

# FATHER FLYNN

## SISTER JAMES

took the pillow off her bed, a knife from the drawer, went up the fire escape to the roof, and stabbed the pillow. Then she went back to the old priest as instructed. "Did you gut the pillow with the knife?" he says. "Yes, Father." "And what was the result?" "Feathers," she said. "Feathers?" he repeated. "Feathers everywhere, Father!" "Now I want you to go back and gather up every last feather that flew out on the wind!" "Well," she says, "it can't be done. I don't know where they went. The wind took them all over." "And that," said Father O'Rourke, "is gossip!" In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen.

### SEVEN

*The lights crossfade to the garden. A crow caws. Sister James sits on the bench, deep in thought. Father Flynn enters.*

FLYNN. Good afternoon, Sister James.

SISTER JAMES. Good afternoon, Father.

FLYNN. What is that bird complaining about? What kind of bird is that? A starling? A grackle?

SISTER JAMES. A crow?

FLYNN. Of course it is. Are you praying? I didn't mean to interrupt.

SISTER JAMES. I'm not praying, no.

FLYNN. You seem subdued.

SISTER JAMES. Oh. I can't sleep.

FLYNN. Why not?

SISTER JAMES. Bad dreams. Actually one bad dream, and then I haven't slept right since.

FLYNN. What about?

SISTER JAMES. I looked in a mirror and there was a darkness where my face should be. It frightened me.

FLYNN. I can't sleep on occasion.

SISTER JAMES. No? Do you see that big hand pointing a finger at you?

FLYNN. Yes. Sometimes.

SISTER JAMES. Was your sermon directed at anyone in particular?

FLYNN. What do you think?

SISTER JAMES. Did you make up that story about the pillow?

FLYNN. Yes. You make up little stories to illustrate. In the tradition of the parable.

SISTER JAMES. Aren't the things that actually happen in life more worthy of interpretation than a made-up story?

FLYNN. No. What actually happens in life is beyond interpretation. The truth makes for a bad sermon. It tends to be confusing and have no clear conclusion.

SISTER JAMES. I received a letter from my brother in Maryland yesterday. He's very sick.

FLYNN. Maybe you should go and see him.

SISTER JAMES. I can't leave my class.

FLYNN. How's Donald Muller doing?

SISTER JAMES. I don't know.

FLYNN. You don't see him?

SISTER JAMES. I see him every day, but I don't know how he's doing. I don't know how to judge these things. Now.

FLYNN. I stopped speaking to him for fear of it being misunderstood. Isn't that a shame? I actually avoided him the other day when I might've passed him in the hall. He doesn't understand why. I noticed you didn't come to me for confession.

SISTER JAMES. No. I went to Monsignor Benedict. He's very kind.

FLYNN. I wasn't?

SISTER JAMES. It wasn't that. As you know. You know why.

FLYNN. You're against me?

SISTER JAMES. No.

FLYNN. You're not convinced?

SISTER JAMES. It's not for me to be convinced, one way or the other. It's Sister Aloysius.

FLYNN. Are you just an extension of her?

SISTER JAMES. She's my superior.

FLYNN. But what about you?

SISTER JAMES. I wish I knew nothing whatever about it. I wish the idea had never entered my mind.

FLYNN. How did it enter your mind?

SISTER JAMES. Sister Aloysius.

FLYNN. I feel as if my reputation has been damaged through no fault of my own. But I'm reluctant to take the steps necessary to repair it for fear of doing further harm. It's frustrating, I can tell you that.

SISTER JAMES. Is it true?