

[The office. Wednesday afternoon. Mark in running clothes. Father Tim enters.]

TIM. So — Mark Dolson

MARK. (*Shakes hands with Tim.*) Father Farley—

TIM. I only have a few minutes but this won't take long. (*Noticing Mark's sweat suit.*) Is this the seminarian's new uniform?

MARK. I wasn't sure I should come dressed this way, but...

TIM. (*Looking at Mark's sneakers.*) I hope you didn't track mud across Margaret's nice clean floors.

MARK. (*Looking to see if there's mud on the bottom of his sneakers.*) Sorry.

TIM. Was it necessary that you run here?

MARK. I try to keep a schedule—eight miles a day. It's four miles between here and the seminary, so I'll run the other four when I leave.

TIM. I'm glad you could fit me in.

MARK. It's just that I always do the eight miles around this time. When you called, I said "yes" to this time without thinking.

TIM. There's actually a time when you're *not* thinking?

MARK. (*Pause.*) Sometimes I think more clearly than at other times. When I'm on the phone I don't think very clearly.

TIM. You think very clearly at mass.

MARK. I feel at home in the church.

TIM. That was very apparent last Sunday. (*Pause.*) Tell me—why do you think women are better than men?

MARK. I didn't say they were better. They're more loyal.

TIM. What makes you say that?

MARK. (*Pause.*) Is this why you wanted to see me?

TIM. Do you know that I am an advisor at your seminary?

MARK. Yes— (*Tim gets a wine bottle and two glasses.*) Father DeNicola plays tapes of your sermons in our homily class, and the faculty talk about you a lot. They seem very proud that you're on their "team." But I never see you there.

TIM. The parish keeps me very busy. (*Starts pouring wine into glasses.*) Anyway—I asked some of the faculty about you, and from my description of you they knew you instantly. And from what they say, you have quite a reputation.

MARK. Really?

TIM. And you certainly lived up to it last Sunday.

MARK. Did I?

TIM. Yes—and I wanted to tell you how much I admired the things you were saying during my mass, and don't ever do anything like that again. (*Offers glass to Mark.*)

MARK. (*Refuses wine with hand gesture.*) Why not?

TIM. You were challenging me in front of my congregation. I don't like that.

MARK. I took a stand.

TIM. No, you did not take a stand. You took a *grandstand*. Besides—you're a seminarian—and if you want to become a deacon, you should be going to mass at the seminary.

MARK. Believe me—I prefer to be going to mass at the seminary.

TIM. Then why didn't you?

MARK. Because the rector sent me to yours.

TIM. Monsignor Burke?

MARK. Yes.

TIM. Monsignor Burke sent you to my mass?

MARK. Yes.

TIM. Did he say why he was sending you?

MARK. He said that you were the most tactful priest in the diocese, and that tact was something I needed to learn.

TIM. (*Laughs.*) He really is something.

MARK. You're *not* the most tactful priest in the diocese?

TIM. I might be—but that's not why he sent you.

MARK. It's not.

TIM. No.

MARK. Well—why do you think he sent me?

TIM. Because he wanted to get back at me for canceling a dinner engagement with him.

MARK. I'm sorry—I don't understand.

TIM. He gets very upset when I cancel anything with him, but he never shows it. So he does something more subtle. For example, he knows your reputation—he knows my dialogue sermons, so he put the two together hoping for exactly what happened. In other words, you did what he wanted you to do.

MARK. If I were used as a pawn, that's the players' problem, not mine.

TIM. If you want to be a priest in the same church as the players, it is your problem.

MARK. Do you cancel dinner with him often?

TIM. Is that any of your business?

MARK. You just said—it is my problem. I should get to know the church hierarchy—monsignors, advisors—why did you cancel.

TIM. Someone in the parish had a problem and I couldn't get away.

MARK. Really?

TIM. You don't believe that?

MARK. No.

TIM. Very good. You shouldn't. Actually, he and his sister had pictures of a trip the three of us took to Barcelona, and they wanted to get together with me over dinner to look at the pictures.

MARK. Why didn't you?

TIM. The only thing I can imagine worse than the trip itself would be pictures of the trip. *(Silence.)* It was a harmless lie.

MARK. I didn't know there was such a thing.

TIM. Well—worse than that—it was a useless lie. *(Tim laughs—Mark doesn't.)*

MARK. Can I go now? It's not good to break up the eight miles this much.

TIM. Certainly... *(Mark starts to leave.)* If you'd rather skip the rest of your run, I can give you a lift. *(Mark turns.)* I have to go to the seminary anyway. I have a meeting with Monsignor Burke. About two seminarians. Wait a minute. *(He takes a page from a notepad on the desk.)* Maybe you might know something. *(Reading.)* "Frank Kearney and Alfred Varasi"—do you know them?

MARK. Yeah—fairly well. They work with the emotionally disturbed children every Tuesday and Thursday. I watch them—they're good.

TIM. It seems they're together a lot.

MARK. They're best friends.

TIM. How do you know?

MARK. I usually see them together during the day. So I assume...

TIM. I probably shouldn't be discussing this with you, but this meeting was prompted by rumors which have been reaching Monsignor Burke that not only are they together all day, but all night as well. Do you know if that's true?

MARK. No—I don't. But so what if they are?

TIM. Don't play innocent with me, Mark. When I was at the seminary we could only travel in threes. Things have loosened up a little since then. But there are still strong taboos. Frank and Alfred are fooling around with the ultimate taboo.

MARK. They haven't taken any vows yet.

TIM. There's a serious question they'll be allowed to—ever.

MARK. That's ridiculous—one meeting can't decide that.

TIM. You're right. These meetings never decide anything. They only help Monsignor Burke decide.

MARK. How are you going to advise him?

TIM. The only purpose of the rector's advisor is to find out exactly what the rector wants to do and then advise him to do that.

MARK. That must make you feel awfully insignificant.

MARK. Yes—well—I'd love to discuss this with you further, but if I don't leave now, I'll be late. And the one thing the rector loves more than chastity is punctuality. *(Mark starts to leave.)* Are you sure I can't give you a lift?

MARK. *(Stops and turns.)* Is that your Mercedes out there?

TIM. Yes.

MARK. I'd rather run. *(Pause.)* Listen, I don't know if yours and Monsignor Burke's game rules apply to seminarians, but I hope you won't use your position at the seminary over me. I only spoke up at your mass because it was important to me. Becoming a priest is important to me. *(He comes close to Tim.)* Please don't play games with it.

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