

UNSPOKEN ACTS

By
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Edited by
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*A disfigured loner befriends a priest who is not able to keep his secret,
even though it is told in the sanctity of the confessional.*

UNSPOKEN ACTS

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

Spring 2014 READING

- Friday Night Footlights, Dramatists Guild, 1501 Broadway, New York City

Spring 2019 SPRING NEW WORKS FEST

- Manhattan Repertory Theatre; 42nd St, New York City

First Performance:

First full production of this play was done in February 2018 at Manhattan Repertory Theatre in New York City under the direction of Amos Dreisbach.

Cast:

Fr. Frank - Owen Scott

*Dale - Timothy Regan**

Narrator/Judge - Jasmine Saunise

Woman – Rachel Weekley

Girl – Hannah Matusow

Little Girl – Katherine O’Meara

**Appearing courtesy of Actors Equity Association*

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

FR. FRANK - A middle-aged Catholic priest, very lonely and questioning his faith.

DALE - Mid 30s, a trucker, a disfigured loner with a will to make a confession.

NARRATOR/JUDGE - On/Offstage Voice

WOMAN - On/Offstage Voice

GIRL - On/Offstage Voice

LITTLE GIRL - On/Offstage Voice

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: Interior of St. John's Catholic Church. The stage is set with a dimly lit spot on the image of a confessional booth center stage.

Downstage right is Fr. Frank's room, sparse, with a bed and worn-out blanket. Upstage right is a small wooden dinner table with two chairs, one broken, propped against the wall. His desk, just right of center, slightly downstage, is stacked with books, papers, a pen, a bottle with a cork, and a tall glass.

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Music filters in. Inside the booth we can see the silhouettes of the penitent and his confessor, a priest. The stage lights come up to full as a Gregorian Chant rises and fills the background against a very deep loud voice.

NARRATOR. To wisdom be attentive, to knowledge be true. That discretion may watch over you, and understanding may guard you. The lips of an adroit drip with honey, smoother than oil; lies are as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. And in the end, when your flesh is consumed, you say, “Oh, why did I hate my teacher? My heart scorn love of truth? Why did I not listen to the voice of innocence?”

The music crescendos booming into a grand finale as soon as the narrator finishes his speech. As the music stops abruptly the stage is dark. Momentarily, the lights come up on the confessional and now we can clearly see the outline of a woman and a priest.

WOMAN. Bless me Father, for I have sinned... it's been about six months since my last confession... How long ago was Easter? Well, I know I went for Easter. But bless me Father, uh, I lied to my husband, it was about money. I told him that I only paid twenty something for a dress, but it was really thirty-eight ninety-nine. And I scream at my kids at least once, no twice, a week. I lose it... I just lose control. My little one looks like a cherub, but Father, let me tell you, she drives me wild. She's three and a half going on eighteen, and my twelve-year-old thinks he's thirty-five. Honest to God, Father. I pray every day for patience. My husband doesn't understand. He's very loving and supportive, but.... *(Sobbing.)* and God, I know I gossip, I talk about other people. Especially my sister-in-law... She tells me all this juicy stuff about her love life. Well, I'm sure you know people today are having sex out of wedlock. And well, my friends and I, I know, I shouldn't talk about her, but she makes it too easy. Then she always says she doesn't care what people think. I know it's a sin, yet I

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continue.... Well, Father Frank, I don't want to waste your time anymore. For these and all my sins I am heartfully sorry.

As the priest gives her absolution in Latin, the lights in the confessional dim. The footlights come up slowly.

FR. FRANK. *(Exits the confessional, Speaks directly to the audience.)*

The sacrament of Confession was never really my forte. In fact, it was always hard for me to look my parishioners in the eyes after knowing what their sins were. I always thought to myself, "thank God for the confessional booth". At least we can pretend I didn't know they cheated on their husband, that they beat their kids, that they... And I've always wondered... What if someone confesses to a murder? People think that we are judging when we sentence with three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys. No, we are not judging. Or at least I never considered myself to be a judge. There is only one Judge... God, Our Father who art in Heaven. My lot in life is to play the Judas... the friend who betrayed... *(Beat.)* I can never forget the first day he came to see me. It was in the confessional. His name was Dale. It was the closest thing I ever had to a personal relationship. We grew to be like... brothers.

The stage lights dim as the lights come up on the confessional. Fr. Frank meanders upstage and enters into it. In the shadow we hear the voice of Dale, a wandering loner, whose speech impediments indicate his lack of formal education.

DALE. Uh Father, uh, I just sorta wandered into your church. I was brought up a Catholic, but ain't been to church since I was a boy. I'm sorry, uh, sorry, sorrweeeee.

FR. FRANK. Well, hello. Welcome to St. John's Parish.

DALE. It's okay?

FR. FRANK. Sure. In fact, it's great. So you haven't been to the sacraments in a few years?

DALE. Uh, yep. I didn't really come here to uh, I means, I didn't think about church, you know. I means to, I mean, every now and again, go to

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church, that is. When I hear gospel music on the radio, but I look at all them people and all dressyed like a million, I sees myself all foul and deformed, and I uh, I just can't get myself out of m' truck.

