

Doubt

By John Patrick Shanley

DRAMA

Characters: *SISTER ALOYSIUS (The head nun and principal of St Nicholas School. Driven by a high sense of duty but rigid and conservative.)*

FLYNN (A middle aged priest. Articulate and personable.)

FLYNN: May I come in?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: We would require a third party.

FLYNN: What was Donald's mother doing here?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: We were having a chat.

FLYNN: About what?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: A third party is truly required, Father.

FLYNN: No, Sister. No third party. You and me are due for a talk.

He comes in and slams the door behind him.

FLYNN: You have to stop this campaign against me!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You can stop it any time.

FLYNN: How?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Confess and resign.

FLYNN: You are attempting to destroy my reputation! But the result of all this is going to be your removal, not mine.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: What are you doing in this school?

FLYNN: I am trying to do good!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Or even more to the point, what are you doing in the priesthood?

FLYNN: You are single-handedly holding this school and this parish back!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: From what?

FLYNN: Progressive education and a welcoming church.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You can't distract me, Father Flynn. This isn't about my behavior, it's about yours.

FLYNN: It's about your unfounded suspicions.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: That's right. I have suspicions.

FLYNN: You know what I haven't understood through all this? Why do you suspect me? What have I done?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You gave that boy wine to drink. And you let him take the blame.

FLYNN: That's completely untrue! Did you talk to Mr. McGinn?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: All McGinn knows is the boy drank wine. He doesn't know how he came to drink it.

FLYNN: Did his mother have something to add to that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: No.

FLYNN: So that's it. There's nothing there.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I'm not satisfied.

FLYNN: Well, if you're not satisfied, ask the boy then!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: No, he'd protect you. That's what he's been doing.

FLYNN: Oh, and why would he do that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Because you have seduced him.

FLYNN: You're insane! You've got it in your head that I've corrupted this child after giving him wine, and nothing I say will change that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: That's right.

FLYNN: But correct me if I'm wrong. This has nothing to do with the wine, not really. You had a fundamental mistrust of me before this incident! It was you that warned Sister James to be on the lookout, wasn't it?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: That's true.

FLYNN: So you admit it!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Certainly.

FLYNN: Why?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I know people.

FLYNN: That's not good enough!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: It won't have to be.

FLYNN: How's that?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You will tell me what you've done.

FLYNN: Oh I will?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes.

FLYNN: I'm not one of your truant boys, you know. Sister James is convinced I'm innocent.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: So you talked to Sister James? Well, of course you talked to Sister James.

FLYNN: Did you know that Donald's father beats him?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes.

FLYNN: And might that not account for the odd behavior Sister James noticed in the boy?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: It might.

FLYNN: Then what is it? What? What did you hear, what did you see that convinced you so thoroughly?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: What does it matter?

FLYNN: I want to know.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: On the first day of the school year, I saw you touch William London's wrist. And I saw him pull away.

FLYNN: That's all?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: That was all.

FLYNN: But that's nothing.

(He writes in his book)

SISTER ALOYSIUS: What are you writing now?

FLYNN: You leave me no choice. I'm writing down what you say. I tend to get too flustered to remember the details of an upsetting conversation, and this may be important. When I talk to the monsignor and explain why you have to be removed as the principal of this school.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: This morning, before I spoke with Mrs. Muller, I took the precaution of calling the last parish to which you were assigned.

FLYNN: What did he say?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Who?

FLYNN: The pastor?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I did not speak to the pastor. I spoke to one of the nuns.

FLYNN: You should've spoken to the pastor.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I spoke to a nun.

FLYNN: That's not the proper route for you to have taken, Sister! The Church is very clear. You're supposed to go through the pastor.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Why? Do you have an understanding, you and he? Father Flynn, you have a history.

FLYNN: You have no right to go rummaging through my past!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: This is your third parish in five years.

FLYNN: Call the pastor and ask him why I left! It was perfectly innocent.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I'm not calling the pastor.

FLYNN: I am a good priest! And there is nothing in my record to suggest otherwise.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You will go after another child and another, until you are stopped.

FLYNN: What nun did you speak to?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I won't say.

FLYNN: I've not touched a child.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You have.

FLYNN: You have not the slightest proof of anything.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: But I have my certainty, and armed with that, I will go to your last parish, and the one before that if necessary. I will find a parent, Father Flynn! Trust me I will. A parent who probably doesn't know that you are still working with children! And once I do that, you will be exposed. You may even be attacked, metaphorically or otherwise.

FLYNN: You have no right to act on your own! You are a member of a religious order. You have taken vows, obedience being one! You answer to us! You have no right to step outside the Church!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I will step outside the Church if that's what needs to be done, though the door should shut behind me! I will do what needs to be done, Father, if it means I'm damned to Hell! You should understand that, or you will mistake me. Now, did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?

FLYNN: Have you never done anything wrong?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I have.

FLYNN: Mortal sin?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes.

FLYNN: And?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I confessed it! Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?

FLYNN: Whatever I have done, I have left in the healing hands of my confessor. As have you! We are the same!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: We are not the same! A dog that bites is a dog that bites! I do not justify what I do wrong and go on. I admit it, desist, and take my medicine. Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?

FLYNN: No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Mental reservation?

FLYNN: No.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You lie. Very well then, if you won't leave my office, I will, and once I go, I will not stop.

(She goes to the door. Suddenly a new tone comes into his voice.)

FLYNN: Wait!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You will request a transfer from this parish. You will take a leave of absence until it is granted.

FLYNN: And do what for the love of God? My life is here.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Don't.

FLYNN: Please! Are we people? Am I a person flesh and blood like you? Or are we just ideas and convictions. I can't say everything. Do you understand? There are things I can't say. Even if you can't imagine the explanation, Sister, remember that there are circumstances beyond your knowledge. Even if you feel certainty, it is an emotion and not a fact. In the spirit of charity, I appeal to you. On behalf of my life's work. You have to behave responsibly. I put myself in your hands.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I don't want you.

FLYNN: My reputation is at stake.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You can preserve your reputation.

FLYNN: If you say these things, I won't be able to do my work in the community.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Your work in the community should be discontinued.

FLYNN: You'd leave me with nothing.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: That's not true. It's Donald Muller who has nothing, and you took full advantage of that.

FLYNN: I have not done anything wrong. I care about that boy very much.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Because you smile at him and sympathize with him, and talk to him as if you were the same?

FLYNN: That child needed a friend!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You are a cheat. The warm feeling you experienced when that boy looked at you with trust was not the sensation of virtue. It can be got by a drunkard from his tot of rum. You're a disgrace to the

collar. The only reason you haven't been thrown out of the Church is the decline in vocations.

FLYNN: I can fight you.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You will lose.

FLYNN: You can't know that.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I know.

FLYNN: Where's your compassion?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Nowhere you can get at it. Stay here. Compose yourself. Use the phone if you like. Good day, Father. I have no sympathy for you. I know you're invulnerable to true regret.

(Starts to go. Pause)

And cut your nails.

(She goes, closing the door behind her. After a moment, he goes to the phone and dials.)

FLYNN: Yes. This is Father Brendan Flynn of St. Nicholas parish. I need to make an appointment to see the bishop.

(Lights fade.)