
HUCK'S PICKS

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A NEW TAKE ON AN OLD STORY

In *Making Amends* by Dane Toomey, Frankie Hart is a reformed thug. He is also dying, on the way out with little time left. He has a secret he needs to share with his friend Sean, a secular version of confession as it were. After his wife and daughter leave the hospital room, Frankie tells Sean about one of his stealing ventures in New Orleans, one in which he encountered an old African American woman who had been left by her family to die in Hurricane Katrina's devastation. After a lengthy conversation, and a stern lecture on the wages of sin, the old woman kills herself when she eats a bottle of pills while Frankie sleeps. Frankie finds her dead, recognizes the kinship they share about being alone with no one who cares and resolves to make her family suffer. He shoots her twice and ransacks the house to make it look like a murder committed during a robbery.

After the story, Sean leaves Frankie alone, and in a poignant reenactment of New Orleans, he eats a peanut butter sandwich, which intentionally sends him into anaphylactic shock, and he dies before the cancer can finish him.

Toomey's Frankie is a new and improved version of the original in my own short story, which Toomey adapted for the stage and was presented at the Kennedy Center by the Safe Streets Arts Foundation. My Frankie had no redeeming qualities. Dane's outran and outlived his past and became someone worthy of our compassion. An excellent and uplifting read and performance.

MEET THE NEW BOSS, SAME AS THE OLD BOSS

The American by Paul Ferguson and John Kelly is a play written over five years ago, but the themes it addresses are as relevant today as when the dramatis personae first appeared. Fred Whitehurst has a long and distinguished record of service to his country, first in two branches of the military, followed by a 16-year career with the FBI. Fred learns very early that many people, including those sworn to protect and defend the Constitution, function with moral compasses that do not point due north. He encounters graft and corruption at every level. Each time he attempts to redress the problems, whether padded expense accounts or committing perjury, his supervisors attempt to silence him. Bringing his wife, Cheryl, into the fray, Fred eventually realizes that he has no help coming from the upper echelons of government, the FBI, or even Congress. Finding himself suspended from his FBI position, he eventually sues and recovers substantial monetary damages and gets his old job back but then resigns in disgust and goes public with his accusations.



The play is a sober look at the vulnerability of whistle blowers, whether in the public or private sector, who risk their careers and sometimes their lives in attempts to correct an injustice. In Fred's case, those injustices led to the imprisonment of innocent men and women through the corrupt practices of the FBI's crime lab. This was especially striking for me, recalling the statement by a state crime lab technician reprimanded for altering fingerprint analyses. She said that she worked for the state crime lab, and it was therefore her job to put people in prison. Apparently, it didn't matter whether crime scene fingerprints given to her by police agencies actually matched those of the man arrested.

Ferguson and Kelly's play is as current today as it was in 2007, or 1907 for that matter. At times, you need a program to distinguish the bad guys from the good guys when they all look and act alike.

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