FR. FRANK. Sometimes it is hard. But you're here today, that's the most important thing now. I'm glad you came today.

DALE. You means y'aint gonna yell at me?

FR. FRANK. No. Not at all.

DALE. Boy I was all ready t' run the hell... er I means the hecks outta here, if you were gonna start to yell. I get a-scared when people holler at me. I don't wanna be hit.

FR. FRANK. I'm just glad you came in for confession.

DALE. Uh, I didn't really comes for a confession, Father. I don't wanna lie t'ya, specially bein' a God man and all.

FR. FRANK. No?

DALE. Uh, yeah well, like I says before... I didn't even mean to come to into church. I just saw the steeple, the cross from the highway, and somebody says in my head... Dale, go in. To tell y' the truth, I didn't really think even, something inside me told me to get my a- a- sef over there. So here I am.

FR. FRANK. That's the Holy Spirit inside you. He's guiding you.

DALE. Oooooo, y'means the Holy Ghost? I always liked calling it the Holy Ghost ever since I was a kid. Never thought about him being in me though. I better get going now Father. I feel like I'm getting a little sick. Gonna throw up or something. I ain't used to talkin' to nobody. But I been practicing... On the trees and the rivers... I talk to the bugs and flowers too.

FR. FRANK. Will you come back tomorrow?

DALE. Uh, no. I can't come back tomorrow. I'm a haulin' load o' steel up north. I'm supposed to be at the plant by noon. I got miles to go. I got to go now. This was nice. Thank yer. Thank yer kindly sir.

FR. FRANK. You're welcome.

DALE. You gots any family?

FR. FRANK. Yes.

DALE. A lot of kin folk?

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FR. FRANK. No. Just one brother left. He's in a nursing home. He's not well and getting on in years. How about you?

DALE. I got one sister. She went to college and became a queen... the college queen. Yep, dem Northern boys didn't ever see anything quite as pretty till our Darla came to school. Whoa-boy! She gots milky white thighs and long silky hair... Oh, oh, I'm sorry Father. Now that's probably a sin right there, huh? That's why I stays away from the damn, I mean, the church. I'm always sayin' the wrong things. I always goof up with people. Jes not much of a talker. I likes t'talk. Don't get much practice. No one can stands lookin' at me. Talkin's one of them things where y' can't get good unless ya do it a lot and y' can't do it unless yer good at it. Like sports. No one wants to play with ya. I'm a hauler and I don't get to talk much on the road to people. I mean the driving's long hours and I never got much chance to have friends, get a girl or raise a family. I don't talk too easily, I say dumb things like that and then I don't go back. 'Sides I can't expect people to look at me for too long. I look like a pig pounded by a poker, jus ain't too pretty. But I better go now. Bye-bye.

FR. FRANK. Will you come back again?

DALE. For the confession?

FR. FRANK. No, just stop by my church anytime you pass through town. It doesn't have to be for confession. Come for lunch sometime.

DALE. You couldn't break bread with me Father, the likes of me darn sicken a man's stomach. I usually eat in my truck by mysself.

FR. FRANK. We could talk again. I'd like that...

DALE. You would?

FR. FRANK. Sure. I don't have many people I can really talk to either. *(Beat.)* Will you stop back? To visit me, I mean. I would like that.

DALE. I do got... *(Laughing nervously.)* something... Ha, uh huh, uh huh, I'll blow my whistle there for ya. So ya knows it's me coming. Ha, uh huh.

FR. FRANK. Great. I will listen for it. And I look forward to another talk.

DALE. I do got something to talk to you about... *(Suddenly pensive.)* To you, er, God, I mean. I don't know how to talk to God, but it seems like I really got to. It's that something inside me feeling. I never felt this way

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before. I just sorta went out and did things, without thinking. Uh, and then, I, uh, saw this dog, it was like a mongrel... first I thought it was just road kill... Father can I tell you something... Sometime I need to tell you this but not now... Now is about the dog on the road, ok. I was coming up outta the Bayou and I saw this dog, a golden retriever, he was limpin' on by, like he had just been hit by a truck or something. So, I pulled on up and got out of my truck. Got a hunk of baloney out of my bag for him, then saw he was bleeding. His back leg was all bent. I fed him some of the baloney. He ate it up really fast, then he bit me, real mean-like. Blood drippin' outta my arm, mixin' with his spit. I thought I was poisoned. Then the damn dog just ran off like it wasn't even hurt. I sat there alongside the road like I was put into a trance. All of a sudden, I started thinking about the dog and how it was just like me. Moseyin' on down the road sorta crippled, but makin' it. Then as soon as somebody reached out and gave me somethin' good, I snatched it up, then I hurt them and then I runs away. I never means to hurt of them, Everybody's take me all wrong. Uh shoot, Father, see I did it again... bad talkin' about things that don't even matter. I gotta go. I think that Holy Ghost is tellin' me t' get of your hairs now.... I gotta get gone. Get on boy, git yerssef gone. (*Exits.*)

The stage lights dim. A pin spot follows Fr. Frank tracking his memories. Lost in thought, he stops at his desk and pours a drink from a bottle. The sound of a truck revving up is heard in the distance. A whistle blares as Fr. Frank downs his drink with conviction.

