

The Knowledge of Sin

By

Matthew McLachlan

47-21 41st St, Queens, NY
11104 APT 1C
MMclachlan123@gmail.com
Phone: 352-255-4015

Cast of Characters

FRANK: 30's. Strongly built with a tough demeanor.

ABBOTT: 60's. Well kempt and still handsome.

LIGHTS UP on a small office with a therapeutic atmosphere. A loveseat sits against the Stage Right wall. CRISPIN ABBOTT sits hunched over a medium-sized desk facing the Up Stage wall. His back to the audience. On the wall are framed quotes and a portrait of Roman philosopher Seneca the Younger. ABBOTT writes in a notebook. He glances at other papers next to him, jotting down more notes. ABBOTT's watch makes a quick double-beep. He opens the side drawer to his desk, pulls out a file, and places it on his desk. He continues to write. A heavy knock at the door. ABBOTT opens the folder.

ABBOTT
(Without looking up)

Come in!

FRANK FATICO enters with a bounce in his step and a smile on his face.

ABBOTT
Afternoon, Frank.

FRANK
(Cheerfully)
Hey, Abbott! How're you doin'? You good?

FRANK sits in the loveseat.

ABBOTT
(Writing)
Not too bad.

FRANK
(Nodding)
That's good! Yeah...yeah, that's good.

ABBOTT looks at FRANK, fully taking him in for the first time.

ABBOTT
(Grinning)
And how are you Frank?

FRANK
Oh, you know...same old same old...

ABBOTT
Is that right?

FRANK
Yup.

ABBOTT smiles.

FRANK
Wha?

ABBOTT
Nothin'. I just wouldn't say "same old same old."

FRANK
No?

ABBOTT
No. I've never seen you this eager to talk.

FRANK
Yeah, well...I'm not much of a talker, I guess.

ABBOTT
Very true.

(Beat)
Truthfully, I don't think I've ever seen you *smile* before.

FRANK
Yeah, well...
(Smiling)
Today's a good day.

ABBOTT
Oh, yeah?

FRANK
Yeah. My uh...my lawyer tells me that I've impressed the judge with my behavior and cooperation...sooo...they're planning on reducing my time on house arrest.

ABBOTT
(Genuinely)
That's great to hear, Frank. *Really*.

FRANK
(Getting excited)
Yeah! But...that's not even the best part.

ABBOTT

No?

FRANK

Nah. They said that because my ex relapsed again, there's a better chance that I'll be able to have visitation with my son. And, uh...maybe if I keep doin' the way I've been doin'...I could have him on weekends, maybe.

ABBOTT

Frank! That's great! Really, that's great news.

FRANK

(Smiling big)

Yeah...thanks.

ABBOTT

I'm sure you'll be happy to see Max again.

FRANK

Psh. You have no idea.

(Beat)

They'll have to have some guy there with me...supervisin', ya know?

ABBOTT

Sure.

FRANK

But...it'll be good...

FRANK nods slowly, staring off. Silence. He punches his hand into his fist, snapping himself out of his daze.

FRANK

So...yeah. They said, uh...finish up *here*...with the anger management counseling, get that signed off...and then it's the home stretch.

(Smiles)

And, uh...seein' as today is our last session and all...I guess I can't help but, uh...ya know...be *excited* or whatever.

ABBOTT

(Smiling lightly)

I bet.

ABBOTT sits up in his chair. He grabs his notebook and puts it in his lap.

ABBOTT

Well, then...we better get started. We've got a lot of ground to cover and not a lot of time.

FRANK looks a little lost but still smiles.

FRANK

What, uh...whaddy mean..."a lot of ground"?

ABBOTT

Well...our sessions haven't really been the most...

(Searches for the right word)

Conversational.

FRANK

Yeah? So?

ABBOTT

So, we need to get through a lot, seeing as it's our last session.

FRANK looks around for a moment.

FRANK

Wha...whaddy mean? What does that mean? "Get through a lot?"...

They stare at each other.

ABBOTT

(Con conversationally)

Frank...what do you think the point *is* for this counseling session between us?

FRANK

(Confused)

The *point*?

ABBOTT

Yes. Why do you think you're here?

FRANK

Uh...

(Shrugs)

Show the judge that I can control my shit.

