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 more that it’s easier to believe him?
SISTER JAMES: Be we can corroborate his story with Mr. McGinn!
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes. These types of people are clever. They’re not so easily undone.
SISTER JAMES: Well, I’m convinced.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: You’re not. You just want things to be resolved so that you can have simplicity back.
SISTER JAMES: I want no further part of this.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I’ll bring him down. With or without your help.
SISTER JAMES: How can you be so sure he’s 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 it would be nice if this school weren’t run like a prison! And I think it’s a good thing that I love to teach History and that I might inspire my students to love it, too! And if you judge that to mean I’m not fit to be a teacher, than so be it!
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Sit down. (Sister James does.) In ancient Sparta, important matters were decided by who shouted loudest. Fortunately, we are not in ancient Sparta. Now. Do you honestly find the students in the school to be treated like inmates in a prison?
SISTER JAMES: (Relenting.) No, I don’t. Actually, by and large, they seem to be fairly happy. But they’re all uniformly terrified of you!
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes. That’s how it works. Sit there.
(Sister Aloysius looks in a notebook, picks up the phone, dials.)
Hello, this is Sister Aloysius Beauvier, the principal of St. Nicholas. Is this Mrs. Muller? I’m calling about your son, Donald. I would like you and your husband to come down here for a talk. When would be convenient?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: How’s your brother?
SISTER JAMES: Much better.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I’m very glad. I prayed for him.
SISTER JAMES: It was good to get away. I needed to see my family. It had been too long.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Then I’m glad you did it.
SISTER JAMES: And Father Flynn is gone.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes.
SISTER JAMES: Where?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: St. Jerome’s.
SISTER JAMES: So you did it. You got him out.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes.
SISTER JAMES: Donald Muller will be heartbroken that he’s gone.
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: Hmmmmmm.
SISTER JAMES: Did you ever prove it?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: What?
SISTER JAMES: That he interfered with Donald Muller?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Did I ever prove it to whom?
SISTER JAMES: Anyone but yourself?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: No.
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 at night anymore. Everything is uncertain to me.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Maybe we’re not supposed to sleep so well. They’ve made Father Flynn the pastor of St. Jerome.
SISTER JAMES: Who?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: The bishop appointed Father Flynn the pastor of St. Jerome Church and School. It’s a promotion.

SISTER JAMES: You didn’t tell them?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I told our good Monsignor Benedict. I crossed the garden and told him. He did not believe it to be true.

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

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

SISTER JAMES: So you did prove it!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I was lying. I made no such call.

SISTER JAMES: You lied?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes. But if he 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 wrongdoings, one steps away from God. Of course there’s a price.

SISTER JAMES: I see. So now he’s in another school.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes. 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 comforts her. Lights fade.)
FLYNN/ALOYSIUS

FLYNN: Have you never done anything wrong?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I have.
FLYNN: Mortal sin?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes.
FLYNN: And?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I confessed it! Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?
FLYNN: Whatever I have done, I have left in the healing hands of my confessor. As have you! We are the same!
SISTER ALOYSIUS: We are not the same! A dog that bites is a dog that bites! I do not justify what I do wrong and go on. I admit it, desist, and take my medicine. Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?
FLYNN: No.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Mental reservation?
FLYNN: No.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: You lie. Very well then. If you won’t 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!
SISTER ALOYSIUS: You will request a transfer from this parish. You will take a leave of absence until it is granted.
FLYNN: And do what for the love of God? My life is here.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Don’t.
FLYNN: Please! Are we people? Am I a person flesh and blood like you? Or are we just ideas and convictions. I can’t say everything. Do you understand? There are things I can’t say. Even if you imagine the explanation, Sister, remember there are circumstances beyond your knowledge. Even if you feel certainty, it is an emotion and not a fact. In the spirit of charity, I appeal to you. On behalf of my life’s work. You have to behave responsibly. I put myself in your hands.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I don’t want you.
FLYNN: My reputation is at stake.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: You can preserve your reputation.
FLYNN: If you say these things, I won’t be able to do my work in the community.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Your work in the community should be discontinued.
FLYNN: You’d leave me with nothing.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: That’s not true. It’s Donald Muller who has nothing, and you took full advantage of that.
FLYNN: I have not done anything wrong. I care about that boy very much.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Because you smile at him and sympathize with him, and talk to him as if you were the same?
FLYNN: That child needed a friend.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: You are a cheat. The warm feeling you experienced when that boy looked at you with trust was not the sensation of virtue. It can be got by a drunkard from his tot of rum. You’re a disgrace to the collar. The only reason you haven’t been thrown out of the Church is the decline in vocations.
FLYNN: I can fight you.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: You will lose.
FLYNN: You don’t know that.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I know.
FLYNN: Where’s you compassion?
SISTER ALOYSIUS: Nowhere you can get at it. Stay here. Compose yourself. Use the phone if you like. Good day, Father. I have no sympathy for you. I know you’re invulnerable to true regret. (Startes to go. Pause.) And cut your nails.

