

**SISTER ASLOYSIUS, SISTER JAMES**

(In the garden. Sister Aloysius is fiddling with a potted plant. Sister James enters.)

SISTER JAMES. Good afternoon, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Good Afternoon, Sister James. Mr. McGinn pruned this bush, which was the right thing to do, but he neglected to protect it from the frost.

SISTER JAMES. Have we had a frost?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. When it comes, it's too late.

SISTER JAMES. You know about gardening?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. A little. Where is your class?

SISTER JAMES. The girls are having Music.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. And the boys?

SISTER JAMES. They're in the rectory.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. With Father Flynn.

SISTER JAMES. Yes. He's giving them a talk.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. On what subject?

SISTER JAMES. How to be a man.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Well, if Sisters were permitted in the rectory, I would be interested to hear that talk. I don't know how to be a man. I would like to know what's involved. Have you ever given the girls a talk on how to be a woman?

SISTER JAMES. No. I wouldn't be competent.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Why not?

SISTER JAMES. I just don't think I would. I took my vows at the beginning . . . Before . . . At the beginning.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. The founder of our order, the Blessed Mother Seton, was married and had five children before embarking on her vows.

SISTER JAMES. I've often wondered how she managed so much in one life.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Life perhaps is longer than you think and the dictates of the soul more numerous. I was married.

SISTER JAMES. You were!

SISTER ALOYSIUS. You could at least hide your astonishment.

SISTER JAMES. I . . . didn't know.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. When one takes on the habit, one must close the door on secular things. My husband died in the war against Adolph Hitler.

SISTER JAMES. Really! Excuse me, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. But I'm like you. I'm not sure I would feel competent to lecture tittering girls on the subject of womanhood. How is your class? How is Donald Muller?

SISTER JAMES. He is thirteenth in class.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I know. That's sufficient. Is he being accepted?

SISTER JAMES. He has no friends.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That would be a lot to expect after only two months. Has anyone hit him?

SISTER JAMES. No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Someone will. And when it happens, send them right down to me.

SISTER JAMES. I'm not so sure anyone will.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. There is a statue of St. Patrick on one side of the church altar and a statue of St. Anthony on the other. This parish church serves Irish and Italian families. Someone will hit Donald Muller.

SISTER JAMES. He has a protector.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Who?

SISTER JAMES. Father Flynn.

**SISTER JAMES, SISTER ALOYSIUS**

(In Sister Aloysius' office.)

SISTER JAMES. I've been trying to become more cold in my thinking as you suggested . . . I feel as if I've lost my way a little, Sister Aloysius. I had the most terrible dream last night. I want to be guided by you and responsible to the children, but I want my peace of mind. I must tell you I have been longing for the return of my peace of mind.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. You may not have it. It is not your place to be complacent. That's for the children. That's what we give them.

SISTER JAMES. I think I'm starting to understand you a little. But it's so unsettling to look at things and people with suspicion. It feels as if I'm less close to God. I've become more reserved in class. I feel separated from the children.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That's as it should be.

SISTER JAMES. But I feel. Wrong. And about this other matter, I don't have any evidence. I'm not at all certain that anything's happened.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What have you seen?

SISTER JAMES. I don't know.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What have you seen?

SISTER JAMES. He took Donald to the rectory.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What for?

SISTER JAMES. A talk.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Alone?

SISTER JAMES. Yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. When?

SISTER JAMES. A week ago.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Why didn't you tell me?

SISTER JAMES. I didn't think there was anything wrong with it. It never came into my mind that he . . . that there could be anything wrong.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Of all the children. Donald Muller. I suppose it makes sense.

SISTER JAMES. How does it make sense?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Our first Negro student. I thought there'd be fighting, a parent or two to deal with . . . I should've foreseen this possibility.

SISTER JAMES. How could you imagine it?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. It is my job to outshine the fox in cleverness! That's my job!

SISTER JAMES. But maybe it's nothing!

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Then why do you look like you've seen the Devil?

SISTER JAMES. It's just the way the boy acted when he came back to class.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. He said something?

SISTER JAMES. No. It was his expression. He looked frightened and . . . he put his head on the desk in the most peculiar way. And one other thing. I think there was alcohol on his breath. There was alcohol on his breath.

**FATHER FLYNN, SISTER JAMES, SISTER ALOYSIUS**

(In Sister Aloysius' office.)

FLYNN. I think we're getting off the subject.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Yes, you're right, back to it. The Christmas pageant. We must be careful how Donald Muller is used in the pageant.

FLYNN. What about Donald Muller?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. We must be careful, in the pageant, that we neither hide Donald Muller nor put him forward.

FLYNN. Because of the color of his skin.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That's right.

FLYNN. Why?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Come, Father. You're being disingenuous.

FLYNN. I think he should be treated like every other boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. You yourself singled the boy out for special attention. You held a private meeting with him at the rectory. (Turning to Sister J.) A week ago?

SISTER JAMES. Yes.

FLYNN. (He realizes something is up.) What are we talking about?

SISTER JAMES. Donald Muller?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. The boy acted strangely when he returned to class.

FLYNN. (Turning to Sister J.) He did?

SISTER JAMES. When he returned from the rectory. A little odd, yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Can you tell us why?

FLYNN. How did he act strangely?

SISTER JAMES. I'm not sure how to explain it. He laid his head on the desk . . .

FLYNN. You mean you had some impression?

SISTER JAMES. Yes.

FLYNN. And he'd come from the rectory so you're asking me if I know anything about it?

SISTER JAMES. That's it.

FLYNN. Hmmm. Did you want to discuss the pageant, is that why I'm here, or is this what you wanted to discuss?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. This.

FLYNN. Well. I feel a little uncomfortable.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Why?

FLYNN. Why do you think? Something about your tone.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I would prefer a discussion of fact rather than tone.

FLYNN. Well. If I had judged my conversation with Donald Muller to be of concern to you, Sister, I would have sat you down and talked to you about it. But I did not judge it to be of concern to you.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Perhaps you are mistaken in your understanding of what concerns me. The boy is in my school, and his well-being is my responsibility.

FLYNN. His well-being is not at issue.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I am not satisfied that is true. He was upset when he returned to class.

FLYNN. (To Sister J.) Did he say something?

SISTER JAMES. No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What happened in the rectory?

FLYNN. Happened? Nothing happened. I had a talk with a boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What about?

FLYNN. It was a private matter.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. He's twelve years old. What could be private?

FLYNN. I'll say it again, Sister. I object to your tone.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. This is not about my tone or your tone, Father Flynn. It's about arriving at the truth.

FLYNN. Of what?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. You know what I'm talking about. Don't you? You're controlling the expression on your face right now. Aren't you?

FLYNN. My face? You said you wanted to talk about the pageant, Sister. That's why I'm here. Am I to understand that you brought me into your office to confront me in some way? It's outrageous. I'm not answerable to you. What exactly are you accusing me of?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I am not accusing you of anything, Father Flynn. I am asking you to tell me what happened in the rectory.

## FATHER FLYNN

(At the pulpit, to his congregation.)

A woman was gossiping with a friend about a man she hardly knew -- I know none of you have ever done this -- and that night she had a dream. A great hand appeared over her and pointed down at her. She was immediately seized with an overwhelming sense of guilt.

The next day she went to confession. She got the old parish priest, Father O'Rourke, and she told him the whole thing. "Is gossiping a sin?" she asked the old man. "Was that the Hand of God Almighty pointing a finger at me? Should I be asking your absolution? Father, tell me, have I done something wrong?"

(Irish brogue.) "Yes!" Father O'Rourke answered her. "Yes, you ignorant, badly brought-up female! You have borne false witness against your neighbor, you have played fast and loose with his reputation, and you should be heartily ashamed!" So the woman said she was sorry and asked forgiveness. "Not so fast!" says O'Rourke. "I want you to go home, take a pillow up on your roof, cut it open with a knife, and return here to me!"

So she went home, took the pillow off her bed, a knife from the drawer, went up the fire escape to the roof, and stabbed the pillow. Then she went back to the old priest as instructed.

"Did you gut the pillow with the knife?" he says.

"Yes, Father."

"And what was the result?"

"Feathers," she said.

"Feathers?" he repeated.

"Feathers everywhere, Father!"

"Now I want you to go back and gather up every last feather that flew out on the wind!"

"Well," she says, "it can't be done. I don't know where they went. The wind took them all over."

"And that," said Father O'Rourke, "is gossip!"

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen.

**SISTER ALOYSIUS, MRS. MULLER**

(In Sister Aloysius' office.)

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I'm concerned about the relationship between Father Flynn and your son.

MRS. MULLER. You don't say. Concerned.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That it may not be right.

MRS. MULLER. Uh-huh. Well, there's something wrong with everybody, isn't that so? Got to be forgiving.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I'm concerned, to be frank, that Father Flynn may have made advances on your son.

MRS. MULLER. MAY have made.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I can't be certain.

MRS. MULLER. No evidence?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. No.

MRS. MULLER. Then maybe there's nothing to it?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I think there is something to it.

MRS. MULLER. Well, I would prefer not to see it that way if you don't mind.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I can understand that this is hard to hear. I think Father Flynn gave Donald the altar wine.

MRS. MULLER. Why would he do that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Has Donald been acting strangely?

MRS. MULLER. No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Nothing out of the ordinary?

MRS. MULLER. He's been himself.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. All right.

MRS. MULLER. Look, Sister, I don't want any trouble, and I feel like you're on the march somehow.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I'm not sure you completely understand.

MRS. MULLER. I think I understand the kind of thing you're talking about. But I don't want to get into it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What's that?

MRS. MULLER. Not to be disagreeing with you, but if we're talking about something floating around between this priest and my son, that ain't my son's fault.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I'm not suggesting it.



MRS. MULLER. He's just a boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I know.

MRS. MULLER. Twelve years old. If somebody should be taking blame for anything, it should be the man, not the boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I agree with you completely.

MRS. MULLER. You're agreeing with me but I'm sitting in the principal's office talking about my son. Why isn't the priest in the principal's office, if you know what I'm saying and you'll excuse my bringing it up.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. You're here because I'm concerned about Donald's welfare.

MRS. MULLER. You think I'm not?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Of course you are.

MRS. MULLER. Let me ask you something. You honestly think that priest gave Donald that wine to drink?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Yes, I do.

MRS. MULLER. Then how come my son got kicked off the altar boys if it was the man that gave it to him?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. The boy got caught, the man didn't.

MRS. MULLER. So you give my son the whole blame. No problem my son getting blamed and punished. That's easy. You know why that is?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Perhaps you should let me talk. I think you're getting upset.

MRS. MULLER. My boy came to this school 'cause they were gonna kill him at the public school. So we were lucky enough to get him in here for his last year. Good. His father don't like him. He comes here, the kids don't like him. One man is good to him. This priest. Puts out a hand to the boy. Does the man have his reasons? Yes. Everybody has their reasons. YOU have your reasons. But do I ask the man why he's good to my son? No. I don't care why. My son needs some man to care about him and see him through to where he wants to go. And thank God, this educated man with some kindness in him wants to do just that.