

## Such As We

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### February, 1955

In good years, New York in February can be an early echo of spring. This was not one of those years. It was raining: it had been raining most of the week, off and on. The sky was grey and grim and low, hanging heavy between the skyscrapers.

Mulcahy's wallet and his keys were in the right-hand pocket of his overcoat, and his scarf was in the left-hand pocket. The overcoat was still hanging up in the hall, and the door was locked behind him.

He walked. Uphill was the right direction if he were going to work, though there was no chance he would be able to get there.

The letter was folded into the inside pocket of his jacket. The paper was stiff and heavy: he could feel the corners through two layers of cloth. It rubbed against him: it was impossible to forget it was there.

His trousers were wet below the knee already, and the shoulders of his jacket were soaked. He didn't feel cold, exactly.

He wasn't even sure what he did feel. He didn't want to think about what he felt.

The rain blurred his specs. For the first few blocks, he was walking against the flow of commuters, dodging them with the kind of instinct that short-sighted people develop in crowds. When the sidewalks were emptier, he walked, head down, seeing words on heavy paper, not stones beneath his feet.

### Friday 8th October, 1954

One of the things Hawkeye liked about being a civilian was weekends. The army didn't do weekends. At best, it did 96-hour passes, and that just wasn't the same. He'd been out of the army over a year, and he still got a kick out of being able to leave work on Friday and know he wouldn't be back in till Monday.

Of course, the problem was that all the other civilians could do that too. Obviously it would have made sense to have set up an appointment in writing.

His stomach hurt.

It would make sense if he wanted Mulcahy to make up his mind what he felt about Hawkeye before he saw him. Or arrange a prior appointment half an hour after he'd arranged to meet Hawkeye. Or decide to be washing his hair for the next three months.

Or run a mile.

Hawkeye was kind of hoping it wouldn't come to that. For one thing, Mulcahy had always been able to beat him, either at a sprint or long distance.

The school was quiet. It didn't feel empty: it just felt quiet. Hawkeye's main plan was to walk in, look round, find out where Francis Mulcahy was teaching, and catch him as he left. After that he'd improvise.

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It wasn't much of a plan, but he hadn't been able to think of a better one since July. He was on his third corridor now, and still no one had stopped him. It was as easy as putting on a white coat and a stethoscope and walking into a hospital.

On this corridor, there were voices, distant through the doors and the glass panels beside the doors. Hawkeye walked slowly down the hall.

Every man Hawkeye had fallen for had tended to be on the tall side of high. Mulcahy was a few inches shorter than him. Nicely built, though. Solid muscles. Boxer. Runner. Shy and quiet with a conscience a mile high, three miles thick, and made of steel: standing by the blackboard in one of the rooms Hawkeye had just passed. He took two steps back and looked again. He was in the right place.

Mulcahy's wire-framed glasses made his face look both fragile and plain: slide them off – Hawkeye's fingers twitched, wanting to do it – and you saw he had the kind of looks that come from good bones. He was well-proportioned, well-made: Hawkeye had never been able to hold him as he wanted to, and feel him rest against Hawkeye, head fallen back in the curve of Hawkeye's shoulder, his back relaxed against Hawkeye's chest and stomach, his strong legs nestled against Hawkeye's legs. Hawkeye stood in the corridor, empty-handed, and knew with a physical sense of surety what it would be like to take Mulcahy in his arms and kiss the back of his neck and feel him at rest.

Mulcahy was writing on the board. He turned away from it and out of Hawkeye's field of view: Hawkeye heard him begin to speak. "Who can tell me – "

Hawkeye opened the door. His stomach hurt. Mulcahy was standing with his back to him: he hadn't noticed the door opening, yet.

The children – boys and girls in their early teens – had noticed him. They were staring. In an ordinary classroom, they'd be whispering. Hawkeye grinned at them. Mulcahy glanced over, following the direction of their gaze, and saw him. His eyes went wide and his mouth opened. He came a few steps towards Hawkeye, looking as if he disbelieved his eyes.

"Hawkeye?"

"Last time I looked."

"What are you *doing* here?"

Hawkeye smiled. His stomach gave a twist. He didn't let himself react visibly. "It's a long story. Got time to see me after school?"

Blank astonishment faded into a smile: half-reluctant, unmistakably affectionate, still puzzled. "I suppose so. But you shouldn't *be* here. Go and wait for me in the receptionist's office, please."

Relief wasn't a long enough word for it. Hawkeye could have danced, except that it would have made him even more conspicuous than he already felt. His stomach had stopped churning.

"I could juggle," he offered cheerfully.

Mulcahy's smile faded. "Go *now*."

Hawkeye backed out.

It was twenty minutes after the students had left before Mulcahy appeared in the reception office. One look at him, and Hawkeye suspected the jumpiness had transferred directly from Hawkeye's stomach to Mulcahy's.

"You know, you really shouldn't just come into the school and wander around," Mulcahy said.

"You know, you're absolutely right, and I never will again," Hawkeye said promptly. "Can I buy you some coffee? We've got a lot to catch up on."

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Mulcahy looked uncertain. Hawkeye stood still and was careful not to smile. Switching on the charm would be for later. Much later, probably.

Mulcahy's smile was polite, but at least it was a smile. "Well, I have some marking to do."

"Do you have to start it right now?"

"No, I suppose not. Perhaps some coffee would be welcome." Mulcahy's smile was still polite.

"I saw a diner on my way from the station," Hawkeye said.

"Yes, I know it."

The diner was small, clean, and smelt pleasantly of coffee and fried food. It was well-lit. Hawkeye waited until they were both sitting down and Mulcahy could focus on his face. "How's it been going?"

"Very well," Mulcahy said. "I wrote to you last month – did you get my letter?"

"Yes," Hawkeye said. "Sorry I didn't reply to it – it's been a busy month."

"Oh, that's all right," Mulcahy said. "What's your news? Why are you in this part of the world?"

"I have a job at Bellevue."

Mulcahy put his coffee cup down and stared at Hawkeye. "In New York?"

"Yes." Hawkeye nodded.

Mulcahy was looking wide-eyed, utterly startled, and very kissable. He picked up his coffee again and put it down without drinking from it. "How – when did you get the job?"

"I started on Monday. I'd heard I got it four weeks ago. I kept meaning to write to you about it, but I was so busy packing up the Portland apartment I never found the time. So I thought I'd just come up here and see you."

"I was wondering why I hadn't heard from you," Mulcahy said.

Mulcahy had written to Hawkeye punctually – and, Hawkeye had felt, reading the letters, punctiliously – once a fortnight, regular as clockwork, since July. Hawkeye had usually managed to reply within a week. His letters in response had likely seemed as stilted and polite as Mulcahy's were: there were too many things he was thinking about that he could not write down.

"Do you have to do the marking tonight?" Hawkeye asked. "It's Friday. Do you have classes tomorrow?"

"No," Mulcahy admitted. "But I like to get it over with. And there are quite a number of school activities I like to get involved with on Saturdays, which rather eat up my time."

"I was going to ask you out for dinner. Celebrate my new job. Hear all the news about yours. How about tomorrow evening?"

Mulcahy picked up his cup and used it to shield his face. He was drinking from it, probably, but Hawkeye had never seen anyone who could use a coffee cup for masking purposes so effectively.

"Why Bellevue?" Mulcahy asked at last.

"I talked to Doctor Allen about moving away from Maine General," Hawkeye said. "And he knows Doctor Courmand at Bellevue." This was all perfectly true. "Have you heard of Doctor Courmand?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Big name in thoracic surgery. He's a heart man. Brilliant surgeon. He's a regular pin-up in at least three medical journals. There are techniques in use in Bellevue that no one else is using yet, not anywhere in the world."

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The difference between a polite smile from Mulcahy and a genuine one was nothing measurable: but Hawkeye saw the one melt into the other and knew the difference. “That’s wonderful, Hawkeye.”

In the past three months Hawkeye had read every paper Cournand had written on heart surgery: he could riff on them *ex tempore* for up to two hours. He knew because he’d done it when he’d been interviewed. He intended to use less graphic detail than he’d have used with another surgeon, but half-way through explaining Cournand’s technique of successfully catheterizing a cardiac vein to get a mixed venous blood sample from a ventricle of the heart, he realised that he’d lost track of his good intentions. “Sorry.”

Mulcahy was still smiling, and it was still genuine. “That’s wonderful,” he said again. “You wrote so little about your work at Maine General, and you sounded so despondent about it last time we spoke. But this man wants to work with you?”

“Well, more like I want to work with him. So far he thinks I’m ‘promising’. I haven’t asked him what he thinks I’m promising. So, want to come dissect a steak with me tomorrow night?”

“Where?”

Hawkeye put on a mock pompous accent. “I believe there are a number of fine restaurants in New York City.” He remembered who he was talking to, and laughed.

“What’s the joke?”

“It’s hard to do a silly voice to someone who’s lip-reading.”

Mulcahy’s smile got a quirk to it. “That’s true. Well, every affliction has its blessings.”

“Sir!” Hawkeye jerked his chin up. “Are you impugning my acting abilities?”

Mulcahy actually laughed. “I don’t think you should give up your day job.”

Hawkeye made a disappointed face. “You have wrecked all my hopes and ambitions.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Hawkeye planted his elbows on the table and grinned widely. “Could you be less apologetic if you tried? Listen, I don’t know about you, but I’m hungry – what’s the food like here?” His stomach had been hurting at lunchtime.

“It’s quite good,” Mulcahy said. “I usually have my meals up at the school, though, and – ” he glanced at his watch “ – I should be getting back.”

“See you tomorrow?”

“Certainly,” Mulcahy said. “Where?”

“Want to meet me at Grand Central? I’ll meet you there by the platform for the train that gets in at twenty past six, okay?”

“Okay,” Mulcahy said. He was still smiling. He finished his coffee and stood up. “It’s good to see you, Hawkeye.”

“Good to see you too,” Hawkeye said. “See you tomorrow.” He waited, all but holding his breath, but Mulcahy only nodded and lifted his hand goodbye.

It was going to work. If he had to sit on his hands for the next three months and then use all his considerable talents of wit, charm, persuasion...

“Ah, who am I kidding,” Hawkeye said out loud. “Patience.”

“What was that, bud?” The man behind the counter was leaning forward over it, eyeing Hawkeye with open curiosity.

“Nothing,” Hawkeye said, and then “Did I see the magic words?”

“What?”

“Breakfast served all day.”

“Sure. What do you want?”

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Hawkeye squinted at the menu. "Two eggs, hash browns, side of bacon."

"How do you want your eggs?"

"Over easy," Hawkeye said, and grinned. His stomach didn't hurt. He was hungry. He had a guaranteed appointment with Francis Mulcahy in a little more than twenty-four hours. And breakfast smelt *fine*. Things hadn't looked this good in months. In years. "Over easy. And a short stack of pancakes."

The man leaned his elbows on the counter and looked at Hawkeye with frank disbelief for a moment. Hawkeye gave him back look for look. He was all out of wisecracks for now.

He woke up at four in the morning, startled out of nowhere, and sat up, heart beating so hard he could feel it against his ribs. He didn't recognise the room – a hotel in Tokyo or Seoul – and no one was with him –

The moment passed, as it always did. At least the room looked unfamiliar because it *was* unfamiliar: he'd slept there for less than a week. It had been worst of all when it happened in the old house in Crabapple Cove. There was no one with him because he was a civilian again, and no one was dead.

Dad was dead.

"Four in the morning is not a good time for this, Dad," Hawkeye said out loud. "Do you have to be dead right now? Couldn't you wait?"

Push-ups sometimes helped, shoving him over into sleep with sheer physical weariness: a belt of Scotch usually did the trick, though he couldn't risk it if he were operating the next day: reading himself to sleep was pretty much infallible, but could take an hour or more.

Sex was a pretty good way of getting to sleep, too. But Hawkeye had been having more trouble even jerking off in the past three months than he had since he'd cracked the proximal phalanx in his right thumb and had a cast on his hand for six weeks. He kept thinking about Francis: and that distracted him in more ways than one.

Mostly in ways he didn't want to be distracted into when he just wanted to jerk off and go to sleep. It was as bad as it had been the weeks after Trapper left. No, worse. At least when Trapper had gone, Hawkeye had known – well, he had known when he thought about it – that after the war Trapper was never going to want what he had had in a tent in the middle of Korea.

If he'd thought about it when Trapper was there, he'd have known that, too.

He'd had a hard time jerking off when Carlye left him, but at least then he'd known three cruising places between their apartment and the hospital. Friendly hands and mouths were a distinct improvement on his own right hand, especially when he couldn't think of anything but someone who didn't want him any more.

He wanted Francis. He was trying to do his thinking in advance for once, instead of doing it all afterwards.

The problem was, that hard as he thought, he kept coming up against the solid fact of Mulcahy's conscience. Mulcahy was kind-hearted, obliging, liked to be useful, and was as persuadable as the next man – unless you were trying to push him into doing something he knew was wrong. At which point, the pleasant, shy, soft-spoken man would turn into a pleasant but immovable wall of solid steel.

Persuading Francis to move in with him might have been possible if Francis didn't already know that Hawkeye found him attractive. Getting Francis drunk enough to be persuaded to have sex with him despite his conscience might have been possible but for two obstacles. Hawkeye had already tried it and had discovered it was a sure route to a one-night stand; and he had decided already that if anyone tried to do that to

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Francis Mulcahy again, Hawkeye was going to kill him. Even if it was Hawkeye himself.

Maybe especially if it was Hawkeye himself.

Neither wit, charm, persuasion, nor liquor would work. Patience might. It was just possible that, after Mulcahy had been formally laicized, he'd turn around and discover that it was okay to let himself be taken care of by a skinny stoop-shouldered doctor whose grasp on sanity felt, at times, perilously tenuous.

The one thing that made Hawkeye feel that this was not just a crazy plan was that Mulcahy *had* come all the way from Philadelphia to Crabapple Cove, four hundred miles or so, not exactly on the direct route to New York. He'd come not even being sure Hawkeye was *there*, let alone knowing that Hawkeye would need him. He'd come because he wanted something from Hawkeye – and Hawkeye wasn't even sure whether he'd got it.

He wanted Francis. In bed with him, eating breakfast with him, sharing a cup of coffee with him, smiling sideways at him with that almost invisible sense of humour. If he couldn't have him in bed – and Hawkeye wanted him there – he could at least have him living here. Waking up at four in the morning wouldn't be so bad if there was – “Someone,” Hawkeye said out loud. “God. *Someone*.” He laughed out loud, a cracked sound in his own ears. “God, I'll take good care of him,” he said. “Let me have him. I need him. You've got lots of priests, you're not going to miss one.”

Some prayer. Without quite willing it, Hawkeye called Francis to mind: smiling, kind, his blue eyes intent and focussed on Hawkeye's face – Francis's face a little fragile, very serious, infinitely vulnerable, and the steel-strength behind that.

“If I believed in you,” Hawkeye said, lying back, staring up at the ceiling, “I wouldn't believe you'd want to let him go.”

He wanted Francis, and he hoped it wasn't going to take more than three months to get him. Six months to laicization, Francis had said, and that had been back in July. Three months more.

## Saturdays in October, 1954

Mulcahy had met Hawkeye at Grand Central, six-thirty, three Saturday evenings in a row so far: each time Mulcahy had been fairly sure it would be the last. Twice he'd told Hawkeye to leave a message with the receptionist at the school if Hawkeye changed his plans.

Hawkeye hadn't. He talked with his usual exuberance about his work, but hadn't mentioned his personal life – a silence that Mulcahy was perhaps too conscious of, given the circumstances under which he himself worked.

The first time, in a steakhouse, Mulcahy had returned the money Hawkeye had left when he gave Mulcahy his father's car. Hawkeye had taken it, raising his eyebrows, and opened it.

“You really think I'm worth this much?”

So long as Hawkeye was teasing like this, Mulcahy felt safe. “You left it in the glove compartment.”

“Gas money,” Hawkeye said. “I didn't want to see my dad's old car starve.” And they'd talked of other things: but not about Mulcahy's work.

There was an abyssal difference between a priest who had been deafened, and a deaf teacher who was silent about his past: that he'd expected.

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He liked his supervisor, Albert Moskowitz: he liked most of the other staff. Fred Sparks was a kindly and helpful man. He found it difficult to talk with them casually outside school hours, because there was so much about his past he could not talk about. He had told them the lie that Hawkeye had promised him was half a truth, that he had been a corpsman in Korea for the duration of the war. But he could not justify to himself expanding on that lie: the only thing he could do was to say he preferred not to talk about it.

They thought he had been a teacher in Pennsylvania before he had gone to Korea: but there again, though he was almost required to tell this half-truth, since he could not tell them he had been a priest, he could not justify building on it with further half-true constructions about a secular career in teaching.

He knew they found him quiet and dull. He wished it could be otherwise. He hoped that after a while, it would be less conspicuous that he didn't talk about his past before he came to Fanwood.

Standing outside the restaurant, Hawkeye turned to him and grinned. "I haven't had a Korean meal since the last time I ate in Rosie's."

Mulcahy smiled back. "Neither have I." Hawkeye was already pushing the door open: air filled with the smell of spices rushed out into the street. He followed Hawkeye in.

The smell wasn't quite what Mulcahy remembered: the menu looked only half-familiar. He glanced up and caught Hawkeye's eye: the other man grinned at him and said something. Mulcahy frowned. He didn't like asking people to repeat themselves.

Hawkeye said something more, and his head tilted sideways. Mulcahy smiled and nodded. He thought about getting out his notepad. He was startled when Hawkeye stood up and came round the table. When he was within a couple of feet, it was possible to read what he was saying: "The light's too dim. You can't hear me."

"I'm afraid not," Mulcahy admitted. "Sorry."

Hawkeye pointed to the door. Mulcahy shook his head and tapped the menu.

The waiter who appeared was young, and unmistakably Korean: he spoke to both of them. Glancing up, Mulcahy saw Hawkeye answer. The waiter smiled. Mulcahy felt for his notepad, and thought about standing up and producing notepad and pen and asking the waiter and Hawkeye to write down what they were saying to each other. After a minute – no more, though it felt longer – Hawkeye and the waiter finished talking, and Hawkeye turned back to Mulcahy.

"Okay. I asked if he could turn the light up, and he said no. Then I asked if they deliver, and he said they could let us have take-out. You want to come back to my place and eat? Better lighting and it's only fifteen minutes on the subway."

"What?" Mulcahy – both startled and irritated – sat still and tapped at the menu again. "Let's just eat here."

Hawkeye's gaze focussed on him: it was odd how definite the change was. He crouched down, bringing his face on a level with Mulcahy's. "Sorry. Listen, I know you'd love the opportunity to lecture me without even having to tell me to shut up, but I'd like to be able to talk to you, too."

"What about?"

Hawkeye shrugged. "Heart surgery. How the food compares to Rosie's home cooking. Bar cooking. Whatever. Come on." He wasn't even turning on the charm: he was just – for Hawkeye – being reasonable.

Mulcahy nodded. "Fine," he added, out loud.

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In any case, he was beginning to think that any fears he had had about Hawkeye's feelings for him had been egotistical and foolish. This ought to be a relief to him, and in a way it was.

Hawkeye's apartment was near the steak house where they had eaten two weeks ago. It was a pleasant, modern building with an elevator: Hawkeye's apartment was on the twelfth floor. "Sit down," Hawkeye said, waving him to the dining table. "I'll stick these in the oven for ten minutes, warm them up a bit."

Mulcahy sat, and looked around. The table was in an alcove off the living room. Hawkeye had half-unpacked: there were still boxes stacked by the wall, but the single set of bookshelves was full. The couch and armchair both looked new. The paint on the walls looked scraped and battered. He looked back at the kitchen door: Hawkeye was standing in the doorway, leaning up against the jamb, watching Mulcahy. He was smiling, as if he was thinking of something that pleased him.

"Hawkeye?"

"What do you think of it?"

"Very nice," Mulcahy said politely. It had a disorganised, only half at home feel to it. Compared to the Swamp, it was a palace: compared to the old Pierce house in Crabapple Cove, it was... small. "How do you like it?"

"Need to get the place painted up before I buy any more furniture. It's handy for work – only about a mile to walk, and the subway's only five minutes away. What do you want to drink?"

"Water would be fine," Mulcahy said, cautiously.

"That I've got," Hawkeye said, grinning at him.

The food, they agreed, did not taste quite like the food they remembered, from Rosie's or from occasional forays into Seoul. It was blander, milder, and in many ways more like Chinese food. Some of the ingredients were obviously canned. The restaurant hadn't supplied them with chopsticks, and Hawkeye admitted he'd never caught the knack of eating with them anyway.

"I had more practice than you," Mulcahy said, chasing a last mouthful of rice with his fork. "Nothing but chopsticks to eat with at the orphanage." He smiled at Hawkeye. "The real knack is not minding when you spill."

"You could show me," Hawkeye said. "What about Chinese next Saturday? I'll try to find a better-lit restaurant this time."

Mulcahy hesitated.

Hawkeye shrugged. "Okay, no Chinese, what about Italian? Good lighting, spaghetti, meatballs? And no chopsticks."

Mulcahy shook his head. "Hawkeye, surely..."

"Seafood? There's a place down by South Street –"

"Hawkeye, I've enjoyed this, but you have – you must have – other people to spend time with."

Hawkeye tilted his head to one side. "Well, you know, there's –" He stopped. "No one that I can think of."

"The people you work with."

"I spend time with them through the week. Surgeons, nurses, interns, medical students. Great people. Terrible on Saturday nights. What's the problem? I like having a meal with you, once in a while. Is once a week too often?" Hawkeye grinned suddenly. "Or do you have a date for next week?"

Mulcahy brought his hands together under the table, palms flat, fighting the urge to make a fist. *Dear Lord, help me, it's Hawkeye.* He got no sense of God's concern, but

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so many of his prayers had felt as if they were going unanswered in the past few months.

“No,” he said, and tried for a polite smile. “No, I was concerned about your social life, not mine. Perhaps I was too inquisitive. I’m sorry.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “Listen, I’m sorry. You don’t have to spend time with me, but I like having someone to eat with on Saturday evenings. A friend. We’re friends, right?” He was smiling, looking hopeful.

Mulcahy swallowed, feeling his anger melt, his hands relax, a deep part of him wanting to sit back and bask in Hawkeye’s attention. A small numb area was reminding him of something – of some other occasion when he had reacted just like this, when Hawkeye had said *we’re friends, right?* – In a different tone of voice from the one his mind heard now, blurred with drink, smelling of gin – but mostly he wanted to sit back and smile at Hawkeye, smiling at him. And look forward to next Saturday, when it would – it could – happen again.

He could end up living from Saturday to Saturday. Wanting this, coveting it, beginning to think he had a right to it.

*You and I, we’re friends, right.*

Mulcahy stood up. “May I use your bathroom?”

Hawkeye looked startled. “Sure. Door on the right.”

There were two doors on the right in the hall: Mulcahy picked the wrong one first. An empty room.

He backed out, deduced which door was the bathroom, locked himself in, and used the facilities. The other room had looked very empty.

The other room *was* very empty: yet not quite unfurnished. A bed, brand new, with a mattress but no bedding. A wardrobe, battered and second-hand. There was nothing else in it: it was not being used for storage, neither was it being lived in.

Mulcahy walked into the middle of the room, half in a daze, looking round. He felt both chilly and light-headed. He wasn’t surprised when he turned again and saw Hawkeye standing in the doorway of this room, watching him with a wary expression.

“Why did you rent a flat with two bedrooms?” he asked.

Hawkeye shrugged. He didn’t move. In the caution of his face, Mulcahy read the answer: he was not surprised when Hawkeye opened his mouth at last, to say with ostensible calm, “I meant this one for you.”

“You could have lied,” Mulcahy said. He meant it for a joke, but he thought it came out too tired and sad for that. Certainly Hawkeye didn’t laugh.

“Did you come to New York to work with Doctor Cournand?”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “That’s just good luck. I’d have taken any job I could get. I came to New York to see you.”

“To see me.”

“I want you,” Hawkeye said. “I don’t – I didn’t know how you’d feel. If you’d want to never see me again. But if you did – if you didn’t – ” He stopped.

Mulcahy swallowed. “Hawkeye.” He was almost afraid to say anything. “I told you – when we talked about it – ”

“I love you,” Hawkeye said.

The room was even colder: Mulcahy put his hands together, trying to warm them up. He didn’t want to look at Hawkeye.

“Please don’t – ” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy realised his hands were fumbling with his specs, and put his hands to his sides with an effort of will. That wasn’t fair to Hawkeye. “No,” he said, eyes unwillingly fixed on Hawkeye’s face. “No, you don’t. And even if you did – ” He had

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to stop, to take a breath. “Hawkeye, this isn’t something I can do, and you know it. I’m a priest. I’m supposed to be – ” He couldn’t say it. He didn’t deserve that defence. “God knows I’ve sinned. But I can’t – I’m a failure as a priest. But I won’t do this. I hoped we could – I hoped you wanted to be friends. I shouldn’t have – I’m sorry, Hawkeye.”

“Hold on a minute.” Hawkeye spread his hands. “First of all, you were a terrific priest. Best one I ever knew.”

“No.”

“Yes. You were. But the operative word, Francis, is *were*.” It looked as if Hawkeye’s anger was building. “It’s not your fault they won’t let you be a priest. If it’s anyone’s fault, it’s mine, and I know it. And if you never want to see me again because of it, fine. But I do – ” There was a crack in his defence. “I love you,” he said again. “Don’t tell me I don’t. I want you to live with me. I’ll wait – I meant to wait. I can wait.”

“Don’t.”

Hawkeye stood still and looked at him. His eyebrows went slowly up. “Just ‘don’t’?”

“What else can I say?” Mulcahy was feeling grey all the way through. “It’s a sin. A mortal sin. I can’t – I *can’t* – ” He was going to miss Hawkeye. It felt as if he were missing him already.

“Steady,” Hawkeye said. “Look – can’t we pretend this never happened? At least until January?”

“January?” Mulcahy felt stupid. “What difference does the new year make?”

“Aren’t you due to be laicized in January?” Hawkeye said.

Numbness spread, and behind it, hiding a long way behind it, anger. “But what difference would that make? It would still be a mortal sin, whether or not I was a priest.”

“Living with me?”

“You know what that would mean.”

“I told you,” Hawkeye said. “I’m not going to do anything you don’t want. Any time you tell me stop, I’ll stop. You want to move in and live here tomorrow? You’re welcome. Don’t want to do anything but have dinner with me? I can live with that. I’d like to live with that. With you.”

“But I can’t,” Mulcahy said.

“What?”

“Hawkeye – I – *I’m* the one who’s deaf, so why – why can’t you *hear* me?”

Hawkeye fell back a pace. He lifted his chin. “I’m listening.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “Sex between men is a mortal sin.”

“Why?”

“It’s a crime against nature – ”

“What does that mean?” Hawkeye exploded. He had gone from stillness to frenetic action – a lightning transition Mulcahy had seen many times over the years. Arguing with Hawkeye in this mood was futile: even when Mulcahy could hear, he’d have made a poor job of it. About the only way to stop Hawkeye was to literally grab him and pin him: and that was the last thing he should do.

Hawkeye was pacing, talking fiercely: Mulcahy caught what he was saying in patches. It was an atheist’s defence, a scientist’s attack. Hawkeye knew more facts that Mulcahy had realised were to be known about homosexuality. Percentages and statistics, recent research and 19th-century ideas.

“Hawkeye – ?” Mulcahy said finally. “You said you’d listen.”

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Hawkeye stopped. It was as abrupt a change from swiftness to stillness as the first change had been. "Okay." He put his hand up, briefly, covering his eyes: a familiar gesture, as if Hawkeye were shielding himself from the stupidity of the world.

"Okay," he said, and glanced at Mulcahy. "Talk. I'm listening."

"It's a sin. Scripture condemns it and the authority of the church condemns it."

"Why?"

"What?"

"Why do they say it's a sin? What's wrong with it? Who does it hurt? And anyway, didn't you say that it wasn't a sin if two people loved each other?"

"No," Mulcahy said, startled. "I couldn't have said that."

"You did."

"I *couldn't* have," Mulcahy said. "Love isn't a sin, but it doesn't – make a sin not a sin."

"What about those two women in your parish? Or Sturges and his buddy? You said they loved each other, and you decided that it wasn't a sin for them –"

"No," Mulcahy said. He must have said it more emphatically than he realised, because Hawkeye looked at him directly for the first time, his eyes widening, as if he too was seeing the abyss of misunderstanding between them. "I'm not condoning what they did – or may have done. I'm not empowered to decide that a sin's not a sin. All I said – I felt – was that God would feel their love for each other was a good in itself. That God might – that God could forgive them their sin, and that – I couldn't find it in myself to condemn them." He stopped. "And it might be that my failing – my weakness – is that I couldn't."

Hawkeye didn't say anything.

"If I moved in here," Mulcahy said. For a moment, he could see it. He wanted it: not just his desperate wanting of Hawkeye's body, the lust that he could not satisfy, but shared meals, and Hawkeye's teasing him with a glint in his eyes, and someone to talk to who knew him. It was a moment before he could go on. "If I moved in, I would – I want you. And I do get the impression that you," he swallowed, and went on diffidently, "that you feel the same way."

"Yes," Hawkeye said.

"So I can't –" He realised that Hawkeye was staring at him with something like disbelief. "I can't," he repeated, flatly. "Maybe you could. I don't doubt you have – more resources than I do. But I can't resist you. I want you too much. I don't believe you love me, but – but if you do, I'm sorry. I'm very sorry," he repeated. His voice felt unsteady. "I'd like to go now."

Hawkeye was still standing between him and the door. He didn't move. "I want you," he said. "Yeah. I do. I want to find out where you're ticklish. I want to make love to you till we're both too spent to fall over, let alone stand up, and then I want to do it all over again. I want – I want you to live with me. I want to make love with someone who matters to me, and –" He spread his hands. "I want – I hoped – it would matter to you just as much. And not because it's a sin, however you work that one out, either. Because I'm *me*, and you're *you*, and –" his hands jerked an emphasis.

Hawkeye had been moving closer as he spoke. Mulcahy stepped backwards. "I can't," he interrupted Hawkeye. "Please, Hawkeye, *listen* to me."

"I'm listening," Hawkeye said. He grinned, a wide-mouthed grimace that somehow lacked humour. "I didn't say I liked it. Or agreed with it. But I'm not going to do anything you don't want. Whatever reason you have for not wanting it. I never meant

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to have this conversation now. Dinner on Saturday nights. That can't be a sin, can it? Even saints have to eat. Right?"

"Hawkeye – " Mulcahy wasn't sure if what stopped him from saying more was a laugh or a sob. *I want to find out where you're ticklish.* Only Hawkeye. "Please don't -- "

"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. "Look. Let's just – let's not – Look, at least stay for coffee."

"I think I'd better go," Mulcahy said. It was beginning to feel like a refrain.

"Okay," Hawkeye said. He stepped to one side. "Go."

Mulcahy was putting his overcoat on before he realised that Hawkeye was doing the same thing. "Where are you going?"

"I'm walking over to the station with you."

"What?" Mulcahy stared. "I'm not going to get lost."

Hawkeye shrugged.

"I'm deaf, not helpless!"

Hawkeye shrugged again. His coat was buttoned up: he pulled a familiar woollen hat on over his head. "You don't have to talk to me or pay any attention to me," he said. "I'm just going to walk in the same direction as you at the same speed for the same amount of time, if that's okay with you."

"Would it make any difference if it wasn't?" Mulcahy was conscious that what had come out of his mouth was nearer a snarl than a patient remonstrance.

Hawkeye looked at him. There was an immovable expression on his face: Mulcahy had seldom met it turned on him, but he had seen it before, often enough.

They didn't talk on their way to the station, and Hawkeye stopped by the entrance as soon as they were in the main concourse. Mulcahy, who had been doggedly trying to ignore him all the way there, swung round and looked at him.

"Bye," Hawkeye said. "See you next week, I hope." He turned away before Mulcahy could say anything, pushed out the door, and was gone.

## November, 1954

### 1. Monday, 1st November.

"You got a letter," Moskowitz said. He handed it over: Mulcahy took it with a polite smile and put it into his jacket pocket without opening it.

"Don't mind me if you want to read it," Moskowitz said.

"Oh no," Mulcahy said, and drank his coffee. "I know who it's from. I'll read it later."

"How was yesterday?"

"Yesterday?"

"There was a Halloween party planned – wasn't there?" From the smashed pumpkins on the drive, it had gone off as planned. Moskowitz had come in early, intending to catch Mulcahy at breakfast in the cafeteria: from the tired look on his face, Mulcahy had not had a particularly relaxing weekend.

"Oh. Yes." Mulcahy smiled. "Yes. By the usual measure, it was very successful."

"What's your measure?" Moskowitz was amused.

"Oh," Mulcahy's smile quirked into a small grin. "The usual. Exhaustion of adults present multiplied by number of children having fun."

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Moskowitz laughed. "Speaks the voice of experience!"

Mulcahy's grin faded a little: he shrugged and drank his coffee. Moskowitz had noticed that he never liked to be reminded about his previous life: his hearing life.

"Got time to talk things over with me?"

"Why?" Mulcahy looked startled and worried – more so than reasonable. His hand slid to his pocket, as if he meant to take out his letter and start reading it. "Is there a problem?"

"No," Moskowitz said. "You're a very good teacher."

"Really?" The worried look faded: Mulcahy looked startled and pleased.

"Several of the other teachers who've observed you teach say you're an excellent teacher, very patient with the children, though we know you're qualified to teach at considerably above this level." Mulcahy's teaching qualifications for Pennsylvania were for high school mathematics: none of the children he taught were ever likely to progress above grade school.

"Oh, well –" Mulcahy shrugged, visibly more than a little embarrassed. "They're making great progress. I enjoy teaching them."

"You use signing, don't you?"

"Yes, sometimes," Mulcahy said. "I know the children are supposed to get practice speaking out loud, but after all – I'm deaf, and they know it."

"But you're very good at lip-reading. You could help them at that level."

"I'm not sure I could," Mulcahy said, after a moment. "Most of these children have been deaf all their lives: I learned to lip-read after I'd been able to hear for thirty-six years. I don't think that the way I learned would be much help to them."

"Just knowing that you can do it," Moskowitz said. "Many of them don't know any deaf adults. You could be a very useful example."

"I hadn't thought of that," Mulcahy said. He glanced down at his plate, clearly taking a brief moment to think. He looked up again. "I don't think it would be helpful to them to get an idea that it would be as easy for them as it's been for me."

"Well," Moskowitz said, conceding. Mulcahy had literally no experience as an oralist teacher. "Try not to sign to them, though. They shouldn't get into the habit of depending on it."

Mulcahy looked back at him with a mild expression, blinking behind his round glasses. "I think I'm the only teacher here who knows signs," he said. "How dependent can they get, if there's only one teacher who *can* use signing in his classes?"

Moskowitz half-laughed. "Still, we do have rules for the children, and the teachers shouldn't encourage them to be broken."

"Point," Mulcahy said. He smiled, briefly and mildly, and drank his coffee.

## 2. A letter not sent.

Dear Dad,

There's something I never told you when you were alive, and I probably wouldn't be trying to tell you this if you *were* still alive, but you're not, and I wish you were, and I wish I could tell you this.

I know that makes no sense. I think I'm crazy.

I tried to write to you about this from Japan. Yeah, that's right, from Japan. Not Korea. I spent a week or two in a mental hospital in Tokyo. I tore up all the letters I

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never sent you from there. I couldn't find a way to say it: I thought they were going to send me home early because I'd finally lost my marbles.

We went to a picnic on July 4th. We went to the ocean – I'd never seen it in three years I'd been in Korea. We'd never have risked it before, but there was a lull on. The 8063rd agreed to take our casualties July 4th: we took theirs on July 3rd. There were hardly any, either day.