ABBOTT

Okay. Yeah. Anything else?

FRANK

(Confused)

Anything else?

(Scoffs)

And 'cause he fuckin' said so, *that's* why.

ABBOTT

The point of these sessions is for you to talk to me about what it was that made you angry and to understand why you did what you did...to try and eliminate the possibility of it ever happening again.

FRANK

...Okay...so?

ABBOTT

So...if we haven't talked about it and we haven't figured out *why* you did what you did, then we haven't gotten any closer to solving the issue. And if we haven't gotten any closer to solving the issue...

ABBOTT pulls out a green piece of paper from the open folder.

ABBOTT

Then...I can't sign off on this...

Silence.

FRANK

(Confused)

So...wait...

(Beat)

What the fuck are you sayin'?

Silence. ABBOTT studies FRANK.

FRANK

So...what...you tellin' me...all of this has been for *nothin'*?

ABBOTT

I *hope* that's not the case.

FRANK's face turns hard.

FRANK

(Under his breath)

...This is fuckin' bullshit...

ABBOTT

Sorry?

FRANK

I said this is--
 (Yelling)
 Fuckin' bullshit!

ABBOTT

Frank--

FRANK

(Standing)
 No! I didn't go through all this bullshit to be stopped by some fuck like you! All these fuckin' sessions to have you jerk me around last minute?

ABBOTT

Why don't you try talking to--

FRANK

No. No! Fuck this!

FRANK breathes heavily.

ABBOTT

...Do you think this is helping?

Silence. FRANK paces around the room. He turns to ABBOTT.

FRANK

What do ya want me to do, huh? You want me to *beg*? Get down on my knees and *beg* you? Is that it?

ABBOTT

Of course not.

FRANK

Then *what*?!

FRANK stands up straight, takes a long breath. Composes himself.

FRANK

...See? I got my anger issues under control. Alright?
 (Beat)
 What, you don't believe me? I just fuckin' showed you didn't I? What the fuck else do you want me to do?

ABBOTT

That's not how this works, Frank.

FRANK

Then what the fuck? I've done good, right? I've come every week! I've never been late and I never said shit that I shouldn't!

ABBOTT

(Calmly)

That's just it...you've barely said *anything*.

FRANK

So what?

ABBOTT

That's why you're *here*. To talk.

FRANK

No-no-no-no-no. They said all I needed to do was come in here, do the fuckin' time, and I'd be good.

ABBOTT

Well, they were wrong.

FRANK

(Shaking his head)

You've gotta be fuckin' kiddin' me.

ABBOTT

Frank...I can't, in good conscience, inform the court that you've made a significant change, here.

FRANK

"Good conscience"? *Fuck* your conscience! Fuck you and your smug fuckin' self.

ABBOTT

That's unnecessary, Frank.

FRANK

Then what the fuck *is* necessary? *Huh?* What do ya need me to say? What do I need to do?

ABBOTT

What I *need*, is to be able to tell the court that you're not the same man who did what he did...that you can demonstrate non-violent behavior.

FRANK

Bullshit. This is fuckin' *bullshit*.

ABBOTT

So you've said.

Silence.

ABBOTT

I want to help you, Frank...and I think that I can.

FRANK

(Scoffs)

"Help me". You don't know shit *about* me.

ABBOTT

(Matter of fact)

...That's my point.

Silence. FRANK turns and looks around the room, his back to ABBOTT. FRANK laughs lightly to himself. His laughter growing.

FRANK

...This is a fuckin' joke.

(Beat)

You're not even a *shrink*...right?

He turns to ABBOTT.

FRANK

You don't even have a fuckin' *degree*...

(Mocking)

"Anger Management Counselor."

(Beat)

Couple hundred bucks, a weekend seminar, and *I* could be doing your fuckin' job. It's a joke...this whole thing they got me doin' is a fuckin' *joke*.

ABBOTT

(Calm)

Regardless of how you feel about my job or your situation...nothing has changed.

(Leaning in)

I don't *want* this to have been a waste of our time, Frank and I don't want this to stop you from seeing your son.

FRANK scoffs.

ABBOTT

I know you don't believe me, but I *want* you to see your kid. I want you to be in his life.

ABBOTT holds up the bright green folder.

ABBOTT

But I can't sign off on this unless you *give me* something here.

Silence.

ABBOTT

(Frustrated)

If you *don't*...you wont be able to have him on weekends and visitation rights will be limited, *if* you're allowed any at all. And seeing as his mother has relapsed, he's probably with a foster family at the moment, am I right? If she completes a quick twenty-eight day program, she'll be able to get him back and if she falls off the wagon again, it's back to the foster families. He could be bounced around the foster system for *years*--

FRANK

The *fuck* he will!

ABBOTT

--*And*...as damaged as the foster system is in this city, he'll probably be in *worse* homes than if he lived with his mother. He'll be in a group home for most of his childhood and probably be on the street before he's even a teenager.

FRANK

And you're just the fuckin' expert, huh? They teach you that shit at your little seminar? What the fuck do you know about this kinda shit?

ABBOTT

I know plenty.

FRANK

(Laughs)

Oh, yeah?

(Beat)

Look at ya...with your "quaint" little office here and your fancy framed quotes on the wall. Oh yeah, you just *scream* "expert" on livin' hard...

(Brushing him off)

You don't know shit...

(Beat)

Mommy and daddy probably had you in private school since before you could walk. Stuffed into Polo shirts and loafers, so...so, *tell* me...

(Beat)

How the *fuck* could you know what it's like out there? How rough shit can be? What *my kid* could go through?

ABBOTT stares hard at FRANK.

Silence.

ABBOTT

(Softly)

You're right, Frank...you're absolutely right. There isn't anything I haven't used in here that I didn't learn in some classroom...

(Beat)

Everything I'm saying to you was taught to me by some other asshole in a blazer. Some dick head who probably grew up with everything he could ever want...telling us what it's "really like" for people who have nothing.

(Beat)

But there are some things you can't teach...

(Beat)

The foster system, the group homes...living on the streets? There were plenty of chapters in a whole lotta books that we were forced to read for some big test...to make sure that we really knew what it was like out there. But I didn't study those chapters, Frank. I didn't have to. The foster system, the group homes...I was already very familiar with those. Now...why do you think that is? Hm?

(Beat)

'Cause there were no polo shirts and loafers, Frank. There wasn't even "mommy and daddy"...

FRANK

...Bullshit...

ABBOTT

It's true. By the time I was twelve I had been in seven different homes. Some good...most not so good. By thirteen I was living on the street cause I was too afraid to go to the group homes...

(Beat)

I don't bitch and moan about it and I don't *blame* anyone. I made do with what I was given. And I don't need to justify myself to anyone...*especially* not you. What I *do* need...is for you to sit down and let me do my job.

FRANK crosses his arms. They stare at each other. ABBOTT breaks eye contact and sighs, at a loss. He glances at the portrait on the wall and studies it.

ABBOTT

You, uh...you know who that is?

ABBOTT points to the portrait on his wall. FRANK looks at the portrait and back to ABBOTT.

ABBOTT

Seneca the Younger...

(Beat)

Interesting guy. You probably would've liked him. Smart, funny...big hit with the ladies. People know him best for advising some of the most successful emperors in Roman

(MORE)

ABBOTT (cont'd)

history. Now...*he* said..."The knowledge of sin...is the beginning to redemption." Understanding what you've done wrong...is the only way you can truly move forward...

(Beat)

That's why you're here, Frank. That's the point to all this. Or...at least, why I'm the pain in your ass right now...

(Beat)

Now...we don't have a lot of time left, but I think we can still get somewhere...

(Beat)

So...why don't you sit down...and let's at least *try*.

Silence. FRANK doesn't move. ABBOTT studies him.

ABBOTT

(Annoyed)

I get it, Frank...I do. The people you're affiliated with...they don't talk. That's part of the job. But you're not gonna get what you want unless you let me *help* you. And...truth be told, I don't give a shit *how* we get there. You wanna piss and moan? Fine. Go right ahead. Pace around the room and bitch your heart out. At least we'll get somewhere. But if you're gonna sit in silence and *pout*? You're only hurting yourself...

(Beat)

So...you've got two options here. You can start talking...you can at least *try*...or...you can stand there...and get no where.

(Beat)

What's it gonna be?

Silence. Begrudgingly, FRANK makes his way to his seat and sits down, arms still crossed.

ABBOTT

...Okay, then.

ABBOTT sits up and readjusts his notebook in his lap.

FRANK

So...now what?

ABBOTT

Well...why don't we...why don't we start with something simple.

FRANK

Like what?

ABBOTT

(Thinks)

Tell me about when you found out you were going to be a father.

FRANK

(Scoffs)

"Simple."

ABBOTT

(Clarifies)

Easier to talk about.

FRANK

What about it?

ABBOTT

How did you find out?

FRANK

I don't know. She just *told* me.

ABBOTT

By "she" you mean your ex?

FRANK

Yeah. *Kim*. She just...*told* me.

ABBOTT

And how did that make you feel?

FRANK

(Annoyed)

How the fuck do you *think* I felt?

ABBOTT

(Genuinely)

I honestly don't know, Frank.

FRANK

(Admitting)

...I was scared shitless.

ABBOTT

(Surprised)

Really?

FRANK

(Sternly)

Yeah.

ABBOTT

I just mean...you're a pretty solid guy, I don't imagine you get spooked easily.

FRANK

(Confidently)

I don't.

ABBOTT

Well, that's interesting, don't you think?

FRANK

What is?

ABBOTT

That you were scared when you found out you were going to be a father.

FRANK

(Shrugs)

I don't know.

ABBOTT

Can you think of another time when you've felt that scared?

FRANK

...No.

ABBOTT

Never?

FRANK

No. I've never been that scared.

ABBOTT

That's saying a lot for a man in your line of work, wouldn't you say?

(Beat)

I imagine...you've probably experienced a lot of scary things.

FRANK

...Yeah.

ABBOTT

And none of them compared to finding out you were going to be a father...

FRANK

(Shaking his head)

Nope.

ABBOTT
And why do you think that it is?

FRANK
(Thinking)
...I don't know.
(Beat)
Maybe...
(Searching)
'Cause...I didn't wanna fuck 'em up? I didn't have a fuckin'
clue how to be a parent.

ABBOTT
Understandable.
(Beat)
What about Kim?

FRANK
What about her?

ABBOTT
You said that she "just told you"...but how did *she* take the
news.

FRANK
(Scoffs)
Shit...she was as calm as a fuckin' Hindu cow.

ABBOTT
Really?

FRANK
Yeah. She seemed to have it *all* figured out. And if you knew
Kim, you'd *think* she'd have a panic attack and go apeshit.
Something big like that.
(Shakes head)
Nope. She was all breeze.
(Smiling lightly)
I admired her for that shit...bein' all cool like that?

ABBOTT
Was she using at that point?

FRANK's face goes blank. He nods,
slowly.

FRANK
She started around that time.
(Beat)
Pills. Takin' em' behind my back.

ABBOTT

(Gently)

She was using while pregnant with Max?

FRANK

Just the pills. Nothin' serious. That I know of, anyway.

(Beat)

One day, though...I came home and I saw her in the bathroom stickin' her fingers down her throat. I was like "what the fuck are you doin'?" And she looks at me all scared and shit. Turns out, she'd mixed too many pills together and was afraid of overdosing.

ABBOTT

And what did you do?

FRANK looks at ABBOTT, sharply.

FRANK

(Annoyed)

What did I...

(Beat)

Nothin'. I wanted to hit her. Beat the ever-lovin' *shit* outta her for puttin' our kid in danger like that. Instead...I snatched her up and shoved her ass in rehab.

ABBOTT

And how did she feel about that?

FRANK

Fuck how she felt...

(Beat)

She's yellin' and shit, tellin' me all these awful things about how she hates my guts and how she never wanted my kid and blah blah blah. The rehab center knows I'm comin' so they wait there with a bunch of, uh...those um...

(Searching for the right word)

Those big *nurse* guys, what the fuck do you call 'em?

ABBOTT

Orderlies?

FRANK

Yeah, them.

(Beat)

After *that*...I tell myself that it's time to get my shit together. Not for me. Not for Kim. But for my *kid*. I wanna do everything I can, ya know? I visit her every day that I can. I try reading some of them parenting books from the library...

FRANK shakes his head, embarrassed.

FRANK

I even sign up for one of those parenting classes, ya know?
Ya learn how to burp em', feed em', bathe em'...

(Uncomfortable)

Even give em' CPR, 'cause...ya never know, right?

ABBOTT

What happened after Kim was out of rehab?

FRANK

...She wants to start over. Start fresh. I'm hesitant at first...but I want to keep her and Max close, ya know? I mean...she looks like a million bucks. Her face is glowin' and she's smilin' all the time...and happy...she looked really happy.

(Smiling big)

A few months later...Max was born.

ABBOTT

And that made you happy?

FRANK

(Scoffs)

You kiddin'? Happiest day of my fuckin' life.

ABBOTT

And you weren't scared?

FRANK considers this.

FRANK

Yeah...yeah, I was still scared. But now I felt prepared, ya know?

Silence. FRANK stares off in his happy daze. ABBOTT watches him.

ABBOTT

Frank...

(Beat)

...Do you think you can tell me about that night...on May 7th?

FRANK's face hardens.

FRANK

Isn't all that info in your little folder there?

ABBOTT

It is. But I want to hear what you have to say about it.

FRANK doesn't look up.

FRANK

...I don't wanna think about it.

ABBOTT

(Gently)

I understand that, Frank. I don't want to push you any harder than I have to. But I think this will help you.

FRANK looks at ABBOTT, then back to the ground.

FRANK

Yeah...yeah, I'll, uh...I'll try.

ABBOTT

(Nodding)

Okay.

Silence.

FRANK

(Hesitantly)

So...a, uh...a few months after...uh...Max is born...I drive by my place with Tony. My, um...*associate*. And I say, "Hey Ton'...let's stop by the house, grab somethin' to eat. See Max for a minute." "Yeah, sure, why not." So, we pull up, go inside...and, uh...

Silence. FRANK is still.

FRANK

(Hesitant)

I don't know, Abbott...I don't...

ABBOTT

It's okay, Frank. Just...keep trying.

FRANK stares at the ground.

FRANK

(Remembering)

...The second I open the door...I mean, puttin' my fuckin' hand on the *doorknob*, even...I can feel that somethin' is wrong. I don't know...like...everything seems a little bit off center or somethin'. Like the air in the room is tighter somehow. More *tense*.

(Beat)

I call out, look around...no answer. No one's in the living room, the playroom, or Max's room. Tony starts realizin' somethin's up, too.

(Beat)

...And that's when I hear the bathtub running. I run through our bedroom and open the door...and, uh...there's *Kim*. On

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)

the floor by the tub...needle sticking out of her fuckin' arm.

(Beat)

And it took me...three or four *full* seconds to think, "where's Max?"

(Beat)

I tell myself I was trying to process it all, ya know? That I was trying to get through the anger...the *fear*. But it took me *that* long to think about my own kid.

ABBOTT

(Gently)

It's okay, Frank. You did nothing wrong there. Walking into something like that...you were processing it all...and that's okay.

(Beat)

You think you can keep going?

FRANK stares at the floor. He nods, slowly.

FRANK

So...I'm standin' there...and I, uh...I look around...and I...I realize Max isn't on the changing table or even on the *ground*. And my heart tightens. "Where the fuck else could he be?" Ya know?

(Beat)

And then it clicks. And I, uh...I walk over to the tub...and I look in. I see the water runnin', some toys bobbin' around...and...and my boy...on his stomach. And he's just floatin' there. Absolutely still.

(Beat)

I scoop him up as quick as I can and, uh...he ain't breathin'. But...I don't panic, ya know? My brain just switches over. I put him down on the changing table and I, uh...I start doin' those little compressions I learned.

He holds up his pointer and middle finger.

FRANK

Pushin' on his chest with only my two fingers, 'cause he's so frail, ya know? Tryna give him air. Tony comes in behind me and sees what's goin' on and I yell for him to call an ambulance.

(Beat)

I'm just...pushin' and pushin' and pushin'. And I see that I'm drippin' water all over him. I just assume, it's water from the tub, ya know? And it takes me a few seconds to realize...I'm cryin'. My tears are fallin' all over him.

(Beat)

And after what felt like a fuckin' *life time*...

(Smiles)

He starts coughin'...

(Laughs lightly)

He gives these little baby coughs. And then he just starts wailin'. I've never been so happy to hear that little shit yell so loud. He starts cryin' and cryin' and I hold him to my chest. Tony comes in and I hand him Max so I can check on Kim. He takes him into the living room, the kid still wailin'. I bend down to Kim and I see that she's still breathin'. So, I pull the needle out of her arm, slowly. She starts to move and she eventually opens her eyes.

(Beat)

...And ya know what? For a moment...I am so happy. Happy that everyone was okay.

His smile fades. He stares off, face hard.

FRANK

I don't know what came over me. One moment I'm pushing the hair back behind her ears...and the next...I feel my teeth clenched so hard I feel like they're gonna break. And I notice that my hands are wrapped around her neck. She starts looking at me...scared as all hell. And she's weak...so pathetically fuckin' weak.

(Beat)

I lift her up by her neck and push her up against the wall...hands gripped as hard as I fuckin' could. Somehow, she falls over or somethin'...goes sideways into the tub. I keep my grip and I push her down into the water. I just...hold her under...until she stops movin'.

(Beat)

I don't even remember getting on top of her in the tub. I do remember the paramedics rushing in and dragging me out...handing me off to the police when they get there.

He stares off. The memory playing on him.

FRANK

And you know what?

(Nodding)

That would've been right. Me takin' her fuckin' life for what she did.

This peaks ABBOTT's interest, though he doesn't dare interrupt FRANK.

FRANK

But...by some divine fuckin' being...

(Scoffs)

...She starts coughin'...

(Shakes his head)

I sit there in my living room, soaking wet, police surrounding me, and I hear her coughin' up the same bath water that almost killed my kid. And all I could do was sit there...staring at Max across the room...being held by some police officer that won't even let me hold him.

Silence.

FRANK

I'm sure I'm supposed to, uh...tell you it was all a big mistake, right? That I wasn't myself? That I would change it if I could?

ABBOTT

(Genuinely)

...You can say whatever you'd like Frank.

Silence. FRANK opens his mouth to speak when the alarm on ABBOTT's watch beeps twice, indicating that the session is over. They're both still.

ABBOTT

(Softly)

That's our time Frank.

FRANK looks at ABBOTT.

FRANK

What, uh...what does that mean? For me...ya know?

(Beat)

I thought I did good, right?

ABBOTT

(Softly)

Yeah, Frank. You did really well.

FRANK

So, uh...what...

(Beat)

Are you gonna sign that?

He points to the green slip of paper on ABBOTT's desk.

ABBOTT

I have to look at my notes, go over some things...then I'll make my decision.

FRANK

Make your...are you fuckin' *kiddin'* me? I did what you needed, right? I said all the shit you wanted me to say. I mean...what the fuck else do you want me to do?

ABBOTT

Frank--

FRANK

No! I didn't sit in this chair, listen to your bullshit, have you put me through the ringer like this just to have you turn around and--

ABBOTT

Frank!

(Beat)

You did well. Okay?

(Beat)

Now...legally, I can't tell you my decision, *anyway*. I'll inform the court this afternoon. You should hear from your lawyer by the end of the day.

They stare at each other.

ABBOTT

(Genuinely)

You did *well*, Frank.

FRANK

...So...that's it, huh?

ABBOTT

...Yeah.

FRANK

Ain't nothin' I can do or say...

ABBOTT

...That's it.

FRANK nods, slowly. Silence. FRANK stands up and walks towards the door. He stops in his tracks. Turns back to ABBOTT.

FRANK

(Tearfully)

This, uh...this ain't about me, Abbott...ya know? This whole thing? It's about my kid.

(Beat)

'Cause me? I'm an asshole. And I don't deserve something as good as him after the shit I've done. I fucked up...I know that...but...

(Beat)
I did it 'cause I love him...ya know?

Silence. FRANK wipes his face and stands up straight.

FRANK
You just, uh...you do right by him. Alright?

Silence.

ABBOTT
(Genuinely)
You take care of yourself, Frank.

FRANK nods. He turns and walks out the door. ABBOTT stares at the door. He picks up the file and puts the green slip of paper on top. He picks up his pen and studies the paper. He looks around the room. He turns and looks at the portrait of Seneca mounted on the wall. He turns his gaze away slightly, thinking about what to do next.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY