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Product Code A0030-F

# A HOUSE DIVIDED

A Play By  
**SEAN DAVID BENNETT**

“Weep, my darling, weep. That is the first step. Then, tomorrow  
we can make something strong of our sorrow.

- Lorraine Hansberry,  
*The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*

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# A HOUSE DIVIDED

## A Play by Sean David Bennett

### CHARACTERS (In order of appearance):

Molly Shields: *The matriarch of the Shields family; in her late fifties, still very attractive, carrying herself with an energy that is part youthfulness and part resignation*

Bud Shields: *Her elder son, a well-meaning, attractive man about 36; a man that feels overlooked and underappreciated by his father*

Fr. Stephen Shields: *A good-looking man like his brother, Bud; a devoted priest about 33, with dark curly hair, bright eyes and an easy smile*

Sarah Shields: *Bud Shield's wife; who emigrated from war-torn Northern Ireland where her brothers were killed in a clash between Protestants and Catholics*

Fr. Sebastian Toole: *The Shields' "adopted" son saved from a dysfunctional family that died in a fire at their home*

Thomas Shields: *The stalwart head of the family; a "true" Irish Catholic, often unyielding without awareness of the consequences*

Monsignor O'Connell: *Father Stephen Shield's superior at the Rectory*

### THE SETTING:

*The action of the play takes place in the recent past and is set in the living and dining rooms of the Shields home in Kenwood Manor, a Long Island, NY suburb.*

ETC:

*A House Divided* was first presented by the Arena Players Ensemble, Farmingdale, L.I., New York on February 17, 2005, with the following cast:

<i>Molly Shields</i> .....	SUE ANN DENNEHY
<i>Bud Shields</i> .....	ANDREW ROTH
<i>Fr. Stephen Shields</i> .....	JOHN FRENCH
<i>Sarah Shields</i> .....	CHRISTINE SULLIVAN
<i>Fr. Sebastian Toole</i> .....	PETER CONNOLLY
<i>Thomas Shields</i> .....	MICHAEL LANGE
<i>The Monsignor</i> .....	EDWIN YOUNG

Directed by Frederic De Feis. Scenic design by Fred Sprauer; costumes by Lois Lockwood; Lighting by Al Davis. Production Stage Manager was Evan Donnellan.

## *A HOUSE DIVIDED*

*Part I of The Kilmallock Trilogy*

Is dedicated to

Gary Garrison and Lynne LaSalle

*Good Friends, Wonderful Teachers*

## *THE KILMALLOCK TRILOGY*

Is dedicated to

JACK V. HORNBACK

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**A HOUSE DIVIDED**  
A Play by Sean David Bennett

**ACT I; SCENE ONE**

*(AT RISE: A Thursday afternoon in spring; the Shields home in Kenwood Manor. The front entrance is upstage right and opens onto the living room. On the sill of the bay window up center are small plants and family photographs with a writing desk beneath. Downstage right is a sofa and a reading chair as well as a liquor cart. A staircase just left of the bay window leads to the bedrooms off. A dining area with a sideboard and a table elaborately set for dinner stands stage left. A swinging door just above leads off to the kitchen. MOLLY SHIELDS is dusting the dining room. SHE wears a Sony Walkman on her head and sings along with the music. MOLLY is in her late fifties, still very attractive, and carries herself with an energy that is part youthfulness and part resignation, according to her needs of the moment. As SHE dusts, MOLLY removes a copy of the Daily News from the sideboard, and pauses to read a headline that has caught her eye. SHE retrieves her coffee from the side-board and sits with her back to the living room. BUD SHIELDS enters through the front door followed by his brother, FR. STEPHEN SHIELDS. THEY are both good-looking men, with dark curly hair, bright eyes and easy smiles. BUD is wearing a sports coat, shirt and tie. HE comes into the room, sees his mother reading, puts a hand to his lips to silence STEPHEN, and moves further into the living room.)*

MOLLY

*(Sings)* “At the Copa,  
Copacabana...”

BUD

*(Speaking in a large, booming voice, obviously not his own)* “Is that all you can do – sit there and read the paper while I’m out working myself to the bone?”

MOLLY

*(Jumping up, throwing a dust rag over the paper)* Oh, you devil. I thought you were your father. You sound just like him.

BUD

*(Kissing her cheek)* Just as long as I don’t end up looking like him.

MOLLY

*(Pulling away)* You should look half as good when you’re his age. Where’s your brother?

STEPHEN

*(Crosses to desk to drop off books HE has been carrying)* In the living room—

BUD

*(Removing the headset from her head and putting it on his own)* I'll look better. I know for a fact he didn't look half as good when he was mine. *(HE takes her in his arms and starts to dance.)*

STEPHEN

*(Calling from living room)* That's because we both get our looks from our mother.

MOLLY

Don't be putting your father down, either of you.

BUD

*(As HE stops dancing)* What is this – Guy Lombardo?

MOLLY

I wouldn't be caught dead listening to him. It's Barry Manilow.

BUD

They aren't the same?

MOLLY

I smell beer on your breath.

BUD

Ed Fitzgerald stood us a round at the Oasis.

MOLLY

Sarah will be ticked.

BUD

It was only a small one. You know how cheap Fitzgerald is.

MOLLY

Why is he still celebrating? His daughter Rose was born three months ago.

STEPHEN

*(As HE enters the dining room)* Little Rose will be walking before that happens.

MOLLY

You're worse than your brother – going into a bar in broad daylight with your collar on. What will people think?

BUD

That Stephen's a regular guy— not some snob like O'Connell.

MOLLY

*(As STEPHEN reads her paper, MOLLY reaches to take it back)* Here, you — give me that! *(SHE tries to swat him, but STEPHEN ducks and holds the paper for BUD to see.)* I said—

STEPHEN

*(Reading)* “Woman trapped in shower gives birth to triplets— Uses husband’s razor to cut umbilical cords.”

BUD

*(Shaking his head)* Makes a person wonder why the good nuns teach some people to read...

MOLLY

*(Grabbing the paper and walking away)* I read other things.

BUD

*(Ticking them off)* “*True Confessions,*” “*Modern Romance,*” Danielle Steele.

STEPHEN

Mrs. Shields’ five-foot-shelf of the world’s greatest literature.

MOLLY

*(Exiting into the kitchen)* I don’t know what the two of you think you’re doing – coming in here, scaring the life out of a person. Serve you right if I fell down dead – right at your feet.

BUD

*(Calling after her)* There’s a good idea – Stephen could give you Last Rites.

STEPHEN

In spite of the life you’ve led...

BUD

St. Peter would be forced to let you in, whether he wanted to or not. *(Falling on his knees, Al Jolson-style,)* *Sings:*

“Open up your Golden Gates,  
Dear St. Peter— here I come...”

MOLLY

*(Entering with bread basket)* How would either of you know what kind of life I lead? You only come by when it suits you.

STEPHEN

*(To BUD)* I knew that was coming.

BUD

*(To MOLLY)* Well, then — are you saying you're not a sinner?

MOLLY

I most definitely am not.

BUD

So where does that put you and Jesus — above him, below?

STEPHEN

*(Grinning)* They're equals.

MOLLY

I mean I'm in a state of Grace. At least I was until you two walked in. Don't you be messing up the living-room, Stephen.

STEPHEN

Fine, I'll just take these upstairs.

BUD

*(Pointing to the newspaper article)* You should think about something other than sex, sex, sex all the time. I'm leaving this place. I want nothing to do with loose women.

MOLLY

May I remind you that I am getting a big, fancy birthday dinner ready for His Highness, your father? I don't need your brother or you underfoot.

BUD

I'm just saying, if seeing either of us is giving you dirty thoughts...

MOLLY

That's enough, I said.

STEPHEN

Bud's concerned about the state of your immortal soul.

BUD

You could go blind — or grow hair on your hands.

MOLLY

I've given you both my last warning. I've too much to do before company gets here.

STEPHEN

We're having company? Who else is coming?

MOLLY

Bud and Sarah.

BUD

I'm not company, Mom. I'm your other son. Sarah's my wife.

STEPHEN

Just because Sarah's an Episcopalian doesn't make her company.

MOLLY

Her faith has nothing to do with anything, and tonight you'll both do me a favor and keep religion away from the dinner table.

STEPHEN

You don't want me to say Grace?

MOLLY

I mean I don't want another one of your wild talks about Jews and Buddhists and every religion being the same.

STEPHEN

Fine, then, Sebastian can say grace.

MOLLY

Sebastian?

STEPHEN

He's just arrived from Chicago, so I invited him over for Pop's birthday.

MOLLY

Without asking me?

STEPHEN

I didn't think you'd mind. He's coming over to talk to me, so I told him to stay for the party.

BUD

Since when aren't you glad to see Sebastian? You're the one goes around calling him your third son.

MOLLY

I'm always glad to see him. I half-raised him, didn't I? I just don't want your father upset on his birthday by the three of you and your crazy arguments. One of you always brings up a sore subject — like Ecumenism or women priests. You know how much it upsets him but you do it anyway. Your father is from the old school.

BUD

The old school: “Put your history books away now, boys — time for bigotry class.”

MOLLY

Your father is not a bigot. He’d give the shirt off his back to anyone who asked it of him. Black or white, catholic or not. I mean what I say about not riling him up tonight. Your father is getting old. He’s a good man and a simple one.

STEPHEN

Not just simple, Mom. Old fashioned.

MOLLY

So leave him be. You aren’t going to change him.

BUD

Or Sarah. Either of you know which pope decided to make religious warfare a part of the marriage contract?

MOLLY

Bud Shields – How many times do I have to tell you? Sarah’s religion doesn’t make a bit of difference to me – or to your father. We love Sarah – we really do.

BUD

Despite the differences. (*Looking up from the paper*) Not to change the subject, but did you ever find out which it is?

MOLLY

(*Confused*) Which what is?

BUD

You know – blindness or hair?

MOLLY

(*Messing his hair*) For your sake, I hope it’s not hair. You used to have such beautiful curls when you were a baby.

BUD

You know what they say: “The less hair, the more ...”

MOLLY

That’ll be enough, thank you.

BUD

Pick on Stephen, why don’t you?

STEPHEN

Thanks, Bud.

MOLLY

There's nothing to pick on. (*To STEPHEN*) You're all skin and bones. Don't you eat?

STEPHEN

You know what Mrs. Cooney's cooking is like. You've been to enough church suppers.

BUD

Addie Cooney, patron saint of rectory cooks. Eighty-five, if she's a day, and blind as a bat. She still cooking everything in Thunderbird?

STEPHEN

Only when she isn't drinking it.

MOLLY

You're thin as a rail, Stephen. I don't believe she's feeding you at all. If she is, it's a secret potion, known only to her and God.

STEPHEN

And neither of them is telling what's in it. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some work...

MOLLY

Don't be ducking the issue, Stephen. The weight you're losing shows in your face.

STEPHEN

I'm fine, Mom, really I am. It's just been another one of those weeks when I wish I could have my old room back and hide under the covers.

MOLLY

No chance. I'm done matching kids' socks and making their beds. Twenty years was enough. (*As BUD burps*) Bud Shields, you had better have some coffee before Sarah sees you. Stephen?

STEPHEN

No, thanks, Mom. I'll wait a bit.

BUD

We had one beer, that's all — but if it makes you happy.

MOLLY

(*As SHE starts to exit*) Stephen, light the desk lamp if you're going to read or you'll be as blind as your Uncle Dean when you're his age.

BUD

I didn't know he — uh — you know—

MOLLY

Never knew he what?

BUD

Nothing. Besides, Stephen has all his hair. I'm going upstairs to make a pit stop.

MOLLY

Remember to put the seat up. (*Crossing upstage to where STEPHEN is sorting through documents*) You ought to have better sense.

STEPHEN

What now?

MOLLY

Drinking and joking with your brother in a bar in the middle of the day. Have you no brains? Honestly, Stephen.

STEPHEN

I was keeping an eye on Bud so he wouldn't overdo. That's what started the last argument, isn't it?

MOLLY

You look tired, too. O'Connell has no right to be asking you to put in all those extra hours at the Chancery. Instead of wearing you out, let him turn it all over to the lawyers. That's what they pay them for, isn't it?

STEPHEN

Lawyers? Are you kidding?

MOLLY

How else do they expect to handle all this?

STEPHEN

They don't. They're waiting for it all to go away.

MOLLY

Be serious. Do they really think this whole thing is just going to blow over?

STEPHEN

Either that or they're damned good actors. The Cardinal only talks about getting away to France on vacation next month. He's turned everything over to Bishop Walsh, who ducks into his office whenever he sees me coming down the hall. That leaves only O'Connell and me.

MOLLY

What's his part in all this?

STEPHEN

O'Connell handles the press. Occasionally, he oversees a meeting I'm having with a member of the family – but only if he has to.

MOLLY

He should worry less about your work and see more to his own. It's all they talk about on television these days.

STEPHEN

O'Connell's doing a fine job – in his own, calculating way. Never loses his cool, no matter what. Keeps everyone at bay— lawyers, reporters, families— goes about everything like he has ice water in his veins.

MOLLY

Your father says the same thing about him.

STEPHEN

It's true. You've no idea what a heartless man he is.

MOLLY

Oh, yes I do. I've gone to him for Confession.

STEPHEN

I'm not joking, Mom. The three of them are only interested in cutting their losses. That's why they won't talk to any of the families directly. Instead, O'Connell will come to me and say, "See what you can do, Stephen. Find out what they're really after."

MOLLY

Go back to your parish work, before you get hurt.

STEPHEN

Mom, I can't just walk away.

MOLLY

Yes, you can. When you first went down there, you said it was only a matter of a few rotten apples and it would all be over in a few months. It's been almost two years.

STEPHEN

That's what I was told.

MOLLY

And you believed them.

STEPHEN

It isn't like any of us knew the true facts.

MOLLY

Somebody did. Things like this don't happen unless someone is looking the other way. There's nothing in this life without its seamy side, Stephen, including the church.

STEPHEN

I don't know that. And I have been asked – for now that the whole business stay as low profile as possible.

MOLLY

Make them find someone else. You need to learn when to walk away, Stephen. No one person can do what you're doing without it changing them, and I don't mean for the better.

STEPHEN

Mom, look. Maybe you're right, maybe it is changing me— and maybe I need to be changed. Until now, all I knew of evil came from books in the seminary. It never occurred to me that one day I would come face to face with it – feel its presence, alongside me in the room, as I'm listening to one of these families. Sometimes, I feel like I'm all that stands between evil and these children. I can't walk away. Not if I want to be the kind of priest I mean to be.