On July 5th I got ferried off to the evac hospital and from there to Tokyo. I tried to operate on a patient without anaesthetic. I thought the nurse was trying to smother him when she put the mask down on his face. I remember that now, and I know why, but I spent two weeks in a mental hospital in Tokyo and I didn't know why I was there. I kept asking the doctor and he wouldn't tell me, he said I had to figure that out for myself. You know how pesky doctors can be when they're ill, Dad? Sure you do. I was pesky, testy, and restless.

I felt fine. I slept a lot. I ate a lot. I didn't have nightmares. The only problem was something I didn't want to tell him: the last thing I remembered clearly before waking up in hospital in Tokyo was the day at the beach. I remembered getting on to the bus to go home, and a couple of things like I was dreaming: yelling for a bottle – I thought it was whisky – and seeing this big colourful rooster on a woman's lap. After that, not a thing.

I thought I'd done it at last, Dad. Had my first alcoholic blackout. They say the first sign of alcoholism is drinking alone. Well, in Korea, I drank alone. I also drank in company. I drank a lot. But I was fairly sure I wasn't an alcoholic, yet, because I could stop drinking. I stopped drinking for a week a few times just to prove I could. Well, once. Twice if you count those two weeks in Tokyo.

I had a room to myself. A window, looking out on a garden, with chicken-wire over the glass. A doctor who visited me daily and tried to get me to talk. A friend who visited me twice. The first time I yelled at him: I was furious about being locked up. The second time I yelled at him louder: I was *really* furious about being locked up.

I figured if I spent two weeks being clean and sober, that would prove to them that I wasn't an alcoholic and they could let me go. I was even prepared to give up my still to prove I wasn't. My favourite room-mate, apart from BJ. Went with us every time we moved. I told you I drank a lot.

It wasn't an alcoholic blackout. It was classic memory suppression. I'd seen a lot of horrible things in Korea, but this was one too many. I'm not sure I'm ever going to forgive the doctor for making me remember it, either.

According to the doctor, I got over it. He asked me the right questions, and got my memory back for me – for which I was not so grateful as I might be. That was when I tried to write to you about it. Figured if I'd lost my marbles and the war was ending anyway, they might as well send me back to Crabapple Cove as send me home. Except that the doctor was obsessive about sending people back to where they lost their marbles to make sure they were okay again. He'd been yelled at about this before, so I knew yelling wouldn't do any good.

I think I tried pleading instead.

He sent me back to the 4077th. I got there just in time for the next round of shrapnel. Everything went fine. Well, you'd know that, because *I'm* fine. Apart from the losing my marbles thing. And then the war ended.

Dad, I was miserable at Maine General when I got back. I never told you that because I didn't see what there was to do about it. I didn't want to work in Crabapple Cove: I was afraid I'd start drinking again. There were doctors at Maine General

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who'd been in residency when I last worked there, and in three years they'd gone ahead of me. I told myself that was why I hated it. I hated it because I was lonely.

Yes, I saw you every weekend, and I really appreciate that. I know you wanted me to get married and have grandchildren for you, but it's never going to happen. There were only ever six people I thought I could live with, and two of them broke my heart, and two of them weren't interested, and one of them's dead, and the sixth one...

We never talked about that, but I figured you knew.

Actually, I have no idea.

I just like to think you did.

I used to imagine introducing this guy to you. You'd have liked him. He's quiet and he's smart and he's got guts. He'd have liked you too.

I don't believe it's a sickness or a phase or anything I can be cured of. I don't even want to be cured of it. I wish I could have figured out how to talk about this with you when you were alive, because I think you'd have been interested. Maybe not happy about it, but interested. I wanted to talk about it with someone.

And you'd have liked him. He's the kindest, smartest, most *decent* person I ever met, and the toughest. And I think I could talk to him about being crazy without him thinking I'd gone crazy.

The only problem is, I'm in love with him. And he doesn't want me to be. I think that's the problem. I mean, it couldn't be that he doesn't want a hard-drinking promiscuous half-crazed talkative surgeon with nightmares in his life. And I haven't even told him about the nightmares.

I wrote to you about him. I told you he was the sanest guy in the outfit. I remember cracking to someone – maybe it was you – that it was a wonder he didn't go deaf from the sound of all the commandments breaking. Doesn't seem quite so funny now.

He's a Catholic priest. The Church is kicking him out for reasons which pass my understanding. He's still trying to live by their rules, and their rules say once they've kicked him out he ought to be miserable and alone for the rest of his life, and he's the last person who deserves to feel that way, but what the hell can I do?

He won't even answer my letters.

Of course, neither will you, any more.

Love, Hawkeye.

### **3: All Souls: first Sunday after All Souls.**

Any parish priest acquires something of a knack of spotting who's at mass and who isn't, even with his back turned. Father Saunders had never considered himself to be particularly expert: but at early morning Mass on a weekday, even on a festival, a new face stands out.

The man didn't come up to take communion. He stopped to light three candles on his way out. A stranger, passing through, Saunders concluded, and thought no more of it until the face reappeared again on Sunday morning.

A man in his thirties, new to the area, evidently a regular church-goer: not married. He didn't come up to take communion. Saunders hadn't seen him at confession.

This time, Saunders caught him at the door on his way out. Once again, he'd stopped to light three candles.

"Good morning," he said cheerfully, extending his hand.

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The man took it, leaning forward a little, his expression curiously intent. “Good morning,” he said pleasantly – and would have pulled back, joining the stream of parishioners leaving the church, but Saunders kept hold of his hand just long enough to discourage him.

“New to the area?”

“In a way,” the man said. “I’ve been to mass here before.”

“Yes – didn’t I see you on Tuesday morning?”

“Yes,” the man said.

“Is there something you’d like to talk about, my son?”

The man nodded, abruptly. His face stayed calm, but his voice cracked. “Yes – there is.” He stepped back: “I’ll – ”

“Please, just wait for me over there,” Saunders said. He didn’t want to let this man go, but there were several parishioners who’d expect a few words. “I won’t be long.”

The man was sitting by the confessionals, his head bowed. Saunders came over and stood beside him. “Do you wish to confess to me, my son?”

The man didn’t stir. His lips were moving. Saunders waited. The man came to the end of his act of contrition, and turned his head: he started and stood up.

Saunders turned towards the nearest confessional door. The man caught at his sleeve. “Father Saunders?”

It was the gesture of a religious, plucking at the cloth that covered his arm, not touching or taking hold of his arm: Saunders turned, surprised.

“I’m sorry, Father,” the man said. “I’m deaf. I can’t hear you unless I can see your face, and the light isn’t enough inside the confessional. Can we – ”

“Deaf?” Saunders said, surprised. “Are you sure you can’t – Yes, yes, why don’t we go over to the parish house?” The man stared at him, and it occurred to Saunders that the light probably wasn’t enough here, either. He pointed at the door, and the man followed him.

There was choir practice this afternoon, but Saunders was in the habit of keeping an hour free. If no one needed him after the morning services, he could have an hour to eat his lunch. It rarely worked out that way, but Mrs Reid had grown used to this system in the years she had been his housekeeper, and no longer made him anything for lunch on Sundays that couldn’t be held over till supper, if necessary.

Saunders had used his study for confession occasionally, though never for this reason. There were chairs by the window, in a good light. When they both sat down, he asked again, “Do you want me to hear your confession, my son?”

The man nodded. “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” he said after a moment. “It has been three weeks since my last confession.” He stopped. “My last confession was not a good one.”

“When was the last time you feel you made a good confession?” Saunders asked.

“June,” the man said. He paused. “Father, I’m sorry to take up your time on Sunday, but it’s a complicated story.”

“I have plenty of time, my son.”

The man smiled, almost invisibly. “Bless you for saying that.” He stopped. “Father, a few years ago, I met a man and worked with him for nearly three years. I -- ” He stopped again. “I have always been... I’m afflicted with – ” He literally, physically, shuddered. “I have... I’m a homosexual.”

“That must be very difficult for you, my son,” Saunders said. When the man said nothing, he prompted “Did you have a guilty relationship with this man?”

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“I committed a mortal sin with him once,” the man said. “I repented it, and I confessed it. I avoided the occasion of sin afterwards. But I felt... I feel... he was, he is, a very good friend. I continued to have feelings for him.” The man stopped again, and seemed unable to go on.

“The temptation to commit sin is not itself a sin,” Saunders said. “Do you pray to be delivered from this evil affliction?”

“I used to,” the man said. “When I was a boy. I no longer pray to be delivered from this, but to be able to resist the temptation to act on these feelings.”

“But you know that this affliction is evil.”

“I am – I have been conscious that I have sexual feelings for other men since I was twelve,” the man said. “I prayed for years – for *years* that this – that these feelings would be taken away from me. But I now think that God gave me these... tendencies for His own reasons, and that I should accept – what God gave me.”

“You *must* pray that you shall be delivered from this,” Saunders said emphatically. “God can’t deliver you to sin.” He realised he was overriding what else the man had to say. “I’m sorry, my son. I shouldn’t interrupt your confession. Go on.”

“I met the man again in June.” The man stopped again, but this time Saunders didn’t prompt him. “I didn’t... I didn’t sin with him. But I wanted to. I – he asked me to live with him. He asked me several times. I wouldn’t – but we were friends. He asked me to write to him. I did. Then – five weeks ago – the man came to New York and – we met again. We had dinner together three times, and then he – I – found – ” He stopped again.

“You found you still had sinful feelings for him,” Saunders half-asked, half-prompted.

“Yes,” the man said. “No. I’d known that – since June. But I never – never expected him – never thought he’d still return these feelings – ” He stammered and halted.

“Have you committed a mortal sin with him?” Saunders asked.

“No.”

“Temptation is not in itself a sin, my son,” Saunders said. “Though temptation to commit such a dreadful sin is something you must pray to be delivered from. You must avoid this man – you must not meet him, nor correspond with him. You have resisted temptation, but you must do more than that – you should pray to be delivered from these feelings that afflict you. Fix your thoughts on that. If you have not committed any mortal sin with this man, why do you feel that your confessions since June have not been good confessions?”

“Because...” The man swallowed. “When I sinned with the man before, I felt true contrition. When I am... when I was tempted this time, I could not feel... I could not feel that. At most I feel attrition – I was conscious that I must not. I have been trying to achieve contrition, but... in my heart and my conscience, I cannot feel it. I have prayed to God to help me, but...”

“You have not committed a mortal sin,” Saunders said. He was trying to be patient. He guessed from the use of the terms contrition and attrition that the man was one of those scrupulous Catholics who ought to be regarded as a blessing. The difference between repentance through sorrow for having offended God and repentance through fear of God’s punishment was clear, but not something most Catholics would be conscious of in those words. Still, the man was clearly trying to fight off a terrible temptation, and he ought to be supported. “You cannot achieve contrition for a sin you have not committed.”

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“I *want* what this man offers.” The man’s voice cracked. “Not only... not only what would be sinful, but – his friendship, his companionship – ”

“He is an occasion of sin for you, my son. And you may be an occasion of sin for him. You must not see him. You were aware of this when you avoided seeing him before, after you committed a mortal sin with him – ”

“I didn’t avoid seeing him,” the man said. “We were in Korea – in an army unit. I could have applied for a transfer, but I felt that – my work there justified the risk of remaining. He promised he wouldn’t – he promised ‘never again’, and he kept the promise.”

Saunders frowned. “What about you?”

“I’m sorry?”

“You say *he* promised. What about you? In June, did he get in touch with you, or you with him?”

“I did,” the man said.

“My son, have you told me the whole truth about your relationship with him?”

“Yes,” the man said.

“Why did you get in touch with him in June?”

“I was – ” The man shifted in his seat. His hand went up to his glasses and seemed to fidget with them for a moment. “I had just – I am a priest. I was suspended from the priesthood nearly a year ago. In June, my bishop – strongly advised that I should apply for laicization from the priesthood, and I did so. I was – I wanted to talk to someone.” His voice trailed off.

The advantage of the confessionals is that the sinner cannot really see the priest: not only does this allow the sinner to feel that he is confessing to God, through the priest his representative, but it enables any shock the priest might feel to be concealed. Saunders had never wished to be inside a confessional so much in his life. He thought he had managed to keep most of his real feelings from his face, but from the look on the man’s face, he knew that he had not been entirely successful.

“I’m sorry – ” he said, through lips that felt stiff. “Go on, my – my son.”

The man looked a little confused. “I wanted to talk to someone,” he said. “That was why I went to see him.”

Saunders nodded, pulling himself together. “You were ordained when you committed a mortal sin with this man in Korea?”

“Yes.”

“And you felt contrition for the act?”

“Yes.” The man spoke very softly.

“Yet you did not avoid him?”

“I – couldn’t.”

“You could have applied for a transfer, you said. You were company chaplain, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I didn’t think it would happen again,” the man said quietly. “He’s a good man: he promised he wouldn’t – make any, any attempt like that again, and he didn’t – ”

“But what about *you*? You seem to be trying to put all the blame for what occurred on to him – didn’t you feel that as someone afflicted with these evil tendencies you should have avoided even a possible occasion of sin?”

The man went red. His mouth opened, but he closed it again without saying anything. After a long moment, he said “I’d tried. I’d succeeded, for – for many years. In not allowing such things to happen. God knows I don’t want to evade my own

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guilt, but I did try – I did *try* not to – to commit any sin with him, but I was...” His voice trailed off. “God knows I tried,” he said finally. “And I felt true contrition. I had broken my vows, I had committed mortal sin, I thought I might have to leave my work there, with that unit, in that part of Korea – there was an orphanage I was closely involved with – and I didn’t want to. I didn’t want to have to go. We talked about it in private and he promised that he wouldn’t – do anything, and he kept that promise, most faithfully. Until – ”

“Did you really think that your work was more important than saving your immortal soul?” Saunders asked. “Or did you have sinful feelings towards this man?”

The man swallowed hard. He was still rather red in the face. “Yes,” he said. “Yes, to both, I suppose – I wanted to do my work, and I – had become accustomed to feelings that I knew would be wrong to act on.”

“And when you applied for laicization from the priesthood? Were you impelled by these sinful feelings?”

“No,” the man said. He sounded absolutely definite. “I didn’t want to apply for laicization. But my bishop had written to me, so strongly advising it – he said he wouldn’t have ordained me if he had known – ” His voice broke. He took off his glasses and wiped at them, seeming to take a long time about it. Saunders waited, realising that it would do no good to speak when the man couldn’t see him.

“ – if he had known,” the man finished, “that I’m... a homosexual.”

Saunders nodded. He folded his hands together and prayed silently for guidance. “Does your regular confessor know you are a priest – ?”

“No.”

“I think you should go back to your bishop,” Saunders said, “and ask to be reconciled.”

The man said nothing.

“You’re not yet laicized?” Saunders asked, receiving the nod he expected. The Holy See never did anything in a hurry.

“You weren’t ordained in this diocese,” Saunders said.

“No. I came here, after I sent the letter of application.”

“On your bishop’s instruction? Did you tell him that this man lived here?”

“No.” The man looked startled. “No, he didn’t – then. He’s moved here.”

“Moved here?” Saunders was startled. “Did he know – I’m sorry, my son, you said that already.” He promised himself a penance for appearing to be inattentive in confession: the shock had distracted him from the details.

“I came here,” the man said, “because I had to get away from people who knew I had been ordained – ”

Saunders nodded. He had never, as far as he knew, met a laicized priest. The Church required that such an unfortunate person should break all attachments and move away to where no one knew he had once been a priest. “You should write to your bishop and ask for permission to be transferred somewhere else,” he said. “But if you are being laicized really against your will – how old are you?”

“Thirty-seven.”

Older than Saunders had thought, but still too young to make such a final step away from the Church. “My son, have you thought what being laicized means? You are not only barred from every duty of the priesthood, but even from the privileges every Catholic earns with baptism. You are rejecting a precious gift from God. Write to your bishop, my son. If you’ll give me your details, *I’ll* write to him. I’ll write to the Holy Father himself. You must not turn away from the Church.”

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“Father – ” the man said. “I really wanted advice on what to do about – ” He swallowed. “This man.”

“Well,” Saunders said, a little exasperated. “You mustn’t see him or correspond with him again. You know that. And if you go back to your own diocese, and ask your bishop for reconciliation, to support your withdrawal from laicization, you won’t. And you must pray for these evil feelings to be taken from you. What is your name, my son?”

The man pushed his glasses a little further up his nose. “John,” he said.

“I’ll hold you in my prayers, John. If you want to talk this through again, my door is always open to you, and I’d be glad to hear your confession at any time.”

“I’m sorry,” the man said.

“Come and see me again, John. Please.”

The man nodded. “Thank you, Father.” He stood up. “Goodbye. God bless you.”

“God bless you,” Saunders said, and stood up to walk with him to the door. “John, remember that feeling the temptation to commit a sin is not a sin. I think you’re inclined to torment yourself over this, especially since you’ve separated yourself from the Church.”

The man said nothing, but his mouth seemed to tighten a little.

“Write to your bishop, my son.”

### 4. A prayer.

There was an unopened letter on the table beside the bed.

*Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God? Do not err: Neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers: Nor the effeminate nor liars with mankind nor thieves nor covetous nor drunkards nor railers nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God.*

Dear Lord, I haven’t seen Hawkeye for three weeks now: it feels longer. He writes to me every Saturday evening: he says he goes to Grand Central to meet my train, and when I’m not on it, he goes home and writes to me.

I don’t write back. I sit here and I read the Bible and remind myself that I have Scriptural authority to ignore him. I even have the advice of a priest. Not to see him. Not to write to him.

I can’t separate my love for him from my other feelings for him. I’ve tried. I’ve prayed. Once the priest knew I was being laicized, he wasn’t very interested in my other sins: I should pray for these feelings to be taken from me, he said. I can tell myself that these feelings are evil, but I can’t *feel* that they are, and you know I haven’t prayed to have them taken from me.

*Fly fornication. Every sin that a man does is without the body: but he that commits fornication sins against his own body. Or know you not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God: and you are not your own?*

Dear God, help me. I go to Mass: I can’t hear the priest, but I know the ritual: I know it by heart. I haven’t been able to take communion in four Sundays: I want this too much, and I cannot make an act of perfect contrition. But as Father Saunders pointed out, I can’t confess to a sin I haven’t committed: only wanted to.

I want to be with Hawkeye.

He says he loves me.

## Sins and Virtues

I wish I didn't believe him.

*Love is patient, is kind: love envies not, deals not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeks not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinks no evil: Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices with the truth: Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

Dear Lord, should I read Corinthians when I'm trying to remember that what he feels for me is a sin, and what I feel for him is a sin? No matter what I read, no matter how sound the scriptural authority, I find myself reading beyond the condemnation, and remembering more than I should. I read my Bible carefully, and I find that men like Hawkeye – men who fornicate with other men, myself as much as Hawkeye – are *filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness: full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity: whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious, proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute: without affection, without fidelity, without mercy* and instead of feeling rebuked, I think of Hawkeye: I cannot make this passage describe him.

If someone read it to him, and told him *Who, having known the justice of God, did not understand that they who do such things, are worthy of death: and not only they that do them, but they also that consent to them that do them*, he would laugh: and he would take the passage and apply each text to himself, finding some reason why it applied to him.

But it wouldn't. I can accuse myself, but I cannot accuse Hawkeye unjustly.

And it does seem unjust, dear Lord. Forgive me.

*We see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face. Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known. And now there remain faith, hope, and love, these three: but the greatest of these is love.*

He opened the letter.

### 5. Friday, 19th November.

Susan Dunsford taught fourth-graders: the children in her class would be in Francis Mulcahy's math class in a couple of years, assuming that he passed the state examination to teach in New York.

He seemed like a nice man, in her estimation, though woefully inexperienced at teaching deaf children – and practically speaking, she'd had her doubts about whether a deaf man was competent to teach an academic subject from the start. Mr Moskowitz, his supervisor, seemed to think he was doing well.

On Fridays in the winter, Mr Moskowitz left early. Mr Mulcahy's last two classes on Friday were unsupervised. Mrs Dunsford took the opportunity to stop by two or three times, and the third time was sure enough of her ground to speak to him.

The children had gone, shepherded to their dormitories. Mr Mulcahy had one of the dorm workers' bedrooms, in the oldest boys' dormitory, for sixteen and up. They were allowed to go from class to class, and class to dorm, unsupervised.

"Mrs Dunsford. How can I help you?"

"I wanted to talk to you about how you teach."

Mr Mulcahy looked startled. "I'm sorry, Mr Moskowitz isn't here – surely we should talk this over with him?"

"I've spoken with him twice about this already, in fact," Mrs Dunsford said. "You encourage the children to use signs in your class."

## Sins and Virtues

Mr Mulcahy's eyebrows appeared over the top of his glasses. He said nothing for a moment. "Mrs Dunsford, I don't allow the children to use signing to talk among themselves in class – I realise that's against the rules."

"But you sign *to* them," Mrs Dunsford said. "And you let them sign questions to you."

"Well, yes, I do, when I'm trying to explain a problem to one of the profoundly deaf children. It's quicker than trying to communicate in writing."

"But they have to learn how to communicate with normal people, Mr Mulcahy."

"Yes," Mr Mulcahy said. The expression on his face barely changed, but she felt rebuked.

"I'm sorry," Mrs Dunsford said. "But they have to learn – most people can *hear*."

"Yes," Mr Mulcahy said. "And most of their teachers can." He resettled his glasses, rubbing his ears, not smiling. "I can't." He looked back at her, diffident. "But I do believe – that I can teach them mathematics."

"Mr Mulcahy, I am truly sorry," Mrs Dunsford said. "I didn't intend to be offensive. But not allowing the children to use signs among themselves isn't just a rule – they have to learn how to communicate in *English*, not by making signs with their hands. If they're encouraged in the use of signing instead of learning how to speak, their lives will be very limited. A deaf child *can* learn to speak, can make the most of what hearing he has, and can leave this school with the ability to work in a normal environment." Mrs Dunsford had worked at the New York School for the Deaf for thirty-seven years. She had seen many teachers, at about this point in their first term, seem ready to give up in sheer frustration. "I'm convinced of that. I never give up on a child, no matter how little hearing he has left, and I don't like to see any teacher giving up on *any* child. These children deserve all the help we can give them."

Mr Mulcahy was a skilled lip-reader: when he paid attention, it was almost as if he were listening intently. He nodded. "Yes, I see." He paused. "Mrs Dunsford, were you aware that I'm profoundly deaf? Even my hearing aid doesn't help me very much – I have tinnitus in both my ears. I find I can't lip-read the children very well, not those who were born profoundly deaf: and I'm afraid many of them don't write English very well. But they can communicate with me in signs."

"You can't tell what the children are saying to you?" Mrs Dunsford picked that up with some shock. It was vitally important, in oralist teaching, for a teacher to be able to understand what the children were trying to say, and respond appropriately. If Mr Mulcahy couldn't do that – if his lip-reading failed him at this important point – he should have told Mr Moskowitz well before this.

"I can," Mr Mulcahy said. "I have some difficulty with those who don't – they don't speak English, I think, quite as you or I do. But –"

"I need to think about this," Mrs Dunsford said. She managed a smile. "I'm sorry to have spoken so bluntly, Mr Mulcahy."

"Perhaps we could talk about this on Monday, when Mr Moskowitz can be present?"

"Yes, perhaps we should." Mrs Dunsford smiled again. She didn't want to be impolite. "What are your plans for the weekend?"

Mr Mulcahy took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. He looked unexpectedly tired. "I don't quite know."

## Saturday 20th November, 1954

Each Saturday for the past three weeks Hawkeye had decided there was no point going to Grand Central: if Francis Mulcahy was going to show, he'd have written. Each Saturday he'd concluded that it didn't take more than fifteen minutes to walk down to the station, and he might as well. Each Saturday, walking back, he'd realised that fifteen minutes walking to the station, twenty minutes waiting around waiting for a train to come in and making sure that Mulcahy wasn't on it, and fifteen minutes walking back, added up to nearly an hour.

But then, what else was he doing with his time?

He could visit the school. That was a last resort, since he'd said he wouldn't. But there had to be a legitimate reason to get inside.

He could write more persuasive letters. He hadn't tried writing in blood yet.

He could call Radar and see if he gave lessons in mindreading.

He could –

"Pray for a miracle," Hawkeye said out loud. Walking up the platform towards him, his hands tucked into the pockets of his coat – *Dad's* coat, Hawkeye suddenly realised – a miracle, in round glasses.

"Hi," Hawkeye said. He was grinning too widely to be more articulate.

Mulcahy dug his hands more deeply into the coat's pockets. "Hawkeye."

As they had done three Saturdays in a row, back in October, they headed out of the station without trying to talk.

Once they were clear of the crowds, Hawkeye stopped. "Where shall we go?"

"Somewhere we can talk," Mulcahy said.

"That steakhouse near my place?"

"Fine."

"Okay." Hawkeye had stopped grinning, but he didn't feel any more articulate.

"So," Hawkeye said. They'd both ordered with hardly a glance at the menus.

"What have you been doing recently?"

Mulcahy started. "Teaching," he said. "How about you?"

"Doing surgery."

They both looked at each other, and Hawkeye was relieved to see a small, real smile. "I'm sorry," Mulcahy said.

"For what?"

"That I didn't write back."

"Oh, you got the letters." Hawkeye picked up a napkin and twisted it in his hands. "You didn't have to write back, you know. I mean, if you didn't have an answer. Which I assume you didn't. Though I admit a telegram to let me know you'd *got* them would've been nice." The napkin ripped.

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said again.

"No, that's okay." Hawkeye crumpled up the remains of the napkin into a ball and fidgeted with it. If he had two more of them, he could juggle. "What did you want to talk about?"

A waiter appeared beside them with another napkin and two glasses of water. Mulcahy glanced at him. "Something else, for the moment?" he suggested.

"Sure." Hawkeye could talk non-stop about anything for hours: he'd done it in OR with shells crashing nearby. He could riff on any topic under the sun. He could...

## Sins and Virtues

right now, he couldn't. "Sorry. Talk amongst yourselves. What have you been teaching recently?"

"Math," said Mulcahy, with a brief, slightly disbelieving look. Hawkeye shrugged.

Mulcahy began to tell him about his lesson plans for next term. Hawkeye listened, nodded, smiled. He didn't care *what* Mulcahy told him: he wanted to be here, to be listening to Francis like this, knowing – at least – that Mulcahy wasn't mad at him.

The steaks arrived. Coleslaw. Sauce.

"Go on," Hawkeye said.

They were in a booth, which was well-lit enough for Hawkeye to talk and Mulcahy to listen: the well-lit booths were why Hawkeye had chosen this restaurant for the first evening.

"I'd like to talk about what was said the last time we met," Mulcahy said.

"Yeah." This was a pretty good steak.

Mulcahy went on cutting up his steak with hands that didn't shake. "Can I move in to your apartment?" he asked.

The glass on Hawkeye's side of the table spun round, landed on its side, and launched water all over the table and his plate. Hawkeye realised he had knocked it over seconds before a waiter appeared with a cloth. He retrieved the plate – there was only a little water on it, and he'd eaten worse – and let the waiter mop up the table. A few minutes later, the waiter gone, he realised he still hadn't answered the question – and that Mulcahy hadn't eaten a mouthful since then, though he'd been manipulating the food on his plate with his knife and fork. "Yes," he said. "Yes – if you want to. I mean, I've got the spare room..." His voice trailed off. "When do you want to?" *What do you mean by move in? Live with me, or live with me?*

"I have an arrangement to do dormitory duty at school, in exchange for room and board," Mulcahy said. "I should give them notice. I haven't talked to them about it, but I suppose the end of this term. Is that all right?"

"Yes," Hawkeye said again. "Francis – ?"

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye. His face was quite still. "We should talk about rent, I suppose. And whatever else matters – I really don't know: I haven't ever – " he smiled, but it didn't make him look happy, " – lived like this before."

"Sure. I'll draw up a sub-let agreement. No loud noises, no pets, no children, no trombones after midnight – " Hawkeye broke off. "Francis, is this what you want to do?"

Mulcahy pushed his plate away and folded his hands together in front of him. "Did you change your mind?"

Hawkeye shook his head violently. "No. Oh no. *I* didn't change my mind. What I can't figure out is why *you* have. Or if you have."

"Hawkeye – " Mulcahy sounded genuinely distressed.

"Because you don't *look* happy."

"This is very difficult for me – "

"Oh, yeah? Well, the last four weeks haven't exactly been a bed of roses for me, either!"

They looked at each other. Mulcahy's hands were clenched together so hard the knuckles were white. He *didn't* look happy.

"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. He was, but he didn't think he sounded like it. He hoped he looked more convincing. "Listen – you want to come up to my place for coffee? We could talk better. I really mean coffee. Talk."

Mulcahy smiled, briefly, almost invisibly. "All right." He looked as if he was about to get up.

## Sins and Virtues

“Finish your steak,” Hawkeye said.  
Mulcahy gave him a look. “If you finish yours.”  
“Oh.” Hawkeye looked down at his plate. “Yeah.”

He hadn't done much with his apartment in the four weeks since Mulcahy had been there last. He'd been working and going out to drink or play poker, and coming home and switching off: he hadn't wanted to think about what to do with the too-large apartment.

He made a pot of coffee and poured them each a cup. He remembered how Mulcahy took his: he wondered, without wanting to ask, if Mulcahy remembered about Hawkeye's.

Mulcahy accepted the cup and sat down at one end of the sofa: Hawkeye sat down at the other end. They looked at each other.

“This is what I want to do,” Mulcahy said. His voice was grave and level. “I love you. I want to be with you.”

Hawkeye shook his head before he could stop himself. “Sorry,” he said. “I keep feeling I've flipped over two pages at once. Last time we talked, you just kept saying it would be a sin if we did *anything*. Now you want to move in? How did this happen?”

Mulcahy drank from his cup. “I thought you'd be pleased,” he said. His voice was still level.

“I'm stunned, surprised, astonished, startled, taken aback, taking fright, and wanting to take advantage,” Hawkeye said. “*Pleased* doesn't quite cover it. Did – did you just say you loved me?”

“Do you believe me?”

“It would serve you right if I said I didn't, wouldn't it?” Hawkeye asked. He saw Mulcahy's hands twitch, as if reaching for his glasses, and said, immediately. “No, don't tell me to shut up. I believe you, I just – ” He hesitated. “I just don't understand.” To his own ears his voice sounded lost and uncertain: he wished he knew what Mulcahy could read on his face. “I love you. I want to make you happy. I want to – ” He swallowed, terrified and dry-mouthed suddenly, and drank from the mug he was holding. “I want to make you happy,” he said lamely. “I don't get the feeling that you are.”

Mulcahy was silent for a moment, looking down at the coffee in his mug. He looked up with a small, embarrassed shrug. “Do you mind if I ask – ?”

“Sure. Anything.”

“Did you say ‘taking fright’ or ‘taking flight’? I'm sorry, they look very similar, and I couldn't tell – ”

“Taking fright,” Hawkeye said. “Running scared.”

Mulcahy nodded. His mouth twitched. “Are you scared of *me*?” He sounded almost amused.

Hawkeye's mouth had gone dry again. He drank more coffee. “I'm terrified,” he said finally, flippantly. “You haven't even moved in yet and already I'm terrified you're going to leave me.” It was more true than he wanted Mulcahy to know. “I thought it was going to take longer to – to persuade you – ” He grinned, hoping to get back at least that amused twitch of the mouth. “You're going too fast for me. Give me a chance to catch up. Two hours ago I didn't even really expect you to show up this evening, I thought I'd be writing you yet another letter asking you to at least write back, and now we're talking about you moving in next month. And you're still – ”

He broke off.

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy looked up and nodded. “Yes,” he said. “I’m still a priest. But... I’ve lost my vocation. Or had it taken away from me.” He spoke as of a physical thing that had been removed, quite matter-of-factly.

“When – ” Hawkeye stopped. That probably wasn’t his business. “How – ” He wasn’t sure he’d understand the answer. “Did you just say you love me?”

“Didn’t you know?” Mulcahy looked genuinely startled.

Hawkeye opened his mouth, shook his head, and ran his hand through his hair. *Why would you?* “Like me, lust after me – ” He meant to run with it, but the next word out of his mouth wanted to be *Lick me*, and he didn’t think Francis would find that funny. He didn’t think *he* found that funny. “Francis, do you really want to move in with me? You don’t know the first thing about me.”

“I think I know you quite well,” Mulcahy said.

“The first thing about me is, I have nightmares.”

“I snore,” Mulcahy said.

“I have really bad nightmares.”

“I snore so loudly I was once thrown out of my dorm at the seminary.”

Hawkeye blinked. It would make him feel very stupid to ask *You mean it, we’re going to sleep together?* but if Mulcahy didn’t think they were going to, why would it matter if he snored?

All the other questions he could think of to ask began with *when* and *how* and he didn’t suppose Mulcahy had an answer for him, or at least not one Hawkeye would want.

*When did you decide this was okay? How have you squared this with your conscience?*

*When is your conscience going to get up and tell you to leave me?*

*How much is it going to hurt when you do?*

A lot. It was going to hurt a lot.

“Hawkeye?”

“A lot,” Hawkeye said, and then caught himself. “Yes, what?”

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said. “I didn’t think – you’d need more time to think about it.” He was running his finger round the edge of his coffee cup. He looked embarrassed. “I took it for granted – I’m sorry.”

Hawkeye put his coffee cup down. He reached forward and removed the cup from Mulcahy’s hands, getting a surprised look.

“Okay,” Hawkeye said, “Just – let me – ” For the first time in his life he wasn’t sure what to do with his hands. “Please.” He moved closer, putting his arm round Mulcahy’s shoulders, settling his other arm across Mulcahy’s front, making his hands still, not roaming. Mulcahy cooperated, neither active nor resistant. Hawkeye leaned his head against Mulcahy’s head, rubbing his cheek against the soft fine hair. He remembered curving his hand against the curve of the skull, feeling the hair with his fingers, teasing Francis’s lips with his tongue. “Okay.” He swallowed. “Move in. Anything. Anything you want.”

Then it occurred to him to move his head so that Mulcahy could see what he was saying, and said “Sure. I didn’t change my mind.” He let go and moved back a little, making it easier for them to talk. “You want to move in next weekend?”

Mulcahy gave him an odd look. “I can’t until the end of term.”

“Oh yeah, right, you said.” Hawkeye rubbed his hand across his eyes. “Well, whenever,” he said, taking his hand away. “Listen, it’s Thanksgiving next week, you doing anything?”

“I – No,” Mulcahy said. “Not really.”

## Sins and Virtues

“Come to dinner. Stay the night. I mean – I can fix up the other bedroom. You can stay the night – if you want. We can talk about – about you moving in.”

“I could buy a trombone,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye laughed. He knew he was laughing harder than the joke deserved, but he couldn't stop. He felt Mulcahy take hold of his hands, and bent his head, looking at their hands joined together. He looked up and caught Mulcahy looking at him, with mingled compassion and tenderness. *He said he loved me. Loves me. He does, he said it, he doesn't lie: he loves me.*

“I'm sorry,” Mulcahy said. “I'm not happy, right now. But this is – what I want.”

Hawkeye shook his head. “You don't need to apologise,” he said. He curled his hands round Mulcahy's. “Just tell me you're coming for dinner next Thursday.”

“Yes.”

“And staying the night?”

Mulcahy smiled, but it didn't make him look any happier. “Yes.” He looked down at their hands. “Hawkeye?”

“Yeah?”

“You still have nightmares?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “Sometimes.” He let go of Mulcahy's hands and reached for their coffee cups. “Don't you?”

“I probably do,” Mulcahy said. “But I've – I generally don't remember my dreams.” He accepted his cup.

“Wish I didn't,” Hawkeye said cheerfully and flippantly. “Except for the ones about nurses.”

Mulcahy gave Hawkeye a small polite smile. “Of course.” He drank his coffee.

“Mine's gone cold.” It was lukewarm, at least. Hawkeye stood up again – he was feeling restless all over, his muscles twitching – and took both cups through to the kitchen to rinse them out and pour a fresh cup from the pot.

