

DOUBT

A screenplay by
John Patrick Shanley

based on his stage play

7 A.M. SUNDAY MORNING, THE BRONX. LATE OCTOBER, 1964.

We're on Beach Avenue. On the left, a block of apartment buildings glow gold in the sun. On the right, private houses. Some trees, some leaves falling. The apartment buildings are five stories high, the private homes two stories. It's a clean, peaceful place. There's not a soul to be seen.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EARLY MORNING

An old man plays a zither.

INT. AN APARTMENT BUILDING BEDROOM - MORNING

12-year-old JIMMY HURLEY is asleep. He's all boy, rough working class haircut, freckles. His MA comes in, still in nightclothes and shakes him. SHE TURNS ON THE LIGHT.

MA

Jimmy, come on. You're serving today.

The boy wakes and Ma leaves. He sits up in his pajamas.

WARREN (O.S.)

Christeeeen! Where's my pants?

MA (O.S.)

On the bed. If they had teeth, they would've bit you.

WARREN (O.S.)

If my pants had teeth they'd be in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.

Jimmy gets out of bed.

EXT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM WINDOW - MORNING

There's a fire escape.

EXT. NOW WE SEE THE WHOLE ALLEY - MORNING

Which is formed by these apartment buildings. It's a strange, gloomy, expressionistic sight. Nothing but fire escapes facing each other to the left and right, a 30 foot gap of cracked concrete between. The TITLE APPEARS:

(CONTINUED)

DOUBT

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING. A MAN OUTSIDE PLAYS THE ZITHER.
JIMMY WALKS OUT TO A BEAUTIFUL DAY.

ZITHER MAN

Jimmy! Go to the store, buy me the
newspaper and cigarettes.

JIMMY

Can't. Serving mass. I'm an alter
boy.

EXT. SAINT NICHOLAS CHURCH AND SCHOOL - DAY

It's old brown brick, more school than church in appearance.
Trees. Nice place. Kevin is coming out of the candy store
across the street. He and Jimmy greet each other as Jimmy
heads for a side door.

JIMMY

Hey, Kevin!

KEVIN

Hey, Jimmy!

INT. EMPTY CHURCH - DAY

The organist sits down and prepares for mass.

INT. A CHANGING ROOM BEHIND THE ALTAR - DAY

A closet, a bench. It's dimly lit. Jimmy is staring up at a
painting. He turns at the sound of a door. DONALD MILLER
rushes in. He's also 12, a bit chubby, black.

JIMMY

There you are.

DONALD

Overslept.

JIMMY

Well, you made it. I'll do the
cruets if you light the charcoal.

(CONTINUED)

DONALD
You think I'm fat?

JIMMY
You're alright. What? Clothes don't
fit?

DONALD
No, they fit.

Donald moves to the closet; he begins to unbutton his shirt.
Jimmy exits with the candle snuffer.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

The Hurleys step out of their building.

MA
You're gonna be going to the bakery
after mass.

WARREN
I am? Why don't you go?

MA
I'm gonna be making breakfast.

WARREN
I can make breakfast.

MA
When have you ever? Funny man.

Another man greets a woman on her way to church.

INT. IN THE CHANGING ROOM - A TABLE - DAY

Jimmy fills the cruets with water and wine. Donald lights
the charcoal in the incense burner. Jimmy carries the cruets
past Flynn, who is preparing for the service.

JIMMY
Good morning, Father.

INT. THE CHURCH - THE ORGANIST PLAYS - DAY

The choir sings HOLY GOD WE PRAISE THY NAME.

(CONTINUED)

EXT. THE STREETS OUTSIDE THE CHURCH - DAY

PARISHIONERS, all working class people, are walking to church. Everyone is dressed quite nicely. The older women wear hats, the younger women have napkins pinned to their hair. The men are in jackets and ties; they've used hair tonic; some wear hats. People say good morning.

INT. THE CHURCH - THE ORGANIST PLAYS - DAY

Parishioners file in and sit down.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHURCH ALTAR - FATHER FLYNN AT THE PULPIT - DAY

He's an educated man with a slight Eastern seaboard working class accent.

End of song. END OF CREDITS.

FLYNN

Be seated.

THE CONGREGATION SITS.

THE ALTAR BOYS SIT - IT'S JIMMY AND DONALD.

The boys look to the priest.

BACK TO FLYNN WHO LOOKS THE CONGREGATION OVER AND THEN POSITS:

FLYNN

What do you do when you're not sure? That's the topic of my sermon today.

NOW WE SEE SISTER JAMES IN ONE OF THE PEWS LISTENING.

She wears the black bonnet of the order of the Sisters of Charity. She's young and she's good. Do you remember what good is? We hear Flynn while we look at her.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN (O.S.)
Last year, when President Kennedy
was assassinated, who among us did
not experience the most profound
disorientation? Despair?

Sister James eyes shine with tears.

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
Which way? What now?

NOW TO A SLOW TRACKING SHOT OF A WHOLE FAMILY
PARENTS (RAPT), a NEWBORN, KIDS (Subtle squirm).

FLYNN (O.S.)
What do I say to my kids? What do I
tell myself? It was a time of
people sitting together, bound
together by a common feeling of
hopelessness.

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
But think of that! Your BOND with
your fellow being was your Despair.
It was a public experience. It was
awful, but we were in it together.

HIGH ANGLE MASTER SHOT OF CONGREGATION FROM BACK OF CHURCH

FLYNN (O.S.)
How much worse is it then for the
lone man, the lone woman, stricken
by a private calamity?

LOW DUTCH ANGLE:

A single of a PALE WOMAN.

FLYNN (O.S.)
'No one knows I'm sick.'

LOW DUTCH ANGLE:

A single of a STOUT OLDER MAN.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN (O.S.)
 'No one knows I've lost my last
 real friend.'

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
 "No one knows I've done something
 wrong." Imagine the isolation.
 Now you see the world as through a
 window. On one side of the glass:
 happy, untroubled people, and on
 the other side: you.

A dramatic silence.

BACK TO SISTER JAMES, WHO SNEEZES.

A girl whispers, "God Bless you, Sister." Sister James is
 embarrassed.

SISTER JAMES
 Thank you.

FLYNN (O.S.)
 I want to tell you a story.

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
 A cargo ship sank one night. It
 caught fire and went down. And
 only this one sailor survived.
 He found a lifeboat, rigged a
 sail...and being of a nautical
 discipline...turned his eyes to the
 Heavens and read the stars.

JIMMY AND DONALD IMAGINING IT

FLYNN (O.S.)
 He set a course for his home, and
 exhausted, fell asleep.

Sister Aloysius gets up and walks down the aisle. We do not
 see her face. On her way, she gestures to various children
 to sit up and stop talking.

WILLIAM LONDON, a fidgety blond boy of 12, is heard flirting
 with two girls, ALICE AND SARAH.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIAM (O.S.)
 (whispers)
 ...just keeps going on. I'm really bored.

FLYNN (O.S.)
 Clouds rolled in. And for the next twenty nights, he could no longer see the stars. He thought he was on course, but there was no way to be certain.

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
 And as the days rolled on, and the sailor wasted away, he began to have doubts.

Sister Aloysius walks up alongside William and the two girls, slapping William on the back of the head.

WILLIAM
 He just keeps on going. I mean - -
 Ow.

FLYNN (O.S.)
 Had he set his course right? Was he still going on towards his home?

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
 Or was he horribly lost...

Now to a boy RAYMOND in a pew who is resting his chin on the pew in front of him. He's sleepy.

FLYNN (O.S.)
 and doomed to a terrible death? No way to know. The message of the constellations - - had he imagined it because of his desperate circumstance? Or had he seen truth once...

We see a nun's habit appear by the boy and then the nun leans down to whisper to the boy.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS APPEARS RIGHT BY THE BOY'S FACE.

Her face is obscured by the black bonnet. She rotates her head toward the boy and she is revealed for the first time. Her eyes like diamonds. She is terrifying.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Straighten. Up.

Raymond straightens up instantly.

Sister Aloysius, finished with the boy, rises into view. She is listening to the sermon, watching the priest.

FLYNN (O.S.)
and now had to hold on to it
without further reassurance?

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
There are those of you in church
today who know exactly the crisis
of faith I describe. And I want to
say to you: Doubt can be a bond as
powerful and sustaining as
certainty. When you are lost, you
are not alone.

SHOT OF CONGREGATION

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

BACK TO SISTER ALOYSIUS

Crossing herself.

FLYNN (O.S.)
Amen. Please rise.

MASTER SHOT OF THE CONGREGATION RISING

The organ begins to play. Choir sings PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM
ALL BLESSINGS COME.

SINGLE OF DONALD SEEING SOMETHING.

(CONTINUED)

DONALD'S POV: BIRD IN THE CUPOLA.

INT. SACRISTY - DAY

DONALD
Hey, Father.

FLYNN
Hey, Champ.

DONALD
That was some sermon.

FLYNN
Did it mean something to you?

DONALD
I want to do that. I want to be a priest.

FLYNN
You'd be a good one, I'm sure.
Here, take a look.
(He demonstrates a toy. A dancer that turns when you hold up a mirror. Donald smiles)
See? (singsong) Do-do-do-do-do.
She's dancin'. Kinda neat.

DONALD
Yeah.

FLYNN
Here. You try.
(Flynn gives it to him)
That's for you. Take it.

DONALD
Thank you, Father.

FLYNN
You're welcome.

EXT. THE CONVENT ATTACHED TO THE CHURCH SCHOOL - PREDAWN

There's a garden outside with a statue of Elizabeth Seton. We hear a hand bell being rung, not loud.

