

Botticelli's Angels
by
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CAST

Frank O'Sullivan (47) is medium build, super tidy and always well turned out – it's a point of pride bordering on compulsion. He's intensity itself, and looks older than his years though his eyes have a youthful gleam, shining somewhere between madness and innocence.

Johnny O'Sullivan (20) is always in jeans, practicing his budding magician skills, and has great musical and singing talents to boot. Slender build and elfin-like, he's got cheeky freewheeler written all over his good looks, and a smile to light up the darkest day.

Ursula Brown (26) is a trainee counselor on placement with the Diocese as part of her diploma course. She has pink hair, lives in her scuffed-up DM boots and likes to come across as ballsy. She's brave but is yet to fully develop her emotional intelligence, and can be a little too logical.

Location – present day, South East London.

Act 1
Scene 1 Frank's flat

From an old record player, Nat King Cole's ethereal, Unforgettable, rings out in a drab bedsit crammed to bursting with stuff - books, model animal balloons, a saxophone, a tambourine. You'd be forgiven for mistaking the place for a charity shop - though it's also impeccably tidy.

In pride of place, on the main wall, a framed poster of Botticelli's Mystical Nativity – somehow its beauty makes the place all the shabbier.

Stage left, bunk beds – on the top bunk, a blue bear that's seen better days, a red heart between its paws and stitched on it, are the words I LOVE YOU.

On the back of the top bunk, hangs an Irish Country Scenes calendar, open at March - sheep on verdant rolling hills, silvery lakes, every possible cliché. The Nat King Cole record clicks off and the needle goes back to his place.

Centre stage, in a suit, is FRANK (47) on a chair shining his shoes to within an inch of their lives. He is intensity itself and despite his weathered face, his eyes gleam a youthful quicksilver.

Stage right, in jeans and T-shirt, is JOHNNY (20) leans on a wall, strumming his guitar the opening to Johnny Cliff's, I Can See Clearly Now.

FRANK: *(Belfast accent)* You've five more minutes – after this pair, I'm done. So, if you can be bothered to fetch them to me, I'll do them. Otherwise, you're on your own...

JOHNNY: *(Sings with great feeling)* I can see clearly now the rain has gone. I can see no obstacles in my way.....

FRANK: It's *all* obstacles in my way, how many times have I told you?

JOHNNY: *(Belfast accent)* Is not. It's no obstacles. Now, if you don't mind? *(Sings on)* Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind. It's going to be a bright, bright, sunshiny day.

FRANK: If there are no obstacles, what's all the song and dance about? I mean, what's there to celebrate, if he's nothing to outwit?

JOHNNY: You sure have some skill for breaking a spell and wearing a man down, don't you? I'm sure there's a talent show you can enter for that...

FRANK: Look, if you're serious about getting this job, you really ought to make an effort. Now - those shoes? You know what they say - shiny shoes and a neat haircut, maketh a man.

JOHNNY: Will you stop fussing! My shoes are fine. It's my beady eye they'll be interested in, not the shine on me feet. *(Points at Frank's neck)* What's that bro?

FRANK: What?

JOHNNY: *(Approaches)* This....just here....down your back....

FRANK: Get off me, get off....

JOHNNY: Don't move, I got it...

He pulls a ten-pence from Frank's collar and presents it to him.

There?

FRANK: *(Yanks ten-pence off him)* Will you focus, Johnny?

JOHNNY: Ah, focus-smochus....! But there's more....what's this?

Johnny pulls a string of brightly coloured hanker-chiefs out of Frank's ear.

Ta-dah!

FRANK: *(Exasperated)* Shouldn't you be getting ready for tomorrow? Why don't we practice your answers together?

JOHNNY: I have my answers, thanks very much. *(Picks up newspaper, slides into chair)* Now where was I? Five across. Dark, stony space. Four letters, middle one V.

FRANK: Don't know.

JOHNNY: You're not even trying.

FRANK: I'm no good at puzzles, you should know that by now.

JOHNNY: You used to be great at them. If you concentrated, you'd get back into it in no time.

FRANK: I am concentrating – on me shoes.

JOHNNY: You're funny aren't you, for such a grump?

FRANK: Grumpy's better than moody.

JOHNNY: Is not.

FRANK: Is so, and anyway I'm only grumpy because I have to fetch and carry after you.

JOHNNY: That's your choice, I've told you a million times. *(Beat)* Dark stony space....Oh, I know – it's easy-peasy. Cave. *(Beat)* Right. Now. Six down. Settle. Eight letters starts with C...Mmm...

Johnny sinks deep into thought, biting the end of his pen. Frank spits on his high shine shoes with an admiring glance when, there's a KNOCK on the door – he freezes.

FRANK: Who could that be?

JOHNNY: Colonize....? *(Counts on his fingers)* C.O.L.O.N.I.Z.E! *(Beat)* Yes....!
(Writes in answer) We're winning here Frankie.....winning, alright.

FRANK: Earth to Johnny, hello? Who could that be now?

JOHNNY: As if I'd know?

FRANK: Well you do live here - even if you do treat the place like a hotel.

Another KNOCK. Frank looks to Johnny, totally spooked.

JOHNNY: Open the door and you'll find out! For God's sake, man. Never known anyone who can make such a mountain out of a molehill....and we're talking mega-mountains. The Himalayas are coming to mind, you know?

Frank bats his talk away, puts his finger over his lips, which finally silences Johnny who holds up his hands up in surrender.

Frank moves to the door where he puts the chain on, opens it a crack.

FRANK: Yes?

A fresh-faced, feisty WOMAN (26) with pink highlights and a nose ring, peeks in through the gap in the door.

WOMAN: *(Well-spoken English accent)* Hi. I'm looking for Frank O'Sullivan.

FRANK: That's me, alright.

URSULA: *(Shows her ID)* I'm Ursula Brown. I'm an outreach worker for the Diocese that's working on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy.

FRANK: *(Goes to close the door)* You must have the wrong address.

URSULA: But this is Flat 3a, Perronet House?

FRANK: Yes, but there must have been some mistake.

URSULA: But this is the letter you wrote to us, in reply to the ad?

Ursula hands Frank a letter over the door-chain - he reads it intrigued, turning to shoot Johnny a look who lifts his hands in a 'search me' shrug before slinking off to hide under the bunk beds, from where he watches the scene unfurl.

FRANK: *(Unlocks door chain)* You'd better come in. I think I can explain....

URSULA: *(Stepping inside)* Thanks.

Frank can't help stare at her attire - a floaty dress over black leggings and scuffed-up Doc Martin boots that haven't seen a lick of paint in years, done up with purple laces – she smiles broadly at him.

URSULA: Since you didn't turn up for the appointment and there was no number for you -

FRANK: I'm not on the phone.

URSULA: Right, so I thought I'd follow up to make sure we made contact. The Diocese is determined to help everyone who reached out for help.

FRANK: *(Whispers, jerks thumb off stage)* Johnny needs help, not me.

URSULA: Who's Johnny?

FRANK: My kid brother.

URSULA: I see.

FRANK: He's the one makes all the mess. He's awful untidy, you know.

Frank tidies up though nothing is out of place – she watches intrigued.

Once Frank's put the paper away, there's nothing to do.

He can't meet Ursula's gaze.

They stand like lemons next to each other in the small space.

A creaking silence builds, then Ursula spots the painting on the wall.

URSULA: Botticelli's Nativity?

FRANK: You know it?

URSULA: It's my favourite painting. Got pride of place over our mantelpiece.

FRANK: Really?

She nods vigorously.

Botticelli's my favourite painter.

URSULA: Mine too.

FRANK: He's such a master.

URSULA: Yep.

FRANK: I love the angels. (*Points to top of painting*) Dancing into the golden heavens like that. The colours. The movement he's captured. Amazing.

URSULA: I love how the angels down here, are hoisting up the distressed men and helping them up so tenderly.

Frank nods and they stare at the painting together.

URSULA: So, anyway, this interview? We could do it here, if it's easier?

FRANK: Interview?

URSULA: The assessment we mentioned in our reply? It's just you talking and me listening – to ensure you get heard. If you're free, we could do it now?

FRANK: (*Checks his watch*) Oh my God! Is that the time? I have to get Johnny ready for tomorrow – he's up for this job, see? And he's very disorganized, so I've to nag him the whole time. (*Heads to door, opens it*). I'm sorry but I'm going to have to ask you to excuse me....

URSULA: No problem, but take my card so we can arrange for another time.

She hands it to him – he takes it, wary.

The Sisters of Mercy have co-operated fully with the Diocese who are taking the healing process very seriously....

FRANK: Thanks.

She exits. Frank closes the door, leans on it, lets out a deep breath.

JOHNNY: (*From under bunks*) I did tell you not to write in, didn't I?

Johnny slides from under the bunk-beds, bounces back to Frank who goes to the fridge and takes out a Guinness

FRANK: Stop messing. You wrote in. Not me.

JOHNNY: (*Picks up letter*) Er...hello? Is that my fair hand? No, I don't think so. I've much nicer writing than that scrawl, thank you very much.

Frank gets a glass from a cupboard, deep in thought.

In fact, I said leave it, didn't I? I said, move on man, it's ancient history. Get some new fish to fry (*picks up blue bear*) and I get said get a hot woman to hold at night and put all this behind you.

Frank sits at the table staring at the letter.

And I also said, they'll want info, and loads of it. And of course, I was right. But would you listen? Would you, my arse. But then, you were never one to let a sleeping dog lie, were you?

Johnny sits opposite Frank.

So, what are you going to do?

Frank cracks open the can of Guinness.

There'll be no escaping them now, bro. Be like the Jehovah's Witness. Round every week until you crack, you mark my words.

Frank looks totally spooked, pours the drink.

Seemed nice enough though. Very proper, despite the 'I'm-not-really-middle-class' grunge look. Very English.

FRANK: That's probably because she is English, since we are in England.

JOHNNY: Need so few words the English, don't they?

FRANK: How many years in this country and you're only noticing now?

JOHNNY: I know - it just never fails to surprise me is all. Like each word is costing them a fiver and they've to eek them out.

Johnny picks up Ursula's card off the table, reads it.

Ursula. That's a pretty name. Means little bear – or she-bear. In the Latin, like.

Johnny eyes Frank but he's clearly lost in his own world.

Father McStay taught me that. Remember, how he'd foam at the mouth and thrash his ruler down on the desk if we got the wrong answer.

He mimes thrashing down a ruler Frank nods, mimics it – they share a moment.

Anyway, that's what you'll be doing, if you ring your woman back. Foaming and thrashing, alright....foaming and thrashing.

Johnny puts down the card, picks up his paper, returns to the crossword.

JOHNNY: Eight letters, aggressive Canadian wild predator. Last letter Y.

FRANK: Grizzly.

JOHNNY: You're a genius bro, bloody genius.

Johnny scribbles down the word, then sees Frank holding Ursula's card.

JOHNNY: Anyway, if you do go, you remember the old rule, right? Get in and get out – fast as we can.

FRANK: In and out. Fast as we can.

Fade to black.

Scene 2

Office

A sparse, simple room. A classical painting on the wall.

Two chairs, a table with tissue box on it, and a jug full of water.

Frank, stressed but trying not to show it, sits opposite Ursula.

URSULA: I'm so pleased you got back in touch, Mr. O'Sullivan.

FRANK: Call me Frank, please.

URSULA: OK, Frank. Well, first off I want to congratulate you.

Frank looks blankly at her.

For taking this first difficult step - coming forward is never easy.

FRANK: *(Goes for a joke)* You're telling me. But at least there's none of them here so that's something, alright.

URSULA: Let me reassure you, I'm not linked to the Order at all. This is voluntary outreach work. It's part of my diploma in counselling.

FRANK: So you're not even getting paid to deal with all this?

URSULA: No, but getting experience and helping on such a critical project is very important to me.

Frank just stares at her, trying to look like he gets it but clearly lost already.

Anyway, you can just think of me as your first port of call, on this journey to healing.

FRANK: Journey to healing?

URSULA: Yes, that's the overall aim.

FRANK: Right.

URSULA: First of all, do you mind me asking where you saw the advert?

FRANK: In the Irish Times. Johnny loves the crosswords in that paper. He's great with words so he is.

URSULA: Right. But he didn't want to come along today?

FRANK: God no, this wouldn't be his scene.

URSULA: OK. So, shall we start with you saying a little about yourself?

FRANK: Me?

Ursula nods and smiles brightly at him – Frank stalls, not sure what to say.

FRANK: Not much to say. Been over since '82. 30th of June to be precise - beautiful sunny day, smooth crossing.

Beat.

As a boy I dreamt of being a famous painter. Only thing I was ever good at in school.

Still would love to pack in my job and fill my days with paint classes.

What you want and what you get, eh?

Beat.

I used to paint and decorate for a living but I put my back out on a job. So now I zap sex toys with a scanner and they get packed into discreet jiffy bags – so nobody can

tell what's hidden inside. (*Taps side of nose*) Just like the Church all these years, no?

URSULA: The Church really does want to reconcile with all those affected.

FRANK: I don't know about that.

URSULA: How do you mean?

FRANK: Doesn't the Church just want to pay us all off to keep them quiet?

URSULA: The Church really wants to ensure you get the support you need.

FRANK: It's Johnny needs the support, not me. (*Beat*) I'm alright. I've my love of art. Working nights frees me up for gallery visits and talks. You've got to have a passion to get you through, right?

URSULA: Absolutely. And I happen to love art. My husband's a professional art restorer and I have a lively interest, through him.

FRANK: Really? So, he restores old paintings to their original state?

URSULA: It's not an exact science, but they try.

FRANK: I'd love to do that. Though there's a lot of controversy over the different methods, isn't there? I read somewhere, that the restoration of the Sistine Chapel totally drained all its colours - what's your take on that?

URSULA: I heard the same - that it needed cleaning, but lost tone. From what Mike, my husband, tells me - it's a balance. Anyway, we should really get back to you.

FRANK: (*Pointing to a poster on wall*) What's that painting?

URSULA: It's a Gozzoli. The Fall of Simon Magus, the rogue magician? (*Points at it*) In the middle there, impressing Emperor Nero that he can fly. But St. Peter and St. Paul are looking on, worried because Simon's powers fail him and he falls to earth and dies.

Frank nods, searches the painting for something it can't give him.

FRANK: I don't think I've ever seen it before and believe me I've seen a lot.

URSULA: It's not one I knew either but since it was here I looked it up. (*Beat*) Anyway. The next thing we need to do, is confirm that this is the school you and Johnny were placed in when your mother passed away?

Ursula takes a photo from a file – puts it in front of Frank who recoils.

FRANK: Your letter said nothing about looking at photos of the place or I wouldn't have come, I can tell you that for nothing.

URSULA: But as the letter outlined, we have to go through the verification process. I know it's difficult.

FRANK: How many schools by that name are there in Dundrum? One, that's how many. And besides, I already gave you the name and description of the nun in my letter, what more do you want?

URSULA: But your letter was rather general and if...

FRANK: If what? *(Beat)* And if I'm after making all this up, is that it?

URSULA: No, not at all....

Frank storms toward the door – pulls it open.

URSULA: Look, I can help you. Trust me, please –

FRANK: Trust? *(Rounds on her)* Trust me. Those are the exact words she used and more fool me, I fell for it. So don't give me trust - it's a bit rich coming from you people.

URSULA: I'm really not linked to the Church. As I said, it's voluntary outreach work....

FRANK: Oh, how heroic of you...

URSULA: ...and the more you tell me, the more I can help.

FRANK: I don't need help. I need a very exact sum of money - three thousand, seven hundred and fifty pounds?

They hold each others' gaze.

FRANK: Well, can you get it for me?

Ursula goes to speak only she's mute with confusion.

FRANK: Johnny was right. *(Turns on his heel)* I should never have come.

He dashes out, Ursula walks back to her desk, looks through Frank's file, her attention lands on something – she picks up a piece of paper - stares at it in shock, thinks what to do and then in a flash, puts it in her bag and flies out the door.

Fade to black.

Scene 3

Frank's flat.

Johnny is bored, kicking his heels, mooching around the flat looking for something to do, singing a lazy rendition of Lean on Me by Bill Withers.....

JOHNNY: *Lean on me...when you're not strong...lean on me..*

When an idea strikes – he lines up the linen basket in the centre of the room and makes paper-aeroplanes out of the newspaper aims them into the basket – one goes in.

JOHNNY: Yes!

He does a few more but they miss. So he takes his socks off and throws them both in and puts on super-fast Irish commentator voice.

And it's a goal for Ireland! A great shot by MaCafferty but will it be great enough to win the match and can he hold his nerve and get a hat-trick...?

Johnny goes to recover the socks from the basket and is taken aback at what he finds -

JOHNNY: What's this?

He pulls out a packet with a photo of a buxom woman on the front.

Sister of Mercy.....?

He pulls out a black outfit – holds up a nun's habit against his body.

Oh my, oh my.....you sly old dog, Frankie.

Would never have thought you'd be into the kinky stuff...

He pulls it over his T-shirt and jeans and finds a wimple and puts that on too, laughing as he goes.

So you're slipping over to the dark side, are you bro? That's totally cool with me....you sly, sly old dog though!

Then Johnny pulls on the fishnet stockings – really getting into it.

Then he finds a whip and starts to flog the laundry basket with it.

Get back, will you get back and say your Hail Mary's...you wicked boy!

Then looks down at himself and laughs, sings into the whip handle - Bill Withers' Lean on Me - devotional, deep Gospel style eyes shut.

JOHNNY: *(Sings)* Lean on me...when you're not strong... I'll be your friend. I'll help you carry on.

Just then Frank enters, raincoat soaked with rain, stares in total shock at Johnny.

FRANK: What in God's name?

Johnny turns to stare in shock at Frank but front it out by blasting out another verse at Frank, to front out his surprise.

JOHNNY: *(Sings)* For it won't be long before I'm gonna need, someone to lean on.....*(Tailing off)* You're back early.....

FRANK: Take it off.

JOHNNY: So, how was the little bear-woman?

FRANK: *(Shouts)* Take it off!

JOHNNY: I was just trying to send out good vibes to you, is all.

FRANK: *(Shouts louder and louder)* Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!

He slides down the wall and curls into ball.

Johnny freezes, totally thrown, pulls off the costume as if it were burning his skin.

JOHNNY: *(Inches toward Frank)* It's off. It's gone. Look, see? I'm sorry, bro.

Frank stands, takes a deep breath, barely registers Johnny

Guess we both have different ways of dealing with it, you know?

Frank opens the fridge, gets out a can of Guinness, cracks it open.

I'm really sorry, OK?

FRANK: I don't want to talk about it.

JOHNNY: OK. *(Beat)*. Why didn't you tell me you'd got it?

FRANK: What did I just say?

JOHNNY: But I'm not 'talking about it', I'm just asking - why you didn't show it to me?

FRANK: Because I don't tell you everything, that's why, OK?

JOHNNY: And there was me, convinced you did.

Frank sits by the table, drinking. Johnny comes over, tentative.

JOHNNY: *(Tries to joke)* So.... are we rolling in the money?

FRANK: Told you a thousand times, I'll never taint myself with their money. I just need enough, as well you know. *(Beat)* What about you, how did it go today?

JOHNNY: Who cares if it comes from the Vatican coffers or the Department of Social Services? It's all money, isn't it?

FRANK: I have my principles. Now - how did it go?

Johnny looks away, shrugs.

How did it go?

JOHNNY: It didn't. I didn't go. Sorry, bro.

FRANK: *(Rounds on him)* You didn't go? *(Beat)* No, of course you didn't. I mean, why help your only brother out when you can stay home and prance around instead?

JOHNNY: I've my principles too, even if you never bothered about them.

FRANK: You can't compare the two.

JOHNNY: You said you'd always look after me.

FRANK: That's not fair, and you well know it. I've always looked after you. I've done all sorts Johnny, to keep the wolf from the door....even when we didn't even have a damned fucking door. All sorts, remember?

Johnny's caught out, looks ashamed.

Exactly. So, don't twist this because this is the third time in as many weeks you've had a chance at a job and you've run the other way....

JOHNNY: I don't want any other job. I'm a magician and if I can't do my magic, then there's nothing.

Johnny pulls his shoes on and throws his jacket on.

But don't worry, I'll be gone for good since that's what you want.

FRANK: You can't go out in this. You'll catch your death....

He tries to block him but in a sleight of hand, Johnny ducks under his arm and he's out the door in a flash.

Frank thinks about giving chase, but exhausted he turns, closes the door behind him and lets out a deep sigh – what to do?