If he'd asked Carlye to marry him, maybe she'd have stayed with him. If he'd asked Trapper to leave his wife and live with him after the war, maybe at least they'd have broken up before Trapper left.

*Marry me*, he heard himself saying to Francis, and got in response the same small polite smile.

If he didn't say anything – Francis had already agreed to move in – there was no possibility of rejection.

*Yeah, and look how well that worked out the last two times.*

“Francis?”

Mulcahy accepted his coffee cup. “Thank you,” he said.

“There's something I want to say to you about you moving in,” Hawkeye said. He was finding it more difficult to say than he'd expected, and he'd expected it to be difficult.

“Yes?” Mulcahy looked as if he expected it to be something to do with the rent. Or possibly the chores. He had a practical expression on his face, down-to-earth, awaiting instruction.

“I love you,” Hawkeye said. “How does it go? Love, honour, cherish. I love you, honour you, and I want to cherish you – as much as you'll let me,” he added. “I do. Do you?”

Mulcahy had gone from practical to grim without moving a muscle. His voice, when he spoke at last, was on the edge of anger. “I don't find that kind of joke amusing.”

## Sins and Virtues

There was a hideous sinking hole somewhere not far beneath him. "I'm not joking," Hawkeye protested. It was a last-ditch defence: no one ever believed him if it got that far. "I'm *not*. I want you and no one else. No matter what I say about nurses. Or anyone."

"Hawkeye – "

Hawkeye got to his feet, impelled by twitchiness. "God. Why does no one *ever* believe me when I say I'm not joking?"

Mulcahy had stood up. Hawkeye stared at him. "Why don't *you* believe me?"

"Hawkeye – "

"I haven't had sex with anyone else since May!"

Mulcahy smiled. "Well, that *is* a long time," he said, and somehow the anger seemed to have dissolved out of him. He put his hands out and took hold of Hawkeye's hands. "If you mean what I think you mean, I do appreciate the sentiment – " his grip was firm and solid " – I hadn't even begun to think about that." He sounded genuinely amused.

"I mean it," Hawkeye said. "Look, I'm not – " *a hard-drinking promiscuous half-crazed talkative surgeon with nightmares* – "Look, I don't – "

Mulcahy's hand on his shoulder. Hawkeye twitched. "Look. I'm not such a terrific catch. I know that. But you wouldn't believe how much I want this. I'm not going to foul it up. I promise."

Mulcahy still looked amused. "You don't need to make these kind of promises." His hand was still resting on Hawkeye's shoulder.

Hawkeye shivered. He remembered asking *Are you going to run away if I kiss you?* and watching Mulcahy shut him out by closing his eyes.

"Don't tell me to let go of you this time," Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy blinked. "You're not holding on to me," he said.

His mouth tasted of coffee. After a moment, Hawkeye put his arms round Francis's shoulders, and went on kissing him. After a longer moment, Francis was kissing him back: his mouth was awkward, gentle, over-tentative, sweet. Hawkeye slid his mouth across Francis's cheek, feeling the stubble rasp lightly at his lips, and used his tongue on the sensitive patch of skin right under the ear. He was nuzzling down the other man's neck before he realised that something was wrong.

Mulcahy hadn't let go of him or moved away from him or even closed his eyes. But something was wrong.

"You okay?" Hawkeye realised he was going to have to step back in order to ask the question. He repeated it.

Mulcahy stared at him, looking ruffled and red in the face. After a moment he took his glasses off and rubbed his hand across his eyes. He put his glasses on again and opened his mouth to say something, then seemed to think better of it and sat down.

"Francis?" Hawkeye sat down at the other end of the sofa.

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said.

"Did we just – " Hawkeye stopped. "Did *I* just turn over two pages at once?"

Mulcahy laughed: it sounded awkward. "I suppose so." He stopped. "No. Hawkeye – " He stopped again. "I have a confession to make." He seemed to brace himself. "My reasons for accepting your offer were very selfish."

"Oh?" Hawkeye was feeling dazed. Was this a *no*, an *I've just changed my mind*, or another attack of the *we can't because it's a mortal sin*? "Selfish?"

"I'm lonely," Mulcahy said. "I've missed you."

"Good." Hawkeye stopped. "I mean, not good you're lonely. Good you missed me. I missed you. Is this a problem?"

## Sins and Virtues

“I shouldn’t – ” Mulcahy looked away. “I kept thinking – ” He looked back. “That I’d like to have someone to talk to.”

“Talk,” Hawkeye said. “Right.” He nodded. “Okay. Just... talk?”

“I meant – ” Mulcahy was fidgeting with his hands. He wasn’t sitting still. “I’ll – I’d – I’m sorry. I’m not very good at dealing with this kind of affair.”

Hawkeye bit his tongue. Mulcahy looked up and caught his eye. He laughed without awkwardness. With considerable relief, Hawkeye kicked his shoes off, leant back against the cushioned arm of the sofa and tucked his knees up, wrapping his arms round them. That kept his hands out of the way. “Any kind of affair,” he said lightly. Mulcahy looked more relaxed. Hawkeye waited till he was looking at him again, and asked “What did you want to talk about?”

“What?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “A trained observer, such as myself – ” He was putting on his detective voice, even though Mulcahy wouldn’t notice, because it comforted him. “ – notices that these things.” He dropped his voice. “Unless you just meant in general you’d like someone to talk to, but right now you don’t have anything to talk about.” Mulcahy could make him more nervous, faster, than anyone had been able to... since Carlye. “Do you?”

“Hawkeye, are you all right?”

“Worried,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy’s eyes widened. “About what?” He sounded alert and concerned.

“About you.”

“Why?”

“Why did you come here tonight?”

“To see you,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah, but – ” Hawkeye shifted his feet. “Why now? What happened?”

Mulcahy gave him a defensively cheerful look. Hawkeye gave him a look back. After a moment, Mulcahy shifted a little and said, mildly, “It’s really not very interesting.”

Hawkeye tilted his head. “Well?”

Mulcahy clasped his hands together, as if he were trying not to move them. “I use signs to communicate with some of the children I teach,” he said. “There’s a rule against the children using signs in class, but I’d assumed it was because the teachers think the children might be talking about them, if they use signs to speak to each other freely in class.” He smiled, very faintly. “And of course, sometimes they’re right.”

Hawkeye laughed. “Beats passing notes.”

“I can’t lip-read the profoundly deaf children very well, but often they’re the best signers, so I reasoned that if I confined our communication by signs to questions they asked me or I asked them, it wouldn’t really be a breach of the rules.”

“Makes sense.”

“Apparently I shouldn’t be using signs at all, because they need to learn how to communicate by speech. It’s supposed to be very bad for them to think they can communicate by sign. But I’m not sure I can teach them – not all of them – if we *don’t* use signs.”

“Well, were you hired to teach them how to speak?” Hawkeye asked.

Mulcahy gave him a brief look of surprise, and looked away. He didn’t turn his head back to look at Hawkeye for a minute or so. “Numbers are a universal language,” he said. “I’ve taught arithmetic to Korean children who spoke and understood no English at all. I feel that I am of some use there, even if I can’t encourage the children to learn how to speak.”

## Sins and Virtues

“And that’s what you were hired to do? Teach math?”

“That’s what I told Mrs Dunsford,” Mulcahy said. “But, after all... I don’t know anything about teaching deaf children. Maybe she’s right.”

“Who’s Mrs Dunsford?”

“She’s been teaching at the school for over thirty years, I think. Very good teacher. Devoted to the children. She’s really excellent at her job...” Mulcahy hesitated.

“You just don’t like her very much?” Hawkeye asked.

“I didn’t say that,” Mulcahy protested.

“You didn’t have to,” Hawkeye said, and grinned. “You never do.”

“But what if she’s *right*?”

“What if she’s not?” Hawkeye tilted his head back and looked up at the ceiling. He was trying to think of the right thing to say. He knew less than nothing about teaching deaf children, or teaching children at all. And Mulcahy knew it. Putting on a confidence-building front was a standard medical trick, but it didn’t work when the patient *knew* the doctor didn’t know any more than he did. Or less.

“When you were hired, they knew you were deaf?” Hawkeye asked. At Mulcahy’s nod, he speeded up the questions. “They hired you to teach math, right? They didn’t hire you to teach the kids to learn to speak, right? You’re doing a good job, right?”

Mulcahy’s small smile had broadened to an outright grin. “You’re trying to make me feel better,” he said. “Right?”

“You got me,” Hawkeye agreed immediately. He added, more seriously, “But I’m right, you know.”

“That’s what you always say.”

Hawkeye made a clownish face. “That’s because I’m always right.” He stopped. “Where do you learn signs, anyway? I tried to find a book, but all I could find was a guide to fingerspelling.”

Mulcahy started. “Why would you want to learn how to sign?”

“I’ll show you,” Hawkeye said. He unfolded his legs, stretching them out. “Come here. Come on.” He reached for Mulcahy, getting him to turn round and lean back: after a minute’s manoeuvring, he had them both lying back on the sofa: himself with his head resting against the arm, and Mulcahy resting against him. Francis was tense. Hawkeye put his arms round him, and waited for him to relax.

“Hawkeye, what are you doing?”

Hawkeye settled himself comfortably, and took Francis’s hand in his. He began to trace letters on Francis’s palm: S, H, O, W, I, N, G, Y, O, U, W, H, Y, I, N, E, E, D, T, O, L, E, A, R, N, S, I, G, N, S.

He heard, and felt, Francis chuckle. “You’re crazy,” he said, but he relaxed, momentarily. Then he sat up again, breaking Hawkeye’s light grip, and turned round to look at Hawkeye. “Did you manage to learn fingerspelling?”

Hawkeye lifted up his hands. Carefully, he spelt out “A, L, I, T, T, L, E.”

Mulcahy frowned a moment, then nodded. “I see...”

“Did I get it wrong?”

Mulcahy lifted his hand and tilted it from side to side. He was smiling, almost invisibly. “Perfect, actually.”

“You – ” Hawkeye laughed.

“If you know fingerspelling, why did you – why did you use – ” He touched Hawkeye’s hand, briefly.

“I like it,” Hawkeye said, grinning.

“It’s slower.”

“More fun.”

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy went on looking at him: Hawkeye felt his grin fading. Mulcahy's expression was terribly serious. When Mulcahy leaned forward, Hawkeye thought the other man meant to say something – almost until the moment Mulcahy's lips touched his.

Hawkeye pressed his hands down against the sofa. Not to move too fast, not to make Francis run a mile –

He stopped worrying about it. Francis's mouth tasted good. All the awkwardness and gentleness and sweetness said *Francis*, said *he loves you*, said *he wants you*.

"Hawkeye?" Francis was looking at him, less ruffled than before but more uncertain.

"Francis." Hawkeye sat up.

"I –" Mulcahy put his hands together again. "I'm sorry – I don't –"

Hawkeye leaned forward, feeling an urgent need to stop Mulcahy putting any doubts into actual words. "No. Don't say *anything*. Just come to dinner. Next Thursday. Okay?"

Mulcahy looked back at him. He looked half-amused, half-relieved. "Dinner. Next Thursday." He paused. "I can manage that."

### Thursday 25th November, 1954

It was the first time Hawkeye hadn't come to meet him at the station. Of course, it was broad daylight – just after noon – and Mulcahy knew the way to Hawkeye's apartment perfectly well.

It was disturbing not to be sure if the doorbell was working, no matter how long or how hard he rang it. On the other hand – Mulcahy glanced at his watch – it was past the time Hawkeye had asked him to come, and –

He knocked, hard and long, and waited. No answer.

An emergency at the hospital, then. Or something. Mulcahy stood still a minute, thinking. The restaurant on the corner where he and Hawkeye had eaten before was open: and most likely Hawkeye would think to look there.

He turned away and went back down to the elevator. He was about to step inside when a hand closed on his shoulder.

Hawkeye was wearing nothing but his red towelling dressing-gown. His hair was flopping into his eyes. He looked half-awake, and furious. He opened his mouth but didn't shape any words: instead he jerked his thumb, violently, back at the open door of his apartment. Mulcahy started back up the hall. Hawkeye went with him, not taking his hand off Mulcahy's shoulder.

Hawkeye switched the light on before he kicked the door shut. "You were just going away," he said.

"I thought you weren't in."

"Of course I was in!" Hawkeye still looked angry. "Do I look as if I'm not in? You were going away without even leaving a note."

"I rang the door bell," Mulcahy said. The door to Hawkeye's bedroom was standing open. "When did you go to sleep?"

Hawkeye blinked at him. "You're not going away again," he said.

"No," Mulcahy said. "What was the emergency last night?"

Hawkeye shook his head. "Not an emergency. Not a real one. Complications. One of Cournand's patients. Doctor Cournand asked me to stay on with him in case he decided to operate again and wanted another surgeon to assist. And we operated. *God*

## Sins and Virtues

he's a good surgeon. Did I say that already? Anyway. And we stayed on until the patient started coming round – bp normal, pulse normal – and – ”

“So the patient's all right?”

“Great,” Hawkeye said. “Did I say all right? I meant *great*. I rang up this morning and he had a good night's sleep.”

“How much sleep have you had?”

“I couldn't sleep when I got back,” Hawkeye said. “Started cooking instead. After a while it felt like not worth going to bed.” He yawned, obscuring the next thing he said. “ – what are you doing here this early?”

Mulcahy looked at his watch. Hawkeye caught hold of his wrist and turned it slightly. “Oh.” He stood with his mouth slightly open. “Okay, wait till I get some coffee – ”

“I don't think you need coffee,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked at him, eyebrows up. “Who's the doctor here, you or me? I need coffee. If I don't have coffee, I'm going to go to sleep. And I find it really difficult to eat dinner in my sleep. If I have coffee and a hot shower I'll wake up. Not a hot shower of coffee. Just water. Hot water. Have you ever thought about how wonderful hot water is? I mean really thought about it? So. Coffee and hot water. Are you okay with staying here until I've had coffee and a hot shower?”

“You need to go back to bed,” Mulcahy said.

“I'd love to,” Hawkeye said. He started to giggle. “I'd love to. But I don't think – ” He was giggling too much to be understood.

“Hawkeye?”

“Bed. Sure. Why not?”

Mulcahy took hold of Hawkeye by the elbow and steered him towards the bedroom door. Hawkeye went cooperatively. Last night's clothes were strewn across the floor. The bed looked like Hawkeye had exploded out of it.

“Don't go away,” Hawkeye said. He lay down on the bed, catching at Mulcahy's forearm. “I really mean it, don't go away.”

Mulcahy sat down on the edge of the bed. Hawkeye's eyes were sliding shut again. He said something, yawned, and slid his hand up Mulcahy's arm. “Don't go away,” he said again, quite clearly.

Mulcahy sat still. He didn't want to move. Hawkeye's grip on his arm slackened only some time after he seemed to have gone to sleep.

There was plenty of space on the other side of the bed. More than room enough for another man to lie down next to Hawkeye.

Dinner was three-quarters prepared in the kitchen, and the dishes were three-quarters not done. Mulcahy slid off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and set about the dinner and the dishes. He was unhappily conscious that while he was doing what he ought to be doing, he would rather be on Hawkeye's bed, watching Hawkeye sleep.

He wanted Hawkeye.

It terrified him, how *much* he wanted Hawkeye. It had been fifteen years – more than fifteen years – since the last time he had stood in the public showers at the gym where he trained, and let himself want another man. A man whose name he'd never known. It shamed him still, that he could recall the feeling of that man's mouth on his dick far more vividly than he could bring to mind that man's face.

The turkey was probably an eight-pounder – it would take three hours. No matter how he spun out washing the dishes, it couldn't take him more than an hour.

## Sins and Virtues

He managed to find things to do for nearly two hours, but Hawkeye was still fast asleep when Mulcahy wandered back through to his bedroom to check on him. He was tangled in bathrobe and sheets, twitching a little as he slept. A blanket and a comforter had fallen to the floor. Mulcahy picked the comforter up and tucked it over him.

*If I move in...*

Mulcahy went round the bed and spread the blanket on the other side, half over Hawkeye. The other man stirred again, turning on to his face. Mulcahy lay down on the blanket, pillowing his head on his arm. Hawkeye was a huddled shape next to him, ruffled hair and half-hidden face.

*When I move in...*

He couldn't remember the faces of most of the men he'd had sex with. He'd never learned their names. It had been easier to repent what he'd done with them.

*I want you to live with me. I want to make love with someone who matters to me. Because I'm me, and you're you, and I wanted it to matter to you just as much.*

He couldn't confess to a sin he hadn't committed: Father Saunders was right about that. But he could never confess the sin: he could not persuade himself that he would feel contrition for wanting Hawkeye...

For wanting Hawkeye to make love to him, as if he mattered.

For wanting to be with Hawkeye.

He could remember exactly when Hawkeye had separated out from the unit of Hawkeye-and-Trapper: one lunchtime when he'd been sitting over a dull bland meal. He'd been assigned to the 4077th for three months by that time, and was close to concluding that he was useless here. No one came to his services: no one came to confession: he hovered in the operating room, trying to find things to do, and tried to find ways to talk with the patients who stayed in post-op long enough to be talked to.

He told Hawkeye this: he couldn't remember why. At the time, he'd been wary of Hawkeye, who had already acquired a reputation for cruel practical jokes outside the OR and cruel verbal jabs inside the OR. Feeling that his prayers were inadequate was a problem he might have taken to his confessor, but he wouldn't see a priest to confess to without getting leave to go to the orphanage, if it happened there was a priest there, or Seoul, if he could get a 24-hour pass to go there.

It was his first memory of Hawkeye separate from Trapper. Separate from anything else that Hawkeye had done or said before. Hawkeye had looked at him, oddly vulnerable, and said *I'm able to do a lot of things in surgery that I'm not really good enough to do.*

Hawkeye turned over restlessly in his sleep, his hands shifting and jerking under the covers. Mulcahy pushed himself up on his elbow and watched him: he was still asleep, just dreaming.

Nightmare?

Hawkeye's mouth was twitching, opening, closing: if he were speaking, Mulcahy couldn't understand what he was saying. Better not to wake him: it was easier to forget dreams if you slept through them. It made Mulcahy uncomfortable to watch him like this without intervening, but it couldn't help to wake him.

Jokes about marriage aside, Hawkeye wanted him, and liked him, and wanted him to be happy. Loved him, however awkward that made Mulcahy feel.

It wasn't as if this would be forever. Hawkeye needed someone who remembered Korea, right now: someone he liked and wanted and wanted to take care of. A year, two years, a few years, and Hawkeye's resilient spirit would recover: normality was still an option.

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye rolled over again. He was facing Mulcahy now, and he looked as if he were saying something out loud. Mulcahy put his hand on Hawkeye's chest, hoping to be gentle enough not to wake him. He caught the vibration of speech, a second before Hawkeye's eyes flickered open, and his mouth fell open. He said something again, incomprehensibly, closed his eyes, and then his muscles relaxed. Mulcahy's hand retreated, reluctantly.

A long moment later, Hawkeye's eyes opened again. "Morning, Francis." He blinked. "Or is it afternoon?"

Mulcahy smiled. "If we were in Korea, I think it's still last night."

He saw Hawkeye laugh without showing it on his face: like a ripple through his whole body. "Is that turkey I smell, or is it my imagination?"

Mulcahy glanced at his watch.

"You should know that ordinarily I hate people who do that when they're in bed with me."

Mulcahy didn't quite manage to suppress a laugh. He said, trying to be sober, "The turkey's been in for two and a half hours, nearly."

"Ah. Should be nearly done, then." Hawkeye looked at him. "I didn't plan for it to be this way, you know."

"I didn't mind." And he didn't, though he'd minded before. He smiled and said brightly. "You know I always like to feel useful."

"I didn't ask you over to be useful," Hawkeye retorted, and his grin acquired a teasing edge. "Just decorative."

Mulcahy laughed out loud, this time: he couldn't help it. "You needed to get some sleep."

"I don't know what's wrong with me – I've stayed awake for seventy-two hours at a stretch before."

"When you had to," Mulcahy said. "You didn't have to. When did you get to sleep this morning?"

"Did I tell you about last night, or was that just a dream I had?"

"You had to operate on a patient who'd developed complications?"

"Cournand operated," Hawkeye corrected. "I just assisted." His face went thoughtful. "Did I tell you he's a terrific surgeon?"

"Twice, so far. When did you get to sleep this morning?"

"Sometime after six," Hawkeye said. "I called the hospital sometime just after six, and they said the patient was doing fine. I meant to just catch a nap till it was time to put the turkey in the oven, but I must have gone right out. Why were you going away without even leaving a note?"

"I thought you were out," Mulcahy said. "I'd rung the bell, and knocked, and I thought –" He felt apologetic at the accusing look on Hawkeye's face, even though he hardly felt it was his fault. "I didn't realise you were fast asleep, or I'd have knocked louder."

"I must have slept right through it," Hawkeye said. "I didn't even know what woke me up. I'll get you your own keys tomorrow. But not even a *note*?"

"It didn't occur to me," Mulcahy said. "I – just thought you must have an emergency at the hospital, and I'd wait for you in the restaurant down the block."

Hawkeye closed his eyes again, and made a face, shaking his head. "Yeah. Sorry. I got twitchy. You must be starving."

"I'm used to fasting for longer than this," Mulcahy said.

"Not when you're waiting for Thanksgiving dinner," Hawkeye said. "Look – I should get up and peel the potatoes –"

## Sins and Virtues

“No need, I can do that. Why don’t you have a shower – ”

“Are you implying I smell bad?”

Mulcahy kept his eye on the target and plunged towards it. “Why don’t you have a shower, I’ll make some coffee, and see what else has to be done?”

“Coffee,” Hawkeye said, with sudden enthusiasm. “You’ll find a bag of good stuff – Italian grind – in the cupboard to the right of the sink. I’ll love you forever if you make me a big mug.” He sat up, and grinned, showing all of his teeth. “Of course, I’ll love you forever anyway. But if you make me coffee, I’ll love you forever *twice*.”

Hawkeye liked his coffee milkless and sweetened: Mulcahy found the biggest mug in the kitchen and handed it to Hawkeye when he appeared in the kitchen.

“Thanks,” Hawkeye said. He tasted it, smiled to himself, and drank. “You cleaned up the kitchen,” he said, looking round.

“Is it all right?”

“It’ll take me some time to get used to it,” Hawkeye said. “I didn’t ask you over...” The sentence trailed off in the middle. “I just meant to ask you to dinner.” He was fully dressed, and he’d shaved: his hair still looked damp, but neatly combed. “Why don’t you have yourself some coffee and I’ll do the rest?”

“I mixed up some biscuits – ”

“You did?” Hawkeye opened the oven. Mulcahy had put the pan with biscuits under the turkey. He stood up and turned round. “You did. Okay. I need to make the succotash.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

Hawkeye took a deep breath. He seemed to consciously relax. “You want to get the potatoes on? Or get the pickled vegetables out of the fridge?”

“No reason I can’t do both,” Mulcahy said. He smiled. Hawkeye smiled back.

After the potatoes were boiling, Mulcahy investigated and found a tray for the pickled vegetables in the cupboard Hawkeye had absently pointed out. At the back of the cupboard there were five bottles: three unopened, one three-quarters full, one half-full.

Mulcahy straightened up. He supposed it was none of his business. Hawkeye was chopping a whitish meat to mix with the onions. Spontaneously, Mulcahy said “Salt pork?”

Hawkeye turned his head. “What else would you put in succotash?”

“Don’t you make it with bacon?”

“Bacon?” Hawkeye looked visibly incredulous. “Bacon?”

“I never heard of anyone making succotash with anything else.”

“In tourist restaurants they make succotash with lobster,” Hawkeye said. “Flatlanders will eat anything. But *bacon*?” His mouth gave the emphasis to the last word. He turned his head back to the chopping board, and went on slicing, neat and fast. Done, he turned his head again, and eyed Mulcahy. “You want to make it with bacon next year?”

“Thanks,” Mulcahy a little dryly.

“Just a thought.” Hawkeye added the salt pork to the onions, and reached out two cans from the same cupboard where Mulcahy had found the tray. He seemed to stop a moment, but he said nothing.

Mulcahy checked the potatoes again. “Can I ask a personal question?”

Hawkeye turned towards him. He looked exasperated. “You want to move in with me. You can ask any personal question you like.”

## Sins and Virtues

“I wondered – I haven’t seen all that much of you, I know, but still, I wondered – if -- ” Mulcahy came to a halt.

Hawkeye waited.

Mulcahy said, finally, “I’ve had dinner with you four times, and you didn’t drink. Not even a glass of wine or beer. So I wondered if you’d given up drinking altogether. I wasn’t going to ask – but I saw what you have at the back of that cupboard.” A bottle of gin, three-quarters full: another of Scotch, half-full: two bottles of beer, and another of red wine.

“Ah.” Hawkeye looked down at the pan. He looked uneasy when he glanced sideways. “Well.”

“I’m sorry.” Mulcahy said. “I shouldn’t have asked.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. He went on stirring. “No, I guess – we should talk about it.” He didn’t look happy. “Can we wait till I’ve got this done?” He turned his attention back to the pan, and his face away from Mulcahy.

Mulcahy stood still. Finally, he said “I should mash the potatoes.”

If Hawkeye said anything, it was invisible. He didn’t turn his head.

“Perhaps we can talk over dinner.” Mulcahy didn’t dare say anything more: it was grossly unfair to be angry with Hawkeye simply for keeping his head turned in the wrong direction.

It didn’t take long to get the meal on the table. Hawkeye had prepared alarming amounts of food: from the boat of gravy to the bowl of cranberry sauce, it all looked like too much for four people, let alone two, even if neither of them had eaten all day.

Hawkeye sat down and looked at Mulcahy. “You want to say grace?”

Mulcahy stared. “You’re agnostic...?”

“You’re not.” Hawkeye folded his hands together on the edge of the table. “Better say it fast – that turkey’s been calling to me for a quarter of an hour.”

Mulcahy crossed himself. “Dear Lord,” he said, and realised that he had no idea what to say next. He felt self-conscious, which he usually didn’t when he prayed. He was still feeling angry. He had no feeling of connection with God. To pray out loud at an agnostic’s invitation at a dinner when they intended to discuss a relationship in mortal sin?

He couldn’t reject Hawkeye’s invitation. He took a breath, and crossed himself again. “Thank You, dear Lord, for this good food.” He lifted his eyes: Hawkeye was watching him, intent, focussed. Mulcahy heard himself say “Thank You for bringing us together to share this food, and bless us, dear God, and our friendship. Amen.” He didn’t feel angry any more.

“Amen,” Hawkeye said, and picked up the carving knife and fork. He grinned. “Are you a breast man or a leg man?”

“Both, thank you,” Mulcahy said. “Hawkeye, you said we could talk – ”

Hawkeye was carving neat slices off the breast. The look he gave Mulcahy was odd and wary. “I guess.” He handed Mulcahy a plate of turkey and stuffing. “You want to help yourself to the trimmings?” He started to carve himself a plateful. He wasn’t looking at Mulcahy, but his face was turned towards him enough to read what he was saying. “It’s not so much I gave up drinking. I don’t like to drink around you.”

Mulcahy was in the middle of helping himself to succotash. He stared at Hawkeye. “What? Why? Do you imagine I’ll disapprove?” He added more than he’d meant to.

“No.” Hawkeye was scooping mashed potato out of the dish. He looked uneasy. “You remember that night I – I was trying to talk to you, and I was too drunk for you to understand what I was saying? I decided I was never going to put you – or me – in that position again.”

## Sins and Virtues

“Oh.” For the second time in ten minutes, Mulcahy had no idea what to say next. “Hawkeye – I don’t think that’s a very good reason – ”

“That’s up to me, isn’t it?”

“Well – ”

“You hate telling people when you don’t understand them,” Hawkeye said. “You’d rather nod, smile, and shut up. Well, I don’t want you to have to treat me like that.”

“But...” Mulcahy swallowed. “Hawkeye, the reason I didn’t understand you that night wasn’t – wasn’t just because you weren’t sober.”

“That was the main reason, wasn’t it?”

“You woke me up,” Mulcahy said. “I was tired and I couldn’t find my specs at first, and even when I found them I wasn’t focussing very well. I had no idea what you might be saying to me. It didn’t help that you were... weren’t sober, and you were exhausted, but it wasn’t the only reason I couldn’t understand you. It certainly doesn’t mean you can’t have a drink.”

“But why didn’t you tell me you couldn’t understand what I was saying?” Hawkeye demanded. He put his knife and fork down on the table and glared at him. “Why didn’t you *tell* me?”

Embarrassed, Mulcahy looked down at his plate. He looked up again a moment later. Hawkeye was still not eating. “Well, I’m not sure I could have – ”

“Right, I was drunk.”

“You were tired,” Mulcahy said. “You were upset. And *I* was tired. There were all sorts of reasons why I just – I just thought it best to let you go to sleep. I had no idea -- ”

“You *never* tell people you can’t understand them,” Hawkeye said. “When we went to that restaurant with the dim lighting? Did you tell me you wouldn’t be able to hear me? You were just going to sit there and nod and smile at me all evening, weren’t you?”

“Well – ” Mulcahy stopped.

Hawkeye didn’t say anything. He was sitting with his arms folded on the table, staring across it at Mulcahy.

“Hawkeye?”

“Weren’t you?”

Mulcahy stared back.

“Oh, damn,” Hawkeye said finally, looking as if his lack of sleep had caught up with him all at once. He put his face in his hands and rubbed at his eyes. After a long moment, he took his hands away. “I’m sorry,” he said. “You asked, I told you. You don’t like to say when you stop understanding me, so I don’t want to drink around you. You hate being deaf, do you think I don’t get that?”

“But – ” Mulcahy was fumbling for words. “But I don’t want to give people the trouble of repeating themselves...” He trailed off.

Hawkeye looked as if he were trying to think of something to say in response. Then he shrugged, widely, and grimaced. He looked down at the food on his plate. “Okay.” He picked up his fork and fidgeted with it. “You’re not eating.”

“Neither are you.”

They both started to eat at the same time: Mulcahy was hungry enough that the food still tasted good.

Refusal to admit when he couldn’t lip-read had nothing to do with not giving people trouble, Mulcahy recognised. Or not enough. Pride was the root of it.

“How’s the succotash?” Hawkeye asked.

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy ate another mouthful. “Delicious.” It was good – surprisingly good: Mam had always made it from scratch, not from cans.

“These are great biscuits,” Hawkeye said.

It was a moment before Mulcahy remembered he’d made them. “Thank you.” He hesitated. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

Mulcahy said, with difficulty, “When I have to admit I couldn’t tell what someone was saying, I’m embarrassed. It shouldn’t stop me from doing what I should – but – sometimes – it does.”

Hawkeye lifted his hand briefly to cover his eyes. “Francis – ” He stopped. “You know, this is ruining one of the best meals I’ve had in a long time? I’m sorry.”

“I asked.”

Hawkeye grinned. It looked more like a grimace. “Can’t we just forget I asked...?”

“I asked.”

“I forgot.” Hawkeye grinned again, this time with more feeling. “Come on. How’s the succotash? What would it taste like with bacon?”

Mulcahy managed a smile in return. “Different. Do they really make it with lobster, in Maine?”

“In tourist restaurants,” Hawkeye said. “They make *everything* with lobster.”

“I like the stuffing. It’s unusual.”

“Cornbread,” Hawkeye said. “Try the cranberry sauce.” He looked cheerful, but not relaxed: his free hand was tapping on the table.

“In the Korean restaurant – I’m sorry I didn’t tell you I couldn’t see what you were saying,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye froze. “We weren’t going to talk about that any more,” he said stiffly.

“I try very hard not to let my being deaf be an inconvenience to anyone else,” Mulcahy said. “But – ” *dear God, help me say it* “ – if I need to – ”

Hawkeye stood up. Mulcahy broke off what he was saying, and stared after him. When Hawkeye came back with the bottle of wine in one hand, and two glasses in the other, he said nothing.

Hawkeye sat down, put one glass in front of Mulcahy, and the other in front of him. Solemnly as if he were performing a rite, he filled them each with red wine. He lifted his glass. “What shall we drink to?”

The words Mulcahy had meant to say were caught in the middle of his mouth. He looked at Hawkeye, speechless for a moment. “Finest kind.”

Hawkeye nodded. “You and me.” He drank, before Mulcahy could say that wasn’t what he’d meant: he wasn’t sure what he *had* meant.

The flavour wasn’t like sacramental wine. Less sweet, more complex. Sacramental wine was red, transubstantiated blood. It had occurred to him more than once, standing in O.R., that the red wine that became the blood of Christ was nothing like the startling bright red of the blood that splashed the floor and painted the surgical whites and the surgeon’s hands.

“Should be white, not red,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy stared.

“The wine,” Hawkeye said. “If I’d thought about having wine with dinner tonight, I’d have bought a bottle of white.”

“Oh.” Mulcahy tasted the wine again. “It seems fine to me.”

Hawkeye grinned. “Don’t tell me, you never drink... wine.”

Mulcahy almost managed to suppress a laugh. He glanced at the window. “Ah, the children of the night, what sweet music they make.”

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye's mouth fell open. He tilted his head back, and Mulcahy saw the full-throated shout of laughter. He stopped, wiping his eyes, and looked at Mulcahy with an expression of affection, and admiration, and amusement. "You saw that movie!"

"Was there a movie? I read the novel," Mulcahy said. He kept his face straight. It wasn't easy: he couldn't remember anyone ever looking at him quite like that before.

"Is it true what they say about vampires and crosses?"

"Like snakes and ladders?"

Hawkeye laughed again. He reached out across the table, and caught at Mulcahy's hand. "I love you," he said, and took his hand back. He went on eating.

After a moment, Mulcahy started to eat again. They didn't talk for a little while: Hawkeye was looking at Mulcahy as if something too good to be true had happened. The expression on his face made Mulcahy feel strangely both happy and uncertain. If he had done something, he had no idea what it was.

"You know I love you too," he said.

Hawkeye's face broke into a grin. "You know I don't think I'd ever get tired of hearing you say that?" he said.

"I think you would," Mulcahy protested.

"No. Tell you what, I bet you. We can sit down on the couch after dinner and you can tell me you love me, and if I get tired of hearing you say it, I lose."

"What are you going to bet?"

"A lifetime lease on this apartment," Hawkeye said, and grinned wider.

Mulcahy laughed. "Now, be serious," he protested again. "We were going to talk about... about rent, and shared costs, and so on. You're going to find me rather inexperienced –"

Hawkeye's eyebrows went up. "Really?"

Mulcahy had learned to how to deal with the insinuation Hawkeye could put into one word, but nothing seemed to fit: nothing fitted because he had none of his defences left. He wasn't entitled to them any more.

He was left with nothing but the resource he'd used when he first encountered Hawkeye: pretending he hadn't heard it. "I've lived in several parish houses, in a seminary, in a college dorm... but I've never shared an apartment like this. What rent should I pay? How do you pay for the utilities?"

Hawkeye started to explain, and Mulcahy paid attention. It wasn't quite as new to him as he'd made it sound, but it was true he'd never been a tenant in his own right.

"So half that would be my rent?" It would take a large chunk out of his new salary, but he thought he could manage on what was left.

"Wait a minute," Hawkeye said. "How much do you get paid?"

"At the moment, I'm paid as one of the deaf instructors," Mulcahy said. "But at the beginning of January, I'll be paid as a teacher, and that will be two thousand seven hundred a year."

Hawkeye stared, opened his mouth, and then – visibly – changed his mind. He looked as if he were thinking of something else to say. "I got paid more than that in the army. *You* got paid more than that in the army. Look..."

"I want to pay my share," Mulcahy said hastily, cutting off what he was afraid Hawkeye was about to say.

"Well, fine, but –" Hawkeye stopped. "Look, how –" He stopped again.

"How much do you get paid?" Mulcahy asked.

Hawkeye shrugged and grinned. It looked false. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask."

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said, immediately. He suppressed the impulse to snap "But I told you mine." He was the tenant.

