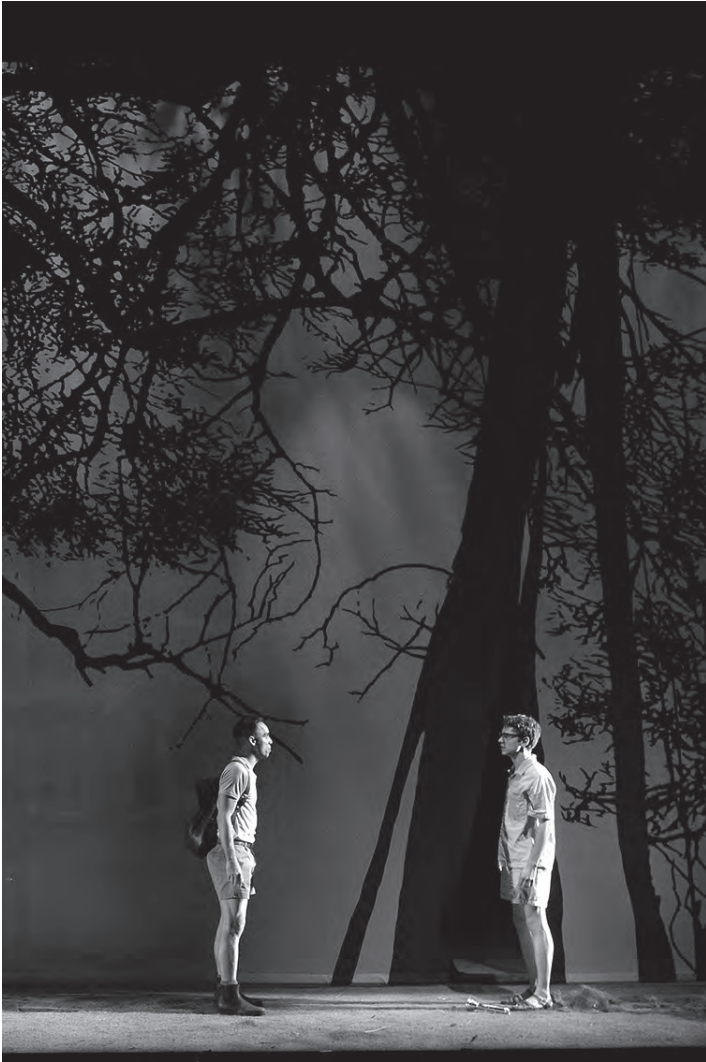




KATE MULVANY is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. Her new play, *The Rasputin Affair*, was shortlisted for the Griffin New Play Award and the Patrick White Award and will premiere at Ensemble Theatre in 2017. In 2015, she penned *Masquerade*, a reimagining of the much-loved children's book by Kit Williams, which was performed at the 2015 Sydney Festival, the State Theatre Company of South Australia and the Melbourne Festival. Her autobiographical play, *The Seed*, commissioned by Belvoir, won the Sydney Theatre Award for Best Independent Production in 2007 and is currently being developed into a feature film. Kate's *Medea*, created with Anne-Louise Sarks and produced by Belvoir in 2012, won a number of awards including an AWGIE and five Sydney Theatre Awards. It completed hugely successful seasons at London's Gate Theatre and Auckland's Silo Theatre. She's also currently under commission at Sydney Theatre Company. Kate's other plays and musicals include *The Danger Age* (Deckchair Theatre/La Boite); *Blood and Bone* (The Stables/Naked Theatre Company); *The Web* (Hothouse/Black Swan State Theatre Company); *Somewhere* (co-written with Tim Minchin for the Joan Sutherland PAC); and *Storytime* (Old Fitzroy Theatre), which won Kate the 2004 Philip Parsons Award. Kate is also an award-winning stage and screen actor, whose credits include *The Seed*, *Buried Child* (Belvoir); *Blasted* (B Sharp/ Sheedy Productions); *Tartuffe*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* (Bell Shakespeare); *The Crucible*, *Proof*, *A Man With Five Children*, *King Lear*, *Rabbit* (Sydney Theatre Company); *The Beast* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *The Literati*, *Mr Bailey's Minder* (Griffin Theatre Company); and the feature films *The Little Death* and *The Great Gatsby*.



