this.

CLINT

I can fuckin read.

Robin is stung.

Clint walks away and answers his phone. James deliberately gets in his way.

James eyeballs Robin then goes after Clint.

Cut to the colour image of the boys on a cctv screen.

The school headmaster and a teacher, PHIL O'BRIEN are in the headmasters office watching the kids.

Mr O'Brien is in his early fifties and getting one step closer to being disillusioned with teaching every day. The headmaster is just thirty, who sees himself as more of a manager than a teacher.

Phil is clearly distressed, the Headmaster very calm.

MR O'BRIEN

This is so wrong.

HEADMASTER

Is it?

MR O'BRIEN

Come on!

The headmaster watches on the screen. He sees Clint push James away, he looks like a troublemaker, aggressive.

Phil watches through the window, he sees James taunting Clint as he tries to talk on the phone, only too aware of the cameras.

HEADMASTER

Every year they seem to get more selfish, more arrogant. They don't care about anyone or anything...

MR O'BRIEN

(interrupting)

Were you any different at 16?

HEADMASTER

I think I was. This might just give them some direction, some discipline...

MR O'BRIEN

I thought that was our job.

9

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

9

Clint returns from his call and fronts up to James. Some of the other kids start to gather round.

JAMES

Mummy want you home? Maybe she found you some new trousers at Oxfam - save you from wearing them ankle swingers.

More boys stroll over. Nick and Jay stand beside James. Some others behind Clint, Robin is at the back.

CLINT
Why you always in my face?

JAMES
Why you always dressed like a clown?

A few laughs. Clint goes right up to James's face.

CLINT
Listen, I'm not gay like you. I don't want to talk fashion with you.

Boys laugh and whoop. James pushes Clint away. Jay jumps around and knocks into other boys.

JAY
Oh my god, he will kill you bruv.

A female teacher has come over to the group. She tries to calm them down. She puts a hand on Jay.

JAY
What you doing Miss! You can't touch me you know.

She quickly lets go.

JAMES
Yeah, we're only joking Miss.

Other boys act shocked at her and laugh as though it were all a joke.

10 INT. HEADMASTERS OFFICE - DAY

10

The headmaster pushes a pile of white envelopes over the desk towards O'Brien. O'Brien turns back to look out at the boys, his arms folded across his chest.

HEADMASTER
All I'm saying is it's very easy to look at the negative side, when it could be good for them. Teach them some respect, turn their lives around before its too late.

O'Brien looks confused, who does he think these kids are?

O'BRIEN
I'm not doing it.

HEADMASTER

You are. (pauses, changes tactics)
It'd be better coming from you.
They trust you.

O'Brien looks out at the boys.

HEADMASTER

We don't have a choice. It's not
our decision. (beat) Phil.

O'Brien turns and looks at him.

HEADMASTER(CONT'D)

It's your job.

The school siren RINGS.

11 EXT. WALKWAY - DAY 11

The boys pile through a small doorway together, deliberately jostling each other. A tall thin Asian boy calls out.

AMIR

(mock serious)
Don't be jostling no desi tho.

Clint piles into him deliberately, they laugh. They all bundle along the corridor, falling into each other.

12 EXT. CORRIDOR - DAY 12

Mr. O'Brien's black shoes trudge along an empty metal walkway. He carries the pile of identical white envelopes. It feels like he's hardly moving.

Title Card: CHERRIES

13 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY 13

All the boys from the playground are in the class of around 20 - James, Clint and Robin.

The boys are all talking amongst themselves, laughing, shouting.

The teacher, Phil O'Brien, chews the end of his glasses, deep in thought.

Mr O'Brien looks at his watch and seems to notice the boys for the first time.

MR O'BRIEN
 (Shouts)
 Alright, alright. Enough.

The boys begin to quieten down.

MR O'BRIEN
 (Shouts louder)
 Quiet.

They shut up. O'Brien stares out at the faces staring up at him. He takes a breath.

MR O'BRIEN (CONT'D)
 Right.
 (he pauses)
 Who's been following the coverage
 of the war? Who watches the news?

Silence. A few half nod but they all avoid O'Brien's stare. He looks around.

Robin starts to put his hand up but looks around to see if anyone else is. No-one is.

CHARLIE surreptitiously writes 'cunt' on someone else's work while they're not looking.

JAKE concentrates on a detailed biro drawing of some tits on the inside cover of his notepad.

CLINT
 I watch it sometimes.

O'Brien is pleased to get an answer and surprised its from Clint.

MR O'BRIEN
 How does it affect you?

CLINT
 Makes me angry.

MR O'BRIEN
 (Surprised)
 Angry? Why Clint, can you explain.

CLINT
 Cos I've put the telly on for
 football and that depressing crap
 is still on. Does my head in.

A few boys laugh and Clint is pleased with himself.

Nick laughs and James gives him a dirty look.

Annoyed, O'Brien turns to the rest of the class.

MR O'BRIEN
 Anyone actually watch it to see
 what's going on in the world? How
 does it make you feel?

With an elaborate 'yawn' arms outstretched.

CLINT
 Sleepy.

MR O'BRIEN
 Robin what about you.

CLINT
 Bored.

O'Brien flashes him a warning look.

ROBIN
 Sad.

JAY
 Oh shut up you tart.

James laughs.

MR O'BRIEN
 Sad. Why?

Robin clams up and shrugs. O'Brien leaves him and looks around. The class avoid his eyes again. He gives up on the discussion.

14 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 14

O'Brien walks around his desk. He opens a drawer and takes out the pile of white envelopes.

The boys look back at him with blank faces and at the envelopes, wondering what they are.

MR O'BRIEN
 Nathan. Hand these out please.

O'Brien holds out the pile of white envelopes.

NATHAN, enthusiastic, he likes to join in, looks at the top envelope. It is blank except for his own name typed in small black letters - NATHAN PARSONS.

He puts the envelope on his desk and proceeds to hand out the rest.

MR O'BRIEN
 Nobody open the envelopes until I
 say so.

The boys are intrigued, quiet. They all get one and immediately pick it up to inspect it.

Clint starts to open his.

Mr O'Brien jumps up.

MR O'BRIEN

Clint!

He startles him, Clint stops.

MR O'BRIEN

What did I say?

He puts it down.

CLINT

It's got my name on it.

O'Brien sits down behind his desk. Once they all have their envelopes.

MR O'BRIEN

Open the envelopes.

15 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 15

In unison the boys all open the envelopes. Take out the letter and start to read.

Clint opens his letter.

Top centre, there is the 'Ministry of Homeland Security' logo and letter heading.

Top right, Clint's full name and address. The letter reads,

Re: Immediate Commencement of Military Basic Training.

Dear Clint Davies,

This letter is to inform you that you are being called upon to start training duties with the British Armed Forces.

Words jump out at him.

Military training. Compulsory. Immediate.

Clint looks up along with the other shell shocked boys.

Mr O'Brien looks at them.

JAMES

Sir, this is a joke, right?

NICK

It's gotta be Sir. Have you read this?

MAX

It's a wind up.

Clint slams his letter down, unimpressed.

CLINT

It's bullshit.

ROBIN

I don't understand.

The class all start calling out. Comparing their letter with the boy next to them.

MR O'BRIEN

Quiet, quiet.

(The boys quieten down)

There's a presentation I'm supposed to show you which should answer some of your questions.

O'Brien presses a button on a remote control. The lights dim and a film is projected onto the interactive white board. The Ministry of Homeland Security logo comes up and a glossy animated film begins. The kids watch on.

VO

The Ministry of Homeland Security is instigating a unique programme of personal, physical and intellectual development, which will provide a rounded education specifically designed to meet the needs of today's modern Armed Services...

16

INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

16

O'Brien turns off the projection, disgusted. The kids sit quietly in the dimmed room all eyes on their teacher.

O'Brien puts the remote control down and tries to explain.

MR O'BRIEN

I know this is a shock. I'll tell you what I know. Everyone was hoping the war would be over quickly, but this doesn't look likely and, even if it is, restoring stability in the Middle East could take many years.

(MORE)

MR O'BRIEN (cont'd)
Recently there has been a high
casualty rate and troop numbers
have been... depleted.

The kids stare on, wide eyed. Mr O'Brien moves briskly
onwards.

MR O'BRIEN (CONT'D)
The government have done some
projections and if this carries on
a long time, well then... then
we're in trouble.

Clint leans back precariously rocking on the back two legs of
his chair, unperturbed.

CLINT
Hang on, what's that smell? It's
BULLSHIT.

JAMES
Shut up Clint.

Clint starts to whistle to himself. The boys all start
calling out at once.

ROBIN
What does it mean 'training
duties'?

PETER
Sir. Don't you have to be in the
T.A or something?

MR O'BRIEN
Look its probably just a
precaution. They want all boys over
sixteen to start training, so that
if...

They all start interrupting, he holds up his hand to quiet
them.

MR O'BRIEN
IF, they have to enlist you, then
you'll be ready.

ROBIN
What about... if I don't agree with
the war Sir. I don't want to fight.
I want to be a conscientious
objector.

CHARLIE
You what?

MR O'BRIEN

(Softly)

They aren't forcing you to fight Robin, they're only forcing you to train.

CLINT

For now...

ROBIN

Aren't there medical exceptions? I'm epileptic.

MR O'BRIEN

Maybe there will be Robin.

STEVE

I got asthma.

Amir is kneeling on his chair. He shouts out.

AMIR

I got asthma.

CLINT

(Sarcastically)

I am Spartacus.

There's a palpable tension in the room.

17 EXT. STREET - DAY

17

The wheels are on a large dull green army truck. It jerks and thuds along the road.

18 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

18

AMIR

What I don't get is how come we aint heard nothing about this 'til now?

MR O'BRIEN

They didn't want to create any panic or hysteria by letting the press get hold of it.

ALEX

Sir can't you do something?

MR O'BRIEN

(interrupting)

Look, I don't know all the answers here, but soon we've to go to the hall where representatives from the government and the army will come to talk everything through.

CLINT

They're coming now? This is bullshit!

JAMES

(turning on CLINT)

Stop saying that. Don't you know any other words...

A text alert sounds from Nick's phone. O'Brien goes over to him.

MR O'BRIEN

Phone off.

Another text alert from someone else. And then another, and another. Someone else answers their phone.

MR O'BRIEN

Everyone's phones off now. NOW.

The boys are shocked by O'Brien's anger, and reluctantly do what they're told.

NICK

It's true, same thing's happening at Northgate.

CHARLIE

Shit, serious?

Nick nods.

It's starting to sink in, the boys are more thoughtful.

ROBIN

(To Clint)

Isn't your brother in the army?

CLINT

Yeah, and he's a fuckin idiot.

MR O'BRIEN

Clint.

ROBIN

Is he out there?

CLINT
Trying to clean up the fucking mess
the government made.

MR O'BRIEN
Clint, I won't warn you again.

CLINT
(Under his breath)
What're you gonna do, shoot me?

STEVE makes an action of being shot in the head. He looks around smiling. No one laughs. Clint looks at him.

NATHAN
(to Clint)
Has your brother said anything
about this then?

CLINT
(laugh)
Tony ain't exactly in charge if you
know what I mean.

LEO
Surely they can't force us.

Jake is drawing a detailed skull on his letter.

JAY
Have you read this dickhead,
'punishable by a custodial
sentence'.

BANG. A football slams into the window from outside, they all jump, hearts racing. They are really on edge.

19 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 19

JAMES is re-reading the letter, he puts it down firmly.

JAMES
So what? What are you all pissing
yourselves about? I saw an advert
for the army and they were doing
some pretty cool stuff, extreme
sports...everything....

A few boys realise JAMES is right, this could be OK.

JAY
We gonna do abseiling? I always
wanted to do that...

STEVE

He's right you know. Bunji jumping, assault courses... I saw one thing on the tele with speedboats...

LEO

Blowing shit up...

CLINT

Yeah, it's fucking brilliant - 'off road driving with the added excitement of roadside bombs...'

The mood is shattered. NICK reacts on CLINT.

NICK

You know it all don't you? We're just saying, if we do have to do it, maybe it aint as bad as we think. My cousin did National Service in Greece...

MR O'BRIEN

It's true, they have it in Greece, Austria, Denmark, Brazil...

AMIR

(Over O'Brien)

Yeah well they need a bit of discipline, the Greeks... they're all lazy fuckers.

CLINT

(laughing)

Innit.

NICK

(to Amir)

Who asked you? If your lot could sort your own mess out we wouldn't have to go there at all.

The atmosphere in the classroom is turning ugly.

MR O'BRIEN

Hold on a minute.

AMIR

(fronting up)

You what?

CLINT

He's from Tottenham you prick.

AMIR looks at NICK for a minute, ready to smack him, but then deflects.

AMIR
I'll have a chicken kebab Nicholai,
when you gotta minute..

Clint laughs.

JAMES
(to Clint)
No wonder your brother's not in
charge. Clearly a pussy like you.

Clint jumps up.

CLINT
What did you say?

MR O'BRIEN
Boys.

NICK
(towards Amir)
You lot start them young innit -
babies with explosives...

Amir now really fronts up. The insults fly fast across the
classroom.

ROBIN
You can't say that.

JAMES
I said your brothers a pussy.

AMIR
You what?

NICK
You heard.

CLINT
You've got a big fucking mouth.

James gets up. Amir gets up.

AMIR
(to NICK)
Come on Stavros.

MR O'BRIEN
Amir calm down, James sit down.

NICK
You got some terrorist moves to
show me.

Amir rushes in.

JAMES
 (to Clint)
 Come on then pussy.

Clint goes for him. The classroom erupts. Punches fly.
 O'Brien tries in vain to regain control.

MR O'BRIEN
 Calm down, everyone. Amir, sit
 down. James.
 (SHOUTS)
 Get back to your seats all of you.
 CLINT.

His shouting has no effect so he wades in. He isn't supposed
 to touch them but is forced to.

O'Brien is trying to get between the group fight and tear
 them apart. He knows he is losing control of the whole
 class.

Robin sits at his desk, rubbing his head upset.

ROBIN
 Stop it, stop it.

O'Brien gets between them grabs James by the jumper and
 pushes Clint away, but with more force than he intended.
 Clint goes flying backwards, falls into some desks and ends
 up in a heap on the floor.

James pulls back, his arms raised.

The room goes quiet.

MR O'BRIEN
 That's enough.

Mr O'Brien stands at the front of the room, catching his
 breath. He goes to help Clint. Clint pushes his hand away.

O'Brien is shaken.

20 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 20

Slowly, Clint stands up and sits back down at his desk.

The other kids shuffle back to their seats stunned by all of
 this - the sense of rebellion and aggression over. Everyone
 is suddenly shocked, quiet and scared again.

Clint looks around at the subdued boys.

CLINT

What if.... If all of us said we weren't gonna do it... They can't force all of us.

MR O'BRIEN

I'm afraid they can....And they will.

JAY

Yeah man, it says seven years here.

Clint stares at him. Mr O'Brien stares back.

CLINT

(quietly)

I know what it's like out there.

MR O'BRIEN

Maybe it'll be ok.

Clint looks at him. O'Brien looks down.

The kids sit silent, together, unsure what to do next, unsure of the future, but knowing that everything is about to change.

Mr O'Brien looks at his watch. Clint decides. He screws up his letter and aims for the bin. It misses.

CLINT

I'm not doing it.

Clint stands up and calmly walks out of the classroom.

Robin smiles. James jumps up.

JAMES

Sir. He can't just...

Mr O'Brien shakes his head.

MR O'BRIEN

Leave him.

21 EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY 21

The electronic school gates start to open.

22 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY 22

Clint runs across the playground. Robin watches admiringly from the window.

The siren goes.

MR O'BRIEN

Okay. It's time to go to the hall.

Robin's face falls. None of the boys want to move. James takes a deep breath.

JAMES

Fuck.

James slowly stands up and leads the way. NICK looks at him and follows, the rest of the boys stand up.

23 EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY 23

Clint passes a parked car and army jeep in the playground. He runs through the now open school gates just as the large army truck is pulling in. He keeps running.

24A INT. STAIRWELL - DAY 24A

James leads the rest of the class down a dark flight of stairs.

24B INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HALL - DAY 24B

James leads the boys into the hall. He puts his hand on Robin's shoulder. Another class are already there, the boys are all looking as shocked as them.

There are 2 officers sitting at tables at the front of the hall with the kids queuing in front in neat rows.

The headmaster walks to the front with a SERGEANT from the Army, his hand on his shoulder, they shake hands.

Robin quickly wipes away a tear, trying hard not to cry.

25 EXT. PARK - DAY 25

Clint runs through the park, fast, free. The sun shines, birds are singing, children play.

26 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL - DAY 26

Empty corridors. Banks of lockers. Empty classrooms. School books and backpacks litter the desks and chairs, but there are no pupils.

27 INT. SCHOOL HALL - DAY 27

The boys stand in line in front of the two desks.

The headmaster is on the sidelines, he watches what is going on, he tries to catch the sergeant's eye but can't. His face falls ever so slightly, he knows he is no longer in charge.

James's hand shakes as he hands over his ID card.

At the next desk Robin places his finger on a scanner which flashes a light and scans his fingerprint.

28 INT. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY 28

The classroom is empty.

Mr O'Brien picks up Clint's scrunched up letter and put it in the bin. He sits at one of the student's desks, alone, Desolate.

29 EXT. PARK - DAY 29

Clint slows down and finally stops. The sun is still shining and the birds are still singing but now all he sees is everything he is going to lose.

He doesn't know where to go or what to do.

Clint stands alone in the park.

30 INT. SCHOOL HALL - DAY 30

Close up of a finger on glass as it gets scanned. The screen splits in two as another is scanned, then four, then 8 and so on until the whole screen is covered in the compartmentalized fingerprints.

END.