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Hawkeye shrugged again. He looked embarrassed, which was not an expression Mulcahy was used to seeing on his face. “Twenty-three thousand.”

Mulcahy nodded. It was a moment before it sank in. “You did say twenty-three thousand?”

“Are you asking me if you heard right?” Hawkeye raised his eyebrows.

“But how on earth do you spend it all?” Mulcahy asked. He was still blank with astonishment.

He realised it was a stupid question even as the words came out of his mouth, and was relieved when Hawkeye only shrugged, picked up his glass and fidgeted with it. “This and that. Look, do you – look, you don’t want to pay half the rent on this place.”

“I’m paying my share and that’s that,” Mulcahy said, emphatically.

“Sure. But if you pay half, that’s going to be over half what you take home. And it’s –” He stopped. “I don’t – I don’t *want* –” his mouth twisted, so that Mulcahy only got the word from context “ – to take all that from you.”

*You’ve already taken my soul. What more can you take?* Mulcahy heard himself thinking it, and knew in the same moment of thought, it wasn’t fair. He couldn’t resent Hawkeye for a decision he himself had made.

There was no reason to argue with Hawkeye over something like this. He managed a smile, and lifted his own wine glass. “Well, you’re the landlord. You set the rent. I’ll pay it.”

Hawkeye’s eyes widened. He looked very much as he had looked when Mulcahy had asked *Can I move into your apartment?* He didn’t spill his wine, though. After a moment, he smiled, a cheerful, almost theatrical gesture. “Fine.”

“Fine,” Mulcahy echoed.

“What do you mean, you’re being paid as a deaf instructor? Aren’t you a teacher? What difference does it make that you’re deaf?”

“I’m certified to teach in Pennsylvania, not New York,” Mulcahy said, a little breathless from the subject-change.

“What difference does that make?”

“Well, none, so long as I’m working at Fanwood. They can hire any deaf instructors they see fit, and I’m certainly qualified in that area,” Mulcahy said dryly.

Hawkeye nodded, a faint edge to his smile.

“The certification course takes two years,” Mulcahy said. “Mr Moskowitz told me this Monday that they’re willing to have me work there from January, officially under Mr Moskowitz’s supervision – providing I’m working towards getting my New York State teaching certificate.”

“Okay.” Hawkeye nodded. “No problem with that lady – Miss Dunswick?”

“Mrs Dunsford.”

“Whatever.” Hawkeye shrugged. “No grief from her?”

Mulcahy hesitated. “Not exactly.” Mrs Dunsford had formally apologised, in front of Albert Moskowitz, for “anything she might have said that was hurtful” – and for all the formality, he’d got the feeling she meant it. “I don’t think she approves, but she’s – willing to wait and see.” He got the further impression that she and Moskowitz had argued it out before Mulcahy arrived at the meeting: Moskowitz had taught at Fanwood for many years, if not for quite as long as Mrs Dunsford. “I’m ... I think I’m something of an experiment.” He smiled. It *was* amusing, in its way.

Hawkeye didn’t look amused. “How do you feel about that?”

“Well, Mr Moskowitz said – he said I was a good teacher, and I really don’t think I’m doing the children any harm, and I do need the job –” That didn’t taste good: he

## Sins and Virtues

was conscious, all over again, of the difference between a priest and a lay teacher. He looked down at his plate. Somehow he'd got through most of the food on it. "I do think I can teach them math, even if I am deaf."

"Sure you can," Hawkeye said. "I don't get it. What's the problem? Why shouldn't you?"

"Well... if it were going to cause the children problems because we couldn't communicate, I would have to resign." *And do what?*

"But –" Hawkeye looked tired and exasperated – a familiar expression, comforting in its very familiarity. "What makes you think you're causing them problems? You're – you're about the kindest, smartest guy I ever met. I bet you're a great teacher. And it doesn't sound like your ever-awake instinct for seeing your own failings saw a problem till this schoolmarm started telling you she thought you ought to be having trouble. Want some more –?"

Hawkeye was reaching for the carving-knife.

Mulcahy shook his head. "No – no thank you. Do you really think that?" He wasn't sure whether to be puzzled, pleased, or worried, but mostly confusion was winning out.

"That you're a great teacher? Sure. If I'd had you for math classes in high school, I might be able to add up a bar tab today. If you hadn't distracted me."

"Distracted you?"

Hawkeye grinned. "I was very easily distracted when I was in high school. Half the football team and all of the swimming team. One cute math teacher..."

"Hawkeye," Mulcahy protested.

"I had to go into pre-med when I graduated. It was the only place I was more interested in the coursework than the distractions. Look, help me out here. We have more turkey than I can eat."

"Really, I'm quite full."

"I bought a pumpkin pie for dessert. And a pint of ice cream." Hawkeye looked hopeful.

Mulcahy laughed. "I have an idea –"

"Yeah, what?" Hawkeye put his hands on the table and looked at him.

"Mam used to have a pie course a couple of hours after dinner, on Thanksgiving and at Christmas. Why don't we clear up the table and have your pumpkin pie in an hour or two? I don't believe I have room for it now."

"Sure," Hawkeye said. He picked up a piece of biscuit, swirled it through the gravy on his plate, and popped it into his mouth. "Coffee? Don't worry about the leftovers, we're never going to finish them all."

Hawkeye had finished making the coffee well before Mulcahy had finished putting the leftovers away. When Mulcahy glanced round, he was propped up against the doorway, watching him.

"You're pretty thorough."

"Waste not, want not," Mulcahy said, brightly. It was true that even in a strange kitchen, in a situation Mam would not have been able to comprehend, he could feel her looking over his shoulder with instructions on putting leftovers away to be eaten later. It was also true that, once this task was complete, he and Hawkeye were going to sit down on the couch together, and he was finding it easier to focus on the task at hand.

"Come here," Hawkeye said, the next time he looked round.

Mulcahy wiped his hands on the dishcloth and hung it up. He came over.

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Hawkeye put his hands on Mulcahy's shoulders, and kissed him, gently, so briefly that Mulcahy had hardly time to think about it before Hawkeye had pulled back and handed him a mug of coffee. "I'm glad you came," Hawkeye said, picking up his own mug. "I didn't mean you to do so much of the work. I wanted it to be perfect."

"It was delicious," Mulcahy said. The coffee was good. He sat down on the couch at one end, and Hawkeye sat down at the other. He kicked his shoes off and folded himself up, watching Mulcahy with that odd predatory look, fond and intent. Mulcahy buried his face in his mug and drank.

When he looked up again, Hawkeye hadn't moved. He was still nursing his coffee, still watching Mulcahy.

"Do you have to work tomorrow?" he asked, making conversation.

"What?" Hawkeye stared a moment. "No. Cournand told me I had the whole weekend off. You?"

"Yes," Mulcahy said. "Some of the children have gone home till Sunday evening, but not all of them. I'm expected back tomorrow."

Hawkeye nodded. He looked relieved. "I made up the bed in your – in the other bedroom," he said.

Mulcahy nodded. He drank more coffee. He had wondered what Hawkeye would do – how Hawkeye would begin – and he still had no idea. He smiled at Hawkeye again, trying to think of something else to say.

Hawkeye put his mug down. Mulcahy was conscious of more relief than anything else: without waiting to be asked, he put his own mug safely out of the way. Hawkeye leaned forward. "Can I ask you to do something?"

"Anything," Mulcahy said. It was truer than he wanted it to be.

"Hold me," Hawkeye said.

"What?" Mulcahy was half doubtful, half bewildered.

"Hold me," Hawkeye repeated. "Hold me, put your arms round me, hug the stuffing out of me –"

"The cornbread stuffing?"

Hawkeye jerked his head back and laughed as if Mulcahy had tickled him. He had shifted along the sofa while he was speaking, and he was within arm's reach. Still not sure it could really be himself doing it, amused despite himself, Mulcahy put an arm round Hawkeye's shoulder, and Hawkeye leaned in against him. He didn't do anything else: he stayed there, warm and solid, a lovely astonishing weight. Mulcahy could feel him breathing: if he looked sideways he could see him smile. Neither of them said anything.

Hawkeye had slid down against the back of the sofa so that Mulcahy's arm fitted comfortably across his shoulders. His hands were folded together in his lap. His head was resting solidly against Mulcahy's shoulder.

It was almost a fraternal embrace. Except for the intention behind it. Hawkeye's. His. It would have been permissible to hold him like this to comfort him – to comfort anyone. Almost permissible. He would have been trying uncomfortably not to think about what he was thinking about. He would have retreated, and tried not to be in this situation again.

Not thought about how it would feel to have this solid weight against him if they were both naked, in the same bed.

Of course, he *was* in this situation. In the middle of it. For a while, for as long as Hawkeye wanted him to be here: he could hold Hawkeye like this.

"Hawkeye," he said, and Hawkeye lifted his head to look at him.

"Mmm?"

## Sins and Virtues

“Can you move a little?”

“Sure,” Hawkeye said, though he looked regretful.

“No,” Mulcahy said, “not like that – ” He heeled off his shoes, and shifted himself round, tugging Hawkeye into position. He was propped up against the arm of the sofa, and Hawkeye was all but lying on top of him, an angular warm weight. Mulcahy could put his arms round his chest, and did, hugging him a little closer for the pleasure of feeling Hawkeye sigh a breath out and relax. They couldn’t talk like this – he couldn’t even see if Hawkeye were smiling – but he didn’t care. For the time being, it felt as if he didn’t have to care about anything.

After a while, he realised Hawkeye was probably asleep. He lay still, looking at Hawkeye’s black hair, salted with white, feeling Hawkeye against him, all the way down. Hawkeye could rouse him to sudden fierce lust with a touch or kiss. He wasn’t feeling that now: what he was feeling was... desire. Nothing that would wake Hawkeye. Nothing that overwhelmed him the way Hawkeye had overwhelmed him last weekend. In another life, he’d have tried to retreat, to go somewhere by himself until the feeling went away.

He didn’t have to do anything about it, not right now. Hawkeye was lying in his arms. Four years ago, when he’d first met Hawkeye, his hair had been pure black. Three years in Korea had changed them both. He was deaf, Hawkeye had nightmares.

Mulcahy yawned. Hawkeye was warm and sleeping peacefully. The first winter in Korea, Mulcahy had longed to be warm, warm and clean, more even than he’d wanted good food or enough sleep or a friend to talk to...

*Dear Lord, thank you for bringing me to this place....*

He woke up abruptly because Hawkeye had sat up and where he had been was cold.

“Damn,” Hawkeye said, and rubbed his hand over his eyes, as if he was trying to wake himself up. “Who’s that?”

“What?”

Hawkeye stood up, glancing at his watch. “Someone at the door. If it’s anyone from the hospital I might need to go on over, but if it’s anyone else, I’m giving them the bum’s rush. Either way...” He yawned again. “Don’t move. I’ll be back in a minute.”

## Thanksgiving, 1954

Afterwards, it occurred to Sarah that she should have been worried Ben would be out for the evening. At the time, she was so tired she just stood, waiting, for the door to open, and when it didn’t, she rang the bell again.

A minute or so later, the door opened. Ben stood and stared at her.

“Hello,” Sarah said.

“Hi,” Ben said. He looked more bewildered than unwelcoming.

“I’m sorry – can I come in?”

He blinked and stepped backwards. “Sure. Come in. Is – should I be expecting Bill now or in half an hour?”

“I’m sorry, I should have called you – ” Ben’s apartment was small, and smelt wonderfully of food. Sarah’s appetite fluctuated, but right now she was hungry.

“You’re having people over to dinner?”

## Sins and Virtues

“No. Had a friend to dinner, and we both dozed off afterwards. I – I really just woke up. Didn’t get enough sleep last night. Is Bill half an hour behind you or just coming up the stairs?”

The sitting-room was brightly-lit. There was someone else there. Ben’s friend. He looked familiar, but she couldn’t think where from.

“Mrs Pierce? Are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” Sarah said automatically.

“Good,” Ben said. He didn’t make introductions. “Sarah, where’s Bill?”

“He’s in Crabapple Cove. Or maybe Florida.” More charitably, Sarah added, “Or in Vermont.”

“Oh.” Ben stood looking at her. He rubbed his hand across his forehead, a gesture so like Bill’s that it gave her a cold shiver. “Sarah – ” His face twisted into a bewildered, crooked smile. “What are you doing here?”

“Hawkeye,” the other man said. He said it quietly, but there was an odd edge to his voice.

Ben looked at him, then at Sarah. His face changed. “Sarah, do you want to sit down? Can I get you anything?”

“I’m fine,” Sarah repeated. About to die of embarrassment, but fine. “I need to get to my hotel – ” a cab driver ought to be able to find her one “ – but I wanted to tell you – ”

“Sarah,” Ben said. He took her gently by the arm and steered her to the sofa. “Sit down. When did you eat last?”

“I had a sandwich when the bus stopped. I’m fine, Ben.” What she wanted to ask was “Who’s your friend? And when is he going to leave?” but in fairness she couldn’t. She was the uninvited guest, not him.

“I have a fridge full of Thanksgiving dinner. Turkey? Stuffing? Potato? Succotash? Biscuits or dinner rolls?” Ben grinned. “Say you want some. I was wondering how I’d get through it all.”

“I’ll fix you a plate, Mrs Pierce,” Ben’s friend said. When he smiled, she recognised him.

The door in the other wall must lead to a kitchen of sorts: Sarah could hear the sound of a fridge door opening and the clatter of dishes. She lowered her voice and said to Ben, “I remember him now – he’s deaf, isn’t he?”

Ben sat down in the armchair. “Yes,” he said shortly.

“I’ve left Bill,” Sarah said. “And I wanted to tell you I believe you about him pushing you into a pond when you were six.”

“Seven,” Ben said, as if automatically. “What?” His face twisted again. “You’ve left Bill? You mean like – like *permanently* left him? Where is he? What happened? Where are the *kids*?”

“They’re with my mom and dad,” Sarah said. “They invited us for Thanksgiving. But Mrs Pierce – I mean, my mother-in-law – I mean – ”

“Aunt Ellen came up from Florida,” Ben said. He sounded entertained.

“You don’t like her either?”

Ben leaned forward. He looked very serious. “Can’t stand her,” he said, as if confidently. He grinned like a whip. “So you really left Aunt Ellen? You know she’ll head back to Florida as soon as she remembers how cold it is in Maine in the winter.”

“No,” Sarah said. “I left *Bill*. We had a – he *knew* we’d been invited to Vermont for Thanksgiving, we’d planned to go, Danny and Mary were so excited about it – I *know* he knew about it – ”

“Steady,” Ben said. “Wait – what?”

## Sins and Virtues

“My mom and dad have a big party at Thanksgiving,” Sarah said.

“Yes, I know,” Ben said. “My dad told me they invited him, when I was in Korea. Thanksgiving for the big party, just family at Christmas.” He smiled: he looked younger when he smiled. “I’m really sorry I never thanked them, when they came to the funeral. It was nice of them to have him for Christmas, those years.”

“He never came,” Sarah said, bewildered. “They asked him, but he always said he couldn’t come.”

“What?” Ben frowned. “He wrote me about how your parents had invited him to Christmas in Vermont – ” His head jerked back and he laughed, an abrupt, almost painful sound. “Oh, I get it.”

“What?”

Ben was shaking his head. He was still laughing. “Dad said he’d been *invited*, and he said Christmas in Vermont was something to look forward to, and he said your parents were really friendly and he liked them, but he never said he’d *gone*.” He had stopped laughing. “He didn’t want me to worry about him. He never wanted me to worry about him. You know when he had that operation on his kidney three years ago he wrote to me so late I only knew he was going into hospital the day he went in? He – when he – ” He leaned back in the chair and rubbed his face again. He didn’t look at all like Bill, just at that moment.

Ben was a year or so younger than Sarah, but except when he was smiling, he looked older: sometimes he looked older than Bill, who was six years older than him. He’d been away at medical school, or practicing in Portland, and for three years he’d been in Korea: she’d known him mostly through Uncle Daniel’s stories, or Bill’s. In Bill’s stories he was a good kid, the little brother Bill never had: and you could always tell where Ben was at gatherings by looking for a circle of people who were chuckling and having a good time. Ben would be in the middle of the circle. She’d never had a conversation with him, nor ever noticed that she hadn’t, until Uncle Daniel began sharing letters from his son, from Korea.

Bill and Danny and Uncle Daniel all had the Pierce face, long-nosed, long-chinned, large-smiled, but Ben had it to an almost clownish exaggeration. At least Mary looked like a Pargeter.

“Sorry,” Ben said, leaning forward again, elbows planted on knees. “What’s wrong, Sarah?”

“We don’t go to Vermont every year,” Sarah said. “We didn’t last year – you were home from Korea – ”

“Yes, I remember that,” Ben said.

“Mom wrote to me earlier this year to make sure we were definitely coming *this* year, and I mentioned it to Bill – I know I did – and Danny was so excited because he was old enough this year to sleep in the hay barn with the other boys – There aren’t enough beds in the house for all the children,” she found herself explaining, “so all the boys who are old enough sleep in the hay barn, and all the girls sleep on mattresses on the floor in the attic – ”

“Sweet setup,” Ben said, and grinned. “Yeah, go on. So you were all set to go to Vermont – ?”

“Then Bill’s mom wrote him and said she’d be visiting us over Thanksgiving. And Bill wrote back and told her fine, and then he told me, and I said no problem, we’d write my mom and they’d fit her in somehow – and he said – ”

The betrayal was still raw in her mouth. Ben was watching her very soberly.

“He said, ‘Don’t be ridiculous, we can’t go running off to Vermont when my mom’s visiting.’ And then – he kept saying that we’d never planned – I’d never told

## Sins and Virtues

him we were going to my mom and dad's this year, and I couldn't just make plans like this when his mom was visiting, and what difference did it make..." Her nose was full of phlegm, and her eyes were heavy with tears. "He *did* know. I *did* tell him. He *lied*."

Ben leaned forward. "And just like that, it turns into a fight you're having about what you told him, not a fight about whether or not you're going to Vermont, because you *lost* that one." He spoke with a kind of vicious recognition. "Neat. Very neat."

"Mrs Pierce?" Ben's friend was standing beside the sofa, holding out a very large, very clean handkerchief. It was a relief to bury her face in it and blow: but she was intensely aware that she needed to pee. Another woman would have already asked her if she wanted to see the geography of the house: she wished Ben were married.

"Thank you," she said to the man. He smiled at her: he had a nice smile. "Ben, I'm sorry, but I have to wash my hands –"

"Sure," Ben said. He stood up, holding out his hand to her, letting her use it for leverage rather than pulling her to her feet. Then he let go and pointed. "Out that door, second on the right."

Ben's bathroom was small and shiny-clean, sparkingly modern. The Pierce house in Crabapple Cove already felt like home, but she had a distinct pang of envy over this bathroom. There was a mirror over the sink. Pregnancy always made her look ugly, but she looked worse than usual. She had walked into Ben's home looking like a hag. A few minutes' work with face powder at least took off the shine and grease of tears.

When she came back the table had been set: Ben held out a chair for her. Slices of grilled turkey, a mound of mashed potato reheated with butter, pickled vegetables, succotash, a biscuit split open and toasted, a dinner roll, cornbread stuffing – it looked like the stuffing Uncle Daniel had always made –

Ben poured her, without asking, a glass of wine. The two men were sitting with coffee in front of them.

"I'm sorry," Sarah said. "I remember you, but not your name."

"Francis Mulcahy," Ben's friend said. He smiled at her. "Please, call me Francis."

"My name's Sarah."

"Yes." He held out his hand. A little awkwardly, they shook.

"Now we've got that sorted," Ben said, "How's the turkey?"

"Aren't you going to have anything?"

Ben laughed. "We ate ourselves *silly* about three o'clock. We were going to have pie and ice cream about now. It can wait till you're done, if you eat fast."

"Please eat slow," Francis said. He was smiling a little. "I'm not sure I have room yet for pie."

"This pie?" Ben protested. "You'll love it. Remember the army version of pumpkin pie? Sweetened cardboard inside floppy cardboard with cardboard soup that I think they called ice cream?"

"Oh, the ice cream wasn't soup." Francis's smile got a little wider. Sarah wondered how deaf he was: he seemed to be understanding what she and Ben were saying. Surely he couldn't have heard what she'd told Ben when he was in the kitchen? "It was too solid for soup."

"That made it exactly like army soup."

"Point."

They were talking back and forth about Thanksgivings in Korea: it was a few minutes before Sarah noticed that Francis's eyes were focussed intently on Ben's face. He wasn't *listening* to what Ben was saying: he was, visibly, hearing with his eyes. She clacked her knife against the edge of her plate, and Ben's gaze twitched towards

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her: it was a moment later before Francis reacted, following the direction of Ben's gaze, not the sound she'd made.

They were both looking at her. She hadn't meant to say anything, but Francis, at least, obviously thought she had. "Do you work in the same hospital as Ben?"

"No," Francis said. He was looking at her now with that same intent focus. "I teach at Fanwood – at the New York School for the Deaf, out at White Plains."

"You're a teacher?" Sarah said, surprised. "I thought you were an orderly."

"I was a corpsman in Korea," Francis said, a little shortly. "I was a teacher in Philadelphia, before the war." The way he said it seemed to cut off further questions.

"I used to teach school, before I was married. I taught third and fourth graders, mostly."

"I teach math," Francis said. He smiled. "Mostly to older children, though the classes at Fanwood can be very mixed."

"Do you find it difficult, keeping control in the classroom, being deaf?" It was no sooner out of her mouth that it occurred to Sarah that Francis might take offence at it. "I mean –"

"I know what you mean. It's certainly different, not being able to hear what my students are doing. I sometimes wish I really *did* have eyes in the back of my head." Francis was smiling. "But they're very well-behaved children, on the whole. And of course they're deaf too: they understand how to get my attention if they need to ask me a question."

Ben moved his hand sharply, and Francis's gaze flicked back to his face. Ben said, audibly amused, "You mean teachers *don't* have eyes in the back of their heads?"

Francis looked almost as if he wanted to laugh, though his voice stayed sober. "They're specially implanted. I had mine taken out when I went to Korea."

"Why?" Ben spread his hands. "Didn't you want to keep an eye on us?" He was smiling.

"The army wouldn't provide me with two pairs of specs."

"My God. There was no limit to their limits. Sarah, you want seconds?"

"No, thanks."

"Sure? You're eating for two, and I think Francis only cooked up enough for one and a half."

Francis leaned forward a little. "When is it due, Mrs Pierce?"

"Christmas Day, would you believe? I couldn't believe it when the doctor told me."

Francis did laugh, a little. "Well, it would mean no one would ever forget when his birthday was."

"Or have to go to school on her birthday. And she'd never get a birthday present," Ben said. He was cheerfully flippant. "Or a birthday party. Or a birthday cake." He wrinkled his nose. "Let's hope the doctor was wrong. Doctors usually are, you know."

"He was right about Danny, almost. Wrong about Mary by a couple of weeks."

"Yeah? She was exactly one month old when I got the letter from my draft board. I don't have any problems remembering her birthday." Ben got up, collecting Sarah's plate. "Seconds? Or will you join us for pie and ice cream?"

"Pie and ice cream," Sarah said. "Thank you."

"Coffee?" Ben had turned so that he was squarely facing Francis.

"Thank you," Francis said. He handed Ben his cup.

Sarah was curious enough about Fanwood, but before she had a question formulated, Francis asked "What brings you to New York, Mrs Pierce?"

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“Oh... I just came to visit Ben,” she said, knowing it sounded lame. She should have anticipated this question. “For the holiday.”

Francis nodded. He had a curious expression on his face – somehow both serious and inquisitive. “I see.” He propped his elbow on the table and smiled at her.

Sarah opened her mouth to tell him about Bill, and caught herself. He was a very good-looking man, but she shouldn't be *that* susceptible to a charming smile.

It came over her with a rush of embarrassment: the position she'd put herself in. She was alone with two men, one of whom she hardly knew. Of course Ben was her brother-in-law – sort of – but if she were going to divorce Bill –

The word sat down on her with crushing force. She wanted never to see Bill again – never to have to deal, again, with the way he turned things around, so everything was always *her* fault if their life wasn't arranged how he wanted it –

But when she thought of telling her parents – telling the children –  
Of course she couldn't do it.

“Mrs Pierce, are you all right?”

She couldn't possibly burst into tears now. She swallowed very hard and pressed her fingers against her upper lip. After a moment, she let go again.

“Please, call me Sarah.” Her voice sounded perfectly level and normal.

Francis wasn't smiling. “All right. Sarah. Did you come from Maine today?”

“No – Vermont,” Sarah said.

“That *is* a long way. Did you come by bus?” When she nodded, he went on in the same thoughtful, pleasant, not quite casual voice, “That's quite a trip, in one day. Though you pass through some beautiful countryside, don't you think? I'd never visited Maine before last summer, and I found it very lovely.”

“It is nice – in the summer. We get a lot of tourists.”

“I imagine you do.” Francis leaned forward a little. “Sarah, is there anything I could do to help?” He seemed to catch himself then, realise what a strange thing it was to say, and added “I mean, I would *like* to help, and I'm sure Hawkeye –”

Bill called Ben ‘Hawkeye’ in the best of his stories: when Uncle Daniel talked about his son, he had used ‘Hawkeye’ as often as Ben's given name: and there were still a couple of men in Crabapple Cove who'd been pals with Ben when they were boys in the town school. It *was* strange to hear Ben's family nickname like this: it somehow pointed up for her again that the man was a stranger – charming, good-looking, and *odd*.

“Everything's fine, really,” Sarah said, cutting him off. She heard the kitchen door being shoved open, and Ben put a plate with a generous slice of pumpkin pie on it in front of her, and another in front of Francis. A large scoop of ice cream was melting into the browned top.

When they were all sitting with pie and ice cream, and fresh coffee, Ben said “Did you say you'd booked a hotel room?”

“I was going to stay at one of the women's hotels,” Sarah said, gathering her wits together. She knew there were several in New York, and the cab drivers would know where they were.

Ben shook his head. “I've got a spare room.” He glanced across the table at Francis – a strange look, as if he were unsure of the other man's reaction. “Stay here.”

Francis didn't look shocked, if that was what Ben had expected. He said, matter-of-factly, “I'm sure that's the best thing to do, Sarah.”

“I really mustn't,” Sarah said, disconcerted.

“You really must,” Ben said. “I have all these Thanksgiving leftovers in the fridge, and only me to eat them up.”

## Sins and Virtues

They had the strangest conversation over pie: Ben was pressing her to stay, persistently but with a lack of enthusiasm that Sarah didn't find at all odd. To be landed with a pregnant, tearful houseguest wasn't something that any man would want. But though she demurred politely, Ben kept on: it didn't seem to occur to him that anyone could see anything improper in the arrangement, and from the comments Francis kept dropping into the conversation, neither did he.

There was no denying that she would prefer not to have to go out again, and flag down a cab, and tell the driver to find her a respectable hotel, and then explain herself all over again to the desk clerk. If Bill decided to make a stink over this, she supposed he could. But that seemed too embarrassing to mention.

"That's settled, then," Ben said. "You're staying."

Francis glanced at his watch. "There's a train back in forty minutes, and then there won't be one for two hours. I should go in twenty minutes, I suppose."

Ben tilted his head to one side. "You looked up the train times?" His voice sounded odd.

Francis lifted his coffee cup and drank from it. "I thought I'd better," he said mildly. "The trains run on a different schedule on holidays."

"Right." Ben finished the last of his pie. "I'll walk over to the station with you."

"That's really not necessary."

Ben's face took on a stubborn look.

Francis looked at Sarah, "There's some nerve damage to my ears. I have had a problem with my balance, if I'm careless. But I haven't fallen because of that in months, I don't have a problem if I can see my surroundings and don't move too fast, and the streets here are *very* well lit." He sounded amused and matter of fact. He glanced back at Ben.

Ben opened his mouth, and closed it again. Finally, he said, "There could be a power cut."

Francis chuckled. "If there is, I'll stand still and wait for you to find me."

There was a bustle of departure: Sarah stayed where she was. Getting up was the awkward part: once she had made herself comfortable, it was always a strain to move. She heard the front door close, and it was a few minutes before Ben came back into the room.

He came across to the table and sat down where Francis had sat. He picked up Francis's coffee cup by mistake for his own, and turned it in his hands, looking at her. "Sarah, not that I'm not pleased to see you – but why did you come here?"

"I thought Bill might follow me to Vermont," Sarah said. It sounded foolish when she put it into words. "And I didn't want to have a fight with him in front of my parents."

Ben nodded, eyebrows going up. "Why?"

"They love him," Sarah said. She was close to tears again. "They'd believe him. You're the only person I know who knows Bill and who – isn't – who *doesn't* like him. And I – I wanted to tell you I believed you about the pond, because that's what Bill does, he turns things around, he's always doing things like that."

Ben fidgeted with the cup he was holding. When he met her eyes again, he laughed, awkwardly, as if he were faking it. "We should start a club. The Bill Haters."

"You and I would be the only members," Sarah said. It was sort of a joke.

"If there's two of us, there might be more. We could run an ad in the *Courier*."

"And to thank you for the house."

"The house?"

"You put my name on the rental agreement."

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“Oh...” Ben’s mouth twitched. “Nothing personal. Everything Bill said about renting the house made sense. And the more he said it, the more I didn’t want him to have it. Solved the whole problem by letting *you* have it.”

Dampened, Sarah swallowed any further spoken gratitude. Even after Bill had gotten grumpy about it, she still liked knowing it was *her* name on the agreement.

Ben put the cup down with a click. “Do your kids know where you are?”

“They think I’m in Crabapple Cove,” Sarah said. “So do my parents.” She’d meant to go back there: she had got out by telling herself that she was only taking Danny and Mary to their grandparents, letting them have a family holiday, that she would go back and be hostess, be a good wife, just as soon as she’d seen them settled in –

And then there was the bus to New York. It had been almost a spur-of-the-moment decision. Not quite, of course: she could have, she’d meant to, sit and wait for the bus back to Portland. She’d even been toying with the idea of calling Bill and asking him to meet her there so she wouldn’t have to take the bus back to Crabapple Cove. He’d have done it, no matter how mad at her he was, but the moment she thought of going to New York instead, all the screwed-up tension uncurled. It was a blissful feeling. Not having to have that fight with Bill. Not having to be the polite hostess to Bill’s mother, who would complain all weekend that her grandchildren weren’t there. Not having to hear her parents explain all weekend why Sarah’s husband wasn’t there, and how much they missed him. But there was the bus to New York, and instead of having a fight with Bill, she was... being a nuisance to Ben.

“I meant to go home,” she said. “But there was a bus to New York, and I...”

“You went AWOL,” Ben said. He had the oddest look on his face, as if he were trying to stifle a laugh.

“I’m sorry,” Sarah said.

Ben did laugh then – a nearly hysterical laugh. It wasn’t the kind of mirth that’s for sharing. He bent over and laughed, loudly, wildly, and almost frighteningly. When he sat up again and wiped his eyes, he was smiling, but it looked... unreal. He looked at her for a long moment as if he didn’t recognise her at all. His hand moved to Francis’s coffee cup and he picked it up without looking at it and drank the cold dregs. It seemed to sober him.

“Sorry,” he said, finally. “Just – a thought I had.” He glanced round. “The spare room’s the first door on the right, if you want to make yourself at home. I should do some clearing-up in the kitchen.”

“Can I help?”

“No,” Ben said, cutting her off. “Just... make yourself at home.”

The guest room was mostly unfurnished, still: just a double bed, a wardrobe, and a bookcase. The carpet was good quality, and all the walls needed were a lick of paint. The bookcase and the wardrobe were empty, but at some point during the evening Ben had made up the double bed, turned down the top sheet, and even put out a toothbrush and a cake of soap – both still in their wrappings from the pharmacy – and a couple of towels. Sarah sat down on the bed. She felt both welcomed and touched. She couldn’t imagine Bill doing something like this for any guest – not even his own mother. Of course, Ellen wouldn’t mind: she’d just take over.

The bookcase wasn’t quite empty: there were three books in it. The sort that migrate to spare-room bookshelves: a couple of detective novels and a copy of the Bible.

Ben was busy in the kitchen: he refused her offer of help, again, but told her there was a virtually-infinite supply of hot water.

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“You want a t-shirt to sleep in?” he added, and didn’t wait for an answer. The t-shirt was faded Army green, and made for someone much taller and wider than Ben.

She never slept well in the third trimester, nor in a strange place. But she was tired enough tonight that the moment she laid her head down on the pillow, she was out.

There was a note taped to the bathroom door. Ben had terrible handwriting, but she thought it said *Had to go out. Back before lunchtime. Help yourself to anything for breakfast.*

When Ben cooked a Thanksgiving dinner, he certainly didn’t cut corners. Judging by the size of the turkey carcass, he’d bought an eight-pounder. He hadn’t mentioned anyone else coming to dinner – just himself and his friend Francis Mulcahy. Well, he probably didn’t know very many people in New York yet.

She’d washed her underwear and hung it discreetly over a radiator in the guest room last night: it was dry, if rather creased, this morning. It was strangely pleasant, getting herself up with no rush, no one wanting breakfast or wanting to know why she wasn’t ready yet, or demanding that she find his shoes or boil two eggs or iron a shirt. She didn’t even have to make herself a proper breakfast: slices of turkey between two slices of stuffing, spread with cranberry sauce, made a pleasant kind of sandwich.

When Ben came back, she had put together a turkey meatloaf for lunch, and had properly disjointed the turkey carcass so that the remains would take up less space in the fridge. Ben came in smiling: he handed her a set of keys. “Sorry I had to go out.”

“To the hospital?”

Ben shrugged. “We had to operate on someone late Wednesday.” He said no more.

“I made lunch,” Sarah offered tentatively. She put the keys down on the table.

“And then I should go find a hotel. Thank you for putting me up last night.”

“Stay here over the weekend anyway,” Ben said. “It’ll be hopeless trying to find a hotel room in New York for the holiday weekend.”

With a sinking feeling, Sarah realised that he was probably right. She had another trickle of worry about how expensive a hotel room in the city was likely to be. She had her pin money savings, but even the bus rides had bitten a painfully large chunk out of them.

“I have to go back Sunday,” she said. It was the first time she’d admitted it even to herself.

“Well, you should at least enjoy New York while you’re here. Let’s go out for lunch.”

“I made meatloaf.”

“Turkey meatloaf?”

Sarah nodded, startled. Ben made a face. “Let’s go out for lunch. I had turkey yesterday.”

“The turkey needs eating up,” Sarah said, slightly shocked.

After a moment, Ben’s mouth curled up. “Waste not, want not,” he said dryly. “Let’s go out after lunch.”

Ben ate the meatloaf with appetite. Halfway through he said, waving his fork at the dish, “You know, I thought the army version had put me off meatloaf forever, but this is good.”

“What was the army version of meatloaf like?”

Ben chuckled suddenly. “Trust me, you don’t want to know.”

“Why not?”

“BJ used to tell me it puts everyone else off their food if I describe it accurately.” He went back to eating meatloaf, looking amused.

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“BJ was one of the other surgeons?” Sarah said tentatively.

“That’s right. How did you know?”

“Uncle Daniel used to read us your letters.”

“That must have been fun,” Ben said. He no longer sounded amused.

“You had a lot of good stories. He was proud of you.”

Ben tilted his head to one side. “What do you want to see in New York?”

Ben took her to a Korean restaurant for dinner. It wasn’t too different from Chinese, she decided: a little spicier, but still good.

She wasn’t nearly as tired as yesterday, but the room didn’t feel as strange. She went to sleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow, and didn’t wake up till four in the morning. Four in the morning had a tired kind of familiarity in the third trimester: bladder the size of a pea. Stupid joke.

She was on her way back from the bathroom when she heard Ben yell. At first she didn’t even know it was Ben: but it had to be, who else was in the apartment? The sound came from behind Ben’s bedroom door, a string of harsh wordless noises like nothing Sarah had ever heard before. When they stopped, it should have been a relief, but the silence that followed was almost as terrifying.