INT. THE CONVENT - SISTER JAMES' CELL - PREDAWN

Her eyes open. The bell rings again. She gets up. She is refreshed and happy to start her day. A single bed, a sink.

INT. CONVENT HALLWAY - THE NUNS EMERGING TO BEGIN THE DAY

INT. THE BEDROOM - DAWN

Sister James has bathed. She's partially dressed but still working on her bonnet. She puts on her rosary.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH SCHOOL - MORNING

SIX CLASSES of uniformed BOYS and GIRLS, 25 to a class, are lined up in double file and headed in to the compound. Each class is loosely overseen by a Nun.

SISTER JAMES

Like Noah's Ark, girls. Two by two.

CUT TO:

EXT. AN INNER COURTYARD - THE EIGHTH GRADE - OVERSEEN BY SISTER JAMES - MORNING

FLYNN (O.S.)

Morning, Sister James.

SISTER JAMES

Good morning, Father Flynn.
Beautiful day.

NOW WE SEE FLYNN AND SISTER JAMES

Standing with her class. Jimmy's there, as well as Donald Miller. Sarah and Alice are faintly heard singing "This Old Man."

FLYNN

Not too bad.

(To the Kids)

How are the criminals doing today?

(CONTINUED)

Several Kids answer "Not bad, Father." "Good, Father."

FLYNN
Morning, Champ.

DONALD
Morning, Father Flynn.

Flynn grabs William London's wrist playfully. William is spunky.

FLYNN
You wash those hands today, Mister London?

William snatches his hand away.

WILLIAM
I washed 'em, Father.

FLYNN
I don't know. They're a different color than your neck.

Kids laugh at the remark, embarrassing William. Flynn has walked on to greet someone out of view.

EXT. THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MORNING

Sister Aloysius is looking through the window, down on the student populace. Her eyes narrow.

BACK TO SISTER JAMES

William takes a step towards her.

WILLIAM
Sister, are we having the test today?

SISTER JAMES
Tomorrow, William.

WILLIAM
Is it long division?

SISTER JAMES
Among other things.

(CONTINUED)

Sister James turns away to greet another nun and William grabs her arm to ask her another question.

SISTER JAMES
Good morning, Sister.

William touches her sleeve.

WILLIAM
How much of it will be long
division?

SISTER ALOYSIUS (O.S.)
Boy!

THE WHOLE SCHOOL STOPS AND LOOKS UP

Sister Aloysius looks down on the courtyard from the balcony outside her office.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
William London. Come up here! Come
smartly now.

Pale and alone, William walks up the stairs.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Don't make me wait.

FATHER FLYNN AND SISTER JAMES WATCH FROM BELOW

As two of the girls confer.

ALICE (O.S.)
What did he do?

SARAH (O.S.)
He touched Sister James.

Flynn confides to Sister James.

FLYNN
The dragon is hungry!

Sister James blushes with pleasure at the attention, stifles a giggle. The noise resumes.

SARAH (O.S.)
You don't touch a nun.

INT. AN EMPTY HALLWAY IN THE SCHOOL - DAY

RAYMOND, a student, rings a big brass bell with relish. It signals the start of the school day.

INT. SISTER JAMES' CLASSROOM - DAY

The class is in session. There's about 25 kids, half boys, half girls. The girls are on one side of the class, the boys on the other. The class has not totally settled down. There are giggles and whispers.

SISTER JAMES
Take out your history books,
please. Turn to page 683.

RALPH raises his hand.

SISTER JAMES
Yes, Ralph.

RALPH
I forgot my history book.

SISTER JAMES
You can look on with Raymond. Mr.
London? Do you have your history
book?

WILLIAM
Uh, no, Sister.

SISTER JAMES
Share with Mr. Malloy, please.

WILLIAM
Do I have to? His breath stinks!

The class laughs.

SISTER JAMES
I'm sure Mr. Malloy's breath is
just fine.

A door creaks.

SISTER ALOYSIUS IS ENTERING THE CLASS

(CONTINUED)

She takes in that the class is noisy. The class stands.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Be seated.

SISTER JAMES

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the
thirty-second president of The
United States.

BACK TO SISTER ALOYSIUS, WHO SPEAKS TO NOREEN

SISTER ALOYSIUS

That barrette out of your hair,
Miss Horan.

Noreen takes a rhinestone barrette out of her hair.

NOREEN

Yes, Sister.

Sister Aloysius takes a position at the back of the class.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Morning, Sister James. Continue.

BACK TO SISTER JAMES WHO DOES CONTINUE

At first self-consciously, and then with increasing
confidence.

SISTER JAMES

Franklin D. Roosevelt, together
with Abraham Lincoln and John
Fitzgerald Kennedy, was perhaps our
greatest president. When he
assumed office, 13,000,000 people
in this country were unemployed.
They'd lost hope. And President
Roosevelt said to these people:
"The only thing we have to fear is
fear itself." What did he mean by
that? James?

JIMMY

I think he was trying to say
there's nothing really wrong, you
know? So don't get so emotional.

SISTER ALOYSIUS LISTENING - SHE HAS RESERVATIONS

(CONTINUED)

Sister Aloysius spots a wire coming out of a boy's ear. It's TOMMY CONROY. She walks over, pulls the plug out of Conroy's ear.

SISTER JAMES (O.S.)
 Maybe...Maybe he was saying that
 the world is good and we need only
 work together to overcome our
 problems.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 What's this, Mr. Conroy?

TOMMY
 I don't know, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 You don't know you have a wire
 coming out of your ear?

CONROY
 No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 Huh? Huh?

CONROY
 No, Sister. I didn't.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 You come with me, boy. Go.
 (They leave)

SISTER JAMES
 Who knows what the New Deal was?

INT. THE SCHOOL BASEMENT - CHOIR PRACTICE - DAY

Sister James is leading the CHOIR in singing THE FIRST NOEL. She's very happy to be doing this. MRS. KEAN accompanies on a portable electric organ. Sister Aloysius sits in the back with SISTER RAYMOND.

SISTER RAYMOND
 I love this song. (No response.)

INT. THE CONVENT DINING ROOM - NIGHT

EIGHT NUNS sit around a rectangular table having dinner. No one speaks. Sister Aloysius is at the head of the table. To her right is a very old nun named SISTER VERONICA. To her left is Sister James.

WE GO TO A SINGLE OF AN OLD WOMAN'S HAND

Softly feeling for a fork. The fork is lost underneath her plate.

NOW WE SEE SISTER ALOYSIUS NOTICING SISTER VERONICA

Who is trying to find her fork without anyone seeing. Sister Aloysius gently pushes the fork under Veronica's hand so the old woman finds it.

NOW WE GO TO SISTER JAMES TRYING TO EAT THE SALISBURY STEAK

She pulls an inedible piece out of her mouth and is about to put it on her plate when she sees that Sister Aloysius is watching her. She puts it back in her mouth.

SISTER ALOYSIUS RINGS A LITTLE BELL THAT'S BY HER

Then she addresses the table.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
This past Sunday. What do you think
that sermon was about?

Sister James is, with difficulty, swallowing.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sister James.

SISTER JAMES
Huh?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
What was Father Flynn's sermon
about?

SISTER JAMES
Well, Doubt. He was talking about
Doubt?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Why?

SISTER JAMES

Excuse me, Sister?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Well, sermons come from somewhere, don't they? Is Father Flynn in Doubt? Is he concerned that someone else is in Doubt?

SISTER JAMES

I suppose you'd have to ask him.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

No, that would not be appropriate. He is my superior. And if he were troubled, he should confess it to a fellow priest, or to the Monsignor. We do not share intimate information with priests.

SISTER TERESA

No.

SISTER RAYMOND

That's true.

SISTER VERONICA

What are we saying?

Silence falls again.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I want you all to be alert. I am concerned, perhaps needlessly, about, eh, matters in St. Nicholas School.

SISTER RAYMOND asks timidly.

SISTER RAYMOND

Academically?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I was not inviting a guessing game, Sister Raymond.

Sister Aloysius notices her napkin stirring. A breeze?

INT. A CHANGING ROOM BEHIND THE ALTAR - DAY

Father Flynn walks in. He looks up at the stained glass eye.

EXT. WILLIAM LONDON OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL - DAY

He has a bloody handkerchief to his nose. He's in a good mood. He takes the handkerchief away. The nose has stopped bleeding. He smiles. He lights a cigarette.

INT. A LARGE CAFETERIA WITH MANY TABLES AND WINDOWS - DAY

It has good natural light. The STUDENT BODY is having lunch.

INT. THE CAFETERIA - SISTER ALOYSIUS IS AT A TABLE - DAY

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Missy! Get away from her. And sit
down.

She sits with Sister Veronica, having a glass of water. She washes down an aspirin. Sister Veronica is eating with gusto.

Sister James appears with a tray.

SISTER JAMES
May I join you, Sister Aloysius?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes.

Sister James seats herself. Her food is revolting but she tries to hide that from her superior and herself.

SISTER JAMES
Chicken Chow Mein.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sister Veronica's favorite.

SISTER VERONICA
It's very good.

SISTER TERESA
I like the noodles. I like the
crunch.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
What happened to William London?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I sent him home.

SISTER JAMES
Oh dear. So he's still bleeding?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes.

SISTER JAMES
His nose just let loose and started
gushing during the Pledge of
Allegiance.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Was it spontaneous?

SISTER JAMES
What?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
His nosebleed.

SISTER JAMES
What else would it be?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Self-induced.

SISTER JAMES
You mean you think he might've
intentionally given himself a
nosebleed?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Exactly.

SISTER JAMES
No!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
You are a very innocent person,
Sister James. William London is a
fidgety boy. If you do not keep
right on him, he will do anything
to escape his chair.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

He would set his foot on fire for
half a day out of school.

She notices Sister Veronica's sleeve has goo on it, dips a
napkin in water, and sets about cleaning it off.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Here. Sister, allow me to help
you. Your sleeve.

SISTER VERONICA
Uh-oh.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Mmm. Let's see.

SISTER VERONICA
Oh thank you, Sister.

INT. ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL - STAIRWELL - DAY

Sister Aloysius and Sister James walk up the stairs.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sister Veronica is going blind.

SISTER JAMES
Oh how horrible!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
If they find out in the rectory,
she'll be gone. So, if she looks
unsteady, take her hand.

INT. CLASSROOM - SISTER ALOYSIUS AND SISTER JAMES ENTER - DAY

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Ordinarily, I assign my most
experienced teachers to eighth
grade, but I am working within
constraints.

She sits in Sister James' chair. Her bones seem to hurt a
moment. She rummages through the desk drawers.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Are you in control of your class?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES

I think so.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Usually more students are sent down to me.

SISTER JAMES

I try to take care of things myself.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

That can be an error. You are answerable to me, I to the Monsignor, he to the Bishop, and so on up to the Holy Father. There is a chain. Make use of it. (Discovers a small box. Inquires.) Candy?

SISTER JAMES

Cough drops.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Candy by another name.

Sister Aloysius throws the box in the wastebasket. She gets up.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

How is Donald Miller doing?

SISTER JAMES

Steady.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Good.

(Points to a back corner chair)

That girl...Noreen Horan.

SISTER JAMES

I've seated her as far away from the boys as possible. Doesn't do much good.

Sister Aloysius has gone to Noreen's desk and finds the barrette; she examines it in the sunlight as if it's a murder weapon. She works it. It looks like little legs spreading.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Just get her through. Intact.

CUT TO AN OPEN WINDOW AS A GUST OF WIND PROPELS DEAD LEAVES

Into the classroom and on to the floor. Sister Aloysius goes to the window and shuts it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What's this? The wind is so...peripatetic this year. Is that the word I want?

SISTER ALOYSIUS' TIED-IN POV DOWN TO THE STREET

We faintly hear Father Flynn share convivial chat with the OLD MONSIGNOR on the street.

MONSIGNOR

Wasn't that a fine cut of beef for dinner, Father Flynn?!

FLYNN

It was, Monsignor, very good. Though I believe it was chicken.

MONSIGNOR

Was it a chicken? Yes, I guess it was a chicken. It was very good.

The old man pats the younger man's shoulder warmly.

After a moment, we hear a timid Sister James.

SISTER JAMES (O.S.)

Is something the matter?

SISTER ALOYSIUS (O.S.)

What?

SISTER JAMES (O.S.)

Is something the matter?

SISTER ALOYSIUS, WHO IS STILL STARING OUT THE WINDOW

SISTER ALOYSIUS

No. Why? Is something the matter?

SISTER JAMES

I don't think so.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Well, then, nothing's the matter then.

Another silence. Sister James doesn't know what to do.

SISTER JAMES

Yes.

The older nun picks something off the floor.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What's this?

SISTER JAMES

A pen?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

A ballpoint pen. The students are not using them for assignments, I hope?

SISTER JAMES

No, of course not.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I'm sorry I allowed even cartridge pens into this school. Always the easy way out these days. Every easy choice today will have its consequence tomorrow. Mark my words.

Sister James picks up dead leaves.

SISTER JAMES

Yes, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Ballpoints make them press down, when they press down, they write like monkeys.

SISTER JAMES

I don't allow them ballpoint pens.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

And yet here one is. Penmanship is dying all across this country.

SISTER JAMES

I hope not.

Sister Aloysius starts to walk out and stops, examining the top of the desk.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You should frame something. Put it up on the blackboard. (Picking up a framed photograph.) Put the Pope up.

SISTER JAMES

That's the wrong Pope. He's deceased.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I don't care what Pope it is. Use the glass to see behind you. The children should think you have eyes in the back of your head.

SISTER JAMES

Wouldn't that be a little frightening?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Only to the ones who are up to no good.

She goes.

INT. THE SCHOOL BASEMENT - LONDON AT THE FOUL LINE - DAY

FLYNN (O.S.)

Relax. Put it up there.

William shoots and misses.

FLYNN

All right, now.

Jimmy swaps positions and moves onto the foul line.

FLYNN

The thing about shooting from the foul line (Points at Jimmy's head.) is it's psychological. All right, come up with a routine.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

All right, shift your weight, move
your hips...

The boys laugh.

FLYNN

Hey, you think that's funny, Ralph?
You know what's funny is you never
getting a foul shot.

BOYS

Oooh.

FLYNN

All right, concentrate on the
routine, and you'll forget to get
tensed up. All right, go ahead,
Jimmy.

Jimmy shoots and gets it in. Smiles.

FLYNN

Good man. You listen. That's good.
All right, now sit down. Everyone.
Good. On another matter,
I've noticed several of you guys
got dirty nails. All right, I don't
want to see that. I'm not talking
about the length of your nails, I'm
talking about cleanliness. See?
Look at my nails.

CLOSE UP OF HIS EXTENDED HANDS - HIS NAILS ARE QUITE LONG AND
POLISHED

FLYNN (O.S.)

All right, they're long, I like
them a little long, but look at how
clean they are. That makes it okay.

REACTION SHOT - WILLIAM LONDON DOESN'T LIKE THE NAILS

INT. THE RECTORY - THREE PRIESTS HAVING DINNER - NIGHT

The Monsignor, FATHER SHERMAN, and Flynn are eating a roast
and washing it down with red wine. Boisterous laughter. The
Monsignor is smoking a cigarette. The pack is on the table.
Pall Mall unfiltered.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN
The climpity-clomp. Clomp clomp
clomp. Harder than a herd of
elephants.

MONSIGNOR
You are wicked!

FLYNN
No, I told her, "You're her mother!
You raised her, you fed her, YOU
tell her she's fat!"

MONSIGNOR
Oh!

FATHER SHERMAN
But wait, how fat is she?

FLYNN
What, the mother or the daughter?

FATHER SHERMAN
The daughter.

FLYNN
I never met the daughter.

FATHER SHERMAN
What about the mother?

FLYNN
Fat!!!

INT. THE CONVENT DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinner's in progress. The Nuns eat. Silence.

INT. THE CHURCH - A MASS IN PROGRESS - MORNING

Father Flynn is serving with Jimmy and Donald Miller as altar boys. Flynn lifts the host and recites the blessing of the Eucharist. Jimmy rings the bells.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

Domini nostri Jesu Christi. Qui pridie quam pateretur, accepit panem in sanctas ac venerabiles manus suas et elevatis oculis in coelum, ad te Deum Patrem suum omnipotentem, tibi gratias agens, benedixit, fregit, deditque discipulis suis, dicens: 'Accipite, et manducate ex hoc omnes. Hoc est enim Corpus meum.

INT. THE SACRISTY SEEN FROM THE DARKER CHANGING ROOM - DAY

Donald is in his school clothes. Dimly, in the distant sacristy, Flynn can be seen talking with Jimmy. Donald dimly hears Flynn and Jimmy talking.

JIMMY

Father, we having practice after school?

FLYNN

If you guys want it, we can have it. Let me know.

INT. SISTER JAMES' CLASSROOM - DAY

William London sneaks across the back of the classroom and whispers to Noreen Horan, and she giggles.

SISTER JAMES SEES THIS REFLECTED IN THE GLASS OF THE PHOTO

She speaks without turning.

SISTER JAMES

The Fascist governments of Germany and Italy were already working together. They formed the Pact of Steel. The Pact of Steel was a military alliance between Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. Mister London, get back in your seat and stop bothering Miss Horan, please.

WILLIAM'S REACTION - HE'S SPOOKED THAT THE SISTER KNEW

BACK TO SISTER JAMES WHO SMILES AT HER LITTLE VICTORY

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
Now, who can tell me - -

The intercom buzzes.

SISTER JAMES ANSWERING THE INTERCOM

We hear Flynn's voice, but not what he's saying. Sister James replies.

SISTER JAMES
Yes? Yes. Of course, Father.

She gets off the intercom and turns to the class.

SISTER JAMES
Donald? You should go to the
Rectory.

INT. SCHOOL GYM/CAFETERIA - A DANCE CLASS IS IN PROGRESS -
DAY

MRS. SHIELDS is a middle-aged woman in a dress and silver tap shoes. BLAME IT ON THE BOSSANOVA is on the record player.

MRS. SHIELDS
Two, three, four, five, six, seven,
eight, nine, ten, eleven.

They dance facing their partners. A few of the girls sing along.

MRS. SHIELDS
Go one, two, three, touch. One,
two, three, kick. Back, side,
front, kick. Back, side, front...

Raymond is doing the mashed potato. Mrs. Shields moves to him.

MRS. SHIELDS
Raymond, what are you doing?

RAYMOND
The mashed potato.

MRS. SHIELDS
You're supposed to be doing the
bossa nova.

(CONTINUED)

RAYMOND

But I know the mashed potato.

MRS. SHIELDS

(laughs) All right, now follow.
Back, side, front, kick. Back,
side, one, two, three, kick. Back,
side, front, kick. Back, side,
front. Okay. Let me get in front
of you so that you can see what I'm
doing.

SISTER JAMES IS SITTING ON A FOLDING CHAIR WATCHING

Amused. She claps lightly. Then she sees something.

SISTER JAMES' POV - SOME LOCKERS - FLYNN APPEARS

He is somewhat furtive. He has something white in his hand.
He opens a locker and puts the white thing in. It's fabric.
He sees Sister James and smiles. He takes a sip of water
from the drinking fountain and goes back upstairs.

SISTER JAMES SLOWLY WALKING TOWARDS THE LOCKERS

She goes to the locker. She opens it, a boy's white T-shirt.
She returns it to the locker puzzled.

INT. THE HALLWAY - SISTER JAMES' STUDENTS LEAVING - DAY

INT. SISTER JAMES' CLASSROOM - DAY

Jimmy's got his school bag. Others are heading out. He looks
at Sister James, who is intently talking to one of the
students.

JIMMY'S POV - SISTER JAMES' BACK

Her habit obscures the identity of the student she's talking
to. Sister James leans down towards the unseen boy's face.

SISTER JAMES

Donald, are you feeling ill?

DONALD (UNSEEN)

No.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
You sure? Are you all right?

BACK TO JIMMY LOOKING AS HE GOES

A shadow passes over his expression.

BACK TO JIMMY'S POV of SISTER JAMES' BACK

EXT. WITHIN THE GARDEN - SOME ROSE BUSHES - DAY

Sister James comes out of the convent. Sister Aloysius is unrolling burlap. Sister James sees her and walks over.

SISTER JAMES
Good afternoon, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Good afternoon, Sister James.

SISTER JAMES
Sister, can I speak with you about Donald Miller?

Sister Aloysius rolls the barrow onto a path. Sister James follows.

CUT TO

EXT. AN OLD UTILITY SHED AS SISTER ALOYSIUS OPENS IT - DAY

Accompanied by Sister James.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
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?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES

No.

INT. THE SHED AS THEY ENTER WITH THE BARROW - DAY

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Someone will. And when that happens, send them right down to me.

Sister Aloysius stows the contents of the barrow in the shed as Sister James continues.

SISTER JAMES

I'm not so sure anyone will.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

This parish serves Irish and Italian families. Someone will hit Donald Miller.

SISTER JAMES

He has a protector.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Who?

SISTER JAMES

Father Flynn.

A CLOSE UP OF SISTER ALOYSIUS - SUDDENLY VERY ALERT

She turns to face Sister James.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What?

Sister James becomes elaborately casual.

SISTER JAMES

He's taken an interest.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I told you to come to me, but I hoped you never would.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
Maybe I shouldn't have.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
So it's happened.

SISTER JAMES
What!? Oh, no. I'm not telling you
that! I'm not even certain what
you mean.

MR. MCGUINN throws open the rear door, startling them. He's
putting away the garden hose.

MCGUINN
Oh excuse me there, Sisters!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
No bother we're done here! Come,
Sister.

They start to go.

INT. THE CONVENT FOYER - DAY

Sister Aloysius is hustling Sister James through the door.
Stops in shadow and asks.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
What have you seen?

SISTER JAMES
It is unsettling to look at people
with suspicion. I feel less close
to God.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
When you take a step to address
wrongdoing, you are taking a step
away from God, but in His service.
What have you seen?

The housekeeper, Mrs. Carson appears with a cat.

MRS. CARSON
Good afternoon, Sisters!

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Good afternoon, Mrs. Carson. Why the cat?

MRS. CARSON

Because there's a mouse. Want some tea?

INT. THE RECTORY - THE DINING ROOM - DAY

Flynn has the BOYS arrayed around the table.

FLYNN

If you don't want to dance with her, don't dance with her.

JIMMY

Well, is it wrong?

FLYNN

No.

CONROY

But what if the girl turns you down?

FLYNN

All right, you have the right to ask a girl to dance. All right, she has the right to turn you down. The trick is don't take it to heart.

RALPH

What if they ALL turn you down?

FLYNN

Well, then you become a priest.

They all laugh. Jimmy is thoughtful. Raymond raises his hand and Flynn calls on him.

FLYNN

All right, next question.

INT. THE CONVENT'S BLUE SITTING ROOM - THE TWO NUNS - DAY

(CONTINUED)

Sister James is seated. Sister Aloysius is closing the door.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
What have you seen?

SISTER JAMES
He called Donald Miller 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, during class.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Why didn't you tell me?

SISTER JAMES
I didn't think there was anything
wrong with it.

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

SISTER JAMES
How does it make sense?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
He's isolated.

SISTER JAMES
I don't know that anything is
wrong!

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Our first Negro student. I thought there would be fighting. A parent or two to deal with. I should have foreseen this possibility.

SISTER JAMES

How could you imagine it?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Well, it's my job to outshine the fox in cleverness. That is my job!

SISTER JAMES

But maybe it's nothing!

Sister Aloysius sits next to her.

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...

(Struggles)

And one other thing. I think there was alcohol on his breath. There WAS alcohol on his breath.

Sister Aloysius puts a consoling hand on Sister James' hand.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Years ago at St. Boniface there was a priest... But I had Father Scully then. Here there's no man I can go to, men run everything. We are going to have to stop him ourselves.

Mrs. Carson barges in with the dead mouse in a napkin.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. CARSON
 There we go! She got him! It takes
 a cat.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 Yes it does. Yes it does.

EXT. ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL - DAY

Children exiting the school as a storm gathers.

CUT TO:

INT. SISTER JAMES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

There's a storm raging outside. Wind and rain. She tries to
 sleep, but a tree branch claws the window.

INT. THE CONVENT KITCHEN - SISTER ALOYSIUS - MORNING

She is lifting a kettle off the gas range as a commotion out
 in the hall catches her attention.

MRS. CARSON
 This towel will never be dead white
 again.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 Yes it will.

Sister Raymond is helping Sister Veronica to her room.

SISTER RAYMOND (O.S.)
 Mrs. Carson!

SISTER VERONICA (O.S.)
 I'm fine.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 What happened?

SISTER RAYMOND
 There's a branch down.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 (To Veronica.)
 Are you alright, Sister?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER RAYMOND

She didn't see it.

SISTER VERONICA

I'm fine. Just bushwhacked. No need
for a fuss.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You just go lie down. I'll bring
you some tea.

Sister Aloysius is beleaguered, but not alarmed. She unhooks
the intercom.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

(On intercom.)

Come on. Mister McGuinn? Could you
look in on the courtyard? A branch
has fallen. A branch has - -!

(slams down receiver)

EXT. THE CONVENT STEPS - MORNING

Mr. McGuinn is tugging at the fallen branch, which is large.
Sister Aloysius comes out with a pot of tea in a towel and
steps around the situation.

MCGUINN

Watch your step here, Sister. I'll
cut it up.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

The world is crashing, Michael.

MCGUINN

I haven't heard a wind like that
since I left Mullingar!

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I've never known a wind like it.
The wind has changed.

She goes on as he tugs.

CUT TO

INT. THE ENTRANCE DOOR TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

A bench outside this door. The boy, Conroy, sits. Father Flynn joins him.

FLYNN
What are you doing out here,
Conroy?

CONROY
I talked in class, Father.

FLYNN
Waiting for Sister Aloysius. She
know you're here?

CONROY
She knows.

The door opens suddenly. It's Sister Aloysius. The men stand.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Good morning, Father Flynn. Good of
you to come by.

FLYNN
Good morning, Sister Aloysius. How
are you today?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I'm very well, thank you. (Shifts
attention.) Mister Conroy.

CONROY
Yes, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Mister Transistor Radio.
Multiplication table ten times in
its totality delivered to me
tomorrow morning. Legible, Boy!
Return to class. Go. Go, go.

Conroy, miserable, goes. Sister Aloysius addresses Flynn.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I'd invite you in, but we're just
short Sister James. Hear that wind
last night?

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN
I certainly did!

Conversation dries up.

FLYNN
Did I hear Sister Veronica had an accident?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes, Sister Veronica fell and practically killed herself.

FLYNN
Is she alright?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Oh, she's fine.

FLYNN
Her sight isn't good, is it?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
(Lying)
Her sight is fine. Nuns fall, you know.

FLYNN
Nah, I didn't know that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
It's the habit. It catches us up more often than not. We go down like dominoes.

Sister James appears, running down the hall.

SISTER JAMES
Am I past the time?

FLYNN
Not at all.

SISTER JAMES
Good morning, Father. Good morning, Sister. I'm sorry I was delayed. I ran into Sister Veronica.

FLYNN
How is she?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
I'm afraid she has a bit of a
bloody nose.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I'm beginning to think you're
punching people.

SISTER JAMES
Sister?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
First William London and now ...
Never mind. Well, come in, please.

FLYNN
Sister...

INT. THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Sister Aloysius is at the door.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Please. Sit. Have a seat.

They come in.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I actually have a hot pot of tea.
(Closes the door but for an inch.)
And close this but not quite for
form's sake. Father, would you care
for a...

Sister Aloysius is offering Flynn a chair, but he doesn't
notice. He sits in Sister Aloysius' chair, at her desk.
She's taken aback, but recovers quickly.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Would you have a cup of tea,
Father?

FLYNN
I would love a cup of tea.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sister, perhaps you could serve
him?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
I'd be glad.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
And yourself, of course.

SISTER JAMES
Would you like a cup of tea, Sister
Aloysius?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
No, I've already had my cup.

FLYNN
Is there sugar?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sugar? Yes! (Goes to her desk,
rummages in a drawer.) Yes. It's
somewhere here. I put it in the
drawer for Lent last year and never
remembered to take it out.

FLYNN
(Winking at Sister James)
Ah, it mustn't have been much to
give up then.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I'm sure you're right. Here it is.
I'll serve you, though for want of
practice, I'm, I'm a little clumsy.

She's come to him with the sugar bowl. She's poised over him
with a lump of sugar in a small pair of tongs.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I see your fingernails.

SISTER ALOYSIUS' POV - FLYNN'S LONG NAILS

SISTER JAMES SIPS HER TEA, WATCHING THE TWO OF THEM

BACK TO SISTER ALOYSIUS FROZEN IN THE ACT OF SERVING FLYNN

FLYNN
I wear them a little long. The
sugar?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes. One?

FLYNN
Three.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Three?

She's appalled and tries to hide it.

FLYNN
Sweet tooth.

She digs at the sugar because the cubes have melded together.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
One. Two. Three. Sister, you care
for sugar?

SISTER JAMES
Never! (Gently, to Flynn.) Not that
there's anything wrong with sugar.

Sister Aloysius puts the sugar away in her desk.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Well, thank you, Father, for making
time for us. We are at our wit's
end.

FLYNN
Well, I think it's an excellent
idea to rethink the Christmas
pageant. 'Cause last year's effort
was a little woebegone.

SISTER JAMES
Oh, I loved it! But I love all
pageants. The hymns! O Little Town
of Bethlehem, O Come O Come
Emmanuel, O Come All Ye Faithful - -

SISTER ALOYSIUS
All right. Thank you, Sister
James! So what do you think,
Father? Is there something new we
could do?

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

Well, we all love the Christmas hymns, but it might be jolly to include a secular song.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Secular?

FLYNN

Yes. IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS. Something like that.

Sister Aloysius gets up.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What would be the point of a secular song?

FLYNN

Just fun.

SISTER JAMES

Or FROSTY THE SNOWMAN.

FLYNN

That's a good one. We could have one of the boys dress as a snowman and dance around.

Sister Aloysius flips the blinds. A shaft of sunlight blazes on the priest.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Which boy?

FLYNN

(Squinting)
We'd do tryouts.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

FROSTY THE SNOWMAN espouses a pagan belief in magic. The snowman comes to life when an enchanted hat is put on his head. If the music were more somber, people would realize the images are disturbing and the song heretical.

Sister James and Father Flynn exchange a look.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES

I've never thought about Frosty The Snowman like that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Well, it should be banned from the airwaves.

FLYNN

So. Not FROSTY THE SNOWMAN.

He writes something in a small notebook.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Oh, IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE - -
A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS would be fine,
I suppose. Parents would like it.
May I ask what you're writing down?
With that ballpoint pen?

FLYNN

Oh. Nothing. It's an idea for a sermon.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You had one right now?

FLYNN

I get them all the time.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

How fortunate.

FLYNN

I forget them so I have to write them down.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Oh. What is the idea?

FLYNN

Intolerance.

Sister James tries to break the tension.

SISTER JAMES

Would you like a little more tea,
Father?

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

Not yet. (To Sister Aloysius) It's a new time, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What's new about it?

FLYNN

Something inside of people is new.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

There is nothing new under the sun.

FLYNN

The Church needs to change. We should sing a song from the radio now and then. Take the kids out for ice cream.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Sweet tooth.

FLYNN

Maybe take the boys on a camping trip.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

The point being?

FLYNN

We should be friendlier. You know, the children and the parents should see us as members of their family.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

But we are not members of their family. We're different.

FLYNN

Why? Because of our vows?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Precisely.

FLYNN

I don't think we're so different. You know, Sister, I would take some more tea.

Flynn gets up. Sister James gets up.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 And they think we're different,
 yeah? The working class people of
 this parish trust us to be
 different.

Flynn flips the blinds closed.

FLYNN
 I think we're getting off the
 subject.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 Yes, you're right. You're right.
 Back to it.

The wall intercom rings. She answers it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 Yes, Sister Raymond? (Listens.)
 Well you tell her to wash her face
 and her neck and report to me at
 three.

She hangs up.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 (turning on the desk lamp)
 Excuse me. The Christmas pageant.
 We must be careful how Donald
 Miller is used in the pageant.

Sister James shakes as she pours the tea, spilling a little.

FLYNN
 Easy there, Sister.

SISTER JAMES
 Oh, uh, yes, Father.

FLYNN
 All right, what about Donald
 Miller?

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

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN
Because of the color of his skin?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
That's right, yeah.

FLYNN
Why?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Oh come, Father.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Well, you yourself singled the boy out for special attention. You held a private meeting with him at the Rectory. (Shooting a look at Sister James) A week ago?

SISTER JAMES
Yes.

Flynn picks a lemon drop out of the bag.

FLYNN
What are we talking about?

SISTER JAMES
Donald Miller?

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

The priest turns to Sister James, popping a lemon drop in his mouth.

FLYNN
He did?

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Can you tell us why?

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN
How did he act strangely?

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

FLYNN
Do you mean you had some
impression?

SISTER JAMES
Yes.

FLYNN
And he'd come from the Rectory so
you're asking me?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Hmmm.

SISTER JAMES
That's it.

FLYNN
Mmhmmm.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Hmmm.

FLYNN
Mm-hmmm. 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'm a little uncomfortable.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Why?

FLYNN
Why do you think?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
The boy's well-being is my
responsibility.

The phone rings.

FLYNN
His well-being is not at issue.

DUTCH ANGLE OF PHONE ON SISTER ALOYSIUS' DESK

It rings. She doesn't answer it.

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

FLYNN
Did he say something?

SISTER JAMES
No.

DUTCH ANGLE SHOT OF ALL THREE

SISTER ALOYSIUS
What happened in the Rectory?

FLYNN
Happened?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Mmmhmm.

FLYNN
Nothing happened. I had a talk with
the boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
What about?

FLYNN
Private matter.

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

BACK TO STRAIGHT ANGLE SHOTS

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
Should I get the phone--?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
(overlaps)
No.

FLYNN
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.

The phone stops ringing.

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? 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.

FLYNN
I don't wish to continue this. And
if you're dissatisfied with that, I
suggest you speak to Monsignor
Benedict. I can only imagine this
unfortunate behavior is the result
of overwork. Have a good morning.
Sister. (To Sister James) Sister.

Flynn heads for the door.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Sister Aloysius follows him to the door. What she says stops him.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
There was alcohol on his breath.

Flynn turns.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
When he returned from his meeting
with you.

FLYNN
Alcohol.

SISTER JAMES
I did smell it on his breath.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Well?

FLYNN
Let this alone.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
No.

A bell rings. Students start coming down the stairs.

INT. THE OFFICE AS FLYNN STANDS AT THE DOOR - DAY

He is pensive, troubled. He closes the door.

SISTER JAMES
Take your time, Father. Would you
like some more tea?

FLYNN
You should've let it alone.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Not possible.

Sister Aloysius backs away from him. Sister James sits down.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

Mr. McGuinn caught Donald drinking altar wine. When I found out, I sent for him. There were tears. And he begged not to be removed from the altar boys. I took pity on him. I told him if no one else found out, I would let him stay on.

Sister James leaps to her feet, overjoyed.

SISTER JAMES

Oh, what a relief! That explains everything! Thanks be to God! Look, Sister, it was all a mistake!

Sister Aloysius is unmoved.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

And if I talk to Mr. McGuinn?

FLYNN

Oh, talk to him by all means. But now that the boy's secret's out, I'm going to have to remove him from the altar boys. That's what I was trying to avoid.

SISTER JAMES

You were trying to protect the boy!

FLYNN

That's right.

SISTER JAMES

I might have done the same thing!
(To Sister Aloysius) Is there a way Donald could stay on the altar boys?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

If the boy drank altar wine, he can't continue as an altar boy.

FLYNN

Of course. Are you satisfied?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

Hmmm. Well, I'll be going. I have some writing to do.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Intolerance.

FLYNN

That's right. I'm not pleased with how you handled this, Sister. Sister.

He goes.

Sister James weakly launches into optimism.

SISTER JAMES

Well. What a relief! He cleared it all up.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You believe him?

SISTER JAMES

Of course.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Isn't it that it's easier to believe him?

SISTER JAMES

But we can corroborate his story with Mr. McGuinn.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Mmm...hmm. Yes. These types of people are clever.

SISTER JAMES

Well, I'm convinced!

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You're not. You just want things to be resolved so you can have simplicity back.

SISTER JAMES

I want no further part of this.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I'll bring him down.

SISTER JAMES
How can you be so sure that he is
lying?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Experience.

SISTER JAMES
You just don't like him! You don't
like it that he uses a ballpoint
pen. You don't like it that he
takes three lumps of sugar in his
tea. You don't like it that he
likes FROSTY THE SNOWMAN. And
you're letting that convince you of
something terrible, just terrible!
Well, I like FROSTY THE SNOWMAN!
And I think it would be nice if
this school weren't run like a
jail! And I think it's a good thing
I love to teach History and that I
might inspire my students to love
it, too! And if you judge that to
mean that I'm not fit to be a
teacher, then so be it!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sit down.

Sister James immediately complies. The light bulb over her
head flashes and goes out.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Look at that. You blew out my
light. In ancient Sparta, important
matters were decided by who shouted
loudest. Fortunately, we are not in
ancient Sparta. You honestly find
the students in this school to be
treated like inmates in a prison?

SISTER JAMES
No. Actually, they all seem fairly
happy. But they're all uniformly
terrified of you!

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes. That's how it works.

Sister Aloysius looks up a phone number on an index card.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sit there.

She dials a number. Speaks into the phone.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Hello, this is Sister Aloysius
Beauvier, principal at St. Nicholas
School. Is this Mrs. Miller? I'm
calling about your son, Donald.

EXT. PARISHIONERS COMING INTO CHURCH - DAY

It's raining a bit. Umbrellas.

INT. THE CHURCH AS FATHER FLYNN GIVES HIS SERMON - DAY

MASTER SHOT OF CONGREGATION

FLYNN
A woman was gossiping with a friend
about a man she hardly knew-- I
know none of you have ever done
this--

REACTION OF PARISHIONERS CHUCKLING

BACK TO FLYNN IN CLOSEUP

FLYNN
--that night she had a dream. A
great hand appeared over her and
pointed down at her.

JIMMY IS SERVING AS ALTAR BOY

It's a story and he likes stories.

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN
She was immediately seized with an
overwhelming sense of guilt.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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?"

CUT TO SISTER ALOYSIUS SEATED AMONG CONGREGATION

FLYNN (O.S.)
 "Should I be asking your absolution? Father, tell me, have I done something wrong?"
 (Irish Brogue)
 "Yes!" Father O'Rourke answered her.

CUT TO SISTER JAMES

FLYNN (O.S.)
 "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!"

BACK TO FLYNN AT PULPIT

FLYNN
 So the woman said she was sorry and asked for 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!"

CUT TO JIMMY

FLYNN (O.S.)
 So the woman went home, took a pillow off her bed, a knife from the drawer, went up the fire escape to the roof, and stabbed the pillow.

BACK TO FLYNN

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

Then she went back to the old parish priest as instructed. "Did you gut the pillow with the knife?" he says. "Yes, Father." "And what was the result?" "Feathers," she said.

EXT. ALLEY - VIEW FROM ROOFTOP - DAWN

A world of feathers.

FLYNN (V.O.)

"Feathers?" he repeated. "Feathers everywhere, Father!"

THE ROOF - MRS. DEAKINS WITH A SPENT PILLOW - DAWN

She's watching the feathers flying away on the breeze.

FLYNN (V.O.)

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

CUT TO SISTER JAMES

FLYNN (O.S.)

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

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN

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

INT. THE CHURCH AS FATHER FLYNN BLESSES HIMSELF

FLYNN

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

CUT TO SISTER ALOYSIUS

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN (O.S.)
Please rise.

CUT TO

Sister James turning back to look at Sister Aloysius.

EXT. THE ROOF - DAWN

Feathers fly away into the morning light.

The sound of a breeze.

EXT. THE GARDEN - DAY

A CROW CAWS.

We start on a letter and find Sister James, who sits brooding on a bench. She puts the envelope away, hears the crow caw, and looks up.

SINGLE OF A CROW ON A BRANCH EYEING HER

BACK TO SISTER JAMES LOOKING UP AT THE BIRD

The voice of Father Flynn makes her look around.

FLYNN (O.S.)
What's that bird complaining about?

NOW WE SEE FLYNN AND SISTER JAMES

FLYNN
What kind of bird is that? That a starling? A grackle?

SISTER JAMES
A crow.

FLYNN
'Course it is. Are you praying? I didn't mean to interrupt.

SISTER JAMES
I'm not praying, no.

FLYNN
You seem subdued.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
Oh. I can't sleep.

FLYNN
Why not?

SISTER JAMES
Bad dreams.

FLYNN
Yeah, I can't sleep on occasion.

SISTER JAMES
Why? Do you see that big hand
pointing a finger at you?

FLYNN
Yes. Sometimes.

SISTER JAMES
Was your sermon directed at anyone
in particular?

FLYNN
What do you think?

Flynn lights a cigarette.

SISTER JAMES
I received a letter from my brother
in Maryland. He's very sick.

FLYNN
Then maybe you should go and see
him.

SISTER JAMES
I can't leave my class.

ALTERNATING SINGLE SHOTS - DUTCH ANGLE SHOT FROM BELOW:

Flynn smokes his cigarette.

SISTER JAMES
Is it true?

FLYNN
What?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
You know what I'm asking.

FLYNN
No.

SISTER JAMES
I saw you put an undershirt in
Donald Miller's locker.

FLYNN
He left it in the sacristy.

SISTER JAMES
Why didn't you hand it to him?

FLYNN
I'm trying to spare him further
embarrassment.

Sister James shakes her head

BACK TO STRAIGHT ANGLES

FLYNN
(moves next to her on the bench)
It's me that cares about that
child, not her. Has she ever
reached out a hand? That black boy
needs help or he's not going to
make it! If she has her way, he'll
be left to his own undoing. Why do
you think he drank the wine? He's
in trouble! And she sees me talk in
a human way to these kids and she
immediately assumes that there must
be something wrong with it. Well,
I'm not going to let her keep this
parish in the dark ages! And I'm
not going to let her destroy my
spirit of compassion!

SISTER JAMES
I'm sure that's not her intent.

FLYNN
That I care about this
congregation!

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES

I know you do.

FLYNN

Like you care about your class! You love them, don't you?

SISTER JAMES

Yes.

FLYNN

And that's natural. How else would you relate to children? That I can look at your face and know your philosophy. It's kindness.

SISTER JAMES

I don't know. I mean, of course.

FLYNN

There are people who go after your humanity, Sister, that tell you the light in your heart is a weakness. Don't believe it. It's an old tactic of cruel people to kill kindness in the name of virtue. There's nothing wrong with love.

SISTER JAMES

Love?

FLYNN

Have you forgotten the message of our Savior? It's love of people.

SISTER JAMES

I just feel as if everything is upside down.

FLYNN

There are just times in life when we feel lost. It happens.

SISTER JAMES

And it's a bond. Flowers.

INSERT - FATHER FLYNN HAS PRESSED FLOWERS IN HIS BIBLE

FLYNN

To remind me of Spring.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
I should be going.

FLYNN
I'm sorry your brother's ill.

SISTER JAMES
Thank you, Father.

She heads for the path, stops.

SISTER JAMES
I don't believe it!

FLYNN
You don't?

SISTER JAMES
No.

FLYNN
Thank you, Sister. Thank you very
much.

INT. A SCHOOL HALLWAY - STUDENTS GO BY - DAY

Father Flynn is in the hallway reading a folded copy of The Daily News. Sports scores. He spots Father Sherman in a vestibule and they share a laugh. Noreen Horan approaches him.

NOREEN
Father, I think I've just got to
tell somebody.

FLYNN
Hello, Noreen.

NOREEN
I'm in love.

FLYNN
That's wonderful. Who's the lucky
boy?

NOREEN
Jimmy Hurley.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN
Have you told him?

She shakes her head. Flynn sees Jimmy and looks in his direction.

FLYNN
Maybe you should.

NOREEN
Maybe I will, Father.

She turns off Flynn's look and goes after Jimmy.

NOREEN (O.S.)
Jimmy! Jimmy Hurley!

Flynn follows her progress towards Jimmy and sees Donald. Flynn decides to dodge the boy, calls out to Father Sherman and ducks into the vestibule.

FLYNN
Father Sherman...

Donald stands there a moment confused and disappointed.

DONALD MILLER PASSES WILLIAM LONDON IN THE HALLWAY.

William purposefully dumps Donald's schoolbag and its contents. Donald stops.

WILLIAM
You dropped something.

Kids are stepping on Donald's stuff as he gathers his things. He looks up. Father Flynn is offering his hand. Helps him up. Embraces the boy.

FLYNN
It's all right.

Sister James looks on.

INT. SISTER JAMES' CLASS - DAY

Sister James is in a very bad mood. Some of the Kids are laughing. She snaps.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES

Okay. Be quiet. I said be quiet!

The class gets quiet.

SISTER JAMES

The next one of you that speaks out of turn gets sent right to the Principal! Now the question was: What was Patrick Henry's famous remark?

Jimmy raises his hand. She ignores it.

SISTER JAMES

Donald.

Now we go to Donald, who wasn't listening.

DONALD

Sister?

SISTER JAMES

What was the question? Nobody help him. Jimmy, put your hand down.

Jimmy puts his hand down.

SISTER JAMES

Donald Miller, stand up.

Donald stands.

SISTER JAMES

What was the question, Donald?

DONALD

I don't know, Sister.

SISTER JAMES

That means you weren't listening.

DONALD

Yes, Sister.

SISTER JAMES

The question was: What was Patrick Henry's famous remark?

(CONTINUED)

DONALD
I don't know.

Jimmy can't stand it anymore and blurts out.

JIMMY
Give me liberty or give me death!

SISTER JAMES
James Hurley, down to the
Principal's office now!

INT. SISTER ALOYSIUS IN HER OFFICE - OVERCAST DAY

She's wielding a long pole which is for changing light bulbs. She has removed the old bulb and is screwing in a new one. Her intercom rings. She doesn't hear it. It rings again. No reaction. Then knocking at her door, but she's unaware. More knocking. The bulb lights and she senses something. She goes to the door still carrying the pole. She opens the door to reveal MRS. MILLER, who is in her Sunday best, carrying an umbrella.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Mrs. Miller?

MRS. MILLER
Yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Come in.

Mrs. Miller starts in.

INT. SISTER ALOYSIUS' OFFICE AS SHE CLOSSES THE DOOR - DAY

And offers Mrs. Miller a seat.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Please have a seat. I was changing
a bulb.

MRS. MILLER
I thought I mighta had the wrong
day. You didn't answer.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

(removes earplug)

Huh? Oh. Well, just between us, I was listening to a transistor radio with an earpiece.

She shows the woman a for-the-era small transistor radio.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Look how tiny they're makin' 'em. I confiscated it from one of the students, now I can't stop listening to it.

MRS. MILLER

You like music?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

No. News reports. Years ago I used to listen to all the news reports because my husband was in Italy in the war.

MRS. MILLER

You were a married woman?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Yes. But then he was killed. Is your husband coming?

MRS. MILLER

Couldn't get off work. I only have a half an hour myself.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I see. Of course. It was a lot to ask.

MRS. MILLER

How's Donald doing?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

He's passing his subjects. He has average grades.

MRS. MILLER

Hmm. Good. He was upset about getting taken off the altar boys.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Did he explain why?

MRS. MILLER
He said he was caught drinking
altar wine.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
That is the reason.

MRS. MILLER
Well, that seems fair. But he's a
good boy, Sister. He fell down
there, but he's a good boy pretty
much down the line.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
How is he at home?

MRS. MILLER
His father beat the hell out of him
over that wine.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Oh, he shouldn't do that!

MRS. MILLER
You don't tell my husband what to
do. You just stand back. My husband
didn't want Donald to come here.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Why?

MRS. MILLER
He thought he'd have trouble with
the other boys. But that hasn't
really happened.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Good.

MRS. MILLER
That priest, Father Flynn, been
watching out for him.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes.

A knock comes at the door.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Excuse me.

She goes to the door, opens it.

INT. OUTSIDE THE PRINCIPAL'S DOOR - JIMMY STANDS - DAY

The door opens. He's facing Sister Aloysius.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

James Hurley, what are you doing out of class?

JIMMY

Sister James sent me down.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What for?

JIMMY

Talking.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Well, go back up and shut up! Go, go!

Jimmy's shocked. Jimmy sees past Sister Aloysius to Mrs. Miller. Flynn appears behind Jimmy. Sister Aloysius sees him and shuts the door.

FLYNN'S POV - MRS. MILLER SITTING IN THE OFFICE - DAY

As Sister Aloysius shuts the door.

FLYNN AND JIMMY IN THE HALLWAY

JIMMY

What's going on?

FLYNN

(Irritated)

None of your business! Go on! Go back to class.

JIMMY

(under his breath)

Bullshit.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN
What'd you say?

JIMMY
Nothing.

Jimmy, hurt, starts up the hallway. Flynn lingers, looks at the office door, uncertain.

BACK TO SISTER ALOYSIUS AND MRS. MILLER IN THE OFFICE

Sister Aloysius wants to get away from Flynn.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
You have twenty minutes you say?

MRS. MILLER
It's just that I have to walk to work.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Where is work?

MRS. MILLER
Parkchester. If I don't start cleaning by noon, I'm not home to let Donald in.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
May I walk with you?

MRS. MILLER
I don't mind.

INT. SISTER JAMES' CLASSROOM - DAY

Sister James is doing a math problem on the board.

SISTER JAMES
...eight sixty-fourths. Who can tell me what the common denominator is? Nobody?

At this moment, Jimmy comes in the door and heads for his seat.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES

Back already, Mr. Hurley? (He doesn't answer. She repeats harshly.) I said, back already, Mr. Hurley?!

JIMMY

(turns)
Leave me alone.

BACK TO SISTER JAMES REACTS

SISTER JAMES

Who do you think you're talking to?
This is my classroom, Boy. Don't
you forget that.

The boy has sat down. Jimmy quietly breaks down.

JIMMY

I'm sorry.

SISTER JAMES

I'm sorry, Jimmy.

EXT. PARKCHESTER - A QUIET HOUSING DEVELOPMENT - DAY

Mrs. Miller and Sister Aloysius walk along. It's a green and quiet place. A somber day. They come down a flight of steps.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Have you met Father Flynn?

MRS. MILLER

Just seen him on the altar, haven't
met him face to face. No. Just, you
know, heard from Donald.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

And what does he say?

MRS. MILLER

Oh, you know, "Father Flynn, Father
Flynn." He looks up to him. The man
gives him his time, which is what
the boy needs. He needs that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Mrs. Miller, we may have a problem.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. MILLER

Well, I thought there musta been a reason you wanting to see me. Principal's a big job. I just want to say though, it's just till June.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Excuse me?

MRS. MILLER

Whatever the problem is, Donald just has to make it till June. Then he's off into high school.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Right.

MRS. MILLER

If Donald can graduate from St. Nicholas, he's got a better chance of getting into a good high school. And that would mean an opportunity at college.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Well, I don't see anything at this time standing in the way of his graduating with his class.

MRS. MILLER

Well, that's all I care about.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I doubt that.

MRS. MILLER

Try me.

ANOTHER ANGLE - BASKETBALL COURT IN THE BACKGROUND - DAY

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I am concerned about the relationship between Father Flynn and your son.

MRS. MILLER

You don't say. Concerned. What do you mean, concerned?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
That it may not be right.

MRS. MILLER
Well, there's something wrong with
everybody, isn't that so? Got to be
forgiving.
(points)
I work right there.

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

MRS. MILLER
May have made.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I can't be certain.

MRS. MILLER
No evidence?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
No.

MRS. MILLER
Then maybe there's nothing to it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I think there is something to it.
I think Father Flynn gave Donald
that altar wine.

MRS. MILLER
Why would he do that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Has Donald been acting strange
lately--?

MRS. MILLER
(overlaps)
No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Nothing out of the ordinary?

(CONTINUED)

MRS. MILLER
He's been himself.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Alright.

MRS. MILLER
Look, Sister. I don't want any
trouble.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I don't uhh...I'm not sure you
completely understand.

MRS. MILLER
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. MILLER
Look, I only have a few minutes.
Not to be disagreeing, but if we're
talking about something floating
around between this priest and my
son, it ain't my son's fault.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Oh, I'm not suggesting that--.

MRS. MILLER
(overlaps)
He's just a boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I know.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I know. I agree with you
completely.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. MILLER

You're agreeing with me, but I got called to the principal if you know what I'm saying.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I am concerned about Donald's welfare.

MRS. MILLER

You honestly think that priest gave Donald that wine to drink?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Yes, I do.

MRS. MILLER

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I know. The boy got caught, the man didn't.

MRS. MILLER

So you're giving my son the blame.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

No.

MRS. MILLER

No problem my son getting blamed. And you know why that is?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

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

MRS. MILLER

Sister, you ain't going against no MAN in a ROBE and win. He's got the position.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

And he's got your son.

MRS. MILLER

Let him have him then.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What?

MRS. MILLER

It's just till June.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Do you know what you're saying?

MRS. MILLER

Know more about it than you.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I believe this man is creating or may have already brought about an improper relationship with your son.

MRS. MILLER

I don't know.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I know I am right.

MRS. MILLER

Why you gotta know something like that for sure when you don't?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What kind of mother are you?

A wind comes up.

MRS. MILLER

Excuse me, but you don't know enough about life to say a thing like that, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I know enough.

MRS. MILLER

You know the rules maybe, but that don't cover it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I know what I won't accept!

(CONTINUED)

MRS. MILLER

You accept what you gotta accept
and you work with it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

This man is in my school.

MRS. MILLER

Well, he's gotta be somewhere and
maybe he's doing some good, too.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

He is after the boys!

MRS. MILLER

Well, maybe some of them boys want
to get caught! That's why his
father beat him. Not the wine.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What are you telling me?

MRS. MILLER

I'm talking about the boy's nature
now, not anything he's done. You
can't hold a child responsible for
what God gave him to be.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I'm only interested in actions,
Mrs. Miller.

MRS. MILLER

But then there's the boy's nature.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Leave that out of it.

MRS. MILLER

Forget it then. You're the one
forcing people to say things. My
boy came to your school 'cause they
were going to kill him in the
public school. His father don't
like him. He come to your school,
kids don't like him. One man is
good to him. This priest. Then does
the man have his reasons? Yes.
Everybody does. YOU have your
reasons.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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 to see him through the way he wants to go. I thank God, this educated man with some kindness in him wants to do just that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
This will not do.

MRS. MILLER
It's just till June.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I'll throw your son out of this school.

MRS. MILLER
And why would you do that if it didn't start with him?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Because I will stop this.

MRS. MILLER
You'd hurt my son to get your way?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
It won't end with your son.

MRS. MILLER
Throw the priest out then.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I am trying to do just that.

MRS. MILLER
Then what do you want from me?

Sister Aloysius struggles for a moment.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Nothing. As it turns out.

MRS. MILLER
Please leave my son out of this. My husband will kill that child over a thing like this.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I will try.

MRS. MILLER

I'm late. Sister, I don't know if you and me on the same side. I'll be standing with my son and those who are good with my son. It'd be nice to see you there. Good morning.

She goes, leaving Sister Aloysius, who is shaken. She walks away. A SUDDEN WIND ENGULFS HER. She struggles with the wind and dead leaves.

EXT. ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL - SISTER ALOYSIUS ENTERS - DAY

It's raining heavily, and very windy.

INT. ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL - STAIRWELL - DAY

Sister Aloysius hurries up the stairs.

INT. ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

LOW DUTCH ANGLE

Sister Aloysius walks down the hallway. She stops, experiences a moment of nausea, and then makes for her office.

INT. THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

There's a window open. Flynn appears. He has been awaiting her return.

FLYNN

May I come in?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

A third party would be required.

FLYNN

Yeah. What was Donald's mother doing here?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
We were having a chat.

FLYNN
About what?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
A third party would truly be
required, Father. Why - -

Flynn enters the office.

INT. THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Flynn is in. He shuts the door.

FLYNN
No, Sister. No third party. You and
me are due for a talk.

The storm picks up outside.

FLYNN
You have to stop this campaign
against me!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
You can stop it at any time.

FLYNN
How?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Confess and resign.

FLYNN
You are attempting to destroy my
reputation!

A gust of wind comes in the window and blows some papers on
the floor. She goes to the window. She raises the blinds,
shuts the window, flips the blinds open.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Who keeps opening my window?! What
are you doing in this school?

FLYNN
I'm trying to do good!

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 (on her knees, picking up the
 fallen papers)
 Even more to the point, what are
 you doing in the priesthood?

FLYNN
 You are single-handedly holding
 this school and this parish back!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 From what?

FLYNN
 Progressive education and a
 welcoming Church.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 You can't distract me, Father. This
 is not about my behavior, it's
 about yours.
 (She stands upright)

FLYNN
 No, this is about your unfounded
 suspicions.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 That's right.

She starts arranging the papers.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 I have suspicions.

FLYNN
 Just leave that. It's not
 important.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 I will decide what's important.

FLYNN
 WHY do you suspect me? What have I
 done?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
 You gave that boy wine, and you let
 him take the blame.

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

That's completely untrue! Did you talk to Mr. McGuinn?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

All McGuinn knows is that the boy drank wine. He doesn't know how he came to drink it.

FLYNN

Did his mother have something to add to that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

No.

FLYNN

So that's it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I am not satisfied.

FLYNN

Ask the boy then!

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Oh, he'd protect you.

FLYNN

Why would he do that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Because you have seduced him.

FLYNN

You're insane! You've got it in your head that I've corrupted this child after giving him wine, and nothing I say will change that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

That's right.

FLYNN

But this has nothing to do with the wine. Not really. You had a fundamental mistrust of me before this incident! It was you that warned Sister James to be on the lookout, wasn't it?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
That's true.

FLYNN
So you admit it!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Certainly.

FLYNN
Why?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I know people.

FLYNN
That's not good enough!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
It won't have to be.

FLYNN
How's that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
You will tell me what you have
done!

FLYNN
Oh I will?

The light bulb overhead blows out again.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Out again!

FLYNN
Sister James is convinced I'm
innocent.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Oh, so you talked to Sister James?
Well, of course you talked to
Sister James.

FLYNN
Did you know that Donald's father
beats him?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Yes.

FLYNN

And might that not account for the odd behavior Sister James noticed in the boy?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

It might.

FLYNN

Then what is it? What? What did you hear, what did you see that convinced you so thoroughly?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What does it matter?

FLYNN

It matters! What does it matter? I want to know.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Out this window I saw you grab William London's wrist...and I saw him pull away.

FLYNN

Are you serious?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I am.

FLYNN

That's all?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Yeah. That was all.

FLYNN

That's nothing!

He sits at her desk and writes in his book. Rain drums down outside.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

What are you doing now?

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

I'm writing down what you say. It might be important when I have to explain why you have to be removed.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

This morning, before I spoke with Mrs. Miller, I took the precaution of calling your last parish.

FLYNN

What'd he say?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Who?

FLYNN

The Pastor.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I did not speak to the Pastor. I spoke to a nun.

FLYNN

You should have spoken to the Pastor.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I spoke to a nun.

FLYNN

You know that's not the proper route for you to have taken, Sister! The Church is very clear. You're supposed to go through the Pastor.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Why? You have an understanding, you and he?

FLYNN

No, you have no right to go rummaging through my past!

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You have a history. This is your third parish in five years. Why?

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

Call the Pastor. Ask him why I left! It's perfectly innocent.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I'm not calling the Pastor.

FLYNN

I'm a good priest!

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You will go after another child and another child, until you are stopped.

FLYNN

What nun did you speak to?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I won't say.

FLYNN

I've not touched a child.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You have.

FLYNN

You haven't the slightest proof of anything.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

But I have my certainty, and armed with that, I will go to your last parish, and the one before that if necessary. I'll find a parent. Trust me, Father Flynn, I will.

FLYNN

You have no right to act on your own! You have taken vows, obedience being one! You answer to us! You have no right to step outside the church!

SISTER ALOYSIUS

I will step outside the church if that's what needs to be done, till the door should shut behind me!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

I will do what needs to be done,
though I'm damned to Hell!

During last, she brandished rosary and then slammed it down.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
You should understand that, or you
will mistake me. Now, did you give
Donald Miller wine to drink?

FLYNN
Have you never done anything wrong?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I have.

FLYNN
A mortal sin?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes.

FLYNN
And?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I confessed it, Father!

FLYNN
Then whatever I have done, I have
left in the healing hands of my
confessor. As have you! We are the
same!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
No, we are not, we are not the
same! A dog that bites is a dog
that bites!

INSERT - SISTER ALOYSIUS RECOVERS THE ROSARY FROM TABLE

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Did you give Donald Miller wine to
drink?

FLYNN
No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Mental reservation?

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You lie. Very well then. If you will not leave my office, I will. And once I go, I will not stop.

She goes to the door. Suddenly, a new tone comes into his voice.

FLYNN

Wait!

The RAIN STOPS. A silence falls.

FLYNN

I can't say everything, you understand? There's things I can't say. Even if you can't imagine the explanation, Sister, remember there are things beyond your knowledge. Even if you feel certainty, it is an emotion, not a fact.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

You will request a transfer, and take a leave of absence until it's granted.

FLYNN

You'd leave me nothing.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

It's Donald Miller who has nothing, and you took full advantage of that.

FLYNN

I've done nothing wrong. I care about that boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Why? 'Cause you smile at him and you sympathize with him, and you talk to him as if you were the same? You are a cheat. And that warm feeling you experienced, when that boy looked at you with trust, was not the sensation of virtue.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

That could be got by any drunkard
with his tot of rum.

FLYNN
I can fight you.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
You will lose.

FLYNN
Where's your compassion?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Nowhere you can get at it.

Sunlight starts to illuminate the office.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Stay here. Compose yourself. You
can use the phone if you like. Good
day, Father.

She starts to go, has one more thought.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I have no sympathy for you. I know
you are invulnerable to true
regret.

She heads to the door.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
And cut your nails.

She goes, closing the door behind her. After a moment, he
goes to the desk. He sits there a moment. He opens his
Bible, and removes the pressed flowers.

INSERT - FLYNN PLACES FLOWERS ON TOP OF BIBLE

INT. THE CHURCH - A CHRISTMAS MASS IS IN PROGRESS - THE CHOIR
Is singing GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO.

INT. THE CHURCH - DAY

FLYNN

I never like to say goodbye. But there is a wind behind every one of us that takes us through our lives. We never see it, we can't command it, we don't even know its purpose. I would have stayed among you longer, but that wind is taking me away.

CUT TO DONALD SITTING IN CONGREGATION

FLYNN (O.S.)

I will miss it here. And I will miss you.

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN

But I'm content that the power that propels me does so with superior knowledge as to what is for the best, and that is my faith. I would like to come down now among you and say goodbye, and wish you peaceful hearts and loving hearts.

Choir sings UBI CARITAS

FLYNN

(Comes down the aisle, clasping Parishioners' hands)
 Goodbye. I'll stop by. God bless you. Peace. Nice to see you here, Mary. God bless you. I wish you much happiness. I will see you again. Happy holidays.

WILLIAM LONDON IN A PEW

A ghost of a smile.

BACK TO FLYNN

Continuing down the aisle shaking hands.

NOW TO MRS. MILLER

(CONTINUED)

She is sitting separately from her son.

BACK TO DONALD

EXT. BRONX STREET - A SNOW HAS FALLEN - DAWN

CUT TO

EXT. ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL COURTYARD - BLANKETED IN SNOW - DAY

Mr. McGuinn carries a tree out of the shed.

CUT TO

INT. ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL - QUIET HALLWAY - DAY

A decorated Christmas tree.

CUT TO

INT. THE CONVENT'S BLUE SITTING ROOM - DAY

Sister Veronica places figurines in the creche.

EXT. THE CHURCH GARDEN - SISTER ALOYSIUS - DAY

It's a beautiful early winter's day. The Choir can softly be heard singing SILENT NIGHT. Sister Aloysius is sitting in her shawl on a bench. Sister James exits the convent and approaches her.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Sister James, welcome back.

SISTER JAMES
Thank you, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
You were missed. How is your brother?

SISTER JAMES
Better. Much better.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I'm very glad. I prayed for him.

SISTER JAMES
It was good to get away. I needed
to see my family.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Then I'm glad you did it.

SISTER JAMES
And Father Flynn is gone.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes.

SISTER JAMES
So you did it. You got him out.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes.

SISTER JAMES
Donald Miller is heartbroken.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Can't be helped. It's just till
June.

SISTER JAMES
I don't think Father Flynn did
anything wrong.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
No? He convinced you?

SISTER JAMES
Yes, he did.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Hmmm.

SISTER JAMES
Did you ever prove it?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
To whom?

SISTER JAMES
Anyone but yourself?

(CONTINUED)

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Nope.

SISTER JAMES

But you were sure.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Yes.

SISTER JAMES

I wish I could be like you.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Why?

SISTER JAMES

Because I can't sleep anymore.

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Maybe we're not supposed to sleep so well. They made Father Flynn Pastor of Saint Jerome.

SISTER JAMES

Who?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

The Bishop appointed Father Flynn Pastor of Saint Jerome Church and School. It's a promotion.

SISTER JAMES

You didn't tell them?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

Oh, I told our good Monsignor. I crossed the garden and I told him. He did not believe it to be true.

SISTER JAMES

Then why did Father Flynn go? What did you say to make him leave?

SISTER ALOYSIUS

That I had called a nun in his previous parish. That I had found out his prior history of infringements.

(CONTINUED)

SISTER JAMES
So you did prove it!

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I made no such call.

SISTER JAMES
You lied?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Yes. But if he'd had no such history, the lie wouldn't have worked. His resignation was his confession. He was what I thought he was. And he's gone.

SISTER JAMES
I can't believe you lied.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
In the pursuit of wrongdoing, one steps away from God. Of course there is a price.

INSERT - HER CRUCIFIX CRADLED IN HER HAND. SHE COVERS IT WITH HER SHAWL.

SISTER JAMES
I see.

SISTER ALOYSIUS
Oh, Sister James!

SISTER JAMES
What is it, Sister?

SISTER ALOYSIUS
I have doubts! I have such doubts!

Sister Aloysius is bent with emotion. Sister James puts out a hand of comfort. She kneels before Sister Aloysius.

THE END