CRAIG SILVEY grew up on an orchard in Dwellingup, Western Australia. He now lives in Fremantle, Western Australia, where, at the age of nineteen, he wrote his first novel, *Rhubarb*, published by Fremantle Press in 2004. In 2007, Craig released *The World According to Warren*, a picture book affectionately starring the guide dog from *Rhubarb*. In early 2008, he completed his second novel, the award-winning *Jasper Jones*, which has become a hit around the globe—it has been published in over thirty countries and has been translated into fourteen languages. *Jasper Jones* has won Australian Book Industry awards, Australian Independent Booksellers awards, the Australian Booksellers Choice Award and was a co-winner of the West Australian Premier's Award for Fiction. The novel also won the 2012 USA Printz Honor Book for excellence in literature written for young adults. *Jasper Jones* has been shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and both the Victorian and NSW Premiers' Literary Awards, among others. In 2016, Craig co-wrote the AWGIE-winning adaptation of the *Jasper Jones* feature film. Craig followed up *Jasper Jones* with the acclaimed and beautifully illustrated novella, *The Amber Amulet*. Outside of literature, Craig is the singer-songwriter for the band The Nancy Sikes.



*Guy Simon (left) as Jasper and Nicholas Denton as Charlie  
in Melbourne Theatre Company's 2016 production.  
(Photo: Jeff Busby)*

# JASPER JONES

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BASED ON THE NOVEL  
BY CRAIG SILVEY

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ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE  
BY KATE MULVANY



Currency Press, Sydney

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*Tom Conroy (left) as Charlie and Charles Wu as Jeffrey in Belvoir's 2016 production in Sydney. (Photo: Lisa Tomasetti)*

# INTRODUCTION

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1965 will be a tumultuous year for the small town of Corrigan. The race to the moon is underway. Australia's involvement in the war in Vietnam is being escalated and some of the young men are being conscripted and sent over to fight in it. And fifteen-year-old Laura Wishart has mysteriously disappeared. For Corrigan the last event overshadows the others. What happened to her?

For Charlie Bucktin this summer will be traumatic and life-changing. This play, like Craig Silvey's much-loved 2009 novel on which it is based, starts like a good detective story with the discovery of a body but it soon becomes something else. In the thrilling opening scene Charlie is woken in the night by Jasper Jones, the slightly older and much tougher outcast boy, and taken to his secret place outside town where he has found Laura's body hanging from a tree. For reasons that are shocking but completely understandable they cut her down, weigh her body with stones and sink her in the dam.

It is from that initiating act that the play starts to depart from the detective genre. There are no detectives, only the police who, like the townsfolk, mindlessly blame Jasper for everything bad that happens in Corrigan, and when it comes to the crunch are happy to violently beat him up because he is a 'half-caste'. Only Charlie and Jasper know what has happened to Laura's body, and they keep their secret till the end, hoping to find out the how and the why of it all.

This is a play about trust and courage, especially among the five wonderful central teenage characters. Jasper believes he can trust Charlie, which is why he seeks his help in the first place. Charlie finds to his surprise that he almost instantly trusts Jasper, in spite of Jasper's bad reputation and his own doubts:

CHARLIE: I can't trust anything—liquor, cigarettes. God knows what'll happen when I have sex. At this rate my dick'll probably fall off halfway through. (p. 11)

Charlie also has a close friend, the comically courageous cricket-tragic Jeffrey Lu, the son of refugees from Vietnam. (One of the other major

events of 1965 was Doug Walters' test debut, about which Jeffrey is obsessed.) Their friendship is expressed in a series of cheerfully insulting interchanges that provide much of the play's humour.

One of these is their argument about superheroes, when Charlie is arguing that the mortal Batman obviously has more courage than the invulnerable Superman (pp.14-16). Soon after that they meet Laura's sister Eliza, whom Charlie has a crush on but dare not approach; and then the town bully, Warwick, whose size, strength and attendant goons make it easy to be tough. We admire Jeffrey's clownish bravery, as he faces up to these thugs who are thwarting his attempts to get a place in the cricket team. For all Charlie's pathological fear of insects and his general book-nerd gentleness, we admire his courage as he sticks by Jasper. But in the end we discover that it is Laura who has had to endure the most.