Sarah stood frozen, looking at the door. She ought to do something. But she couldn’t just walk into Ben’s bedroom. But the silence behind the door – the *howl* –

After what felt like a very long time, Sarah heard dragging footsteps and the door pulled open. Ben was wearing only his bathrobe, sloppily pulled round him. He saw her and wrapped the bathrobe closer, staring at her with a blank look.

“This is not good,” he said finally, leaning back against the wall, his head tilted backwards, looking as if someone had shoved him. “Sarah, we’re in New York, right?”

“Yes,” Sarah said.

“Good, because I couldn’t think what I’d be doing in Levinetown.” He swallowed very visibly. He was shaking, Sarah saw, and sweating heavily. “Did I wake you?” he asked in a half-mumble.

“No, I was awake already,” Sarah said, once she’d figured out what he was asking. “Ben, are you all right?”

He looked at her then, and there was a tremor in his voice that somehow she could tell would have been laughter in other circumstances. “You mean aside from the nightmares? Just fine.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“I was heading for a belt of Scotch. Want to join me? I hate to drink alone.” He pushed himself away from the wall. “Sorry,” he said after a moment. He was still trembling. He was sweating so heavily that he was actually a little stinky, and swaying a little. “Just go back to bed, Sarah, I can pour my own liquor.”

“You don’t need a Scotch,” Sarah said. “Take a hot shower – make it *really* hot – and I’ll make you a cup of hot milk. That should put you back to sleep.” Without thinking about it, she spoke as she would have done to Danny or Mary, if they’d woken with a nightmare.

Ben stared at her for a long moment. His face twisted in a swift, unpleasant-looking grin. “Just go back to bed, Doctor Sarah.” He turned away and went through to the living room.

It was only then that it occurred to Sarah that she had been standing in front of Ben wearing only a t-shirt, which perhaps didn’t expose her indecently, but only just. Horrified and embarrassed, she retreated to the guest bedroom. Yesterday she’d

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bought a few things to wear, but knowing she would have to go back, she hadn't bought more than a minimum. She didn't have a bathrobe. She hadn't bought a proper nightgown.

She sat down on the bed. With the door closed, she could still hear when Ben slammed his own bedroom door shut behind him.

Sarah was sitting at the dining-table, drinking coffee, when she heard Ben come out of his room. She was conscious – edgily conscious – of where he was: showering in the bathroom, dressing in the bedroom. She hoped he would be fully dressed. She was.

“Morning,” Ben said.

“Good morning,” Sarah said. She looked down uncomfortably.

“I hope there's more coffee,” Ben said.

When he sat down on the other side of the table with a large cup of coffee, she had to look at him. He was fully dressed, complete with tie and jacket, clean-shaven, and his hair was clean and neat. He wasn't smiling.

“About last night,” he said.

Sarah gripped her coffee cup.

“I have nightmares sometimes,” Ben said. “I should have warned you. I'm sorry. I didn't think I'd wake you, through two doors.”

“No, I was awake anyway.” Sarah managed a small smile. “I was in the hall when I heard you...”

Ben rubbed his face. He shrugged a little. “I just... I know you were trying to be helpful, but... Hot milk?”

“It works for Danny and Mary when they have nightmares.”

“Bad dreams,” Ben said. “They don't have nightmares.”

Sarah was about to protest – Danny had woken up screaming only a month ago, scared of the boogeyman he was convinced was hiding in his closet – but she stopped. Danny's screams had been heartrending, but nothing like the noise out of Ben's throat last night. She didn't know what to say. Trite phrases like *war is terrible* or *I'm so sorry* didn't really cover it.

“People say things like ‘War is hell’” Ben said after a moment. He put down his coffee cup and rubbed at both his eyes. “But it's worse than that. War is war. Worse things happen in war than anyone wants to say. Things that – you don't know, you can't imagine, because until you've seen it you can't – you can't conceive how bad it can be.”

He dropped his hands and looked at her. “I told myself I stopped writing the bad stories to my dad because he'd write back, and he'd always find something to say – but it would take ten days, at least, and by the time he'd read my letter and written back I had more stories that were even worse – but that wasn't it. I used to really admire Hemingway. You read Hemingway?”

“Yes,” Sarah said, bewildered.

“He wrote about war and he left all the bad parts out. I used to wonder about that – decide I couldn't admire him any more. And then I realised nobody could. Nobody could write about the worst of it, because if you haven't seen it you won't believe it, and if you have seen it, you don't want to remember it. I couldn't write the bad stuff down. No one could.”

Sarah had stopped drinking her coffee. After a minute's silence, Ben leaned forward. “I'm sorry,” he said again. “I told you. Aside from the nightmares, I'm fine. What do you want to do today?”

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Sarah stared down at her coffee. She wanted to be able to say something, and couldn't. "Do you still have – how long do you think the nightmares – your nightmares will last?"

Ben shrugged. "I don't know. I talked to a psychiatrist about them when I was in Korea, he seemed to think they'd go away when I got home. I don't have them as often as I used to. And differently." He rubbed his face. "What do you want to do today? Francis is coming for dinner tonight, by the way."

"Your friend Francis?" Sarah had wondered for an instant if Ben was talking about a girlfriend.

"We usually have dinner together on Saturday nights," Ben said. "He works Monday through Saturday." He sat back and looked at her. "I'm thinking of renting my spare room to him – he's got to study for his New York State teaching certificate. You thinking of going back to teaching?"

"I can't," Sarah said.

Ben raised his eyebrows.

"If I'm married to Bill, he won't want me to go back to work. Especially not with..." Sarah's hand moved over the shape inside. The third trimester was strange in another way: the baby was becoming real to her, moving, kicking, sometimes almost visible. But only to her. no one else. "Especially not with this."

"And if you dump Bill?"

"Who's going to hire a divorced woman to teach children?"

Ben raised his eyebrows. "Who needs to tell them you're divorced?"

Francis appeared promptly at seven with a bottle of wine. It was Californian white, not expensive, but Ben's appreciation was on the enthusiastic side of polite: he was, as Uncle Daniel had been, an appreciative host.

"We're having turkey soup, turkey bake, and turkey ice cream," Ben said cheerfully, opening the bottle. "If you hadn't bought this, we'd have had turkey soda, too."

Francis laughed, a little awkwardly. He looked as if he were amused by Ben, but not sure how to respond to the teasing. "Then I'm twice as glad I brought it."

The soup was succotash and turkey, thickened with potato: Sarah had layered turkey, gravy, stuffing, and cranberry sauce into a deep dish, a kind of oven casserole Mom called Thanksgiving Sunday roast. Francis and Ben were both more than politely complimentary about the meal. It turned out that Francis, though he'd been working out at White Plains since the middle of June, hadn't yet been properly into the city: Sarah told him about the Empire State Building and the Staten Island ferry ride.

"There's a shrine to the first saint born in America down by Battery Park, I believe," Francis said. "Did you see it?"

Sarah shook her head. "Are you Catholic?"

"Yes," Francis said.

They went on talking about the New York sights Sarah and Ben had seen over the past couple of days. When Ben got up to clear the table, he waved at them both to stay. "What, you think I can't handle the dishes? I'm a surgeon, I know how to do a scrub in seven and a half minutes."

*I married the wrong cousin.* It wasn't the first time Sarah had thought something like this, but it was the first time it had come through so distinctly. Watching Ben stack the dishes, his narrow ugly hands moving with quick surety, he wasn't attractive – she had never found him attractive – but she *liked* him. When she thought about it,

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she couldn't remember the last time she'd felt she liked Bill in this way – comfortably, humanly.

“What are your plans for tomorrow?”

Sarah managed a bright smile. “Oh, I've got to catch the bus early to get back to Vermont. And then I suppose we'll be heading back to Crabapple Cove on Monday. Danny will miss a day of school, but he won't mind that.”

Francis nodded. He was looking at her intently. Serious and inquisitive. He looked kind.

“What do you think of divorce?” Sarah asked abruptly.

His expression didn't change, but he leaned forward a little. “Is anything wrong?”

“No.”

“Oh.” He nodded.

“I can't leave my husband,” Sarah said.

He didn't even look taken aback. He tilted his head a little. Not a nod, or a shake.

“My parents don't approve of divorce. Neither do I. I suppose if you're Catholic you won't either.”

That got a sudden smile. “I'm not a very good Catholic, I'm afraid,” Francis said.

“Oh,” Sarah said.

Ben was still in the kitchen. He'd bought a pint of ice cream and some fresh fruit earlier in the afternoon: he was probably making a fruit salad. Or coffee. Ben could take longer over making coffee than anyone she knew. Francis was still looking at her.

“He lied to me,” Sarah said. “It wasn't about anything important. Though it mattered to Danny,” she justified herself.

“And to you,” Francis said, quietly.

“But it wasn't the first time. It was just the first time I *knew* he was lying, not just misremembering – I used to think I kept forgetting things, and then I knew it wasn't me, but I still kept telling myself he forgot, he didn't remember – ” This couldn't make any sense at all to Francis. “I don't know why I'm telling you this. I'm sorry.”

Francis smiled again, very briefly. “I'm a good listener.”

It was a moment before Sarah was sure it was okay to laugh, and then it was several moments before she was sure she could stop. She was almost in tears again. When she looked up, Francis was offering her another handkerchief.

“Thank you,” Sarah said, mopping up. “How many of these do you have?”

Francis didn't answer. Sarah put the handkerchief down and repeated herself.

“Oh, you remember what it's like being a teacher. You can never have too many hankies.”

“I washed out the one you gave me before – it's in Ben's guest-room.”

Francis nodded.

“Ben said you'd be studying for your New York state teacher's certificate?” Sarah said.

“Sarah, God knows I'm not the best person to advise you,” Francis said, “but if you were Catholic, and went to your parish priest, he might tell you that you don't have to live with a man you can't trust.”

Sarah stared at him, astonished. “I shouldn't have – ” she said weakly, and then, more strongly, “He's a good husband, he really is.”

She had almost got used to the direct, focussed gaze: she understood it wasn't personal. It was noticeable, though, when Francis dropped his gaze. He looked down at his folded hands for a long moment, and when he looked up, his smile looked

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diffident, as his voice was shy. "I'm sorry. I'm *not* the best person to advise you. You were asking about the teacher's certificate?"

Ben came back with a bowl of fruit salad and a pot of coffee, as Francis told her about the basic requirements for someone with a college degree. They sounded overly-stringent, and she said so.

"They're very thorough," Francis said mildly.

"I suppose it stops most people who don't already live here from trying," Sarah said. It wasn't that she could have moved here anyway. Or wanted to. "How are you going to manage in your classes at night school?"

Francis shrugged. "I'll try to sit in the front row. I always did." He smiled, but not happily. "And I expect I can borrow someone's notes." He looked away from her.

"Do you remember that canned fruit cocktail we used to be so grateful for in Korea?" Ben said.

"With the cherries?"

To Sarah's surprise, both men started to laugh. Francis quietly, Ben nearly hysterically. He slapped at the table. "Artificially coloured – artificially flavoured – modified –"

"– in heavy syrup –" Francis got out, though it was hard to see how he could understand what Ben was saying.

"– on Klinger's spring hat!"

Francis stopped laughing after a minute: he took his glasses off and wiped at them with yet another clean handkerchief. Ben was still laughing. "Oh dear," Francis said. "Hawkeye –" he slid his glasses back on.

Ben swallowed down his laughter. "What is it –?"

Francis said nothing. Ben picked up the coffee pot and poured them each a cup. He drank his black and sweet. Francis was adding milk to his, still with an odd small grin. He was an odd man altogether, Francis Mulcahy.

*Father Mulcahy*. She nearly spilled her coffee, and set it down hastily.

The Roman Catholic priest who'd been chaplain in Ben's unit in Korea – surely his name had been Father Mulcahy? Could it have been *Francis* Mulcahy? She couldn't remember that Ben had ever mentioned the chaplain's Christian name in his letters home. Or Uncle Daniel hadn't.

Didn't Roman Catholic priests wear white collars?

They tried desultorily to explain the joke to her, but it was clearly one of those things you had to be there for. The fruit salad was good: the ice cream was rich and creamy.

"What time's your bus tomorrow?" Ben asked, after Francis had left.

"Quarter of eight."

"Ugh." Ben made a clown face of disgust. "I'll book a cab." He stopped and looked at her. After a moment he said, in a different voice, "You don't have to go back, you know."

"I miss Danny and Mary," Sarah said. For twenty-four hours it had been a relief not to have to think about them, but the relief had long since worn away: missing them was a physical ache.

"But not Bill?" Ben had an edge of humour in his voice.

"He's my husband," Sarah said.

"Yeah."

"About your friend Francis?"

"Yeah?" Ben asked. He sounded challenging.

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“Isn’t he... wasn’t he a priest? ‘Father Mulcahy’?”

Ben picked up his coffee cup and turned it in his hands. “Not any more.” There was still an edge in his voice, but it wasn’t humour. He looked at Sarah. “I don’t understand it myself, but apparently he got into an argument over doctrine with his bishop, and his bishop recommended he stop being a priest, and – so he sent in a letter asking them to fire him.”

“That’s crazy,” Sarah said, in blank astonishment.

“I’m glad I’m not the only one that thinks so,” Ben said. He put the cup down. “But he’s still playing by their rules, and their rules say he’s not supposed to talk about it. And not let anyone else find out.”

“Oh.”

“So. Don’t tell anyone he’s former Father Mulcahy.”

Sarah was still astonished. “Why would I?”

Ben shrugged. “No reason. But don’t. He’s had a hard enough time fitting in here, I’d hate for him to have to pick up and move again.”

“Well, I won’t say anything,” Sarah said. She couldn’t think of anyone she would say it to. “It’s very nice of you to let him stay here while he’s studying for his teacher’s certificate. Two years night classes, when he’s already qualified!”

Ben shrugged. “I like him. He’s no trouble to have around.”

Sarah wondered if Ben would find it difficult to let his room to a normal tenant: he hadn’t said how often he had nightmares, but if Francis were really very deaf, he’d never hear them.

“You didn’t set the rent on the Crabapple Cove house very high...”

“So?” Ben sounded defensive.

“Do you need the money?”

When Ben grinned, Sarah knew before he could say anything that she’d said something foolish. But the grin slid away when he said, sounding serious, “I’m not going to play heavy landlord if you owe me the rent for a few months. If you have to.” He smiled again, openly amused.

“I’m not leaving Bill.”

“Whatever you say.” Ben propped his chin on his hand. “Thanks for coming all this way just to tell me you believe me about the pond when I was seven.”

“Thank you for having me.”

When Ben laughed this time, it was a swallowed, choked-off laugh, not wild hysteria. He sat back in his chair and grinned sideways at her. “You’re welcome. But next time – for God’s sake call ahead.”

## Thursday 23rd December, 1954

### 1. Day

Mulcahy was sitting on the edge of the bed, his chin on his fists, staring at the carpet. It was blue, thick-piled, and soft underfoot. He had come back from the bathroom in his pyjamas, barefoot, and the feel of the carpet on the soles of his feet had been an unexpected sensual pleasure: like walking on warm dry grass over warm dry moss. Of all the things he’d expected to be unexpected, this carpet wasn’t one of them.

He had kept himself busy all day. Now he’d run out of ways to be busy. He couldn’t sit here all night thinking about the carpet.

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“Hi,” Hawkeye said cheerfully. He was grinning widely. “Breakfast?”  
Mulcahy nodded. Hawkeye took the second suitcase out of his hand. “This everything?”

“I travel light.” It was difficult to talk when they were walking. Hawkeye turned his head to share another wide grin, but said nothing.

They ate breakfast at a diner the next block over from Hawkeye’s apartment. It was busy enough that no one was paying attention to either of them. “Some of your stuff from Pennsylvania got here safely.”

“Some of it?”

“Three cartons and a suitcase.”

“That’s all of it.”

“And a letter.”

“I don’t remember packing a letter,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye didn’t look amused. “You’ve got one, though. Looks official.”

It couldn’t be from the Vatican: it hadn’t been ... it had barely been six months. “Where was it postmarked?”

“Pennsylvania,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy shrugged. Hawkeye was looking wary, not worried, and the last thing Mulcahy wanted was to worry him. “It’s probably a reminder about overdue library books.”

Hawkeye opened his mouth in a sudden visible laugh. “Francis, have you stolen some library books?”

“No,” Mulcahy said, “but that wouldn’t necessarily stop the library sending a notice. I got a notice from them once in Korea for a book I returned in 1949.”

“By the way,” Hawkeye said, “I got a call from Sarah.”

“Oh? How is she?”

“She wants me to come visit them for Christmas.”

“Oh.” It was a moment before the full meaning of that sank in. “Oh,” Mulcahy said again. “Are you going?”

Hawkeye’s gaze shifted away. “She called me yesterday. I got a letter from her two days ago. I don’t want to spend Christmas with her and Bill, but when I started trying to say that she thought I was talking about Bill – ”

“They’re still together, then?” Mulcahy was relieved. He’d wondered, whenever that conversation came back to him, if he’d said the right thing. “You should go.”

“I knew you’d say that,” Hawkeye said. “I don’t want to go.”

“Oh.” Mulcahy picked up his coffee. He wondered what – or if – he should say to Hawkeye to persuade him to go: it was undoubtedly the right thing to do.

“Only I said I would.”

Mulcahy put his coffee down again. “Oh.” If Hawkeye left tomorrow, he would be back Monday or Tuesday, surely? That wasn’t so long.

“Can’t you say anything else but ‘oh’?” Hawkeye looked exasperated.

Mulcahy fidgeted with the cup. “Ah – ” he said, and caught himself. It was funny. He looked back at Hawkeye, expecting him to laugh.

Hawkeye didn’t look amused. “I’m heading up to Maine first thing tomorrow and I can’t see how I can get back till Sunday night at earliest. All you can say is ‘oh’?”

“I’ll miss you?” Mulcahy offered, not sure what Hawkeye was getting at.

Hawkeye did grin then. “Yeah, well, you don’t have to. You could come with me.”

“But I haven’t been invited.”

“I invite you. It’s my house.”

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“Hawkeye, what possible reason could you give for bringing me?”

“I just need to tell Sarah you don’t have anywhere else to go at Christmas, and she’ll invite you.”

“But I do.” Mulcahy said. “There’s a party at the school on Christmas Day for the children who don’t go home.”

“You can’t go back to school on Christmas Day.”

“I can’t come and stay with your family,” Mulcahy said.

“Why not?”

Mulcahy shook his head. “I’m a stranger. And – if things aren’t going well, the last thing they’ll want is a stranger about the place. Getting in the way.” Especially a deaf man for whom allowances would have to be made. It made him wince to think about it.

“I’ll miss you,” Hawkeye said finally. He had his chin propped on his hands, and he was looking at Mulcahy in a way that made him wish they were alone. And reminded him that there was another reason why he shouldn’t go with Hawkeye.

Mulcahy glanced at his watch. “Shouldn’t we get moving?”

“Yes,” Hawkeye said. He got up briskly, and was paying for both breakfasts before Mulcahy caught up with him, too late to protest.

“I’ll buy you breakfast tomorrow.”

“Only if you come to Maine with me. I’ll be leaving early.”

Mulcahy was wondering what the letter was, but he put it out of his mind. Hawkeye had insisted that as Mulcahy’s landlord he had to buy his tenant a desk to work at, and in a furniture salesroom on the Lower East Side Mulcahy picked out a solid wooden desk in good condition, and a chair to match, delivery after Christmas.

Somehow it seemed natural enough, on their way back, to stop in at the neighbourhood stores and buy bread, eggs, milk, apples, a few staples, a few extras. Following a short and quiet but vehement discussion on the sidewalk, Mulcahy paid for the fresh food – Hawkeye won on the staples. It wasn’t as if the rent Hawkeye was charging him could possibly cover the cost of meals as well, and Hawkeye wasn’t going to be home for the next few days.

Hawkeye was ahead of Mulcahy at the apartment’s front door, but glanced at Mulcahy and stepped back. “Try out your key.”

It turned smoothly in the lock. It was the first time it had occurred to Mulcahy to think that this apartment was – would be – his home.

“Read your letter, I’ll make lunch,” Hawkeye said.

The cartons and the suitcase were piled together in the middle of the spare room floor. The letter was conspicuously on the corner of the bed. Mulcahy picked it up. It was too light to be any kind of official letter, and in any case it really had been barely six months since he had written that letter at his bishop’s behest. January was more likely. Or even February.

After he’d tried to think of the worst that it could be, the letter was actually funny, in a way. He took it through to the living room, and found Hawkeye in the kitchen.

“What is it?”

“I seem to have caused a little trouble in the diocese,” Mulcahy said.

The corners of Hawkeye’s mouth curled up. “Yeah?”

“I didn’t ask my... the bishop’s direction where to go, or what to do. They didn’t know where I was.” Mulcahy was trying to feel repentant, and failing. “Apparently this has caused the diocese some administrative headaches.”

Hawkeye looked as if he were chuckling. “Good.”

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“I’m afraid it’s going to cause them some more headaches, too, because they say they’ve been paying my Social Security for the past six months, and Fanwood’s been paying it since August.”

“Send them two aspirin and tell them to call me in the morning,” Hawkeye said. “Are you going to get into any trouble over this?”

Mulcahy shrugged. “What are they going to do – defrock me?”

Hawkeye laughed, wide mouthed, propping himself back against the counter. “No, I mean with the government. I don’t understand Social Security, but are you supposed to get it paid twice?”

“I doubt it,” Mulcahy said. “I’ll write to them.” He was unable to stop himself from smiling. From the pained opening to the incongruous conclusion of *yours in Xto*, the letter was like a cold breath on the back of his neck. It shouldn’t amuse him as it did.

But it couldn’t touch him. Couldn’t touch him.

Because of Hawkeye.

He had an impulse to step in and hug Hawkeye. He only recognised the impulse when he knew he wasn’t going to do it. He might have done it without thinking about it, but the moment he thought about it, he couldn’t do it. He hadn’t done it except when Hawkeye had asked him to. He was afraid of doing it, and embarrassed about being afraid.

“Can I help you get lunch?”

“Soup and sandwiches,” Hawkeye said. He pointed at a can on the counter. “You want to make the soup?”

“If you explain the recipe,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye twisted his head round to look at him direct. “It involves a can opener and a chicken. Or there’s another can in the cupboard that I think involved a cow.” He handed Mulcahy the can opener.

“Can I help you unpack?” Hawkeye asked.

“I don’t really need any help,” Mulcahy said. He held the door open for Hawkeye.

“Well, I could sit here – ” Hawkeye sat down on the edge of the bed “ – and assist.”

“How were you planning to assist?”

“By not getting in your way.” Hawkeye heeled off his shoes and folded his legs up, elbows on his knees. “Unless there’s anything else I can do.”

Mulcahy started with the suitcase: it had what clothes he’d owned last June that he hadn’t packed to take with him when he left. Winter clothes, mostly.

“What were you supposed to do?” Hawkeye asked. “I put some hangers in the wardrobe, but if there’s not enough, we could go out and pick up some more.”

Talking like this was episodic, more than awkward. Well, it might be awkward for Hawkeye, remembering not to talk when Mulcahy had his back to him.

“Is this difficult for you?” Mulcahy asked.

“What?” Hawkeye blinked at him.

“You can’t talk to me if I’ve got my back to you.” Mulcahy had been putting shirts on hangers, preparatory to hanging them in the wardrobe. He looked up to let Hawkeye reply.

“That’s okay, when you’ve got your back to me I think about kissing the back of your neck.” Hawkeye was looking at him with a grin that was fading fast. “Well,” he added, “I do.”

Mulcahy swallowed. He was used to Hawkeye teasing: he’d always liked it, once he was sure it was done with goodwill. He was used to the feelings he had around

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Hawkeye. He wasn't used to this. Hawkeye knew; and he knew Hawkeye knew; and Hawkeye knew he knew Hawkeye knew... Unexpectedly, Mulcahy laughed. He suppressed it almost immediately, but Hawkeye's grin brightened again.

"There's more than enough hangers," Mulcahy said. He felt breathless and on edge. It was the easiest thing to say.

"Oh. Good." Hawkeye nodded.

Mulcahy was halfway through hanging up the winter clothes from the suitcase when Hawkeye managed to catch his eye again. "I got a maid comes in three days a week. Any ironing you want her to do?"

"You didn't mention a maid." Mulcahy stopped. It should have occurred to him.

"Didn't I? Mrs Bradford. Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays. You should have noticed that this place doesn't look like it would if I were doing the housework. She also irons shirts."

"Won't she notice I've moved in?"

"I should think so. She seems like a pretty observant woman. You're hard to miss."

"Will that be all right?"

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"Will she be in this Friday?"

"Christmas Eve?" Hawkeye looked a query. Mulcahy had forgotten what the day was: he'd only remembered Hawkeye wasn't going to be there. "I never thought of that. No, she's not coming in till next Wednesday. I'm usually out when she's in, but she's supposed to come in at nine-thirty for three hours. If you want her to iron your shirts, put them in the laundry basket. When do you go back to school?"

"Not till the third." Mulcahy realised he had been distracted from hanging up clothes. He went back to it.

His breviary was at the bottom of the second case. He hadn't used it to read the daily office since June. He put it in the drawer under his shirts. His rosary was under his socks.

Two of the cartons were packed with books. The other... well, leave that for now.

"You need another bookcase," Hawkeye said.

"I'm sure they'll all fit in." There were three books already on the top shelf: the Bible, King James version, and two paperback detective stories: Mulcahy pulled one off the shelf. "Isn't this the one BJ got, the winter of 52?"

Hawkeye had got off the bed and was crouching down beside the bookcase. Mulcahy glanced sideways at him.

"Yeah, I tracked it down when we got back – I couldn't stand not knowing how it ended."

"Was it good?"

"Well, it was bugging me. Can I help you with these?"

"If you like," Mulcahy said. He pushed the third carton a little further back, out of Hawkeye's reach: he saw Hawkeye look, but the other man said nothing.

When he glanced at Hawkeye again, he was looking at one of the Jowett translations. "You *did* steal a library book. Several."

"They've been cancelled," Mulcahy protested. A few years ago there had been a book sale at the public library he'd gone to when he was a child: he'd done without lunch for a week to pick up the familiar, battered books.

Hawkeye grinned at him. Mulcahy realised he'd been blindsided.

"Where do they go – under P for Plato or J for Jowett?" Hawkeye let him off the hook.

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“I think all the English translations should fit on that shelf,” Mulcahy said, pointing.

“Okay. What were you supposed to do?” Hawkeye was sorting out the English translations from the rest, glancing down at the books and up at Mulcahy.

“What?”

“When they told you you couldn’t be a priest and you had to go: you left. What were you supposed to do?”

Mulcahy guessed at an indignant tone in Hawkeye’s voice. “I should have waited for instructions,” he said. He should have, undoubtedly: he just hadn’t wanted to. “Until I’m formally laicized, my diocese is responsible for me.”

Side by side, on the floor – the carpet was unexpectedly soft – they unpacked the books and shelved them. Mulcahy had accumulated nearly seventy books that belonged to him, rather than to the parish or the diocese: it had seemed like too many for poverty’s sake, the last time he had packed up these cartons, when he’d got rid of everything he could bear to let go.

Mulcahy was kneeling: Hawkeye was in a kind of ungraceful sprawl, as inelegant as a cat washing itself. He didn’t comment on the books as he shelved them, but Mulcahy got the impression that he was memorizing each title.

“You like the Greeks,” he said finally, taking the last book out of the second carton and passing it to Mulcahy – a Korean-English dictionary, too big even for the lowest shelf. “You read Korean?”

“Very badly,” Mulcahy said. He leaned the dictionary up against the side of the bookshelves. “Yes – when I was a boy, my two heroes were Plato and – and a boxer my father took me to see when I was twelve. Plato means ‘broad’ in Greek – it’s thought that he was probably a wrestler.”

“I know.”

Mulcahy was startled.

“I treated your hero for a stroke. Gentleman John.” Hawkeye wrapped his hands round his upmost knee.

Mulcahy looked back, astonished. “Gentleman Joe Kavanaugh. How – how did you know?”

“Well, mostly because I’ve never seen anyone’s face light up the way yours did when he showed up.” Hawkeye rocked himself back, eyeing Mulcahy thoughtfully. “You were even rude to Margaret when she said she didn’t think much of him.”

“Was I?” Mulcahy was discomfited.

“Well, not terribly rude. You shut Margaret up, but I think it was mostly the shock of the unfailingly-polite Father Mulcahy saying something like that. I’d have had to be much ruder to get her to shut up.”

“What did I say?” Mulcahy could barely remember.

“Now, let me think. Did you cast aspersions on General MacArthur, or Florence Nightingale? I forget.”

“You’re making it up,” Mulcahy accused.

“No, I swear. You said something very impolite about Florence Nightingale.” Hawkeye shifted position. He was kneeling facing Mulcahy. “So that was when you took up boxing? When you fell for Gentlemanly Johnny? I mean Jimmy?”

“Joe Kavanaugh,” Mulcahy corrected again. “Did everyone know?”

“Well, there were a whole lot of reporters there who never noticed anything that wasn’t pushed under their noses on a notepad, and a few patients in post-op who weren’t in a state to notice anything much, and I don’t think Klinger sent any memos to I-Corps about it, but...”

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Mulcahy took his specs off and rubbed his hand across his eyes. “Hawkeye, did I really make that much of a fool of myself?” He had to put his specs back on to get an answer, but he didn’t especially want one. “He was such a splendid man. I suppose I did fall for him... but I didn’t think anyone knew.”

He put his specs on and pushed himself to his feet, both at the same time, putting his hand on the wall to support himself through the brief wave of dizziness. When it passed, Hawkeye was standing facing him, looking concerned.

Mulcahy managed a smile. Of course Hawkeye had been teasing him. He nodded, smiling, expecting the familiar *gotcha* look, but Hawkeye didn’t grin. He looked worried. He lifted his hand to rub at his mouth, and said something. “ – okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine,” Mulcahy said, trusting that the first words that he hadn’t seen were *Are you* – “We’re done here. I’m unpacked.”

Hawkeye had always had a knack for making the wrong joke at the wrong time to the wrong person. Mulcahy walked into the living room and over to the window: the short December day was already over for those at the foot of the canyons, but up above the last light of the sun reddened the skyscraper peaks.

When he was a boy he had imagined that Joe Kavanaugh might do an afternoon’s training at the gym where Francis was learning how to box. Even in his mind he had never done more with Gentleman Joe in the showers than offer to pass him the soap.

*You fell for him.*

And watch him, of course. The way he’d learned how to watch.

Hawkeye materialised by the window. Mulcahy glanced at him and looked away.

The way he’d learned how to watch so that it wasn’t his fault. He couldn’t imagine that Hawkeye had ever done anything like that; Hawkeye had been direct and open about what he wanted.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said, still looking out of the window. He turned his head reluctantly and looked at Hawkeye.

“...sorry?” Hawkeye shook his head. “For what?”

“I’m not very good company right now.”

“I hadn’t noticed.” Hawkeye shrugged. “You’re always good company. Even when you look as miserable as you do right now. Anything I can do?”

“No,” Mulcahy said. Hawkeye was still looking at him, and still with an unhappy question written on his face. It was disturbing to see it, and to feel so personally responsible; Mulcahy wanted to do something to remedy it – anything except –  
Anything.

“I – ” Mulcahy’s hands stayed obstinately by his sides. “I know I’m not very good at this. But it is what I want.”

Hawkeye shrugged again. He didn’t move either. “You being here is what I want. You don’t have to be good at anything except just – being here. And you seem to be managing that better than I am, so far.” He smiled, but it didn’t change the look in his eyes. “I’m sorry I’m heading off like this tomorrow. I have to get back for rounds on the 27th – I’ll be home by Sunday night. Be here when I get back, okay? Unless you get invited to a really good Christmas party, in which case just pin a note to my pillow and try not to make too much noise when you get in.”

“I’ll be here,” Mulcahy said, feeling a familiar warmth at the casual teasing. “We’ll manage it better next year, but we could have a late Christmas party. I’ll put up some decorations.”

To his surprise, Hawkeye was looking definitely happier. The sad query had left his eyes, and he was grinning so widely that his first words were incomprehensible. “ – a tree!” He seemed to realise that he hadn’t been understood, and repeated, “We’ll

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get a tree. And decorations. Where do you find a good spruce in New York – Central Park? Get your coat on. Let's go. I'll get my hatchet."

He was joking about the hatchet.

It was well past dark, and freezing, when they got back: balancing a tree between them, clutching carrier bags in cold hands. Mulcahy fished the door key out of his pocket without thinking about it. "I want a big mug of cocoa," he declared. "Can I make you one?"

"Coffee," Hawkeye said absently. He lifted the tree like a dancing partner. "I'm going to get this set up in front of the windows."

In fact it took both of them, and nearly an hour, before it was straight enough to suit Mulcahy. It would never have occurred to him to buy a tree just for himself, let alone one this size, but now it had been bought, it would certainly be wasteful not to display it properly.

"Have we got enough?" he inquired, looking at the decorations Hawkeye was heaping on the table.

"I could always go back to the hospital and liberate some thermometers," Hawkeye said. He was eyeing the tree assessingly. "The golden baubles are going there, where they'll catch the light from the window."

"If they do, only your window cleaner's going to see them."

They argued up and down and sideways out to the tips of the branches how best to decorate it: several times Hawkeye simply took a bauble that Mulcahy had placed on the tree and moved it to somewhere else. After the third time, Mulcahy simply stole them back and replaced them where they should be. It took all evening: they stopped to eat, but Hawkeye seemed determined to fit every piece of sparkle he'd bought on the tree. He'd bought quite a lot of it.

They both collapsed on the couch to look at their handiwork: it was actually a few moments before Mulcahy remembered. He glanced at Hawkeye, and saw Hawkeye watching him.

There was a long moment when neither of them said anything. Hawkeye shifted on the couch, as if he meant to reach out to Mulcahy, but he stood up instead, abrupt and awkward. "First dibs on the shower," he said. "Good night."

He couldn't sit here all night thinking about the carpet, now he'd run out of ways to be busy. He had kept himself busy all day. Of all the things he'd expected to be unexpected, this carpet wasn't one of them. The feel of the carpet on the soles of his feet was an unexpected sensual pleasure that made him think vaguely of thick dry moss. Coming back from the bathroom barefoot, in his pyjamas, Mulcahy walked slowly to the edge of the bed, and sat down, chin on fists, staring at the carpet. It was blue, thick-piled, and soft, and undoubtedly expensive.

Hawkeye had been signalling, as widely as he could, that he wasn't even going to ask. Which was fair: Mulcahy had known all along that he would have to make this decision at some point, and better have it clear in both their minds that it *was* his own decision.

"Dear Lord, if what I am doing needs your forgiveness, of your mercy grant it to me," he said out loud, and pushed himself to his feet.

He was almost at the door when it occurred to him to add, "If what I am doing deserves your blessing, of your grace, grant it to me."

## 2. Night

This article in the surgical journal was probably interesting enough: Hawkeye was finding it hard to focus. He'd promised himself to give Francis all the time and space he needed. Not to make a pass. It was making Hawkeye twitchy.

Hawkeye couldn't stop himself from teasing him: not even when it was obvious that his best gambits were falling flat. He kept hoping that *something* would make Francis laugh and relax and sit back and let himself be... be happy.

Francis had looked happy exactly twice today; when he was telling Hawkeye about the letter from his bishop and while they were decorating the Christmas tree. Hawkeye had spun that out as long as possible, but it had to end sometime. Plus one stifled laugh when Mulcahy was hanging up his shirts, but Hawkeye wasn't sure that counted.

Oh, what the hell: he needed all the points he could get. It counted.

He wanted Francis to live with him. He'd promised he could wait. And he could. He *could*.

The door opened, quietly. He looked up from the journal and thought for an instant he was hallucinating: Mulcahy was standing silently in the doorway, hands by his sides, looking – Hawkeye grimaced – looking polite.

"Need something?" Hawkeye asked out loud. He closed the journal, using his finger to mark the place where he was looking at the diagram of a stranger's heart.

Mulcahy took two steps into the room, and closed the door. He sounded as hesitant as he ever did when he was about to say something that he thought might be discourteous.

"I don't quite know how to put this."

"No?" Hawkeye's heart thumped.

Mulcahy came across the room. He glanced down at the journal. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt."

"What do you want?" Hawkeye's voice started out at a bark and trailed off as Mulcahy sat down on the edge of the bed. Hawkeye dropped the journal beside the bed.

Francis put out his hand and took hold of Hawkeye's hand. He smiled, a little oddly. "I don't quite know that either," he said. "But I know I want –"

He seemed to have got stuck.

Hawkeye slid his hand up Francis's arm. The other man was trembling – his face was calm, his hand was steady, but his muscles were taut and vibrating like wire.

"Hawkeye –"

"Francis," Hawkeye started, and then decided it wasn't a moment for words. He shifted sideways a little, tugging the other man on to the bed, and slid down, shrugging off the bathrobe he had wrapped around his shoulders. He wrapped his arms round Francis, sliding his hands down to the small of his back. As if an echo, Francis's arms came round him: solid and warm. He was tense, Hawkeye could feel how tense he was, but he was in Hawkeye's arms.

*We don't have to do anything*, Hawkeye was all set to say; but then one or other of them moved a little – and he could feel the hard warmth of an erect cock, trapped inside smooth fabric, pressing against his thigh. He was getting hard himself, and the rush of arousal made him breathless for a moment.

Francis's pupils were dilated. His breath was coming fast. He was tense as hell, but turned on. For that diagnosis, Hawkeye had an effective operational technique, swift and smooth. They could talk afterwards.

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He kissed Francis's mouth, teasing his lips open, sliding one hand to the waistband of his pyjama bottoms; moving to kiss the sensitive spot just under the ear. He unbuttoned Francis's pyjama jacket one-handed, just enough to slide that hand inside – he felt the catch in Francis's breathing as fingers made contact with nipple – and began to plant distracting, almost tickling kisses along the line of his jaw as he tugged down Francis's pyjama bottoms.

Francis was holding on to his shoulders, hands clenched, breath coming as hard as Hawkeye planned to have him come in the next few minutes. When his hands slipped down to rest palm-first against Hawkeye's shoulders, Hawkeye assumed it was an accident.

Hoped it was an accident.

Not an accident. Hawkeye became aware of this as if his bedroom was getting colder. Francis was trying to push him away. In a cold split second he wanted to ignore it, to claim he hadn't felt it – afterwards would be afterwards, Francis couldn't say he hadn't wanted it –

He wanted years with Francis, not a night.

He lifted his head and looked Francis in the eye. "Okay," he said. He heard his voice cracking. With difficulty, he moved himself away. "Okay. What's going on?"

Francis was red, shivering, and breathless. He didn't say anything for a minute. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah, well, what next? 'We can't because it's a mortal sin'? You could have thought about that before you came *in* here!"

It dawned on Hawkeye slowly that it had been a cruel thing to say. Francis had looked away, as if involuntarily, a quick flinching of his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Francis said again, looking back at him. "I don't – I'm not very good at saying this –"

"Just spit it out," Hawkeye said. He caught what he said and laughed: that hurt his throat. He was knotted up with tension.

"Do we have to go so fast?"

"I've waited since June. How much slower can I go without breaking into a full halt?"

"I'm sorry," Francis said a third time. "I mean – more slowly *now*, in – in bed. Is it possible? I don't have much experience..." his voice trailed off. He was looking at Hawkeye, his eyes wide behind his glasses.

When Francis took his glasses off, it usually meant *I don't want to listen to you now*. He put them down on the bedside cabinet, and pushed the covers aside. He tugged at Hawkeye's pyjamas, accomplishing what he wanted far less deftly than Hawkeye, but just as quickly. He went down on Hawkeye's erection with his mouth open: more a determined act than a skilful one.

One of Hawkeye's personal touchstones was *Any blowjob is a good blowjob*.

Mulcahy's mouth was wrapped round his dick and he was doing something with his tongue that felt almost right and he was almost close to coming –

He'd been determined that the first time he got to make love to Mulcahy was going to be perfect –

This wasn't it. He was so close, though, so close that even though he couldn't summon a clear fantasy he was going to come –

He wanted Francis to stop so they could talk. There were things he hadn't asked Francis he should have.

He didn't want this to stop till he came. He'd been on edge, *needing* this, needing *this* –

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It wasn't perfect, but he came. Semen splashed white on Francis's face: he must have jerked his head back when he felt Hawkeye beginning to come. Francis put his hand up to wipe it away, looking at Hawkeye with wonder and accomplishment. It was better than coming, seeing that. Dazed weariness was pulling him down – he'd wanted to make Francis come *first* – “Don't go away,” he said, trying to say the words clearly enough, reaching out to hold on to Francis, wanting him there.

“How long did I sleep?” he asked, and repeated the question without yawning in the middle of it. Francis was lying on the bed beside him, head propped on one arm, watching him; his hand warm on Hawkeye's chest.

“I'm not sure,” Francis said. “Not long.”

“I wish you hadn't done that,” Hawkeye said. “I wanted it to be perfect.” He half-laughed. “Don't tell me it was delicious.”

Hawkeye felt Francis's hand move on his chest as he looked away. Hawkeye lifted his hand and put it over Francis's, and tugged.

Francis landed against his chest and his breath went out in a gasp. “Hawkeye – ” At least he was looking at Hawkeye now.

“We need to talk,” Hawkeye said.

“You need to sleep; you've got to drive to Maine tomorrow,” Francis said.

“Today.”

Francis looked over at the clock. “Tomorrow.”

“Fine. Tomorrow.” It felt later. “Francis – Can I tell you something?”

Francis's shrug and nod were amused. “You can tell me anything.”

“I'm not joking,” Hawkeye said. “I'm not crazy. At least, not about this. I love you. The real thing. When I came up that Friday after Thanksgiving to hand over the keys, I knew I'd only get to see you for five minutes and never get a chance to touch you, but I had to see you – I *had* to. But if you tell me you never want to see me again, I can deal with that. If I have to. If you wanted to move in here and never lay a hand on me, or me on you, I can deal with that. I can. If I have to. But now I don't know what's going on – you don't want me to make love to you, but you're happy going down on me? How does that fit into your rules? Who makes these rules? Why wouldn't you let me make you come?” He was sitting up and Francis was staring at him from inches away. Hawkeye wanted to kiss him.

Francis swallowed. “I didn't mean to stop you from... from having sex with me. Just... to slow down. I wasn't sure – ” He looked away, for only an instant. “I knew – I wanted – I want – to have sex with you. But I don't – ” he had managed to wipe his face roughly clean of come while Hawkeye was asleep, but his hand went up to touch his face as if he thought the marks were still there “ – when you – ” He was going bright red. He spoke as if both embarrassed and unsure of himself. “ – when you went at me like that, I felt like – like I – like it wasn't my decision.”

Hawkeye reached out for him without thinking. The curve of his hand fitted the curve of Francis's neck. He was no longer angry – he no longer even wanted to be angry. “Did you come?”

He knew the answer even before he felt Francis shake his head. “It really doesn't matter. You're tired – ”

“Not so much,” Hawkeye interrupted. “I go to sleep after I come. It doesn't matter whether I'm tired or not. I can stay awake if I'm standing up, but if I'm anywhere near horizontal, I – it's a typical physiological response to orgasm – I could probably draw you a diagram.” He stopped and thought about it. “Or not, because my drawing's never been up to much. That was why I wanted you to come first. We could have

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snored together.” He was leaning closer. “Anyway, I’m awake again.” Habit made him lower his voice to a purr. “What can I do for you?”

That wasn’t the right question. “I don’t know,” Francis said. “I don’t – know. I’m sorry, I – I –” His neck muscles were so tense they felt rigid. “Maybe we should just go to sleep?”

Hawkeye shook his head. “You can’t sleep like this. If it was okay for you to go down on me, how about vice versa?”

“I can get to sleep,” Francis said. He gave Hawkeye a defensively cheerful look. It was incongruous. “I’ve had a lot of practice.”

“I can’t sleep with you like this,” Hawkeye said. “Look, what else am I good for? You’ve been miserable all day, I won’t be seeing you for at least three days, can I at least try to make you feel good?”

“I haven’t been miserable all day!” Francis protested.

“Then you need to sue your face for a liar. The only times you looked happy was when we were decorating the tree and when you were telling me about that letter from your bishop. And I didn’t have anything to do with either one. I kept trying, but nothing I could do was good enough – but I’m good enough at this, if you’ll just let me.” He was speaking out of terrified need, and he knew it. He hadn’t meant to let Francis know how much – how very much – he needed him.

Francis stared at him, looking wide-eyed and stricken. “Is that what you think?” Then he did move towards him. “Hawkeye? Can I – can we lie down –”

Inside the curve of Hawkeye’s arm, he was easing them both down to the bed. When they were lying down. Francis’s head was on Hawkeye’s shoulder, his arm across Hawkeye’s chest. There was no way Francis could see Hawkeye’s face.

“I have always been...” Francis’s voice was uncertain, shy. “At least, since I was twelve, I’ve known...” Hawkeye felt him shudder as if kicked. “I’m a homosexual.”

Hawkeye wanted to laugh and wanted to kick himself for wanting to laugh. He tightened his arm round Francis’s shoulders. He understood that Francis had positioned them like this precisely so that he couldn’t interrupt. He even understood why.

“I said you weren’t my first,” Francis said. “But I’d never...” He paused. After a while, he said, carefully, “I had never done anything myself. I used to – when I was in the showers at the gym – I found I could sometimes look at a man who was looking at me, in a certain way, and he would –”

Francis stopped speaking for so long that Hawkeye wanted to prompt him. If Francis had been able to see his face, he would have.

When Francis began again, he sounded as if he had steeled himself to say it. “He would offer to suck my dick. I would say yes, and he would... and there was never any... reciprocation expected. I would repent and confess to a priest, and it would all be over – until the next time it happened. I told myself that I wasn’t doing anything, that it wasn’t really my fault, and while I never lied in confession, I never made it clear that this was something I did... regularly.”

*How regularly?* Hawkeye wondered. He was full of a fierce half-amused half-appalled tenderness. If he’d been showering with Mulcahy, and not in those separate wooden boxes the army had provided for the benefit of the nurses, he’d have been tempted to... *look at him in a certain way.*

“Two or three times a year,” Francis said. “From when I was twelve to when I was twenty-two. Even after I’d felt my vocation as a priest. Only when I was about to enter the seminary, by the grace of God I was able to be honest with myself and accept that I couldn’t divide my nature like this. I couldn’t keep praying for God to

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change me and keep ... enjoying these incidents. I had to stop. And I did. But you were the first person I ever lay down with.”

Francis stopped again. “I knew moving in with you would mean having sex with you,” he said at last. “And I did... do want that. But I didn’t know, even when I’d consented, it would mean feeling so overwhelmed by you. I’m sorry. I’m just not... not used to this. It’s my fault, not yours.”

Hawkeye reared up on one elbow and looked down at Francis. “Your fault,” he said blankly, conscious of a cocktail of feelings so intense he’d get drunk just breathing in the fumes. “*Your* fault?” The water from his eyes felt hot on his face.

“I should have told you earlier.” Francis reached up and touched Hawkeye’s face. “Or not at all, I suppose. I’m sorry. I don’t know what to do.”

Hawkeye turned his face and kissed the palm of Francis’s hand. Only for a moment, but he was conscious of the shiver and tremble of the other man’s reaction.

“I’m used to doing it fast. Turning the other guy on before he’s got time to *think* no. Or getting it done before we go on... and do something else. Or just...” Hawkeye swallowed. “I wasn’t expecting you tonight. You’d gone all day not touching me – looking as miserable as if someone shot your puppy – ”

He felt Francis laugh before he saw it. A lot of the tension went out of him: Hawkeye felt himself relax a little.

“Okay,” Hawkeye said, abandoning as futile ideas of making it perfect. “Let me lie down with you and hold you. Till you go to sleep.”

He slid off Francis’s glasses and folded them, putting them down carefully on the bedside cabinet. The other man blinked at him, vulnerable and dazed and kissable: Hawkeye pantomimed turning off the bedside light, and Francis nodded.

Then they held each other, in the easy dark. Hawkeye didn’t try to kiss him. He rubbed his hands up and down the other man’s back, pressing tension out of his muscles. He could feel he was winning when Francis’s neck muscles loosened and his dropped head brought his mouth against Hawkeye’s shoulder.

“Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye’s mouth twitched. Francis had spoken sleepily, almost as if he expected an answer. Hawkeye slid his hand further up and ruffled the hair at the back of Francis’s head: it was the best he could do without switching the light back on.

“I meant to tell you about the letter from my bishop’s secretary.”

“Uh huh,” Hawkeye said out loud, amused. He wondered if Mulcahy could feel that he was speaking. “Well, I’m a captive audience.” One that couldn’t answer. He slid his hands down again, sliding Francis a little closer. Francis’s arms tightened around him.

“I just meant to tell you,” Francis said. “It wasn’t a very kind letter. But it was okay to get it... because I had you.”

Surprise stilled Hawkeye’s hands. He felt as if his heart had stilled an instant, too.

“I’m not very happy right now. I’m sorry. But you make me feel at home with you. Thank you.”

Hawkeye swallowed. His arms tightened almost convulsively. “You make me feel like you could perform heart surgery on me without anaesthetic,” he said out loud, hoarsely. Not sure if Francis would understand it, or even if he were writing correctly, Hawkeye traced first *youre welcome* and then *I love you* on Francis’s back.

Francis’s laugh was half a grunt: he *was* falling asleep, even without coming. How he did it, Hawkeye had no idea: in this state, Hawkeye would have had to jerk off before he could hope to sleep, no matter how tired he was. Francis said sleepily, “I love you too,” and it was a few minutes before he said anything else.

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“Hawkeye – ?”

Hawkeye had the angle right, between his thigh and Francis’s hard-on: pretty much all Francis had to do was breathe and he’d come.

“I – I – ” Francis sounded awake again, unexpectedly so. He jerked, twitched, and came: he didn’t make much noise about it, but the difference between the feel of his muscles before and after was astonishing. Hawkeye lay still and enjoyed it, his hands still tracing long lines on Francis’s back. He wrote again *youre welcome*, and reached for the box of tissues beside the bed, mopping up.

“Hawkeye,” Francis said after a moment. He sounded more amused than anything else. “You’re *devious*.”

Hawkeye nodded, grinning. He could sleep now, too.

Francis hadn’t been kidding about snoring. Once he went to sleep, he sawed wood. Hawkeye slept and woke and slept again: each time he drifted to the surface of sleep he woke abruptly, knowing where he was, who was making the noise in his ear.

He woke to the alarm thinking *earplugs*, but the next breath’s thought was *tonight, tomorrow night*. No need for earplugs: no Francis. He levered himself out of bed and tried not to wake him.

He’d left a gift under the tree last night. It lurked there, looking terribly obvious and lonely to Hawkeye.

He was halfway down his mug of coffee when Francis appeared, looking sleepy, wearing – Hawkeye smiled – the faded red bathrobe.

“You were just going without saying goodbye?” Francis sat down at the table. Hawkeye pushed the coffee pot at him.

Francis smiled at him: he looked tired. A little awkward, but mostly tired. He poured himself a mug of coffee and added milk.

“I’ll be home Sunday night.”

“How are you getting up to Maine?” Francis asked.

“Rental.”

It looked as if it took a moment for that to sink in. “You could have had your father’s car back.”

“It’s your car,” Hawkeye said. “It was easier to fix up a rental, anyway. I just pick it up this morning, return it Sunday night.” He finished his coffee, and stood up.

Francis stood up. They looked at each other, and then Francis put out his hands and caught hold of him, pulling him into a hug.

“Goodbye,” Francis said. “Drive carefully.”

Hawkeye found himself grinning. When Francis let go of him and he could step back from the hug, he said “You bet. You too.”

## Christmas Day, 1954

### 1. Letter from Maine

Dear Francis,

I miss you. It’s been a whole day since I last saw you and it feels like forever. It feels like twice forever till I see you again. Writing to you is better than nothing. Not much better though.

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Fortunately, three years in Korea taught me to regard any Christmas on which I don't have to operate on half a dozen wounded soldiers as a good Christmas. And wounded soldiers are scarce in Crabapple Cove, unless we count the armies of lobsters. If they ever cut a deal with the Pentagon, we're all doomed.

What am I talking about – we're safe so long as the Pentagon realise all lobsters turn Red when things heat up.

Got into Crabapple Cove at quarter of six, and discovered Mrs Godden trying to persuade Danny and Mary to eat her tuna casserole. Without much success. Not enough ketchup. Not in the house, and probably not in the world. Sarah's labor pains started at noon Christmas Eve, and it looks like the kid's determined to arrive dead on schedule: sometime early in the morning Christmas Day. Danny and Mary said their mom told them they were getting a baby for Christmas. Danny wants a puppy instead, and Mary wants a Ginny. (It's a kind of doll. Looks sort of like a baby girl with metal implants in her hips so you can move her legs back and forth and pretend she's walking. I know this because I bought one for her. Sarah's suggestion. Danny's getting a fishing-rod.)

I got Mrs Godden to leave – she had to go home and poison her own family – and cooked up plain spaghetti with butter for the kids. After I'd got them off to bed – Danny needs to be shown the inside of his closet and assured there is no boogeyman in Crabapple Cove, Mary just wants eight pages of a storybook about talking mice dressed up in little tiny ball gowns. I'm not kidding. That's her favorite story right now. Enough to strike Klinger green, in his frilly period.

So I read Mary her story, lied to Danny – very convincingly – and settled down for a pleasant Christmas Eve by the telephone. Wrapping presents for Danny and Mary, Bill's, Sarah's, and Santa's. Santa gives the best presents, but he didn't buy Mary a Ginny. He has taste. Mine is all in my mouth.

I wish you were here. Right here, sitting on the sofa beside me, probably doing a better job than me on wrapping presents. I miss you.

You may not have noticed, but it's now twelve hours later. Bill rang me up from the hospital at five in the morning – it's a boy. Sarah and son both doing well, Bill said. But he's not. When Sarah was in labor she told Bill she wants a divorce. That would be OK – lots of women in labor tell their husbands they want to murder them, that's why midwives make the big money, reassuring anxious fathers that mommy doesn't really mean the death threats – but Sarah's still saying she wants a divorce, and Bill can't figure out why.

I drove Danny and Mary to the hospital so they could see their baby brother. Then I drove them back again while Sarah and Bill were still being polite to each other. The hospital are keeping Sarah in overnight – I think they hope she'll wake up tomorrow and say everything is just fine. Bill's coming back tonight. Or he is if he has any sense. What do you think? Should I tell Bill why Sarah wants to divorce him? Or just tell him why I'd like to push him in the swimming-hole? I miss you. We went out for a walk after we got back from the hospital, while it was still light, and Danny and Mary went sliding on the pond. It's shallow water, deep mud. Freezes hard every

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winter. It's beautiful up here in winter – especially after a hard frost. I'd like you to see it.

I'm sitting in the kitchen writing this while Danny and Mary drink hot cocoa and eat cookies. They asked me who I was writing to and I told them my friend Francis, in New York. They wanted to know why I was writing to you, and I told them because I wanted you to come visit Crabapple Cove in winter and see how beautiful it is. Danny said I should tell you that he's made a snowman. Mary says she's made a snowman too, but actually it's more like a snowblob. Don't tell her I said that.

I think they've had too many cookies

Okay. Following the cookie emergency there was the Too Full To Eat Dinner emergency, and then the Too Excited To Go To Sleep emergency. I don't know why I call them emergencies. Nobody died. I only shouted at them once. Danny still has to be convinced the boogeyman isn't in Crabapple Cove before he'll go to sleep. He says there was one in Levinetown that lived in his closet, and he thinks it might have followed him here. Not a chance, I told him: boogeymen have better sense. Besides, they're very territorial. It's nearly 10 and there's no sign of Bill. He'd better come home tonight, because I'm leaving tomorrow morning.

Mary liked her Ginny. Apparently what you do with it is take it by the ankles and hit your brother with it. The body swings round and increases the force of the blow. I hadn't realised. Now it makes sense. Danny says he isn't sharing his fishing rod with rotten little sisters, so it looks like I have to buy another one, Mary-sized, before summer. I'll see you tomorrow. I miss you,

Hawkeye

## 2. Feed the hungry

Mulcahy went for a walk after breakfast on Christmas Day. It was good weather for walking: warm for December, clear sky, no wind. Central Park was nearly 20 blocks away. He passed six churches on the way. Three of them were Catholic.

There was a party at the school, as he'd told Hawkeye, but he couldn't face the explanations necessary if he showed up for it. There were churches nearby where he could have gone to Mass. There were undoubtedly charities within walking distance that would be providing a Christmas dinner for the homeless, or something else where he could have made himself useful, but he hadn't looked for them.

He had nothing to do. He had nowhere to go. He missed Hawkeye.

Central Park was greyed brown and tired green. Mulcahy set out walking uptown along the first path he came to.

He could not go to confession. He wondered – he had been wondering since yesterday – how the two women in his last parish had managed it. They had lived together, and loved each other, and gone to confession, and taken communion at mass on Sundays and festivals. Had they been celibate? Had they decided that since in their minds their love for each other was not a sin, they need not struggle to repent and confess it?

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He had told himself that it was the mutual devotion of Ruth and Naomi. He hadn't asked himself how they saw it.

He was certain, remembering how they had been together, that they had not repented or felt guilt. He wished that he had talked to them. Perhaps, even then, he'd been afraid of what they would say to him.

He still wished he could have talked to his bishop. The letter his bishop had sent him was long-ago ashes in the Pennsylvania school's incinerator, but he often remembered sentences from it, suddenly and abruptly.

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

*Homosexuals are bound to celibacy by natural law.*

*Suffering from this affliction, you cannot be a good candidate for the priesthood.*

*I would ask you to consider seriously your vocation.*

*If you choose to apply for laicization, I will support your application.*

He stood by the pond and took his specs off to rub at his eyes. He had managed to be a priest for nine years. He had managed to be celibate for fifteen years. He had failed at both. It ought to feel as if he had failed God, but he had felt since Thanksgiving – since falling asleep on the sofa with Hawkeye in his arms – that God was still there: still very much with him, as He had always been.

The Church was not. He could not pretend anything else. He could go to Mass – even if he never took communion, never went to confession, never tried to feel contrition, he could go to Mass. But it would be a pretence: if he spoke to anyone, even under the seal of the confessional, about how he lived, with Hawkeye, they would know he was living in a state of mortal sin.

Unrepentant. Uncontrite. Unreconciled.

Even knowing this, he could not feel that God condemned him. And that made him a heretic.

"Heretic," he said out loud, and glanced round: no one at all seemed to be in earshot. He was above the pond, walking on a tree-lined path. He stood still, digging his hands into his pockets. His scarf was in one – he didn't need it today; his gloves in the other. Hawkeye's father's coat was warmer than his own winter coat, and comfortable: he'd pulled it on without thinking about it when he left the apartment.

*Take it as a Catholic. The Protestants got their share.*

Hawkeye needed someone. He ought to be married: Mulcahy knew it, and wished he could make himself want it, instead of wanting Hawkeye. Even if Hawkeye needed someone now who remembered Korea, in a year, maybe two years –

If – when – Hawkeye met the right woman, someone he could marry, it would hurt. But it would be the end of this. And the end in a right way, an end that would mean –

Being lonely. He had come to Hawkeye that weekend five weeks ago because he was lonely. Because he had been unable to feel that sitting alone in the small room at the school, trying not to think about Hawkeye, while Hawkeye was alone a few miles away, alone and in need, was in any way the right thing to do.

But if Hawkeye was with someone – a woman for whom he felt passionate, loving friendship –

It would hurt, being alone. But it would be an acceptable pain. *Bless us, dear God, and our friendship. Help me never be less than a friend.*

The coat hugged itself around him. "Hawkeye," he said. "I wish you were here."

A man had come round the corner, and was staring at him. Mulcahy stared back, embarrassed at having spoken out loud, wondering how loud he had spoken.

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The man was wearing jeans and a jacket: he stuck his hands in his back pockets, leaning back a little. He was looking at Mulcahy now in a way that Mulcahy recognised, nerve deep, bone deep.

He turned quickly and walked away.

### 3. Anatomy of a divorce

Bill drove between Crabapple Cove and Levinetown every day. He knew the road even in a hard frost on a moonless night. He was literally unaware of anything that had passed between leaving the hospital and walking up the path to the front door.

The kids had to be asleep. Bill closed the door quietly.

“Good evening,” Ben said. He was leaning against the doorway to the old parlour. “How’s Sarah?”

“Oh, she’s fine,” Bill said.

“How’s my newest nephew?”

“He’s fine.”

“Danny and Mary went off to bed about eight. They’re fine. So that just leaves you and me. I’m fine, too. Thank you for asking. You look terrible.” His voice had an edge to it that Bill didn’t like.

“I’m fucking exhausted,” Bill said.

“I had a terrific Christmas,” Ben said. He sounded mocking. “Thanks for inviting me.”

“Sarah invited you. Right now I can’t imagine why. She’s been acting kind of crazy recently,” Bill mocked back.

Ben glanced up. He lowered his voice. “Bill, if either of your older kids happen to be awake, they can hear what you say if you talk loud in the hall.”

Bill went past Ben, down the hall to the kitchen. He wasn’t hungry, but he hadn’t eaten since breakfast this morning.

“When do you have to get back to New York?”

“Tomorrow.” Ben turned a chair round, sat down, and propped his chin up on his hands over the chair back. It was so familiar it made Bill grin.

“No chance you could stay on another day? It’s been good having you here, Hawkeye.”

“I’m doing rounds on Monday morning,” Ben said, quickly. “I have to get back for Sunday night.”

“Did you ever deal with pregnant women?”

Ben’s mouth twisted into a grin. “I’m a surgeon. A thoracic surgeon.”

“What does that mean?”

“Means ‘no’.”

“They keep telling me at the hospital that women say all kinds of irrational things when they’ve just given birth.”

“She didn’t sound irrational when I was visiting her this afternoon.”

“She wants a divorce!”

“She doesn’t sound crazy to me,” Ben said, and grinned: sudden, swift, and nasty. As if he actually meant what he’d just said.

“Sarah’s been acting irrationally for weeks. This time’s been hard on her.” Bill knew what he was saying was true. “She’ll get over it.”

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Bill had put together a plateful of food. He sat down at the table, facing Ben: Ben was looking past him. When his gaze switched back to Bill's face, he spoke abruptly. "What if she doesn't?"

"She will. She doesn't want a divorce. We've been married nine years. This is just some crazy thing she's come up with because she's mad at me about Thanksgiving." Bill picked up a forkful of beef and sniffed at it. The icebox had needed cleaning out, but the meat smelt okay. He ate it. "She's *still* mad at me," he added, "and dammit, *she* was the one who ran off and spoiled the holiday."

"She ran off?" Ben's eyebrows went up. "*Ran?*"

"Mom came up from Florida for the holiday, and the moment Sarah heard the news, she started making plans to go to *Vermont*."

"Visiting her folks?"

"Sure. But she can do that any time. Mom doesn't visit from Florida every year." The lettuce looked wilted, but it smelt fine. "I tried to argue her out of it, but she packed herself *and* the kids on the bus to Vermont the day before Mom got here, and didn't get back till Monday. Mom had to head back to Florida on Wednesday, she only got two days with her grandkids, and Sarah acts like the whole thing was *my* fault."

Ben grunted. He was watching Bill eat with apparent fascination. "You know, in all the time BJ complained, I never realised how disgusting it looks to see someone sniff his food before he eats it."

Bill put down his fork. "What's the problem?"

Ben lifted his hands and widened his eyes. "I'm just passing a remark."

"I appreciate your helping out, Hawkeye, but not your snide comments."

"Be glad that's all."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Have you seriously considered what you're going to do if you can't persuade Sarah she doesn't want to divorce?"

"Come off it," Bill said. Ben was looking at him as if quite serious. It was disconcerting. Hawkeye had always been a joker, and sarcasm was only what Bill expected from him. "Quit joking around."

Ben stood up. He opened his mouth as if he speak, but he looked twitchy. "Ah, the hell with it. I'm going to bed." As he turned, he muttered "Why does *no one* ever believe me when I say I'm not joking?"

"Ben – " Ben didn't turn. "Hawkeye!"

Ben turned round. "Look. Bill." He rubbed the back of his hand over his forehead. He sounded tired. "If things aren't going your way, if you think you might get into trouble, you make up a story, and you *stick* to it. I don't know whether you believe the stories you make up, but I don't really care any more. I don't care about you any more." He sounded surprised. "I really don't."

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, you know. You pushed me into the swimming-hole when I was seven, and then you lied about it to everyone for years."

Bill had a mouthful of beef: he nearly choked. "Hawkeye, you're back on *that*?"

"Just you and me. I'll never tell." Ben came back to the table and leaned both his hands on it. His head jerked forward. He looked almost like a stranger. "Just as a matter of interest: how do *you* remember that day?"

Bill got up. It felt as if a shred of beef had caught at the back of his throat. He took a glass from among the clean dishes, and filled it from the tap. He'd always liked the water here. It tasted like home. He drank, deep, and refilled the glass. "I went out in

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the boat with you, and you got up when you shouldn't have and fell in," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, that's all that happened. And you're wrong – I *did* get into trouble. Dad seemed to think I should have kept more of an eye on you." He looked up, directly into Ben's eyes. "Whatever way you remember it, that's the way it happened."

"Oh, right," Ben said, softly. He was smiling, crookedly. "Right. Well, you've had twenty-seven years for that story: how about this one? You knew about Sarah's plans to go to Vermont for Thanksgiving, you just decided to claim she'd never told you because that meant you didn't have to tell Aunt Ellen she'd either have to go to Vermont or change her plans."

"What?" Bill stared. "You're making it up."

Ben's smile was more like a smirk. He shook his head, slowly.

"You have to be making it up."

"You're forgetting something," Ben said. "Twenty-seven years ago it was just you and me in the boat. And I bet you think it's just between you and Sarah now. But when you start making stuff up here and now, you've got to allow for Danny. He knows when his mom told him the four of you were going to Vermont for Thanksgiving. He remembers because his mom told him he could sleep in the barn with the big boys this year, and two years ago he was too little. He bragged about it at school."

"He's only seven," Bill said. He was fumbling for a better rejoinder.

Ben's smile was definitely a smirk now. "So was I, and *I* remember. You've only had six or seven weeks to forget – do *you* remember?"

"Of course I –" Bill looked down at the plate of food. He pushed it away. "You've got a hell of a nerve, standing in my house making crazy accusations –"

"Your house? *Your* house?" Ben laughed. He didn't sound amused, but angry. "Bill, this house is *mine* – and it's leased to *Sarah*. It's not yours. It's never going to be yours."

"I pay the rent on it." Bill was trying to keep his temper. "What does it matter to you? That business about the boat was when we were both kids – why keep raking it up?"

"You really want to know why?" Ben tilted his head to one side. "Because that was the first time I knew I was going to die. That's not the kind of thing you forget."

"Why keep raking it up *now*?"

Ben didn't answer. He was looking over Bill's head. Finally, he said, "Bill, I can believe you remember your version of what happened at the swimming-hole... like you said, it's been twenty-seven years. But this Thanksgiving story is only what, six, seven weeks old? You've got to remember how it really was." His eyes slid to Bill's face. "Don't you?"

"You're making stuff up."

"You keep saying that. But unless you're actually psychotic –"

Bill lifted his head, disturbed.

"– and I don't think you are, you've got to remember. On some level. You've *got* to." Ben leaned forward. "You want to convince Sarah she doesn't want to divorce you? Head back to the hospital and the minute she wakes up, tell her you're sorry you lied about Thanksgiving and you'll never do it again."

"What? Ben, you're *nuts*."

Ben laughed. He went on laughing for some time. Bill stood up. It was the first time in this conversation that he had genuinely thought Hawkeye might be crazy: he didn't sound either amused or angry, just... hysterical. He straightened up, wiping at

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his eyes. “The consensus is *in*. Okay. I’m nuts. Look, I really do have to get back to New York for tomorrow night. But I’ll hang around here till noon if you want to go back to the hospital tonight. Or I’ll go through Levinetown on my way home tomorrow morning and tell Sarah I’ll give her six months off the rent as my Christmas present to her if she wants a divorce.” He spoke casually, half-seriously: it was infuriating.

“Get out,” Bill said. There was an angry, sick feeling in his belly. “Get *out*. If you go near Sarah, I’ll – I’ll – ”

“Yeah?” Ben tilted his chin up. “What are you going to do?” He stood still, his hands at his sides, in the same cocky hit-me-if-you-dare stance, as if he were still ten, as if this was a matter of stolen apples or a fishing-rod borrowed without permission.

“Don’t you understand – this isn’t a joke, this isn’t a game – this is *my marriage* we’re talking about, this is my *life*. Grow up, Hawkeye!”

Ben shrugged. He turned to go again. “I’m tired,” he threw over his shoulder, “and I’m as grown up as I want to be. You decide about your marriage. Good night.” There was a mocking twist in his voice, though he did sound tired. The door closed behind him.

For a long moment, Bill wanted to go after him, and tell him – something, anything, about the swimming-hole. He barely remembered it: that whole day was a blur. He remembered telling people *about* what had happened much more clearly than he remembered the day itself.

The moment when he could have done that passed. He sat down again and finished his tasteless meal.

Ben had left the door to Danny’s room open: Bill closed it gently. The door to Mary’s room was shut, and so was the door to the spare room where Ben was sleeping. It faced the door to the room where Bill and Sarah slept. The house was silent, but for the creaking of the eaves. Bill went into their room and closed the door.

Sarah slept on the right of the bed, convenient to the door if the children cried in the night. It always seemed to take longer to get to bed when she wasn’t there. Bill was desultorily getting into bed when he heard Ben’s door open.

He heard Ben go down the stairs, moving quietly. Bill opened his own door. From the top of the stairs he could see by the light that Ben was in the kitchen.

Ben’s hair was tangled across his eyes; he looked bewildered and dazed and only half-awake. He was standing in the kitchen pouring himself a shot of whiskey. Despite his look of being half-asleep, his hand was steady.

“Hawkeye?”

“What – ?” Ben looked at him and set the bottle down. He lifted the glass and looked at it. “What do you want?”

“What are you doing?”

“Drinking,” Ben said with candour, and drank as if for a bet. The empty glass was rinsed out and left beside the sink: the bottle went back in the cupboard.

“What if I did – maybe say something different about Thanksgiving? It wasn’t like it was important.”

“Something different?” Ben raised an eyebrow. “Yeah?”

“It wasn’t *important*. But say I did. You really think if I apologised to Sarah, she’d give up on this divorce idea?”

“How would I know?” Ben looked exasperated. “But you know what I’d do? I wouldn’t just apologise.” He went across the room, brushing past Bill as if he wasn’t there. He was at the door when Bill asked, “What would you do?”

## Sins and Virtues

For once, Ben didn't sound as if he were joking. "I'd crawl." He turned round. His face was a familiar clown's mask, mouth open and grinning, but his voice was serious. "I'd crawl all the way to Levinetown. I'd promise anything." He reached out for the door handle, without looking. "That's what *I'd* do. Right now, I'm going to sleep."

Disconcerted, Bill said, "Good night."

### 4. Letter to California

Dear Sis,

Of course anything you send to me at the school will reach me, but I've moved. I'm only ten minutes walk from the railway terminus – it takes me less than an hour to reach the school in the mornings, and it's more convenient for the evening classes I have to take.

Also, while the youngsters I was looking after at the school are fine young people, I did miss having someone to talk to in the evenings. The apartment belongs to one of the doctors I knew in Korea – he's working at Bellevue now. He's up in Maine over Christmas, visiting his family, or I'm sure he'd ask to be remembered to you – this is the Dr Pierce I wrote about.

There is something I have been meaning to write to you about for some time now.

When I went on retreat last year, ~~it wasn't entirely my idea~~ I was instructed by my bishop to take the time to prayerfully consider my vocation. He was disturbed by a disagreement I had had with him over a point of doctrine. He suspended me from the priesthood, so I was in the retreat house as a lay brother.

When I left the retreat house, it wasn't on the instructions of my bishop: I am afraid that I felt I had spent enough time considering, and it was time to go back to work. He wrote to me at the school for the deaf, strongly advising me to apply for laicization. And I did. Next month or perhaps in February, I'll hear from the Holy See.

I'm very sorry. I know I should have written to you about this before: I couldn't somehow bring myself to do it, though I wanted you to know. I wish I could have seen you face to face.

Although it wasn't my idea, in the months since then I have had time to consider what he wrote to me, and though I think (though I don't like to be critical) he advised me for all the wrong reasons, he was right.

Do you remember the nun you wrote to me about, years ago, who talked about how having a vocation feels like the finger of God, touching you, or like a thread, pulling you? I've always remembered what you said you'd felt – not a finger or a thread, but like Mam grabbing you by the scruff of the neck and shoving you into the kitchen and saying 'There's your work, get it done!'

## Sins and Virtues

That's how I felt. Even after I was deafened in Korea, I felt it. Only then God took His hand away. I lost my vocation.

It's taken me all these months to get used to being an inactive, invisible priest. Even when I was at college everyone knew I was there on a Jesuit scholarship, I was aimed for the priesthood. It's still very strange sometimes when people don't "Father" me all the time – "present company excepted, Father", "excuse my language, Father" – but then I thought it was very strange sometimes when people *did* "Father" me all the time.

I feel now that when I finally hear from the Holy See, it will come as a relief – like a long operation over.

Please forgive me. I'm sorry for the pain this letter must cause you. I love you very much: your understanding has meant more to me over the years than I'll ever be able to tell you.

I hope you had a good Christmas. Pray for me.

Yours,

Francis

### 5. Sunday, 26th December

Green branches set with gold baubles. *What if I could have written to her about Hawkeye...*

Mulcahy woke. He had a cramp in the back of his neck: he had gone to sleep on the couch. The tree smelled of forests only in his dream.

Hawkeye moved into his field of vision: Mulcahy sat up. Hawkeye handed him his specs. Hawkeye came into focus, and the world seemed to settle into place.

"I went to sleep with them on," he said.

"Yes." Hawkeye sat down on the couch beside him. "I took them off when I came in." He sat with his hands on his lap. "About half an hour ago," he added, before Mulcahy asked. "It's nearly midnight. I left Maine late."

"Is everything all right at home?"

Hawkeye's grin was crooked. "Home?"

Mulcahy looked a query; Hawkeye went on, smoothly, "Good news and bad news. The good news is, I have a new nephew. A healthy nine-pounder with all his fingers and toes. Good voice. Born Christmas Day. Sarah says she wants to name him after me."

"That's – that's *splendid* news, Hawkeye." Mulcahy would have been more delighted, but there was an odd look in Hawkeye's face. "Sarah's well? And the others?"

"Sarah's doing fine. Danny and Mary are fine." Hawkeye shrugged. "Sarah wants a divorce. I last saw Bill – still digging."

"Digging?" Mulcahy was confused.

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“He was in a hole,” Hawkeye elaborated. “And he was still digging.” He leaned back and tucked his hands behind the back of his neck, still watching Mulcahy. “You didn’t open your present.”

“I was –” Mulcahy was trying to think of a polite excuse. He looked at Hawkeye, and gave up. “I was unhappy,” he said. “I... didn’t really want to.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye shrugged. “I didn’t mean to get back this late. We could just... I have rounds tomorrow. Later.”

“Couldn’t you open yours tonight?” Mulcahy asked. The small parcel had slipped down from the back of the sofa and was wedged between two cushions: he dug it out and handed it to Hawkeye. “Happy Christmas,” he said. “I’m sorry I didn’t wrap it before you left.”

Hawkeye looked down at the present, with a small, cautious smile. “Hey.” He looked up. “You want yours?”

The other parcel was still under the tree. Mulcahy got up. He’d picked it up before, registered that it felt like a couple of books, and put it down again. He sat down next to Hawkeye. “It isn’t much, I’m afraid,” he said.

Hawkeye’s smile broadened into a grin. “That was what I was going to say.” He turned the gift over in his hands. “I thought you’d be better at wrapping presents than me,” he said. His fingernails were always clipped very short: it took him longer to untie the tidy knot Mulcahy had made in the coloured string than it took Mulcahy to peel the tape from the paper without tearing it.

The books were old leather-bound volumes, the covers red, the pages edged in gold: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Not translations: the original texts. Mulcahy opened the *Iliad* to Book XXIII, and ran his eye down the verses to find *You sleep, Achilles, and had forgotten me...* He had never owned such fine books. He looked up.

Hawkeye was turning the penknife over in his hands: a single blade and a corkscrew. Mulcahy had asked to have B.F.P. engraved on one side and the outline of a hawk and an eye on the other. Hawkeye looked up.

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye swallowed. There were tears standing in the corner of his eyes, Mulcahy saw. “You haven’t got them,” he said. “I wasn’t sure when I bought them...” He didn’t finish his sentence. One hand came up and knuckled at his eyes and he smiled. “Thanks.” He tossed the penknife up, and caught it. “Thank you. In case I ever forget who I am, right?”

“I missed you,” Mulcahy said. He put his hand on Hawkeye’s shoulder, then curved his grip round the back of Hawkeye’s neck. The lightest pressure, and Hawkeye was leaning in towards him for a kiss.

## New Year’s Day, 1955

Mulcahy woke. Hawkeye was behind him, lying so that the shape of his body made a kind of cradle for Mulcahy: he could feel him breathing. It was the sixth morning he had woken with Hawkeye holding him. It had almost stopped feeling like a luxury he shouldn’t indulge in.

Even without any need to get up early, he was still awake. He got up.

He was showered and making coffee before Hawkeye appeared. He still looked sleepy: he propped himself up against the wall by the kitchen door, and watched.

Mulcahy filled the big mug, sweetened it, and handed it to him. He filled another mug for himself, and added milk. Hawkeye drank. “You know I’d love you forever

## Sins and Virtues

even if you didn't make me coffee," he said, coming up for air. "It's just that with coffee I'm awake enough to know it." He yawned again. "French toast?"

"What?"

"Breakfast," Hawkeye said. He was smiling. "What do you say to a big pile of French toast with maple syrup and crispy bacon?" He made a wide gesture with his free hand that somehow ended up with his hand curling round the back of Mulcahy's neck. "We can eat it and then go back to bed. Or we could take it back to bed and eat it there." His smile had slid into a crooked grin. "Or we could just skip the French toast till later."

His hand was moving on the back of Mulcahy's neck. Mulcahy realised he was moving closer to Hawkeye, without even thinking about it. He put his mug down on the counter: they were standing almost too close to talk.

"Hawkeye?"

"Mmmm?" Hawkeye's coffee mug was gone. His mouth tasted of coffee.

"I love you," Mulcahy said. He didn't know what Hawkeye said in reply. Something: he felt Hawkeye's mouth moving against his face, a dart of tongue and twitch of lips, not a kiss. Hawkeye's kisses were tingling against his skin.

Mulcahy put his hands on Hawkeye's back, feeling the sharply-defined bones through the soft towelling of his bathrobe. It was easier standing up than lying down: he was tense and aroused, but he wasn't defenceless –

He shouldn't need to defend himself. Hawkeye wasn't attacking him. He was kissing him. Hawkeye's hands were at the small of his back. He hadn't thought of this. They had sex at night – they didn't stand in the kitchen kissing like this –

It seemed they did.

Hawkeye had twitched open Mulcahy's bathrobe. He was down on his knees so quickly that Mulcahy nearly staggered, but Hawkeye's hands steadied him, and he looked down to see Hawkeye flash a grin up at him before –

*mouth hot and wet around his dick*

Mulcahy's mouth opened: he thought he made a sound. He clutched at the man's shoulders – Hawkeye's shoulders – trying to think of Hawkeye, trying to protest. He couldn't find it in him to protest. He'd forgotten – he always forgot – how good it felt, to feel the man's mouth, lips, tongue, even the teasing nibble of teeth –

*Hawkeye.*

He could never bring himself to make the man stop once he'd begun. He couldn't now. The man – *Hawkeye* – was lapping at his dick, even his balls, not just a suck but enjoying him like a meal –

After a while it was impossible to think about anything but the man's mouth. After a while, he came, in a shock of pleasure. He felt the mouth movements of the man swallowing. He leaned on Hawkeye's shoulders, shivering.

*I want to make love with you because I'm me, and you're you.*

"Oh, my," he said stupidly, looking into Hawkeye's grinning face. "I... do you want..."

"Sure, if you want," Hawkeye said. "Why don't we take this back to bed?" He got up. "You may be used to all that kneeling, but –" his grin got broader "– I'm out of practice." He kissed Mulcahy. His mouth didn't taste of coffee, but something half-familiar – not Hawkeye's semen: his own.

"I'm out of practice too," Mulcahy said, numbly. He was trying to find words to apologise, but Hawkeye's head tilted and his mouth opened: he was laughing. Even though he was still visibly aroused, he looked satisfied – happy and satisfied.

*I want to make love with someone who matters to me.*

## Sins and Virtues

“I wanted you to have what you want,” Mulcahy said. He felt oddly distanced, almost as if he were in shock. Hawkeye had never looked this satisfied before. If this was what Hawkeye wanted. He went down on his knees, parting Hawkeye’s bathrobe, sliding his mouth down on Hawkeye’s dick. *Hard* was Hawkeye’s word for it: it didn’t seem exactly the right word to Mulcahy, whenever he felt it in his mouth. Wet-velvet quivering, tasting like nothing else in the world, his lips and his tongue and his mouth and his nose all experiencing it together. Impossible not to know this was Hawkeye: this was the most intimate way of experiencing Hawkeye’s arousal that Mulcahy could imagine.

Hawkeye’s hands on his shoulders, then his head, quivering and jerking – those steady, strong hands –

*I wanted to make love with you.* Mulcahy felt the stiffness of Hawkeye’s dick increase, overwhelmingly, and he had learned that meant Hawkeye was about to come. Always before he had been unable to overcome the reflex to jerk his head back: this time he fought to keep it there, accepting Hawkeye’s semen as Hawkeye had taken his. *I want to make love with you.*

He could let go now, and did. He couldn’t stand up yet. He didn’t think he could look up at Hawkeye and smile at him yet. He knelt on the kitchen floor looking down stupidly at Hawkeye’s bare feet, his own knees. He had never reciprocated any of the – brave, he now thought – offers to give him pleasure. He had accepted pleasure from mouths he had done his best to think of as anonymous, and he had retreated, repenting as best he could, refusing to recognise a familiar face if he saw the man again. Had any of them felt as he now felt? *Dear Lord, if you’re trying to teach me a lesson...* His thoughts broke off in sheer astonishment.

Hawkeye was kneeling down beside him, retying his bathrobe. Mulcahy didn’t look up. Hawkeye took hold of his hand, as if he meant to say something to him, but pushed a mug of coffee into it instead. It was barely even warm. Hawkeye folded his hand round Mulcahy’s and tilted the mug towards his mouth. Surprised, Mulcahy drank. He blinked past the edge of the cup: Hawkeye was looking at him soberly.

“I didn’t expect you to do that,” Hawkeye said. “Thanks.”

Mulcahy said nothing. The taste of coffee mingled with and overwhelmed the taste of semen. When he stopped drinking, he said “You did it for me.”

Hawkeye grinned. “Yeah, but I’d been wanting to do that for a week. For months. For years. You hadn’t.” His hand went to the back of Mulcahy’s neck. “You don’t look – ” This time his hand was comforting, not arousing. “You usually look... happier.” His grin didn’t look very cheerful. “Of course, I’m usually asleep.”

“I’m all right.” Mulcahy found his centre of balance, and stood up carefully. Hawkeye’s hand slipped away from the back of his neck. He felt oddly disarrayed and alone. Every time they’d had sex before, it had been in bed. Limbs tangled together in the dark, unable to speak clearly to each other, but so close he could feel Hawkeye breathing – it was easier, somehow. And he wasn’t usually – he wasn’t usually this upset by –

Hawkeye’s face, below him, was oddly distorted. “I thought you liked it?” Hawkeye stood up. All humour had fallen away from him. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.” Mulcahy managed a bright smile.

“Something’s wrong,” Hawkeye said.

“I love you,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah, good, right, that’s nice, what’s wrong?” Hawkeye was reaching out to him and Mulcahy nearly turned away.

## Sins and Virtues

It was difficult to meet Hawkeye's gaze. He did not want to remind Hawkeye about the showers. "I don't seem to like it when one of us is standing up." It wasn't the full truth: he thought he could learn to like it – kneeling: knowing this was Hawkeye. He could not bear it, standing, if he forgot.

"Oh." Hawkeye's face expressed bewilderment. "Okay. You know you can have me any way you want me, lying down, kneeling, sitting, bent over, doing the splits, just name it and if I'm flexible enough we'll do it. Okay?" He was leaning forward, focussed, intent. His mouth parted, and he showed his teeth in an eager smile.

Mulcahy wanted to bury his face against Hawkeye's shoulder. He knew so many ways of suppressing the wish, that it was a moment before it occurred to him that he didn't have to. He stepped forward, and Hawkeye's look seemed more bewildered than ever, but Mulcahy wrapped his arms round Hawkeye's body and pressed his face against Hawkeye's shoulder. (Even the same *bathrobe*.) The world narrowed down to an extremely small focus: he was holding Hawkeye, and Hawkeye was holding him. Their bodies pressed against each other. Not in bed, but standing up, in the kitchen, with the smells of coffee weaving round them. "I love you," Mulcahy said again. Hawkeye's arms tightened round him. He turned his head and nuzzled at Mulcahy's hair.

Hawkeye said something: Mulcahy reluctantly disengaged and looked at him.

"I just said I didn't want to let go of you," Hawkeye said. He grinned and held out his arms again, tilting his head to one side. "More?"

It felt as if some part of him that had been cold was melting-warm. Mulcahy put his arms around him again. Hawkeye's laugh was an internal shake that could be felt all the way down his body. He said something else. Mulcahy stepped back again and looked at him.

"Oh come on," Hawkeye said. "All I said was –" he was smiling so widely it was hard to read his lips "– or French toast?"

"French toast?"

"I'm wounded. You'd rather eat my French toast than cuddle me?" Hawkeye lifted his eyebrows. "Then again, my French toast is perfection itself. And we can always go back to bed afterwards, right?" He turned away to the fridge, letting go of Mulcahy, turning back and reaching out again. His hand caught Mulcahy's in a brief squeeze, half handshake, half caress. "Happy new year, by the way."

Last night Hawkeye had mentioned something about a party on Saturday evening: before he'd got very far talking about it, they'd gone to bed, and stopped talking. At least, stopped talking coherently.

Hawkeye's version of French toast *was* good.

"About this party tonight," Hawkeye said.

"What party?"

"Doctor Cournand's party."

"Oh." Mulcahy picked up another piece of French toast that he wasn't sure he wanted, and bit into it. After he'd swallowed, he said "Well, you should go." He'd already heard enough about Doctor Cournand. "I don't mind at all. You *should* go."

"I want you to come with me."

Mulcahy shook his head, not quite astonished – he'd seen that coming – but still, startled. "I'd be out of place."

"Look, it's not just for surgeons. It's not even just for medical staff. I have to go, and I'd like you to come too." Hawkeye put out his hand. "Wait a minute, before you

## Sins and Virtues

tell me to shut up – the party’s starting at eight. We get there about eight-thirty, stay an hour or two, and then we can go.”

“But why would you have brought *me*?” Mulcahy was disturbed.

“You worked with me in the MASH unit in Korea,” Hawkeye said. “Cournand’s said a few times he thinks that was excellent training. He’ll probably want to talk about it with you.”

“But –” Mulcahy protested again. “But I wasn’t – they’ll think I was medically trained, and I wasn’t.”

“You saw enough operations,” Hawkeye said.

“I couldn’t discuss them with a surgeon,” Mulcahy said. “I can see you have to go, but – there isn’t really a reason for *me* to be there.”

“You live with me,” Hawkeye said. “And you were in the 4077th. It doesn’t matter what you did – Cournand’s never going to have time to talk about heart surgery with you. But he won’t mind you being there.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I asked him,” Hawkeye retorted. “When I got the invitation. I told him someone else from the MASH unit would be staying with me then, and was it okay if I brought him along? And he said yes.”

“Oh.” Mulcahy fumbled for words. “Don’t you think... you should have asked me?”

“This was the Monday before Thanksgiving,” Hawkeye said. “I was hoping you were going to be staying with me. I still wasn’t sure. I didn’t want you to...” He trailed off. “I didn’t want you to run a mile,” he said at last.

“From a party?”

“From me assuming you were going to live with me.” Hawkeye looked down at his plate for a moment. Crumbs of toast were scattered on it. “I just don’t want to go without you,” he said, looking up again.

“How big a party will it be?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “Hundred or so, I guess.”

“White tie?” Mulcahy saw an exit.

“Sure. I can lend you my old tux,” Hawkeye blocked it. He glanced at Mulcahy. “It’ll fit. And a bow tie.”

Mulcahy had rather hoped that Hawkeye’s old tux *wouldn’t* fit, and that would settle the question, but it did. It must have been bought for Hawkeye before he got his full height.

Conscious of being watched, he turned to the doorway: Hawkeye was dressed for the evening, leaning against the doorpost, holding a white bow tie in one hand.

“Need any help tying this?”

“I can manage,” Mulcahy said, a little irritated. He reached for the tie, and realised he was being stupid. He managed a smile. “No, I can’t, actually.” A regular necktie he could have managed: but he’d never worn a bow tie in his life.

Hawkeye tied it neatly and swiftly. He was smiling, it seemed with simple pleasure: he finished with a swift kiss. “You look great.”

Cournand’s apartment faced east across Central Park: a succession of large high-ceilinged rooms that were, when they arrived, crowded with people. Mrs Cournand greeted them at the entrance with the kind of absent kindness that someone who has just said hello to over a hundred people in the space of less than an hour is capable of.

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“Not sure if she even recognised me,” Hawkeye said, turning to face Mulcahy. He glanced round the room. “I’m not sure I recognise half the people here.”

They made their way towards the bar. It was months, Mulcahy realised, since he had been in any such large gathering of people who could all hear and who had no idea of making adjustments for a deaf person.

Hawkeye was stopped a dozen times on their way to the bar: as far as Mulcahy caught what they were saying, by people who called him “Doctor Pierce”. Mulcahy had been used to keeping a smile on his face: he was out of practice, he supposed, because it felt stiff and awkward. Hawkeye looked as if he were enjoying himself.

“Hawkeye,” he began, and then as Hawkeye didn’t turn to look at him, realised that Hawkeye was worse than deaf: in this crowd Mulcahy didn’t dare raise his voice, because he’d never know when he was shouting over the noise. He was relieved when it was clear Hawkeye had never heard him.

Hawkeye did turn when they got to the bar. “Scotch? Or a Martini?”

“I’ll have wine, thank you,” Mulcahy said. When Hawkeye leaned forward, looking at him, eyebrows raised, Mulcahy lifted his hands and spelt W, I, N, E.

“Oh.” Hawkeye nodded. “Red? White?”

R, E, Mulcahy spelt.

“Red it is,” Hawkeye said, before Mulcahy could finish. He got the barman’s attention quite quickly, while Mulcahy stood, feeling awkward, trying to keep his eyes all around him. He could not recall feeling like this in any other crowd – not even at the 4077th, the first days after he realised his hearing was almost wholly gone and his balance was somehow changed. There were more people in this one room than at the whole 4077th, but he was far better adjusted to his change in balance now than he was then.

Hawkeye turned back with a glass in either hand, and looked at him. “You okay?”

“I – ” Mulcahy swallowed. He pointed at the wall where there was a clear stretch between two crowded sofas. “Can we go over there?”

Someone brushed past him, a man on his way to the bar, and Mulcahy flinched. Hawkeye’s eyes narrowed. “Why are you talking so quietly?”

Mulcahy headed over to the wall. He got there safely, and turned, feeling better with his back to it. Hawkeye had followed him. “You’re not okay.”

Embarrassed, Mulcahy shrugged. “Too many people,” he said, smiling, making it a joke, “and they can all hear.”

Hawkeye seemed to hear him. “Why didn’t you tell me?” He looked exasperated.

“I didn’t know,” Mulcahy said, equally exasperated. “I haven’t been to a party like this for – years.” He was trying to project his voice a little, not too much.

“Ah.” Hawkeye said. He looked at the glasses. “This was a stupid idea, wasn’t it? Shall we just go?”

Mulcahy took the glass of wine out of Hawkeye’s hand. “I’m fine. I just need to get used to this.”

“You look like you need to sit down.”

“I’m fine,” Mulcahy repeated. He drank from his glass. “Do all these people work at Bellevue?”

Hawkeye glanced round. “No. About half of them are in private practice, I should think.”

“Are they all doctors?”

“I think the women mostly aren’t.”

“Oh.” Mulcahy turned the glass in his hands. Hawkeye looked uncertain, and it made Mulcahy feel uncomfortable: the only time Hawkeye had ever looked uncertain

## Sins and Virtues

was when he felt he had done something he needed to apologise for, and Mulcahy couldn't see that this was something Hawkeye needed to apologise for. "We were going to stay a couple of hours. Why don't you... mingle, and I'll stay here?"

"Mingle?" You could all but *see* the inverted commas as Hawkeye repeated the word. He looked at Mulcahy, and took a quick drink of his Martini. Whatever he saw, seemed to decide him. "Okay."

For the next little while, Mulcahy could track Hawkeye's movements round the room by looking for a ring of people with a single focus at their centre: that would be Hawkeye. He had seen the same thing happen at parties in the 4077th mess tent, or summer parties outside in the compound: except usually the focus had been double. Hawkeye and BJ, or Hawkeye and... Captain McIntyre.

A woman in her thirties, who had been talking with a couple of people sitting on the sofas, turned away and smiled at him. They fell into conversation; she was married to a physician at Bellevue, and taught in a small private school for gifted children: she had heard of Fanwood, and was interested by it.

"Are you a friend of Doctor Cournand's? I saw you talking to Doctor Pierce."

"No," Mulcahy said. "I'm..."

The woman smiled suddenly and brightly. "Doctor Pierce."

Mulcahy glanced round. Hawkeye had reappeared.

"Mrs Dreher. Can I get you a drink?" He was still holding the Martini glass, and it was half full.

"I would love –" She had turned away a little from Mulcahy, and he couldn't get the rest of the sentence. She smiled up at Hawkeye, and handed him her empty glass. Hawkeye was smiling, looking down at her. "Your usual?"

She said something – must have said something: Hawkeye laughed. "Whatever you say." He turned and went across the room to the bar. Mrs Dreher turned back to Mulcahy, her face flushed and smiling. "He's such a delightful man – you know each other?"

"Yes," Mulcahy said. "We used to – we were in Korea together."

"Oh," Mrs Dreher said. "You were in the MASH unit? Are you Doctor Hunnicutt, by any chance?"

"No," Mulcahy said. He introduced himself. "I'm not a doctor," he added.

"Claudia Dreher," she said. "I'm not a doctor either." She laughed. "There's a weekly poker game – not a club, just a regular circulating Thursday night game. My husband hosts it every six weeks or so. Do you play poker?"

"I've been known to." Mulcahy was amused despite himself.

"They spend three hours in the den playing cards, and when they surface they hardly remember to say goodbye or thank you. But Doctor Pierce does, though it may be because he's new." She smiled at Hawkeye, reappearing with her drink. "I was just saying to Mr Mulcahy that after you've played poker long enough with my husband, you'll be as bad as all the rest."

"Are you saying he's a bad influence?" Hawkeye twitched his eyebrows and grinned. He handed her the glass.

"Poker! I don't understand the appeal. Now if you had *girls* in there, instead of cigars and cards –" She was laughing.

Hawkeye put his hand on his heart. "Are you accusing *me* of flirting with other women? Why would I do that when I could flirt with you?"

A man – her age, a little older – appeared at her elbow, and said something: Mulcahy didn't catch it, but both Mrs Dreher and Hawkeye laughed. The new man put his arm round Mrs Dreher's shoulders and glanced at Mulcahy.

## Sins and Virtues

“Francis Mulcahy,” Hawkeye said. “Friend of mine from Korea. Francis, this is John Dreher.” They shook hands as Hawkeye was talking: Dreher kept his arm round his wife and his eyes on Hawkeye. “E.N.T. physician, and husband of the loveliest woman in the room.”

Mulcahy nodded, smiled, and sipped at his wine glass.

Doctor Dreher said something to Hawkeye, glancing briefly at Mulcahy – Mulcahy caught the name Cournand, and Hawkeye nodded. “Yes, he did.” Dreher responded, and Hawkeye shrugged. “Why not?” He turned away, and Claudia Dreher dragged at her husband’s hand on her shoulder.

“– hear you unless you’re looking at him,” she said.

Dreher smiled, his eyes for the first time focussing on Mulcahy. “Is that true, you’re deaf?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

“You manage very well: I’d never have guessed.”

Mulcahy shrugged. He was conscious of a strange feeling, like free-floating anger, and he wasn’t sure where it had come from or why.

“So, you knew Doctor Pierce in Korea? What was he like?”

There were too many images – Hawkeye unshaven and shambling with exhaustion, Hawkeye laughing louder than anyone else over a joke, Hawkeye bright-eyed and fierce in the OR, Hawkeye’s gaze meeting his over the mess table or the body of a dying man or a game of poker or – Mulcahy shrugged and said, truthfully, “He worked very hard.”

“Yes, we heard something about the pace in these MASH units, even over here. Incredible numbers. One hundred patients in twenty-four hours?”

“Sometimes more,” Mulcahy said. “We all got used to working long hours.”

“Longer than residency?”

“Seventy-two hours at a stretch, sometimes, when the wounded just kept coming”

Dreher made a face, looking impressed despite himself. “Pierce doesn’t talk about it much. You’re a doctor?”

“A corpsman,” Mulcahy said. “I teach math at the New York School for the Deaf now.”

“Ah.” Dreher nodded, apparently a little confounded.

Hawkeye was coming back across the room, half a pace or so behind another man: Dreher turned, deference in the set of his shoulders.

Doctor Cournand, Mulcahy guessed: even before the man in his fifties, short-clipped hair going white and thin, shook his hand – a surgeon’s strong grip – and introduced himself. “So you worked with Doctor Pierce in Korea?” He smiled broadly. “What was he like in theatre?”

Mulcahy blinked. It was a moment before he grasped what Cournand must mean. “He worked very hard,” he repeated.

“From what I heard, you all did. What was Doctor Pierce like?”

Mulcahy had been conscious, since he put it on, of the tux Hawkeye had leant him. It fitted him surprisingly well. It dawned on Mulcahy, conscious again of the different weight against his throat, the absence of any signal that he was a priest, that Hawkeye had bought this for him. It fitted him *too* well to be anything else. Bought it, had it washed a couple of times so it wouldn’t look absolutely new, and lied to Mulcahy about its origins.

“He used to sing,” Mulcahy said. “He’d imitate a radio.”

Cournand laughed. He said something in the middle of the laugh, but Mulcahy didn’t get it. Hawkeye put his hand up to cover his eyes, briefly: Mulcahy realised that

## Sins and Virtues

there were several other men – all surgeons, Mulcahy supposed – in a ring surrounding himself, and Cournand, and Hawkeye. It was impossible to follow what the others were saying.

“– sing?” Cournand said. “What did he sing?”

“Just... popular music,” Mulcahy said. “Or tell jokes.” *Or flirt.*

“Sing,” Cournand said, shaking his head. “He’s a talker, but...” He turned his head away to glance at Hawkeye, and looked back again at Mulcahy. “– excellent training. Perhaps we should send all our surgeons off to the front lines if they come back with this kind of expertise.” He laughed: it was a joke. Mulcahy’s face felt frozen: he looked at Hawkeye, expecting a furious outburst, and got a shrug and a half-grin, as if Hawkeye was inviting him to share the joke.

Mulcahy stepped back from the group, lifting his empty glass as a passport. It was easy enough to walk away: he felt hollowed out inside by anger, quite unafraid that someone would bump into him and make him lose his balance.

The maid found him his coat: he decided not to wait for the elevator.

Hawkeye was waiting for him in the apartment building’s entrance. He was standing by the front door, arms crossed in front of him, wearing his topcoat and hat: Mulcahy hesitated, not sure if he could believe his eyes.

Of course, he hadn’t rushed to get down the stairs, even well-lit as they were. If Hawkeye had been watching and had seen Mulcahy leave the room – if he had realised Mulcahy was leaving the party – he had time to disengage from the group around Cournand, say goodbye to their hostess, which Mulcahy had failed to do, get his own coat, and take the elevator down.

The concierge was looking at them with glassy uninterest. “Share a cab?” Hawkeye said.

They didn’t talk in the cab going cross-town, either: Mulcahy stared at the back of the driver’s neck, conscious of Hawkeye watching him.

Hawkeye paid off the driver before Mulcahy could make a move. It was a familiar pattern, one Mulcahy had meant to start breaking: but his mind was too full of other things, and he didn’t even know where to start.

Hawkeye had left the hall light on. He closed the door and Mulcahy turned to face him. He had been bracing himself on the way up to begin, at least, with an apology – he shouldn’t have left the party like that, all but forcing Hawkeye to leave at the same time just to find out that nothing was wrong.

“I’m sorry,” Hawkeye said. He ran his hand through his hair. “I didn’t think. Are you okay?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. “I’m sorry – I shouldn’t have walked out like that. Do you want to go back to the party?” Hawkeye had been having a good time, if not for Mulcahy.

Hawkeye looked back at him, his face set in stubborn lines. “No. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Mulcahy said. He saw Hawkeye’s eyebrows go up and his mouth twitch, and before he could see any more, he turned away, went into his room, and shut the door.

He took off the tux, and the white tie, and the shirt – he had been wanting to divest himself of it for what felt like hours. He was – angry, in a tired kind of way. He hadn’t slept in this bed yet.

Hawkeye was watching him from the doorway. When he saw Mulcahy face him, he said “You know, what you need is a doorbell with a light attached.”

Mulcahy supposed he must have looked as bewildered as he felt.

## Sins and Virtues

“See,” Hawkeye pointed. “We put a light up there, and wire it up, and it flashes when I press the button. Then you can come in here and shut the door and I can press the doorbell and you’ll know I know you’re ignoring me.” He frowned. “Actually, that would work for the front door, wouldn’t it? Not for ignoring me, for letting people in. Right?” He came a step further into the room. “We could put a light up in the living room and a couple more in the bedrooms, and maybe one for the hall? Want one in the bathroom, too, or would it just distract you from the important things in life?”

Mulcahy bundled the clothes together, and handed them to Hawkeye. “Please don’t do that any more,” he said.

“Do what?” Hawkeye was holding tux and all in his hands, a crumpled mass of black and white.

“Give me things,” Mulcahy said. *And lie about them.*

Hawkeye’s face froze. After a moment, the freeze cracked again in a grin. “I wondered when you’d figure it out. I thought it would either be when you were putting it on or taking it off. It’d never fit me.”

“Actually, I worked it out at the party.”

“Oh.” The grin on Hawkeye’s face crumpled. “Sorry. I guess that upset you. Look, I’m sorry I didn’t – all right, fine, I’m sorry about the whole damn thing. I wanted you to come to the party, and I didn’t want to have a fight with you about getting you a tux on top of talking you into coming to the party, and – ” He stopped short. After a long moment, he said, “Francis, I’m really sorry. Believe me. Work with me here.”

“I don’t want you to give me things,” Mulcahy said.

“Oh, come on,” Hawkeye said. “You mean you don’t want me to give you stuff and lie about it. You mean that, don’t you? I’m really sorry I lied. I won’t do it again. Not even to get my own way.” He smiled again, looking hopeful.

“No,” Mulcahy said. “You – ” He swallowed. “Hawkeye, I don’t earn very much compared to you. But I want to pay my own way. I don’t want you to give me things I can’t afford.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye shifted his weight from foot to foot. “Look, maybe this isn’t the best time to talk about this again, but – Can I put this down somewhere? I can’t take it back, so either you have to keep it or I have to rip it up and use it for dusters, but either way, do I have to keep holding it?”

Despite himself, Mulcahy smiled. Hawkeye smiled back, looking greatly relieved. He came over and dropped the mess of clothing on the bed. “You know, you have great shoulders,” Hawkeye said, and put his hand on the back of Mulcahy’s neck. “Want to help me get out of this?” He was still in full evening dress.

Yes, Mulcahy nearly said. “I want to know you won’t do this any more.” He kept his hands by his sides. He was only wearing his undershirt, and he could *feel* Hawkeye’s eyes on him.

“Francis, you know I won’t – ” Hawkeye’s hands went up to his necktie and pulled it off. “Francis, look, what’s yours is mine. I mean what’s mine is yours. Either way. Both. I meant it. You and me. We’re a team. We’re a pair. We’re – we’re – marry me.”

“What?” Mulcahy stared, for a moment not believing his eyes, but he could *see* what Hawkeye had just said, especially when Hawkeye repeated it.

“Marry me,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy was almost too astonished to be angry. “Hawkeye, I’m not your *wife*.”

“Fine, I’ll be your wife. You okay with your wife earning more than you?”

Hawkeye was trying for a laugh. Mulcahy wasn’t amused. “Francis, I’m not joking.

## Sins and Virtues

I'm not – I've been thinking about this. You're right, I can't keep giving you things. But we could set up a joint bank account."

"We can't do that."

"We can, you know. The bank won't ask why. What, you don't trust me with your money? I'd trust you with mine."

"But we can't – " Mulcahy was feeling trapped. "We don't talk about this, but – you're a normal man."

Hawkeye laughed. He sat down on the bed and bent over and shook with laughter. When he looked up again he was wiping tears out of his eyes. "You're probably the only person in the world who thinks I'm normal."

Exasperated, Mulcahy shook his head. "You know what I mean."

"No, I don't," Hawkeye said. He looked sober now. He put his hands on the bed behind him and leaned back, looking up at Mulcahy.

"You're a normal man," Mulcahy said, "and I'm *not*. I told you – I'm not. I'm a – you have the capacity to have a normal relationship. And I – " It hurt more than he'd expected to say it, with Hawkeye right there in front of him, on his bed, his eyes fixed on him. "I hope someday you do. In a year or two – we won't – we won't be together any more. I hope you'll – "

Hawkeye stood up. "What did you just say?" His face had drained of all expression. "Tell me you didn't just say that." He took a step forward, stooping, his face close to Mulcahy's. "How long have you been thinking that?"

"What?"

"That we won't – that in two years we'll have split up."

"I've always hoped – "

"Always?" Hawkeye's body had gone tense: he looked as if he were ready to leap. "Always?" He took two stumbling steps backward, away from Mulcahy. "When you asked to move in, this was a strictly time-limited offer, two years and then you're going to walk?" He jabbed his finger forward, though he was out of reach. "You know, if you'd told me that up front, I'd probably have said yes anyway? I'd – " He jerked his hand back and shook his head, becoming incomprehensible for a moment. " – break my legs?"

"What?"

Hawkeye shook his head again. "Don't look at me like that," he said, strangely calm. "Don't look at me at all. Get out. I mean it. Get out. I don't want you hanging around here waiting to break both my legs."

Mulcahy stood still. There seemed no safe place to move. He was trying to digest what Hawkeye had said, and trying to think of something to say. He couldn't. He took a step closer to Hawkeye, and the other man lunged.

The room spun catastrophically. For a few long moments he could not tell which way was up or down.