MOLLY

Walk away, Stephen. That's what you must do with this whole business.

STEPHEN

I can't do that.

MOLLY

You most certainly can. Why can't you at least have the common sense of the spider in the nursery book I used to read to you? Or have you forgotten?

STEPHEN

What are you talking about? What spider? What nursery book?

MOLLY

Your grandmother brought it over from Ireland when she was a little girl. I used to read to you from it.

STEPHEN

You used to frighten me with it, you mean. Those were some of the most terrifying stories ever told to a little child. No wonder all the young people leave Ireland.

MOLLY

You're missing the point. The spider lays its eggs, remember? And then what happens?

STEPHEN

I don't know. I forget.

MOLLY

It goes away. It doesn't stick around to fertilize the eggs. It has the common sense to go about its own life first. And why do you suppose that is, Stephen?

STEPHEN

The spider likes to party?

MOLLY

It goes away because it knows that it will die if it stays and fertilizes the eggs. It seems to me, Stephen, that spider knows more than you do.

STEPHEN

But it does come back, mom. It fertilizes the eggs, so that they don't die. All the time it spends away from them, the spider knows it must return, just as nature intended.

MOLLY

As God intended, you mean.

STEPHEN

Fine, by God, then.

MOLLY

And when it does, what happens to the spider, Stephen? Did you forget that?

STEPHEN

I'm not a child, mom. I get your point.

MOLLY

Ah, you don't understand any more today than you did when you were a boy. The spider has the good sense to take care of itself *first*. Unlike you, the spider knows its time on earth is limited, whether it lives another day or just for another second. All we ever have, Stephen, is what we have before us – this moment right now contains the full, entire span of our lives.

STEPHEN

Stick to Danielle Steele, Mom. Philosophy's not your forte.

MOLLY

*(Kissing his cheek)* You're just like your father. Neither you nor he can see into life's dark places, but that doesn't mean they're not there. If you really want to make your priesthood matter, Stephen, you'll have to learn which battles you can win and which ones you must walk away from.

STEPHEN

I'm telling you, I know what I'm doing. Don't be so dramatic.

MOLLY

Don't you be so dismissive.

STEPHEN

Let's not talk about this for the sake of the old man's birthday — and not while Bud's here.

BUD

*(Coming downstairs)* Let's not talk about *what* while Bud's here?

MOLLY

Did you put the seat down?

BUD

Yes, Mom. This may come as a surprise to you, but I'm toilet-trained.

MOLLY

You can't tell it by my mop. *(SHE exits into kitchen)*

BUD

She changed moods quickly — what were you two talking about?

STEPHEN

The work I'm doing at the chancery. I shouldn't have involved her.

BUD

She involves herself. That's how she came by the name 'Mother'.

STEPHEN

She means well. She and Pop both do.

BUD

They don't play fair. Sarah and I have given them two grandchildren, for God's sake. When do you think they'll notice we've grown up?

STEPHEN

Parents don't have to play fair. You know that.

BUD

It's different for you. They respect you. You're mankind's great savior and I'm just a high school administrator.

STEPHEN

I'm the last person you should envy, Bud. They treat me the same way as they do you—like we're still making model airplanes and living upstairs in our bedrooms.

BUD

I'm not jealous, Stephen — just stating a fact. When I told them I was the youngest administrator appointed by the school board, they had almost nothing to say. When you went away to seminary, they couldn't stop talking about you.

STEPHEN

And now that it's gotten messy, they're both pulling back.

BUD

Maybe they're just doing what we're all trying to do.

STEPHEN

Which is...?

BUD

Come on, Stephen — we're all doing our best to cope with an impossible situation. It's one thing to stand up for you, but the rest of it—

STEPHEN

You mean these cases I'm working on?

BUD

It just seems like every day there's some new scandal which, you have to agree, wouldn't be happening if priests were allowed to marry.

STEPHEN

*(Smiling)* Excuse me, but I thought I just heard Sarah's voice echoing off the sofa.

BUD

It may surprise you all, Stephen, but I'm not only toilet-trained, I have a mind of my own. I don't need my wife – or my family – to do my thinking for me — as you'll find out tonight at dinner.

STEPHEN

What's that supposed to mean?

BUD

It'll keep. I'm waiting to tell you all at the same time. Look, I didn't mean to speak so harshly about the priesthood, before. It's not just these stories going around. It's all the rest of it. I could never have done it... You and Sebastian both strike me as two very lonely men. You more than he.

STEPHEN

Sometimes. All the same, I'm sorry if what others are doing causes you to have misgivings about me.

BUD

I haven't — not about you. It's only that I hate the way the priesthood's been so demeaned. People we both know crack jokes and ask me all the time if you're staying with it or not.

STEPHEN

With the priesthood? Of course, I'm staying.

BUD

I know that. I tell them how happy you are...

STEPHEN

But—

BUD

The truth is— it's me. I'm ashamed that you're one of them. I wish I could tell people that you're a cop— or a plumber.

STEPHEN

Why haven't you told me this before?

BUD

It's not you. I love you and I'm proud of you. You're my brother, for Christ's sake. But I know what people are thinking— and so do you. A priest zips his pants up, goes to hear confession and leaves an eleven-year-old boy in the sacristy bleeding from his anus. If someone were to touch my son that way – or my daughter – I'd kill him. Rip the balls right off him.

STEPHEN

That's enough, Bud. You know damn well those men aren't priests, they're diseased animals.

BUD

*(Pouring a drink from the sideboard)* Is that how you hold yourself together— telling yourself that *they're* sick and you're sane? You may not be out there doing the things they're doing, Stephen, but they're out there, doing the things you're doing: baptizing, saying Mass— What in the world do you tell your parishioners on Sundays?

STEPHEN

I don't. I don't have to. I go to greet a young family before Mass and the mother and father each grab an arm of their child, so he can't run to me the way he used to. You know how that makes me feel?

BUD

I have an idea—

STEPHEN

No, Bud, you don't. You don't have a clue how dirty it makes me feel. Dirty. I don't feel like a priest any more. I'm supposed to be their shepherd, but I – I don't feel like I am. I don't feel like I can be a shepherd to anyone.

BUD

Stephen, I didn't mean—

STEPHEN

I stand there in the church hall thinking that everyone can look straight through me into my soul. They see what it's in danger of becoming— if it hasn't already. That's what I feel. I understand them— I ask myself the same questions they're asking.

BUD

And what's your answer?

STEPHEN

I don't have one. All I can do is pray.

BUD

Pray? That's all? As in, "Pray and it will all get better?"

STEPHEN

You can't put a man down for praying, Bud— For behaving as if there is still something to believe in. I pray because I don't understand any of it— not one damned bit of it—

BUD

—that a man's hands can go from touching a girl's vagina to consecrating the Body and Blood of Christ?

STEPHEN

No, Bud, I *don't*— and I never will. Sometimes, when I'm in my room in the rectory, I lose all concept of time and space. Bohrer says I'm having panic attacks.

BUD

You've been seeing Dr. Bohrer?

STEPHEN

For God's sake don't tell Mom. Some nights I fall asleep and dream I'm back at the summer house, and Pop is teaching us how to swim— yelling at us from the dock to keep our heads up. Suddenly, I'm not able to touch bottom with my toes anymore and I start to sink because there's nothing underneath me. It's all water. I hear him shouting at me to come back, but I just keep waving my arms and kicking my legs, until I'm in the middle of the ocean and I can't find my way back.

BUD

You know what I say? If the Church can do this to a person then screw the church. Fuck it.

MOLLY

*(Entering with hors d'oeuvres tray)* Bud Shields! What did you just say?

BUD

Sorry, Mom. I didn't hear you come in.

MOLLY

What difference does that make? How dare you use such language in this house?

STEPHEN

Bud didn't mean it. We were having an argument.

BUD

It's just a four-letter word. You and Dad use plenty of them.

MOLLY

Not that one we don't. In all the time you were living here, you never heard either of us use that word. I've never said that word in my entire life.

STEPHEN

Bud didn't mean anything, Mom. They say it every day on television. It's just a vulgar term for having intercourse.

BUD

You know, like you and Dad did to have both of us — you did do it, didn't you?

*(MOLLY is a picture of rage and confusion. Her mouth opens, but no words come out. When SHE finally does speak, it is a sputter)*

MOLLY

You—You— Your father and I may have had intercourse— but we never fucked! *(As both men break up in laughter, MOLLY puts down the tray, and speaks almost to herself.)* I could have gone my whole life without saying that word. I honestly believe I could have— if I'd never had such dreadful, disgusting children.

STEPHEN

*(Going to her)* Mom, we're sorry. It slipped out...

MOLLY

*(Pushing him away)* How dare you? How dare either of you conduct yourself in a manner that brings out the worst in a person? What kind of priest are you – Or don't you care? You both think you can stand there and apologize— as if words can wipe away actions? Well, they can't. The hurt is here – right here inside me – where you can't get at it— because I won't let you go there anymore.

SARAH

*(Entering with laundry)* Is everything all right, Molly? I could have sworn I heard you say—

MOLLY

*(Brushing past her.)* Excuse me, Sarah. I have to watch the stove.

BUD

Sweet Jesus— I never saw that one coming.

SARAH

*(Folding laundry on the dining room table)* She's not been herself all day. I think she's worried about seeing the doctor tomorrow.

BUD

She told me she was going for a check-up. Has she said anything different to you, Sarah?

SARAH

Jesus, Mary and Joseph— Don't either of you recognize when a woman thinks she's found something?

BUD

Like what?

STEPHEN

You mean, a lump of some kind?

SARAH

That's exactly what I mean. You'd best go to her, Stephen.

STEPHEN

I will. I'll just give her a moment. (*Indicating the laundry basket*) Can I help you with these?

SARAH

They're just about folded. Go now— I want to have a word with your brother.

STEPHEN

(*To BUD, as HE exits*) Looks like the festivities are beginning earlier than usual this year.

SARAH

How many? And don't lie to me. I need to know if you're still sober enough to do what I asked you to do this morning.

BUD

(*Bounding up from the sofa*) Oh, Christ! I forgot...

SARAH

You forgot. How? How do you forget to pick up your own children at Day-Care?

BUD

I'm sorry, honey— I can explain—

SARAH

No, you can't. You can explain a lot of things, Bud Shields, but that isn't one of them. It's not like I ask you every day. Just today— so I could help Molly with your father's birthday dinner. I thought it was a simple enough request, but I was wrong.

BUD

Honey— Sarah, it's still early. I can leave now and get there well before the day-care closes.

SARAH

That's not the point. Saturday, you stayed up half the night watching a soccer match from Italy, but couldn't get up the next day to take your two kids to Mass. I had to take them to my church with me.

BUD

You said I could. There's nothing wrong with them going to Good Shepherd with you.

SARAH

Tell that to your father.

BUD

It's none of his business.

SARAH

It will be, if I give in to all the pressure to sign them up for Sunday school. How do you think he'll take it when one of his neighbors comes up to him and says, "Hello there, Thomas— I hear your grandchildren have joined the Church of England?" Who do you think will get blamed if that happens?

BUD

You're beginning to sound like my mother.

SARAH

And you're beginning to act like your father.

BUD

Sarah, we can talk about this when we get home. I'll go now— and get them to your aunt's house, like I promised.

SARAH

You'll be back in time for the party? No stopping off?

BUD

*(Going to her, taking her in his arms)* I promise. Honey, I've got something really important to tell you this evening – and I don't want this to spoil it. Please.

SARAH

What is it, then?

BUD

I 'm saving it for tonight— for the whole family. But I can tell you this— I'm about to make you the happiest woman in the world.

SARAH

*(As HE moves to leave, smiling)* Where's my kiss?

*(HE kisses her, starts to exit, and stops when HE sees FR. SEBASTIAN TOOLE standing in the doorway. SEBASTIAN also wears his clerical collar)*

SEBASTIAN

Hello, Sarah — Bud.

SARAH

Sebastian. I didn't know you were in town. Good to see you. Where are your manners, Bud? Say hello.

BUD

Good to see you, Sebastian. I gotta run. I'll catch up with you later. *(HE exits)*

SEBASTIAN

Later then. *(To SARAH)* Seems a man in a great hurry, doesn't he? May I come in?

SARAH

Trust me, he is. Of course, you can come in. What brings you to town?

SEBASTIAN

I'm here to visit with Stephen— and of course there's the big birthday bash for Tom. I'm surprised *you're* here, though.

SARAH

If you're referring to the last battle-royal, I can tell you it's over and done with, as far as Bud and his father are concerned. Tom wangled a couple of seats to the Rangers game last week, and that was enough for Bud.

SEBASTIAN

But not for you.

SARAH

I made Molly a promise— if Thomas didn't bring it up again, neither would I. I just came over to help with the dinner. Can I get you something? A cup of coffee?

SEBASTIAN

No, thanks. I've already had a couple gallons with O'Connell down at the rectory, listening to him repeat himself on all his favorite subjects— mainly himself.

SARAH

Make yourself comfortable and I'll go tell Molly you're here.

SEBASTIAN

Ah, stay a minute, now. Leave, and you'll take all the beauty out of the room.

SARAH

Don't be flattering me, Sebastian— I know better. I look as old and tired as I feel.

SEBASTIAN

Not true. You look exactly the same as you did four years ago.

SARAH

Five. It was at Brian's christening.

SEBASTIAN

Has it been that long— Brian is five?

SARAH

Going on six. About to lose two teeth, as a matter of fact.

MOLLY

*(Entering from kitchen)* Why Sebastian— how nice to see you. Where are your bags?

SEBASTIAN

Hello, Molly. I'm staying at the rectory. O'Connell wants me where he can keep an eye on me. Are there any more beautiful, charming women like yourself hiding in the kitchen, or are you the only one?

SARAH

Be careful, Molly. He just tried a similar line on me.

MOLLY

And I suppose you objected.

SEBASTIAN

She did.

MOLLY

Give her a few years. Thomas will be so happy you're here for his birthday. How long can you stay?

SEBASTIAN

Only a few days — Some parish business.

MOLLY

Of course— your promotion. I'm so happy for you. How was your trip?

SEBASTIAN

In a word— Amtrak! And no talk of a promotion. Nothing's official, yet. Is Stephen around?

MOLLY

In the kitchen. Go and say hello.

SEBASTIAN

*(Kissing her, then exiting to kitchen)* I will.

SARAH

I wish you'd warned me.

MOLLY

I'm as surprised as you. Stephen didn't mention a word until this afternoon. He looks well, doesn't he?

SARAH

I suppose.

MOLLY

I write and invite him to visit us every holiday, but he always begs off. Too many memories. Women are better at dealing with some things than men—That's always been my belief.

SARAH

I'm not so sure. If I hadn't come to this country — after you know — I probably would have lost my mind.

MOLLY

That was a different matter entirely. Your brothers, rest their souls, died for a cause they believed in. A far cry, if you ask me, from what that boy's mother did.

SARAH

The cause of the fire was never proven, Molly.

MOLLY

Thanks to my Thomas— but you mustn't ever say anything to Sebastian.

SARAH

He doesn't know? All these years you've let him think it was an accident?

MOLLY

That boy has had a terrible life, Sarah— all that drinking and the fighting. All Thomas did was convince the district attorney that she'd never live to see trial— and wasn't he right? She died that very morning and it was a mercy that she did. A terrible way for a child to lose his parents. Thank God he was spending the night here.

SARAH

They're awfully quiet in there, don't you think?

MOLLY

*(Turns to kitchen, calls)* Stephen! Sebastian! Do not be touching anything in the kitchen. If you want something, ask me. I don't need another of your messes.

STEPHEN

*(From the kitchen)* We were just helping ourselves to some of the pound cake. Is that okay?

MOLLY

Sebastian can have anything he wants. I'll deal with *you* later.

*(STEPHEN enters from kitchen. MOLLY turns her back to him)*

SEBASTIAN

Now there's a familiar phrase. Okay, Stephen, what did you do this time?

STEPHEN

Nothing. Just a little misunderstanding— right, Mom?

MOLLY

Is that what you call it?

SEBASTIAN

You're not going to let it spoil Thomas's birthday, are you? None of us would want to be doing that, now would we? Whatever it is, make it up. You know, don't you Molly— Anger causes the face to wrinkle prematurely.

MOLLY

Don't be sweet talking me, Sebastian, the way the rest of my family does.

SEBASTIAN

And why not? I'm the third son, remember?

MOLLY

*(To Sarah)* I invite him to stay for supper— one night, mind you. The next thing I know I'm buying him a toothbrush and putting out an extra facecloth in the bathroom for him.  
*(To Sebastian)* That one puts years on a person, but you take them right off.

SARAH

*(Picking up laundry basket)* These are all folded. I'll go bring in the rest. You know, Molly, you have a perfectly good dryer in the basement. One of these days you should try using it.

MOLLY

The chemicals in those fabric softeners make me itch.

STEPHEN

*(A wink)* Mom thinks Proctor and Gamble are plotting to poison her— don'tcha, Mom?

MOLLY

Regardless of what their commercials say, laundry always smells fresher when it dries in the sun. I don't like funny smells sticking to my clothing.

STEPHEN

Sometimes when people get older, they start to have these odors... How often do you and Dad bathe?

MOLLY

Will you never learn when a person has had enough?

SEBASTIAN

I don't think he can.

STEPHEN

No one ever wants to hear my side— Where's Bud gone off to in such a hurry?

SARAH

He went to pick the children up at Day Care and take them to my Aunt Mary's.

SEBASTIAN

They won't be here for Tom's party?

SARAH

They won't be to any parties, anywhere, any time soon. I spent all Tuesday afternoon at their school, explaining which words they learned at home and which words they didn't. I don't think their teacher believed me, and until she does, it's no birthday cakes, no desserts, no movies, and no TV. There's too much watching television in this country as it is.

STEPHEN

Dad won't be happy if they miss his party. He'll say you're punishing him instead of them.

MOLLY

And well he'd deserve it. Almost everything that comes out of their mouths they learned from him.

STEPHEN

So did Bud and I. You might as well forgive your children as you do your grandchildren.

MOLLY

Don't be telling me what I should or shouldn't do. You know how I feel on certain issues.

SEBASTIAN

Somebody want to tell me what's going on?

STEPHEN

Just before you came, a very tiny four letter word slipped out of Bud's mouth. He didn't mean to say it.

MOLLY

He never does. That's why God, in His wisdom, made him part of *this* family, where you all think it's so easy to forgive and forgive and forgive. (*SHE exits*)

SARAH

I'll just bring these upstairs. You two catch up. (*SARAH exits upstairs*)

STEPHEN

(*Imitating*) "Forgive and forgive and forgive." Mom still has the touch. "Who's not feeling guilty? Come sit by me."

SEBASTIAN

She's changed a lot.

STEPHEN

My mother? How so?

SEBASTIAN

Not your mother— Sarah. Seems a bit defensive, sort of.

STEPHEN

You've got to admit, Sebastian, it's a bit awkward...

SEBASTIAN

I thought your father and she had put all that to rest.

STEPHEN

I'm not talking about that. I mean you and her.

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, there was never anything between us. I've told you that. It was twelve years ago.

STEPHEN

For you—

SEBASTIAN

For either of us. She'd just come to this country and my parents had just died. We were thrown together like two mourners at a funeral. Which we were. Helping her cope with her loss helped me with mine.

STEPHEN

There was a little more to it than that.

SEBASTIAN

We were fond of each other. That's all there was to it. Besides, your brother came along and swept her right off her feet.

STEPHEN

She married him on the rebound.

SEBASTIAN

Sometimes, I feel just like Molly. I never know when you or Bud is joking. If you're serious, then tell me this. Why would she have to do a thing like that? She was pretty enough to have any man she wanted.

STEPHEN

—Except one.

SEBASTIAN

You're the only person who ever thought that and I wish you'd put it out of your head—especially now. Sarah means nothing to me.

SARAH

*(Descending the staircase.)* Thank you, Sebastian— and why do you suppose *that* is?

SEBASTIAN

God, Sarah, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that the way it sounded.

STEPHEN

I was goading him about the past, Sarah— the way you two always went about together.

SARAH

Right— I heard it out of context.

STEPHEN

Yes, exactly.

SARAH

How *did* you mean it then, Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

I was referring to there not being an especial closeness between us. It's something Stephen has often teased me about.

SARAH

Good. I'm glad you set the record straight. With all the lunacy and lust among the clergy these days, a man in your position can't be too careful.

SEBASTIAN

What do you mean: a man in my position?

SARAH

We all know you're a man who's about to be given his own parish.

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, you shouldn't have said anything.

STEPHEN

Don't look at me. Your buddy O'Connell isn't the best person in the world for keeping secrets. He's very proud of you.

SEBASTIAN

It's only in the talking stages. You know how these things go. One black mark and—

STEPHEN

*(Laughs)* And we all know you. When you set your mind on something, you pull out all the stops. With that god-given gift for persuasion of yours, who is going to say “no” to you?

SEBASTIAN

People say “no” to me all the time.

SARAH

Trust me. You’ll make it happen, especially if O’Connell puts in a good word for you. And we all know you’ve got him in the palm of your hand.

SEBASTIAN

I don’t.

SARAH

We’ll see. I’m going to help Molly with dinner. *(SHE exits)*

STEPHEN

He talks about you as if you were his own flesh and blood. If I didn’t know better, I’d say he was in love with you.

SEBASTIAN

I find that offensive, Stephen. I really do.

STEPHEN

I mean like a son. The way my father took to you when we were kids.

SEBASTIAN

The man’s been good to me, that’s all.

STEPHEN

Better than he’s ever been to me, and I’m with him practically every day. But then, I don’t cater to him.

SEBASTIAN

Are you saying I do?

STEPHEN

Come on, Sebastian. Whenever you’re home, you sit up half the night listening to his stories, as if they were brand new and you hadn’t heard them a dozen times. You even write to him.

SEBASTIAN

If I didn't know better, I'd say you didn't like him.

STEPHEN

I don't. I'm not half as keen as you are on having his company. I get plenty of it at the rectory and now down at the Chancery. I don't trust him, either. The less I have to do with him, the better I like it. I should tell you that Sarah isn't the only person who's changed around here. I hate what I'm doing and what it's doing to me. And O'Connell is a large part of it.

SEBASTIAN

O'Connell tells me you're doing a fine job.

STEPHEN

He talks to you about my work?

SEBASTIAN

Once in a while...

STEPHEN

In detail?

SEBASTIAN

Not the names or anything. Sometimes, he's just looking for a second opinion.

STEPHEN

That's just wrong. These matters are confidential.

SEBASTIAN

Perhaps he trusts me.

STEPHEN

I don't know how you do it — Here I am, doing all his work for him, running interference for him with the press and with the victims' families — and I can't get the time of day from him. But he'll talk about it all to you — a thousand miles away.

SEBASTIAN

Let's change the subject. I've had four hours with the man on top of a horrible train ride. That's enough penance for one day. (*Looking around at the room*) How little this room has changed since we were kids. I can still see your Lego blocks strewn all over the carpet — trying to build that Ferris wheel— the one we saw at Coney Island.

STEPHEN

The Wonder Wheel!

SEBASTIAN

Is it still there, or has it been torn down with all the other rides?

STEPHEN

No. It's there. It was in some PBS documentary. The cars are a lot older and it looks scarier today than when we were kids. *(HE smiles)*

SEBASTIAN

What are you laughing at?

STEPHEN

Nothing – just that with your fear of heights, how will you ever manage being a part of the hierarchy?

SEBASTIAN

A person does what he has to, I guess. What are these?

STEPHEN

Just some travel brochures.

SEBASTIAN

*(Picking up the brochures)* Prague ... Warsaw ... Berlin.

STEPHEN

I stopped by a travel agency on my way home, today. I thought it would take my mind off my work.

SEBASTIAN

Good for you. Sabbatical?

STEPHEN

Maybe a couple of weeks next summer. I was hoping you'd consider going, too.

SEBASTIAN

I'd like to, but I can't this year, Stephen—

STEPHEN

—“Something's come up.”

SEBASTIAN

It has.

STEPHEN

We talked about it before. It's called “fear of heights.” You don't have to go by plane...

SEBASTIAN

I only wish it were that simple. Jesus, Stephen, this is so difficult. The reason I came back is because I'm here to meet with Bishop Walsh.

STEPHEN

What on earth for? He knows you're not interested in transferring.

SEBASTIAN

No. Look, Stephen. I was supposed to wait until tomorrow and let O'Connell tell you, himself. He made me promise, but it isn't right to keep it from you. I'm to talk with him and the Bishop about you.

STEPHEN

About me?

SEBASTIAN

It seems there's been a complaint.

STEPHEN

Against me? What kind of a complaint?

SEBASTIAN

One of your parishioners has come forward and claims that you – made an improper advance to him when he was a kid. Jesus, now I've said it.

STEPHEN

Him? A Man? Who...is this person? What am I supposed to have done? How does it involve you?

SEBASTIAN

I was called here to give evidence as to your character.

STEPHEN

To give evidence — there's to be some kind of a trial?

SEBASTIAN

Not a trial. Not yet. A meeting has been arranged between O'Connell and the lawyers for the man who's accused you. Maybe it won't have to come to anything. I don't know all the details—

STEPHEN

Yes you do. You wouldn't have said anything to me at all unless you knew what you were talking about. How am I supposed to defend myself? What is it I've done?

SEBASTIAN

I told you— I don't know any of the details. Tomorrow's meeting is to see if they can work things out.

STEPHEN

What things?

SEBASTIAN

There's a chance that these two are just doing this to make a little money.

STEPHEN

Two? There are two of them?

SEBASTIAN

They're both involved in the same accusation...

STEPHEN

How long have you known about this?

SEBASTIAN

O'Connell called me on Saturday — ordered me to come as quickly as I could. Look, it may not be all that serious. They all respect you at the Chancery — and your family. They're doing everything they can to effect some sort of damage control on this.

STEPHEN

What the hell are you talking about — damage control? I want to know what I'm accused of. I've seen the Bishop every day this week at the Chancery and he's mentioned nothing to me. The son of a bitch hardly ever comes out of his office.

SEBASTIAN

Keep your voice down. You don't want your mother to hear.

STEPHEN

What am I supposed to have done?

SEBASTIAN

You remember the Retreat you and I held seven years ago for some teenage boys on probation?

STEPHEN

Of course I remember. We took them to St. Jerome's Campground upstate for the weekend.

SEBASTIAN

Two of the boys – men, I mean – have come forward and accused you of improper conduct with them.

STEPHEN

How? What kind of conduct?

SEBASTIAN

Their story is that you went into their cabin and you brought with you some magazines...

STEPHEN

What sort of magazines? This is ridiculous.

SEBASTIAN

There's more. One of the boys had been excused, earlier in the day, from playing softball. He was running a fever. Your excuse for the visit was that you were checking up on him.

STEPHEN

...And?

SEBASTIAN

You sat down on his bed to feel his forehead — as you did, the magazines fell onto the bedcovers.

STEPHEN

None of this is true...

SEBASTIAN

The boy says — I mean, your accuser claims that you sat there for a long time — never moving to pick up the magazines—

STEPHEN

He's making it up.

SEBASTIAN

—You removed your hand from his forehead, took his hands in yours and moved them to your pants—

STEPHEN

It never happened.

SEBASTIAN

—and that you had an erection. He claims he was frightened and asked you to leave the cabin.

STEPHEN

You've known me all my life, Sebastian. I'd never do anything like that. I work with these cases every day. The priests who are guilty have a terrible evil in them — and I just don't have that. I don't.

SEBASTIAN

That's why I've been called here to vouch for you.

STEPHEN

Who else knows about this?

SEBASTIAN

I told you before. The diocese means to keep it quiet until they have all the facts.

STEPHEN

So quiet that not one of you could tell me about it?

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, keep your voice down...

STEPHEN

The stinking shame of it— You, the Bishop, O'Connell — have all known this since Saturday but couldn't pick up a phone to call me? We've been friends since second grade. Why didn't you warn me?

SEBASTIAN

I told you. I was ordered not to speak to you. They wanted time to go over your file first. Study your behavior... stuff like that.

STEPHEN

Observe me – like a criminal, you mean?

SEBASTIAN

Walsh has been warned not to have another scandal in this diocese so he's moving cautiously with any new accusations. O'Connell says they're both doing all they can to make the problem disappear.

STEPHEN

O'Connell? Damn it, Sebastian, I need a lawyer.

SEBASTIAN

If you get a lawyer at this point, no one is going to believe you're innocent. The Bishop won't even meet with you if you bring a lawyer. It will only look as if you have something to hide. My advice is let everything proceed the way the Church wants it to.

SEBASTIAN, *Continued*

After tomorrow's meeting, they'll call you in and lay all the facts before you. There's nothing to fear if you're not guilty...

## STEPHEN

If? That's the lowest thing you could have said. Why don't you just get the hell out of here if that's what you think?

## SEBASTIAN

You know what I meant.

## STEPHEN

And I heard what you said. Don't any of you think I've learned a single thing down at the Chancery? I know what the Church can do, if it wants. I damn well *will* get a lawyer.

## SEBASTIAN

What will that solve? This is all very preliminary. The two men have promised not to take things any further.

## STEPHEN

To go to the papers you mean? Jesus Christ!

## SEBASTIAN

Walsh and O'Connell both think these men aren't interested in hauling you into court. They're just looking to cash in on these scandals.

## STEPHEN

Michael Silvio—

## SEBASTIAN

What?

## STEPHEN

The kid with the fever.

## SEBASTIAN

You remember the kid?

## STEPHEN

Yes. He was fifteen or sixteen. Skinny. He came to me just before softball practice and said he had a fever. I knew he was faking it, but I said he didn't have to play. I never saw him again that day. I swear it. Didn't we take some of the boys canoeing that evening?

SEBASTIAN

Did we? I don't remember that...

*(THOMAS SHIELDS, smartly dressed in a dark suit, white shirt and blue tie enters through the front door carrying a leather briefcase.)*

SHIELDS

Well, well, well. If this isn't a sight right out of the past— the two of you standing there in your Cub Scout uniforms. Only back then, it really *was* a Cub Scout uniform.

SEBASTIAN

Hi, Thomas. Happy Birthday.

STEPHEN

*(Without smiling)* Happy birthday, Dad.

SHIELDS

A little less enthusiasm there, Stephen, and it would sound like a death wish. Why the long faces? One of you in trouble with Molly again?

STEPHEN

*(Not meeting his eyes)* I am.

SEBASTIAN

*(Covering)* We were just having one of our serious talks when you came in.

SHIELDS

Now why doesn't that surprise me? Who wants to join me in a little birthday toast?

SEBASTIAN

Scotch?

SHIELDS

*(Making a face)* Bushmill's. What brings you to town, Sebastian? Something to do with your promotion?

SEBASTIAN

Just a short visit – mainly to see Stephen. Does the whole world know about my promotion?

SHIELDS

Just about. O'Connell likes to boast about his "two young men," as he calls you. A highball, Stephen?

STEPHEN

Not me. I'm going upstairs to make a couple of phone calls.

SEBASTIAN

If you're trying to reach O'Connell, forget it. He's gone out to play bridge.

STEPHEN

At a time like this? Damn it. Maybe I can still catch him.

*(STEPHEN exits upstairs)*

MOLLY

*(Entering from the kitchen)* I thought I heard your father.

SHIELDS

You did.

MOLLY

*(Giving him a small, wrapped present)* You're home early. Happy Birthday.

SHIELDS

What's this? You already gave me a present.

MOLLY

No, I didn't.

SHIELDS

This morning— don't you remember?

MOLLY

*(Understanding)* You're getting to be plain dirty-minded.

SHIELDS

I certainly hope so – and to thank you for all your generous hospitality, Molly dear, I'm taking tomorrow off so we can spend a long weekend together. Never can tell what might come up.

MOLLY

My advice to you, Mr. Shields, is don't quit your day job until you know for certain that you can perform another miracle.

SHIELDS

Come, my raven-haired beauty – sit awhile.

MOLLY

And let the roast burn?

SHIELDS

Let the house burn! Have you no conception, woman, of what it means, after a hard day's work, to come home to a genuine Hollywood pin-up girl? How often do you suppose that happens, Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

I'd say not often, Sir.

SHIELDS

And you'd be right. Ready for another?

MOLLY

(As *SHE exits*) You'd better be putting something in your stomach if you're starting in on the whiskey. I'll fetch the hors d'oeuvres.

SHIELDS

A fine pair, aren't they?

SEBASTIAN

Who, sir?

SHIELDS

Molly and Stephen. They share a private language between them, I swear. All smiles, the two of them when the sun is out. But watch out when the clouds come. Any idea what they were arguing about?

SEBASTIAN

Same as always, I suppose. So, now that you're sixty-five, Thomas, are you going to start making a little time for yourself?

SHIELDS

You mean, am I planning to join a senior center?

SEBASTIAN

No, sir. I meant, take up new interests. Do some traveling with Molly.

SHIELDS

A pretty picture that would be— The two of us climbing about a yellow school bus with our box lunches of tuna fish on rye and a little bag of potato chips – for what? A day trip to the Museum of African-American History? No, thank you. I've seen what happens to men when they retire. They give up. They grow – old.

SEBASTIAN

I was thinking of something a little more exciting than that. You might even find out that there's life after civil service.

SHIELDS

*(Smarting)* I'm not some Jamaican filing clerk, you know. Thirty-six years I've been at City Hall and I'll be there until they carry me out feet first.

SEBASTIAN

I meant it would be nice if you and Molly had some more time for yourselves.

SHIELDS

The Party needs me right where I am, especially with this new administration. Besides, what with having put the boys through school, and the summer place they no longer have time for, I can't afford to retire as easily as some.

STEPHEN

*(Coming downstairs)* You didn't want Bud or me paying you back when we graduated, remember? If there is a money problem, you've only to ask us—

SHIELDS

Am I complaining? Your mother and I aren't heading for any poor house soon. We manage our finances well enough, thank you. I'm saying that I simply wanted you both to have what I never could. *(Switching off desk lamp)* Mind you, we're not rolling in dough— Not so we can go around leaving lights on in broad daylight.

SEBASTIAN

That's just what Bill Gates was saying the other day.

SHIELDS

*(To STEPHEN)* I hear you and your mother have been at it again. What is it this time?

STEPHEN

That's the least of my worries.

SHIELDS

Don't you know when to give her a wide berth? She's got that doctor's appointment hanging over her head. You shouldn't tease her so. Let her have a little peace.

STEPHEN

If it's peace you want, then try not to get into another brawl at the dinner table with Sarah. The two of you keep pushing this war of yours and one day you'll force her to choose between you.

SEBASTIAN

Did you get through to O'Connell, Stephen?

STEPHEN

The line was busy.

SHIELDS

Is that why you're so edgy tonight? Has O'Connell gone and ruffled your feathers?

STEPHEN

No.

SEBASTIAN

Yes.

SHIELDS

Well, which is it?

SEBASTIAN

It has to do with these cases Stephen's been working on. A new one has just come along and Stephen has reason to believe this particular priest has been falsely accused.

STEPHEN

I *know* he has. And O'Connell is ignoring it as usual— the same way he's handled this whole stinking mess from the beginning.

SHIELDS

Why do you think he's kept you under his thumb all these years? He's never been a man to get his own hands dirty. That's for you to do.

STEPHEN

He hasn't even called the man to give him his support. O'Connell's sat on the case for almost a week without even talking to the man.

SHIELDS

Perhaps O'Connell knows more than he's letting on. Maybe the man is guilty.

STEPHEN

Haven't you been listening? The man is innocent. I — I know this man.

SEBASTIAN

You'll do more to help him by staying calm and thinking rationally, Stephen.

STEPHEN

You're calm enough for both of us. I'm going to try again to reach O'Connell.

SHIELDS

Listen to Sebastian, Stephen. You believe the man to be innocent, then all you have to do is fight for him. Even O'Connell can be made to listen once in a while.

STEPHEN

What is wrong with the two of you? O'Connell's gone too far this time. He's out—playing bridge with the Bishop while this poor guy is suffering.

SHIELDS

I thought you said the man wasn't aware of the accusation?

STEPHEN

He – he's not.

SHIELDS

You shouldn't personalize your work this way, Stephen. Just do what you can, and let the rest of it go. You must always maintain the middle ground in all this.

STEPHEN

There's no middle ground— not in any of these cases. *(To SEBASTIAN)* A man is innocent or he's guilty.

SHIELDS

You miss my point entirely. There's such a thing as mitigation, as many a lawyer would tell you. How else could we live with one another? Look out the window, Stephen. What do you see? You don't just see houses and trees— you see shades of light and dark. That's what shapes everything in our world — not the houses, not the trees, but the shades and the shadows, the light and dark all around us.

STEPHEN

Mitigation? How can you even think of such a thing, Pop? There isn't any mitigation. What do you think I've been doing for the last eighteen months — taking a museum tour? Looking at paintings, with a guide alongside me to explain the uses of chiaroscuro? There are no shadows in any of this — you get two choices, black or white. The Church can't protect the innocent and cover up for the guilty. Don't you know that? Either a priest keeps the promises he makes to God or he doesn't. You don't touch a child, then tell yourself — or God — if you still believe in Him — “This is an exception. It's only this one time.” God doesn't allow the slaughter of innocent souls to be mitigated. It's a sin. An unforgivable sin.

*(STEPHEN turns abruptly and exits back upstairs. SEBASTIAN and SHIELDS look on as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

**END SCENE**

## ACT I, SCENE TWO

*(AT RISE: Later than evening. MOLLY, SHIELDS, SEBASTIAN, BUD and SARAH seated around the dinner table. STEPHEN is not among them.)*

SEBASTIAN

You've done yourself proud, Molly. Dinner was wonderful

BUD

A cut above Mrs. Cooney's food pantry, didn't you think so, Pop?

SHIELDS

Indeed. Indeed.

MOLLY

I'll take that as a compliment.

BUD

*(Winking)* Although the roast was a bit stringy.

MOLLY

*(With feigned interest)* Was it?

SHIELDS

Oh, but it was much better than the vegetables. I thought the carrots were a bit too soft.

BUD

We had carrots tonight?

SHIELDS

*(Pointing)* The bowl over there — with the orange lumps — and the green bits of leaf.

BUD

*(Holding it up)* This? I thought they were turnips.

SHIELDS

You'll hurt your mother's feelings. She copied the look of it right off the cover of *Family Circle Magazine*, didn't you, Molly?

BUD

Ah, me. Where is Martha Stewart when you need her?

SHIELDS

Checking her portfolio.

BUD

And Julia Child?

SHIELDS

Dead.

MOLLY

*(Rising, and preparing to exit)* The nerve of you – Comparing what I’ve just served to Mrs. Cooney’s cooking. This may not be your last birthday meal, Thomas Shields, but I can promise you this — it’s the last I’ll be cooking.

SEBASTIAN

You’d both be better off coming up with a compliment every now and then, don’t you think?

BUD

We were complimenting her. Compared to the last dinner we had here...

SARAH

Bud, go easy on the wine.

BUD

Mom knows we’re joking. She’s a good sport.

SARAH

When she’s up for it. I’m telling you now this isn’t one of those times.

SHIELDS

Molly can give as good as she gets.

SARAH

I’ll just go and help with the coffee. *(SHE exits)*

SHIELDS

As I was saying to Bud only last week, Sebastian, you and Stephen are lucky men — choosing vocations that don’t allow you to marry.

SEBASTIAN

Did you always know this, Thomas, or are you only discovering it now, after forty years of marriage?

SHIELDS

Thirty-nine. Don’t make it worse than it is. Marriage is a difficult proposition under the best of circumstances but never more so than when a woman lacks a sense of humor.

BUD

Mom has a terrific sense of humor, Pop. She married you, didn't she?

SHIELDS

That's not the point. In all the years we've been married, I can count on the fingers of one hand the times she's gotten the point of a joke, or one of my stories.

BUD

That's no measure. There are a lot of times, I don't get them either. Maybe she's not the one at fault.

SHIELDS

Of course she is. *(As SARAH enters with cups and saucers)* Did I ever tell you, Sarah, about the time I took her to see "Fiddler on the Roof" on our first anniversary?

SARAH

Many times. I mean, yes.

SHIELDS

It's all right. Sometimes I forget who I've told what and repeat myself — an old man's failings.

SEBASTIAN

Sixty-five isn't old.

SARAH

No, it isn't. Anyway, you don't look it.

SHIELDS

Compliments, compliments — true sign of an Irish tongue.

SARAH

Oh, so now I'm Irish.

SHIELDS

You've the map of Ireland right there on your face.

SARAH

*(Laughs)* That's not what you thought last time we were here.

SHIELDS

We'd all had a drop too much that night, but that was then and this is now. I say we all move on.

BUD

Great idea. Let's drink on it.

SARAH

Bud, you promised.

BUD

And I'm as good as my word, aren't I? Here's to peace.

SHIELDS

—And a new beginning for all of us. What do you say, Sarah – just a little one?

SARAH

Bud's had enough "little ones," as you call them. Toast each other with coffee, why don't you? (*Exits*)

SHIELDS

That's marriage for you — does something to a woman's sense of humor. I was telling you about the time I took Molly to see "Fiddler on the Roof". There's Zero Mostel up on stage, the funniest man who ever lived, singing a love song to his wife. They've been through everything together – financial problems, pogroms, five unmarried daughters – and after all this he sings "Do You Love Me?" We're sitting in the fourth row of the orchestra and Molly has forgotten she's not watching television. She leans over, pokes me and, in her best Irish whisper says, "What I want to know, is does he love her?" Her voice carries right up to the stage. Mostel stops singing, glares at your mother, walks over and says, "Madam, that is not the point. Of course I love her. Now be quiet and listen to the rest of the play."

MOLLY

(*Entering*) What's he been telling you?

BUD

Oh, Pop was just saying that you don't have a great sense of humor.

MOLLY

I most certainly do. I married him, didn't I?

SEBASTIAN

He was telling us about the time he took you to see "Fiddler on the Roof."

MOLLY

You've gotten a lot of mileage out of that story, Thomas, but there isn't a word of truth in it. It was another play entirely, and it was you who opened your big mouth and embarrassed us. But I'm sure you won't be telling that to the boys, will you?

SHIELDS

I hadn't finished.

MOLLY

You wanted to leave at intermission because you couldn't understand a thing they were saying.

SHIELDS

That damned English play you took me to. A bunch of fairies — all with Limey accents — mumbling and snarling at one another. A waste of good money, that's all it was — and the damned thing goes on to win every award that year.

MOLLY

Don't get started on the English tonight, Thomas.

BUD

Or the Irish, or the Anglo-Irish. Sarah and I are here because it's your birthday — we didn't come to bomb the house.

SEBASTIAN

I've a great suggestion: Let's change the subject.

MOLLY

And don't be getting all sentimental with your stories about the past. If this is going to be one of your crying-jag birthdays, I'll just bring the coffee in and go to the movies with Sarah.

SHIELDS

A fine day it is when a man can't speak his mind in his own home.

SEBASTIAN

Perhaps just not on the English, Thomas.

SHIELDS

And why not? They haven't changed. Still trying to dump their crap on our shores — that play was proof of it.

BUD

Dad, Sarah can hear you.

SHIELDS

*(Raising his glass)* So? She calls herself Irish, doesn't she? Isn't that the point she's always making — she and the rest of the Anglo-Irish are as good as real Irishmen? No difference at all between a Protestant and a Catholic — when it's her people stole the land

SHIELDS, *Continued*

from us, and ruled over us just like the Brits were doing here? They were never anything better than lackeys, the lot of them.

## MOLLY

You've had your warning, Thomas – enough. Bud, go and call your brother down — he's been on the telephone all evening. Hardly touched his dinner. *(Exits)*

## SHIELDS

Never mind. I'll call him. I hope to God he's not calling long distance. *(Rising and crossing to living room, calling up stairway)* Hey, Your Eminence, hang up the phone and get down here. *(Returning)* He's a good boy, but he takes his job too seriously. You should have been the priest, Bud. You've a better sense of diplomacy.

## BUD

That's probably the first compliment I've gotten in this house since high school, but I decline. No, thank you very much, to my being a priest.

## SEBASTIAN

*(Lightly)* And why is that?

## BUD

You haven't been reading the papers?

## SEBASTIAN

That isn't funny, Bud. You think it's some kind of job description, like the press is calling it?

## BUD

For some, maybe. Not that I'm accusing anyone — especially not you or Stephen.

## SHIELDS

That's enough. I'll not have that filth discussed in this house. Save it for the bar rooms — or the rectory.

## STEPHEN

*(Entering)* Sorry I've been upstairs so long. I had some things to do besides trying to get O'Connell on the phone.

## SHIELDS

If there's one long distance call on my bill, I'm mailing the whole thing to the rectory. O'Connell and the Pope can split it between them.

## SEBASTIAN

*(To STEPHEN)* So — were you able to reach O'Connell?

STEPHEN

Of course not, but he had Mrs. Cooney all prepared for my call: “The Monsignor sends everyone his regards, and he especially wishes your father a very happy birthday.” The gall of the man.

SARAH

*(As SHE enters)* Who are you talking about?

SEBASTIAN

It’s not important—

STEPHEN

*(Whirling on SEBASTIAN)* Don’t you even think of saying that. It is important. We’re talking about an innocent man. How can you sit there and be so unconcerned?

BUD

What’s this all about?

STEPHEN

Some young men have come forward and made accusations against another young priest...

SARAH

How does it concern you, Stephen?

STEPHEN

They all concern me, Sarah. This priest is one of the best men the Bishop ever had working with him. O’Connell knows the man has been accused – he knows – and he has made himself unavailable. He’s gone off to play cards.

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, sit down. We’ve been all through this. It will all be taken care of in the morning. You’ll see. Nothing is going to be settled tonight. There’s no need to spoil your father’s birthday. Trust me.

BUD

More crime in the confessional? Good thing we didn’t bring Brian and Megan tonight after all. They’d be all ears and have us up half the night with their questions.

SHIELDS

Are you suggesting my home isn’t a fit place to bring you children?

BUD

Of course not.

SHIELDS

Don't "of course not" me. Is that why you didn't bring them?

SARAH

We've already told you why they're not here. They're being punished.

BUD

It was pretty funny though. Brian's third grade teacher walked in on a bunch of the boys acting up. She was just in time to hear Brian singing:

"Hickory, Dickory Dock  
The priest has swallowed some cock."

SHIELDS

Little Brian — came out with that? Where did he hear it?

SARAH

Bud, I've told you before, it's no laughing matter. It's not funny tonight and it wasn't funny on Tuesday when I had to tell his teacher it wasn't something he'd heard at home — not that she believed me.

SHIELDS

And just what do my grandchildren learn at home— can either of you tell me that? More importantly, which of you has taught them to mock the priesthood? (*To SARAH*) Is it your doing? — (*Then to BUD*) or yours?

BUD

No one's teaching them anything.

SHIELDS

That seems clear.

SARAH

Neither one of us is poisoning their minds against the Church — you should know us better than that.

SHIELDS

Well, I don't.

SARAH

Whose fault is that? We're forever coming over here — you haven't been in our house in over a year.

STEPHEN

Everyone settle down.

SHIELDS

*(Muttering)* Ah, for the love of ...

SEBASTIAN

Thomas—

BUD

Please, everybody. Can we not ruin this evening? Besides it being Dad's birthday, this is an important night for me, too. There's something I want to tell you all, so I can have your blessing.

SEBASTIAN

It's not ruined. If you have good news, Bud, now's the time to share it.

SHIELDS

There's never a bad time for good news.

BUD

Wait till Mom gets here.

SHIELDS

Why doesn't someone go check on her? She might have fallen asleep out there.

MOLLY

*(From the kitchen)* I can hear every word. I'm putting the candles on the cake.

SARAH

I'll go fetch her.

SHIELDS

Well, that's two gone. They'll get to fussing over some damn thing in the kitchen and forget to serve the cake until we've all gone to bed. Might as well have ourselves a whiskey while we're waiting. *(Going to the bar)* Who's with me? Besides Bud, I mean?

*(BUD follows SHIELDS into the living room. SEBASTIAN and STEPHEN exchange glances. STEPHEN starts to speak but SEBASTIAN puts his finger to his lips motioning to STEPHEN to be quiet.)*

SEBASTIAN

I'll join you.

SHIELDS

*(As HE pours the whiskey)* Now that I'm officially an old man...

SEBASTIAN

You're not old, Thomas.

SHIELDS

No, no, no. Hear me out. Now that I've reached an age where men are respected for their wisdom...

BUD

*Some men –*

SHIELDS

Molly may not get the point of my stories, but it's important to me that you fellas do. Thirty-six years I've been at City Hall. Seen men come and go – educated men, honest ones, from mayors on down – men wanting to do good things – tossed out by the voters or never given their party's nomination – and you know why? Because they never learned the secret of getting along with other men.

BUD

Which is what, Pop? To get ahead, a man has to know how to tell bad jokes? Is that what our tax dollars are going for?

SHIELDS

If you'd open your ears instead of your mouth, Bud, you might learn something. What I'm getting at is that my jokes and stories have played an important part in my ability to survive all these years. Men always want a bit of laughter in their life – get in one good story, and they'll wait a week for another.

BUD

Even yours?

SHIELDS

The stories I tell are the means justifying the end. To know what a man is thinking, you must have access to him. A man waiting patiently for your next story is a man who keeps himself open around you. He looks up to you, does what you tell him to do. Success is being able to know whether the man standing beside you is useful or expendable, the way they do in the army: certain men get sent out on patrol and certain men don't. An officer learns the men who can be trusted – he keeps those men close to him. The others he sends out on patrol.

BUD

Who'd you learn that from, Pop – our side or theirs?

SHIELDS

You think I'm joking? I'm trying to educate you. It's my duty to put you both wise – not to stand by and watch you cast aside on life's highway. Your mother and I – well – all we have is you – here – to look after. You and Stephen, and of course you, too, Sebastian. We love all three of you boys.

MOLLY

*(Enters from kitchen, followed by SARAH)* Is it turning sixty-five that's made you sentimental, Thomas? Or did you hoist a few at the Oasis with your boy-os before coming home? Come have your coffee and tea. I'll go bring in the cake.

BUD

No, Mom. Wait. I've got an announcement. Pop's been talking about wanting to see us all succeed and what I have to tell you is going to put a great big smile on his face.

SHIELDS

Well, out with it.

BUD

I've quit my job.

SARAH

*(Coming into the living room)* You did what?

BUD

As of next Friday, no more Assistant Principal. I'm going into the health spa business — with Bernie Hoffman.

SHIELDS

The little Jewish kid from Astoria?

STEPHEN

That's great, Bud. How long have you guys been planning this?

BUD

Six months. We've already got leases for our first two locations.

SARAH

Six months? You've been planning this for a half year? And you never told anyone?

BUD

You'd all have talked me out of it. But it's a done deal. Bernie's asked me to manage both stores.

SARAH

*(Quietly)* How much did you have to lend him?

BUD

It's not a loan, Sarah.

SARAH

How much?

BUD

It's an investment — fifteen thousand, that's all — and I own forty percent.

SHIELDS

How much did Bernie put in?

BUD

He's the contact person. We agreed he didn't have to put in anything. So far, he's the one has done all the work — made all the deals. He does all the promotion and marketing — and doesn't get a salary unless we make a profit.

SHIELDS

Except for the money you've given up.

BUD

So what? He's already got some people signed up from his law firm. Look — these two places were dying on the vine. They have every kind of new equipment — nautilus, bicycles, steam rooms, saunas — the works. The former owners were lousy managers. In a year, we're going to be rolling in money.

SHIELDS

Dying on the vine, were they? And just what the hell makes you think you can turn them around?

SARAH

You kept this from me for six months? *(Her voice begins to rise)* You used our savings to go into this — but you couldn't tell me what you were doing?

SEBASTIAN

Now, Sarah—

SARAH

*(Whirling on SEBASTIAN)* Stay out of this. *(To BUD)* Have you any sense of what a betrayal this is? Do you have any idea what you've just gone and done to our marriage?

BUD

I haven't done anything to our marriage. For ten years, you've all told me what a dead end my job was. Now I've done something about it. You've always told me to go out on my own. You wanted me to go into business with your father after your brothers were killed — remember? You were all set to move us half-way around the world.

SARAH

I told you what I was thinking of doing. I didn't hide it from you.

SHIELDS

That's enough — if there's to be any arguing, do it at your own home.

BUD

I would have gone with you, except that you got pregnant with Brian and we couldn't travel. I would have changed my whole life for you. Whose side are you on anyway?

STEPHEN

Take it easy, both of you.

BUD

*(Pouring himself a drink and downing it)* No. Here's to being free. Here's to emancipating the real third son in this family — the one nobody ever pays attention to.

MOLLY

That isn't true. You've never been put after Stephen. Never.

BUD

And to all the sons everywhere who never amount to anything in the eyes of their fathers — or their wives. That's all I've gotten out of the past ten years from both of you. Well, now's my chance to do something for myself and I'm taking it — with or without your blessing or your help or your concern.

SHIELDS

You wouldn't talk this way if you knew how to handle your liquor. What the hell do you know about managing a business?

BUD

*(Spilling his drink)* Nothing. Absolutely nothing. But it's more than you know about me.

SHIELDS

You great big drunken fool. The money's as good as gone.

BUD

That's just like you, Pop — all set to bury me and my dreams — before I've even been laid out. Can't you fucking see? I'm still alive. I'm still breathing.

STEPHEN

Stop, Bud. You've said enough. You and Sarah talk about this when you get home, but not now.

SARAH

We have nothing to talk about. That man over there – the one I used to think was my husband – has just invested half of the money we have in the bank in some stupid business deal – something he only tells me about now, six months after he's gone and done it.

STEPHEN

You have good reason to be upset, Sarah, but something this personal shouldn't be discussed with the rest of us listening in.

SARAH

Jesus, Mary and Joseph — What do you two think a marriage is? Something you can commit to part time? That's what Bud has gone and done — forgotten his wife and children in a juvenile, selfish search for his own freedom. Take it, then. Go ahead, Bud, take your freedom and be done with this marriage.

MOLLY

*(Slamming down a plate on the table)* Silence, every one of you. Not another word. The next one speaks, I'll run this knife through you. *(THEY turn to her as SHE advances into the room)* Look at all of you – standing there, behaving like a bunch of wild children. Is that how you want me to treat you? Then, fine. That's the way it will be. I've had it with the lot of you and that's the God's honest truth. The only thing to do with a bunch like you is to make you take a time out.

STEPHEN

Mom—

MOLLY

Time out, I said. There's only one thing left to be done this evening and that's to bring out the cake, which I'm about to do – unless you want me to dump it in the garbage. Not another word out of any of you, until you can bring yourselves to behave like adults.

SHIELDS

Now, Molly—

MOLLY

Don't you "now, Molly" me, Thomas Patrick Shields. The time out goes for you as well. Shame on all of you for tearing into one another as if you didn't have an ounce of civility or love in you. *(SHE exits)*

BUD

(*Crossing to SARAH*) I wanted to tell you, but there never seemed to be a good time. I did the wrong thing. I'm sorry.

SHIELDS

Molly's right. Best to take this argument home with you. I say we drink to a truce and a new beginning for all of us. What do you say, Sarah – just a little one?

BUD

I'm for that.

SARAH

No. You can have coffee or tea. No more drink.

STEPHEN

Good idea. The best peace is a sober one.

SHIELDS

Damn it. This isn't Northern Ireland, Sarah. This is a *real* Irish household. When we call for a truce, we keep our word. We don't use it as a device to get men killed.

SARAH

What did you just say?

BUD

Knock it off, Pop.

STEPHEN

It was just such a phony truce cost Sarah's brothers their lives. How could you forget?

SHIELDS

I'm not forgetting a damn thing. I'm talking about the way it was done, not about those who got caught in it. Sarah's brothers were good men. Did I ever say they weren't? They were noble men who died for Ireland. I've always said that.

SARAH

Oh, for Christ's sake — come into the real world, Thomas. My brothers weren't the great martyred patriots you think they were — or wish that you could be. They were stupid — and arrogant — lightheaded from all the malarkey fed to them by men like you — two stupid young fools who put themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

SHIELDS

That's a terrible, terrible thing to say about your own flesh and blood.

SARAH

You don't know the first thing about it. You weren't there — I was. They had no business going out that morning. Everybody else had the good sense to stay in their houses and go about their business. There had been enough warnings. Only those two thought they had to prove something.

SHIELDS

They died for what they believed in. It takes great courage to be willing to die for a cause — surely you believe that?

SARAH

Would you really like to know what I believe, Mr. Shields — about boys who get themselves killed for ideas they don't understand, and old men who stand around their coffins and drink to their deaths? Do you think my mum and dad believe my brothers died for a cause? What cause? All they knew was that their sons were bits of bones and flesh — and fresh, sticky blood running down Connaught Street. People came out to go shopping that Saturday and they slipped and fell on my brothers' blood — until the dustmen came and washed it all down the sewer. The day they were buried, my father's hands shook so that I had to hold the razor and shave him. He couldn't do it by himself. To hell with all your ideas of courage and causes.

SHIELDS

Who do you think you are — coming in here and speaking to me like that — in my own home?

SARAH

*(To BUD and SHIELDS)* Your home — your life — that's all the two of you ever think of — yourselves, *(To SHIELDS)* and you're more to blame than he is.

SHIELDS

Me—?

SARAH

Who else did he learn from? Like father, like son.

SHIELDS

You had a better one, I suppose?

SARAH

I did indeed. He loved us and he was bright enough to treat us all with respect.

SHIELDS

Bright is it? He was a bright man, all right. Bright enough to teach his two sons just enough to get themselves killed by a bloody bomb.

SARAH

Don't you say a word about my father or my brothers, Thomas Shields. The fact that you go around toadying to every boy-o in City Hall doesn't mean you know a goddamn thing about politics. Especially Irish politics.

SHIELDS

And I suppose you do. I suppose that's why you're here — in *this country*. Because you're so full of love for the old one.

SARAH

*(Quietly, at first)* No, Mr. Shields. That is not why I'm here. I'm here because I want to live — not die like my brothers. They didn't make it, more's the pity, but I did. I came here because I was tired of not being able to walk where I wanted to; of having to take the long way around to church or to work; of having to be in before curfew. I was tired of being told by my parents to watch what I said for fear it would be overheard and lead to a midnight visit from your murdering boy-os. I was tired of Protestant killing Catholic and Catholic killing Protestant. All that killing, killing, killing. Ireland is too small a country to hold all her dead. There's no room for the living. *(Beat)* I don't need another thing from anyone in this house ever again. I'm going home. You can come with me, Bud, or you can stay.

BUD

Sarah, wait a minute.

SARAH

I'll be in the car. I'll count to one hundred and then I'm going. *(Exits)*

STEPHEN

Go out to her Bud.

SHIELDS

*(Grabbing BUD's arm)* One day, you're going to have to teach that wife of yours to respect the men of the house. I've told you that before.

BUD

*(Shaking loose)* You know, Pop, we can't all marry nice, docile women like Mom. Good night, fellows.

MOLLY

*(Entering)* What's just happened?

STEPHEN

Ask Dad.

SEBASTIAN

I think I should be going, too. I'm sorry your birthday wasn't a happier occasion, Thomas.

SHIELDS

You don't have to be off, Sebastian. Come and have some cake with us.

STEPHEN

That's all right, Pop. Mind if I walk along with you, Sebastian?

MOLLY

You're both leaving me?

STEPHEN

It's best, Mom. I'll be back later. Good night, Dad.

*(STEPHEN and SEBASTIAN exit. MOLLY turns around and heads back to the kitchen.)*

SHIELDS

Where are you going? *(MOLLY exits without responding)* Dammit, I'm talking to you. Don't run away.

*(After a moment, SHE appears in the doorway with the birthday cake. Only one of the candles is lit. SHE half-sings, half-speaks the next.)*

MOLLY

Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday to you — Happy birthday, dear Thomas....

*(SHE places the piece with the lit candle in front of SHIELDS)*

MOLLY

Happy birthday to you.

***(LIGHTS FADE OUT)***

**END ACT I**

## ACT II, SCENE ONE

*(AT RISE: Late morning, the next day. THOMAS SHIELDS is seated at the dining room table reading the Daily News and having his breakfast. After a moment MOLLY enters from upstairs with a basket of laundry. SHE keeps her back to THOMAS and does not acknowledge his presence.)*

SHIELDS

The paper says it's going to rain all weekend.

*(MOLLY crosses to the dining room table and stands upstage of it. SHE keeps her back to THOMAS as much as possible while SHE pours a cup of tea, stirring in her milk and sugar)*

SHIELDS

I was going to put those bulbs in when we got back from the doctor's, but I'd better wait.

*(MOLLY finishes and starts to exit into the kitchen)*

SHIELDS

Where are you going? Sit down and have your tea — talk to me. You haven't said a word to me all day.

MOLLY

What I have to say would fall on deaf ears.

SHIELDS

I know I thanked you for the bathrobe.

MOLLY

You did. Twice.

SHIELDS

All I said was perhaps the color made me look heavy.

MOLLY

Fat. You used the word fat.

SHIELDS

That's no reason not to talk to me all day. If it's that other business— I admit my part in it, but I didn't start the argument.

MOLLY

What difference does that make? Next you'll be saying that you were only defending the honor of your family – or Ireland. God damned, blessed Ireland.

SHIELDS

*(Going to her)* I understand you being upset. It was a wonderful dinner.

MOLLY

*(Pulling away, offended)* Draw back, Mr. Shields, and don't be setting your hand to do something your heart should have done. Did I ask you to apologize?

SHIELDS

No, but—

MOLLY

Then don't. It isn't my place to be upset. I'm here to do the ironing, dust the furniture, vacuum the carpets, make the beds and serve you dinner —

SHIELDS

Are you going to be like this for the entire weekend? What was the point in taking the day off?

MOLLY

*(As before)* —Peel the potatoes, shop for food, set the table — while you ride roughshod over what's left of our family.

SHIELDS

You weren't in the room. You didn't hear the things that woman said.

MOLLY

That *woman* — as you call her — is our daughter-in-law — the mother of your two grandchildren. The real question, Thomas, is whom do you think *you* are?

SHIELDS

Me?

MOLLY

Yes, you. Apparently it isn't enough for you to be my husband or Bud and Stephen's father — Or Brian and Megan's grandfather. You have to parade yourself like some Great Liberator, raised up from the ruins of Tara. I'll tell you this, great king of mine: you will not be seeing your grandchildren again until you pick up the telephone and make amends with Sarah.

SHIELDS

I'll do no such thing. She'll be getting no telephone call from me. The nerve — asking for such a thing after the way she spoke to me.

MOLLY

Make no mistake — I'm the one telling you to call. Sarah doesn't care if she ever hears from you again.

SHIELDS

I'll go to my grave first.

MOLLY

Suit yourself. For the time being. I can take the bus over to Sarah's and see the children any time I want. Since you're not welcome there, and they won't be coming over here, I don't expect you'll see your grandchildren in this life.

SHIELDS

*(Through the newspaper)* I know my son — Bud would never let that happen. What do you mean, "For the time being"?

MOLLY

I'll tell you when I'm good and ready. Right now, I want you to pay attention to every word I'm telling you: This is my family as well as yours — and I order you not to break the bond between us and our boys — or Sarah — or our grandchildren.

SHIELDS

You — order me?

MOLLY

Nothing. Not your politics — or the Church — or people's backgrounds is more important than this family, and if you think differently, you can march right out that front door and not come back — or you can tell me to go and I'll be gone before you can finish your tea.

SHIELDS

*(Rising from his chair)* All right — now calm down. I'll admit things got a little bit out of hand...

MOLLY

It was worse than Bedlam when I came in here with your birthday cake. I should have dumped that cake right on your head. *(The fight has left her and SHE is now close to tears)* As much as I love you, Thomas — and I do — I'm not going to have us all divided by such foolishness. Do you hear me?

SHIELDS

*(Chastened but exasperated)* I hear you.

MOLLY

Then you promise?

SHIELDS

Yes. Now sit down and have your tea with me.

MOLLY

(*As SHE sits*) I'll give you one chance, and then I'm through.

SHIELDS

All right, all right – can I have my newspaper back now?

MOLLY

I'm not finished. There's something else.

SHIELDS

What now?

MOLLY

I want you to have a word with Stephen. The work he's doing — I think it may push him right out of the priesthood.

SHIELDS

He would never leave the Church — it's the great love of his life.

MOLLY

Do you remember how you used to say Stephen and I were so close it was as if we had our own language? Well, he doesn't talk to me at all – not one word – about his work.

SHIELDS

He's forbidden to — he told us that himself. Even if he could, do you really want to hear about such things? It's all filth. Don't you get enough of it in those magazines of yours?

MOLLY

(*Exasperated*) You're missing the point. The secret language you claim we had — it's dead. He doesn't talk to me. He doesn't talk to anyone. Did he say where he went last night?

SHIELDS

I haven't seen him. He's been up in his room all day.

MOLLY

You see? Talk to him, the sooner the better. This afternoon, when we get back from the doctor's. Do you want some more tea?

SHIELDS

I'm fine. I can't talk to him tonight. (*Sheepishly*) We have dinner reservations at the Anchorage. I wanted it to be a surprise – to make up for – you know...

MOLLY

Then call him down and talk to him while I go get ready.

SHIELDS

Molly, what do I know about his work? He's an educated man – a priest. I barely finished high school.

MOLLY

Nonsense. Of course, you can talk to him.

SHIELDS

When it comes to the Faith, I've always done what I was told — I don't know the right questions to ask. He'll think I'm a fool. He'll cut me off and say it's a matter that concerns only the Church.

MOLLY

For heaven's sake, Thomas, don't be putting yourself down at this time in your life. Stephen's your son. He's also a man. You can hold your own with any man living. It's no different in the Church than it is at City Hall. Some men wear collars, others play pinochle.

SHIELDS

Molly, this is the Church you're talking about, not some gang of hoodlums.

MOLLY

For the love of God, Thomas, you're as gullible as he is. I'm not saying a word about the Church. I'm talking about a group of men. Men who are using our son to keep their own hands clean. Stephen is in over his head — I'm telling you.

SHIELDS

A fine thing it is to take a day off from work — only to sit at my own dining room table and find I've still got a boss to answer to.

MOLLY

Thomas —

SHIELDS

I'll talk to him. Jesus, save us! Now get ready for your doctor's appointment. I don't want to be sitting the whole day in Bohrer's office reading a copy of last month's Newsweek. If it's one thing I regret, it's never having taught you to drive.

MOLLY

*(Getting up from the table)* That's the other thing.

SHIELDS

What other thing?

MOLLY

For the time being, I'll go by bus when I want to see Sarah.

SHIELDS

You said that.

MOLLY

But — not for long. I've decided to take driving lessons from that Chinese place on Roosevelt Avenue.

SHIELDS

And what do you plan to use for a car? Not the new Buick.

MOLLY

It's *our* Buick.

SHIELDS

If you put one scratch or dent on that car...

MOLLY

You'll just have to live with it. The way I see things, it's either your family or your car. I'll just clear these.

*(SHE exits into kitchen. SHIELDS reads the paper as STEPHEN enters from upstairs.)*

STEPHEN

Hi, Dad. I thought I heard Mom say she was going to take driving lessons. That's good.

SHIELDS

Good for whom, Father Shields? Have you been having a pleasant day?

STEPHEN

I've been doing some writing in my room.

SHIELDS

Did you sleep well last night, Father?

STEPHEN

*(Pouring coffee)* Fine. What's all this about? I've had the same bed since high school.

SHIELDS

Ah, but things change, Father.

STEPHEN

And why this “Father” stuff all of a sudden? Stephen is good enough.

SHIELDS

Would you prefer I call you Stephen instead of Father?

STEPHEN

I’m only saying there’s no reason for being formal all of a sudden.

SHIELDS

That’s what I mean about things changing. You’ll always be Stephen. But we’ve only known you as “Father Shields” for what — eight years now? Will we always know you as Father Shields?

STEPHEN

Did Mom put you up to this?

SHIELDS

Nobody puts me up to anything. I just wanted to ask you a few questions, myself, that’s all. See how you’re doing — find out if you need anything.

STEPHEN

She did — didn’t she?

SHIELDS

You weren’t home before I went to bed last night. What did you do?

STEPHEN

Nothing. I took the subway into the city and walked up Fifth Avenue. I thought I’d find a bookstore. I wanted to be alone with my thoughts.

SHIELDS

You wanted to be alone — so you went into Manhattan?

STEPHEN

What better place? I’ve always loved the city — and never more than last night. It started raining when I came up out of the subway — sheets of rain turning red and then green with the changing of the traffic lights. Strangers huddled under a tobacco shop awning; cabs were dropping their passengers into puddles of rainwater – traffic paying no attention to a cop blowing on his whistle – my own sound and light show! I must have lost all sense of time taking it all in. An old lady – a street person, actually – came up to me and asked “Are you lost, Father?” I didn’t know what to answer, so I just stood there. “Are you lost, Father?” she asked again and suddenly I realized why I had gone to the city — somehow, instinctively, I knew I would run into someone like her — someone

STEPHEN, *Continued*

who could see inside me. “Yes, I am,” I said, and then – because I felt embarrassed – I crossed the street to get away from her. I found myself in front of Jimmie Dougherty’s, so I went in and had a couple of beers.

SHIELDS

You went to Dougherty’s by yourself?

STEPHEN

*(Smiles)* I don’t get carded these days, you know.

SHIELDS

You know better than to go off drinking on your own. Do you want to wind up like your brother?

STEPHEN

That’s not fair. Bud tried to tell us last night what he’s been feeling and we wouldn’t listen to him.

SHIELDS

I thought so. You were upset because of what happened last night. I’m sorry.

STEPHEN

No, Dad. I told you, I wanted peace — a stillness that would make the world right again. In Sarah’s church, they call it “the peace that passes all understanding.” That’s the kind of peace I want, Dad, and I don’t have it. I’ve never been able to find it.

SHIELDS

None of us has. You’re talking about perfection, and we don’t have that.

STEPHEN

That’s not true. Martin Luther King had it — and Mahatma Gandhi. They had an acceptance that I just don’t have.

SHIELDS

Not that it did them any good. Nor will it you, if that’s what you’re looking for. They were made in God’s image. We aren’t.

STEPHEN

How can you say that?

SHIELDS

You and I? We’re just ordinary men and like all ordinary men we run from the saints. We don’t have it in us to trust them. We hide — and in our frenzy to save ourselves, we kill our peace-makers.

STEPHEN

How long have you felt this way?

SHIELDS

A man can have his faith, Stephen, and not believe all he's told, which is why we're having this conversation. Things are happening in your life that you could talk about with me — or with your mother. You've no right to cut us off. You're getting old before your time. Do you think I like sitting here, feeling that I have to force the words out of you? Tell me what's on your mind. I promise you I'll just listen — and not say a word. What the hell do you and your brother think we're here for — Ourselves? Let us in, for the love of God, Stephen.

STEPHEN

The love of God — I always thought I knew what that was.

*(Sings)* Sing God a simple song, lauda lauday  
Make it up as you go along, louda, louday  
For God is the simplest of all. — For God...

*(HE breaks off, in tears)*

SHIELDS

You're crying.

STEPHEN

I used to be able to do that — pray and turn things over to Him. I kept telling myself God had a plan for us — that everything would be made right in the end — for all of us. Now I don't know if it ever can be. Why won't God help me?

SHIELDS

*(Alarmed)* Stephen, tell me what this is about.

STEPHEN

*(Turning away)* If I could talk about any of this with you, Dad, I would. It's something I have to process for myself. Things happen in life that can destroy a man's faith forever. I thought I knew what evil was, but I don't. I didn't know it could smile, kiss you, embrace you with kindness — entwine itself around good the way ivy clings to a wall. You forever criticize the Jews because they won't let go of the Holocaust — but I'm beginning to understand — *(Turning back)* The evil in this world is as powerful as the good. At least the Jews — some Jews — have learned that they must be always watchful against evil — forever on their guard against it. In our faith, we haven't learned that yet. We don't know the shapes, the forms that evil can take — we're too busy sprinkling it with Holy Water — baptizing it, confirming it, allowing it to propagate. I don't know what else to tell you.

SHIELDS

You're talking like a man who has no faith. What's come over you?

STEPHEN

I don't know. I don't think I know anything, anymore.

SHIELDS

Have you lost your faith? Stephen, if that's it, I want you to tell me.

STEPHEN

I'm trying to. I don't know. That's the only answer I can give you. That's why you can't help me. I know things now that I didn't count on having to know when I first went into the seminary. Things I don't want to know. People do things —

SHIELDS

What things? What is this about?

STEPHEN

When is God going to break his silence? When is he going to help us?

SHIELDS

Oh, my boy. My boy — What's happening to you?

STEPHEN

To me? What's happening to all of us? This isn't the world we were promised it would be, is it?

SHIELDS

Stephen, everyone has a crisis of faith...

STEPHEN

Don't pull that crap on me, Pop. Talk to me man-to-man: this isn't the world we grew up thinking it was going to be — is it?

SHIELDS

*(Looking away)* No, it's not. It's not the world my Grandmother left Ireland for, it's not the world my father fought for, it's not the world I told you kids it would be when you grew up. It is what it is.

STEPHEN

Yes —

SHIELDS

That's the terrible secret no parent ever wants a child to find out – that the world has dimensions to it that none of us can understand: the way it hurts and maims and changes us all. We're told to make sacrifices for the sake of others, but we can't — we're so busy fending off what we can't see, tending wounds that never heal. We have no choice but to put the needs of those we love second to our own. Your mother and I have let you down, haven't we? What can I do to help you?

STEPHEN

It's as you said: The world is what it is. You didn't make it that way — it just is. I'm the only person who can help me. Pray for me, Dad and — do me a favor. Keep it from Mom, will you?

SHIELDS

She already suspects you'll be leaving the Church.

STEPHEN

*(Shaking his head)* What if it's already left me?

MOLLY

*(Enters with her purse)* There you are, Stephen. There's a fresh coffee cake in the kitchen and — Mother of God, look at you. You look as if you'd walked to the gates of Hell and back. Where were you all night?

SHIELDS

We can talk about it in the car. Let's go, or we'll be late.

STEPHEN

I told you O'Connell said he'd stop by, didn't I?

MOLLY

Yes, you did. But don't let him near the pound cake. He'll go through it like a dose of salts.

STEPHEN

Okay. See you later.

SHIELDS

Try and get some rest. *(HE and MOLLY exit, leaving the front door open)*

STEPHEN

*(Crosses to desk, picks up his Breviary and reads)* “And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted - Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth - Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness—

*(MONSIGNOR O'CONNELL, unseen by STEPHEN, stands in the threshold, observing him)*

O'CONNELL

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

STEPHEN

Blessed are the pure in heart—. . . I didn't hear you come in, Monsignor. Good morning.

O'CONNELL

Good morning to you, Stephen. Trusting people, you Shields's, leaving your front door unlocked. I did knock, you know.

STEPHEN

I didn't hear you. Lost in thought, I guess.

O'CONNELL

I'm not surprised. You've been through a rough twenty-four hours.

STEPHEN

*(Ignoring this)* Would you like some coffee?

O'CONNELL

I think not. We can get this all over with very quickly. I've brought you some very good news.

STEPHEN

Why is that?

O'CONNELL

I beg your pardon?

STEPHEN

"Get it over quickly," you said. Is there some reason we have to rush? I was told I would be allowed to defend myself.

O'CONNELL

*(Smiling)* It's perfectly natural for you to want to do that Stephen, but it isn't going to be necessary. That's the good news I've brought you.

STEPHEN

The charge has been withdrawn?

O'CONNELL

Better than that — it's been settled.

STEPHEN

Settled? How?

O'CONNELL

The two young men and their attorneys have agreed to a settlement. For a small consideration, mind you. No investigations, no meetings, and the Cardinal can take his vacation in France as scheduled. All water under the bridge, as far as anyone is concerned. Finished.

STEPHEN

Water under the bridge?

O'CONNELL

That's what I said. You're free as a bird. I've just come from meeting with the lawyers and the Bishop.

STEPHEN

What made them drop the charges?

O'CONNELL

Oh, they didn't do that.

STEPHEN

Then how can I be free?

O'CONNELL

I told you — the complaint has been settled and all the records are to be sealed — Part of the agreement. What's more, the two men can never bring another accusation against you, or any other priest. That's also in the agreement. These men were just looking to cash in on a sure thing. As soon as I met with them, I knew what they were after.

STEPHEN

Are you saying you gave in to these men? Without an investigation?

O'CONNELL

Some of these people coming forth know we aren't in any position to put up much of a fight so, sooner or later, they name one figure, we propose another — each side compromises and we come up with a settlement that makes everybody happy. Those are the kinds of tawdry cases I've kept out of your hands, Stephen — so you could make progress with the tough ones. I've meant to tell you before how grateful the Bishop and I are for the way you've handled your share of this terrible burden.

STEPHEN

You didn't think there really was an issue of abuse? But you paid them off anyway? That's blackmail.

O'CONNELL

Hardly. When you've been in the game as long as I have, you'll spot this kind of person. The kind of accusation those men made was merely a shadow cast across the Bride of Christ —and now the shadow has been removed.

STEPHEN

You call bribery and blackmail a shadow on the Bride of Christ? There's no Bride of Christ involved here —just His whore.

O'CONNELL

I'd watch how I spoke, Stephen. This isn't all over with yet. If it weren't for what you've been through...

STEPHEN

How do you know what I've been through? You never asked. How could you effect a settlement without even speaking to me? How can you be so indifferent?

O'CONNELL

I will not tolerate you speaking to me this way, especially when I've just resolved another acute embarrassment for the Church and managed to protect your priesthood as well.

STEPHEN

Committing one crime to avoid looking into another?

O'CONNELL

If we can get a settlement, we move on it. That's all there is to it — your case is no different. It's what we have to do if there's going to be any Church left to us when this is all over. Don't act like you're hearing this for the first time.

STEPHEN

In the other cases the men were guilty. We had an obligation to settle.

O'CONNELL

Guilt or innocence has nothing to do with it. We have an obligation to settle these cases as expeditiously as possible. As a result of all our efforts, including your friend Sebastian, you've got a long career ahead of you as a priest now, instead of a jail sentence. Are you forgetting what might have happened if your case went to trial like some of the others?

STEPHEN

What case? I told you I was innocent — and that I could prove it.

O'CONNELL

Stephen, let me tell you something a wise old priest told me when I was your age. I'd caught this young boy stealing lunch money from one of his friends and I wanted him expelled, but my advisor knew the kid's family. They had both money and power — and they would have used it. "Let it go," I was told, "by the time his family is through with you, they'll have made you out to be the thief." He was right — they would have, and I'll never forget his words. "Son," he said, "the more you stir the shit, the more it's going to smell."

STEPHEN

Jesus...

O'CONNELL

I understand you wanting to clear your name — and I sympathize with you. But think of your future.

STEPHEN

How can you stand there and say I have a future ahead of me as a priest? That it's over and done with? Innocence or guilt does matter. If these men were sexually violated, we've an obligation to them.

O'CONNELL

Don't try my patience, Stephen, by second-guessing the Church's decision. Of course we have an obligation to them — and it has just been paid — In full. You probably think they're entitled to more — twenty years of therapy, or a written apology from the Vatican — plus a settlement. They weren't interested. All they wanted was ready cash, so don't stand there passing moral judgments, when it's your neck I've just removed from the noose. No one is interested.

STEPHEN

If I understand you correctly — the Church doesn't care what happens to those two men and, more importantly, has no interest in finding out whether or not I'm guilty?

O'CONNELL

Oh, the Church cares, Stephen — Very much. I'm not finished with what I have to say. You can either hear me out now or tomorrow you can have a formal meeting with the Bishop. It won't change what's already been decided.

SEBASTIAN

*(Knocking on the open front door)* May I come in?

O'CONNELL

Sebastian! I was just giving our friend here the details of the settlement we worked out — but he isn't taking it very well. Seems to think we were wrong to keep his name out of the papers — wants his day in court, as it were.

SEBASTIAN

I'm not surprised. This must all come as a shock, Stephen. But just be glad it's over. It's such good news.

STEPHEN

Is it? To me, Good news has always meant proclaiming the Gospels.

SEBASTIAN

Of course it does. But this is good news, too.

STEPHEN

God help us, if that's the case. You both stand there looking at me as if you'd found a new Gospel — the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Predator.

O'CONNELL

That's sacrilege, and I won't stand for it.

STEPHEN

Why not? You'll allow bribery – or is that as far as you go – *Monsignor*?

O'CONNELL

For God's sake, Stephen, think of the shame we have all saved your parents. If it ever got in the papers — it wouldn't matter whether you were innocent or not. The shame would have killed them.

SEBASTIAN

Give Monsignor O'Connell a chance to explain everything to you. Be glad it's over.

STEPHEN

Maybe I'm not motivated by expediency, Sebastian. Why have you been hovering over my case, anyway? Are you afraid my predicament might damage your promotion? Why the hell don't you just drop me? Walk away — like you did with Sarah? Or is there another piece to the puzzle?

SEBASTIAN

You keep bringing up that fantasy about Sarah every time I see you. Regardless of what you think, I'm here because I'm your friend.

STEPHEN

When someone has to announce that he's your friend, chances are you've just been fucked. I'm innocent — and I mean to prove it.

O'CONNELL

Get it through your head, Stephen. The matter is closed.

STEPHEN

No. You get it through your head, Monsignor. I'm innocent. And you know it or you wouldn't be here now — Either of you.

O'CONNELL

You're innocent. I heard you, and I'm glad for you, but it's you who hasn't been listening, Stephen — Your case is closed. It doesn't matter what I or anyone else believes. It's never going to come up. Your innocence or guilt is no longer a matter of concern to anyone.

STEPHEN

It is to me.

O'CONNELL

Then, by all means, keep telling yourself you're innocent – if it will help you – but you are not to speak of it again outside this room, do you understand? That is a direct order from the Bishop. The Church is not a debating society, Stephen, and, as your Superior, I am ordering you to keep silent. It's time we moved on. Now, I want you to go upstairs, pack your things, and come back to the Rectory.

STEPHEN

*(Calmly)* I want to see the records.

SEBASTIAN

You can't do that, Stephen.

STEPHEN

Oh, yes I can. I'll bring suit, if I have to.

O'CONNELL

No one sues the Church, Stephen. First Amendment would get you thrown out of court. Even if you could, what would you accomplish? Go public with this and the press will eat you alive – the first thing they'd want to know is how many priests you've covered up for – and who would be there to come to your defense? Not the Church, boy-o — and without the records—

STEPHEN

You bastard—

O'CONNELL

Who was it once wrote, "Name calling is the last refuge of the ineffectual?" It must be in a book I read. Go ahead — bring about the end that we've just saved you from. Your family can turn everything it owns into cash and you'll never have enough money. You'll ruin yourself — and your family.

STEPHEN

I think I finally understand you, Monsignor: something I read in a book. "All are guilty, therefore all are innocent." Albert Camus. So you sweep me under the carpet, and do nothing for those two men.

SEBASTIAN

What the hell do you think we should do for them? They were trying to scam us. They're your blackmailers, Stephen

STEPHEN

What makes you so certain?

SEBASTIAN

It was just one of those cases that comes out of nowhere. Two creeps looking to cash in on a good deal. They were lying, their attorney was lying — and they knew that we knew it.

STEPHEN

May I ask how much I cost?

O'CONNELL

How much you cost?

STEPHEN

Yes — How much did I cost you? How much do you think I'm worth to your church?

O'CONNELL

I remind you, Stephen, that you took an oath of obedience. I am holding you to it at this moment. There is nothing more going to be said about the matter.

STEPHEN

My obedience is owed to God. I want to know my worth — and, while you're at it, why was this case so important to you, Monsignor, since you've hardly taken an interest in any of the others? How did you know these men were just looking for money? How did they give themselves away? Who suggested a cash settlement to whom?

O'CONNELL

That's it. I am going back to the rectory and you are to follow with Sebastian. I'll expect you there within the hour.

STEPHEN

You know what I don't buy about all this? It's the fact that you have no compunction whatsoever about having a pedophile in your rectory.

O'CONNELL

Haven't you been saying all along that you are innocent?

STEPHEN

I am. But, since there's to be no investigation, I'm standing here wondering why you're not just a little bit nervous about having me in the rectory? Either you believe I'm innocent, or you know that I am.

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, you're going too far. It can all be discussed later, when you've calmed down.

STEPHEN

I thought so. You do want something more from me. Why don't you two just stop all your dodging and darting and tell me? I have a right to know.

SEBASTIAN

It can wait.

STEPHEN

No, it can't. You expect me to play along with this little game, then it's only fair that you fill me in on what my role is supposed to be.

O'CONNELL

Fine. You want to know? I was going to tell you tomorrow when you'd cooled down — but there's no reason you can't know now. All the records are sealed like we told you, so there's no chance of anyone finding out anything that took place. That was agreed to by both sides.

STEPHEN

So?—

O'CONNELL

We – the diocese – can't look as if it paid no attention to the charges. There's been enough of that already. It's been arranged for you to take a short holiday out in Illinois close to Sebastian's parish.

STEPHEN

You're not talking about Bethel House in Evanston, are you? That's a psychiatric facility. That's where you sent Cranston and Jenner and Rafferty. It's for drunken priests and — and...

O'CONNELL

And people with your sort of problem... I mean with the problem you've been accused of. It all comes down to the same thing. You'll only have to be at Bethel House for a month — six weeks at the most. Then you'll be transferred to work with Sebastian in Evanston.

SEBASTIAN

It's only to keep our part of the bargain.

STEPHEN

I see. You've arranged to take care of all three victims: myself and the two boys — and protect the one guilty party. Nice work, only it isn't going to happen.

O'CONNELL

What are you talking about?

STEPHEN

I mean I am not going to Bethel House or any other penitential purgatory you try to put me in. I'm not going to atone for a crime I didn't commit. And there's another matter as well. You haven't told me how much you are willing to pay for my silence.

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, do you really expect to be paid?

O'CONNELL

Your silence? Is this some kind of a joke?

STEPHEN

Am I smiling? Why are you making me spell it out? How much? You paid Silvio and his friend off when they came to you. Now it's my turn. How much are you going to pay me? My folks aren't rich — you know that. They could use a little money when my father retires. Besides, Silvio shook you down without a shred of proof — not a single document or witness...

O'CONNELL

Whereas —

STEPHEN

Good for you, Monsignor. You catch on fast.

O'CONNELL

There's no chance of that. The Bishop will never hear of it.

STEPHEN

Ah — you've already discussed the possibility with him?

O'CONNELL

Not in so many words...

STEPHEN

But you wanted guidance — in case I wasn't interested in taking the fall for someone else for nothing.

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, you're not in your right mind. What fall are you talking about?

STEPHEN

Oh, Sebastian, you poor, dumb fool. You really didn't think I'd remember, did you? *(Almost to himself)* The sun was going down, and it was starting to turn cold. A breeze was coming up off the lake and I didn't know whether or not to call off the canoeing trip. I was always afraid of the water. If it had been up to me, I would have called it off. But the boys all wanted to go, so I stood there on the beach with them, waiting for you to show up and make the decision. "Let's wait and see what Father Sebastian says," I told them, "He'll be here any minute. He's just gone to check on Silvio." So we waited, and waited — and when you finally came running down to the beach, you were all out of breath — and you looked scared.

O'CONNELL

I forbid you to say another word.

STEPHEN

He called you first — didn't he, Sebastian? Before they contacted my diocese, Silvio tracked you down in Illinois and demanded money. Isn't that right? *(To O'CONNELL)* Look at the two of us. We're so much alike, even our own mothers used to get us mixed up when we were kids.

*(STEPHEN throws a small cushion to SEBASTIAN with his left hand, which SEBASTIAN catches with his left hand)*

STEPHAN

We're both left-handed. When we came up to bat, my father used to say he'd have to squint to see which one of us was at the plate. But Silvio didn't get us mixed up, did he, Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

Do we have to go into all this now?

STEPHEN

He could have come knocking on the door of my church any time he wanted to – if he'd mistaken me for you – but he never did. Instead, he made a call to Chicago. Why was that? Why was he so certain that it was you who'd paid him a visit in that cabin six years ago? Because that wasn't the only time you'd been to see him, was it? Tell the truth, Sebastian. You went down to his cabin that night to have sex with him, didn't you? You'd been seeing him all that summer — and his buddy, Rohnert, was with the rest of the boys down at the beach that night. Silvio was alone in the cabin.

SEBASTIAN

We can talk about all this later. There's so much you don't know.

STEPHEN

No, Sebastian. We'll talk about it now. What's going on between the two of you anyway? You – my oldest friend – would have me placed in a mental hospital — and you – who has known me since I was a child – you'd let him get away with it. Which one of you had to work the hardest on the other?

O'CONNELL

*(Angrily)* You want it all out in the open now, do you? Then, fine. We'll deal with it. The answer is no. No, I don't give a good goddamn which of you is guilty. I told you when I first walked in here that what mattered to me was saving the Church from more scandal. This morning I was able to do that — and do a good job of it. Who the hell are you to judge me? You take one ride on a merry-go-round and you think you know all there is about riding a horse. I've been a priest for longer than you've been alive. Korea, The Philippines, Port au Prince — I've seen more filth and death and betrayal than a mere child like you could ever imagine. Twenty-nine years, I sweated it out in one hellhole after another before I finally got a parish where I didn't have to keep one eye open throughout the night to see what was moving in the shadows. And I mean to keep this assignment. As far as I'm concerned, you can both take it up the ass. It's man's nature to commit evil acts whether he's an officer, a parishioner or a priest. And if you want to survive as a priest, do yourself a favor and get used to it. That's the true meaning of absolution as far as I'm concerned — agreeing to look the other way so that you and the other guy can both survive. It's God who gets to pass judgment – not me – and not you. Hold people to account and you're just asking for martyrdom. I know all about Sebastian and this boy. I'm his confessor as well as yours. He told me years ago, and I've been urging him to break it off ever since. When he finally came to his senses last year, that's exactly what he did. That's why the little bastard turned on him and tried to blackmail him.

STEPHEN

Jesus...

SEBASTIAN

I'm sorry, Stephen. I should have told you, too, but I didn't know how...It started that same summer. Then he came out to Chicago several times to visit me. The last time was when I told him I couldn't do it anymore. That was when he first started asking me for money. I gave him what I could, but he kept calling me for more. He threatened to go to my Bishop — and Ryan doesn't understand these things. It's all zero tolerance with him. He would have let me be arrested and stand trial, if it came to that.

STEPHEN

And of course the good Monsignor here told you this diocese was settling these things more quietly.

SEBASTIAN

I couldn't be sure how far Silvio would go — whether he'd bring his accusations to someone else or...

STEPHEN

So, the two of you talked — and together you set me up.

SEBASTIAN

No, Stephen. It was the only way to keep me from disgrace. I'm sorry you got dragged into it. It wasn't supposed to —

STEPHEN

To what? Ruin my family, my vocation, my life?

SEBASTIAN

Monsignor O'Connell needed a reason to get the Bishop to part with the money. It had to be a priest in this diocese or he would never have agreed.

STEPHEN

You could have come to me first, Sebastian. My family has always been here for you. We would have found a way to do better than this. What you've done is evil – and stupid – and can't work. I can't go along with this. You know I can't.

SEBASTIAN

What are you going to do?

STEPHEN

For starters, I'll probably resign. In the morning, I'll write to the Bishop and ask to be laicized.

O'CONNELL

You'll do no such thing. If you cause this settlement to be broken, the Church will not stand behind you. Do you hear me? You'll be on your own. Try explaining your innocence to your father then. He won't believe you any more than the neighbors on this block will. Not without the Church behind you. It so happens that I agree with you — Sebastian has been foolish and stupid. He's done something completely distasteful to both of us. Nevertheless, what he says is true. I know his Bishop — Ryan would let him go to trial. He'd go to prison and be torn to pieces. Is that what you want to see? Of course not — none of us does. He made a mistake — a bad one — and we have to stand behind him. The only solution is for each of us to compromise, to make a small sacrifice. The Bishop has ordered you to Bethel House and you will obey. You will obey him the way I obey him — the way he obeys the Cardinal. These are orders, not choices.

SEBASTIAN

I'm sorry. What can I say to you?

STEPHEN

Nothing. You've taken my name, my priesthood, my life. I have nothing left.

O'CONNELL

These are mere means, Stephen. You've saved a fellow priest from disgrace. This small little sacrifice — erasing this unfortunate lapse — means Sebastian can go forward with his life, and so can you. Think of the future.

STEPHEN

I have no future — not as a man, and certainly not as a priest. If I go out to Illinois, it's as good as admitting my guilt. If Silvio ever does come forward in the future — or if someone else accuses me — it will be on my record that I spent — what? — six weeks, six months — at Bethel House. My life is as good as over. Did you even think of that — or didn't you care?

O'CONNELL

Listen to me Stephen; right now you've a belly full of self-pity. You stand there doing exactly what you've accused Sebastian and me of doing: thinking only of yourself. You want us to tell you we were wrong to do what we did. That's all you care about. Well, keep to that point of view, if it does you any good. But get the notion of writing to the Bishop — or taking this matter any further than outside this room — right out of your head. The Church isn't looking to make any new martyrs.

STEPHEN

The Church doesn't make martyrs — they make themselves.

O'CONNELL

I have nothing further to say to you. Sebastian can stay and try to talk some sense into you, but I'm due back at the rectory. I'll expect you both within the hour.

*(O'CONNELL exits; STEPHEN and SEBASTIAN stand looking at one another)*

SEBASTIAN

Can I help you get ready?

STEPHEN

I'd rather you left. Or are you supposed to stay and keep watch over me?

SEBASTIAN

Stephen, I don't want this any more than you do.

STEPHEN

Oh, yes you do. It's all going to work out fine for you.

SEBASTIAN

O'Connell was the only person I had to turn to.

SEBASTIAN

And he's served you well, hasn't he? Better than God could have. God might have wanted the ends to justify the means.

SEBASTIAN

You don't have to make this any harder than it already is. Can't you imagine how ashamed I am?

STEPHEN

Of what? Screwing that poor kid or buying him off?

SEBASTIAN

Of everything...

STEPHEN

I don't believe you. I don't believe you gave a thought to anything but saving your own neck. What am I going to tell my family, Sebastian? I can't lie to them — or is O'Connell going to handle that, too?

SEBASTIAN

I never intended to hurt you, Stephen, or your family. They're my family, too — I'm the third son, remember? That makes me your brother.

STEPHEN

I get it — just like in the Bible. Only you're not the third son. Bud is.

SEBASTIAN

Bud?

STEPHEN

Adam and Eve's third son, Seth — the most important man in the Bible, put there by God so the human race wouldn't have to think of itself as descended from a murderer. You and I — Cain and Abel — we stay behind in the garden, coveting our parents' and our own corruptions. But Seth — Bud — he gets to walk into the light with God's blessing, sinless, to go forth and multiply.

SEBASTIAN

I don't see where any of this is leading.

STEPHEN

God never said we were born in sin. How could we be created in his image if that were true? God is holy, and good, and pure. It's men like you and O'Connell — and a church full of men who think like you — who would ever think of defaming God's most noble creation. Lie and lie after lie — for what? Temporal power? Shame on you, Sebastian — not for what you did, but for who you are.

SEBASTIAN

"I am who I am." Isn't that what God said to Moses? "I am who I am." Take a good look, Stephen, because I'm not what I am. I'm what you — and your mother — and Bud — and your father made me. The third son, created not by the breath of God but by a phone call your mother made asking if I could stay to dinner. Molly knew there'd be nothing at home for me except maybe a note telling me to fix myself a cheese sandwich. She knew what I'd find at my house — my mother passed out in bed — with a bottle or two on her nightstand, and my father locking himself in — down in the basement — with his wood saws and the lousy, stinking birdhouses he kept on making, night after night.

STEPHEN

I don't want to hear any more. I need you to leave.

SEBASTIAN

Do you know what it's like to have nothing of your own that you can bring to God — only what you steal from someone else? Look at me, Stephen — go ahead and look. I'm your brother — the one all of you in this house created. I'm not made in God's image — I'm made in yours.

STEPHEN

Stop now, Sebastian, and leave.

SEBASTIAN

I gave this family my life. Ever since I was a kid, I've taken orders — from my family, then from yours, and now from the Church. What was I to any of you? Tell me that, if you can. Tell me that I exist, I'm begging you — tell me that I matter.

STEPHEN

Go. Go back to the rectory, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

Tell me! You can't, can you? You can't tell me I exist because I don't. There isn't any me. You think I sold you out but how could I, Stephen? I don't exist. *(Falling to his knees and making the Sign of the Cross)* If that's what you think then you have to forgive me, Stephen. Forgive me and grant me absolution. Then the seal of confession will bind us both – we'll never be able to talk about what I did – and we can have our friendship back — like it was. I – want –absolution – not from the Church, Stephen — I want it from *you*. Bless me father. Bless me for I have sinned. *Please.*

STEPHEN

*(Helping SEBASTIAN to his feet, half-pushing him to the doorway)* Get up, Sebastian: you need to go. Your connection to me – to this family – is over. Over. I cannot give you absolution. It is not mine to give: Absolution is for the living: It doesn't pass from one dead man to another.

*(STEPHEN closes the door behind SEBASTIAN and comes back into the living room. HE takes his breviary from the desk and drops to his knees. When he speaks, it is almost in a child's voice.)*

STEPHEN

Who made the world, Stephen? You did, God. And who made you, Stephen? You did. Why were you made, child? To know you — to know you and love you and serve you in this world and forever in the next. *(As HE slowly removes his collar and places it on the floor besides him)* How, Lord? How are we to serve you if you never break your silence? *(As HE undoes his shirt)* “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see the face of God” — Lord, why can't I see your face? Why can't I hear your voice? Please, dear God, I'm begging you — tell me that we all have a home with you. *(STEPHEN makes the sign of the cross. As if a decision is growing within him, his voice becomes surer, but it is never loud, as HE repeats the following prayers to be said at a gravesite)* Blessed be our God. Blessed be our God forever, for we know that if our earthly dwelling be destroyed, we have a building from God — and I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things...nor powers, nor height, nor depth...nor any other creature ....will be able to separate us from the love of God....

***(LIGHTS FADE OUT)***

**END OF SCENE**

## ACT II, SCENE TWO

*(AT RISE: Sunday morning, shortly before dawn. BUD is asleep on the sofa, a throw rug over him. HE is still wearing his clothing from the previous day. The light from the desk lamp shines on STEPHEN'S Breviary. SHIELDS sits in the darkened dining room. HE stares out into space but is otherwise immobile. After a moment, HE moans a frightening sound, covering his face with his hands. After a moment, SARAH enters from the kitchen, in her robe, carrying a pot of coffee, which SHE sets down on the sideboard. SHE turns on the lamp. When she speaks, it is with a softness SHE has not used towards SHIELDS before.*

SARAH

You stayed up all night again, Thomas?

SHIELDS

I had things to do.

SARAH

What things? *(HE doesn't answer)* What things, Thomas?

SHIELDS

Things my little boy wanted me to do.

SARAH

What did Bud want? He shouldn't be asking....

SHIELDS

*(Shaking his head)* It was for Stephen.

SARAH

Stephen? What things were you doing for Stephen? Can you tell me...? *(Putting her hand out to him.)* You're crying.

SHIELDS

*(Turning away from her)* No.

SARAH

It's all right to cry in front of me, Thomas. I've seen men do it many times.

SHIELDS

*(Softly)* I'm not. I can't. Not now. All my courage is in my tears.

SARAH

As it should be. Sure, we fight hardest for what we cry the longest over. How can I help, Thomas?

*(SHIELDS raises his head to her, then gestures for her to come closer)*

SHIELDS

I don't know how I will bury my boy —

SARAH

Oh, Thomas...Thomas.

SHIELDS

How do I throw that first fistful of dirt on his coffin? Help me, Sarah. Don't let my tears drown me.

SARAH

I promise. What was it Stephen asked you to do?

SHIELDS

Soon, Sarah. I promise — I'll tell all of you soon.

This is Not the End of the Play  
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes