

EIGHT

Crossfade to the principal's office. Sister Aloysius is sitting looking out the window, very still. A knock at the door. She doesn't react. A second knock, louder. She pulls a small earplug out of her ear and scurries to the door. She opens it. There stands Mrs. Muller, a black woman of about thirty-eight, in her Sunday best, dressed for church. She's on red alert.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Mrs. Muller?

MRS. MULLER. Yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Come in. *(Sister Aloysius closes the door.)*
Please have a seat.

MRS. MULLER. I thought I might a had the wrong day when you didn't answer the door.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Oh. Yes. Well, just between us, I was listening to a transistor radio with an earpiece. *(She shows Mrs. Muller a very small transistor radio.)* Look at how tiny they're making them now. I confiscated it from one of the students, and now I can't stop using it.

MRS. MULLER. You like music?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Not really. News reports. Years ago I used to listen to all the news reports because my husband was in Italy in the war. When I came into possession of this little radio, I found myself doing it again. Though there is no war and the voices have changed.

MRS. MULLER. You were a married woman?

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

MRS. MULLER. Couldn't get off work.

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

MRS. MULLER. How's Donald doing?

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

MRS. MULLER. Oh. Good. He was upset about getting taken off the altar boys.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Did he explain why?

MRS. MULLER. He said he was caught drinking wine.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That is the reason.

MRS. MULLER. 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. And he knows what an opportunity he has here. I think the whole thing was just a bit much for him.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What do you mean, the whole thing?

MRS. MULLER. He's the only colored here. He's the first in this school. That'd be a lot for a boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I suppose it is. But he has to do the work of course.

MRS. MULLER. He is doing it though, right?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Yes. He's getting by. He's getting through. How is he at home?

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. He shouldn't do that.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Why not?

MRS. MULLER. Thought he'd have a lot of trouble with the other boys. But that hasn't really happened as far as I can make out.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Good.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Yes. Have you met Father Flynn?

MRS. MULLER. Not exactly, no. I seen him on the altar, but I haven't met him face to face. No. Just, you know, heard from Donald.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What does he say?

MRS. MULLER. 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. Muller, we may have a problem.

MRS. MULLER. Well, I thought you must a had a reason for asking me to come in. Principal's a big job. If you stop your day to talk to me, must be something. I just want to say though, it's just till June.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Excuse me?

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Right.

MRS. MULLER. If Donald can graduate from here, he has a better chance of getting into a good high school. And that would mean an opportunity at college. I believe he has the intelligence. And he wants it, too.

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

MRS. MULLER. Well, that's all I care about. Anything else is all right with me.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I doubt that.

MRS. MULLER. Try me.

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

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That it may not be right.

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

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

MRS. MULLER. *May* have made.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I can't be certain.

MRS. MULLER. No evidence?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. No.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I think there is something to it.

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

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

MRS. MULLER. Why would he do that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Has Donald been acting strangely?

MRS. MULLER. No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Nothing out of the ordinary?

MRS. MULLER. He's been himself.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. All right.

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

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

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What's that?

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I'm not suggesting it is.

MRS. MULLER. He's just a boy.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I know.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I agree with you completely.

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

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

MRS. MULLER. You think I'm not?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Of course you are.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Yes, I do.

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

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

MRS. MULLER. 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 a 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 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 and 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 things 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. 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. After a moment, Father Flynn appears in the door. He is a controllable fury.)*
~~FELYN. May I come in?~~
~~SISTER ALOYSIUS. We would require a third party.~~
~~ELYNN. What was Donald's mother doing here?~~
~~SISTER ALOYSIUS. We were having a chat.~~
~~ELYNN. About what?~~

END