FR. FRANK. He remembered the whistle. It made me smile. I had almost given up on him, thinking I was to blame. I should have been more receptive. For a priest, I am a bit reclusive. Maybe that is why I chose life in the monastery to begin with. I never wanted to be transferred to a community parish. I, well, sometimes, I just do not like most people. But I liked Dale. He wasn't most people. Most people are pretentious and hurtful. Dale was kind and genuine. His words were simply his words... He didn't come back to me for at least six months. It was odd but I recognized his voice as if it were only a day. It rang in my head, over and

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over, replaying like a character from an old movie. It was the same time again, during confessions. I was pleased by his visit.

The stage lights fade to black. The sound of a truck revving up is heard in the distance, the whistle blares. The voice of Dale is heard in echo as if it were very far away.

DALE. I dint hurt nobody. I mean I dint mean to... I was... I was just... I was ... I was just... I just, just, just... (*Blackout.*)

The stage lights come up to half, Fr. Frank is now sitting up in his bed, wrestling with his blanket as he recovers from his nightmare. Shivering from his cold sweats, gets up to get another drink.

FR. FRANK. He is so lonely. He is certainly on the verge of something... And just like he said, I, too, can feel the intervention of the Holy Spirit between us. Some people call it animal magnetism. It's an attraction of some kind. Like it's just "MEANT TO BE". There is definitely a strong connection between the two of us. A solemnity... a wavelength. I felt it immediately. There is something said in the silence between us. He came back. Yes, almost six months to the day.

DALE. Father, can I tell yous somethin'? Some time I need to tell you this, but not now.

FR. FRANK. He came to me with a heart just blistering with sorrow and pain. The guilt and confusion festering so that I almost insisted we meet face to face. But he was dreadfully afraid of that. He pleaded with me and said that his outward appearance, his face, could offend a goat. He was truly mortified by his appearance. He had asked me, "What is a man besides his face?" People judge people on face-value. They look in your eyes and decide whether you're a good person or a bad person. I believe that's how racism all started. I mean, color is given by God, so how can black and white mean good or bad? Dale wanted to know why. I didn't have an answer. He wanted to know why God made him so ugly. I didn't have an answer. He wanted to know why people would condemn him on sight.... I didn't have an answer. Why are people repulsed by physical

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deformity? Often in other species, it attracts. What possible purpose could his disfigurement play in God's great plan? I did not have an answer. *(Beat.)* We grew close from our talks. He said that I was the first person he had really talked to in sixteen years. He was so afraid... Had I seen him... I recalled my vows, recognized my purpose and retreated from asking him to meet me face to face. It was just that suddenly, I felt so close to him and wanted to touch his cold and lonely wounds. I just really wanted to hug him, to comfort him. It was purely a selfish motivation. Perhaps I should have never entered this life. This pitiful soul poured out so much pain; his mouth was left raw. It happened so fast... My mind was in a whirlwind, it still is... As a man I feel like I should speak up. I feel as though I need to make a report for justice. But for what? Justice is merely a pastime. And fair resolution is rarely issued. As a man of the cloth, I felt deeply my vow of silence. I just wanted to reach out to his poor soul, to tell him that he will be forgiven after making restitution. My God, My God, why? *(Beat.)* He promised to come back. He left abruptly again. His innocent intentions were more corroded than most people's intended guilt. Now that I have Dale in my life, I could not leave this church. No matter how much ridicule, no matter how many people stab me in the back. Finally, I can sense the divine purpose to my calling. *(Blackout.)*

The sound of a truck pulling away is heard, the faint whistle blares. Music swells to a grand finale. The Narrator's voice bellows in the darkness, a slight echo follows each of his words.

NARRATOR. It was only through legislature that I came to know iniquity. I should never have known what depraved desire was until the courts had spoken it, "You shall not covet." Offense seized that moment, and thus superior reasoning was born. It used the commandment to rouse in me every kind of amoral craving. Without law sin has no life. I thought I knew truth when I lived without law, then the commandment came; with it, sin came to life. And I died. The commandment that should have led to eternal life has brought me unto death. Stinking death. Rotting death. Deformed life. Sin found its way into my mind... It used the law; first to

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deceive me, then to slay innocence. The law is holy, and commandment is holy, just and good. Or this is what we are taught to believe. (*Blackout.*)

Sudden silence then the sound of a solitary heart beating, racing. A flickering spotlight comes up on the scrim to show the silhouettes of a very large man straddling the frail limp body of young girl who is being brutally raped.

WOMAN. Father, you have to understand, a mother's love does not look at legality. My daughter was only but fourteen years old. You tell me she needs to have this baby and I'll tell you... (*Shouts.*) My husband was a pig. **GIRL.** (*Screaming.*) Somebody! Please! Help, help me... Hellllllp. Help me. Help. Hh-he's hurting me. I can't breathe, I can't breeeeee.... Daddy stop. Mama please help me... (*Blackout.*)

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