

Mr. Dennis Sobin  
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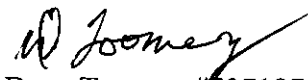
April 6, 2011

Dear Mr. Sobin

Please find the enclosed revision to "Making Amends," my more appropriately presented adaptation of Mr. Charles Hucklebury's short story "Gumbo."

It is do to the correspondence not only of yours but the PEN America Group as well that has convinced facility staff to allow me access to a computer on which I might craft a presentable product. Thank you for your help in this, our less accessible world.

Thank you,



Dane Toomey #537187

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Enclosures: Revised Play 13 pgs. including cover sheet  
SASE

Making Amends

A one act play by: Dane Toomey

Based on the short story Gumbo

by: Charles Hucklebury

## Cast of Characters:

FRANKIE HART: Old thief, and not a good one. Spent twenty plus years behind bars in spurts. All small time infractions. Thin, white, tattooed male. Mid 60's. Has come from a bad background, yet made a decent life.

SEAN : White male, early 40's. Sponsored in Twelve Step program by FRANKIE for a dozen years. Friend of the family. Dressed in work clothes and worn boots.

MAY HART: FRANKIE'S wife of 22 years. Late 50's. Conservative of dress and action. Warm to friends but ferocious to perceived threats to her family.

NADINE HART: Daughter to FRANKIE and MAY. Middle class through and through. 21. Not yet familiar with trials and tribulations of life, but thinks she is.

## THE SCENE:

Modest oncology ward, year 2034. Room has bed, with laptop tray across FRANKIE'S lap. Tray with drink, covered plate, crumpled napkin and water carafe. One bedside chair. Three are gathered around FRANKIE in bed. FRANKIE realizes he is not leaving hospital and wishes to clean his spiritual slate.

ACT ONE

Curtain opens to FRANKIE coughing. MAY and SEAN are on either side of the bed. NADINE sits in only available chair, present only through obligation. Her attention is on an electronic device in her lap.

FRANKIE: Sean, there are a couple of things we need to take care of before I cash out.

MAY: Oh honey, it's not that bad. The Doctor said...

FRANKIE: (Interrupting) Babe, it is that bad, and we all (wracking cough) know it. Oh man that shit hurts. Maybe I should have been kinder to my body (chuckles). It seems a little pissed.

SEAN: Frank, whatever it is, we can cover it later.

FRANKIE: No Sean. Rigorous Honesty. You know the drill. There are some things I need to talk about. That means you need to be the sponsor to me now. Ok?

SEAN: Whatever you need Frankie. (Addressing women) Could you give us a few? Maybe go down to the cafeteria and pull us back some coffees or something?

NADINE: We'll do you one better (rises from chair). Come on Mom, lets go get some dinner. (To Sean) Call when you're done. I'll drop Mom back by if there's any visiting time left.

MAY: Nady, don't be rude. (To Frankie) The Doctor has the t-number.

MAY (cont.): Please have him call if there's any change.

FRANKIE: Alright babe.

(To Nadine) And you. Be an adult. (Reaches out to Nadine who puts hand in his) Your Momma's gonna need you soon (kisses her forehead). (Whispers) You don't have to be an ass all the time.

NADINE: You know Hospitals creep me out is all Dad. (To May) Come on Mom, I need a smoke anyway. (Kisses Frankie on cheek) Take care Daddy, I'll see you tomorrow.

FRANKIE: (To Nadine) Be good sweetie.

(To May) You two go on now. We'll be fine. There's just some things I need to talk to Sean about. I haven't been to a meeting since I got put in this hole. I'll see you in the morning ok? (Kisses May then pats her on the rump- shooing her toward the door.) Go get some food. I'll be fine.

(Nadine and May gather things and exit through door, upstage left, discussing food choices. Door closes.)

SEAN: Frankie, you should just...

FRANKIE: (Pensive) Sean, I've been your sponsor for what, twelve years now? And, we've talked about everything right? Told each other damned near everything there is to know about each other. What we can remember of those times anyway.

You remember when we first met?

SEAN: Mostly. (Pause) I wasn't all there then. You know that.

FRANKIE: I know that you weren't. I wanted you to think about it for a second though.

FRANKIE (cont.): Anyway, we know each other right?

SEAN: Yeah, I'd say we know each other Frankie.

FRANKIE: Sean, you don't know shit.

Do you know why I go back down to Mardi Gras every year?

SEAN: I just figured it was to give the groups down there some slack when they were over run with alcoholics. You know, give something back.

FRANKIE: That's what I tell folks. And it's true, but it's a lie as well.

Helpin' out is what I do down there. Hell, if I could afford to fly to Brazil every year for Carnival, I'd do that too. But I have history in N'Orleans.

After hurricane Katrina wiped out most of the city, I did some serious dirt down there. (Pause) Sean, there are some things from that time that I've never told anyone.

SEAN: Frankie, we've talked about that time of your life, you need to let it go. You've been sober for what, twenty years this time? I mean that's twenty years!

You ever think you'd make it that long?

FRANKIE: Nothing I think makes any difference and you know it. (Sighs) Sean, I want to make a final fifth step here tonight. Like I said, there's something I never told anyone. Don't worry about visiting hours. I already took care of it with the Doc. He's a friend of Bill's too.

SEAN: Whatever you need Frankie. You know that. What you want me to do?

FRANKIE: (Wracking coughs) I don't need you to do anything. Just let me get this out.

FRANKIE (cont.) (Long pause) Sean, I grew up in the ninth ward. Not many of us graduated from high school down there, if ya know what I mean.

I started workin' for my Mom's boyfriend early on. Just door rattlin' and such. Small time snatch an' grab shit. But I kept getting' caught. Hell, I did my first bit in Juvy when I was ten. Judge thought I should "learn a lesson the hard way." There was another boy at the home went to the same school as I used to. For Christmas that year, we got shoes from some bullshit charity or other. My feet were to big for my body then and everybody just knew I was gonna grow up tall. Feet on kids are like paws on puppies.

Anyway, I got these god-awful tasseled loafers to wear that year as my gift. They were the only thing they had in an eleven. And this jackass kid starts razzin' me about my (air quotes) foo-foo faggot shoes. So, I stuck him.

Billy Wilkins was his name. I just took my "Big Chief" pencil an' popped his eyeball.

SEAN: We don't have to go over all of this tonight Frankie.

FRANKIE: Man, would you just shut up and listen? I gotta get this out and I gotta do it the right way.

After I did that to Billy, I got more time of course. Got out when I was sixteen instead of fourteen like I was supposed to. But I didn't get tried as an adult. They didn't do that back then. They understood that kids'll be kids. When I did get out, I was only out about a year. And that was mainly because the po-lice didn't want nothin' to do with me. I was to small a fish.

You've been there. I don't have to tell what it's like to be a kid that age on the street. Fuckin' crazy what you'll do for somethin' as measly as a hot burger from Mickey D's. (Wheezing cough) Ugh. Don't ever get this cancer crap man (gasps) it's like acid in ya. (Deep breaths) Hurts.

After that I was in and out of minimum yards for the next ten years.

FRANKIE (cont.): Heck, got most of my ink there. A little staph never hurt nobody. Hell, wasn't nothin' else to do except work on the states roads or pump iron. Try to avoid the crash test dummies.

Then Katrina hit.

I was sittin' in Orleans Parish waitin' on another court date and shit started gettin' real bad for the Justice Department. They ended tossin' out all of us small fish. Just (air quotes) lost the records. Aint natural disasters great?

So there I was out in a town all covered in mud and shit from where the sewers had overflowed. All I had to wear was a state assed jumpsuit and some funky Gilligans. They didn't even return the clothes we were arrested in. That is how fast they were pushin' us out the door.

Just told us to go.

(Frankie gazes out over the heads of the audience, staring off into space. Shaking his head as if coming to grips with a difficult decision. Slowly his chin sinks to a rest on his chest for a long moment. His eyes are closed.

Without opening his eyes, he motions Sean to come closer. Sean pulls the chair close to the bedside.)

FRANKIE (cont.): I scored a shot of smack just before they herded us all out. It wasn't good stuff, but when you're feemin' the way I was, anything's better than nothin'.

Out in the town, it was a ghost town. You could hear the choppers overhead, but most of the City cops had vanished. The ones who were left weren't worried about me. And anyone I met did the same thing I did. Just waited to make sure they weren't being followed and then moved on. (Sip of water)

SEAN: I can get ya another soda if you want. Root beer? Ginger ale?



FRANKIE: No thanks. I gotta get this done then later I can have my little snack (pats covered plate lid).

I was lookin' for anything that wasn't nailed down. Anything to turn a buck. Found some cheap rum in one house and a old .38 revolver in another one. (Chuckles) The bullets were green in the heater, but the cylinder turned, so I pocketed it. That was my big find.

Then I hit this one house. It had a two down, two up floor plan. Best part was, it had separate entrances.

Downstairs was a wreck. And not just from the hurricane. This place was lived in like a sty. Moldy food in the sink. Roaches everywhere. Piles of old dirty clothes. Shit, I didn't want to think about what might be livin' in there. Then I went out and upstairs (smiles ruefully).

You been in one old persons home, you've been in 'em all. Especially an old woman's house. They're spotless. Like they don't have nothin' better to do than clean. They got little doilies layin' around and always there's a crocheted thing across the back of the sofa.

Back then I was used to gettin' in and out quick, but I thought I could take my time with this one. It'd be getting dark soon and I needed a place to crash anyway. I thought this place'd do fine. Until I found the old lady that is.

(Clasping his shaking hands, Frankie eyes the morphine dispenser at his side but does not push the button. )

FRANKIE (cont.): The old lady was just rockin' real quiet and slow in the living room. Scared the shit out of me when she said "Hello." Seriously, here I was all gacked out and then she's there where she shouldn't be. Not yellin' or screamin' at me to go away or nothin'. Just all peaceful like she'd invited me. She was pro'lly (coughs, squeezing eyes closed in evident pain) somebody's granny or great-granny and this ol' gran just starts

FRANKIE(cont.): talkin' to me. Tells me she knows I aint no National Guard or nothin' so I could just take my "sorry, theivin' carcass out o' her house.

Never once raised her voice. That's what made me curious. So, I sat and talked to her.

She said she'd offer me somethin' to drink but there wasn't nothin'. She had a couple empty water bottles at her feet, and a half gone scrip o' hydrocodone. Bottle pro'lly had a hunnerd pills in it, and she'd ate half of 'em. Big 750's too.

Weird the shit you recall.

(Sean's phone tweets. He looks to Frankie for permission before answering.)

SEAN: (Into phone) Hello? (Pause) No, we're still talking. (Pause) They'll be over soon, but he has it worked out with the Doctor. (Pause) No, I'll ask. (To Frankie) May wants to know if you want her to come back around tonight?

FRANKIE: Nah, just tell her that I love her, and she can see me tomorrow.

SEAN: (Into phone) May? He says no. Don't bother yourself comin' back this way tonight. He said to tell ya he loves you and you can see him tomorrow. Ok? (Pause) No, he didn't want to cough somethin' up on the phone. (Pause) Ok, I'll tell him. Bye. (Pulls phone headset from ear and puts in pocket).

May says you're a stubborn ass. But she said that she loves you too. And she told me to remind you to eat something so consider yourself reminded.

FRANKIE: Don't worry, I got a special snack right here (points to covered plate). Let's finish this fifth step and then I'll eat before I crash tonight. (Pause)

The old granny and me, we talked for a couple hours. Well, she talked.

She told me all about her life growin' up poor and black in the Great Depression. All about her husband who'd been a Seabee, and about her son. He was a real piece o'

FRANKIE (cont.): work that one. From what she said, when the storm surge started rollin' in, her boy and his wife packed up and asked her twice if she wanted to go with them. She told 'em, "No, you go. Aint no hurricane gonna make me run. Besides, I got some things to do without you two under my feet." She told me that she didn't think they were ever comin' back.

A few times I wanted to tell her what a bad life really was, but she knew a whole lot better than me. I just kept my mouth shut till she finished.

She must've set there ten minutes or so before I knew she was finished. Then I told her "Ya know gran, you an' me got a lot in common. I mean, I bet you never stole nothin' in your whole life or shot no dope but we're kinda kin anyway. I aint got nobody gives a damn whether I'm alive or dead either. And I sure wanna make some people hurt."

I never did forget what she told me then. Changed my life forever. Once it had a chance to sink in that is. She said, "It aint about somebody else's pain boy. It's about your pain. That's what I'm tryin' to tell you. It's about bein all alone with everything behind you and nothin' in front of you. *Nothin'*. Don't get it wrong.

I left her there rockin' in that chair, an' went to another room to drink my rum. Turns out it was her son an' daughter-in-law's bed I crashed in. (Pause, nervously drumming fingers on lap table).

Next mornin' I went in an' the ol' gran was dead. OD. I guess she just stopped breathin' or somethin'. Looked that way anyhow. She was just sittin' there all peaceful. Like she didn't have a care in the world, which I guess was true then. And Sean, it Pissed me off that she took the easy way out. There wasn't pro'lly a dozen pills left. And there was a neat little note on the table beside her body. I downed the pills that was left, and read the note. Served her right. Then I pocketed the note. Didn't want to leave anything behind that the cops would use as a clue, 'cause they would show eventually.

Sean, I was so mad at her boy. I wanted him to hurt. Wanted him to wonder if things would have been different if he'd taken her along anyway. Or stayed. So I shot her dead body twice. Make the little prick think about "would've, could've, should've."

FRANKIE (cont.): I toasted her with what was left of the rum. "Here's to you Gran," I told her. "I owe ya one. I'll remember that part about havin' everything behind me, an' nothing in front. You're one of the best teachers I ever had." Then I set her chair over on the side an' made the place look ransacked. Went out the back door and beat feet to Magazine Street.

SEAN: So, what happened then?

FRANKIE: I was lookin' to score an' startin' to itch. Nice thing about little old ladies is they always got them hard candies layin' around. I sucked on some of them I took from Gran's place and really started lookin' for a place to hole up.

I didn't wanna stop, but I had to. I just didn't have nothin' left. Along the way, I'd managed to get rid of the gun, and the note. Tossed 'em into the sludge as I drug my ass across town, always lookin' out for those freaks with guns an' shit. I found me a hole an' woke up, or came to is a better way to put it, on a bus to Bentonville.

Some church group tryin' to save lives had found me. They pulled me out because I was still breathin'. Saved my worthless ass. (Pause)

I'm getting' tired now Sean, and you know the rest of the story. Got detoxed and sober after a few tries.

I been holdin' onto this for a lot of years. Feels good to let it go.

That's why I go down to Mardi Gras every year. It aint to help. Or to test myself. I got amends to make.

SEAN: Well you got it off your chest. Now you can work on healing. May and Nadine need you here. You've got a great family.

FRANKIE: I know Sean, but I need you to make me a couple promises.

SEAN:        You know I won't talk about anything Frankie. What's said here stays here.  
              Same as you've always done for me.  
              Whatcha need?

FRANKIE:    Promise me you'll look after May and Nady if I don't come outta here. You of  
              anybody know how bad I hate hospitals.

SEAN:        Yeah, they suck.

FRANKIE:    (Looks around) Who ever would've thought I'd end up here. Good life. Good  
              wife. And a great kid. Hell, anybody who knew me then would just be shocked as shit  
              that I'm still alive. They'd never believe I had a family. Take care of 'em for me. And  
              thanks for listening. It means a lot.

SEAN:        Alright Frankie, I'll keep an eye on 'em till you get your butt outta here.  
              Then We'll hit a meeting, ok?

FRANKIE:    Sounds good. Now get. I gotta get some sleep. Doc says it helps.

SEAN:        See ya tomorrow. (Leaves through door upstage left).

(Frankie opens meal tray cover and gingerly removes sandwich within. Steeling himself,  
he bites off a quarter in one chaw. Chews quickly and swallows with the aid of a drink of  
water.)

FRANKIE:    Here's to you ol' Gran. Everything behind and nothin' in front. (Frankie starts  
              wheezing. Hands fly to throat. Body thrashing, trying to breathe past constricting throat.  
              BEEPS, WHISTLES and HOSPITAL ALARMS sound. Body relaxes. Lights fall,  
              single spot centered on bed.

MAY: (Off stage) (sobbing) He knew he was allergic to peanut butter! He KNEW!

(Spot centered on bed fades to darkness)

THE END