Jeffrey teases Charlie about his infatuation with Eliza ('Sassytime!'). Charlie and Eliza's relationship is a beautifully written first-love story, full of awkwardness, misunderstanding and growing tenderness. It is the awkwardness and misunderstanding that obscures another issue of trust, when we finally learn the truth of what they have been inadvertently keeping from each other.

The fifth teenager is of course the dead Laura. In the novel Charlie is haunted by memories and stories of her. In a play he can be haunted by her ghost. It is one of the many brilliant things about Kate Mulvany's adaptation that she brings Laura on stage in the flesh. Laura visits him in his room while he is sleeping. It is she who points out to him the word 'Sorry' scratched on the tree from which she was found hanging, and later on the old car—such a significant relic of Jasper's unknown past—in Mad Jack Lionel's yard. She visits the Lu's house when the vandals trash their beautiful flower garden. Having her so present in Charlie's journey is very moving.

Another theme explored in the play is the idea of the normal and what lies beneath that banal word. When Charlie and Jasper first come back from the terrible scene of the death everything at first seems ordinary again. The town of Corrigan reacts to Laura's disappearance with fear and anxiety and the young people are locked up, as might be expected, but the novel and the play evoke small-town normalcy—the streets, the cricket ground, the pub, the railway, the river, the farmlands



and the bushland beyond. It is a portrait of a usually quiet community that is suddenly disrupted, like when your country fights an overseas war and sends your young men off to die, or when you drop the body of a hanged girl into the dark waters of a dam.

Mulvany has also given to Charlie's troubled angry mother, Mrs Bucktin, a wonderful speech in which she reveals all her despair about having to live in such a 'normal' country town.

MRS BUCKTIN: I reckon it's set in a town of never-ending fucking silence. Silence and space. Dead paddocks and dried-up dams and a bunch of ghosts covered in dust walking around a place where nothing ever changes. It just doesn't fucking change. Stinking men and bored women and incessant heat and filthy flies and fucking on a back seat. Just to feel something, just to feel anything, just to escape the silence. (p.66)

And what is most shocking of all is our realisation at the end of the play that what has happened to Laura is in fact, no matter how outraged we might be, all too normal.

Then there are the adults who control the teenagers' lives, but whom Charlie, as he grows to some sort of early maturity, gradually realises have troubles and secrets of their own. Most of them do not appear (in fact, the only parents who appear on stage are Charlie's), but are looming presences in the story. His mother's own desperation emerges as a reason for her erratic behaviour. His gently quiescent father—who has given him his love of the books which are the solace of his young life and his point of contact with Eliza—teaches him a lot, but is excluded from his secret. Mr Bucktin himself displays great courage when he confronts the gang who are tormenting Jeffrey's father.

Jeffrey's parents are decent, hard-working, refugee immigrants, facing the hostility, and occasionally the friendship, of the people of Corrigan. In his supreme self-confidence, his cheerful acceptance of all the shit thrown at him by Warwick and his mates, and in his energetic wit and cleverness, Jeffrey becomes a defiant trickster figure whose triumph in the iconic Aussie cricket match is one of the great pleasures of the story.

Jasper's violently drunken father only returns to town from time to time to beat up his son. Jasper's Aboriginal mother is long gone, and we eventually find out why and where. This is the source of his

fierce independence, and the reason why he has his secret place. He is a teenager who needs somewhere to live and survive on his own. This is why, when Laura turns up dead in his special place, he enlists Charlie to help and their trusting friendship begins.

Eliza and Laura's father and mother are supposedly pillars of the community but the revelation at the end demonstrates how alone these children are. Normal life can be a nightmare.

The other adult is Mad Jack Lionel, the supposedly evil killer of a young woman. He lives isolated on the edge of town, a source of mystery, feared and loathed by all the young people. Stealing from his peach tree has become a rite of passage for tough boys trying to prove their machismo. Jasper's personal relationship to Mad Jack, eventually revealed, and Charlie's understanding of this and his final complicity in the splendid peach tree scene, is one the happiest arcs of the story.

But there remains, as we watch these events, the central question: what happened to Laura? This is the tragic arc of the story, in which most of the questions raised about trust and courage are answered.

Mulvany has taken a novel based in first-person narrative, relying for its story on discoveries, and turned it into a drama based in the actions of characters. The interactions between Charlie and Jasper, Jeffrey and Eliza are brought concisely and gloriously to theatrical life. She takes Charlie's painfully introspective library research into the violent crimes with which he becomes obsessed, and gives the story of the torture of Sylvia Likens (p.29) to Eliza to tell to Charlie. This raises the stakes for Eliza and gives the actor something very strong to play:

'The sister. Jenny. Why didn't she tell someone at school? A neighbour? Anyone? She was Sylvia's only ally and she didn't say a word. Why would she do that?' (p.29)

In this exchange neither of them knows that the other knows the truth about Laura, and we, the audience, don't know that Eliza knows what happened to Laura. It makes for a rich subtext.

There are many such scenes of complex dramatic irony. When Charlie has his warm scene with his father and asks if he can join in the search for Laura, Mr Bucktin says they might find something that 'might not be for eyes of children' (p.35). We know that Charlie knows that they will not find anything, that his eyes have already seen more, and that his hands have done something about it.

Kate Mulvany has taken from Silvey's novel the deceptively simple but moving final refrain that the young Charlie reiterates so powerfully and with such a sense of innocent shock, surprise and outrage, as if he cannot believe that this is the way things go in the world. Here he shares it with Eliza, as we learn the truth at last.

'This is what happened ...'

*John McCallum*  
*Sydney, 2017*

John McCallum is a theatre reviewer for *The Australian*.



*Jasper Jones* was first presented by Barking Gecko Theatre Company at Studio Underground, State Theatre Centre of WA, Perth, on 17 July 2014, with the following cast:

JASPER JONES	Shaka Cook
CHARLIE BUCKTIN	James Beck
JEFFREY LU	Hoa Xuande
MRS BUCKTIN	Alexandra Jones
ELIZA WISHART / LAURA WISHART	Elizabeth Blackmore
MAD JACK LIONEL / MR BUCKTIN	Humphrey Bower

Director, John Sheedy

Set & Costume Designer, Michael Scott-Mitchell

Lighting Designer, Trent Suidgeest

Sound Designer, Ben Collins

## CHARACTERS

CHARLIE BUCKTIN, a bookish white 14-year-old boy  
JASPER JONES, an Indigenous 16-year-old boy  
LAURA WISHART, a dead 15-year-old girl  
ELIZA WISHART, Laura's mysterious 14-year-old sister  
JEFFREY LU, Charlie's Vietnamese next-door neighbour, best friend  
and cricket fanatic  
MR BUCKTIN, Charlie's father  
MRS BUCKTIN, Charlie's mother  
MAD JACK LIONEL, the scariest bloke in town  
WARWICK TRENT, town bully  
CLARRY, Warwick Trent's henchman  
OFFICER, philanderer  
MRS LU, Jeffrey's mother (voice only)  
STRANGER, a way out  
MOB, faceless citizens  
MEN, brutal coppers

This play is ideally for seven performers, but can be done with six.  
The doubling for six works best as:

CHARLIE  
JASPER  
LAURA / ELIZA / MEN / MOB  
JEFFREY / STRANGER / MEN / MOB  
MRS BUCKTIN / WARWICK / MEN  
MR BUCKTIN / CLARRY / OFFICER / MAD JACK / MOB

With seven performers, MAD JACK can be played as a single character.  
Mrs Lu's voice can be pre-recorded.

## SETTING

The (fictional) West Australian town of Corrigan during the summer  
of 1965.

## ACT ONE

---

### SCENE ONE

*On a dark stage, beneath a tree, the louvered window of a sleep-out is illuminated by the dim glow of a kerosene lamp. Inside the room is a thirteen-year-old boy, CHARLIE BUCKTIN, reading a book intently in his glasses and pyjamas.*

*The only sound is the cricking of summer cicadas.*

*Then ...*

*A dark creeping figure makes its way deftly, silently across the space to Charlie's window.*

*CHARLIE does not look up from his book.*

*A beat.*

*The figure looks around, then ... raps abruptly on the louvered window.*

*CHARLIE gasps and falls out of bed with a fright. He looks in amazement at his visitor, then turns to us ...*

CHARLIE: [*whispering*] Jasper Jones has come to my window!

