

CONFESSION

A Short Play

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Characters

ARCHBISHOP WESTON – 60s-70s

CATHERINE LYNNFIELD – 30s-50s

FATHER CLARENCE MURPHY – 50s - 60s

Setting

The archbishop's office in the 1990s.

SCENE: Opens with WESTON and CATHERINE.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

Thank you for coming in today, Miss Lynnfield.

CATHERINE

You can call me, Catherine. Do I call you Archbishop Weston?

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

I prefer, "Your Excellency."

CATHERINE

Ok. I'll try to say that.

ARCHBISHOP

Let's sit down. Did my secretary explain to you why the archdiocese requires your services?

CATHERINE

Yes. You have a priest you want me to evaluate.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

That's correct. I understand you specialize in these kinds of cases. And you received your training at Marquette?

CATHERINE

Yes.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

Good. Well, you were highly recommended. So how many sessions will you need with Father Murphy before you can write a report?

CATHERINE

It really depends on how open he is. How willing he is to share. Do you think he will have any problems with talking to a woman?

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

Why should he?

CATHERINE

Well, your excellency, the Catholic Church isn't known for being exactly female-friendly.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

I'm sure Father Murphy won't have an issue with your sex, ah, rather, your gender. The topic of the interview, obviously, will be the challenge for him...and you.

CATHERINE

I wonder what type of reception I can expect from Father Murphy.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

You can expect to meet a very charming man. It is one of the reasons why a lot of people have found it hard to believe all he is accused of...But because of the number and the volume of the complaints from the Deaf community, well, we have to investigate. I know it sounds like a joke, but these deaf people can really be very, ah, noisy. They're demanding that the Church do something, and I agree it's time.

CATHERINE

I see. So, you and the Church are going to be receptive to whatever my findings are?

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

Absolutely. Yes, of course. This is legitimate. It's time to resolve this matter one way or another, once and for all..

CATHERINE

How long has this been an issue?

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

Decades. I'm a bit embarrassed to tell you that I'm not the first archbishop to hear these complaints about Father Murphy. Two of my predecessors received complaints. The first did basically nothing. But let's stay focused on your assignment...Your report will help me decide what to do with Father Murphy.

Lights out on the archbishop. Transition to CATHERINE LYNNFIELD's office, She is now seated at her desk, writing. There's a gentle knock at the door. She goes to the door and opens it.

FATHER MURPHY

(Full of good cheer, using American Sign Language and his voice)

Good morning!

CATHERINE

Father Murphy, please come in.

FATHER MURPHY

Thank you. Gorgeous spring day. Are you from here?

CATHERINE

No, I came here for college.

FATHER MURPHY

Where are you from originally?

CATHERINE

(Not willing to be infected by his warmth)

Let's talk about me later. We can sit over here... *(They sit in two chairs at a small table.)* Listen, Father, the first thing I want you to understand is that I'm here to gather information. I have read the files and complaints against you. I'm not here to judge you.

FATHER MURPHY

Oh, I hope not, because only God can judge us...

CATHERINE

As you know, I've been hired by Archbishop Weston to interview you and write a report.

FATHER MURPHY

You mean to interrogate me, I think. *(Sighs)* Oh, well, interrogate, interview. Potato, potata. *(Laughs)* You probably think I'm crazy.

CATHERINE

Your sanity is not something that's in question. It's your sexual history and behavior with your former students at St. John's that I need to get a clear understanding about.

FATHER MURPHY

Of course. Fine. But you should know I haven't worked at St. John's in nearly 30 years.

CATHERINE

Yes, but I understand in your present assignment—

FATHER MURPHY

I don't have an actual assignment. I just assist the Boulder Junction parishes when called upon. Boulder Junction is up north. In the boonies. In case you don't know.

CATHERINE

I know. So, Father, my expertise is in sexual disorders. And I'm being asked to determine if you are or are not a pedophile.

FATHER MURPHY

Well, I can tell you I am certainly not.

CATHERINE

Okay. I hope that's the case. Tell me about yourself.

FATHER MURPHY

All right. So where do you want me to start?

CATHERINE

Let's start with your upbringing.

FATHER MURPHY

Oh, we're going way back?

CATHERINE

Why not?

FATHER MURPHY

I think you just want to get me used to talking to you before you hit me with the hard questions, right?

CATHERINE

I want to get a complete understanding...Father, I just want to get to know you. But if you want me to get more to the point, please tell me about your sexual history. When did you first experience sexual thoughts?

FATHER MURPHY

When I was a teenager. (*Laughs*) Like any normal person, right?

CATHERINE

Were your sexual thoughts about females or males?

FATHER MURPHY

Both. Of course. That's normal, right?

CATHERINE

Yes, if you're a bisexual person.

FATHER MURPHY

No. I was a heterosexual.

CATHERINE

What are you now?

FATHER MURPHY

I'm celibate, of course.

CATHERINE

So, are you no longer attracted to men?

FATHER MURPHY

No, I'm not sexually attracted to anyone, anymore. I'm older now. Celibacy is no longer a struggle.

CATHERINE

All right, Father. You are aware of the many complaints against you, correct?

FATHER MURPHY

I understood that there were only a few.

CATHERINE

How do you explain any of them?

FATHER MURPHY

Just misunderstandings. Big misunderstanding. I think what was at the root of the problems was a lack of education.

CATHERINE

Please explain.

FATHER MURPHY

Well, there are two parts. There was a lack of education on my part and a lack of education on the part of the boys. You see back in those days there wasn't a real curriculum for teaching students about the birds and the bees. It was left to the parents then, but our students' parents generally weren't capable of communicating with their deaf children on that level. So, when our students became teenagers, it was necessary for me to teach the male students the facts of life. You may not be aware but communicating with the deaf requires one to be very physical. You need to show or demonstrate to the individual everything that you are trying to convey.

CATHERINE

You had to provide "hands-on" sex education to all of your students?

FATHER MURPHY

Some. Yes. Exactly. I wasn't properly trained. I realize that now. But I did my best...

CATHERINE

Okay, Father, let's talk about the types of boys that you liked to abuse.

FATHER MURPHY

I didn't "like to abuse" them. And there wasn't a type.

CATHERINE

I'm sorry. Let me rephrase. The boys you chose to provide hands-on sex education — was there anything they all had in common?

FATHER MURPHY

It feels like you're trying to build a case against me.

CATHERINE

No, I am simply trying to understand. I'm trying to build a profile of the boys. How old were they when you started touching them?

FATHER MURPHY

Teaching them. (*Losing some composure*) I was a teacher!

CATHERINE

How old were they?

FATHER MURPHY

Teenagers, of course.

CATHERINE

As young as thirteen?

FATHER MURPHY

Probably. They're still more like children at that age. Fourteen or fifteen years old. Whenever they started having wet dreams and erections and needed explanations.

CATHERINE

I see. What race were the boys?

FATHER MURPHY

Generally white boys.

CATHERINE

Why no minority boys?

FATHER MURPHY

I'm not a racist. But most of the black boys and the Latin boys knew too much about sex already. That's part of their upbringing. They're not as naive. Many were exposed to things they shouldn't be at that age.

CATHERINE

Okay...So please tell me about the boys physically. How tall were they generally? Were they big or smallish? Fit or overweight?

FATHER MURPHY

Average size. Average weight.

CATHERINE

Tell me about the type of personality you looked for in boys—

FATHER MURPHY

I didn't look for them. They came to me when they needed answers. I was not a predator!

CATHERINE

Okay...What kind of personality did the boys who came to you have?

FATHER MURPHY

Well, I guess if you want a general picture, they were boys who needed attention and affection. They weren't confident. They were usually loyal and respectful. They looked up to me. I spoke their language. They didn't have a lot of social skills. Their parents hadn't taught them much. The parents didn't know much sign language.

CATHERINE

I see. And intellectually, were you focused on boys who were brighter or those more on the slow side?

FATHER MURPHY

Neither. I just helped the boys who were ignorant or confused about sex.

CATHERINE

Ones who weren't worldly?

FATHER MURPHY

Yes. That's right. I wanted to help them understand. Look, I know now, it doesn't seem sensible. I was ignorant. I wasn't properly trained. But there was rampant homosexuality among the older boys. They didn't understand sex. I fixed the problem.

CATHERINE

How did you do that?

FATHER MURPHY

I counseled each student once a week. And I thought if they got, um, relieved, they wouldn't need to have sex with each other.

CATHERINE

How did you know which boys were sexually active?

FATHER MURPHY

They would tell me in confession. I knew which boys needed help.

CATHERINE

I see. Father Murphy, can you explain to me how you initiated sexual contact with the boys?

FATHER MURPHY

I did not initiate sexual contact.

CATHERINE

Sorry, let me rephrase that...Can you give me a typical scenario of the first time you spoke to a boy about sex?

