

## For Ever

Jane Carnall

*For Ann, for always.*

Mulcahy had kept going the whole way telling himself that it was more than likely that Hawkeye Pierce wouldn't even be there. The address at Crabapple Cove in Maine was his father's address, and he'd planned to go there when he went home: but all these months after he had been discharged, he almost certainly had a job at a big hospital. In Maine, maybe. Somewhere else, perhaps.

He had almost concluded the house must be empty – he wasn't even sure if the bell was working – when the door opened and Hawkeye stood blinking in the strong afternoon sunlight, looking exactly like the rumpled and exhausted surgeon in Korea. He was even wearing the same brightly-coloured towelling bathrobe. That was shock enough to render him speechless.

"Father Mulcahy?" Hawkeye said. He looked as if he found the sight incredulous, and leaned forward, blinking a little harder, as if to convince himself of his own eyes. "Father Francis Mulcahy?"

It seemed too much to explain just there on the doorstep. He managed a nod. His smile felt awkward.

"Not that I'm not pleased to see you," Hawkeye said, still looking as if he didn't quite believe it, "but what are you doing here?"

"I... wanted to see you." Mulcahy essayed another awkward smile. "May I – " However the conversation went, he didn't want to have it on the doorstep.

"Oh, yeah," Hawkeye said, and then as if a switch had tripped, he grinned, widely, toothily, and stood aside, waving Mulcahy in with a grandiose gesture. He started to say "Have you seen – " and took Mulcahy's hand and shook it, stepping back abruptly, closing the door. Speech was impossible. The hall was dark after the sunlight inside, but not cluttered: Mulcahy followed Hawkeye's retreating back without mishap, through another door at the far end into a big kitchen, sunlit through grimy windows. Here was clutter: plates, cups, and crumbs. A frying-pan and a kettle were on the stove, which was wood-fired and cold.

"Can I get you anything?" Hawkeye asked, staring around, as if suddenly aware of the mess. "I just woke up myself."

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said. "Are you on night duty?"

"Yeah, something like that." Hawkeye moved towards the kettle, then stopped. "Damn, I need to get more wood in. Sorry, Father. I'm not used to guests – Sit down, I'll put something together – "

"May I make a suggestion?" Mulcahy offered.

"Sure."

"I think I can get the stove started," Mulcahy said diffidently, "if you'd like to have a shower."

Hawkeye stared at him. "Do I smell that bad?" He wrinkled his nose. "Don't answer that, Father." He made an elaborate pantomime out of sniffing under one arm, finishing with a suspicious look at Mulcahy. "Yeah, well, you might be right. Don't worry about the stove – just go sit outside, enjoy the view. I'll be back in fifteen minutes. Don't go away." He got to the kitchen door and turned again, pointing.

## Sins and Virtues

“Through *that* door you will find two comfortable chairs and the best view in Maine. Sit down, enjoy, don’t go away, and I’ll be back when I’m sweeter-smelling.”

Mulcahy found himself smiling, without awkwardness. “All right.”

“I really mean it about not going away.” Hawkeye managed to leer and look wistful at the same time. “I’ll even splash on some perfume.”

“No need,” Mulcahy said. He knew it for a pantomime, familiar teasing: it was a relief to see Hawkeye the same.

There were two ancient basketwork chairs on the veranda, padded with cushions so faded that the flowers were grey. The woodpile was still well-stacked, and Mulcahy was perfectly familiar with wood-burning stoves. He got the fire started and filled the kettle, before he went obediently outside and sat down to enjoy the view of the cove that gave the town its name. Far below the sea washed silently against the rocks.

He kept glancing at the door: a dark head poked out a few minutes later. “I also meant it about not bothering with the stove.” Hawkeye looked wider awake, and more refreshed, though there were still dark marks under his eyes that spoke of too little sleep.

“Oh, it was no trouble,” Mulcahy assured him.

“If that stove was no trouble, then it was a miracle.” Hawkeye paused. “Of course, miracles are your stock in trade.”

“Not really, I’m afraid.” Mulcahy smiled, deliberately.

“Want lunch? I’m going to have breakfast. I can pretty much guarantee that it’s going to taste better than army food.”

“Ah yes, army food. You know, while I was on retreat, I used to think fondly of the food in the mess tent.”

“You were on retreat?” Hawkeye peered at him.

“For nearly six months.”

“Oh.”

Mulcahy could see Hawkeye decide not to ask. He couldn’t think of a way to get Hawkeye to ask. He shifted uncomfortably. “How is your father?” he asked.

He knew he’d said something wrong: he’d seen Hawkeye get that appalled, haunted look before. As in Korea, the look vanished into a face-twisting grin after only a moment. “Yeah. Well. He’s fine, you know, I mean for where he is – ” He stopped, and swallowed. “He’s dead.”

“Hawkeye – ” Mulcahy’s throat felt rough. “When? How?”

“He had a heart attack. Just over three weeks ago. He was hospitalised, and then he had another one, and, well, there was nothing they could do. The funeral was...”

Hawkeye screwed his face up, thinking. “Six days ago. I’m still eating the casseroles. That’s what they do here. Bring casseroles.”

During his years as an army chaplain, Mulcahy had listened to so many people tell him that someone they cared about had died. But at this moment, as at all the moments before, he wished he could think of something to say.

“Oh,” he said. “Oh, I’m sorry... Hawkeye, you loved him so much.”

“Loved him?” Hawkeye’s face twisted again. He put his forehead down against his fist. He might have said something then. Mulcahy waited, horrified. It was only a moment before Hawkeye lifted his head again. “Oh God, Father, I miss him so much.” He seemed to hear what he had said, and laughed. “I used to imagine introducing the two of you. ‘Dad, this is Father. Father, this is Dad.’”

*My name is Francis*, Mulcahy thought about saying, and didn’t. “When did you... imagine introducing us?”

## Sins and Virtues

“Oh...” There were tears on Hawkeye’s face, but he was grinning. “A lot of times. I’d think about coming home from the war and getting to show you off to my dad. When I did things – that doctors don’t get to do in Crabapple Cove. Chasing nurses all over. Drinking till I fell over. Operating hungover. I’d think about my dad, and I’d think about telling him all the stuff I did over there, but then I’d think about telling him, this is Father Mulcahy, and he – *he* likes me, and if he likes me, I don’t really care if you don’t like me.”

Mulcahy put his hand out to touch Hawkeye’s upper arm: he patted him gently, cautiously, and Hawkeye’s other hand moved to grab his hand. He had narrow, ugly hands, but his grip was familiarly strong and sure. “But you know what’s funny, Father? I mean, really? He *did* like me. I never found out till I was in Korea, but he liked me. He missed me. I came first with him, even before his patients. But I had to go to Korea to find it out, because we’d never have written each other those kind of letters if I hadn’t, and then he has to die, not even a year after I get back... He was only sixty-four. What did he have to go and die for?” His mouth was twisted up with pain, making his words hard to understand, and his grip on Mulcahy’s hand was savagely tight.

Mulcahy let him hang on. He put his hand on Hawkeye’s shoulder. He realised after a little while, feeling terribly helpless, that Hawkeye was crying, his body racked with sobs.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said again. He could not make out what Hawkeye was saying. “Don’t,” he said helplessly. “It’s all right, Hawkeye. Don’t – ”

Hawkeye looked up. His face was smeared with tears and snot. He sniffed heartily, and used the back of his free hand to wipe his nose. With a visible effort, he put on his familiar wide-mouthed grin. “Sorry, Father. I’m a mess.” Tears were still leaking out of the corners of his eyes. “I’m sorry – ” He stood up. “I’ll get lunch. Casserole okay with you? Mrs Godden over the road did me a tuna casserole I really ought to eat today. It’ll probably be fine if you add enough ketchup.”

“Hawkeye.” Mulcahy stood up. He took hold of Hawkeye’s arms and turned him back to face him. He spoke with familiar authority. “You can cry for your father. You don’t need to – to clown in front of me.”

Hawkeye’s grin held a moment, and collapsed. He was swallowing hard, looking as if he were trying to say something, and not succeeding. He spoke, finally. “I miss him.” Not able to say anything – Mulcahy was finding it hard to talk himself – he put his arms round Hawkeye and hugged him close. The taller man nearly collapsed against him. This close, despite the toothpaste and soap, Mulcahy could smell that Hawkeye was still drunk.

There were things Mulcahy wanted to say more, but there was one thing he needed to tell Hawkeye as soon as possible. He pushed Hawkeye back, seeing the change in Hawkeye’s face as he did so, and said as clearly as he could, “Hawkeye, I’m deaf.”

The look on Hawkeye’s face changed to confusion. “What?”

“I can’t hear you. Unless I can see your face, I can’t tell what you’re saying.”

“What?” Hawkeye was still looking bewildered. “How long – when did it happen? You were ‘on retreat’ – ”

“I’ve learned to read lips,” Mulcahy said. He smiled, because he had learned that that reassured people at this point in his confession. “It really doesn’t matter, except that I sometimes appear to be ignoring people when I don’t intend to. And I do – I do have to see your face.”

Hawkeye caught at his arms again. “Deaf?” he repeated.

## Sins and Virtues

“Yes.” Mulcahy smiled and nodded again. “I’m really quite good at lip-reading now.” He was also making progress in signs, and he’d learned finger-spelling, but he presumed Hawkeye wouldn’t know either.

Hawkeye shook him. “Deaf?” He was clearly all but shouting it.

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He wasn’t sure how loudly he said it, but he was trying to project his voice over Hawkeye’s: the other man closed his mouth and swallowed.

“I’m sorry, Father.”

“My name is Francis,” Mulcahy said.

“When did it happen? How did it happen?”

“That’s not really important,” Mulcahy said.

“Of course it’s important. Who’s been treating you? When did it happen? You weren’t deaf in Korea – what happened to you?”

“Both my eardrums were ruptured,” Mulcahy said. “I’ve been examined by one of the best doctors in the diocese of Pennsylvania. There’s nothing that can be done. I do have a hearing aid, but I find it uncomfortable and it doesn’t help very much. It happened,” he was conscious of prevarication, “shortly before I left the army. Unexploded munitions.” That was true, if misleading.

“I thought you were all safe,” Hawkeye said. His face held a dazed, almost betrayed look, and his grip on Mulcahy’s arms was tightening. “All but Henry Blake, God rest his soul. Trapper and Beej and Radar and Margaret and the Colonel and even Charles. I thought you were all *safe*.”

“I am safe,” Mulcahy said. “I’m just deaf.”

Hawkeye let go of him, sat down and buried his face in his hands. Doubly cut off, Mulcahy pushed his hands down by his sides and shut his mouth. It felt like someone slamming a door in his face. He hated it.

It was only a moment: Hawkeye lifted his head and dropped his hands away from his face. He looked vulnerable and bleary-eyed. “Sorry, Father,” he said again. “I’ll try to remember.” He stood up again. “What about that tuna casserole?”

“Sounds delicious,” Mulcahy said. He followed Hawkeye in.

The casserole tasted just fine to Mulcahy: Hawkeye ate it without enthusiasm. The plates and cutlery were clean, if not the table, but there was a short stack of dishes already in the sink. Hawkeye stood up and cleared their plates, adding them to the pile.

“How long can you stay, Father?” Hawkeye turned round as he asked it. Mulcahy had been watching the back of his head.

Mulcahy hesitated, watching Hawkeye’s lips move, trying to make up his mind. “Actually, I don’t have any current plans.”

“Where are you staying?”

“I left my suitcase at the diner by the bus station,” Mulcahy said. “You seem to have quite a lot of guesthouses here. I –” he stopped. “I didn’t want to make plans to stay here until I knew where you were.”

Hawkeye stared at him. A small, cautious smile appeared on his face. “You know, you could stay here,” he said. “I mean, I have...” the smile faded. “Three spare rooms, right now.”

“I’d be glad to,” Mulcahy said.

“Good.” The smile came back. “Good. Let’s go. We can grab a cup of coffee there.” Hawkeye stood up. “I guess I’d better get dressed,” he added, as if suddenly realising he was still in his bathrobe. “You need a crack at the bathroom, Father? It’s down the hall on the right.”

## Sins and Virtues

It occurred to Mulcahy that this was the first time he'd ever seen Hawkeye in ordinary civilian clothes. They were all a little too big for him, and there was something odd about them in other ways. Mulcahy was getting into the car before it dawned on him that the clothes were from before the Korean war: when Hawkeye hadn't been quite so thin. The bathrobe had disguised it, but surely Hawkeye was thinner than he had been in Korea.

But he drove more carefully. Drunk or sober. It was a couple of miles to the bus station, down narrow roads. Hawkeye took them as slowly as if he was sober. Slower, probably, Mulcahy realised. "How many families around here?" he asked.

Hawkeye pulled to a halt at a junction before he turned his head to look at Mulcahy. "Quite a few." He grinned a little. "Dad delivered half his patients."

The diner was brighter than it had been this morning, because the windows faced west, away from the coast. It wasn't a tourist place. The man behind the counter, a big man with white hair and a face like a stone slab, came out from behind the counter when he saw them come in: not grudgingly, as he had come this morning to point Mulcahy in the direction of the old Pierce house, but with a surprising turn of speed.

"Ben. Good to see you. Y'friend found you, then?"

"Oh, yes –" Hawkeye wasn't facing Mulcahy any more, and Mulcahy was conscious of sudden guiltstricken panic. He ought to have told Hawkeye earlier, no matter how awkward the moment. He stood there in silence, conscious of the man's eyes on him, trying not to stare too obviously at the side of Hawkeye's face, wanting to *hear* so badly he could have screamed for it.

The man held out his hand to Mulcahy, who smiled, nodded, and shook it. Hawkeye was moving over to a table in the corner. Mulcahy followed him.

"Daniel Sheffield," Hawkeye said when they sat down. "Makes the best coffee in Maine."

Mulcahy smiled and nodded. He could not speak for a moment.

Sheffield reappeared with two steaming cups. The coffee was midnight black. Mulcahy looked down into it, glad for a moment to break eye contact, and then, ashamed of himself, looking up again. Sheffield had already gone: so had the milk jug. Hawkeye was looking at him with an odd expression. Mulcahy lifted his mug and tasted the coffee: it *was* good, and he said so.

A minute or so later, Sheffield reappeared with Mulcahy's case in one hand and a fresh jug of milk in the other. He said something to Hawkeye that Mulcahy didn't quite catch – something about Hawkeye's car – and went away again, ignoring Mulcahy's tentative thanks.

"Is there a problem with your car?"

"Not exactly," Hawkeye said. "It's my dad's. Daniel was just pointing out to me that half the main street can see where it's parked, and the other half will find out in half an hour."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand –"

Hawkeye lifted his own coffee mug. "It means we don't have very long before a lot of people will come in here for coffee," he said, and looked wry. "It's not that they all need a doctor right now. But they all want to know whether I'm staying. Stick with me, Father, it's not a conversation I want to have right now." He drank coffee. "Or ever."

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy nodded. “Hawkeye, can I ask you for a favour?” He hoped he was asking quietly enough: it looked like the kind of place where the radio would be playing constantly.

“Sure, Father, anything.”

“Call me Francis,” Mulcahy said. “Or whatever you like, but not ‘Father’. Don’t tell them I’m a – priest.” He got it out without much of a change in his voice.

“What?” Hawkeye was frowning at him.

“Please, Hawkeye, just do as I ask you,” Mulcahy said. He was conscious that there wasn’t much authority in his voice.

“Okay,” Hawkeye said. He looked startled. “What’s the matter – bottom fell out of your Vatican stock?”

“I don’t – ” Mulcahy shook his head. “I don’t want to talk about it here.”

Hawkeye was looking at him intently. “Okay,” he said again.

Mulcahy drank his coffee slowly. Hawkeye was right: over the next hour, people came in to the diner, one by one or two by two, and apparently just happened to walk past the table where they were sitting. They didn’t seem to ask Hawkeye anything: mostly they didn’t mention his father. They accepted being introduced to Mulcahy, with an unsmiling nod and a slow handshake, but Mulcahy was conscious, as the silent and irregular procession went on, that their attention was on Hawkeye: very much on Hawkeye. Sitting across the table from him, Mulcahy watched as Hawkeye said much the same things, over and over: “Yes, it’s a nice day. Friend of mine from Korea, Francis Mulcahy. Good coffee. Thanks for the casserole. Nice day. Korea. Francis Mulcahy. Coffee. Casserole.”

Hawkeye’s voice could deliver savage sarcasms while his face smiled: Mulcahy, sitting, watching, nursing his coffee, realised that he had no idea, and perhaps never would know, what Hawkeye’s voice was saying to these townspeople who had known him so long. They were all older people: they called him Ben. No one called him Hawkeye – or Doctor Pierce, either. During that time, Sheffield came over to deliver two refills each and, with the second refill, two plates with slices of pie: Hawkeye ate his without seeming to notice. It was apple pie, homemade, good: Mulcahy ate his without taking his eyes off the silent conversations taking place two feet away.

Initially, learning how to lip-read had required a level of concentration that Mulcahy had sometimes thought he would never achieve for long enough to be able to have a conversation with anyone again. He could do it now almost without being conscious of it, so long as the person speaking was facing him and spoke reasonably articulately: a change in angle, a slurred habit of speech, and he would be struggling again. Following a conversation between two people, even if the angle was right to see both faces at the same time, still required exhausting levels of concentration, and three people was all but impossible: by the time Mulcahy had finished his pie, he needed a break, and after three cups of coffee, he needed the rest room. An elderly couple – they looked sufficiently alike that Mulcahy wondered if they were brother and sister, not husband and wife – had just finished telling Hawkeye something – about the weather, Mulcahy guessed, from Hawkeye’s response – and moved on to their own table. Mulcahy got up.

Hawkeye looked up at him – a quick flash of panic, almost, it seemed. “Fa – Mulcahy?” he said.

Mulcahy jerked his thumb at the restroom door, and smiled. “Call of nature,” he said, and turned away.

The restroom was small, but reasonably clean: Mulcahy locked himself into it, used the toilet, and washed his hands: seminary rote followed by MASH unit drill. He

## Sins and Virtues

sat down on the toilet seat and took his specs off to rub at his eyes. He had come, selfishly, thinking only of his own needs, to tug at Hawkeye's sleeve and insist on his attention. It seemed – if he could judge by the short while he had spent in Hawkeye's company – that God had in mind a usefulness for him. If he could help Hawkeye, and he thought in all humility that he could, perhaps that was the purpose God had in mind when he had set off on the trek from Pennsylvania to Maine.

“And perhaps not,” Mulcahy murmured. He bowed his head and whispered, “Dear Lord, not my will but yours be done.” He paused a moment, trying to think. “Let me do some good, and if I can't, let me do no harm. Help me in the hour of my weakness. Amen.” He stood up, and added, an afterthought of a prayer, “And, dear God, if you can see your way clear to it, no more three-way conversations for at least the next twelve hours?” He put his specs back on, took a breath, and went out of the door into the silent, crowded room.

There were three people standing by Hawkeye's table: Mulcahy could not see his face clearly enough to know what he was saying, but from all across the room he could see that Hawkeye's gaze was turned towards the restroom door.

As Mulcahy approached the table, Hawkeye stood up. He picked up Mulcahy's suitcase with one hand, and took hold of Mulcahy's arm with the other. “Come on, Father, I remember you said – ” and then his face was turned away from Mulcahy's as they were both walking towards the door, and without literally turning Hawkeye around, Mulcahy could not see what he was saying. Almost certainly some excuse to get out of the diner.

“Sorry I let you in for that, Father,” Hawkeye said, turning his face towards Mulcahy as he backed out of the diner's parking lot.

“That's all right,” Mulcahy said, automatically. And then, suddenly remembering, “I didn't pay for my coffee. Or the pie.”

“I paid,” Hawkeye said. “It's okay.” He was driving slowly down the road away from the direction they had come in, towards a sign saying General Stores. There was almost no traffic, but what there was was coming along in the other direction at quite a clip. Mulcahy appreciated Hawkeye's efforts to talk to him, but wished quite heartily that Hawkeye would keep his eyes on the road. “Steak for dinner tonight. The kind of steak I used to dream about in Korea.”

The groceries Hawkeye bought had included a bottle of gin and another of Scotch. Mulcahy said nothing. Hawkeye seemed to have sobered, though that might just be the effect of the coffee. He was driving more quickly on his road home, but he was keeping his eye on the road. Back at the house, he let Mulcahy help him put away the various groceries: in the cupboard where the bottles went, there was another fifth of Scotch with – according to Mulcahy's experienced judgement – about a quarter of a pint left, half a bottle of vermouth, and two dusty bottles of red wine at the back. That was somewhat reassuring, though the box full of empty bottles was not.

“Let's go sit out there again while the sun's still on the veranda,” Hawkeye said. He was reaching down a pair of glasses. “Scotch for you, Father?”

“I don't want a drink,” Mulcahy said. “I asked you to call me Francis.”

“Well, I do,” Hawkeye said. “Come on, Father, I hate to drink alone.”

“You've been doing it a good deal over the last six days, I think,” Mulcahy said. As always, he was conscious of standing on shaky ground. He had once, in Korea, ended up drinking his store of sacramental wine – which, being stronger and sweeter than most wines, had made him too drunk to preach a sermon before he had realised how much he had taken. Though another priest who had worked in three wars had

## Sins and Virtues

told him worse things happened to sacramental wine in war, and though theologically until it was consecrated it was just fermented grape juice, still, Mulcahy had never been able to think about it without embarrassment, or the nickname he'd briefly acquired because of it. He looked back at Hawkeye, hoping that the other man would be kind enough not to mention 'Dago Red'.

Hawkeye shrugged a little. "To tell you the truth," he said with apparent mildness, "I don't think I've been sober any time in the last six days."

Mulcahy took some small measure of courage: he hoped the mildness was real. "Perhaps you ought to consider it?"

"I was planning to stay drunk for a week," Hawkeye said. "How about joining me?"

Mulcahy hesitated. He hadn't had a Scotch in months – or anything at all: he *was* missing it. And Hawkeye was capable of real self-control, or had been. "Why don't we at least wait until after we've eaten?"

"You take all the fun out of things, Father," Hawkeye said, but he was smiling. He put the glasses down and turned towards the door to the veranda.

"I asked you to call me Francis," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye turned around. "Yeah, I was going to ask you about that."

Mulcahy's heart thumped. He had changed his mind a hundred times since his arrival about loading his problems on to Hawkeye; but then, Hawkeye's compassion had always been a road out of sin for him. Maybe that was what God had intended, to make use of Mulcahy's pain.

"It's not a matter of my personal preference, Hawkeye," he began slowly. "I am suspended from the priesthood." He sat down on one of the chairs: Hawkeye sat down on the other, looking bewildered.

"How? What?"

"I'm not allowed to say Mass – " not in church and not to others " – nor to take confession or give absolution – " except *in extremis*, though this exemption was hardly likely to be of use to anyone, handicapped as he was " – and I'm not allowed to wear the clerical collar or any other sign of priesthood, or call myself or allow anyone to call me 'Father' or 'Reverend'." It was a litany of pain for him, but it came out quite briefly.

From looking him in the face, Hawkeye's gaze tipped downward to his throat. "I can't believe I didn't notice," he said.

"You were used to seeing me in military clothing," Mulcahy said simply. He wore the crucifix his sister had given him tucked inside his shirt: wearing it outside, as he had done in his years of priesthood, would not have contravened the letter of his suspension, but would decidedly have contravened its spirit.

"They kicked you out because you're *deaf*?"

"No," Mulcahy said. It was true he had demanded of God, a year or so ago, when it had become clear that the handicap was no passing thing, "What use is a deaf priest?" But God had answered him. "I learned to read lips so that I could still communicate with the hearing, and I'm learning to sign so that I could minister to the deaf. Even if I couldn't, if I were incapable, I would still be a priest – I could still be a priest."

*Tu es sacerdos in aeternum...* The phrase of music his ears could no longer hear sounded inside his head. "I was suspended because I adhered to a difference in doctrine."

Hawkeye looked at him, head cocked on one side. After a moment, he said "Just that?"



## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy brought his hands together in front of him, still ashamed to remember it. “And – and because I lost my temper with a Monsignor. And my bishop.”

He had known Hawkeye would laugh. He wished he could still hear the sudden shout of it. He was startled when he realised the open-mouthed grimace Hawkeye made wasn't laughter: he couldn't read it at all.

“Father, what *happened*?”

“You mustn't call me that,” Mulcahy said wearily.

Hawkeye broke eye contact for a moment. “I don't want to call you Francis,” he said, looking down. He looked up again. “In private? Who's going to know?”

Mulcahy gestured upwards. “And me,” he added.

“How?” Hawkeye shook his head. He looked frustrated. “Why? What happened? How long are you suspended for?”

“I don't know, exactly,” Mulcahy said, answering the easiest question with the easiest answer. He was again conscious that he was prevaricating. “I was suspended seven months ago.”

“For what? Losing your temper?”

“That was... a side effect.” It might be the right thing to do, to tell Hawkeye, but all of a sudden, Mulcahy was certain he couldn't. He had come four hundred miles to tug at Hawkeye's sleeve, it might be that God wanted him to show Hawkeye his pain, but going through all that again just seemed impossible. He took his specs off again and rubbed his eyes.

It was still disconcerting when people appeared in front of him without warning: it was twice as disconcerting when it was Hawkeye. He crouched down and looked up into Mulcahy's face. This close, even without his specs, Hawkeye's face was clear. There were tears standing in the corners of his eyes.

“You're the best priest I ever knew. There's got to be some mistake.”

Mulcahy shook his head. He tried to smile. “No. Or perhaps, yes – I don't think – ” He swallowed. “It's difficult to explain.”

“Sorry.” The corners of Hawkeye's mouth went up. “I don't want to put you through the Spanish Inquisition. That's more your department.”

Mulcahy tried to smile back. He put his specs on.

“Let's go pick out a room for you,” Hawkeye said. “You want a sea view?”

There were four bedrooms upstairs. Hawkeye pointed at one door. “From that room you get a view of the sea, but the sunrise gets up unpleasantly early in this part of the world.” He pointed at the other. “From *that* room you get a view of the road and too many trees, but the sun lets you sleep in till noon. Both rooms come with full service, lack of central heating, and mice in the roof.”

“I'll take the sea view.”

“Okay, but don't come running to me to complain when the sun gets you out of bed at half past way too early.”

It was a big, bare-boarded room, smelling a little musty. The furniture was battered and mis-matched. Hawkeye disappeared without warning, and reappeared a minute or two later with an armful of bedding. Hawkeye started to make the bed up: after a minute watching him, Mulcahy stepped in. “Excuse me.”

He had learned how to make a bed to Major Houlihan's standards, at the speed required when there were two hundred patients coming through in twenty-four hours. He looked up to see Hawkeye smiling at him. “You'll make someone a good nurse.”

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said.

## Sins and Virtues

There was something odd about Hawkeye's smile. He stepped back into the hall: Mulcahy left his suitcase by the bed and followed him. The door to the other bedroom facing the sea was open; Hawkeye was standing just inside the room, looking round. The room Mulcahy had just tenanted had smelt clean, if dustily unused: this room smelt like a bedroom shut up with unclean sheets and stale sweat. The bed was unmade: the coverlet thrown back and half-fallen to the floor.

Hawkeye looked over at him. "I guess I should clear this room out."

"I'll help," Mulcahy said.

"Oh, no, I couldn't possibly let you, thank you, it's a deal." Hawkeye looked round again. "I was born in this room, you know?"

"Really?"

"So they tell me." Hawkeye shrugged and grinned. "I don't remember it. My dad was born in the room across the hall."

"You have a lot of family history in this house."

"We have a lot of family history in this town. There are Pierces buried in the graveyard since 1680." Hawkeye was still grinning. "Mostly they wait till we're dead."

Mulcahy went across to the window and pushed it up. There was a stick to prop it open: it had worn a hole into the old wood of the sash. "Hawkeye, why don't you put some water on to heat up?"

Hawkeye was still standing by the door. The grin on his face looked fixed by now. "Sure. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

He left the room. Mulcahy didn't waste time. He stripped the bed to the bare mattress, and packed the bedding into the laundry basket, which was a quarter full with stale socks and shorts and a couple of elderly-looking shirts. He left it at the top of the stairs, not sure whether he could carry it down.

The room already smelled fresher when he came back into it. By the time Hawkeye came upstairs, Mulcahy was sorting through the clothes in the closet.

"Are there any of these you want to keep?" Mulcahy was taking shirts off the hangers and folding them tidily.

"Shouldn't think so," Hawkeye said. He wandered over to look at the bed. "Where did the sheets go?"

"The basket at the top of the stairs," Mulcahy said.

"Oh, right." Hawkeye picked up a shirt. "I never saw Dad wear this." He put it down again, unfolded, on top of another pile. "Look, I can't ask you to help with this. Why don't we go downstairs and have a drink?"

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye for a moment. "Why don't you sort out the books on those shelves," he suggested gently.

"Into what?"

"Books you want to keep, books to give away."

"They're Dad's books."

Mulcahy said nothing. After a moment, Hawkeye made an annoyed grimace. "Yeah. Right."

Mulcahy stopped folding shirts. "We don't have to do this now," he said, feeling apologetic.

Hawkeye picked a book off the shelves, looked at it, put it back. "No. I've been meaning to do this for the past five days." He was keeping his face turned towards Mulcahy with what seemed like an effort. "Only I kept opening the door, standing right there," he jerked his thumb at the door, "and deciding to go downstairs and have another drink. I never thought of opening the window."

## Sins and Virtues

“We still don’t have to do this today.”

“I’ve got a week’s compassionate leave from Maine General for the funeral.”

Mulcahy began folding shirts again, carefully. “And you spent it...”

“Getting drunk,” Hawkeye said cordially. He was stacking books in ordered piles, occasionally glancing down at them, but not speaking when he did so. “Maine General expects me back day after tomorrow. But Doctor Allen went to medical school with my dad. He told me at the funeral if I needed more time I should call him. Allen’s the chief surgeon there.”

“Have you?”

“No.” Hawkeye shook his head. “I’m not sure Allen expects me back.”

“And the townspeople here want you to stay?” Mulcahy asked.

Hawkeye shrugged again. “They’d be proud of me if I went back to Maine General. They’d be pleased with me if I stayed here.”

“It sounds like an enviable decision,” Mulcahy said. He didn’t need to hear the tones in Hawkeye’s voice to know it wasn’t, not for Hawkeye.

“Yeah,” Hawkeye said, and went on stacking books.

They worked together in companionable silence, sorting through the treasures and oddments and detritus of a life: Hawkeye produced bags and boxes and carried them downstairs. A few things were kept: most were put away. There was something very comforting about doing a straightforward job, visibly making a difference: Mulcahy stopped trying to keep an eye on Hawkeye to see if he wanted to talk, and just worked.

He was sorting through a drawer of old ties when Hawkeye’s legs appeared in front of him, and Mulcahy sat back on his heels. Hawkeye crouched down and said something – Mulcahy wasn’t focussing, and missed it. He was too close and too unguarded. He should get up, but he was fixed there. He didn’t know what Hawkeye was saying. *Dear Lord, help me in the hour of my weakness...*

“What was that?” Hawkeye shifted a little: the light from the window was full on his face.

“Sorry, I was... thinking out loud. I didn’t catch what you said.”

Hawkeye caught hold of his arms and pulled him up, walking them both to the window. With the sinking light full on his face, he said “Time to stop for steaks, okay?”

“Oh...” Mulcahy nodded. He had a feeling Hawkeye had said something more, but he didn’t want to ask. He turned away from the light and went towards the door. The stairs were barely lit. Mulcahy put a careful hand on the banister and took them slowly: Hawkeye had run down ahead of him.

Hawkeye waited till the light was on his face to ask “How do you like your steak done?”

“It’s been so long since I had a steak, I can’t remember.”

“Medium rare suit you?”

“Sounds delicious,” Mulcahy said.

“Good, because that’s the only way I know how to cook them. Sit down.” He pulled out a chair for Mulcahy by the table, and Mulcahy sat with a relief from physical weariness he hadn’t even been aware of till then.

It was warm in the kitchen, brightly lit: Hawkeye planted a glass of red wine in front of him and went back to the stove. Mulcahy drank from the glass, watching Hawkeye move, before he even remembered that he’d meant to suggest they both refrain.

## Sins and Virtues

It was good wine. Or at least it tasted good to Mulcahy. The smell of cooking food was good, too. Hawkeye was moving round the room: a look at his face suggested he was singing some variant on Italian opera, pointless to try lip-reading. Mulcahy sat back in the chair and relaxed.

Hawkeye appeared in front of him and refilled his glass. “What did you do when you got back from Korea?”

“Slept for a week,” Mulcahy said, smiling.

Hawkeye paused, grinning. “Yeah, I did that myself. Then I turned over and slept for another week. Had a hard time getting off with no shelling in the background, but once I was asleep, my dad couldn’t wake me up for anything. He said I ate in my sleep. I don’t remember it, but I did wake up with food stains all over my jammies.” Evidently hearing something from the stove, he spun round. After a minute, he turned back again. “So what did you do after you woke up?”

“I talked to my bishop,” Mulcahy said. He caught himself smiling. “Well, wrote to him. We were sitting on either side of his desk passing notes across to each other. I hadn’t done that since I was in high school.” He saw Hawkeye’s shoulders shake. “It was a Catholic high school,” he said solemnly, “and the nuns were *very* strict.”

He’d been assigned, after paper discussion, to a parish near the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, and assigned the lightest parish duties: there were already two priests in the parish house. “I’d decided to learn how to sign to the deaf: I was hoping to work with deaf people, perhaps to return to teaching.”

“You’d be good at that,” Hawkeye said, turning round again. “For a corpsman, you were very patient.”

“I like teaching,” Mulcahy said, mildly amused. He’d liked his classes studying at the school, too. “I’ve been learning sign language. Did you know our American sign language is one of the oldest signing systems for the deaf in the world? Derived from the French signing system, which was developed before the French Revolution.” He had picked up this historical detail from the local Deaf Club, which was where – before he had gone on retreat – he had picked up most of the signs he knew.

Hawkeye was dishing up steak, baked potato, and some roughly-dressed salad. “No, I didn’t know that.” He set one plate down in front of Mulcahy, and passed him a knife and fork. “You know you really were a corpsman, after three years with the 4077th? I’d give you a job any time.”

“There are schools for the deaf, but no hospitals for the deaf,” Mulcahy said. “This smells good, Hawkeye.”

“Well, tuck in.” Hawkeye lifted his glass. “Cheers.”

Mulcahy hesitated. “Do you mind if I say a blessing?”

Hawkeye shook his head. He put his glass down.

Mulcahy crossed himself. “Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

“Amen,” Hawkeye said. He drank from his glass.

Mulcahy was attacking the steak with enthusiasm. He had last had a steak dinner after he’d passed Chaplain’s School, with the other chaplains, before they were posted to Korea: four years ago. He had eaten three mouthfuls – buttery, peppery, tender and juicy – before he remembered to look up from his plate.

“So how difficult are these signs to learn?” Hawkeye asked.

“I find it less difficult than Korean,” Mulcahy said. “More difficult than Latin or Greek.” He shrugged, smiling at himself. “But then I began those when I was younger, and had a better memory. I think the children at the orphanage learned more English from me and the sisters than we learned Korean from them.”

## Sins and Virtues

“How do you memorise all the signs? Is there a book?”

“You can’t memorise all the signs,” Mulcahy said. He had thought this himself when he began the task, but a few days’ conversation with some of his new deaf parishioners, graduates of the school who now worked in the area, had disabused him of this idea.

“Why not?”

“Well,” Mulcahy said, “can you memorise every word in English?”

Hawkeye shrugged, his fork pausing halfway to his mouth. Then he grinned. “I used to think Charles had tried.”

“There are a few books describing some of the signs,” Mulcahy said. “But you don’t learn a language from a dictionary.” The Jesuit house where he had spent six months on retreat was attached to a home for severely handicapped children, one reason he had chosen it. Two lay brothers, deaf-mutes, who were not permitted to take vows because of their handicap, had consented to spend their recreation hours with him, speaking to him in charitably slow sign language, and gently correcting his errors. They could not speak a word aloud, and found it pleasant and unusual – he had realised towards the end of his time there – to have a visitor who did not regard them as simple-minded. “I learned it – I am learning it – through other deaf people.”

“What does it look like?”

Mulcahy lifted his hands. He had learned to sign the Our Father, and had practiced it till he could do it smoothly, speaking aloud at the same time.

Hawkeye watched, momentarily frozen, as if absorbing the movement of Mulcahy’s hands through his eyes. “I should learn that,” he said, when Mulcahy had finished with the gesture that said *Amen*.

Mulcahy was startled. “It is quite difficult,” he said cautiously. “If you don’t have a need to learn it – most deaf people do learn to communicate by lip-reading.”

“It looks good,” Hawkeye shrugged. He smiled at Mulcahy, an odd and secret smile.

“This steak is *delicious*,” Mulcahy said, changing the subject.

“I know the field this cow grew up in,” Hawkeye said, and began to eat his steak again, with as much enthusiasm as Mulcahy. “My dad could have cooked it better, but I used to *dream* about these steaks when I was in Korea. This was the Sunday night meal he always used to cook – I remember the first time he decided I was old enough to have a glass of wine with it.”

“How old were you?”

“Twenty-seven. I’d just graduated from medical school,” Hawkeye said, and grinned again. “My fifteenth birthday. I didn’t tell him I’d been sneaking nips out of his Scotch bottle for three years. He didn’t tell me till I was in Korea that he’d known all along and he’d been docking it from my allowance.”

“I wish I could have met him.”

“I wish you could too. I found a nice apartment in Portland, five minutes from the hospital, but for months my dad kept showing up and driving me down here for the weekend. I kept telling him I learned to drive in Korea and he should buy me a jeep for my birthday so he wouldn’t have to make the trip.”

“Yes,” Mulcahy agreed. “The first time I tried to drive a civilian car, it was a little confusing.”

“I hate it there,” Hawkeye said conversationally. He started to eat his steak again, and for a moment Mulcahy wasn’t sure he’d got the words right.

“I worked there for nine months after I got out of residency and it was fine. I got my job back inside a month after I came back. I’m the brightest bright young surgeon

## Sins and Virtues

and if I stay there I'll probably end up in Doctor Allen's shoes." He paused. "Well, maybe not literally his shoes, because I can't say I share his taste in footwear, but something like that." He went back to eating his steak.

Mulcahy ate his. It still tasted good. He finished the wine in his glass: the bottle was mostly dead. He accepted the half glass that was left when Hawkeye split the remaining wine between them, but left it standing. He hoped that would be enough to discourage Hawkeye from opening the next bottle.

"Did you ever tell your father you hated it?"

"How could I tell him? He was so proud of me." Hawkeye had finished the food on his plate. "Maybe I should have written him a letter." He said it with a wide-mouthed smile that, in Mulcahy's expert opinion, looked nothing like the real thing.

"You would have told him, if you'd had more time," Mulcahy said. "And he would still have been proud of you."

"For doing what?" Hawkeye asked. He still had the wide-mouthed smile on. "You know what I was thinking about last night?"

Mulcahy shook his head.

"Joining the army. It looked kind of reasonable somewhere between the fifth and the sixth Martini."

Mulcahy stared at him. "Hawkeye, may I speak quite frankly?"

"Why not?"

"Well, not that it's my place to diagnose, but... are you *crazy*?"

"No," Hawkeye said. The smile looked more natural now. "But I was very, very, very drunk."

"After five Martinis?"

"That was counting since lunchtime." Hawkeye frowned. "Of course, that wouldn't mean I wasn't crazy as well as drunk."

"Hawkeye, I've seen you very, very, very drunk – and you wanted to get *out* of the army. Even more than when you were sober."

"I know, I know. It's a crazy idea. I just – you know, when I saw you this morning, I could have sworn I was still drunk and seeing things."

"You *were* still drunk."

"At least I wasn't seeing things. I wanted to – I wanted to be back in the 4077th. I was crawling into a bottle hoping I'd wake up there." Hawkeye seemed to hear what he was saying. "Maybe I was crazy."

"Did you want to be back when your father was still alive?"

"No. Yes." Hawkeye shrugged. "I wanted to be back where I knew what I was doing. I don't know what I'm doing in Maine General."

"You have other alternatives," Mulcahy said. He was trying to think of a way of phrasing them politely.

"Sure. But I'd rather stay alive and keep doing surgery, so that rules out suicide and applying for a job as a janitor."

"Hawkeye!" Mulcahy sat up, shocked inexpressibly.

"What's the matter, you don't approve of janitors?"

Mulcahy leaned forward. "Hawkeye, I'm... I'm appalled. Are you really so... so *selfish* you would waste all your skill as a surgeon, all your ability to save lives, just because you don't want to leave Maine?"

He had spoken from a sense of righteous anger. It was not even a split second after he said "Maine" that he realised he had no right to speak to Hawkeye like that at all: he was suspended from the priesthood, Hawkeye never had been a Catholic, he wasn't

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye's chaplain any more, and he was a guest in Hawkeye's house – and an uninvited guest, at that.

“Hawkeye, I...”

Hawkeye was grinning: it was one of Hawkeye's real grins, but not a nice one. “You fight dirty, Father.”

Mulcahy kept his eyes fixed on Hawkeye's face with difficulty. “I'm sorry,” he said. “But you... you have other alternatives than Maine General Hospital. Or any other big hospital. There are neighbourhood clinics in Philadelphia where your skills would be a godsend. There are neighbourhoods where they have *no* doctor, and no one willing to work there. When I hear you complaining that you don't know what to do with yourself, I think about the families I used to know who had no medical care at all. And I get...” he swallowed, trying to minimise it, not liking the expression on Hawkeye's face “...quite cross.” He folded his hands together. “And... I'm sorry... but I've asked you not to call me ‘Father’.”

Hawkeye stood up. He picked up both plates, took them across to the sink, and dropped them in it. When he turned round, he wasn't grinning any more. “I never liked those plates anyway.” He came back to the table and sat down. “I'm sorry. I'm irresponsible, egotistical, self-righteous, and those are widely regarded as my *good* qualities.” He picked up his glass and finished the wine in it in one quick swallow. “Drink up. You're a glass behind.”

“I don't think...”

Hawkeye was on his feet again. A tumbler and a Martini glass. Gin, vermouth, an almost-empty bottle of Scotch. The full one stood on the kitchen counter, and the golden liquid inside seemed to be winking at him.

“Drink up,” Hawkeye said again, looking at the wine left in Mulcahy's glass.

“Do you think this is... a good idea?”

“Yes,” Hawkeye said. He was smiling. “I don't know about me, but you look like a man who's three drinks behind.”

Mulcahy swallowed. It was rough, comfortable teasing: he'd missed it as much as anything else about Korea. He wanted to empty his glass and push out the tumbler for the waiting drink: the taste of Scotch, the warmth of acceptance. He wanted both.

Hawkeye sat down, facing Mulcahy. “You did say let's wait till after we've eaten.”

Mulcahy took his specs off and rubbed the bridge of his nose. When he put them back on, Hawkeye had pushed the bottles to one side.

“Look,” he said. “Let's make a deal.”

“What?”

Hawkeye put his arms on the table and leaned forward. “I won't talk you into having a drink with me, if you'll talk to me about how come you got suspended.”

Helplessly, Mulcahy laughed. It was a Hawkeye-style bargain: he should have expected it. He reached up to take off his specs again, but Hawkeye's hand caught at his.

“Don't do that,” Hawkeye said. His voice might have been as gentle as his grip on Mulcahy's fingers. “You take off your glasses when you don't want to talk, and I really think you need to talk.”

“It's not... terribly interesting.”

“Hit the high points.”

Mulcahy sat still, blinking and trying to pray. He was certain it would be a good thing if Hawkeye didn't settle in for another night of hard drinking. He was not sure it would be a good thing to tell Hawkeye the full story of his suspension. And it would hurt, but Hawkeye was right: the worst of the hurt would go with confession. But he

## Sins and Virtues

ought to confess it to God: take this hurt to a priest, not to an agnostic friend. The urge that had driven him nearly four hundred miles to talk to Hawkeye, could he trust it?

If he needed to talk to Hawkeye, Hawkeye needed him. Not him specifically. but someone in pain whom Hawkeye felt he could help.

"I was assigned to a parish, but not doing very much of the parish work," Mulcahy started. "It wasn't anywhere near my old neighbourhoods. I was born in Philadelphia, but it's a big city. About seven months ago, I had... a disagreement with one of the priests in the parish house, which was resolved by the bishop."

"Against you?"

"No," Mulcahy said. "The other priest wanted to deny communion to... some of his parishioners. I... felt that this would be wrong. It's a very strong decision to take, and I didn't feel that he was justified in taking it. The bishop agreed. But I said... some doctrinally incorrect things, in the presence of my bishop, and a visiting Monsignor, and..."

"Was that when you lost your temper?"

"No." Mulcahy stopped. He was doubtful again. "I shouldn't be... shouldn't be telling you about this."

Hawkeye tilted his head. "I won't tell anyone. Neither will..." He pointed upward.

"I mean..." Mulcahy swallowed. There were reasons why he shouldn't be talking to Hawkeye, of all people. "It could be an occasion of sin."

"For you or for me?"

"I hope not for you." Mulcahy looked at their joined hands, and up at Hawkeye's face. It was ridiculous to suppose that. "Do you remember two patients who came through back in 1952? Dan Lowry and Gary Sturges?"

"Sturges?" Hawkeye looked startled. "Yes, I remember him. I diagnosed him with leukaemia. What about him? Did he -- "

"I don't know," Mulcahy admitted. "I wasn't able to keep track of him after he was sent home. He stayed in the unit for a few days after his diagnosis, if you remember -- "

"Yeah, I remember." Hawkeye had let go of Mulcahy's hand. He was sitting with his hands folded together now, tucked under his chin. "You talked me into not sending him to Tokyo right away so he could spend a day or two with his buddy."

"I spent quite a lot of time with them," Mulcahy said. "And when I became aware that they were... were involved in a rather directly physical sense, I found myself in a difficult position."

Hawkeye laughed, abruptly and wildly. "Come off it, F – Come off it. You can't possibly have been as innocent as you looked. There was a lot of that going around."

"Fornication is a sin," Mulcahy said. "But I felt – I came to feel, at least, that it was a sin that – that if I could find it understandable that two people who were in such danger, or under such terrible stress, would seek a little human warmth with each other, God would understand it, too. But this was – these two men had formed a relationship. A deviant relationship. They were not... this was not some chance... camaraderie leading to sin, this was the intention to sin and to keep sinning. And Gary – Sturges – was dying. I knew what I should do. I should have brought him to the awareness of his sin, told him that he ought to separate from his... his buddy, repent what they had done in the past, and avoid the future occasion of sin."

"What stopped you?" Hawkeye's face had gone expressionless.

"I couldn't find it in my heart or my conscience to do so," Mulcahy said. "It seemed to me... that their love for each other – was something good in itself. It was not... I couldn't." He stopped. "I prayed that I had made the right decision. I found no



## Sins and Virtues

direct answer. But a similar... Well, I don't *know* that it was a similar situation. There were two women in the parish I was assigned to, but we had no reason to believe they were... They'd been living together for many years, and one of them *was* rather, well, mannish, and neither of them... they were both a bit standoffish with men, rather career-orientated, if you get my drift."

"I think we're drifting in the same direction." Hawkeye was smiling. There was an edge to his smile.

"But they were regular attenders at Mass, and very active in Church work, very good women. They were publicly known to be friends, perhaps as close as sisters, but not... It didn't seem to me... or to my bishop... that there was any justification to deny them communion, as one of the parish priests wanted to do. After all, we had no reason to believe there was anything sinful about their relationship."

"What about the other priest?"

"He said we should take the question to our bishop, and he did. He was their regular confessor."

"And...?"

"At the first meeting, I said... what I shouldn't have said. That even if they were, perhaps, physically intimate... I felt that their love for each other made this... made their relationship something good in itself."

"Ah." Hawkeye nodded. "And then the roof fell in?"

"There was a second meeting... this one a rather more formal one. I was... I was questioned about my views. I told them how I had come to feel... what I felt, and then the Monsignor asked me – "

Mulcahy could not speak for a minute. His hands went up to his specs, and then he caught Hawkeye's gaze and put his hands together in his lap.

"He asked me," Mulcahy went on with difficulty, "if I had... sinned in this way myself. That his experience told him that priests who defended this kind of sin were usually those who had themselves... been defiled by it."

He saw Hawkeye's face change, and stopped. "I'm sorry," he said.

"No, go on," Hawkeye said.

"I told them – the Monsignor, and my bishop – that I had sinned once since my ordination with a man I had met in Korea. That I had repented it, and confessed, and had avoided the occasion of sin ever since. That my experience had perhaps made me more aware of the temptation to commit this kind of sin, but had not formed my views on it."

He stopped again. "Hawkeye, I'm sorry. I – " He swallowed. "I know you don't feel about this the same way, but I – am trying to tell you how this happened."

"You don't have to apologise to me," Hawkeye said. His face had gone expressionless again. "You really don't."

"My bishop asked me if I had avoided seeing the man after I had sinned with him, and I told him no, I had worked with him daily for three years, but that I had never sinned with him again."

Mulcahy drew a deep breath. He was struggling to keep his eyes fixed on Hawkeye's. "I was – I hoped that would be the end of it. You understand, this was seven months ago: I was still sometimes finding it very difficult to read lips, even in a one-to-one conversation. My bishop and the Monsignor had been communicating their questions to me by written notes: but of course when they spoke to each other, I could only try to follow what they were saying if they faced me. I'd asked them to do so at the beginning of the meeting, but they sometimes forgot. And I'm sure it was just forgetfulness, but at the time..." Mulcahy was conscious of his fingers clenching

## Sins and Virtues

on each other, “the Monsignor began to say something about me, and then turned to my bishop and continued to speak – but I couldn’t see what he was saying. And I ... I...”

He couldn’t go on. He was struggling with tears. Hawkeye was no help: he had his elbows on the table and his face half-buried in his hands, only his eyes visible.

“Sorry,” Mulcahy said again, and took his specs off briefly to wipe his eyes. He slid them back on again and went on. “You see, the last thing I saw the Monsignor say was that I – I was lying. I saw him speaking to my bishop, but I couldn’t *hear* – and the frustration, and the feeling of having my word doubted – I lost my temper.” He hesitated. “Rather... excessively.” All he could say for himself was that he had not thrown a punch, nor anything except hard words. But after having said things he regretted, he had walked out.

Hawkeye still had his hands shielding most of his face. His eyes were shadowed.

“I was... I received a letter from my bishop notifying me that I was suspended from the priesthood, and suggesting that I might want to spend some time in prayer and contemplation, to consider my vocation. So I went on retreat.”

Hawkeye put his hands down on the table. “Father,” he said, “I suppose...” His mouth twisted suddenly. “I never did this before, but I’ve heard the formula is ‘Father, forgive me, for I have sinned.’”

“Hawkeye, I didn’t tell you this to reproach you – ”

“I know you didn’t,” Hawkeye said. “You ought to be cursing me. I – God, Father, I don’t know how to say how sorry I am – ”

“There’s no need to apologise, Hawkeye.” Mulcahy swallowed. “I’m sorry, I wouldn’t have told you the story if I’d known it would make you blame yourself. We discussed it the next day, you gave your word you’d... you’d let it alone, and – I was more to blame. We were both drunk, after all, but I *knew* it was wrong.”

“No, you weren’t,” Hawkeye said. “Nothing that happened that night was your fault. I’d made up my mind to get you into bed, and I did it. I was so fucking selfish and stupid and pigheaded and arrogant I never thought twice about any consequences you’d suffer, but God, please believe me, I would never have done it – ” His mouth collapsed. He was saying something, but Mulcahy couldn’t understand him.

Mulcahy reached forward and took hold of Hawkeye’s hands. He gripped them firmly. “You mustn’t blame yourself,” he said, as distinctly as he could.

Hawkeye jerked his hands out from under Mulcahy’s. He wrapped his arms round himself and sat staring at Mulcahy. “Please. Tell me the suspension’s temporary. Tell me they’re going to see sense and put you back in. You’re a good priest. It’s not your fault that some stupid, arrogant, horny doctor who had his brains in his balls and his sense in a bottle decided to pull you off the tracks. Just once, goddammit, and you didn’t even want me till I got my hands on you – ”

“But I did,” Mulcahy said. “And that’s not your fault, either. Hawkeye, please, stop blaming yourself for this. I wasn’t suspended for sins I committed and repented, I was suspended for defying my bishop – for expressing an opinion contrary to doctrine.”

Hawkeye shook his head. He was biting down on something. “You – please, curse me out. Excommunicate me. Something.”

“Hawkeye, don’t,” Mulcahy said helplessly.

“Tell me it’s temporary. It is temporary, isn’t it? They can’t keep you suspended forever.”

“No.” Mulcahy swallowed. “No, they won’t.” He felt the prevarication was justified when he saw Hawkeye relax a little.

## Sins and Virtues

“Okay. But – Father, if there’s anything I can do for you, ever, just ask, it’s yours. It won’t make up for what I did to you, but it’ll make me feel a little better for being such a complete bastard.”

“There *is* something you can do for me.” Mulcahy took a breath. “Remember to call me Francis, and not ‘Father’. And don’t – say anything about me being a priest.”

“Okay.” The prominent Adam’s apple in Hawkeye’s throat jerked up and down. He was shivering. “Okay. Until you get unsuspected. Then I’m going to take great pleasure in...” He stopped speaking. His eyes were focussed on Mulcahy with almost preternatural intensity. “Oh no. Oh, please, no.”

“Hawkeye – ”

“Father, you never were much of a liar. You don’t think you’re ever going to be taken off this suspension. Do you?”

Mulcahy put his hands to his face and jerked his specs off. He folded them neatly and set them down on the table. He couldn’t see Hawkeye’s face now, or only as a blurred shadow among others. “Oh no,” he said into the shadows. “I know. I have another six months or so. That’s how long I think the Holy See takes to process an application for laicization. As Klinger would say, I’m being defrocked.” He laughed, because it was funny, and *ha, ha* turned somehow to sobs in his throat: he sobbed out loud twice before he could suppress it.

The hand on his shoulder had to be Hawkeye: Mulcahy got up hastily, meaning to put his specs on and retreat. Dizziness caught him, and he couldn’t compensate for it: he was falling, and the floor was very hard.

Hawkeye was kneeling over him, easing his specs back on. He finished, and sat back on his heels, looking down at Mulcahy. “Sorry,” he said. “I know you don’t want to talk to me, and I can’t blame you, but I need to ask you a couple of questions. Medical only.”

Mulcahy nodded.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” Hawkeye lifted his hand.

Mulcahy tracked it. “Three.”

“That’s a good start. Mind if I check out the back of your head?” His hands were gentle and thorough. “Okay. You went down with quite a crash, but it looks like you got away with it. Second question, and this one’s important: how long have you been losing your balance like this?”

“I do fine, usually, if I can see.”

“Come on. When I’m talking to you like a doctor, I want an answer.”

“Nearly a year,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye frowned. “Connected with your deafness?”

“Yes.” Mulcahy sat up cautiously. He rubbed the back of his head: it felt like he was going to have quite a lump. The floor was wood, fortunately. There was a strong smell of gin. Mulcahy glanced round. The table had been pushed to one side. Obscured by it, it was a little while before Mulcahy’s eyes could pick out the source of the smell: broken glass and puddles of liquid on the other side of it. Hawkeye must have pushed the table hard to knock over the bottles.

Hawkeye shrugged widely when Mulcahy looked back at him. His face was set in hard, sad lines: he had been like this sometimes in Korea, when breaking bad news to a patient. He sat there a long moment, staring at Mulcahy. “Look – I can understand if you don’t want anything else at all from me, but – would you let me take a look in your ears? We’d need to drive down to dad’s office, and I’d rather do that tonight.”

## Sins and Virtues

“No need.” Mulcahy found a smile. “I was told there was some nerve damage, too, and that this would mean I would find myself losing my balance. But, as I said, so long as I can see my surroundings, I manage very well.” He stopped, realising what Hawkeye was saying. He didn’t especially want to go out into the unlit road – from inside the brightly-lit kitchen, the night looked very dark – but he had hurt Hawkeye’s feelings enormously, if unintentionally, and perhaps he ought to accept this.

Hawkeye glanced up at the windows. “Okay, so the last thing you want is to go out for a walk in a town where we think street lighting is for tourists. Right. Never mind. Can we –” He put his hands palm down on the floor. “I’m sorry,” he said baldly. “I didn’t intend to panic you like that.”

Mulcahy rubbed the back of his head again, trying to soothe the ache. He was tired. It had been so obvious to him why he had tried to retreat, it hadn’t occurred to him that it wouldn’t be equally obvious to Hawkeye. “I told you years ago, it’s not you I’m afraid of. It’s myself. I have feelings for you it would be wrong for me to act on, even if you shared them. I know that for you, it was just – just an act of pleasure with a friend, not something that was especially important to you or even especially memorable, but for me...” He had tried very hard not to put it into words. “It was more than that.”

Hawkeye twitched. He had been sitting easily on the floor, but he shifted abruptly as if it had stuck pins into his backside. He had been looking at Mulcahy in one way, but his expression had changed. “It was more than that for me, too.”

Mulcahy shook his head, slowly. “There’s no need to... invent stories about it,” he said, as gently as he could. For him it had been an astonishing, almost terrifying, venture into sensual pleasure: the peak sexual experience of his adult life. But he had so few sexual experiences in his adult life, and he suspected that what he knew about the range and depth of Hawkeye’s sexual experience was not even half of it. And as he’d discovered within an hour of Hawkeye’s leaving his bed, the other man had an enviable capacity to switch off what had happened and focus entirely on what he was doing *now*. He had known he must avoid a future occasion of sin: he had realised that if he was to remain of any use to the 4077th, he must avoid such distractions. Priests were celibate for many good reasons, in the wisdom of the Church.

“I’m not making this up.” Hawkeye shifted again. “I couldn’t forget you. I didn’t want to – You’re the only man who ever said no to me and made it stick.”

“That can’t be true,” Mulcahy said, feeling dazed.

“Well, there are men I never tried to get into bed,” Hawkeye said, with some measure of humour. “Colonel named-after-a-tank Potter, for example. He’d have flattened me. And I know all about Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night amnesia.”

“What?”

“A lot of guys – most guys, really – they’re persuadable, if they’re drunk enough, if I get my hands on them, but come the morning, it ... never happened. It’s all ‘Christ was I drunk last night, I don’t remember a thing’. And some nights are longer than others. Trapper was a pretty long night.”

“But I didn’t say no to you,” Mulcahy said. He wasn’t too tired to feel embarrassed. “At least, I didn’t manage to say no... for long.”

“I didn’t let you,” Hawkeye said. He looked savage for an instant. “But I meant the next day. I figured you’d be an amnesia type for certain. But if you want to tell yourself you did something, you got BJ to stay with the unit.”

“What?” Mulcahy knew he ought to muster outrage, but he was too tired to express it, though not to feel it. “You – didn’t... Hawkeye, he was a happily married man!”

## Sins and Virtues

“Sure. But I can have anyone, if I want them. I got him drunk, I got my hands on him, I had him – he was trying to say no to me, but he’d given up really wanting to say no –” Hawkeye shook his head. “And then, well, I thought about you.”

“About... me?”

“You telling me you were going to ask for a transfer. And all of a sudden I just... so I got up and I left him alone. I liked him. I liked working with him. I didn’t want to lose him. And I figured I might, if I went ahead and did what I’d planned. You did that.”

“Oh,” Mulcahy said. “Oh... my.” He couldn’t think of anything more coherent to say than that. Sheer exhaustion was sweeping over him. He was sure he was going to feel something about what Hawkeye had just told him, but he couldn’t feel anything just now. If he had work to do or an office to perform he could stay awake for hours, but he was afraid that if they were just going to sit here and talk he was going to start going to sleep. “Hawkeye, do you have any coffee in the house?”

“Sure,” Hawkeye said. “Are you sure you want any?”

“If it wouldn’t be any trouble,” Mulcahy said politely.

“In my considered medical opinion, you look like you should take two aspirin and call me in the morning.”

“What?”

“Well, you can skip calling me in the morning. Though I can think of some names you might want to call me, if you need any help. But I insist on the aspirin.” Hawkeye got up on his knees, holding his hands out. “If I could think of a better way of putting this, I would: time for you to go to bed.”

Mulcahy put out his hands and let Hawkeye pull him to his feet and steady him. He let go. “Thank you.”

“Can you make it upstairs?”

“I did this afternoon,” Mulcahy reminded him, a little dryly.

“Yeah.” Hawkeye glanced round the kitchen. “I should clean up in here before the gin soaks into the floor forever. My family don’t take any wooden Martinis. Good night.”

“Good night,” Mulcahy said.

The stairs did seem to be higher and steeper than this afternoon. Mulcahy made it up to the landing, found the room where he had left his suitcase, hung his jacket over the back of a chair, and sat down on the bed to ease his shoes off. His breviary was at the top of his case, the marker still at the beginning of Nones. He had time to complete his Office before midnight.

He went through Nones, Vespers, and then Compline: familiar and soothing, even in his tiredness, even if he could no longer hear them.

He was saying Compline when he became strangely certain of a presence behind him. When he turned round, he was unsurprised to see Hawkeye. The other man was sitting on the floor, his back to the wall, his hands on his knees, an odd expression on his face. When he saw Mulcahy turn around, he stood up. “Sorry. I came in to make sure you had aspirin, and I didn’t want to interrupt.”

“I knew you were there,” Mulcahy said. “It’s all right.”

Hawkeye handed him a glass of water and two aspirin. “Drink up.”

Obediently, Mulcahy swallowed. “Thank you,” he said. Hawkeye looked more tired and unhappy than he had when Mulcahy had seen him first early this afternoon, all the lines on his face drawn down. He shouldn’t have told Hawkeye.

## Sins and Virtues

“Okay.” Hawkeye abstracted the glass from Mulcahy’s hand. “Good night, Father.”

Mulcahy stood still, looking at Hawkeye. *Let me do some good, and if I can’t, let me do no harm.* He was so tired he could hardly think.

As Hawkeye turned away, Mulcahy caught hold of his sleeve.

“What is it?”

“Sleep well,” Mulcahy said, and put his arms round Hawkeye in an awkward embrace. After a moment, he felt Hawkeye’s arms close round his shoulders. Standing like this, they couldn’t talk: Mulcahy could feel Hawkeye’s breath catching in his chest and throat.

After a while, Hawkeye stepped back, his hands on Mulcahy’s shoulders. He was smiling, though his eyes were wet. “Thanks. But I can’t keep you here all night.” He walked Mulcahy across to the bed, sat him down, and stepped back. “You know, you looked tired enough when you went upstairs, without starting a long phone call. Go to sleep.”

“I have to say Divine Office.” Mulcahy couldn’t imagine why he’d said that: Hawkeye would neither know nor care.

Hawkeye grimaced. “You don’t have to do anything except go to sleep right now,” he said. “Just – go to sleep.” He was backing out of the room. “If the light’s still on when I come back upstairs again, I’m docking your allowance,” he added before he closed the door.

It was dark and someone was shaking him awake, with an urgency that usually betokened a dying soldier needing the last rites. Mulcahy sat up, hand reaching out for his specs, wondering where his dog tags had got to, trying to remember where he had

–

He wasn’t in Korea –

But it *was* Hawkeye who was shaking him awake –

“What is it?” Mulcahy asked. His face hurt: he had been weeping in his sleep. That happened. Hawkeye would see it if the light was on. That couldn’t be helped.

“Hawkeye, I can’t hear you if I can’t see you –” He was tired and he couldn’t find his specs in the dark and he could smell Hawkeye’s breath from here –

Hawkeye let go of his shoulder and crossed the room, a barely visible shadow in the moonlight. He switched the light on and came back: his mouth was moving, he was talking. It seemed like a long time before Mulcahy realised where his specs were, on top of his breviary, just not quite in the same place as he had put them in Korea –

He put them on, blinking as the room came into focus, and realised with a sinking heart that it hadn’t made any difference –

Hawkeye was still talking. Mulcahy stared at his mouth, willing the movements to turn into something he could understand. Hawkeye was talking fast and his face was an angry mask. He caught “sorry,” and said “That’s all right,” in hope that this would calm Hawkeye down enough to let him understand.

Hawkeye shook his head and said something – his mouth was too distorted to make it out – and he bent closer to Mulcahy. He was shouting, apparently furious.

“Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said. He knew what had gone wrong: He was exhausted. Hawkeye was drunk. He wasn’t focussing as well as he should, Hawkeye wasn’t talking as distinctly as he might be. Once he lost track of what someone was saying it got worse. It didn’t help if the person who was talking to him was overcompensating.

He saw it before he knew what it was he was seeing: the muscle movements distorting Hawkeye’s face and throat away from understanding. Hawkeye was crying.

## Sins and Virtues

He lost track of anger. “Hawkeye,” he said again, trying to put urgency into his voice, and then as Hawkeye didn’t seem to hear him, he reached up and caught hold of Hawkeye’s arms.

Hawkeye seemed to lose his balance and collapsed on top of him. Mulcahy could feel the sobs racking him. Without thinking about it, Mulcahy put his arms around Hawkeye, and held on: Hawkeye’s face was wet, and Mulcahy kissed his cheek.

Hawkeye seemed to freeze. Then he turned his head and kissed Mulcahy. He was shivering: his breath tickled. He went on kissing him: his hands slid under his shoulders and began to massage his back. His mouth tasted of Scotch, familiar and welcome. It was comforting. It felt good.

It felt too good. Hawkeye was lying over him: he didn’t have to move – he couldn’t move –

He could. He hadn’t even let go of Hawkeye. He didn’t want to. He’d wanted this. *I am such a bad priest.*

Hawkeye’s hands were moving more slowly, his mouth kissing lazily, his shivers lessening. He said something – there was a puff of air and his lips moved – but then he put his head down against Mulcahy’s shoulder and, after a while, he had gone to sleep. Mulcahy lay still, holding his love in his arms, knowing it couldn’t last past morning.

Sun through the window lit up dust rising and falling in the shadows high in the ceiling. One of his brothers was asleep with his head against Francis’s shoulder. He had pushed himself across the bed to lie with half his weight on him. Early summer morning. Mam would be calling them for breakfast soon.

He couldn’t hear. Mam was dead. Not his brother.

Hawkeye’s hair was soft. Mulcahy lay still, trying to tell himself he was asleep. Then he told himself he didn’t want to wake Hawkeye. The longer the man slept, the better.

Despite the sun, Hawkeye slept on. He was breathing gently and steadily.

When it happened, it happened quite abruptly: Hawkeye lifted his head, hair flopping into eyes still half-closed with drowsiness, and stared, and blinked his eyes fully open. “Morning.”

“Good morning.”

“Sleep well?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Hawkeye yawned enormously. He was smiling. “What can I get you for breakfast?”

“I should get up. I didn’t want to wake you.”

Hawkeye’s smile died. He sat up, abruptly. “You’re not planning to go?”

“No,” Mulcahy said, just as abruptly. “But I need to say Divine Office.”

Hawkeye glanced at the breviary. “Say it here,” he suggested. “I won’t interrupt. I may not be able to stay awake, but I won’t interrupt.”

Mulcahy shook his head. When he glanced back before leaving the room, Hawkeye had fallen over on his face on the bed and was burrowing into the pillows. By the look of him, he’d be asleep again in five minutes.

Showered, dressed, and sitting on the veranda, Mulcahy had reached Terce when he saw a dark head poking out from the door. It wasn’t Hawkeye.

“Hello,” the man said. “You must be Francis Mulcahy?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

## Sins and Virtues

“I’m Bill Pierce. Ben’s cousin. Is he...”

He looked like Hawkeye: same dark hair, beaky nose, blue eyes, but in Bill the ingredients were transformed: he was almost improbably handsome. He sat down on the other chair without waiting for an invitation. “I had breakfast at Sheff’s and he said Ben had a friend of his from Korea staying with him. You a doctor?”

“No...” Mulcahy faced the issue. “I was... I served as a corpsman.” He added, in part for distraction, “I’m deaf, by the way. Unless I can see your face, I can’t tell what you’re saying.”

Bill had been looking down at the cove. He jerked his head round and looked at Mulcahy. “You’re deaf? I’d never – no one mentioned – ”

“I’ve learned to read lips,” Mulcahy said. He smiled, for reassurance. “I sometimes appear to be ignoring people when I don’t intend to. I do have to see your face.”

“Right.” Bill looked uncomfortable. “Well, what brings you to Maine?” He spoke with exaggerated mouth movements. Mulcahy half-guessed what he said, had to presume it was a question.

“I’m just visiting,” he said, cautiously.

Bill nodded. “Right.” He looked up, and smiled: a wide-mouthed, white-toothed smile with no pain in it. “Hawkeye! You’re looking well.”

Hawkeye was wearing his towelling bathrobe, looking, in fact, tired and rumped. Mulcahy caught only the last half of what he said “ – do you want?”

Bill got to his feet. He and Hawkeye were standing facing each other, with Mulcahy in between: Mulcahy glanced up, wondering if he had imagined the hostility in Hawkeye’s words, but from the look on Bill’s face, he hadn’t.

“ – is going on with you?”

Mulcahy glanced back at Hawkeye. He couldn’t follow a conversation like this. He wasn’t even sure he should try.

“What do you want, Billy?” Hawkeye asked again.

Mulcahy repressed the impulse to turn his head and try to catch what Bill was saying.

“I haven’t made up my mind,” Hawkeye said. A pause, as Bill replied, and then he said, “Look, it’s my house.”

Irrepressibly, Mulcahy’s gaze twitched back to look at Bill’s face.

“ – live here all by yourself, kid!”

Whatever Hawkeye answered was short: Mulcahy didn’t catch it. Bill stepped forward. Hawkeye moved, quick and agile, and sat down in the chair Bill had left. He settled back, spreading his arms, tilting his head sideways, giving Bill the kind of immovable, insolent look that had stopped generals and death and Major Houlihan cold: it didn’t look as if Bill was used to meeting it.

He stood there, staring at Hawkeye, looking uncertain: then he said, with some dignity, “Okay, Ben. When you make up your mind, let us know.” He glanced at Mulcahy. “Enjoy your visit, Mr Mulcahy.”

“Thank you, Mr Pierce,” Mulcahy said.

“How long were you planning to stay?” Bill was making the slightly exaggerated mouth movements again. But it was a simple and obvious enough question. Unfortunately, Mulcahy didn’t quite have an answer. He shrugged.

“Well, we’ll hope to see you two over for dinner sometime, if you’re staying,” Bill said, and turned away: whatever else he said was invisible.

Hawkeye sat still, looking tense, for another few minutes. Then he relaxed. “That was my cousin Billy.”

“Yes, he introduced himself. Besides, I think I would have recognised him.”



## Sins and Virtues

“We’re supposed to look alike. I’ve never seen it.”

“There is a ... family likeness.”

“Sure, except he’s good-looking.” Hawkeye’s grin had an edge to it, but it relaxed after a minute. “Listen, about last night.” He stopped.

Mulcahy waited, flinching. He could not ask Hawkeye to forget it had happened.

“You were crying,” Hawkeye said. “I was in my dad’s room – and I heard you.” He looked uneasy. “I thought you were awake, but you were crying in your sleep.” He stopped again, and then said, with visible emphasis, “You’re *not* okay, Father.”

“I was probably dreaming,” Mulcahy said. He made an effort to smile. “It’s to be expected, I suppose. I’ll be all right.” He hesitated. “I couldn’t help noticing... you seemed rather...”

Hawkeye looked down, briefly, but he met Mulcahy’s eyes again after a moment. “Yeah, I was drunk. I meant to finish off clearing out my dad’s room, and I brought the Scotch upstairs to help. It didn’t.”

“You should have waited till morning. I’m – I would be happy to help. I’m sorry I was too tired to do anything more last night.”

“Martyr,” Hawkeye said. He smiled quickly. “Look, I’m going back to Portland tomorrow morning.” He didn’t look too happy about it. “I’m due back for the afternoon shift. You want to stay here?”

“What?”

“You can stay here, if you want.” Hawkeye shrugged largely. “I mean, there’s plenty of room. You said you didn’t have any plans, and there’s... plenty of room. And you seem to have a knack with that damn stove.”

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said. “But ...”

“No, really, you – if you need somewhere to stay, think things over, I’ll be up in Portland all week. Just don’t have too many wild parties while I’m gone.”

“I don’t think so,” Mulcahy said.

“Have as many wild parties as you like, then. Some of my neighbours haven’t been to a wild party in years, you should invite them.”

“Hawkeye. Thank you.” Mulcahy swallowed. “Thank you very much, but I... I’d better be going, when you go.”

“Why? Because Bill wants the house? I don’t want to let it to him.”

“It is very tempting,” Mulcahy admitted. “But I don’t think I should.” He steeled himself. “After what happened last night.”

There was a long pause. Hawkeye finally said, “If you mean after what I told you last night, I’ll stay away next weekend, too, if you like. As long as you like.”

Mulcahy felt the familiar rise of frustration and embarrassment. “I don’t know what you told me last night,” he said, trying to keep his voice level. “I couldn’t understand you. I was tired and you were drunk – and it didn’t help when you started to shout.”

“You noticed I was yelling,” Hawkeye said. He looked horror-struck. “You didn’t understand... how much of it didn’t you get?”

“I gathered you were sorry. I didn’t know for what.”

Hawkeye looked away. It was another long time before he looked back again. “This was easier to say when I was drunk and you were tired,” he said. “Now I’m tired and you’re sober.”

“You don’t need to tell me anything,” Mulcahy said, firmly and with a need to convince himself of his sincerity. Whatever it was, it had clearly upset Hawkeye. “Why does your cousin want this house?”

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye shrugged. “He’s married. They have two kids, third one on the way. They’re living in a wartime semi over by Levinetown. This is a great house to raise a family in. This is a great place for kids to grow up in. If I was in his shoes, I’d want this house too. They talked to me right after the funeral, told me I could keep my own room, be part of the family – ” His hand, clenched into a fist, was tapping against the side of the chair. “I told them I needed to think about it. I didn’t need to think about it. I don’t want to come home for weekends and be Uncle Hawkeye in the spare room in my own house.”

“It’s difficult for you,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked back at him. “He can’t figure out why I won’t just do what he tells me, you know? I always did. When we were kids.”

“This is a big decision,” Mulcahy said. He was feeling for the right words to say. “It’s not just a child’s game. I’m sure he understands that.”

“I’d like you to stay here,” Hawkeye said. “Give you time to think. I owe you.”

“No, you don’t,” Mulcahy said. He was on more sure ground now, embarrassed though he was. “We talked about this.”

“We didn’t.” Hawkeye’s fist, unclenched, was gripping at the edge of his chair. “You’re gorgeous. I didn’t need, I don’t need to be drunk to want you – ”

“Please, Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said, both startled and hurt. “This isn’t the time for your nonsense – ”

“It isn’t nonsense,” Hawkeye said, abruptly, cutting across Mulcahy. “You’re a beautiful man, and you told me years ago I had to keep you at arm’s length if I wanted you – and I’ve never called you Francis since – ”

Mulcahy’s blood seemed to go hot and thick in his veins. He remembered. *What mustn’t I do, Francis? Tell me and I’ll stop.* Hawkeye’s voice had licked inside his ears, sending ripples of feeling down his flesh.

“But the reason I wouldn’t stop that night – I had a stupid bet on with Trapper.”

“A bet?” Mulcahy stared. “With – ” He had plunged from heat to cold. “What kind of bet?” he asked, a stupid question to which he didn’t want to know the answer.

“I can’t even remember how it started,” Hawkeye said. “Trapper bet me I couldn’t seduce you. So I did.”

There were so many stupid questions to which he didn’t want to know the answer fighting to get out of his mouth. Mulcahy discovered that he was asking “How many people knew about – the bet? That you won it?”

“No one,” Hawkeye said. He was sitting hunched in his chair, his arms tucked in at his sides. “I told Trapper I lost the bet. I didn’t tell anyone else.”

“You went to – all that trouble – and didn’t take your winnings?”

“I started out wanting you and thinking I’d lose. Then I – thought you’d let me – ” Hawkeye seemed to have trouble talking. “I thought we could just – not talk about it and take our chances once in a while. You could just forget about it in between times. Most guys do. Then you told me – ” Hawkeye was keeping his face up, towards Mulcahy, with a visible effort. “You told me how much it mattered to you, and you told me that I couldn’t have you even as a friend unless I stayed at arm’s length. But that night – it wasn’t your fault. None of it was your fault. You’re a good priest. You can’t let them do this to you.”

“I am not a good priest,” Mulcahy said through a stiff mouth. “I don’t – know – what – I am, but I was – not – ” He was shaking. He wanted to say *Couldn’t we just pretend it never happened?* but he didn’t want to watch Hawkeye laugh at him. He couldn’t face one thing more. Helplessly, he said “And Captain Hunnicutt resisted you. *He* managed to stop you.”

## Sins and Virtues

“No,” Hawkeye said. “He didn’t. Beej couldn’t have stopped me if I’d gone ahead. Don’t know what he’d have done if I’d gone ahead. No, I do know. He’d have written his wife in the morning to tell her he’d been unfaithful, and he’d have beaten me up, and then he’d have applied for a transfer out of the 4077th, assuming either or both of us had managed to talk fast enough to get out of being court-martialled. So, you may not remember what I did to you with any joy, Francis, for which I can’t say I blame you, but you can tell yourself you saved one marriage and two careers.”

Mulcahy swallowed. He’d been right. He couldn’t face one thing more. “I do, though,” he said, through a tight throat. “Remember it. With joy.” He took his specs off and stared at Hawkeye through a blur. “I was – such a bad priest.”

The blur that was Hawkeye came closer. “Please,” Mulcahy said. “Don’t – ”

Hawkeye ignored him. He abstracted Mulcahy’s specs neatly, and put them down. He was too close to be able to read what he was saying: his lips moved. Mulcahy could guess: “You can cry.”

He put his head down. “Don’t, Hawkeye,” he said. It was a last-ditch protest, and he didn’t expect Hawkeye to pay attention.

Hawkeye put his arms round him. It was a brotherly embrace, not carnal, and Mulcahy turned his head into the offered shoulder and stopped fighting the grief that had been blocking the back of his nose and clutching at his throat for three days now: since the morning he finished the letter to his bishop.

*Iuravit Dominus et non paenitebit eum tu es sacerdos in aeternum...* The choir had sung the psalm nine years ago, in triumph and in glory, rejoicing in the newly ordained priests, celebrating the end of the world war. Mulcahy had stood in the cathedral among his brother priests, hearing the voices soar, still feeling the touch of his bishop’s hands on his head, making him a priest forever ... *in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech.*

For ever. Until about six months from now.

He had tried to comfort people who had lost a foot or a hand or a limb: tried to, because when he was with them at the MASH unit they had usually been either in a dazed, unaccepting state, or in the first fierce rage against their loss. It had not occurred to him till now to draw any parallel between their situation and his own. It was not a good parallel: he was still hale and sound, apart from his deafness. But it was something like: he had been trying not to think that he would never give communion again, never bless the sacrament, never take confession. Never be a priest again. Never.

It was some time before he came to himself, from the selfishness of grief. He was clutching Hawkeye very hard, and his face was sore. Somehow they were squeezed next to each other on a basketwork chair intended for one: Hawkeye hadn’t moved since he’d sat down. His arms were round Mulcahy’s shoulders. He was thin, too thin, but solid and warm, and Mulcahy wanted him with a passion that was almost as disconcerting as it was overwhelming.

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said.

He *felt* Hawkeye say something – he could almost, he thought, have guessed the words from the vibration of sound on skin. There were accounts of deaf people who could interpret spoken words from the feel of the voice on the back of the hand: Mulcahy thought about Hawkeye speaking to him like that, and shuddered.

He couldn’t resist Hawkeye. He had come four hundred miles because he had wanted this. Not only because there was no one else who would have listened to his confession without condemnation – who would have listened and then held him. If that were all, it was selfish, but not an occasion of sin. He had come four hundred

## Sins and Virtues

miles because some part of him had hoped Hawkeye would seduce him again – the worst had already happened, he could not be further punished for what he had done – and he should have known, he would have known if he had thought about it, that of course Hawkeye would blame himself. All of this was bad enough, but to have gone on, to have told Hawkeye and taken this from him, after Hawkeye had suffered a most devastating loss. Selfishness piled on sin piled on needy grabbing. It served him right to find out that the night that had inspired this had been, for Hawkeye, the winning of a bet. Mulcahy shuddered again, and, on shaky legs, stood up and changed chairs.

“Thank you,” he said again, sitting down before dizziness could catch him. He saw a familiar shape of wire and glass lying on top of his breviary, and put his specs on.

“You okay?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. “No. But I will be.”

Hawkeye leaned forward. “Listen, Father – okay, Francis – you know I wouldn’t -- ” He drew a deep breath. “Do anything you don’t want, right?”

*That’s not the problem,* Mulcahy nearly said out loud. “No. I mean yes. I know that.”

“Okay,” Hawkeye said again. He put his hands together. “What can I get you for breakfast?”

“Anything,” Mulcahy said.

“French toast? Sausages?” Hawkeye stood up. “Tell you what, I’ll bring it out here – No – ” Mulcahy had started to get to his feet. “No, I can do it. No problem.”

Mulcahy sat down. He watched Hawkeye disappear through the door, and picked up his breviary again. He’d been interrupted in the middle of saying the psalms for Terce. He sat there staring at the words, feeling as if a larger chasm that time had separated him from them.

After a while, he began to read the assigned psalm again at the line where he had stopped. It was still – until he was laicized – his obligation. He supposed he might stop. He could not think of a good reason to go on, but that in itself did not seem to be a good reason to stop.

“I tried to get Igor to make this once, in Korea,” Hawkeye said, waving a piece of French toast at the end of a fork.

“Really? How did it turn out?”

“You ate it, you tell me. I couldn’t taste it for crying. Dried egg, powdered milk, army bread. I think the sugar was okay, for World War II issue.”

Mulcahy smiled and nodded. And ate it, mechanically.

“Was the food ‘on retreat’ really worse than in the army?”

“Different,” Mulcahy said. “The Jesuits tend not to cook with food from previous wars.”

“No interest in military history?”

“Mathematics is more traditional for Jesuits,” Mulcahy said. “Shall we finish sorting out your father’s things today?”

“If you want,” Hawkeye said. “Or we could head down to Sheff’s for a good cup of coffee.”

“This is fine,” Mulcahy said. He smiled at Hawkeye. “Besides, I thought you wanted to avoid having that conversation – ”

“Stay or go?” Hawkeye shrugged again. “I can’t work here. I’ll end up getting drunk seven nights a week, eight if I can squeeze them in, without O.R. to stay sober for.”

“Have you – ” Mulcahy stopped. “How often have you been getting drunk?”

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye looked up, looked down, shifted his eyes from side to side, and twitched. It was a visible, intentionally comic routine. But when he finally spoke, he seemed serious. “Not when I have to operate the next day. And I think there’s a few other nights I didn’t have more than one Martini, but – look, I got seasoned in Korea.”

“I know,” Mulcahy said, “So did I.”

“Hell, compared to the rest of us, you were sober.”

“‘Dago Red’,” Mulcahy said, squelching the shame that overtook him.

“Look, in any contest about who was the biggest drunk in the camp, you’d come so far behind the winners you wouldn’t even be on the scoreboard. But I’d be somewhere near the top of the list. It didn’t worry me then. Much. Often. At least not a lot. But...” He stopped. “My dad noticed how much I was drinking. And it worried *him*, even if he never said anything. I mean, not that he couldn’t put the juice away when he wanted to, but...” He stopped again. “He didn’t much want to, as far as I know, except for after Mom died.”

“How old were you?”

“Ten. He didn’t want to worry me about it. He used to wait till I’d gone to bed, Friday or Saturday night, and then he’d get drunk downstairs. And I’d stay awake upstairs, even when he took hours over it, because I was afraid if I went to sleep I’d wake up in the morning and he’d be dead downstairs.” Hawkeye was smiling, as if he were describing a successful practical joke played on him. “Once he’d got upstairs to bed, it seemed like he’d be okay and I could catch some sleep. I never told him that. Not even in a letter.”

Nothing Mulcahy could say seemed adequate. “How long did this go on?” he asked.

“I can’t remember,” Hawkeye said. “No, really, I can’t. I know he’d stopped doing it by the time I went to high school. And it sort of tapered off after a while, maybe a year. But when Mom was dying Dad never told me there was anything wrong with her. He just kept making me fancy breakfasts and telling me there was nothing to worry about. I thought he was going to die too, and if he was, he’d just have gone on telling me there was nothing to worry about until he wasn’t there any more and Aunt Ellen and Uncle John moved in.”

“Who?”

“Billy’s mom and dad. Uncle John’s dead now. Aunt Ellen moved to Florida. They’d have moved in here like a shot. Just like Billy’s trying to do.” Hawkeye’s grin had slipped. “Look, why don’t you stay here? It’s perfect. You said you didn’t have any plans, you don’t need to pay me any rent, and I’ll come down from Portland on my days off. You’d be doing me a favour.”

“I can’t stay here,” Mulcahy said. “You don’t have to let the house to your cousin Billy if you don’t want to. What would your father have wanted you to do? He left it to *you*.”

“He wanted me to get married and have grandkids.” Hawkeye looked back at Mulcahy. “We never talked about that much, either. I did tell him I wasn’t the easiest guy in the world to live with, and he said neither was he, but he’d found the right woman eventually and so would I.”

“You will,” Mulcahy said.

“Oh, come off it.” Hawkeye did laugh then. “In all my life, I’ve met six people I figured I could live with. Five of them were men, and none of them were interested in living with *me*.”

“Who was the woman?”

“You must have met her – she was with the 4077th for a while.”

## Sins and Virtues

“Oh yes,” Mulcahy said, remembering. “Carlye. Nurse Walton, I mean. But, Hawkeye, you’re – you’re very eligible.” He saw Hawkeye grin, a sudden twist of genuine amusement, and plunged on, knowing he was in over his head. “You could find someone very easily who would want to marry you, and good marriages are made out of – of friendship, as much as they are out of... romantic love. Have you really given it serious consideration?”

“Yes,” Hawkeye said. He was grinning, very obviously, very thoroughly amused. “Recently. But I have a feeling that if I proposed... it wouldn’t happen. One of us would run a mile – and I’m not sure it would be me.” He was still grinning, but there were edges to it. “I’m charming, witty, and very persuasive. But I’m a real bastard when you get to know me.”

Mulcahy’s heart thumped. “You know that’s not true,” he said.

Hawkeye showed most of his teeth. “Let’s not argue about this. I don’t want you to know me that well. More coffee?”

“No, thank you,” Mulcahy eyed Hawkeye cautiously. He could not think of any good way the conversation could go if he directly confronted Hawkeye: when someone was this determined to attack himself, arguing with him could drive him to making more and more vicious statements about himself. “Why don’t we finish clearing out your father’s room?” He picked up the plates and got, carefully, to his feet. Hawkeye was clearing the rest of their breakfast back on to the tray. He stood up.

“Okay. Why can’t you stay?”

*Because if I stay, we’ll go to bed.* Mulcahy swallowed hard, finding a truthful but less revealing answer. “I spent six months giving myself time to think, Hawkeye. I don’t think I need any more time.”

They were putting the plates and things down in the kitchen. Hawkeye caught his eye firmly. “What are you going to do? Where are you going to go?”

“I have a letter of introduction to Fred Sparks, the superintendent of the New York School for the Deaf – it doesn’t mention...” Mulcahy’s voice trailed off, but he caught himself and said, with determination, “that I’m a priest.”

“Why New York?”

“Because the headmaster of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf knows Sparks – he said that he would trust his recommendation. I have a teaching certificate for Pennsylvania, but I got it when I was a priest – I can’t use it now. I can’t show it to anyone. But I hoped that with this letter – ” He stopped. He hadn’t tried to find a job without the help of the Church since he was twenty. “In any case, I want to keep working with the deaf, and the headmaster thought that Sparks would be able to help me find work.” He smiled. “I can always be a janitor. Cleanliness *is* next to godliness.”

Hawkeye didn’t even smile. “You’re still a priest,” he said abruptly.

“Yes.” Mulcahy steadied himself.

Hawkeye looked as if he were speaking with reluctance, but his lips shaped the words clearly enough. “This laicization. Can’t you appeal? I mean, I can think of about a hundred people right off who’d be glad to tell anyone you’re a great priest. Some of them are even Catholic. There’s that cardinal who visited, he thought you were terrific – ”

“No.” Mulcahy cut Hawkeye off. He had thought of all this himself, the three days between receiving his bishop’s letter and replying to it. Cardinal Riordan, other priests who had worked with Mulcahy in Korea and in Philadelphia, even his sister’s abbess: to ask them to defend him against his bishop’s judgement would be to turn the hierarchy of the Church upside down. And besides – “I spent six months on retreat,”

## Sins and Virtues

he said slowly, “and after much prayer and thought it seemed to me that I needed to be at work, even if I was suspended from the priesthood. I wrote to my bishop and told him that I was sorry I had set my judgement up against his, and I would not say anything about what we had discussed – I would keep silent if I were asked my opinion on such matters. Then I went back to the school. I never saw my bishop again, but he sent his – his confidential assistant to – to tell me that to keep silent wasn’t enough: if the... subject came up, I must condemn it. I said I didn’t think I could do that... and I asked to see my bishop, to talk to him personally.”

“Then what happened?”

“He wrote me a letter inviting me to apply for laicization,” Mulcahy said, briefly, “just a week ago.”

Hawkeye’s jaw dropped. He looked stunned. “So don’t apply!”

“He ordained me,” Mulcahy said. He had no words to explain to Hawkeye what that meant to him.

“You still want to be a priest – don’t you?”

“Yes.” Mulcahy rarely lost his temper. He had lost it often enough when he was a child, when the neighbourhood kids or his own older brothers had thought it amusing to tease the skinny kid with the specs until he exploded into helpless, pathetic rages. He’d done the same thing to his sister, in the casual way children have of passing on an unwanted gift. Then he had learned how to box, and how to keep his temper, and with the help of a punching bag and gloves he’d rarely lost control since. But he had found himself on the edge of pure anger far more often in the past year than he could ever remember since he first learned that he had a left hook that could knock out a much larger boy. He did not want to explode at Hawkeye. He did not want to say anything he knew he would regret. “Please don’t say that to me, Hawkeye.”

“You’re not going to apply,” Hawkeye said. “Just don’t. I mean – just don’t.” He still looked as if he were forcing himself to say it, but also as if he meant it. “They can’t force you, can they? Can they?”

The letter from his bishop had been kind, even concerned: but explicit. “If he no longer thinks I should be a priest...”

*I would not have ordained you if I had known...*

Mulcahy put a grip on his temper, and forced himself to say calmly, “I wrote back to my bishop the day before yesterday, consenting to his putting forward my application for laicization.”

Hawkeye’s mouth twisted. “How can you be so meek and so stubborn at the same time?”

“It goes with the job description, I’m afraid.”

“I see.” Hawkeye nodded. “They’ve got you coming and going, haven’t they? Refuse to do what they want, and you’re not obedient enough to be a priest: do what they want, and you’re *not* a priest.”

Real rage burned. “Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said, still not quite explosive, “I have to ask you not to speak to me like that about the authority of the Church.”

Hawkeye’s eyebrows went up: he opened his mouth, but closed it without saying anything. They stood there, looking at each other, Mulcahy conscious of how much anger he had inside him and how little Hawkeye deserved it.

“I’m sorry,” he managed at last.

Hawkeye shook his head. “Don’t,” he said. “You want to yell at me, you want to hit me, go ahead. I’ve earned it.”

“Does blaming yourself so vehemently make you feel better?” Mulcahy asked, and then, unkindly, turned his back on Hawkeye and made for the door.

## Sins and Virtues

He was aware, as he climbed the stairs, that Hawkeye wasn't far behind him: but he did not turn round.

The Scotch bottle was on the floor beside the dresser, with a glass to keep it company. It had been full the night before. Mulcahy picked it up. Hawkeye materialised in front of him and took it back. He glanced at the level of alcohol in the bottle, looked back at Mulcahy, and shrugged, emphatically and dismissively. He retrieved the glass from the floor – there was a splash of Scotch still in it – and went out. He came back, a few minutes later, still as sober as he'd left – as far as Mulcahy could judge.

They didn't talk much for the next couple of hours: the routine had been worked out yesterday. Hawkeye's face smoothed out a little.

"We're done," Hawkeye said. He bent over the bed and picked up a small pile of ties. "You want these?" He held them out to Mulcahy with an odd, hopeful expression that slid into amusement as Mulcahy put his hand up to touch his shirt-collar.

"Thank you," Mulcahy said, with shared amusement. He took the ties from Hawkeye. They were all in dark colours, cotton and silk: Hawkeye had been sorting them out from among the others earlier.

"I've always been a fan of neckties," Hawkeye said. "You need any help putting one on?"

"I think I remember how," Mulcahy said.

"See, I want to buy you dinner. You can't be in Maine and not eat lobster, it's against state law. And I never was any good at cooking animals that try to climb out of the pot and wave at me. Maine lobster, drawn butter, best string French fries, fresh coleslaw... am I getting to you?"

"It sounds delicious," Mulcahy said.

"Someday I'll come up with something that gets you more enthusiastic than *delicious*," Hawkeye said. "But I have to take you out for dinner, anyway, because there's only Mrs Clark's casserole in the icebox, and there's a reason it's still there. Can you cook?"

"Well, I don't like to boast, but my spaghetti bolognese is so good that a – guest from Rome asked for third helpings," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye was smiling. "My dad was a better cook than me. But I do the best fish. There's a stream just down that way –" he gestured with his thumb "– where you can get the finest trout in the world. You ever fish?"

"Not often," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked back at him. "Stay on and we'll go fishing next weekend."

Mulcahy shook his head. "I really can't." He turned away, trying to be casual.

He left all but one of the ties on the bed in the room where he – they – had slept last night. Hawkeye was waiting for him at the top of the stairs.

"There's a few things I need to do before we drive over to the lobster house in Levinetown," he said. "Mind coming with me?"

"Glad to."

"It's only the next cove over," Hawkeye said, "but my dad *didn't* deliver half the town."

Walking down to the car, Mulcahy said, carefully, "It's where your cousin Billy lives, isn't it?"

"Yes." Hawkeye turned to look at Mulcahy. "But there's a couple of thousand people live there, not counting tourists. We don't have to run into him."

"How many children did you say he has?"

"Two. Boy, girl. Danny and Mary. There's a third due end of this year."



## Sins and Virtues

“How old are they?”

“I guess Danny must be seven by now. Mary’s four.” Hawkeye stopped by the car, still with his eyes on Mulcahy.

“Do you like them?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “They seem like good kids. Yeah, I like them – they’re... good kids.” He opened the car door, and got in.

“I just wondered,” Mulcahy said, diffidently, getting in beside him, “if you’d find it easier to think of it as letting your young cousins have your house, not their father. If you don’t want to live here yourself.”

That closed the conversation. Hawkeye’s mouth shut tight, and he drove carefully.

Crabapple Cove had two streets, and any number of small roads twisting around it. The Methodist church was at the north end of one street, and the Presbyterian church at the south end of the other. Hawkeye delivered a box of clothes to each.

On the way back from the Presbyterian church, Hawkeye turned right, abruptly, and parked behind a building. There had only been two boxes in the back seat: Mulcahy glanced across at him.

“Okay,” Hawkeye said. “Would you let me take a look in your ears?”

“Here?” Mulcahy said.

“Not *here* here. I haven’t given anyone a physical in the front seat of my dad’s car since I was eighteen. *There* here.” Hawkeye pointed. “My dad’s office. Fully equipped. Including a chaperone, if you want one. Mrs Forrest. My dad’s nurse.”

“For my *ears*?”

Hawkeye hunched up his shoulders, ducked his head, and grinned. “Some people are very shy about their ears.”

Mrs Forrest seemed neither pleased nor surprised by Hawkeye’s arrival. She was in her early sixties, with the look Mulcahy recognised of a competent nurse who knows exactly how competent she is: she greeted Hawkeye with a kind of detached friendliness tempered with exasperation.

“I’ve been wondering when you would step in and let me know what you plan to do.”

“Nice to see you, too.” Hawkeye gestured. “My friend – ”

“Francis Mulcahy,” Mrs Forrest said. She held out her hand. “I understand you were a corpsman with Ben’s unit.”

Mulcahy shook it. “Mrs Forrest,” he said.

“And you’re deaf?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

“I’m sorry,” Mrs Forrest said.

“Billy’s been by, has he?” Hawkeye asked.

“He’s worried about you, Ben. Well, it’s none of my business, and that’s what I told him.”

“I’m not planning to stay here, Mrs Forrest.”

They were standing by the desk in the waiting-room, both of them with the light falling on their faces, both standing half-turned towards Mulcahy: miraculously he could follow both sides of the conversation with surprising ease. It was cheering.

Mrs Forrest looked exasperated. “I know that, Ben. You have your job at Maine General. But do you want to keep this office open, and sell the practice as a going concern, or shut it down?”

Hawkeye glanced at Mulcahy. “F – Francis? You mind if Mrs Forrest and I have a quick business conversation?”

## Sins and Virtues

“Not at all,” Mulcahy said. He sat down on one of the hard chairs by the wall, and picked up a copy of the Readers Digest from 1951. “I don’t believe I’ve read this one.”

Hawkeye peered. “Neither have I.”

“They all belong to you, Ben, and after we finish this conversation you can take them home with you, if you want.”

Mulcahy dropped his gaze, and cut himself out of the conversation. He looked through the magazine without reading it until Hawkeye’s legs appeared in front of him again. He looked up.

“The doctor is ready for you now,” Hawkeye said, with a familiar, amused twitch of his mouth.

Mulcahy put down the magazine and followed Hawkeye into the surgery. It was bleak and clean and tidy: Mulcahy obeyed Hawkeye’s gesture to sit down on the end of the examination couch. He felt Hawkeye’s hands on the side of his head, fingers pressing at his ear: and then a moment later, Hawkeye took his specs off. Mulcahy opened his mouth to protest, then shut it. He couldn’t see Hawkeye’s face, and he would normally have asked a doctor to position himself so that he could see what he was saying, but this was more for Hawkeye’s peace of mind than anything else.

Metal and glass cold inside his ear. Hawkeye’s hand holding his head still. Mulcahy folded his hands in his lap and looked across the room at the white squares hanging on the shadowed green wall. After a few minutes, Hawkeye stepped round to the other side: his lips were moving, but Mulcahy couldn’t catch what he saying. His hand gripped the back of Mulcahy’s head, warm and solid: the metal touch inside his other ear was cold and hard.

When the metal touch moved away from his ear, Mulcahy assumed he was done. Hawkeye moved round to stand in front of Mulcahy, and put his hand on Mulcahy’s face. It wasn’t a caress: Hawkeye meant to check his eyes as well. Mulcahy sat still. He recognised what was happening a few minutes later: Hawkeye was giving him a full upper-body physical. At least, Mulcahy trusted it would stop at that. Hawkeye was capable of a focus Mulcahy envied on what he was doing *now*, but –

*God, help me in the hour of my weakness. Help me now, dear Lord...*

It seemed a long time before Hawkeye slid his specs back on to his face and stepped back. Mulcahy stood up and began to tuck his shirt back in to his waistband, keeping his head down. Hawkeye didn’t move.

Mulcahy looked up. Hawkeye smiled at him. “You’re in good shape,” he said, and then stopped.

They stood looking at each other. The smile faded from Hawkeye’s face. Something else replaced it.

“Francis,” he said, and looked as if he were trying to find words. Then he glanced over his shoulder. “Come in?”

The door opened. “Doctor Pierce,” Mrs Forrest said, looking formal. “May I speak with you?”

“Sure,” Hawkeye said.

She closed the door behind her. “I’m sorry to interrupt,” she said to Mulcahy. “Ben, the waiting room is full. Are you going to be much longer?”

“Is there anyone there who actually needs a doctor, or do they all just want to know what my career plans are?”

“They all know you’re going back to Maine General. They want to say goodbye.”

Hawkeye was very seldom stricken speechless. His mouth open, he looked at Mulcahy, glanced over his shoulder at the door to reception, looked back at Mrs

## Sins and Virtues

Forrest, and finally nodded. “Well, I’m done here. I – ” He looked at Mulcahy. “Do you mind – ?”

Mulcahy shook his head.

“Can you clear up here,” Hawkeye said. He was speaking to Mrs Forrest, Mulcahy realised after an instant’s confusion.

“Naturally,” Mrs Forrest said. “Go on, Ben.”

Hawkeye looked at Mulcahy. “Do you mind?” he asked again.

*Stick with me, Father.*

“Of course,” Mulcahy said after a moment, and followed Hawkeye out.

He recognised some of the people in the waiting room: they’d been in the diner yesterday. Hawkeye moved down the room, shaking hands. He still looked, to Mulcahy’s eyes, disconcerted and upset, but he was smiling. Some of them called him Ben: most of them called him Doctor Pierce.

Here, they said they were sorry about his father, what a good doctor he’d been, how greatly he’d be missed: here, they said how proud of him they’d been, how proud his father had been of him: here, they said how much he’d be missed.

Mulcahy couldn’t see what Hawkeye was saying. He followed close behind Hawkeye, close enough to feel tiny tremors in his back and shoulders. It seemed to take a long time.

It didn’t even end when they got outside: there were people talking to Hawkeye until they got to the car. Mulcahy had been watching Hawkeye’s hands. He had never seen them shake, but they were trembling now: tiny, almost imperceptible shivers. When the car keys appeared in Hawkeye’s hand, Mulcahy took them from him. He got into the car and held the door open for Hawkeye.

It was impossible to hold a conversation and drive at the same time. Mulcahy didn’t even try. It hadn’t occurred to him that he wouldn’t be able to ask for directions, and he had no idea how to go anywhere but back to the Pierce house. Hawkeye sat hunched in the passenger seat, elbows tucked in, hands in his lap. He wasn’t talking.

Mulcahy parked the car. Hawkeye stirred and looked at him. “I need a drink.”

Absently, Mulcahy took the keys out of the ignition and handed them to Hawkeye.

“I thought they’d want me to stay. They expected me to go.”

“Expected and wanted are two different things,” Mulcahy said, carefully. “I’m sure they would have wanted you to stay. But they could hardly have expected it.”

Hawkeye flipped the keys up and caught them. He showed his teeth, not quite a grin. “I really need a drink.”

There was the best part of a bottle of Scotch still in the house. There was nothing Mulcahy could think of to say.

“Yeah, okay,” Hawkeye said, as if answering what Mulcahy hadn’t said. “I don’t suppose you know the way to Levinetown from here?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Let’s switch over then – I’ll drive.”

The Lobster House was a quiet, pleasant restaurant, on Levinetown’s main street. The chief decoration was large tanks with swimming fish and sea creatures inside down one wall. Hawkeye said something to the waiter: he showed them to a table in the far corner. Mulcahy sat down and looked around with pleasure: he hadn’t been into a restaurant like this in years.

Hawkeye picked up the menu, flipped it open, and said, with barely a glance at it, “Lobster, boiled, with plenty of drawn butter and napkins?”

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy nodded.

“String French fries?”

Mulcahy shrugged and nodded.

“Fresh coleslaw?”

Mulcahy nodded, by now amused.

Hawkeye glanced back up at the waiter. “We’re ready to order. What do you want to drink?”

“Iced tea,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked sharply back at him. Then he shrugged, and said to the waiter “Two iced teas.”

The waiter left: Hawkeye sat back, folding his hands on the table in front of him. “You really are in good shape,” he said. “Apart from your ears. You mind me asking – when did it happen?”

“In Korea,” Mulcahy said.

“Yes, but when? From the look of your eardrums, you didn’t get treated at the time. Did you?”

“No, not till I was back in the States,” Mulcahy admitted, incautiously.

Hawkeye frowned. “So when did you run into these unexploded munitions?”

“At an army base before I left Korea,” Mulcahy said, more carefully. “I was sent to Doctor Jonathan Lazar by my bishop when I was home in Philadelphia – he confirmed that there was nothing that could have been done.”

Hawkeye nodded, briefly. “Why weren’t you treated at the army base?”

“I assumed it would get better on its own.”

“You *assumed*?” Hawkeye was frowning harder. “You must have been seen by *some* doctor – ?”

Mulcahy swallowed. He was treading on fragile ground, and it wasn’t a situation he was happy with. *You never were much of a liar.* “I don’t really want to talk about it.”

Hawkeye’s head tilted to one side. He looked suspicious. “Sorry,” he said, without any appearance of remorse.

The waiter came back with two iced teas. Mulcahy changed the subject. “I like this restaurant.”

“Yes,” Hawkeye said, shortly.

“Are those tanks – ” Mulcahy nodded to the other side of the room.

“Dinner,” Hawkeye said, and seemed to give up his look of suspicion. He grinned. “Last time Dad and I ate here with Danny, he was naming every lobster in the tank hoping it would stop us from ordering them.”

“Did it work?”

“He thought it did. He didn’t realise lobsters change colour when they’re cooked. ”

Mulcahy glanced over at the tanks again and gave Hawkeye a deliberately blank, bewildered look. “They do?”

Hawkeye laughed out loud: Mulcahy could see him shake with it. “Haven’t you ever – ” He stopped and his eyes widened. “You’ve never had lobster before?”

Mulcahy kept his bland look on. “Of course. It comes in cans.”

“Oh well, it’s about the same here. Except that it comes in these little red lobster-shaped cans and you have to open them yourself at the table.” Hawkeye had recovered, whether his shock had been real or pretended. “They’re incredible animals, lobsters. Amphibious crustaceans with big claws. I caught my first one when I was eight. Or rather, it caught me.” He lifted his right hand and shook it. “My thumb survived.” His eyes widened. “Oh no. Not now.”

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy glanced in the direction of his gaze. Bill Pierce was standing by the entrance, his arm round a brown-haired woman's shoulders: he lifted his hand and waved back at Hawkeye. "Not now," Hawkeye repeated. Slouchingly, he got to his feet: so did Mulcahy.

"We got a sitter," the brown-haired woman said to Hawkeye. She was looking at Mulcahy.

"Francis Mulcahy," Mulcahy said. "You must be Mrs Pierce." It was a small revenge. He was sorry for it a moment later.

"Oh, call me Sarah," Mrs Pierce said. Bill Pierce had steered her to the table: he was pulling out the chair beside Mulcahy. She remained standing. "Can we join you? We often come here for dinner. We got a sitter, you see..."

Mulcahy glanced at Bill Pierce, and saw him lift his hand to briefly cover his eyes in a strangely familiar gesture, half-mocking, half-despair at this particular example of the stupidity of the universe. He had seen Hawkeye make a like gesture countless times. He looked at Hawkeye, and saw an odd clenching of muscles around his eyes, as if Hawkeye also recognised the gesture, and didn't like it.

"Mind?" Hawkeye said, apparently in response to something Bill had said. "Why should I mind? I came here for a quiet family dinner. After all, you got a sitter."

Bill grinned – it was a disconcertingly familiar wide-mouthed grin – and pulled the chair further out, his hand on his wife's shoulder directing her to sit.

Mrs Pierce didn't move. She was gripping her handbag. Her face looked tense. Mulcahy swallowed. He didn't like this. "We'd be pleased if you could join us, Mrs Pierce," he said, though he was wondering if it would be better to suggest that he and Hawkeye leave.

"Thank you," Mrs Pierce said after a moment. She sat down. Hawkeye dropped back into his chair as if his strings had been cut. The waiter came over again. Mulcahy settled back. He still didn't like this. Four-way conversations were all but impossible for him to follow, but at least Mrs Pierce looked more comfortable, though her hands were still gripping the bag in her lap.

Bill Pierce made Mulcahy distinctly uneasy. Sarah Pierce, he thought he could deal with. He was going to ask her about her children when she said, probably in response to something Bill had said, "Yes, thank you, that would be fine."

The waiter was gone. Sarah smiled at him, and said awkwardly, "You served in Ben's MASH unit?"

"Yes, we were both there for three years," Mulcahy said. "Hawkeye was telling me you have a son, Danny?"

"Yes." Sarah's gaze twitched across the table.

"And a daughter, Mary?"

"Yes," Sarah said. She was trying to look at him and at the other side of the table at the same time.

"Hawkeye was telling me an amusing story about Danny and the lobsters in this restaurant," Mulcahy began.

He was interrupted by a hand tapping the table in front of him: a narrow, ugly hand that he knew wasn't Hawkeye's. He looked up and caught Bill Pierce's gaze.

"Dinner tonight is on me," Bill said. "White wine okay with you?"

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye, who was sitting, head down, fidgeting with his glass. "Thank you, I'll stick to iced tea," he said, definitely but politely.

"Now, I *know* Ben's not on the wagon," Bill said cheerfully, with an emphatic glance at his cousin. "We always have white wine with lobster, and you'll join us."

## Sins and Virtues

“No, thank you. I prefer iced tea,” Mulcahy said, and briefly asked God to forgive the lie.

“Come on – ”

Hawkeye looked up. “He said he prefers iced tea.”

“Okay,” Bill said, after a moment. He handed a wine list – the waiter must have left it – to Hawkeye. “Just you and me, then. Pick whatever you like, I’m good for it. Sarah, you’ll have a glass.”

Hawkeye handed it back. “Iced tea,” he said, with a twist of his mouth.

Bill shook his head. He was looking at Hawkeye with both annoyance and affection – his face was easy to read. “Look, Hawkeye – let’s try to get along.”

“Let’s just have dinner,” Hawkeye said. “Miracles are in short supply around here.”

Bill shook his head, but said nothing. After a moment, he turned directly to Mulcahy. “You have no idea how odd it is to hear a complete stranger calling Ben ‘Hawkeye’. How did you pick it up?”

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye, disconcerted.

“It’s a family nickname,” Bill explained. “From *The Last of the Mohicans*. My uncle Daniel’s favourite book. Now, I know some of Ben’s college friends called him by it, but – weren’t you a corpsman?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He was caught in that lie. “Everyone at the 4077th – the MASH unit – called Doctor Pierce ‘Hawkeye’. Well, almost everyone.”

“Even the enlisted men?”

“Everyone.”

“Must have been one hell of a rowdy unit,” Bill said. “I was in the Coastguard, ’42 to ’45, and there’s no way an enlisted man would have called an officer by his nickname. Not to his face, anyway.” He laughed. “If half the stories Uncle Daniel used to pass on from Ben’s letters home were true, I’m surprised you had time to do medical work.”

*Incoming wounded. Triage in the compound. Incoming wounded.*

“Once a wounded man reached the 4077th, he had a ninety-seven or ninety-eight percent chance of staying alive,” Mulcahy retorted. “It might have looked undisciplined to you, but the team spirit there was – something astonishing. When the wounded came in, everything else made way for them. The doctors – and the nurses – would work round the clock.”

He caught Hawkeye’s emphatic nod out of the corner of his eye and turned to look at him. “Everyone,” Hawkeye said. “Not just the doctors and nurses. The corpsmen, the ambulance drivers, the chopper pilots, the chaplain – yeah, we were one *hell* of a unit, Bill.” He lifted his glass and drank from it as if it were Swamp gin. “Best care anywhere.”

Mulcahy smiled. He lifted his glass, briefly, to Hawkeye. “Finest kind,” he said, and drank.

Sarah was looking from one of them to the other. She was half-frowning, half-smiling, but when she spoke she looked more relaxed than she had before. “Do you know you said that in unison?”

Hawkeye nodded, grinning. Mulcahy shook his head. “I’m sorry – ?”

“You said – about the survival rate at the 4077th.” Sarah looked a little embarrassed. “Both of you. At the same time.”

“Oh,” Mulcahy said. He was disconcerted. “I’m very sorry – I didn’t intend to interrupt.”

## Sins and Virtues

“You didn’t,” Hawkeye said. “I just tried to keep up with you. I particularly liked the bit about the heroic doctors.” Hawkeye was laughing, Mulcahy realised, and he wouldn’t have minded if this had been the mess table at the 4077th and he’d known everyone there.

He wouldn’t have minded if he could hear. But if he could hear he wouldn’t have made the mistake. He smiled and nodded, and was almost grateful when Bill Pierce said something that he couldn’t catch, but that got both Sarah and Hawkeye’s attention.

It might have been possible to follow the conversation between the three of them, with enough concentration: Mulcahy told himself he was taking a rest, and didn’t even try.

The waiter appeared with a big basket of fries and two lobsters: Mulcahy looked up to thank the waiter, and saw Hawkeye looking at him. “You okay, Father?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said, with an automatic smile and nod.

Hawkeye’s face changed. He glanced back at Bill. “His nickname,” he said, as if replying to a question. “Because of his hair. So fair it looks grey.”

Mulcahy shifted, uncomfortably, and caught Sarah’s eyes. She looked discomfited, too. “It really doesn’t,” she said.

With an effort, Mulcahy managed a cheerful smile. “I really have no idea how to eat this,” he said, pointing at the lobster. “Hawkeye?”

The next two lobsters arrived in the middle of a crustacean anatomy lecture from Hawkeye, with demonstrations: twist off the legs, crack the claws, dig into the carapace, find the tomalley – Bill and Hawkeye had a brief half-incomprehensible argument about whether or not to eat it – and the coral.

It *was* good. Better than anything canned. Mulcahy was feeling too uncertain to interrupt a conversation and say so. The argument about the tomalley seemed to have defused a lot of the visible hostility between Bill and Hawkeye: and Sarah seemed to be more relaxed. Besides, Hawkeye liked to talk, and he liked to eat: the combination was bound to make him feel better.

Bill finished first. Hawkeye was still cracking the small claws on the legs, and Sarah – Mulcahy guessed – had politely slowed down not to leave Mulcahy trailing quite so visibly behind. Bill pushed his chair back from the table and finished wiping his fingers on his third napkin. “Want to talk about the house now, Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye was cracking a claw. His shoulders hunched up, his head dropped a little. “I don’t see that there’s anything to talk about.”

“You’re going to be up in Portland most of the time. You won’t want to leave it standing empty through the winter. So you’ll want to let it. We’ll take good care of it – hell, Hawkeye, you know I love the place as much as you do. Don’t you want Danny and Mary to get the same childhood you and I had?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “Which one of them’s going to be you, and which one of them’s going to be me?”

“What?”

“Which one of them’s going to end up getting dumped in the swimming hole and half-drowned and told it was *his* fault for being clumsy?”

Mulcahy’s nerves jolted. Hawkeye had said it without a change of expression, without even turning towards Bill: he was still sitting hunched over his plate, his fingers turning a cracked and empty claw over and over.

“What?” Bill sat up. He looked puzzled.

“You heard me,” Hawkeye said. He hadn’t moved. “I was wondering which one of your kids you want to be me, and which one you want to be you.”

## Sins and Virtues

Bill shook his head. “Kid, that must have been twenty-five years ago. You’re really going to carry a grudge that long?”

Hawkeye had lost his temper fast and easily in Korea: there was no one in camp who hadn’t, at some time or other, been the target of his wordy explosions. The times he had exploded physically *at* someone were few, but Mulcahy realised (and felt as if his heart were sinking fast into his stomach) that Hawkeye’s body was tensed and ready to leap.

Mulcahy looked down at his plate, and said, as if obliviously, “Oh dear. Hawkeye, what do I do next with the tail?” Then he looked up. Hawkeye was staring at him: so was Bill Pierce, much more suspiciously. So, a quick sideways glance told him, was Sarah. All too conscious of hot embarrassment, Mulcahy looked back at Hawkeye and said, trying to make his voice steady, “You did show me, but I can’t remember exactly what the trick was.”

Hawkeye leaned forward. “Okay, you’ve got it off the body. Now you crack off the fins – yeah, like that – and now if you poke at the narrow end, the tail meat just slides out whole. See? Best part of a lobster, except for the claws.”

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said. He glanced around again. “I’m very sorry – did I interrupt?”

“Hawkeye, are you seriously telling me you’re not going to let me have the house because twenty-six years ago, you tripped over your own feet and fell out of the boat, and I laughed at you? I was thirteen. I was an idiot. I’m sorry. But this is ridiculous.”

Hawkeye looked up from Mulcahy’s plate, directly at Mulcahy. His mouth twisted. “Get your own tail next time.”

Mulcahy shrugged, apologetically. Hawkeye’s shoulders looked less tense.

“Billy,” Hawkeye said, sitting back in his chair, still facing Mulcahy, “you told me, and my dad, and my mom, and *your* dad and mom, and all your friends, and all my friends, the story about me falling out of the boat because I was so clumsy. But it’s not twenty-six years ago. No one’s going to take you out behind the woodshed for pushing me in. How about you just own up?”

Bill shook his head. “Why does it matter? I didn’t push you, Hawkeye. You were a clumsy kid.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “I wasn’t.” He still wasn’t looking at Bill. After a moment, he picked up another claw from his plate – one of the tiny claws at the end of the legs – and cracked it between his fingers. “You know I wasn’t.”

“Hawkeye,” Bill said.

Hawkeye dropped the claw on his plate. “Yeah? Got something to say?” He turned his head, cutting whatever else he said off, and looked at Bill.

“Kid, I honestly don’t remember pushing you out the boat. As far as I’m concerned, you fell in. If you want me to say I’m sorry, then I will. I’m sorry. But why are you raking all this up *now*? Because you think you’ve got me over a barrel? I’m not going to admit to something I didn’t do for the sake of getting Uncle Daniel’s house.”

Hawkeye pushed his chair back, abruptly and suddenly. “You have no idea,” he said. He stood up. “Okay. Have it. I’ll send you a rental agreement.” He put his hands on the table, leaned forward, and said – to Sarah – “Don’t worry, I won’t bleed you white. But don’t let Bill kid you. He pushed me in.”

Mulcahy glanced at Sarah. She was sitting on the edge of her chair, and she looked white and upset. Hawkeye straightened up again. He fished out two bills from his wallet and dropped them on the table. “Okay, let’s go.”



## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy cast a desperate look at Sarah, at Bill – who was looking down at his plate – and back at Sarah. He wanted to say something to her, to take that look away, but Hawkeye was halfway to the door – and there was nothing he could think of to say. He got carefully to his feet. “God bless you, Sarah. Goodbye.”

She looked up at him, startled. “Oh. Goodbye. Francis.”

It had still been daylight when they got to the Lobster House: it was dark now. Hawkeye was standing just outside.

The light from the restaurant window was full on Hawkeye’s face. “Sorry,” he said. He looked miserable.

“I don’t think you owe *me* an apology,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye had turned away. He was walking down the street towards the car. Mulcahy followed him. He would have a hard time seeing what Hawkeye was saying in this light, and he couldn’t see what to say him now.

The car was parked under a streetlight. Hawkeye stopped where the light was on his face. “Can you drive back?”

“I think so,” Mulcahy said, surprised.

“Thanks,” Hawkeye said, and slapped the keys into Mulcahy’s hand.

It was an easy road back. Mulcahy parked outside the Pierce house and switched the car lights off. The country night closed down around him. A draft of cold air slid in: Hawkeye had opened his door.

“I’ll follow you,” Mulcahy said. “There’s a full moon. In five or ten minutes, I’ll be able to see.”

After a moment, the door closed again. Hawkeye sat back and glanced at him. His teeth showed white.

“If you’re saying anything,” Mulcahy said, “I can’t see you well enough.”

There was a brief pause. Hawkeye reached out and took hold of Mulcahy’s hand. He moved his forefinger on the palm: one vertical stroke, one horizontal stroke, one vertical stroke. A circle. Four slant lines. A curve, a line, a dot. Three letters and a question-mark.

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He was touched, and surprised. It had occurred to him that if Hawkeye knew fingerspelling they could talk, but not this direct simplicity.

Hawkeye’s teeth showed again. A broken-circle, a small horizontal line, two circles, a half-circle, a vertical line. He paused, as if waiting for Mulcahy to say something, and went on. A river-bent line, a circle – S, O, R, R, Y.

“You don’t need to apologise to me,” Mulcahy said again.

Hawkeye shifted, as if he wanted to shrug, but didn’t want to let go of Mulcahy’s hand. Y, E, S, he wrote. C, A, L, L, D, U, F, A, T, H, E, R. S, O, R –

“It was a slip of the tongue,” Mulcahy said. He thought about it. “Does my hair really look grey?”

N, O. Hawkeye paused. T, O, S, A, Y, S, O, M, E, T, H, I, N, G.

“The person I thought you should have apologised to was Sarah,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye’s grip tightened on his hand. Mulcahy could see him shaking his head.

“Whatever’s between you and your cousin for what he did to you all those years ago, Sarah had nothing to do with it,” Mulcahy said. “But she was obviously very upset.”

N, O, T, M, Y, P, R, O, B

Mulcahy snatched his hand away. He stared at Hawkeye in the shadows. “You didn’t need to say that to her,” he said, and opened the car door to get out. His eyes

## Sins and Virtues

had adapted, enough to get his bearings. He took the path up to the front door slowly, conscious – he couldn't have said how – of Hawkeye very close behind him.

Hawkeye switched the light on in the front hall and turned to look at Mulcahy. "You didn't get a chance to finish your lobster. Sorry. Make you a sandwich?"

"I'm not hungry," Mulcahy said.

"Coffee?" Hawkeye offered. He paused. "Mrs Clark's casserole?"

"I'll take the coffee," Mulcahy said.

"Good choice."

It wasn't until Mulcahy was sitting down that Hawkeye asked "How much of that were you following?"

"Only partly, I'm afraid," Mulcahy admitted. "I don't – I can't follow a three-way conversation."

"But enough for you to be sure I said something to Sarah I shouldn't have?" Hawkeye said. "Look, this situation is family stuff."

"And I couldn't possibly understand?" Mulcahy looked down at his hands, then back at Hawkeye again. "Your cousin took you out in a boat and pushed you in the water, twenty-five – twenty-six years ago, and then told everyone that you fell in – tripped over your own feet. You were seven, he was thirteen, and everyone believed him instead of you. Now he won't admit that he ever lied about it. Is that right?"

Hawkeye had put a pan of water on to boil for coffee. He sat down on the edge of the table and stared at Mulcahy thoughtfully. "You believe me," he said after a long moment.

"Why wouldn't I believe you?" Mulcahy asked. "I do know you quite well. You are perfectly capable of making up a story for – for mischief's sake, but if you had, it wouldn't *matter* to you. I thought – I was quite worried that you were going to..." his voice trailed off. "Hit him," he added, doubtfully. *Or worse.*

"I was thinking about it from the moment they walked in," Hawkeye said. "But I didn't, thanks to you and your piece of tail." He laughed, briefly, and shook his head. "You believe me."

"Why wouldn't I?"

Hawkeye moved his shoulders in an uneasy shrug. "I didn't know. That was the first time I've ever told anyone what I remember happened. Except for Sidney Freedman. I didn't know if anyone else would believe me."

"The first time? Surely you told other people when it happened?"

"No." Hawkeye stood up, restlessly. "No. He helped me into the water, and I – I nearly drowned, and he pulled me out, and the first thing he said to me was –" Hawkeye turned away. A moment later, he faced Mulcahy again. "He said 'You're so clumsy. If it wasn't for me, you'd be dead.' And I thanked him. For saving my life. I knew he'd pushed me in, but –"

Mulcahy waited. Hawkeye jammed his fists against his hips. "But I –" He stopped. "Water's boiling. Coffee?" He turned away.

Mulcahy stood up and went over to him. "Hawkeye?" He put his hand on the thin shoulder, and Hawkeye turned.

"But I loved him," he said. "I – Francis? I really loved him. I hate him." He was standing close to Mulcahy, looking down at him. "And I never told anyone. Not ever. I never even thought about it. For years. And now – every time I see him I can't stop thinking about it, but I couldn't tell anyone –" His hands, clenched into fists, were tapping silently against his legs.

"But you did tonight."

## Sins and Virtues

“Yeah, and you want to know why?” The tempo of his fists beating against his thighs was picking up. Mulcahy caught at Hawkeye’s wrists and pulled his hands up. Hawkeye looked at him, mouth a little open.

“You want to know why?” he repeated, after a moment.

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. Hawkeye’s wrists were muscular. He wasn’t trying to pull himself free of Mulcahy’s grip, but he was shaking.

“Last night I told you – I thought I’d told you – about that damn bet. And I thought you’d forgiven me. I woke up this morning and I was happy!” Hawkeye stepped backwards, not managing to jerk his wrists out of Mulcahy’s continuing grasp. His head jerked forward. “Got that, Francis? I was happy! And you hadn’t even heard me because I was *drunk*.” He spat the last word. “Will you let go of me?”

Mulcahy shook his head. “Hawkeye, I – ”

“Shut up. How often have you wanted to tell me to shut up when you could hear me? I knew you for three years and I can’t remember that you ever shut me up the way you’ve been doing for the past two days. If you can tell me to shut up every time you get mad at me, I can tell you to shut up just once, can’t I? I had to tell you about the damn bet all over again – Look, let go of me!”

“I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

“I’ve been waving my hands around since I was a drama-ridden adolescent, I’m not going to hurt myself doing it now.”

Mulcahy let go. Hawkeye jammed his fists back against his hips. “I kept thinking, tonight, if I could do that to you, if I could tell you that, I could tell Billy I remember about the swimming hole. Even if nobody believed me.”

“I had forgiven you,” Mulcahy said. It was true: there was still the small area of numbness when he thought about how helplessly he had reacted to Hawkeye intent on a bet, but his conscience told him that he shouldn’t feel that way.

Hawkeye brought his hands up, still clenched, and slammed them back down against his legs. “You couldn’t even *hear* me!”

“I forgive you,” Mulcahy shouted, and grabbed for Hawkeye’s wrists. “Stop doing that to yourself.”

“Doing what?” Hawkeye looked bewildered.

Mulcahy hung on to his wrists. “Stop hitting yourself.”

“I’m not hitting myself,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy didn’t let go. “Hawkeye, I forgive you. Now stop beating yourself up. Please.”

“Look, if I were hitting myself, I’d know it.” Hawkeye turned his hands inside Mulcahy’s grip, breaking his grasp. “And why aren’t you doing it for me, anyway?” He didn’t withdraw his wrists: they were almost holding hands. “Why aren’t you punching me? Why aren’t you yelling at me? Why don’t you hate me? What business do you have forgiving me for what I did to you?”

“I’m afraid it’s part of the job description,” Mulcahy said, smiling: anything else was too revealing.

“You’re not a priest any more.”

Mulcahy let go. Briefly, it was as if the small area of numbness had spread to encompass all of him. “I’m still a priest,” he said. “I don’t hate you. I don’t want to punch you or punish you. Whether you repent is between you and your conscience, but I won’t – I can’t beat you up for it. And I wish you’d stop. It doesn’t make me feel any better to see you punishing yourself.” He sat down at the table and took his specs off to rub his eyes. “It really doesn’t, Hawkeye. Please stop.”

## Sins and Virtues

His consciousness of Hawkeye close behind him was so strong that when Hawkeye's hand closed over the back of his neck he didn't even twitch. He put his specs back on and looked at Hawkeye, sitting down beside him, wishing he could still feel numb. Hawkeye's hand was warm and heavy on his skin.

"There is a psalm that is often sung at ordinations," Mulcahy said. "Psalm 109. It was sung at mine. *Iuravit Dominus et non paenitebit eum tu es sacerdos in aeternum*. The Lord hath sworn, and he will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever. Even when I'm laicized. There is something they can't take back. I don't know what it will be like – I've never met a laicized priest. But it wasn't your fault: it was something in me. My bishop wrote –" Mulcahy swallowed, "that he wouldn't have ordained me if he'd known I was afflicted with these tendencies. It wasn't something that ever came up in my interviews before ordination, and it never occurred to me to mention it. I didn't know that he wouldn't have ordained me if I had, and I find I can't regret that he did."

"He wouldn't have found out if it wasn't for me," Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy very nearly took his specs off again. "He wouldn't have found out if I hadn't said... what I said about those two women in the parish. Once he started to ask into it..." he summoned a smile, and a sliver of bravado. "Well, you were my last, Hawkeye, not my first."

Hawkeye's laugh was tangibly jolted out of him. It made the first words of what he said incomprehensible. "– hoped you didn't have a baseline for comparison." He stopped. "But I –"

"Hawkeye, what you did..." Mulcahy found, however selfishly, that he was drawing strength out of the touch of Hawkeye's hand. "I thought at the time, you were just seeking... pleasure with a friend. Knowing you'd – you were impelled not by a feeling of desire for me, but by... because of a bet with Captain McIntyre –" He swallowed. "Any hurt feelings I might have... would be sinful."

"Oh, damn," Hawkeye said, as plainly heartfelt as if it were a prayer. "I never meant –" he swallowed. "I don't know what to say. I don't know why the hell I told you – Except when I heard you crying last night, I couldn't stand to think you'd forgiven me when you didn't know what I'd done."

"I'm grateful for your honesty," Mulcahy said. "And for your help."

"Oh, damn," Hawkeye said again. His fingers moved briefly on Mulcahy's neck, almost as if unconsciously. His shoulders hunched up, and his head went down. It was a moment before he looked up again. "Telling me your hurt feelings are 'sinful' doesn't help. It doesn't take them away. I mean, what is sin, if it's not hurting someone else?"

"Hurt has nothing to do with it," Mulcahy said. Hawkeye was a surgeon. He was conscious – he realised he had been conscious for some time – of an odd smell in the air. "Ah – the water you put on for coffee?"

"What?" Hawkeye stared at him, then his head went up. "God –" he leapt up, and the rest of his speech went out of sight.

The pan had boiled dry. Hawkeye put it in the sink and put on more water. This time he stood over it.

Mulcahy sat, a little turned from the table, watching Hawkeye. For three years he had seen Hawkeye on a daily basis: for nearly a year, not at all. Hawkeye had written to him once, and Mulcahy hadn't written back, and hadn't kept the letter. He had no photograph of Hawkeye, and he had tried not to remember him physically, especially not during the months after he'd lost his temper in front of his bishop and the Monsignor.

## Sins and Virtues

He had known he'd failed. He hadn't realised how far he'd succeeded. Watching Hawkeye when Hawkeye wasn't watching him had been part of his life for three years. He'd memorised him: the curve of his heavy eyelids, the shape of his hands, the angle of his neck, even the way he walked. He'd managed to forget the flex of Hawkeye's wrists, the slouching way he sat, the way the heavy stubble seemed to shape his face, the way his eyes looked blue and hollow when he was tired, or drunk, or aroused. He hadn't forgotten – he had chosen to disregard – the impact Hawkeye had on him.

He would have to begin, all over again, tomorrow. One day at a time.

Hawkeye put a mug of coffee down on the table in front of him. "Cream?"

Mulcahy picked the mug up and cradled it in his hands. "No."

"Sugar?"

Mulcahy shook his head.

"Honey?"

Surprised, Mulcahy shook his head again. "No – "

"Sweetheart?" Hawkeye was grinning as he sat down on the edge of the table, his own mug of coffee in his hand.

That was another thing Mulcahy had almost remembered, almost forgotten about Hawkeye: his unerring talent for making the wrong joke at the wrong time to the wrong person. He managed, as usual, a polite smile, and drank his coffee. It was hot, and good.

"You mind coming through to the parlour?" Hawkeye asked.

"Of course," Mulcahy put his mug down, and stood up.

Hawkeye picked up the mug in his free hand. "There's some stuff there I want to pack up before Billy moves in."

The parlour felt chilly after the kitchen. There was a log basket beside the fireplace, half-empty. "May I light the fire?" Mulcahy asked.

"Sure. I'll get more wood," Hawkeye said. But he stood and watched as Mulcahy knelt down beside the fireplace. Mulcahy twisted his head round to look at him after a minute, halfway through stacking the logs so that they would catch with the smallest amount of kindling. "I can manage," he said.

"You're better equipped to live here than I am," Hawkeye said, and went out.

He came back a few minutes later, with an armful of logs that he slid into the basket. The fire was ablaze. He held out his hands, casually, and let Mulcahy take them to pull himself to his feet. "Coffee's over there."

Hawkeye had put both mugs on the table by the sofa: Mulcahy let go of Hawkeye's hands and sat down. Hawkeye smiled, briefly, and went back out again. He came back with a sturdy cardboard carton and a stack of old newspapers. "Billy knows what this room looks like: I'm just going to take what I can fit in here."

"Why does it matter what Billy knows?"

Hawkeye looked around the room, with an odd expression on his face. "I suppose it doesn't." He dumped the carton and the papers by Mulcahy's feet. "Can you pack stuff?"

"Of course," Mulcahy said.

The carton was a third full before Mulcahy ventured to ask, "Hawkeye?"

Hawkeye had turned away to the bookshelves between the windows, but he swung back to face Mulcahy. "What?"

"You said I'd kept telling you to shut up. I have sometimes been very strongly tempted, but I don't recollect that I've ever told you to shut up."

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye looked away, looked back again, and glanced up at the ceiling. When he faced Mulcahy again, it was a moment before he spoke. “What do you call it when you turn away so you can’t see what I’m saying, or you take your hand away like you did back in the car?” He picked up his mug, and drank from it. “Because what I call it is telling me to shut up.” He wasn’t smiling. “Either that or you just couldn’t stand me touching you any more. But what did I *say*?” The emphasis on the last word was visible.

Mulcahy buried his face in his coffee mug. He couldn’t stay there forever, and when he came up for air, he was going to have to look at Hawkeye again.

When he did, Hawkeye was still looking at him, eyebrows slightly twitched upward.

“Hawkeye,” he began, awkwardly, and feeling very diffident, “you’re kind, and compassionate. You care about people.”

As he’d expected, Hawkeye’s mouth twisted cynically.

“You’re likeable, you’re a delight to listen to – your exuberance, your cheerfulness, your humour – ”

“Can it, Francis, you’re making me blush.”

“But you sometimes – don’t seem to let yourself think about what other people are feeling. And when you don’t think, you can sometimes be – can appear to be – quite cruel.”

The corners of Hawkeye’s mouth twitched upwards again. “Well, you didn’t have to can it that fast.”

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said immediately, automatically.

Hawkeye shook his head. He looked a little rueful. “No, go on. You’re not saying anything new. I’m a bastard.” He sat down on the edge of the sofa. “Go on.”

“I didn’t say you were,” Mulcahy said. “You have far more good qualities than bad.”

Hawkeye shrugged.

“I said you could sometimes appear to be quite cruel – when you speak before you think.”

Hawkeye shrugged again and grinned, a brief flicker of cynical humour. “Go on. I’m not arguing.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “I’m sorry, Hawkeye. I get very angry, and when I do... the easiest thing for me to do if I feel I won’t be able to control it, is to turn away. And when I do, you can’t talk to me. But I don’t intend to shut you up.” He added, with painstaking honesty, “At least, not primarily.”

Hawkeye seemed to be inhaling his coffee. He didn’t say anything for a while. “Okay,” he said at last. “Fair enough. But – what happened – in the car?”

“What you said about – what you said to Mrs Pierce,” Mulcahy said.

“What should I have said to her?”

“She didn’t want to be there,” Mulcahy said. “She was embarrassed when they arrived, and didn’t want to sit down with us, and was disturbed and upset by what her husband was saying – I assume by his pursuit of this house.”

Hawkeye was staring. He put the mug back on the table. “You hardly said six words to her – and she didn’t say more than two words to you.” He shook his head. “Okay, I’m not saying you’re wrong, but I’ve known Sarah for twelve – thirteen years – and *I* didn’t notice.”

“You were thinking about Billy,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah?”

## Sins and Virtues

“No matter what Billy did to you all those years ago, Sarah had nothing to do with it,” Mulcahy said.

“No. Back then... I guess Sarah was in Vermont going to grade school.”

“She was upset already: you didn’t need to say what you said.”

“What did I say?” Hawkeye was frowning. “You know, I really don’t remember. Something about the rent.”

“I saw your face at an angle,” Mulcahy said. “You said something like: ‘Don’t worry, I won’t bleed you white. But don’t let Bill kid you. He pushed me in.’”

Hawkeye picked up his mug, and put it down again. “Yeah,” he said, briefly. “Sounds like something I might have said. But I honestly don’t remember. As far as I’m concerned – ” Hawkeye shrugged again. He picked the mug up.

“You sound like Billy,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye slammed the mug down on the table. Mulcahy felt the force of the blow in his hands. Hawkeye was on his feet and his mouth open, as if vomiting noiselessly.

Mulcahy sat still and stared up at him, keeping his eyes fixed on Hawkeye’s. He could not read Hawkeye’s words, but everything about him shouted rage.

It seemed a long time before Hawkeye sat down again, and bent his head, rubbing at the back of his neck. He looked up. “Sorry.”

“That’s all right.”

“But I do not sound like Billy.”

“Billy denied pushing you in. He said he ‘honestly didn’t remember’, and also that ‘as far as I’m concerned’ his memory was the correct one. You don’t usually say things like that, Hawkeye, but you did just then.”

Hawkeye looked away, very briefly. “Right. You know, if you get any better at lip-reading, they’ll have you up on charges of wilful mindreading.”

“Sorry,” Mulcahy said again.

“Don’t apologise,” Hawkeye said. He looked tired. “Okay. So I said it. It wasn’t exactly the kindest thing to say. Especially if she was already upset. And you’re probably right, she was. That’s what upset you.”

“No,” Mulcahy said. “I’m sorry, I’m not very good at explaining these things. It was a thoughtless thing for you to say, but *you* were upset – you wouldn’t have said it if you hadn’t been caught up in what Billy did to you – ”

“Twenty-six years ago – ” Hawkeye said

“It doesn’t matter *how* long ago,” Mulcahy said. “But – it was when you said it wasn’t your problem – I’m afraid that’s what made me angry.”

“Because...” Hawkeye was frowning. “I don’t get it.”

“The worst part of you,” Mulcahy swallowed, “is the part that says, ‘It’s not my problem’ about something – *anything* – that you can’t deal with like a surgeon. That’s what makes me angry.” Having finally got to the end of it, he picked up his mug and drank from it: the coffee was no longer hot.

Hawkeye was sitting with his hands folded together in his lap. “How do you mean – like a surgeon?”

“You’re a very good surgeon,” Mulcahy said.

“How would you know?”

“Well, I watched you,” Mulcahy said, disconcerted. “For three years. I helped care for the wounded boys whose lives you saved. I don’t think anyone at the 4077th would have disagreed – not even Major Burns, God help him – that you were the finest surgeon there. But sometimes it seemed to me that you dealt with problems – and human relationships... as if you could deal with them by – by – ”

## Sins and Virtues

“By knocking them out, cutting them open, and stitching them up?” Hawkeye interrupted. “Yeah. I see what you’re saying. I want to fix it. If I can’t fix it, I let go of it. I’m a meatball surgeon. I just do – I do them fast and par.”

“That’s not – ” Mulcahy started to say, but Hawkeye overrode him.

“I told you I was the brightest bright young surgeon?” At Mulcahy’s nod, Hawkeye put his hands down on the sofa, gripping at the edge, and leaned forward. “I was lying. I *was* the brightest. I’m not. Not any more. There are men who were residents when I was there who are better than me now.” He paused, and said finally, “I’m not a good surgeon. And everyone at Maine General knows it.”

Mulcahy stared in disbelief. “Hawkeye – ?”

“Yeah? You want more coffee? Mine’s cold.”

“But this isn’t true,” Mulcahy said. “Who told you this?”

“No one. I did. I can *see* I’m not as good as they are. I was a good meatball surgeon, but I can’t do the kind of work they’re doing at Maine General now.”

“Have you talked to anyone about this?”

Hawkeye laughed and shook his head, simultaneously. “No.” His hands folded together on his knees, restlessly beating a silent rhythm.

“Is there anything you’ve tried to do that you *can’t* do?” Mulcahy asked. He was still feeling almost in shock. He was half-convinced Hawkeye was making it up for mischief’s sake: but the level of intensity was wrong.

“No, it’s not that – ” Hawkeye frowned and got up. “I’ll get you more coffee.” He came back a few minutes later with fresh cups and went back to the bookshelves. Mulcahy was carefully wrapping the last of five old-fashioned crystal tumblers.

Hawkeye came back to the sofa with eight books in the curve of his arm: he sat down and handed them to Mulcahy. “See if you can fit these in.”

“No problem. There’s still plenty of space.”

“Listen, I had an idea,” Hawkeye said. “About your teaching certificate.”

“What?” Mulcahy was startled. He hadn’t been thinking about that.

“Why don’t you write to the Pennsylvania school board and ask them to re-issue you with a copy that doesn’t say you’re a priest? You’re qualified to teach there, fair and square, right? You don’t need to explain why you want it – for all they have to know, you want a job working undercover in a school for atheists.”

“Yes, I suppose so. But – ”

“Well?”

“They might say no.”

“They might say yes! You won’t know till you ask.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“There’s my dad’s writing desk over there. Why don’t you just do it?”

“Now?”

“Why not?”

“I – where could I ask them to send it? I don’t have an address.”

“Well, you could stay here, and ask them to send it here,” Hawkeye said. He paused. “No?” and ducked his head, not quite grinning. “Okay. You could give them a post office address in New York, pick up your mail there. You could give them the address of the New York School for the Deaf. You could – ”

Mulcahy was smiling almost involuntarily. “All right.”

“Do you have their address?”

“Oh yes.” It was printed on the certificate.

“There you go. There’s stamps in the box with a salmon on the lid.”



## Sins and Virtues

It took Mulcahy longer to write the letter than he would have thought: but then, he hadn't thought of writing it at all. He finished it at last, wondering that the odd gaps in writing it didn't show on the page, addressed it, and stamped it. When he turned round, Hawkeye was sprawled full length on the sofa, hands folded behind his head, watching him.

There was that same expression on Hawkeye's face that Mulcahy had seen once or twice before when Hawkeye was looking at Mulcahy, but more often when he was looking at someone else. He looked... intent. He looked like a predator who was fond of his prey.

Mulcahy shivered. "Hawkeye?"

"Cold?" Hawkeye glanced over at the fire. He swung his legs off the sofa and went over to put a couple more logs on it. Mulcahy stood still. There was an armchair by the fire, but the angle of light was wrong: it wouldn't be easy to read Hawkeye's face from there.

Hawkeye turned round from the fire and looked at Mulcahy. "Francis? You okay?" The look of hunger had gone from his face, as if Mulcahy had imagined it.

Mulcahy sat down on the sofa.

Hawkeye sat down at the other end, leaning back against the arm. He must have taken his shoes off earlier. He tucked his knees up, wrapping his arms around them, and looked at Mulcahy. "Do you know how specific you can make clauses in a rental agreement?"

"I don't know," Mulcahy said. "What do you have in mind?"

"This was my grandma's room. Then it was my mom's. I'd like it just to stay the way it is."

Mulcahy glanced round the room. It was shabby, but pleasant. "I don't see why you can't write a clause in saying that."

"I'd like to."

The books Hawkeye had picked out were packed into the carton. Hawkeye looked round the room again. "I can't even believe it belongs to me. The rest of the house, maybe, but this room? I can still remember my mom yelling at me for jumping on this sofa with my shoes on."

Mulcahy smiled. "It seems to have survived."

"I was pretty small at the time." He got up again and went over to a shelf by the fireplace, coming back with a framed photo. "About this age." He passed it over to Mulcahy.

The photograph was carefully posed, husband, wife, and son, all looking seriously at the photographer. The child was immediately recognisable. Mulcahy smiled at him, feeling a familiar tenderness. "How old are you?" he said, tapping the glass, looking back up at the familiar beaky nose and chin.

"Eight."

"You hadn't quite grown up to your face yet," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye tucked his hands behind his head and looked amused. "I was an ugly kid. Smart as hell, and smart-mouthed as hell, and ugly as sin."

"Who told you that?"

"Mirrors," Hawkeye said. "I hit puberty and a growth spurt and suddenly went from ugly to my current stunning good looks in the space of about two years. Can't compete with Billy, but I don't stop clocks any more."

"You had very strong features for a child," Mulcahy said. He glanced down at the photo again, and smiled. "I was so inconspicuous no one noticed I'm short-sighted till I was eight."

## Sins and Virtues

“What happened then?”

“I was sent for an eye test,” Mulcahy said, “and the school nurse asked me to read the chart on the wall, and I asked her ‘Which wall’?”

Hawkeye laughed: Mulcahy saw it, not only in his face but in his hands and feet. It was something he’d never been in a position to notice before.

“None of my brothers were short-sighted, and nor is my sister. Mam said it was probably because I read too much, but – ” Mulcahy smiled a little. “My sister read just as much as I did, and she didn’t need specs. Then again, she had her own room.”

“How many brothers do you have?” Hawkeye asked. “You never talked about them.”

“Five,” Mulcahy said. “All older than me.” He shrugged, feeling a rue so old it had worn the edges away. “To tell the truth, we’re simply not that close any more. If we ever were. I and my sister were the first two people in my family to go to college. When I was in the seminary, I used to go back for Christmas and Thanksgiving, but... But after Mam died, and when Mark and Gus were in the forces during the war – the world war – we just never managed it for a few years. And then, after I was ordained – there was too big a gap. We were in different worlds. I’m closer to my sister. Or I was.”

“Was?”

“She’s a nun,” Mulcahy said. “I haven’t yet written to her about – this.”

“Oh. Yes.” Hawkeye moved his feet uneasily. “I guess there wouldn’t be a formula in religious etiquette books.”

“No,” Mulcahy said. “It’s not something that’s supposed to happen. It’s – the only times I’ve heard of it happening before are when a priest is unfortunate enough to become an alcoholic. I don’t know how to tell her.”

Hawkeye looked back at him soberly. “You could always tell her you became an alcoholic.”

Laughing so hard and so unexpectedly actually *hurt*. Mulcahy choked and clutched at his ribs. He was helplessly doubled over when he felt Hawkeye’s hands on his shoulders. “I’m all right,” he tried to say out loud, but he wasn’t sure it got out. Tears of laughter were leaking from his eyes.

He managed to stop eventually, and sat up, still hiccupping with giggles. Hawkeye’s hand was warm on the back of his neck, and he was looking at him with puzzled amusement. After a moment, he lifted his other hand to Mulcahy’s face. It was almost like when he was checking Mulcahy’s eyes that afternoon: but not quite.

Hawkeye was looking at him very intently. Mulcahy swallowed.

“I’d like to kiss you,” Hawkeye said. “You gonna run away if I do?”

“No,” Mulcahy said. He tried to shift backwards, and realised that he couldn’t. He wanted to feel horrified, but he was still warm with too much laughter. “No. But – please don’t.”

“Why not?” Hawkeye’s fingers were moving on the back of his neck. Mulcahy no longer believed it was unconscious. He shivered. All impulse to laugh had fled.

“Because – ” He closed his eyes. “If you let go of me. Please – ”

Hawkeye let go of him. When Mulcahy opened his eyes again, Hawkeye had shifted to the other end of the sofa, and was sitting back up against it with his knees up. “And that’s another way of telling me to shut up,” he said.

Mulcahy rubbed the back of his neck. “Sorry,” he said.

“What for?” Hawkeye was looking at him oddly. “I was out of line. Not you.”

“I – ” Mulcahy wanted to be under a cold shower. “I realise my behaviour – my weakness – may have given you the wrong impression – ”

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye shook his head. His eyes were fixed on Mulcahy. "I get it. You're still a priest. I'm not – I shouldn't – I won't –" He stopped for the third time. "Okay, I am and I do. But I won't."

"Dear Lord, help me," Mulcahy said. He only knew he had said it out loud when he saw Hawkeye's eyebrows go up.

"You don't need to pray for help. I'm not going to do anything you don't want."

"I don't want – to want this."

"That I can't help you with."

"Just another 'not my problem'?" Mulcahy asked. He tucked his hands together, palms flat, fighting the urge to clench them into fists.

"You have feelings for me. I've got them for you, too. I don't see how they're sinful. Nor do you, from what you were saying."

"Love isn't sinful," Mulcahy said. He was still trembling, he realised, and tried to quell his body insurgent. "But what I meant, when I said you handled problems like a surgeon, is that –"

Hawkeye opened his mouth.

"Please, let me finish. This is very hard for me."

"For me too," Hawkeye said, with a look that was humorous without being pleasant: Mulcahy froze.

After a moment, Hawkeye said "I'm sorry. I'll shut up. Don't take your glasses off at me."

"Surgery is very hard to watch," Mulcahy said. "It's even harder to take part in it. The first time I had to assist you with an operation, when the nurses had been sent away, I was – petrified. All thumbs, as you said. A human body, naked, unconscious, being cut into and the inner organs exposed and stitched – I didn't think I'd ever be able to get used to it. I don't think I ever did, but I – but it didn't stop me from seeing that a surgeon can somehow detach himself from feeling what would be natural to feel about cutting up a fellow human being, and that this is a good detachment, like the detachment a good priest is – is supposed to be able to achieve."

Hawkeye was watching him, intently, his face as inexpressive as a mask.

"I – know that you're a good surgeon. But you can detach yourself from feeling what it would be natural to feel about other things. You did it when you – accepted that bet from Captain McIntyre, to – to seduce me. You detach yourself from the – the feelings you arouse in others. You make yourself into a cruel person. I wish you wouldn't, and not just because you make it very hard – very difficult for me to – resist you. Because I don't believe you like yourself very much when you get like this."

Hawkeye didn't say anything. He lifted his shoulders, dropped them again.

"I'm suspended from the priesthood, an application for laicization in my name is on its way to the Vatican, and my bishop thinks he should never have ordained me," Mulcahy said. "If it were only my priesthood, I – I think I would... surrender. I haven't – that night was the only time since I was ordained, but I have – I have had moments of weakness before. But for you and I to – if we were to go to bed –" They had gone to bed together last night, of course, Mulcahy remembered with a flush of embarrassment. He hadn't the stomach to use the cruder language of the gym showers that he remembered from his teenage years, and he didn't suppose Hawkeye had the Latin vocabulary of a priest. He settled for the simplest. "If we were to have sex – it would be a sin."

Hawkeye didn't move or say anything. He went on looking at Mulcahy for some time: the look of hunger was back, tempered by something else, some feeling that Mulcahy didn't have words for.

## Sins and Virtues

“You didn’t think it was a sin for Sturges and his buddy. Or for these two lesbians -- ”

“Please, Hawkeye.”

“Sorry. These two women who were living together. If not for them, why for you?”

Mulcahy was silent for a moment. He was inexpressibly shocked, even though he could see it was a fair question by some lights. He had seen the feeling that Sturges and Lowry had for each other as the love of David and Jonathan: he had told himself that the mutual devotion of Ruth and Naomi had been praised down millennia of tradition.

No such comparison occurred to him when he thought of his own complicated feelings for Hawkeye: nor when he tried to imagine what Hawkeye might feel for him.

“Francis?”

It had been longer than a moment he had been staring at Hawkeye. “They loved each other,” he said.

Hawkeye’s face changed. He looked confused for an instant, and then something darker: hollow-eyed he stared back at Mulcahy. His mouth opened, but not in speech: he closed it again without saying anything. He stood up. The fire didn’t need another log, but he threw one on anyway, and moved sideways, his back still to Mulcahy, to the shelves from which he had taken the photograph. He raised his hands, elbows out, to his face – perhaps to reach up to a shelf at eye-level, but perhaps not.

Mulcahy’s first instinct was to go to him. He sat on the edge of the sofa and stared at Hawkeye’s back and knew he couldn’t: he could not trust himself to keep a comforting touch brotherly, not carnal. Hawkeye would stop, if Mulcahy asked him to: but he was not sure he had the strength of will to ask him again. For this reason alone, he should not be a priest. His bishop had been right.

His bishop wouldn’t have approved of any of this. He got up and went over. “Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye’s shoulders twitched, not quite a shrug. He was staring at the shelves: family photographs and knick-knacks, which must have been familiar to Hawkeye for years. His hands were resting on the edge of the shelf.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye turned, looking startled. “For what?” There were wet marks around the corners of his eyes, and he had a wide uncheerful grin on his face. “I never knew you felt like that about surgery. Or surgeons. Look, I’m – just – in a mood this evening. No reason you have to take care of it. I’ve done enough to you. Look, let’s – finish up in here – ” He began taking photos off the shelves, one by one “ – and I’ll need to pack, but you don’t need to help with that. You want any of the books in here? They’re mostly old stuff, but some of it’s good. You can ignore any of the books on that shelf, they’re all school prizes. The school bought a job lot of Louisa M. Alcotts sixty years ago and they’ve been handing them out ever since. Unless you’re into *Little Women*? I won two copies for spelling, and my dad won three for arithmetic.” He handed Mulcahy a stack of half a dozen framed photos. “Can you fit all these in that box?”

“No,” Mulcahy said helplessly. He looked back at the carton. “I mean, yes. I should think – yes. Hawkeye – ”

“Did you ever get that letter I wrote you?”

Mulcahy nearly dropped the photos. He put them down in the carton, and stood up again, facing Hawkeye. “Yes,” he said.

“You didn’t write back.”

## Sins and Virtues

“No.” Mulcahy had no excuses, no justifications to give. He would never see Hawkeye again after tomorrow. “I was afraid of my feelings for you.” He kept his hands down by his sides and his chin up. He could not blame Hawkeye. “Those had nothing to do with – the bet.”

Hawkeye looked at him, speechlessly, for what felt like a long time. When his eyes glanced away, he spoke slowly and with plain difficulty. “Francis, I care about you. I may not be that good at showing it, and I’m never any good at saying the words, but – I do. Right now I’m angry and I’m horny and I want a drink, and I made a pass at you when I shouldn’t have. I’m sorry. I’m going to go upstairs and pack and write a note for the maid, and then – whatever you want. I promise – ”

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said again. “I should never have told you – ”

“Don’t,” Hawkeye said it abruptly, with visible anger for the first time. “I did it. It was my fault. My stupid fault.” He stepped back, away from Mulcahy, and headed for the door.

“It wasn’t – ”

Hawkeye turned round. “Don’t,” he said. “Whatever you want to say to me – save it for later. Okay? Not – right now.”

“I wanted to say,” Mulcahy said, dry-mouthed, seeing now all the things that would never get said, “I care for you.”

Hawkeye looked at him. His eyes were wide and hollow. “Yeah,” he said. “And if you want to take a shower, cold water is one thing we have in unlimited quantities. Help yourself.”

It was dark outside, and cold. Mulcahy stood in the doorway, letting the cold air flood over him like the moonlight, until his eyes were adjusted. He went down the front steps, holding firmly on to the rail, felt his way along the front of the porch to a dry spot, and knelt down. He had rather be alone to pray.

“Dear God,” he said out loud when he could trust his voice, and then, deciding he couldn’t trust his own thoughts, “*amo te super omnia proximum meum propter te,*” and went on, trying to focus on his feelings and not his body. *Dear Lord, I love you above all things, with my whole heart and soul... I love my neighbour as myself for the love of you... I forgive all who have injured me, and ask pardon of all whom I have injured.* It was cold. His body had gone from lustful to aching. He was finding it easier to focus on his conscience with every repetition of the prayer.

“...*In hac caritate vivere et mori statuo. Amen.*” He stared at his folded hands. “Dear God, you know I love Hawkeye. In your infinite wisdom, You know exactly how I love Hawkeye.” *Which is just as well, because I find it hard to put into words, even talking to you, dear Lord.* “Help me. If I sinned in coming here, forgive me my sin. Let me do no harm. Bless Hawkeye, and have him always in your keeping.” He paused a moment, and realised he could say it without forcing the words. “I thought you wanted me to be a priest. But whatever you want me to do, I’m here to do. Your will, not mine, be done. Amen.”

Now all he had to do was stand up, walk back into the house, meet Hawkeye in the same friendship they had always been able to offer each other before, and tell him... *You’re a good surgeon. You’re a good man.*

And tell him goodbye.

Mulcahy stood up, dusting off the knees of his trousers. His legs were stiff from kneeling in the cold: he rested his hands on the front of the house and did a couple of careful stretches.

## Sins and Virtues

When he looked along at the front porch, the door was open, and Hawkeye was standing at the top of the steps, looking round with a swift urgency in his movements. He was carrying something under his arm.

“Hawkeye?” Mulcahy said out loud.

Hawkeye’s face turned towards him and his whole body seemed to relax. Mulcahy made his way towards the front steps: Hawkeye came to meet him, moving swiftly. The thing he was carrying was a coat: he shook it out and wrapped it round Mulcahy’s shoulders. He waited for Mulcahy to shrug himself into it, and took hold of his hand. His finger traced three characters on Mulcahy’s palm: O, K, ?.

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye grimaced. “Oh, damn you,” he said, quite distinctly, and then something else. His hand holding Mulcahy’s was warm. S, T, A, Y, O, U, T, ?, he traced. W, O, N, T, B, O, T, H, E, R, Y, O, U, I, N, S, I, D, E.

“It’s all right,” Mulcahy said, feeling awkward. “I was just coming back in.”

Hawkeye shook his head, and Mulcahy saw a brief flash of teeth as he grinned. He let go of Mulcahy’s hand, and stepped aside. He followed Mulcahy in.

In the brightly lit kitchen, Mulcahy said apologetically, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to worry you.”

Hawkeye had gone directly to the stove and put another pan of water on. He turned around. “I didn’t mean to bother you,” he said. “I heard you go out, I didn’t hear you come back in. It gets cold at night around here, even in the summer. Figured you could do with a coat. When I didn’t see you –” His face twisted, briefly. “I was standing there thinking how the hell do I find someone in the woods after dark who can’t hear me calling his name?” He looked across the room at Mulcahy. “I’m sorry about what happened earlier.”

Mulcahy shook his head. “I’m sorry,” he said. “You’re a good man, and a good surgeon. I shouldn’t have said – everything I said.”

Hawkeye turned back to the stove. After a long minute, he glanced over his shoulder. “Drive you up to Portland tomorrow morning, if you like.”

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said. It was warm in the kitchen, and he shrugged off the coat again. It wasn’t Hawkeye’s: it was made for a shorter man.

“My dad’s,” Hawkeye said. “I’d have taken it with his other stuff this afternoon if I’d remembered it. You might as well have it.”

“I couldn’t possibly –”

“Take it as a Catholic. The Protestants got their share. Coffee? Or there’s cocoa somewhere.”

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said. He smiled. “Cocoa.”

“Really? Okay.” Hawkeye was moving quickly, speaking quickly, if distinctly. He was sober still: Mulcahy couldn’t have mistaken that. He made the cocoa and handed it to Mulcahy. “Drink it and get warm. Sit down.”

Mulcahy sat. Hawkeye sat down on the other side of the table, leaning forward. He looked around the kitchen, as if taking it in, keeping an eye on Mulcahy. He said almost as if to himself, “You know, this really is a great house for kids. Danny and Mary are going to love it.”

“I’m sure they will.” Mulcahy smiled. “It feels very comfortable.” He consciously relaxed his grip on the mug, trying to make himself feel that the next comment was casual. “You should get married, Hawkeye.”

“What?” Hawkeye looked directly at him, his eyebrows going up with surprise and a kind of amusement.

“You did say you were thinking about it. This morning.”

## Sins and Virtues

“I did?” Hawkeye was frowning and smiling at once now. “Oh. Yeah. I remember.” He leaned back and folded his arms, and shrugged. “I shouldn’t have said that.” He still looked more amused than annoyed, which Mulcahy took with considerable relief. “Why do you want me to get married?”

Mulcahy drank his cocoa to give himself a moment’s breathing space. There were a number of more theologically sound reasons that he could give, but Hawkeye wouldn’t have listened to them. Nor was he sure he had the right to give them. “I don’t think you should live alone,” he said.

Hawkeye wasn’t smiling now. “I don’t want to talk about that,” he said slowly, as if he were thinking out the answer as he went along. His arms were still folded, and his hands were gripping his elbows.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said, immediately. He felt uncomfortable. He wanted to be able to think of something else to say, something unconnected with anything that had transpired in the past few hours, but he couldn’t.

Hawkeye looked as if he too was struggling to find something to say. Finally he seemed to give up and leaned forward, planting his elbows on the table, leaning his forehead on his folded hands. He looked very tired.

Mulcahy finished his cocoa. “Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye lifted his head. “Yeah?”

“I should go to bed. Maybe you should too?”

The weariness on Hawkeye’s face broke into a grin. “Yeah,” he said.

Mulcahy decided to pretend he hadn’t seen that. “What time do you have to get back?”

“We should leave here about nine. I’m all packed. How about you?” Hawkeye wasn’t grinning any more.

“I never really unpacked.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “Look.” He stopped. “I’m sorry,” he said, finally. “For – for running you ragged the past couple of days.”

“I was glad to help,” Mulcahy said, startled. “I always like to feel useful.”

“I’m sorry about what happened to you,” Hawkeye said. “But I’m grateful you came here.” His shoulders twitched, not quite a shrug. “If you hadn’t been here – ” He stopped again. “I’d have hated to leave my dad’s room to be cleared out by Billy and Sarah. Thank you.”

Mulcahy swallowed. He would have given anything, at this moment, to be able to touch Hawkeye without fear of sin. He pressed his hands together, and said, “Hawkeye, what you said earlier – ”

“What was that?”

“You said that you weren’t that good at showing it when you care about people,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah?”

“You are very good at it,” Mulcahy said. “Thank you.”

Hawkeye looked at him a long moment. When he smiled, there was no cynicism in it. “You’re welcome.”

Hawkeye didn’t say much on the road from Crabapple Cove to Portland: he let Mulcahy drive the second half of the way, which cut off all conversation. Inside the city limits, he gave directions by hand signals: Mulcahy had assumed he was being directed to the bus station, until they parked outside an apartment building.

“I live here,” Hawkeye said. He paused. “I’m not going to ask you up. I’m due at the hospital in two hours.”

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy nodded. He'd been trying to think of what to say to Hawkeye, and it was difficult. To tell Hawkeye not to give himself a hard time over this, or ask him not to drink too much, would hardly be effective.

"Write to me," Hawkeye said. "You know. Let me know how you're getting on."

"Of course." Mulcahy nodded. He wasn't sure what he'd find to say. "Hawkeye – there's something I wanted to say to you, before we part."

"Sure," Hawkeye said. He glanced at his watch. "Want to help me get the boxes inside?"

Hawkeye had put four cartons in the trunk of the car: they were none of them large or heavy, and it took only a few minutes for the two of them to get them inside the building. Hawkeye scribbled down his address on a scrap of paper, and handed it to Mulcahy.

They were standing outside the car. Hawkeye was juggling the keys casually from hand to hand, his eyes fixed on Mulcahy.

"I'm not a surgeon," Mulcahy said. "I'm not qualified to judge. But I know who is."

Hawkeye gave a slanting look up at the sky. "We're not on speaking terms."

Mulcahy half-smiled, half amused. "I meant Major – Doctor Winchester."

"Charles?" Hawkeye raised his eyebrows. "Same thing, in his estimation. What about him?"

"I can't imagine Doctor Winchester saying he thought you were a good surgeon out of friendship or liking or kindness, Hawkeye."

"Neither can I."

"Well," Mulcahy said.

"Yeah, but he only ever saw me do meatball surgery."

"You may be a little behind on techniques that the other doctors were learning while you were in Korea, but that doesn't make you a bad surgeon. I'm sure Doctor Winchester would agree – he must be having some of the same difficulties, I suppose."

"He was there for less than a year," Hawkeye said in disgust.

"Well?" Mulcahy asked. "You were there for three."

Hawkeye looked both startled and relieved. He shook his head. "Is this what you were thinking about, all the way up in the car?" He was smiling.

Mulcahy smiled back. "Yes." Almost all.

Hawkeye opened the back door and reached in, picking up the small case he'd packed. He slammed it shut and tossed the keys at Mulcahy, who caught them, surprised.

"The insurance documents and everything else are in the glove compartment. I'm a terrible driver. You have it."

Mulcahy held out the keys. "I can't accept this."

Hawkeye grinned at him: a tired grin, but quite real. "I'm not giving you a choice. It'll be safer with you than with me. Drive it in good health."

"I *can't* accept this," Mulcahy protested more strongly. He went on holding out the keys.

"Come on, you've seen how I drive. You're a far better driver than I am. Take it. It's yours." Hawkeye stepped backwards, holding his case in both his hands, as if he was trying to evade having the keys thrown back at him. "You can and you will. Take it to make me feel better. Take it to keep me off the roads. Take it for any reason you like, Francis, but it's yours."



## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy's hand faltered. He didn't want to accept it: this wasn't a handful of neckties or an old coat or a lobster dinner. But the determination on Hawkeye's face was absolute. He wanted to give the car away.

Mulcahy put the keys into his pocket, and saw relief in the changed lines of Hawkeye's body. He managed a smile. "Thank you," he said, formally.

Hawkeye put the case down on the sidewalk and came closer. He was looking down at Mulcahy. For a brief moment, Mulcahy thought Hawkeye was going to kiss him, but the other man only looked at him, intently and closely. "Take care."

"Goodbye."

32 932 words

October 2004

## Afterword

New York School for the Deaf is a real school, founded in 1818, now known as New York State School for the Deaf. Mulcahy teaches at Fanwood Campus in White Plains, built in 1937. The superintendent of the school in 1953 was Mr. Fred Sparks, Jr, who held that position from 1947 to 1961. I know and have used nothing of him but his name.

All Catholic theology and belief described in this novel is based on my own research: I am grateful to Daegaer for her advice, but any errors are mine and not hers.

Shoshanna, editrix supreme, provided incalculable help with the first and following drafts of "Sins and Virtues". Thank you.

### **Susan Elizabeth Leinbach**

Born: 28th November 1966

Died: 15th June 2006

Susan wrote as Iolanthe: you'll find her *M\*A\*S\*H* slash stories on her website, [iolanthe.netfirms.com/Slashfic.htm](http://iolanthe.netfirms.com/Slashfic.htm). She wrote the first Hawkeye/Mulcahy stories I read: "Spin the Bottle", "Compassion", the unfinished story "Playing the Game", and a trilogy: "Caught", "Possibilities", "Escape". (She also wrote as Scarlatti on livejournal, where we first met.)

It was a sentence from the "Caught" trilogy that inspired what became "Sins and Virtues":

"I see what you mean," I mumbled, half to myself. The problems were definitely coming into focus now. 'Uh... Dad, this is Francis. He followed me home from the war -- can I keep him?' Oh, no, *that* wouldn't be too awkward....

In an online conversation, I asked Susan's permission to write the story that happened "after the war" – taking the "Caught" trilogy as backstory. She agreed, and I began to write what later turned into the opening 1500 words (give or take) of "For Ever". This fragment ended with the sentence "This close, despite the toothpaste and soap, Mulcahy could smell that Hawkeye was still drunk." There the story paused. I had begun it thinking simply "What's the worst thing I could do to Hawkeye? Kill off

## Sins and Virtues

his father. What's the worst thing I could do to Mulcahy? Defrock him.") Soon afterwards, I decided I needed to write my own backstory to "For Ever", and so "An Officer and a Gentleman" and "Out and Far Tonight" got written. (Also, I saw *Goodbye, Farewell, Amen* and discovered that when Mulcahy had arrived at Hawkeye's home in Crabapple Cove, he was profoundly deaf – which utterly changed the sketched idea I had for "Such as We".)

Much grew out of little in writing this sequence, but it was Iolanthe who first made Hawkeye's and Mulcahy's feelings for each other erotic to me, and it was Susan who let me exercise my imagination on the story that could happen if Hawkeye and Mulcahy met again after the war, if they had made love in Korea.

Thank you, Susan. I wish we could have met in person: I'm glad we touched via fandom.

Doug Spencer, Susan's partner, wrote in response to a query about donations in Susan's memory:

"I might suggest that any charity local to you which is involved in cancer research, cancer treatment or palliative care would be pleased to receive donations in her memory. Cancer Research UK (formerly The Imperial Cancer Research Campaign and The Cancer Research Campaign), Marie Curie Cancer Care and the Macmillan Nurses are all organisation worth googling for in the UK. Similar organisations exist in the USA and Canada. Any one of a number of local hospices, and a couple of hospice umbrella organisations, would be pleased to have your money.

"If you're a taxpayer, there may be techniques provided by your government to ensure that your donation reaches its target accompanied by any tax which you might otherwise have had to pay: in the UK, google for "gift aid", or fill out the appropriate sections of the screen if you're donating online. Similar techniques will exist in other jurisdictions.

"If these issues don't enthuse you, there will be others which do. Contribute time, energy and money to causes which you feel are going to help you to honour Susan's memory. Wherever you choose to give it, whatever you choose to give will be gratefully received and faithfully applied."

"Sins and Virtues" is distributed free of charge. You can copy it and pass on copies to anyone you think might like it. Please include this page whenever you copy "Sins and Virtues", in whole or in part. Remember Susan. I will.

Love,

Jane Carnall

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