

TALKING to GOD

A

SCREENPLAY TREATMENT

By

John F McDonald

217 Washington Avenue
Grovehill West
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP2 6LT
England

☎ 01442 249138

Mobile : 07866 420348

e-mail : jmacdonald48@btinternet.com

TREATMENT

Francis Page is in Broadmoor Secure Psychiatric Hospital. He's chained hand-and-foot and sitting between two big guards. He's also wearing a suit. Francis is a schizophrenic ex-bouncer and he's being taken to court to be sentenced for killing a warder in Pentonville Prison. The psychiatrists at Broadmoor have been gradually reducing the regime of tranquilisers and neuroleptic drugs that have been keeping Francis in a stupefied state.

Everything seems strange to Francis at the court. The faces of the judge and barristers are grotesque and their words are incoherent at first. Gradually, Francis begins to focus. He sees his teenage daughter Fiona in the court, but doesn't recognize who she is, just that she's a friendly face. Also Hatchet Harry Kane, a criminal who was in Pentonville with him. Harry seems to be mouthing the words "toilet" and "testicle", but Francis can't understand why. He also sees D.S. Spencer, the policeman who put him in Pentonville.

The judge sentences Francis to be detained at Broadmoor until he is capable of serving a life sentence in a mainstream prison. He tells Francis he has no chance of parole. The guards take him down.

On the way out of the court, they pass the 'Testate' Office and something clicks in Francis' head. He asks the guards if he can go to the toilet. They're annoyed about this, but take him to the nearest men's lavatory. One of the guards checks out the toilet and it seems safe and empty. While Francis is in the cubicle, Hatchet Harry Kane bursts in and starts to overpower the guards. Francis is confused about what's going on, but he helps Harry. Harry gives Francis a small axe to chop through his chains, then they dress in the guards uniforms and make their escape. Outside, James Greenwood, a young mouthy punk, is waiting for them in a car. They drive to a remote, derelict house in Essex.

Inside the house, Kane and Greenwood begin to interrogate Francis about thirty kilos of cocaine he smuggled in from New York and for which he was sentenced to six years in Pentonville Prison. Francis is still groggy from the tranqs and neuros, but he remembers the cocaine was confiscated by D.S. Spencer and his superior, D.I. Dunne. Kane doesn't believe Francis and shoots him in the left kneecap.

Francis falls to the ground and Kane threatens to shoot him in the other kneecap, then he'll be "a cripple as well as a 'windowlicker'". As Kane bends over him, Francis swings the axe and chops Kane's gun-hand off. Francis prizes the gun from the severed hand and shoots Kane in the face. Greenwood is petrified and Francis now begins to interrogate him. Francis' questions are confused and meaningless to Greenwood and Francis strikes the boy with the axe every time he can't answer, until he's nothing but a bloody pulp on the floor.

Francis rips up a curtain and bandages his shattered knee. He returns to Kane's body and retrieves a packet of cigarettes. He lights up a cigarette and sits down and surveys the carnage in the room.

SIX YEARS EARLIER

Francis Page is patrolling outside the Pink Peacock nightclub in London. He's working the door with Matthew Moore, a young Irish bouncer and Agnes D'Argensola, a South American woman who wants to stay in Britain. The schizophrenia hasn't taken full hold of Francis at this stage, but he hears voices in his head – the voice of Alienchrist, which tells Francis that Jesus Christ was an alien and tries to explain love, also the voice of Animalkhan, which tells Francis about hate. Alienchrist and Animalkhan continuously contradict each other. And there's another voice, that of Jeanne of Dreams, which talks to Francis about suicide.

Agnes wants Francis to have sex with her and give her a baby, so she can stay in the country, but Francis isn't interested. He's a little scared of women – his mother was schizophrenic and Francis believes she gave him the condition – his marriage to his wife Angeline is almost on the rocks, the only reason they stay together is because of their two young daughters, Fiona and Sinéad. The only woman Francis really cares for is Glendora, a young black croupier who Francis rescued from the gutter after she overdosed on heroin. Glendora was abused as a child and has AIDS, she now depends on Francis to defend her against the world, which he does.

Francis is also having problems with one of the other bouncers, John Nightingale, a gay American. Nightingale resents the fact that Francis is considered the main man in the door game. He constantly riles Francis about getting too old and, though Francis isn't afraid of the man physically, Nightingale is a college graduate and Francis can't combat his sarcasm, which makes Francis feel inadequate and angry. Francis realizes he's getting past his shelf-life in the bouncing game and is just looking for one big score to buy into his own club.

Things get worse between Francis and Angeline – she finds out about Glendora and leaves him, taking the girls with her.

Percy Shillinger, the owner of the Pink Peacock night club and a big shot on the London scene, is arranging front-of-stage staff for an up-coming heavy metal concert by an American group called the Antichrists. The Pink Peacock bouncers agree to do the job, including Francis, Matthew, John Nightingale and a big bouncer called Jack Black, who's got a reputation for eating too much.