(She goes, closing the door behind her. After a moment, he goes to the phone and dials.)

FLYNN: Yes. This is Father Brendan Flynn of St. Nicholas parish. I need to make an appointment to see the bishop.
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: How come the priest didn’t get kicked off the priesthood?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: He’s a grown man, educated. And he knows what’s at stake. It’s not so easy to pin someone like that down.

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: That’s because that’s the way it is. You’re just finding out about it, but that’s the way it is and the way it’s been, Sister. You’re not going against no man in a robe and win, Sister. He’s got the position.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: And he’s got your son.

MRS. MULLER: Let him have ‘im then.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: What?

MRS. MULLER: It’s just till June.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Do you know what you’re saying?

MRS. MULLER: Know more about it than you.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I believe this man is creating or has already brought about an improper relationship with your son.

MRS. MULLER: I don’t know.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I know I’m right.

MRS. MULLER: Why you need to know something like that for sure when you don’t? Please, Sister. You got some kind of righteous cause going with this priest and now you want to drag my boy into it. My son doesn’t need additional difficulties. Let him take the good and leave the rest when he leaves this place in June. He knows how to do that. I taught him how to do that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: What kind of mother are you?

MRS. MULLER: Excuse me, but you don’t know enough about life to say a thing like that, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I know enough.
MRS. MULLER: You know the rules maybe, but that don’t cover it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I know what I won’t accept!

MRS. MULLER: You accept what you gotta accept and you work with it. That’s the truth I know. Sorry to be so sharp, but you’re in here in this room…

SISTER ALOYSIUS: This man is in my school.

MRS. MULLER: Well, he’s gotta be somewhere and maybe he’s doing some good, too. You ever think of that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: He’s after the boys.

MRS. MULLER: Well, maybe some of them boys want to get caught. Maybe what you don’t know maybe is my son is… that way. That’s why his father beat him up. Not the wine. He beat Donald up for being what he is.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: What are you telling me?

MRS. MULLER: I’m his mother. I’m talking about his nature now, not anything he’s done. But you can’t hold a child responsible for what God gave him to be.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Listen to me with care, Mrs. Muller. I’m only interested in actions. It’s hopeless to discuss a child’s possible inclination. I’m finding it difficult enough to address a man’s deeds. This isn’t about what the boy may be, but what the man is. It’s about the man.

MRS. MULLER: But there’s the boy’s nature.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Let’s leave that out of it.

MRS. MULLER: Forget it then. You’re the one forcing people to say these things out loud. Things are in the air you leave them alone if you can. That’s what I know. 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.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: This will not do.

MRS. MULLER: It’s just till June. Sometimes thing aren’t black and white.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: And sometimes they are. I’ll throw your son out of this school. Make no mistake.

MRS. MULLER: But why would you do that? If nothing started with him?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Because I will stop this whatever way I must.

MRS. MULLER: You’d hurt my son to get your way?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: It won’t end with your son. There will be others, if there aren’t already.

MRS. MULLER: Throw the priest out then.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I’m trying to do just that.
MRS. MULLER: Well, what do you want from me?

(A pause.)

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Nothing. As it turns out. I was hoping you might know something that would help me, but it seems you don’t.
MRS. MULLER: Please leave my son out of this. My husband would kill that child over a thing like this.
SISTER ALOYSIUS: I’ll try.

(Mrs. Muller stands up.)

MRS. MULLER: I don’t know, Sister Aloysius. You may think you’re doing good, but the world’s a hard place. I don’t know that you and me are 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. Nice talking with you, Sister. Good morning.

