

FORGIVENESS BY THE BOOK

by
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For Eddie

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Kathleen Connor 30 year old woman

Frank O'Brien 50 year old inmate, with Irish accent

SETTING

Prison visiting room; table and two chairs, divided by glass.

AT RISE

KATHLEEN IS PACING ON HER SIDE OF THE GLASS. ENTER FRANK, HIS WRISTS AND ANKLES SHACKLED TO HIS WAIST. HE GOES TO CHAIR ON HIS SIDE OF THE GLASS, SITS, WATCHES KATHLEEN PACE FOR A FEW BEATS. KATHLEEN ROUGHLY PULLS OUT HER CHAIR, SITS ON EDGE, LEANS FORWARD TO SPEAK.

KATHLEEN

Look. Here it is. I'm thirty years old and I've never had a boyfriend. And, no I'm not a Lesbian. Or maybe I am. Who would know? I've never had a girlfriend either. You know why? Because I don't trust anybody. I have "abandonment issues".

FRANK

She speaks, so. Kathleen Connor the guard said it was. And so 'tis. The very picture of herself at age twenty-five. Or thirty perhaps, as she says. A young mother, a good wife. A good woman, except for that one thing.

KATHLEEN

You don't mean me. You mean my mother. But whatever...

FRANK

No fault of your own! I'm not blaming you Kathleen, truly I'm not. The sins of the father, so. Forgive and forget they say.

KATHLEEN

You forgive me? That's rich. No! I've come here to forgive you so I can get on with my life. I've been reading self-help books, you know, like Dr. Phil McGraw, and Martha Beck, and Oprah magazines, and so on. Forgiveness is not about you or what you did...

FRANK

Oh, I would agree with that. I'm an agreeable sort of man. Or I would be if I could be but I can't and never was really. No, Kathleen always said I was disagreeable and she was right. I couldn't disagree with that. Although I did, of course. I was quite disagreeable. But I would agree to forgive and forget if I could. I just can't. Cannot forget. Cannot forgive.

KATHLEEN

You really are insane aren't you? You know I'm not my mother, right?

FRANK

The good book says "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved me so much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. *Luke 7:47-48*. Forgiveness is a tricky bit, ain't it? They say you can't move on with your own life until you forgive the person who did you wrong. But what if that person is yourself, Mary Margaret, what then? What if a person can't forgive himself? How can he move on?

KATHLEEN

I'm trying to tell you that it's not about you. It is a process that I need to experience so I can let go. I heard on "Oprah" that [SHE'S REHEARSED AND READY. THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING SHE WILL EVER SAY IN HER LIFE] "forgiveness will release the wall of resentment and blame that surrounds my heart." That's what prevents me from feeling good about myself. That's what keeps me from being able to love other people. It's like body armor! So, I have to forgive you. You understand?

FRANK

Forget about it. I wish I could forget about it. But I was there, Mary Margaret. Oh, forgive me, Kathleen. I saw what happened. It's hard to remember. To forget you were once Mary Margaret. To remember you are not the real Kathleen, but the new Kathleen.

KATHLEEN

I realize that it should matter to me that you are on death row and you are clearly out of your mind. And I do care that people are being killed for killing other people, that in itself is nuts if you ask me, but in terms what I have to do here, it doesn't matter to me now if you're crazy or not. Why you did it. It does not matter. I don't have to forget what you did. I don't have to remember either. Even though I do. Do you hear me? I remember everything!

FRANK

I didn't want to. But the voices, the voices ... the sins of the fathers, Mary Margaret ...

KATHLEEN

No! I don't want to hear, just stop! Stop!

FRANK

It was that night, the voices said because I was Catholic and your mother was not, you children were not, that very night you would all die and go to hell unless I killed you myself, just like Abraham, I had to sacrifice my own family, not just my son, but my wife, my sons ...

KATHLEEN

Mother, Frank Junior, Jack, me, even baby Brigid? Every single one of us? In cold blood?

FRANK

It was the only way I could save you from eternal damnation. The only way your souls could rise unencumbered straight up to heaven.

KATHLEEN

That's crazy.

FRANK

Yes.

KATHLEEN

I watched you. First I was under the piano when you were yelling at Mother. I saw you hit her, I saw you stomp her. I watched as you choked little Brigid to death. After you got the bat, I followed you outside. I was going to stop you from hurting the boys. I called out your name. But you didn't stop. You didn't hear me, and I hid under the porch as you beat the boys ... I pissed myself. I sat in the dirt, in my own pee and bit my tongue raw to keep from crying as you went round the house calling, "Mary Margaret, Mary Margaret..."

FRANK

Mary Margaret

KATHLEEN

No! Mary Margaret died that day. I'm Kathleen now.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

KATHLEEN

Sorry? Sorry? You think you can say you're sorry and everything will be all right?

FRANK

[HE GOES OFF, LOOKING ABOUT WILDLY, DOING EVERYTHING HE CAN TO CONVINCHE HER] We weren't just randomly thrown onto a sea of rocks. We have a mission – to save the world through the power of love. People know this and millions have prayed.

KATHLEEN

Okay, you're off.

FRANK

God heard us. He sent help. He sent you. That doesn't mean you announce this to anyone. You don't tell people "I'm changed. I'm working for God now. He sent me to heal things. The world's about to shift big time."

KATHLEEN

I can't do this. I thought I could come here and forgive you. I thought it didn't matter if you were sane or not. I thought it didn't matter if you thought you had a reason or not. I thought it didn't matter if I could ever forget. I thought ...

FRANK

To forgive is merely to remember only the loving thoughts you gave in the past, and those that were given you. All the rest must be forgotten.

KATHLEEN

What are you quoting?

FRANK

The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world. Our job, should we choose to accept it, is to constantly seek a greater capacity for love and forgiveness.

KATHLEEN

Look at you. You're not even scary. You're just a man. Not that big. Okay, you're kind of nuts. Well, really crazy sometimes, right? But that doesn't matter now, right?

FRANK

Do you remember the loving thoughts you gave me in the past?

KATHLEEN

You mean when I was little?

FRANK

When I was your Da?

KATHLEEN

What do you mean?

FRANK

Remember those loving thoughts, Kathleen. And remember the love that I once gave you. All the rest must be forgotten.

KATHLEEN

I can't forgive, and I will never forget. I thought I was ready, but I'm not. Guard!

FRANK

No! Kathleen, no, don't leave. We're nearly there.

KATHLEEN

You'll just have to work on forgiving yourself.

FRANK

Loving thoughts, Kathleen. Remember the loving thoughts

KATHLEEN

You should have killed me too, Da.

KATHLEEN EXITS. FRANK
WAITS UNTIL SHE IS
OUT OF SIGHT BEFORE
SPEAKING NEXT LINE.

FRANK

Your mother forgives you. Frank Junior forgives you. Jack forgives you. Baby Brigid forgives you. I hope you can forgive yourself one day. I forgive you for not saving your family, Mary Margaret. I wish you could have.

THE END