However, during the concert, Pigg, the lead guitarist of the Antichrists, begins to urinate on the crowd, working them up into a frenzy. Some of the urine splashes on Francis and Animalkhan tells him to kill. Francis wades into the crowd, leaving a trail of bloody and broken bodies and has to be restrained by the other bouncers.

The men are invited back to the Antichrists Hotel by Percy Shillinger. He asks Francis what happened, but Francis can't remember. Shillinger tells the bouncers the band were impressed with their work and want to take them on an American tour – six months, with the potential to earn thirty to forty grand per man. Francis sees this as the chance he's been waiting for. That kind of money will buy him a small share of his own club and he'll be on his way, out of the bouncing game.

As the night goes on, however, the schizophrenia is making Francis disorientated. Pigg tells Francis to go get him a drink. Francis remembers the boy peeing on him and he urinates into a glass and forces Pigg to drink it. Francis gets evicted from the suite by the band's American bodyguards and, although he doesn't know it, his actions have ruined his chances of going on the American tour.

Things between Francis and John Nightingale deteriorate and it's only a matter of time before there's a confrontation. It happens in the Hardcore Gym in London, where the bouncers work out. Nightingale goads Francis about not having a ticket for the American tour. An argument starts and it spills into the shower-room in a surreal scene where thick steam makes the outlines of the two men obscure. Francis beats up the young bouncer and penetrates him anally as the steam turns to a red mist in the hell-like ambience.

Francis confronts Percy Shillinger in the Pink Peacock nightclub about not being picked for the American tour. Shillinger tells him he's too unstable and Francis goes berserk, punching Shillinger in the face and throwing one of his bodyguards over a balcony. Francis is eventually overpowered by sheer weight of numbers and the bouncers throw him out into an alley, where they almost kill him, but Glendora lies over him and covers him with her own body to stop them. Shillinger screams at Francis that he'll never work again in London.

Glendora nurses Francis back to health and suggests there's another way he can make enough money to buy into his club. She knows some people at the casino who are looking for someone to go to Amsterdam and bring back some merchandise. Francis is angry at first, asking her who these people are – she tells him the people are Yardies.

Francis eventually agrees to meet the Yardies. They give him a parcel, which should contain thirty-five grand, and they ask him to go to Amsterdam on Christmas Day and bring back heroin. They'll pay him ten grand for the job – five up front and five when he gets back. Francis doesn't like the Yardies and there's tension between them from the beginning.

Things go wrong in Amsterdam. As it's Christmas Day, the city is deserted and Francis tells his taxi-driver to wait at the end of a dark alley in a remote area. Francis meets two Turkish men in a dingy flat up the alley. Francis tests the heroin while the men count the money.

One of the men suddenly jumps up and slaps Francis across the face, shouting at him in Turkish. The other man pulls a gun. Francis grabs the first Turk and swings him round into the line of fire. He bites the man's neck and a spray of blood covers the gunman's face. The gunman panics and fires, the bullet goes through his partner's neck and out the other side, almost hitting Francis in the face. Francis pushes the dead man onto the other one, who drops the gun. They both fight for the gun on the floor, but Francis is too strong. The other man runs out of the flat. Francis takes the money and the heroin, but when he gets outside, the taxi is gone, so he has to make his way on foot back to his hotel. The journey is surreal and the voices speak to him.

Back in London, Glendora is afraid of what the Yardies will do. Francis sets a trap. He hires a crew of “hard boys” he knows from the East End. He uses Glendora as bait and, when the Yardies come for her, Francis and his men ambush them. They disarm the Yardies and take them to a disused warehouse. Francis tells them the parcel was ten grand light and he nearly got killed. But he’ll make a deal with them – they can have the drugs, but he’s keeping the money. The Yardies bitch about this but they have no choice. The East End boys want to kill them and take both the drugs and the money, but Francis says he doesn’t want Glendora to be looking over her shoulder for the rest of what would be a very short life.

Francis pays off his crew and he and Glendora are in the money, although damage has been done to their relationship for using her as bait. He moves in with her and gives the house back to Angeline, on condition he can see his daughters once a fortnight. Things seem to be going well at last. But Francis is spending the money like it’s burning a hole in his pocket. There’s a confrontation with Agnes D’Argensola in a night club – she calls Glendora a drug dealer and shouts out that she has AIDS. Agnes gets thrown out of the club, but D.S Spencer and D.I. Dunne are sitting at the bar, listening.

The detectives confront Francis while he’s working out in the Hardcore Gym. They tell him they know all about his caper in Amsterdam and they’ll fit up Glendora. They ask him how she’ll be able to cope in prison without him – a young, beautiful heroin addict like her. Francis sees red, but he believes they have him over a barrel. They want him to set up another job for the Yardies, but this time he’s to keep them informed so they can make an arrest.

Francis doesn’t know what to do. If he double-crosses the Yardies again, they’ll kill Glendora for certain. If he doesn’t, the police will fit her up. The voices in his head are telling him all sorts of contradictory things and he’s beginning to lose it completely as the schizophrenia takes over. He goes to see James Greenwood, who has connections with the Yardies and a meet is set up. The Yardies are hostile and reluctant to trust Francis. However, they need someone to bring in thirty kilos of cocaine from New York. Francis says it’s too much, but they say “take it or leave it”. They also say they’ll watch Glendora until he gets back.

Francis flies to New York. He stays in a hotel in Manhattan and makes contact with the dealers. This time things go smoothly, but Francis doesn’t know how he’s going to get the stuff back without double-crossing the Yardies. He finds out that the Antichrists are in town, on the last gig of their tour and the British bouncers are with them. Jack Black has had a heart attack and died from overeating. Francis meets Matthew Moore and tells Matthew he has some jewelry he wants to smuggle back with Jack’s body. Matthew agrees to get him into the morgue to pay his respects, as long as it’s not drugs he’s smuggling. Francis swears it’s not.

The morgue scene is surreal and horrific. Jack has been autopsied and the cut down his stomach is still fresh. Francis removes all the internal organs and replaces them with bags of cocaine, then he sews Jack up again and dumps the organs. Back at the hotel, he fills the cocaine container with magazines and newspapers.

Back at Heathrow, the Yardies approach Francis in the car park, they have Glendora with them and she's not happy – this is the second time Francis has jeopardized her safety. Just as Francis is handing over the container, the detectives swoop and they're all arrested.

Francis is interrogated at a London police station. He swears he believed there was cocaine in the container, says he checked it himself. It must have been switched. The detectives have to release him and Glendora and the Yardies. Francis tells the detectives the Yardies will never trust him again after this, so there's no chance of setting up another job. He re-assures the Yardies that the cocaine is safe and he'll retrieve it for them as soon as things cool down. He thinks he and Glendora are off the hook. However, when Matthew Moore returns, he tells Francis Jack Black's body is going to be cremated. Francis has to act fast.

Francis and Matthew go to the chapel of rest. Francis breaks in and Matthew keeps watch outside. Francis opens up Jack Black and retrieves the cocaine. He pads out the empty body with cushions. But the schizophrenia kicks in and Francis suffers a breakdown. He can't find his way out of the room and he imagines he's in the incinerator and jets of flame are coming at him from all sides and his skin is burning and turning black. Francis passes out. When he comes to it's morning. He picks up the cocaine and leaves.

Outside, Matthew Moore and the car are gone. Francis stands in the middle of the street as the sound of sirens approaches. He's surrounded by police cars and arrested again.

Francis and Matthew are sentenced to six years for drug-smuggling. They are sent to separate prisons, Francis to Pentonville and Matthew to Strangeways. In Pentonville, Francis meets Hatchet Harry Kane and works out with him in the gym. But Francis is becoming increasingly strange, with the voices telling him more and more confusing things. He begins going to the prison chapel and praying to his God.

As Francis serves through his sentence, Fiona, who's now eighteen, comes to visit him. She's moved away from Angeline and now lives in a flat of her own. Fiona looks gaunt and pale. Glendora doesn't come and Francis asks Fiona to find out what's happened to her. Fiona discovers that Glendora is dead. She was shot. Francis doesn't believe her, but Fiona has the emerald ring Glendora used to wear. Francis goes berserk, the visiting room is full of people and only three warders. Francis kills one of them and seriously injures the other two before reinforcements can get through the panic-stricken visitors. Francis is sent to Broadmoor to await trial for the murder of the warder.

SIX YEARS LATER

Francis is in a country church, praying to his God. He goes back to the derelict house in Essex and it's obvious he's been living there for a while. Francis has grown a beard and his hair is longer. His knee wound is infested with maggots, which serve to keep infection away. But he walks with a distinct limp from now on. Harry Kane's money has run out and there's no food left.

Francis drives back to London. He finds Fiona's flat in Holborn and goes there to live with her. Ironically, Fiona is now a heroin addict. The affects of the tranqs and neuros have completely worn off Francis and he's engulfed by the schizophrenia. He believes Fiona is Glendora and he vows revenge on everyone who hurt them both.

Francis waits outside Paddington Green police station at night until D.S. Spencer comes out. Francis abducts him and takes him to the house in Essex. Francis questions him about what happened all those years ago. When Spencer won't answer, Francis shoots him in both kneecaps. Spencer eventually tells Francis that D.I. Dunne kept the cocaine and Glendora sold it for him. Francis is confused and tells Spencer he'll let him live if he gives up Dunne's address. Spencer does and Francis drags him out back and throws him into a shed, with the rotting bodies of Kane and Greenwood.