(She goes, leaving the door open behind her. Sister Aloysius is shaken.)
FLYNN/JAMES

FLYNN: How’s Donald Muller doing?
SISTER JAMES: I don’t know.
FLYNN: You don’t see him?
SISTER JAMES: I see him every day, but I don’t know how he’s doing. I don’t know how to
calculate these things. Now.
FLYNN: I stopped speaking to him for fear of it being misunderstood. Isn’t that a shame? I
actually avoided him the other day when I might’ve passed him in the hall. He doesn’t
understand why. I noticed you didn’t come to me for confession.
SISTER JAMES: No. I went to Monsignor Benedict. He’s very kind.
FLYNN: I wasn’t?
SISTER JAMES: It wasn’t that. As you know. You know why.
FLYNN: You’re against me?
SISTER JAMES: No.
FLYNN: You’re not convinced?
SISTER JAMES: It’s not for me to be convinced, one way or the other. It’s Sister Aloysius.
FLYNN: Are you just an extension of her?
SISTER JAMES: She’s my superior.
FLYNN: But what about you?
SISTER JAMES: I wish I knew nothing whatever about it. I wish the idea had never entered my
mind.
FLYNN: How did it enter your mind?
SISTER JAMES: Sister Aloysius.
FLYNN: I feel as if my reputation has been damaged through no fault of my own. But I’m
reluctant to take the steps necessary to repair it for fear of doing further harm. It’s
frustrating. I can tell you that.
SISTER JAMES: Is it true?
FLYNN: What?
SISTER JAMES: You know what I’m asking.
FLYNN: No, it’s not true.
SISTER JAMES: Oh, I don’t know what to believe.
FLYNN: How can you take sides against me?
SISTER JAMES: It doesn’t matter.
FLYNN: It does matter! I’ve done nothing. There’s not substance to any of this. The most innocent actions can appear sinister to the poisoned mind. I had to throw that poor boy off the altar. He was devastated. The only reason I haven’t gone to the monsignor is I don’t want to tear apart the school. Sister Aloysius would most certainly lose her position as principal if I made her accusations known. Since they’re baseless. You might lose your place as well.

SISTER JAMES: Are you threatening me?
FLYNN: What do you take me for? No.
SISTER JAMES: I want to believe you.
FLYNN: Then do. It’s as simple as that.
SISTER JAMES: It’s not me that has to be convinced.
FLYNN: I don’t have to prove anything to her.
SISTER JAMES: She’s determined.
FLYNN: To what?
SISTER JAMES: Protect the boy.
FLYNN: It’s me that cares about that boy, not her. Has she ever reached out a hand to that child or any child in this school? She’s like a block of ice! Children need warmth, kindness, understanding! What does she give them? Rules. That black boy needs a helping hand or he’s not going to make it here! But if she has her way, he’ll be left to his own undoing. Why do you think he was in the sacristy drinking wine that day? He’s in trouble! She sees me talk in a human way to these children and she immediately assumes there must be something wrong with it. Something dirty. 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: I care about this congregation!
SISTER JAMES: I know you do.
FLYNN: Like you care about your class! You love them, don’t you?
SISTER JAMES: Yes.
FLYNN: That’s natural. How else would you relate to children? I can look at your face and know your philosophy: kindness.
SISTER JAMES: I don’t know. I mean, of course.
FLYNN: What is Sister Aloysius’s philosophy do you suppose?

(A pause.)

SISTER JAMES: I don’t have to suppose. She’s told me. She discourages… warmth. She’s suggested I be more… formal.
FLYNN: There are people who go after your humanity, Sister James, who tell you the light in your heart is a weakness. That your soft feelings betray you. I don’t believe that. It’s an old tactic of cruel people to kill kindness in the name of virtue. Don’t believe it. There’s nothing wrong with love.

SISTER JAMES: Of course not, but…

FLYNN: Have you forgotten that was the message of the Savior to us all. Love. Not suspicion, disapproval or judgment. Love of people. Have you found Sister Aloysius a positive inspiration?

SISTER JAMES: I don’t want to misspeak, but no. She’s taken away my joy of teaching. And I loved teaching more than anything. (She cries a little. He pats her uneasily, looking around.)

FLYNN: It’s all right. You’re going to be all right.

SISTER JAMES: I feel as if everything is upside down.

FLYNN: It isn’t though. There are just times in life when we feel lost. You’re not alone with it. It happens to many of us.

SISTER JAMES: A bond. (Becomes self-conscious.) I’d better go in.

FLYNN: I’m sorry your brother is ill.

SISTER JAMES: Thank you, Father. (Starts to go, stops.) I don’t believe it!

FLYNN: You don’t?

SISTER JAMES: No.

FLYNN: Thank you, Sister. That’s a great relief to me. Thank you very much.

(She goes. He takes out his little black book and writes in it. The crow caws. He yells at it:)

Oh, be quiet.

(Then he opens a prayer book and walks away.)