FATHER MURPHY

Well, usually, I'd learn in confession that a boy had sexual contact with another boy. Then I would invite both boys at different times into the dorm supervisor's office on the nights when I was on duty. Then I would give each boy an educational talk about sex. How it was supposed to be between a man and a woman, after marriage with the purpose of creating children. Then I would explain in sign language exactly how the penis worked. Then I would manually stimulate him to show how it worked. If the boy didn't push my hand away when I was touching him, then I knew he was interested in learning more.

CATHERINE

So you interpreted this lack of resistance as cooperation?

FATHER MURPHY

(Annoyed)

Interest in learning more, just what I said.

CATHERINE

I see. Please continue.

FATHER MURPHY

So I would proceed to teach the boy about sex. *(Pause.)* If I didn't teach them, how would they learn? These boys' parents couldn't communicate with them. They knew only basic signs, if any at all. They weren't capable of explaining such a complex subject to them.

CATHERINE

Is that why you targeted these boys, because they couldn't tell their parents about what you were doing to them?

FATHER MURPHY

I didn't target or groom or favor any one student over another.

CATHERINE

So what would happen next in the lesson? *(When he doesn't respond.)* Father?

FATHER MURPHY

I would masturbate the boy until he...ejaculated.

CATHERINE

And was this a one-time thing with each boy?

FATHER MURPHY

It depended on the boy. Whenever I had dorm supervisory duty, I would put the boys to bed and turn out the lights. Then I would go into the office and let them settle down. When I came back a little while later, I would see who was restless. I went to these boys... Homosexual behaviors were rampant in the dorms and I fixed it. I was taking their sins upon myself.

CATHERINE

What do you mean by that?

FATHER MURPHY

I mean, I took care of them, so they wouldn't play with each other. I relieved them and that ended their desire to play with each other. It was sort of like, ah, milking them.

CATHERINE

Milking them?

FATHER MURPHY

Sorry. I grew up on a farm...I know it sounds ridiculous to someone who doesn't have a penis, but trust me, boys who are going through the change of life need to be relieved or they behave badly. I know it's wrong now, but back then I thought it was the best way to handle them. *(Pause.)* No pun intended. Look, my intentions were good. I just wanted to keep the boys from doing things that they'd regret later.

CATHERINE

Did you get any sexual pleasure out of these educational episodes?

FATHER MURPHY

(After a long beat)

Yes. I did. And that was wrong.

CATHERINE

How did you get your sexual pleasure?

FATHER MURPHY

I often masturbated at the same time. *(Pause)* I know that was wrong. A sin.

CATHERINE

Did you ever consider that this activity might be having a detrimental effect on the students?

FATHER MURPHY

(Sighs)

Yes. I'm not perfect. I made mistakes. But they forgive me now. And I forgive them.

CATHERINE

(Stunned)

You forgive them?

FATHER MURPHY

Yes.

Lights out on MURPHY. CATHERINE moves into archbishop's office and reads from a document. The ARCHBISHOP is seated.

CATHERINE

Summary: admissions-slash-denials, based upon self-report. Of the names submitted, Father Clarence Murphy admits to sexual contact with 19 boys. Denies sexual contact with ten other boys. Denies sexual contact with anyone not named within the complaint. Number of sexual contacts per child ranged from one to more than 25. He would not admit to a number above 25, but didn't deny the possibility of larger numbers. The period of time that he admits he was sexually contacting students at St. John's was 22 years. He denies—

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

Catherine, would you mind putting down the report? I can read it all later. Will you just tell me, is Father Murphy a pedophile?

CATHERINE

Of course, he is!

ARCHBISHOP

There's no need to shout.

CATHERINE

(Regaining control of her emotions)

Sorry. You are going to consider this report seriously?

ARCHBISHOP

Yes, of course.

CATHERINE

Good. Because based upon the number of complaints and the percentage that generally do not come forward to complain, in my opinion, it's quite possible Father Murphy molested as many as 200 boys.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

Oh, good Lord...

CATHERINE

Worst of all, he seems to have no sense of the extent of the harm he has caused.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

No feelings of guilt? At all?

CATHERINE

No. I don't think so. No real signs of remorse. He's rationalized his actions. He claims he was educating the boys. He has convinced himself that he was doing a good thing...

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

What on earth...? How could he feel that? How could he not feel any remorse?!

CATHERINE

It's actually typical for pedophiles. I recommend that you keep him far away from young adolescent males. And you should investigate what Father Murphy's been doing the last twenty years up in Boulder Junction since he left the school.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

So you're saying there are probably more?

CATHERINE

I'm sure of it.

ARCHBISHOP WESTON

God help us—

CATHERINE

(Forcefully.)

God help them.

CURTAIN.