Dunne has been promoted to D.C.I. and Francis goes to his house late at night and breaks in. He goes through the house and finds Dunne and his wife asleep in bed. A young boy is asleep in another bedroom. Francis wakes Dunne with a hand over his mouth. The detective struggles and his wife wakes up and screams. Francis hits her in the face with the crowbar he used to break in and knocks her out. He points his gun at the detective. The boy wakes up and comes into the room. Francis tells him to sit beside his grandfather.

Francis questions Dunne about what happened, but his mind is totally confused and the questions make no sense. Dunne can't understand what he's talking about, but he admits to Francis that it was Glendora who grassed about Jack Black's body and it was him and Glendora who switched the cocaine for bicarbonate. Glendora knew how to get rid of it, she and her old boyfriend, and they split the money between the three of them. The Yardies couldn't allow it to be seen that they were double-crossed again without punishing anybody, so they killed some prostitute, blew her face off and put it about that it was Glendora. Glendora's left the country with her money and her boyfriend.

Francis gets very angry and agitated at the mention of an old boyfriend. He says Glendora had no old boyfriend. Dunne says he never met him, but Glendora said if Francis knew about him he'd get rid of him, like he did before. It's obvious Glendora was talking about her drug addiction, but Francis can't understand. He screams at Dunne that he's lying. The woman comes to and sees her own blood all over the bed and starts screaming. Francis shoots her between the eyes. Dunne tries to grab the gun, but Francis kills him. The boy is kneeling on the floor in front of a mirrored wardrobe. Francis walks over to him and pats him on the head. Francis sees himself in the wardrobe mirror, when he was a young boy. The kneeling boy and the Francis Page boy become one and the same. Francis puts the gun to the boy's head.

When Francis returns to the flat in Holborn, Fiona is dead from an overdose. Francis puts the body into his car and sets fire to the flat. He then goes to the casino. There are a couple of the Yardies in the casino, but they don't recognize Francis. He asks them if they've seen the Countess, which was Glendora's croupier name. They tell him she's dead and asks why he wants her. He says he has ten kilos of charlie in his car outside and he was told she could sell it for him.

The Yardies come out with Francis, but they're suspicious and approach the car nervously. They see Fiona's body and Francis tells them it's the Countess. Francis pulls his gun on them and accuses them of killing her. The Yardies are carrying semi-automatics and a gun-battle commences. Francis gets shot in the neck and one of his ears gets blown off. Francis shoots one of the Yardies and the other one tries to carry his friend away down the street. Francis lines up another shot. Just then, a man and woman come out of a nearby club through a side door and walk towards a limousine. Bullets from Francis's gun are already in the air. They hit the man in the chest.

Francis walks towards the couple. The man is John Nightingale and the woman is Agnes D'Argensola. She's pregnant. Francis bends over the man. The wounded John Nightingale recognizes Francis and thinks he's come back for revenge. He admits to hooking Fiona on the heroin – he says Francis fucked him, so he fucked Francis' daughter. Then he dies. Agnes D'Argensola is pregnant for Nightingale, who was going to take her to America. Francis vaguely remembers her. Sirens sound and Francis has to leave. The police follow his car.

Francis drives the car at high speed round London, trying to give the police the slip. Finally he shakes them. He parks the car and kisses Fiona's dead body. Then he walks away. Francis goes to Soho Square, where he sits on a bench. The night is surreal and strangeness surrounds him. He stays until it's almost morning.

Francis joins the rush hour crowd. He heads for a tube station and boards a tube. People try to give him a wide berth, because he's covered with congealed blood from his wounds. He emerges from the tube in the suburbs and walks up the street where he used to live with Angeline and the girls. A group of teenage schoolgirls are approaching him. They get off the pavement to avoid him. One of them is Sinéad, Francis' younger daughter. Francis tries to talk to her, but she calls him a dirty old tramp and screams at him to leave her alone or she'll call the police.

Francis continues to his old house. He knocks the door and Angeline emerges. She doesn't recognize him for a moment, until he asks her why Sinéad won't talk to him. To Francis, he's back where he was so many years ago and nothing's changed. Angeline is petrified and wants to know if Sinéad's all right. Francis gets inside. He asks Angeline for a cigarette. She says she doesn't smoke, but she'll go get him some if he wants. Francis' mind is in turmoil and he mistakes her for Fiona and tells her not to go outside, because the people out there want to hurt her. Angeline sneaks out the door when he's not looking.

Francis hears sirens approaching the house. He goes upstairs and into Fiona's old room. He hears the police entering the house downstairs and the sound of them beginning to come up the stairs. Jeanne of Dreams talks to him again and convinces him it's time. Francis puts the gun to his left eye and pulls the trigger.

END