

thought he was on course, but there was no way to be certain. As the days rolled on, and he wasted away with fevers, thirst and starvation, he began to have doubts. Had he set his course right? Was he still going on towards his home? Or was he horribly lost 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 and now had to hold on to it without further reassurance? That was his dilemma on a voyage without apparent end. There are those of you in church today who know exactly the crisis of faith I describe. 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. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. *(He exits.)*

TWO

The lights crossfade to a corner office in a Catholic school in the Bronx. The principal, Sister Aloysius Beauvier, sits at her desk, writing in a ledger with a fountain pen. She is in her fifties or sixties. She is watchful, reserved, unsentimental. She is of the order of the Sisters of Charity. She wears a black bonnet and floor-length black habit, rimless glasses. A knock at the door.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Come in. *(Sister James, also of the Sisters of Charity, pokes her head in. She is in her twenties. There's a bit of sunshine in her heart, though she's reserved as well.)*

SISTER JAMES. Have you a moment, Sister Aloysius?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Come in, Sister James. *(She enters.)* Who's watching your class?

SISTER JAMES. They're having Art.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Art. Waste of time.

SISTER JAMES. It's only an hour a week.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Much can be accomplished in sixty minutes.

SISTER JAMES. Yes, Sister Aloysius. I wondered if I might know what you did about William London?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I sent him home.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Oh yes.

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

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Was it spontaneous?

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 and if you do not keep right on him, he will do anything to escape his chair. He would set his foot on fire for half a day out of school.

SISTER JAMES. But why?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. He has a restless mind.

SISTER JAMES. But that's good.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. No, it's not. His father's a policeman, and the last thing he wants is a rowdy boy. William London is headed for trouble. Puberty has got hold of him. He will be imagining all the wrong things, and I strongly suspect he will not graduate high school. But that's beyond our jurisdiction. We simply have to get him through, out the door, and then he's somebody else's project. Ordinarily, I assign my most experienced sisters to eighth grade, but I'm working within constraints. Are you in control of your class?

SISTER JAMES. I think so.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Usually more children 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's a chain of discipline. Make use of it.

SISTER JAMES. Yes, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. How's Donald Muller doing?

SISTER JAMES. Steady.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Good. Has anyone hit him?

SISTER JAMES. No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Good. That girl, Linda Conte, have you seated her away from the boys?

SISTER JAMES. As far as space permits. It doesn't do much good.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Just get her through. Intact. *(Pause. Sister*

Aloysius is staring absently at Sister James. A silence falls.

SISTER JAMES. So. Should I go? *(No answer.)* Is something the matter?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. No. Why? Is something the matter?

SISTER JAMES. I don't think so.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Then nothing's the matter then.

SISTER JAMES. Well. Thank you, Sister. I just wanted to check on William's nose. *(She starts to go.)*

SISTER ALOYSIUS. He had a ballpoint pen.

SISTER JAMES. Excuse me, Sister?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. William London had a ballpoint pen. He was fiddling with it while he waited for his mother. He's not using it for assignments, I hope.

SISTER JAMES. No, of course not.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I'm sorry I allowed even cartridge pens into the school. The students really should only be learning script with true fountain pens. Always the easy way out these days. What does that teach? Every easy choice today will have its consequence tomorrow. Mark my words.

SISTER JAMES. Yes, Sister.

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

SISTER JAMES. I don't allow them ballpoint pens.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Good. Penmanship is dying all across the country. You have some time. Sit down. *(Sister James hesitates and sits down.)* We might as well have a talk. I've been meaning to talk to you. I observed your lesson on the New Deal at the beginning of the term. Not bad. But I caution you. Do not idealize Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He was a good president, but he did attempt to pack the Supreme Court. I do not approve of making heroes of lay historical figures. If you want to talk about saints, do it in Religion.

SISTER JAMES. Yes, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Also. I question your enthusiasm for History.

SISTER JAMES. But I love History!

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That is exactly my meaning. You favor History and risk swaying the children to value it over their other subjects. I think this is a mistake.

SISTER JAMES. I never thought of that. I'll try to treat my other lessons with more enthusiasm.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. No. Give them their History without putting sugar all over it. That's the point. Now. Tell me about your

class. How would you characterize the condition of 8-B?

SISTER JAMES. I don't know where to begin. What do you want to know?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Let's begin with Stephen Inzio.

SISTER JAMES. Stephen Inzio has the highest marks in the class.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Noreen Horan?

SISTER JAMES. Second highest marks.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Brenda McNulty?

SISTER JAMES. Third highest.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. You see I am making a point, Sister James. I know that Stephen Inzio, Noreen Horan and Brenda McNulty are one, two and three in your class. School-wide, there are forty-eight such students each grade period. I make it my business to know all forty-eight of their names. I do not say this to aggrandize myself, but to illustrate the importance of paying attention. You must pay attention as well.

SISTER JAMES. Yes, Sister Aloysius.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I cannot be everywhere.

SISTER JAMES. Am I falling short, Sister?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. These three students with the highest marks. Are they the most intelligent children in your class?

SISTER JAMES. No, I wouldn't say they are. But they work the hardest.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Very good! That's right! That's the ethic. What good's a gift if it's left in the box? What good is a high IQ if you're staring out the window with your mouth agape? Be hard on the bright ones, Sister James. Don't be charmed by cleverness. Not theirs. And not yours. I think you are a competent teacher, Sister James, but maybe not our best teacher. The best teachers do not perform, they cause the students to perform.

SISTER JAMES. Do I perform?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. As if on a Broadway stage.

SISTER JAMES. Oh dear. I had no conception!

SISTER ALOYSIUS. You're showing off. You like to see yourself ten feet tall in their eyes. Another thing occurs to me. Where were you before?

SISTER JAMES. Mount St. Margaret's.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. All girls.

SISTER JAMES. Yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I feel I must remind you. Boys are made of gravel, soot and tar paper. Boys are a different breed.

SISTER JAMES. I feel I know how to handle them.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. But perhaps you are wrong. And perhaps you are not working hard enough.

SISTER JAMES. Oh. (*Sister James cries a little.*)

SISTER ALOYSIUS. No tears.

SISTER JAMES. I thought you were satisfied with me.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Satisfaction is a vice. Do you have a handkerchief?

SISTER JAMES. Yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Use it. Do you think that Socrates was satisfied? Good teachers are never content. We have some three hundred and seventy-two students in this school. It is a society which requires constant educational, spiritual and human vigilance. I cannot afford an excessively innocent instructor in my eighth grade class. It's self-indulgent. Innocence is a form of laziness. Innocent teachers are easily duped. You must be canny, Sister James.

SISTER JAMES. Yes, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. When William London gets a nosebleed, be skeptical. Don't let a little blood fuddle your judgment. God gave you a brain and a heart. The heart is warm, but your wits must be cold. Liars should be frightened to lie to you. They should be uncomfortable in your presence. I doubt they are.

SISTER JAMES. I don't know. I've never thought about it.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. The children should think you see right through them.

SISTER JAMES. Wouldn't that be a little frightening?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Only to the ones that are up to no good.

SISTER JAMES. But I want my students to feel they can talk to me.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. They're children. They can talk to each other. It's more important they have a fierce moral guardian. You stand at the door, Sister. You are the gatekeeper. If you are vigilant, they will not need to be.

SISTER JAMES. I'm not sure what you want me to do.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. And if things occur in your classroom which you sense require understanding, but you don't understand, come to me.

SISTER JAMES. Yes, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm the principal of this school. Do you stay when the specialty instructors come in?

SISTER JAMES. Yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. But you're here now while the Art class is going on.

SISTER JAMES. I was a little concerned about William's nose.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Right. So you have Art in class.

SISTER JAMES. She comes in. Mrs. Bell. Yes.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. And you take them down to the basement for Dance with Mrs. Shields.

SISTER JAMES. On Thursdays.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Another waste of time.

SISTER JAMES. Oh, but everyone loves the Christmas pageant.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I don't love it. Frankly it offends me. Last year the girl playing Our Lady was wearing lipstick. I was waiting in the wings for that little jade.

SISTER JAMES. Then there's Music.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. That strange woman with the portable piano. What's wrong with her neck?

SISTER JAMES. Some kind of goiter. Poor woman.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Yes. Mrs. Carolyn.

SISTER JAMES. That's right.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. We used to have a Sister teaching that. Not enough Sisters. What else?

SISTER JAMES. Physical Education and Religion.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. And for that we have Father Flynn. Two hours a week. And you stay for those?

SISTER JAMES. Mostly. Unless I have reports to fill out or ...

SISTER ALOYSIUS. What do you think of Father Flynn?

SISTER JAMES. Oh, he's a brilliant man. What a speaker!

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Yes. His sermon this past Sunday was poetic.

SISTER JAMES. He's actually very good, too, at teaching basketball. I was surprised. I wouldn't think a man of the cloth the personality type for basketball, but he has a way he has, very natural with dribbling and shooting.

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

SISTER JAMES. What?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. This past Sunday. What was he talking about?

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

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 the monsignor. We do not share intimate information with priests. *(A pause.)*

SISTER JAMES. I'm a little concerned. *(Sister Aloysius leans forward.)*

SISTER ALOYSIUS. About what?

SISTER JAMES. The time. Art class will be over in a few minutes. I should go up.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Have you noticed anything, Sister James?

SISTER JAMES. About what?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I want you to be alert.

SISTER JAMES. I don't believe I'm following you, Sister.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I'm sorry I'm not more forthright, but I must be careful not to create something by saying it. I can only say I am concerned, perhaps needlessly, about matters in St. Nicholas School.

SISTER JAMES. Academically?

SISTER ALOYSIUS. I wasn't inviting a guessing game. I want you to pay attention to your class.

SISTER JAMES. Well, of course I'll pay attention to my class, Sister. And I'll try not to perform. And I'll try to be less innocent. I'm sorry you're disappointed in me. Please know that I will try my best. Honestly.

SISTER ALOYSIUS. Look at you. You'd trade anything for a warm look. I'm telling you here and now, I want to see the starch in your character cultivated. If you are looking for reassurance, you can be fooled. If you forget yourself and study others, you will not be fooled. It's important. One final matter and then you really must get back. Sister Veronica is going blind.

SISTER JAMES. Oh how horrible!

SISTER ALOYSIUS. This is not generally known, and I don't want it known. If they find out in the rectory, she'll be gone. I cannot afford to lose her. But now if you see her making her way down those stone stairs into the courtyard, for the love of Heaven, lightly take her hand as if in fellowship and see that she doesn't destroy herself. All right, go.

THREE

The lights crossfade to Father Flynn, whistling around his neck, in a sweatshirt and pants, holding a basketball.

FLYNN. All right, settle down, boys. Now the thing about shooting from the foul line: It's psychological. The rest of the game you're cooperating with your teammates, you're competing against the other team. But at the foul line, it's you against yourself. And the danger is: You start to think. When you think, you stop breathing. Your body locks up. So you have to remember to relax. Take a breath, unlock your knees — this is something for you to watch, Jimmy. You stand like a parking meter. Come up with a routine of what you do. Shift your weight, move your hips ... You think that's funny, Ralph? What's funny is you never getting a foul shot. Don't worry if you look silly. They won't think you're silly if you get the basket. Come up with a routine, concentrate on the routine, and you'll forget to get tensed up. Now on another matter, I've noticed several of you guys have dirty nails. 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. They're long, I like them a little long, but look at how clean they are. That makes it okay. There was a kid I grew up with, Timmy Mathisson, never had clean nails, and he'd stick his fingers up his nose, in his mouth. — This is a true story, learn to listen! He got spinal meningitis and died a horrible death. Sometimes it's the little things that get you. You try to talk to a girl with those filthy paws, Mr. Conroy, she's gonna take off like she's being chased by the Red Chinese! *(Reacting genially to laughter)* All right, all right. You guys, what am I gonna do with you? Get dressed, come on over to the rectory, have some Kool-Aid and cookies, we'll have a bull session. *(Blows his whistle.)* Go!