

De Profundis

A One-Act Play by Tim Mogford

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DEDICATION

For the original cast and crew, with grateful thanks. -- TM

STORY OF THE PLAY

Josh has a box in his basement containing a number of objects that have meaning for him. As he takes them from the box characters appear who seem to know him, and yet not know him; characters from the past who are still, for Josh at least, very much in the present. Jane, Chloe and Rob don't know each other, but they all know Josh, and as the story progresses we learn the awful fate they all share, as he moves through the ritual which seems so familiar to him. The appearance of Leah, Josh's sister, seems at first to comfort him, but then agitate him. Despite Leah's ability to interact with the three strangers, and their united effort to prevent him from concluding his ritual, the end of the play brings a terrible surprise for her, too.

This one-act play introduces student actors to broken, stylized, and intense dialogue, and encourages them to embrace all the imaginative possibilities of the theatre in this tightly-constructed, claustrophobic piece.

De Profundis was first performed in April, 2012 at the Fulton Opera House Schools Theatre Festival, where it was awarded the Beth Bash Memorial Prize for Excellence in Theatre. The cast was as follows:

JOSH: Nolan Boyer
LEAH: Morgan Kauffman
JANE: Kara Fouse
CHLOE: Kirsten Dimovitz
ROB: Connor Kilgore

Stage Managers were Jillian Kravatz and Stephanie Jenkins.

Cast

(2 m, 3 w)

JOSH: A young man in his later teens, perhaps early twenties. Obsessive, controlling and frequently agitated, his character drives the action.

LEAH: Josh's sister, older by a year or two. She is warm, bright and perceptive, and is accustomed to loving her brother despite the considerable difficulties this brings her.

JANE: Although played by an older actress, Jane's manner and voice should suggest those of a young child. She has grown older in Josh's mind, but his memories of her are of a little girl. An unsettling effect.

CHLOE: A warm, feminine and attractive girl in her late teens. She is accustomed to enjoying a degree of control over boys, and Josh is an unpleasant surprise.

ROB: A boy in his late teens, Rob is both assertive and aggressive. He fights the hardest to resist his role in Josh's ritual.

Playwright's Notes

The play's title is a reference to the opening line of Psalm 130, and its iconic cry "from the depths." This is a play designed to descend: deeper into the basement, into the box of objects, into Josh's disturbed mind, and eventually into time and space. The action and characters should reflect this fading from "reality," and consequently directors and casts should feel free to explore the considerable potential of the stage to create eerie, expressionistic effects. It helped our cast to pay particular attention to the language, which begins ritualistically, almost mechanically, and gradually becomes more frenetic and desperate as Josh loses control of his own memories.

Set

The set is minimal, expressionistic. A desk and chair for Josh and three other chairs, sofas, or stools, one for Jane, Chloe and Rob. How they sit and use their piece will help to create their character.

Props

PRE-SET: Box on table containing dog leash, small doll, piece of feminine-colored fabric; lollipop wrapper; old, beaten-up baseball; and a piece of Chloe's clothing. The box should also contain a small amount of stage blood in which Josh can dip his fingers.

HAND-HELD PROPS: Lock of girl's hair in Josh's pocket; Lollipop for Jane.

De Profundis

(AT RISE: JOSH enters, walks to the desk and picks up the box which lies on top. He checks that the box is closed. HE sits, looks at the box. Goes back to the "door," listens. Returns to the desk. He takes a lock of hair from his pocket. This has the air of a much-rehearsed ritual. JOSH opens the box. Smiles. Enter LEAH.)

LEAH: Josh? *(Concerned.)* Josh?

JOSH: No.

LEAH: Josh –

JOSH: No. Not time yet.

(HE places the lock of hair in the box. LEAH's face immediately becomes neutral. She turns and exits.)

JOSH: *(Cont'd.)* P. Prince. *(Takes out a dog leash and places it on the desk.)* Prince with a P. Have you seen him? He's lost. Have you seen him? It's a responsibility, Josh. You must take care. No noise, no mess. Take him to the park, Josh. Find your bench to sit. Sit, Prince, sit. Peaceful bench. P. Peaceful. P Prince. My bench. My dog. He does what I say. *(HE picks up the leash and looks at it.)* You do what I say.

(With his other hand, he takes a small doll from the box. Enter JANE. She is not a child, but her voice and physicality suggest it. JOSH sometimes talks to the doll, at others out to audience. JANE has a lollipop.)

JOSH: *(Cont'd.)* My dog. Mine. P. Prince. My bench, with my dog. *(Looks pointedly at the doll.)* Do what I say.

JANE: *(This speech has the air of a ritual.)* Do you have a drink? If you have a drink there I'll come. I'd like a drink at your house. Is this your house? It's clean, it's so clean. I like your house. It's better than my mommy's house.

JANE: *(Cont'd.)* I think I want to stay at your house. I'd like to stay and play. If I stay, can we play? Is this your room?

(JOSH goes to put the doll on the desk, looks at leash. Puts the leash down, now puts down the doll. JANE sits, staring. JOSH picks up a piece of fabric, something feminine. Enter CHLOE.)

CHLOE: I like your bench. Is this your bench? You're watching me. I like how you watch me, so I know if I'm pretty. Pretty P like a picture. Will you take my picture? Do I look pretty? My friends came the first time, but you chose me. I know why you chose me, because that was how it was meant to be. Tell me what to think, because I don't know. Where would I be without you?

JOSH: Where would you be without me?

CHLOE: Where would I be without you? Can I see your house? Where do you live? I hope it's clean. If it's clean I'll come. No noise, though. No noise, no mess. That's what I like.

JOSH: *(Placing the fabric on the desk. CHLOE loses her animation.)* That's what I like. *(HE takes out a baseball, old and beaten-up. Enter ROB.)* You can come in. You made a mess.

ROB: Yes, I made a mess. I'm sorry. My – responsibility. No mess. I did it – it was me. So now it must be clean. Clean it up, help Josh clean it up. Do you want to play? The big kids play ball. You can play. You can be like the big kids. Responsibility – if you make a mess you have to clean. Clean it up.

JOSH: Clean it up.

ROB: Yes, clean it. Clean me. Make me clean.

JOSH: I will.

ROB: Thank you.

(JOSH puts the baseball down on the desk. ROB loses animation, becomes neutral. JOSH picks up the leash. Jane's lollipop wrapper flutters to the ground. JOSH sees, picks up the doll, and speaks to it. JANE comes to life.)

End of Freeview

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