JASPER: [*whispering*] Charlie! Charlie, come out here.

CHARLIE: He knows my name! Wow! [*To JASPER*] What are you doing here?

JASPER: I need your help, Charlie. Come out.

CHARLIE: It's really late, Jasper. My parents might wake up—

JASPER: Charlie. Hurry up. I need you.

*A beat.*

CHARLIE: [*to us*] Jasper Jones needs *me*?!

*CHARLIE removes the slats of his window and peers around fearfully as JASPER waits outside. CHARLIE squeezes awkwardly through the window—all arse and pyjamas. He splats heavily to the ground then gets up quickly, pretending it never happened.*

JASPER: You right?

CHARLIE: Yep.

JASPER: You ready?

CHARLIE: For what?

JASPER: I tole you, Charlie. I need your help. Come on. We gotta go.

*JASPER starts to walk away. CHARLIE hesitates.*

CHARLIE: Hang on.

*CHARLIE leans in through his window. He fishes out a pair of ridiculously chunky sandals and puts them on. He is now wearing pyjamas with the dumbest pair of sandals ever seen on a pair of feet.*

In case there's doublegees.

JASPER: Come on. We gotta hurry.

*As they walk, CHARLIE speaks to us once more.*

CHARLIE: You have to understand, I've never snuck out before. I'm a virgin to this kind of thing. Actually, I'm pretty much a virgin to every kind of thing. Except books. So me sneaking out with Jasper Jones, who is known throughout Corrigan as the worst kid in town, well, it's fair to say this is particularly out of character for me.

JASPER: Keep up, Charlie.

CHARLIE: [*to us*] In this town, Jasper is the first to be blamed for everything. Whatever the misdemeanour—nicking lollies from the store, throwing lit matches down the mines, or sneaking through fences to push over cows—no matter how clear their own child is guilty, parents ask immediately, 'Were you with that motherless half-caste Jasper Jones?'

JASPER: Quick, mate.

CHARLIE: [*to us*] And the kids always nod, because Jasper's involvement instantly absolves them. Their parents think their poor little child has somehow been momentarily led astray. And so the case is closed with just one simple instruction, 'Stay away from Jasper Jones'.

JASPER: Hurry up, Charlie. We gotta hurry.

CHARLIE: [*to us*] So me being here, under a full moon, being led by Jasper Jones past the brown lawns and gardens of my sleeping neighbourhood, past the cricket pitch, past the railway, past the power station, over the bridge, through the farm district, and



knowing what my mother would do if she found out where I was ... Well, let's just say this is something *way* more adventurous than anything Huckleberry Finn ever did.

JASPER *offers* CHARLIE *a cigarette*.

JASPER: Wanna smoke?

*A beat.* CHARLIE *looks uncomfortable*.

CHARLIE: Oh, nah ...

JASPER: You sure?

CHARLIE: Yeah ...

JASPER: I didn't nick 'em from the shop, if that's what you're worried about.

CHARLIE: Oh ... that's good.

JASPER: I nicked 'em from me old man.

CHARLIE *rubs his belly*.

CHARLIE: It ... it's just that I've smoked so many tonight I'm already full.

JASPER *turns to a doorway near a tree branch that is bursting with peaches*.

CHARLIE *gasps*.

Wh-what are we doing here?

JASPER *stares at the doorway*.

Jasper ... This is ... This is Mad Jack Lionel's place.

*A beat.*

We really ... *really* shouldn't be here.

JASPER *keeps staring at the door*.

Are you gonna steal a peach? Is that why we're here?

JASPER *still doesn't answer*.

CHARLIE *turns to us again*.

No kid in Corrigan has actually ever laid eyes on Mad Jack Lionel. But we've heard all about him from our parents. He lives in that house there and hasn't stepped outside of it since he killed a young woman a long time ago.

*He indicates the branch full of peaches.*

A popular test of courage in Corrigan is to nick a peach from the tree of Mad Jack Lionel. After you've eaten it, the stone of the peach is kept as a souvenir of your heroics and is universally admired and envied. It's guaranteed to earn you at least a month of respect at school.

*He gazes admiringly at the peaches.*

However, as much as I like the idea of raising my station in this town, I was unfortunately born without speed or courage, which are both essential to the stealing of Mad Jack Lionel's peaches.

JASPER: We're not here to steal a peach.

CHARLIE: [*to us*] Phew. / [*To JASPER*] Do ... do you reckon it's all true, Jasper? What they say about him?

JASPER: Most people around here talk a lot of bullshit, but I reckon they're on the money with that one. He's mad alright.

*He spits on the dirt.*

CHARLIE: Fersure.

*He spits too—pissily.*

Completely.

JASPER: I seen him, you know. A bunch of times.

CHARLIE: Really? When? How?

*But JASPER just flicks his cigarette at Mad Jack's place and starts walking again. CHARLIE hurries after him.*

Is he tall? I heard he's about eight feet high and four feet wide. Does he really have a scar down his face? Does he really have a glass eye that follows you wherever you go? And a tattoo of a skull and crossbones on his arm? Does he really smell like wee? What's his voice like? Raspy? Croaky? What? Does his hair really come all the way down to his knees? And did he really make a pact with the devil? I heard that once. Jasper? Jasper?

*He trips over and hurries back to his feet again.*

JASPER: Come on, Charlie. We're close now. Hurry.

CHARLIE: [*to us*] This is, by far, my worst transgression. Probably my only ever transgression. But I follow Jasper on. Branches and shrubs snap

back at me. The river disappears then reappears again. The paperbarks and floodgums look like they want to snatch us up and then ...

JASPER: We're here.

*They stop walking.*

I can trust you, Charlie, can't I?

CHARLIE: I reckon. Yeah.

JASPER: It's through here.

CHARLIE: What is?

*JASPER puts a hand on CHARLIE's shoulder.*

JASPER: I'm really sorry, mate.

CHARLIE: Huh? For what?

*A long moment. JASPER stares at CHARLIE intently.*

JASPER: This.

*JASPER reveals ...*

## SCENE TWO

*Hanging at the end of a long noose, a young girl in a white nightdress. Like a still ghost in the darkness. Her face is bruised and bloodied. Her long hair is loose. Her head is held at a strange angle as she seems to gaze down at the boys.*

*CHARLIE screams suddenly but JASPER covers his mouth with his hand.*

*CHARLIE struggles to get away, his eyes never leaving the girl, but JASPER is too strong for him.*

*Finally, CHARLIE gives up in exhaustion and JASPER removes his hand from his mouth.*

CHARLIE: Who is that?

JASPER: It's Laura Wishart.

*Silence. The two boys watch LAURA hanging.*

I bin away for a while, Charlie. Outta town. I came back here tonight and the first thing I saw was Laura. Up there. I grabbed her legs and tried to hold her up. Tried to save her. But she was gone already. I dint know what to do. So I ran to your place and knocked on your window.

*Panic hits CHARLIE.*

CHARLIE: Jasper, I shouldn't be here! I have to go back home! You have to tell someone about this!

JASPER: I can't do that.

CHARLIE: I don't understand. What happened? *Why would she do that?!*

JASPER: She dint do it, Charlie. She can't have. You see that rope? That's *my* rope. I use it to swing over the dam. But I always hide it after—I wrap it around that branch so no-one can see it. Cos this is *my* place. This is where I spend most of my time. It's *my* place.

CHARLIE: Well, she must have found it when she shinnied up the tree.

JASPER: She couldn't have shinnied up the tree, Charlie. Laura ... she's a lady. She's delicate, you know. She couldn't have done it herself. And look up there. Look at her face.

CHARLIE: I don't want to.

JASPER: *Look*, Charlie.

*CHARLIE does, reluctantly.*

Someone's beaten her up. The same someone that strung her up that tree, I reckon.

CHARLIE: But who? Who in Corrigan would do that?

*He looks terrified.*

Was it ... was it *you*?

*A beat.*

JASPER *stares at* CHARLIE.

CHARLIE *goes to run but* JASPER *stops him.*

JASPER: Charlie, I promise you, mate—I dint do this.

CHARLIE *settles a little but then panics again. He whispers, afraid.*

CHARLIE: Shit, Jasper! What if whoever did this is still here? Watching us!

JASPER: There's no-one here. I can tell.

CHARLIE: How can you tell?

JASPER: I just can.

*A beat.*

We gotta find out who did this, Charlie. We gotta find out who killed Laura.