He was flat on his back on the bed, Hawkeye on top of him, hands gripping at his arms. Hawkeye's face was buried in the crook of his shoulder. He was saying something, monosyllabically, over and over again, two words each ending on a plosive of air at the tip of his tongue, lower jaw thrusting out for the first, biting in for the second.

*Get. Out. Get. Out. Get out get out get out.*

Hawkeye was pinning him so that he couldn't move; he was having trouble getting his breath. Hawkeye was trembling so hard it felt as if he were being shaken by an outside force. The force of his words against Mulcahy's skin slowed, softened, stopped.

## Sins and Virtues

After a while, Hawkeye shifted all his weight to his left hand and pushed himself up. His right hand was over his face, his palm shielding his mouth: he looked at Mulcahy through his fingers and went backwards, turning away as soon as he got off the bed.

Mulcahy got his breath back. "Hawkeye?"

No answer. Hawkeye got to the door and kicked it forcefully shut behind him.

It was a little while before Mulcahy could move. When he got up, he began changing for bed by rote. He hung up his clothes – even the tux – in the wardrobe, carefully. He sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at his bookshelves. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* glowed from their position of honour. *Get out.*

"Dear Lord," he said out loud.

So long as he hadn't thought about it too hard, it had felt like an acceptable compromise. Love Hawkeye, live with him, but don't stand in his way, don't stop him from finding someone else –

Never think that when Hawkeye said he loved Mulcahy forever he meant it.

"Dear Lord, I didn't mean to –"

No prayer that began *I didn't mean to* was valid. Mulcahy dropped his head into his hands and tried to think.

It was still relatively early in the evening. For all he knew, Hawkeye *had* gone out again. But his bedroom door was uncompromisingly shut.

Mulcahy knocked on the door, and opened it. Hawkeye was a blanket-wrapped huddle on the bed, his hair showing at one end. He did not move or turn his head as Mulcahy came in.

"Hawkeye, I need to talk to you. We need to talk."

Hawkeye was lying facing the wall. He must have heard Mulcahy, but he didn't stir.

Unless he was asleep. But Hawkeye curled up in his sleep: he didn't lie rigidly like this.

Mulcahy hesitated. "Perhaps in the morning?"

No response.

Mulcahy got into bed on his usual side. Hawkeye hadn't left very much of the covers for him. He used his bathrobe for an extra blanket, and thought about using Hawkeye's, thrown as usual over the back of the chair. He left it there.

"Good night," he said out loud, before he lay down, and got no answer. He took his specs off and put them on the bedside table.

Hawkeye wasn't even touching him, nor he Hawkeye, but he was terribly conscious of the other man's body: the weight distorting the mattress, the warmth he could feel from here. He could touch him, put his arms round him, kiss him, but he had no idea how Hawkeye would react: whether with anger and pain, or worse yet this same cold indifference.

Or worst of all: *Get out.*

It felt as if he couldn't sleep, though he must have dozed. He was certainly not quite asleep when Hawkeye thumped him in the back. He sat up, reaching for his specs. Hawkeye was lying spread out over most of the bed, the covers kicked off, his arms twitching and jerking. His hands moved as if they had a life of their own. His mouth opened – he was saying something, but Mulcahy couldn't read it.

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye twitched and half-sat up, head jerking back: he opened his mouth and said something, fell back on to the bed, and said quite clearly, "Francis." Then he sat all the way up as if impelled by some force, and his head went back, his mouth opening wide, and all his muscles went rigid. There was a sudden smell of fresh urine, mixing with the reek of sweat. His eyes jerked open.

### Sunday 2nd January, 1955

The OR was full, and there was a queue outside. It had been that way for a long time. Hawkeye was bent over a bowel resection, exteriorised and clamped guts spreading their special stink in his nose. He was all but done when he looked up and saw that BJ's table had a patient but no surgeon.

"Close for me," he said to the nurse. "Where's BJ?" he asked the room.

"He's dead, Pierce," the Colonel said, tired and impatient. "You have to operate."

Hawkeye nodded. He was too tired to feel anything but impatience with himself. He knew he had two tables at once this shift, he'd known that all along.

Shrapnel. Bowel resection. Broken arm with bone fragments. Hawkeye was working fast but well: he always did. He was working between two tables, somehow managing. Bowel resection. Broken legs. His hands and his scalpel and his eyes and his nose: he was tired, but everything was fine. People died all the time here.

The torn-up shattered bodies rolled on to his tables and he operated. He didn't look at their faces. His hands were fine. Broken bodies could be fixed.

"Close for me," he said again, and looked up. The Colonel's table had a body on it: no surgeon.

"He's dead," Winchester drawled. "You're Chief Surgeon, Pierce, *you* operate."

"How can I do three tables at once?"

"Better get started. They're waiting for you."

"How can I operate on three of them at once?" He had to do it. He could do it. He must. "Margaret, you take this table –"

She wasn't there. She had never been there, all through the long night. Hawkeye stared, stupidly, at the nurse across the table from him. Margaret was dead. He'd known that all along. People died all the time.

"Okay, *you* take this table –" He had no idea what her name was. He looked around again. He didn't know any of the nurses. Charles wasn't there any more. Four tables, four patients, and only one surgeon. The bodies were bleeding: he could hear the droplets falling from the tables, tiny splashes on the cement floor.

"Where is everyone?"

"They're all dead," the nurse said. She spoke tiredly, impatiently. "People die here all the time, Doctor."

"Where's Francis?"

"Who?"

"He means Father Mulcahy," one of the other nurses said. "The priest."

"Francis," Hawkeye said.

"He's gone," the nurse said. "You need to operate, Doctor. They'll die if you don't operate."

"But –" Hawkeye stared from table to table. It was impossible. He couldn't do it. He had to do it. They were still alive. He had to operate. He couldn't cover four tables, even though he had to. "Who do I start with? Where is everyone?"

## Sins and Virtues

“This one’s already dead,” one of the nurses said. She turned, and he saw her face. The mask hid most of it.

“So is this one.” The other nurse lifted her hand. The state she was in, she couldn’t be sterile: Hawkeye’s mouth gaped open, mouthing a protest that didn’t seem to be finding voice.

“And this one.” All their voices sounded odd.

The nurse who had been operating with him looked at him, across the table. She had been like this all along. “Dead.”

He was sitting up in bed in a strange room, covered in sweat, a traitor warm wetness at his groin. Father Mulcahy was kneeling on the bed beside him.

“Hawkeye?”

The room was a hotel room – Seoul or Tokyo? Who was really dead and who had he just dreamed dying?

“Who’s dead?” he asked, through lips that didn’t seem to work.

Mulcahy shook his head. “I can’t understand you,” he said, and Hawkeye remembered he was deaf.

“We’re not in Korea,” he said, confirming, not asking a question. When he looked round again he knew this room, and understood he had been dreaming. No one was dead. He hadn’t been operating with dead nurses. It was three in the morning. His joints felt sore and creaky, and his head wasn’t sure how far it was to the floor, but he levered himself up off the bed and began, clumsily, to strip off his pyjamas. The fabric was clammy to the touch, and he reeked. It wasn’t the OR smell.

“Let me help,” Mulcahy said.

There was some reason not to let him, but Hawkeye couldn’t remember what it was. Aside from being a disgusting sight, which was reason enough. But he was too tired to protest very hard. He let Mulcahy slide his bathrobe round his shoulders, helping his arms into the sleeves, and tie it in front of him.

“Thanks,” he said, when he could catch Mulcahy’s eye. He was trying to speak distinctly. “I’ll be fine. Sorry I woke you. Just go back to sleep.” He turned away and shambled towards the door. A shot of whisky. A *big* shot of whisky. Sleep, and no dreams.

Mulcahy’s hand on his shoulder steered him towards the bathroom. “No,” Hawkeye explained, or thought he did: “through there. That way.” The whisky wasn’t in the bathroom.

Mulcahy turned on the shower over the tub, and got Hawkeye to stand under it. Hawkeye sat down, simply letting his legs fold under him, and stared up at Mulcahy. Francis. “I remember now,” he said, feeling slow. “You’re leaving me.” The hot water running down his face blurred his vision. He bent his head forward and let the water drum on the back of his neck. He rested his arms on the edge of the tub and put his face down against his arms.

He wanted Francis. Going to sleep with the two of them nested like a pair of spoons. Making love with him, however awkward and clumsy it was. Sharing French toast and bacon. Being greeted in the morning with a big mug of coffee and Francis’s smile that looked like it was invented just for him.

He wanted all of that, years of that, the rest of his life.

Francis wanted to leave. A year. Maybe two. After that...

He could have it for the rest of his life. Providing he made the rest of his life very short. That was funny, and Hawkeye laughed.

## Sins and Virtues

He lifted his head and looked at Francis, who was leaning on the edge of the tub. He looked very worried and very determined and very endearing, and it hurt just looking at him.

“Your pyjamas are wet,” Hawkeye said, in lieu of saying anything else.

Mulcahy looked down at himself. He’d been quite thoroughly splashed by the shower. “Yes, I suppose they are.” He smiled a little: he still looked worried.

“I’ll be all right,” Hawkeye said. “It’s just a nightmare. I told you I have them. Just go back to bed. Your own bed. I’m all right.”

“Let me help.”

“No,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy reached for the shower controls, getting splashed again, and turned the water off. There was silence, filled only with the sound of droplets splashing on tile. Hawkeye shuddered. Mulcahy helped him out of the tub and dried him off. It was like getting pushed around by a nurse: Hawkeye found himself being tugged inexorably out of the bathroom. He only resisted when he realised Mulcahy was pushing him in the wrong direction.

“Wait a minute. This is your room. That’s my room.” It was hell trying to have an argument with someone who was deaf and ignoring you.

“The sheets are clean,” Mulcahy said. They were: and cold. Mulcahy threw back the covers, pushed Hawkeye into bed, and tucked him in. Then he left.

Hawkeye dropped his head back onto the pillow and looked at the ceiling. He was tired, clean, and more or less comfortable. He wanted a shot of whisky: he just didn’t want to move.

No one was dead.

Not an emergency. *What am I going to do next?*

Resign from Bellevue. Tell Cournand what he really thought about the war as surgical training. Go back to Crabapple Cove. Go to California.

Go to hell.

Join the army.

*Always. I was always going to leave you.*

The ceiling blurred from water in his eyes. Carlye. Trapper. BJ. Francis. *It’s not the war that stinks. It’s me.* He normally had to be much more drunk to feel this much soggy self-pity, but if he started going crazy again, he could feel it at all hours. Nothing to do then except lie on a bed looking at a wall and a window with chicken wire across it, and relapse into a fug of sorry-for-himself-Hawkeye.

*I’ll leave a note. Before I go, I’ll leave a note.*

One of the other officers could play the guitar and made up songs. He’d been transferred away, but his songs had stayed: Hawkeye tried to remember the words of one that had been popular in the officer’s club, in a morbid kind of way, for quite a while. The tune had stuck in his head forever. He was singing it softly to himself when the door opened. “...and I can take or leave it if I please – ”

Francis came in. He was carrying a mug.

Hawkeye broke off singing. “Coffee? You shouldn’t have.”

“Cocoa,” Francis said. He sat down on the edge of the bed and put the mug down on the table. With the expertise of a nurse, he got Hawkeye to sit up, and pushed the mug into his hand. Hawkeye looked down at it.

“Francis – ” His voice creaked. *I’d crawl. That’s what I’d do.* “If there’s – can I – Anything I can do to change your mind?”

Francis gave him a worried look. “I really think we should talk about this in the morning. Can you drink this, please?”

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye drank. He didn't like cocoa. He said so. "Are you going to be here in the morning?" He finished the cocoa and put the mug back on the table, staring at Francis. "I know I told you to get out. I didn't mean it. I did mean it, but I'd never – You can stay as long as you like. Whatever you like. Rest of my life. All of it." He put his hand out and caught Francis by the wrist, feeling the pulse of the blood close to the skin. "I love you."

"I love you," Francis said. He usually said it back, if Hawkeye said it to him. It was nice hearing it. Hawkeye slid down into the bed.

Francis must have found himself a fresh set of pyjamas. He was dry and clean and warm, and got in next to Hawkeye just like usual. He put an arm round Hawkeye.

"I guess you're going to be here in the morning," Hawkeye thought he said, but he might have gone to sleep in the middle.

For once, he woke before Francis. He'd gone to bed naked: Francis was still in his pyjamas. Francis was pressed up against him, solid, almost protective warmth, head down against Hawkeye's shoulder, snoring like a small buzz saw. He'd had no earplugs in last night. If he was tired enough he really could sleep through anything.

Mulcahy's arm was a solid weight across Hawkeye's chest. His hand was resting on Hawkeye's other shoulder. He didn't feel like someone who was going away.

"Stay here," Hawkeye said out loud. He lay still, squinting down at the fair head on his shoulder. He never wanted to move.

Francis sighed out a breath, and stopped snoring. After a moment, he lifted his head.

"You don't need to move," Hawkeye said.

"Good morning," Francis said. He smiled. It wasn't his usual morning smile: slightly awkward. He shifted himself up and rubbed one hand over his eyes; the other hand was fumbling over the surface of the bedside table. His glasses were perched on the far edge. Hawkeye sat up, reached for them, and slid them on to Francis's face.

Francis blinked at him. It felt like Hawkeye could almost see himself coming into focus in Francis's eyes. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"About last night..."

"Yeah. Well, I did warn you I had nightmares." Hawkeye felt tired already. "You won't hear a thing if you're in here and I'm in there, so don't think about it."

"That wasn't what I wanted to talk about." Francis looked at him uncertainly. "Unless, that is, you want to talk about it –"

"What else is there to talk about?" Hawkeye pulled his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms round them. "I'm not going to kick you out this morning, don't worry about it. Take your time."

"Last night you were trying to talk to me, after you woke up, but I couldn't understand most of what you were saying. I'm sorry I didn't tell you I couldn't understand, but it didn't seem – I wasn't sure how much you were taking in."

"Oh." Hawkeye tried to remember what he'd said. "It doesn't matter. I understood you just fine, earlier."

Francis was looking unhappier than ever.

"Look, it's okay..." Hawkeye tried to find words. "It's not that I don't l- " His tongue tripped. " – like you any more. It's just... I don't – if you're going to – better if you leave now than if you leave in a year. Or two years. Been there. Done that."

"Hawkeye?"

## Sins and Virtues

“No.” Hawkeye lifted his hand. “I don’t really want to know why.” He didn’t want to hear. He understood, watching Francis, that if Francis were to ask “Can I stay?” he would say yes. Eventually. He might resist for all of five minutes. He’d tell himself that he had a year or two to persuade Francis to stay for longer. He’d believe it. He was having a hard time telling himself not to believe it.

Francis looked at him, and looked away. He took off his glasses again to rub at his eyes, and put them back on again, and looked back at Hawkeye with an expression at once vulnerable and puzzled. Hawkeye wanted to kiss him. He felt like an idiot. Why tell him to get out? *When I could have two years of this, it’s better than nothing, it’s a whole lot better than nothing?*

“Francis – ”

“Please – will you let me say this?”

“Okay.” Hawkeye shrugged.

“I love you,” Francis said. “I tried to tell myself, when I was a priest, that I loved you like a brother, like a friend, like – like a priest is *supposed* to love, with the love I give to God. I found – I find loving you very confusing, but you give me – you make me feel extraordinary happiness. I knew that we – we wouldn’t be – I could be assigned somewhere else. So could you. And when the war was over, you would go home, I would – be reassigned to other duties, and I’d learn – I’d try to forget what you looked like.” He smiled at Hawkeye, a little awkwardly. “I’d made sure not to have any photographs of you.”

“You’re telling me it’s physical,” Hawkeye said. It was an effort to keep his face turned in Mulcahy’s direction.

“No,” Mulcahy said, almost crossly, “it’s *not*. I did manage to forget what you looked like. Mostly. But I still wanted you. I still loved you.” He stopped and looked away. “I still knew... you loved me.” He reached out, without looking, fumbling, and caught hold of Hawkeye’s forearm, sliding down to take hold of his hand. His eyes were fixed on Hawkeye’s face. “And I was very lonely, and I couldn’t – I knew you were lonely too. I promised myself that when you met a woman you could – could marry, I wouldn’t – I’d take myself off without further ado, and you could have a normal life.”

“And you figured this wouldn’t take more than a year or two,” Hawkeye said. He leaned back, removing his hand from Mulcahy’s grasp. “You – ” His voice dried up. He got off the bed, awkwardly and clumsily, and leaned on the edge of it. He stared at Mulcahy for a long moment. “Were you even going to ask if I *wanted* to marry this woman before you left me? Was this going to happen the first time you saw me flirt with someone eligible? Any warning? I’d just come home and find you gone? Would you have even left a *note*? You’d better have planned on leaving a note, with directions to the last girl I flirted with, otherwise how the hell would I have known you were leaving me so I could marry her?”

Mulcahy looked back at him. He looked uneasy. “I must confess... I hadn’t thought at all about the practicalities.” The smile that surfaced was plainly amusement at himself. “If I had – I can see certain difficulties already.”

Hawkeye let out a bark of laughter. He was still angry, and he wanted to pin Francis down and kiss him. “You don’t say.”

“I thought I was doing the best I could,” Francis said, solemn again. “It didn’t occur to me till last night how very arrogant my behaviour was, and how much it would hurt you. I never meant to hurt you. I’m very sorry.” He slid off the bed on the other side. “That’s – that’s really all I had to say. Shall I start the coffee?”

## Sins and Virtues

“No.” Hawkeye scrambled to get round the bed and grab at Francis’s arms. “No. That had *better* not be all you have to say. I mean it’s not like I have any right to complain about *you* being arrogant and thoughtless, though I’ll save it up and use it against you the next time – ” He shook Francis. “I just need to know there’s going to be a next time. A whole lot of next times. A whole lifetime of next times. Not just two years. Two years isn’t enough. Ten years won’t be enough. I want you – ”

“Hawkeye – ”

“*Forever,*” Hawkeye said. “Promise.” He was only conscious of how hard he was gripping at Francis’s arms when he saw the other man wince. Even then it was a struggle to relax his hands.

“I love you,” Francis said again, and his arms went round Hawkeye, holding him firmly, his face buried against Hawkeye’s bare shoulder. “But – ” His voice was muffled, but quite audible. “I don’t know if I *can.*”

Hawkeye held him, feeling a wave of tenderness and exasperation that seemed nearly strong enough to knock them both down. He was at least as exasperated with himself. “You already made lifetime vows once, didn’t you?” He felt Francis trying to pull away from him to see what he’d said, and shook his head, holding him tightly. “Okay.” He kissed the other man’s hair. “Dad always told me, wait at least a year after divorce before proposing to a married man.” He could keep telling himself not to ask. Dad would have said *no time to be in a hurry.*

“Hawkeye, I can’t hear you if I can’t see you,” Francis said, and managed to tug himself away to look Hawkeye in the face.

“See, *that’s* why you should be naked more often,” Hawkeye said, and grinned. “More skin area to write on.”

“Hawkeye,” Francis said. “What were you saying?”

“That was I was an idiot for trying to rush you into promising me the rest of your life,” Hawkeye said. “But I get first dibs, okay? No fair promising anyone else.”

Francis looked reluctantly amused. “I think I can agree to that.”

“Where’s my bathrobe? And my pyjamas?”

“I put them both in the laundry last night,” Francis said. “Why don’t you get showered and dressed and I’ll start the coffee?”

Hawkeye glanced at the clock. It was later than he’d thought. “You get showered and dressed. I’ll catch up. You want to meet up for breakfast at Ted’s, after Mass?” That was the diner two blocks east that was convenient for Hawkeye on the way over to Bellevue: it was also just half a block from the nearest Catholic church. Ted’s did good coffee.

Francis looked blank: he hadn’t looked at the clock. “It’s quarter of nine,” Hawkeye pointed out. “They do second shift at Mass at half past, don’t they?”

“Hawkeye – ” There was the oddest expression on Francis’s face. “You haven’t – ” He shook his head. “I’m not going to Mass.” He turned away.

For three years, even when it had meant going directly from an all-nighter in the OR, Father Mulcahy had served Mass every Sunday in the mess tent. He’d served Mass when anyone else would be dropping, exhausted, onto an army cot or into a Martini. He’d served Mass when no one came. He’d said once to Hawkeye, after a ninety-six in Tokyo, that the blessing of taking a few days leave was the chance to hear someone else say Mass, and that hadn’t even been four days that included a Sunday.

Francis handed him his mug of coffee. Hawkeye clutched at it like a refuge.

“Shall we have scrambled eggs for breakfast?” Francis asked.

## Sins and Virtues

“Are you all right?”

Francis had made himself a mug of coffee, and was drinking it. He looked startled. “We don’t *have* to have scrambled eggs – do you want something else? Are *you* all right?”

“All right? I’m disconcerted, disturbed, distressed...” Hawkeye stopped talking. He had told himself that questions in this area were none of his business, and assured himself that he wouldn’t understand the answers anyway. “Can I ask you a question...?”

Francis looked at him. “I think I’d rather you didn’t.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye stopped talking again. The coffee was good. Francis looked as if he were using his cup as a shield for his face. “Okay, let me put it this way: why aren’t you going to Mass?”

“Because I’m...” Mulcahy looked away again. “I’m living with you in what the Church says is mortal sin,” he said. His voice was flat.

Hawkeye could remember exactly how it had felt when Mulcahy had told him – warned him – that he was going to apply for a transfer out of the 4077th. The gulf opening up underneath him was horrifying.

“Are you all right?”

“Francis – ” Hawkeye swallowed. He would have preferred to be drunk before he asked a question like this. He would have preferred to be well past drunk.

Unconscious would be best. “Do you think you’re going to hell for living with me?”

Francis seemed to inhale his coffee, rather than drinking it. “What kind of question is that?” He was spluttering. “You’re agnostic!”

“You’re *not*.” Hawkeye leaned forward. “Just tell me?”

“Is this a joke?”

“No.” Hawkeye wanted to howl, but managed to keep his voice down. Howling would do no good, anyway. “No. I want to know – If you think it’s a mortal sin, how have you squared this with your conscience?”

Francis looked at him, still a little dubious. “The teaching of the Church is that it is a mortal sin. I can’t confess it and be absolved, because I can’t repent it, and I’ve no intention of avoiding a future occasion of sin. I could go to Mass, but I could never take communion. I realised some time ago, that I couldn’t feel that God condemned me, but I can’t pretend – I know what the authority of the Church says.”

Hawkeye sorted through that. He set aside for later secret comfort *I can’t repent it* and *no intention of avoiding you*, and asked “If you don’t think God condemns you, why are you bothered about what the Church thinks?”

Francis looked wryly amused. “Because I’m not a Protestant.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye wanted to ask *So you’re sure you’re not going to hell?* but would have felt like an idiot. “If you can go to Mass without taking communion, why aren’t you going?” He glanced at his watch. Francis would have to dress and run like greased lightning to make it on time now.

“Because,” Francis finished his coffee. He looked as if he would rather be somewhere else. “Because everything I said – anything I said, about how I was living – would be a lie.”

Hawkeye put his coffee down unfinished. “Is this why you were planning to leave me in two years?”

Francis looked down, briefly. “You have a knack,” he said, and didn’t finish the sentence. He looked up again after a moment. “I used to think you’d be a very good priest,” he said.

“What?”

## Sins and Virtues

“You have a gift for asking... good questions.”

“What?” Hawkeye was bewildered.

“I suppose I did think that separating from you would be so painful I might be able to repent ever being with you.” Francis’s smile was brief. “Of course, if I’d thought about it, I’d have known true repentance doesn’t work like that.”

Hawkeye let out a long breath. He was shivering. “Francis – ” *you swapped your religion for a hard-drinking half-crazed arrogant manipulator with nightmares* – “I’m not – ”

“Are you all right?”

“If we didn’t – ” Hawkeye remembered what he was giving up with a rush of physical detail “ – if we didn’t make love, if we just – if we didn’t sleep together – ” Francis, solid and warm, in his arms “ – Would that be okay? Could you still go to Mass?”

There was a pause. Francis seemed to be having trouble meeting his eyes. “Is that what you want?” he said, finally.

“No,” Hawkeye said. He was too on edge to be anything but honest. “Even if you do give the worst blow-jobs I ever had. I want you. I love sleeping with you. I love making love with you. I love everything about you. But – ” He shifted his feet. “I didn’t know – I didn’t think – I don’t want you deciding – ” *I’m not worth it.*

Francis looked away again. “Perhaps you could do that,” he said. “I couldn’t. I mean, I could if – But I couldn’t change my feelings. I came to realise that I couldn’t make myself believe God condemned you. If I couldn’t believe God condemned you, I couldn’t believe He’d condemn me.”

Waiting for Francis to turn his head and look at Hawkeye again was the longest thirty seconds of Hawkeye’s life, and it wasn’t long enough. He was trying to think of the right thing to say. He was certain he couldn’t.

“I separated myself from the Church over this,” Francis said finally, looking at Hawkeye. “If you’re blaming yourself, you mustn’t.”

“I started this,” Hawkeye said. “Back then. And you want to be a priest the way I want to be a surgeon, and you’re not, and I ought to be sorry. I am. Kind of. But I got *you* out of all of this – and what did you get?”

Francis took his glasses off and began to clean the lenses. They might even have needed cleaning. “Do you know, I used to try to sit next to you, or across the table from you, in the mess tent, just to be able to look at you?” He put his glasses back on.

“You did?” Hawkeye remembered. “You *did*...” He felt his mouth open in an involuntary smile. “But – ”

“Shall we have scrambled eggs for breakfast?”

Hawkeye looked at him. After a moment, he said, “Sure. You scramble the eggs, I’ll burn the toast.”

When Francis had his back turned, there was not only no fun talking to him, there was no point. Hawkeye finished cutting the bread and wrapped his arms around him from behind, planting a kiss on the nape of his neck. He wanted very much to feel Francis settling back against him, the way he did in bed at night when Hawkeye held him.

Francis tensed up when Hawkeye took hold of him, but not for long: between Hawkeye’s lips touching his skin and taking leave, he seemed to relax. He was still stirring the eggs, but he seemed to fit himself into Hawkeye’s arms as if an egg could make space for itself in an egg box. Hawkeye pressed his mouth against the back of Francis’s head. He was too wrung-out to get an erection, even with Francis’s body pressed up against his all the way down. All he wanted to do was stand here and hold

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him, with the good smell of eggs cooking in butter and the even-better smell of Francis in the morning, for the rest of his life. They could arrange to have coffee piped in.

“Hawkeye. Toast.” Francis’s voice sounded as if he too were half-dreaming.

“Never mind,” Hawkeye said into Francis’s hair. “Who needs toast when I have you?”

“You were going to make toast,” Francis said. He sounded a lot crisper. Crunchy. Half-burned. Hawkeye let go of him, surprised, and stepped back. “Okay. Toast. Yeah. Okay.”

“What do you want to do today?” Hawkeye asked. The eggs were good, though he wasn’t very hungry.

“I ought to look over my plans for this week’s classes,” Francis said. “And I need to do some laundry.” He was looking at Hawkeye with a mild and neutral expression that made Hawkeye instantly suspicious. “What do you want to do?”

“Go back to bed,” Hawkeye said,

“I think that’s a very good idea,” Francis said.

“You do?” Hawkeye raised his eyebrows, surprised. “Sure, if you want.” He propped his chin on his fist and grinned at him.

There was an instant where Francis clearly didn’t know or didn’t believe he’d heard what Hawkeye had just said. Then there was an instant when he did, his blue eyes looking startled behind his glasses, and he was becoming extremely embarrassed.

It had once been a goal of Hawkeye’s to trip Mulcahy into that state between disbelief and embarrassment: even though Mulcahy had always recovered in the space of seconds, still the look on his face for those few seconds was worth it.

Now it wasn’t. Hawkeye realised it well before the first few seconds were up: but the look on Francis’s face didn’t fade into the usual teasing amusement or irritating serenity.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Francis said, still looking embarrassed. “You didn’t sleep well last night. You have to work tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry,” Hawkeye said, overriding him. “That was a dumb thing to say.”

“No, it wasn’t,” Francis said. He sounded quite forthright, and he met Hawkeye’s eyes, though with embarrassment. “We’re...” He stopped, as if trying to think of the right word, and seemed to give up. He shrugged and smiled at Hawkeye, and ate another forkful of scrambled egg, his eyes still on Hawkeye’s face.

Hawkeye reached out and took hold of Francis’s other hand. “Lovers,” he said. “Living together. Partners, friends, best friends, paired off, spliced, shacked-up – *married*.” He hadn’t meant to say all that – in fact, he’d given himself stern prohibitions against mentioning it – but it came out with a passionate rush. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I love you. I know – ” He swallowed. *I didn’t know. I didn’t want to know. I didn’t think about it.* He said, thinking it through almost as he said it, “I want to be there for you. Whatever you want, whatever you need, if I can give it, it’s yours. For as long as I’m alive.”

Francis put his fork down. He was staring at Hawkeye even more intently than usual. His free hand came out to take Hawkeye’s by the wrist. “I love you,” he said. “But I – ”

“Don’t,” Hawkeye said, panicked by the conviction that the next words were going to be *can’t do this*. “You don’t need to promise me anything.”

There were tears starting in the corners of Francis’s eyes. Hawkeye froze, appalled.

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“You’re such a generous man,” Francis said, after a moment. He was holding his face very still, and the tears weren’t spilling over, though Hawkeye could hear them in his voice. “You give and you give – you give me so much, and the little you get back you don’t seem to want very much. I can’t even –”

He let go of Hawkeye’s hand. “I’m sorry,” he said. He sounded really, flatly ashamed now. “Every morning for the past week I’ve woken up thinking that I don’t deserve this, and I don’t. I don’t want to be dependent on you. I thought I could live with you and pay my share and just be your tenant, separate from – from this, but I don’t think I can afford to do that. I want to give you something in return for all you give me, but I don’t seem to be able to do that.”

Hawkeye’s mouth was dry. He swallowed. *All you have to do is stick around.* He swallowed again, trying to generate saliva, trying to find something to say. *All you have to do is be here and you’ve given me more than I’ll ever give you.*

“If I gave up my job –” He was almost talking at random. “If we moved somewhere that cost less –”

“What?” Francis sounded shocked. “What – ?” He was staring at Hawkeye, mouth open, eyes wide, a picture of disbelief. “You’re not serious?”

“No,” Hawkeye admitted. “But –”

“Give up your *job*?” Francis had moved from shocked to the edge of anger. “What on earth for? Why would you want to do anything else?”

“I don’t,” Hawkeye said. “I – don’t. But –” He was trying to speak coherently. “I don’t – I think about you leaving – and I think I’d rather live in a rat hole in Harlem with you and work as a janitor than live here and work with Cournand without you.”

“You can’t be serious,” Francis said.

“*Don’t say that to me.*” Hawkeye’s heart was pounding. “Don’t. Don’t *ever* say that to me. Don’t ever *dare* say that to me again. *I’m* not the guy who says he’s hoping we split up.”

“No,” Francis said. He sounded angry enough to make Hawkeye blink. There was a raw scratch in his voice like tears. “*You’re* the – the guy who says I don’t need to promise you anything. Or give you anything. Or *do* anything – It seems to me that you don’t want anything from me except –” His voice shook, and spilled the tears he’d been holding. “It seems I can’t even give you a good – good *blow-job* –” He rubbed at his eyes with the sleeve of his bathrobe. He glanced back at Hawkeye.

“I’m sorry,” Hawkeye said. He was lost. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

“I expect it was true.” Francis managed a smile.

“No, it wasn’t.” Hawkeye put on a wide grin that stressed the corners of his mouth. “The worst blow job I ever had was from Sue Ellen Norton when I was fourteen and she nearly vasectomised me.”

“What?”

“Never mind. I don’t want to give you ideas.” Hawkeye looked down at what remained of the eggs on his plate. He pushed it to one side. His stomach hurt. He felt his voice was flat with despair, but Francis wouldn’t be able to hear that. “I just don’t want you to leave me. Ever. I love you. I don’t know what way to tell you that and have you believe me, but it’s true.”

Francis pushed his plate to one side. “I was never thinking of leaving you,” he said.

“You said –” Hawkeye blinked, his mouth falling open. “And you said – And besides, there’s the thing with the church –”

“I assumed that you would – quite naturally – transfer your – your affections to someone else.” Francis glanced down, looked up, awkwardly. “After all – you have

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before. You mentioned half a dozen others. You were thinking of someone else as recently as last summer.”

Hawkeye shook his head. “The only person I was thinking about then was you.”

“But you said...” Francis’s voice trailed off.

“I probably talked about you, to you, hoping you’d pick up on it, and you thought I was talking about someone else,” Hawkeye said. “Which was stupid of me, but you know me: deviousness, misdirection, and stupidity are my middle names, on at least three of my fake IDs.”

Francis didn’t laugh: it was more like a hysterical hiccup. He swallowed and rubbed his face again. “Oh, Hawkeye.”

They sat there looking across the table at each other. After a moment, Francis said, tentatively, “You didn’t eat your eggs.”

“I’m not hungry,” Hawkeye said. He propped his face on his hands, staring at Francis, and then took his hands away when he realised that they blocked his mouth. “You know what’s funny? I’d give anything if you promised me forever. But I don’t think I’d believe you. Not knowing what you gave up for me.” He had lost. He knew it.

Francis was frowning. “I didn’t,” he said. He sounded soft and reluctant, and Hawkeye took it at first hearing for kindness.

“I didn’t,” Francis said again. He still sounded reluctant, but Hawkeye remembered he had never done kindly lies, even when anyone else would have without the slightest shame. “Hawkeye, I’m sorry, but I didn’t give anything up for *you*.”

Hawkeye opened his mouth to contradict, caught Francis’s eye, and shut up.

“I love you. And I ... And I like living with you.” He swallowed. “In ways... I never expected. I care for you a great deal, and I find I like being able to – to care *for* you, as well as – to experience your care for me so directly. But... Hawkeye, I’m very sorry, but – even if I had known, this time last year, how *much* I would... would like this... I would still have tried to stay a priest. It was only when my bishop told me that my feelings – my desires – made me unfit to be a priest, that I – ever considered going to you. Even then...” He glanced down. “It became clear to me that my bishop was right. About me. I’m not fit to be a priest. I felt my vocation go. I didn’t give my priesthood up for you, Hawkeye. It gave me up.” He looked up again, for a silent moment. Hawkeye didn’t venture to say anything.

“And then it became clear to me,” Francis said, “after – during November – that I couldn’t bring myself to believe – what the Church required me to believe. Not just for people like Gary Sturges – but about – ” it still cost him a visible effort to say the word “ – homosexuals. I did try to keep myself within the bounds of Church doctrine, but I couldn’t, and by the time I wrote to my sister, I saw it had really all been one thing – my inability to accept the ruling of the Church, this time last year, and my inability to accept that we ought to – I ought to – obey the Church now. I’m – I’m a heretic, I suppose.” He smiled, as if he expected Hawkeye to find it funny. When Hawkeye didn’t smile (he couldn’t: he felt as if his face was freezing) Francis said, with discomfort, “But I didn’t – do that for you, either.”

“Who did you do it for?” Hawkeye asked. He was fairly sure the last word and the first were distinct enough to be understood, but the rest came out as a mumble.

Francis put his hands together in front of him. He sounded awkward, but quite certain. “God, and my conscience.”

Hawkeye laughed, half-cracked, half-embarrassed. “How did He let you know?”

Francis said nothing for a while. He didn’t look away from Hawkeye. “I prayed,” he said.

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"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. "It was a dumb thing to say." He felt as if he were repeating himself. He felt as stupid as he felt when a nurse said, counting sponges as he closed, *you've left one inside*.

"No." Francis was rubbing the back of his neck now, sounding ever more awkward. "I'm aware that my faith does look rather foolish to you. I should have explained this to you some time ago, but I knew you would find it funny, and it's – it's a rather painful topic for me."

"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. He was feeling struck with a kind of absolutely appalled stupidity. "You shouldn't – I was over the line."

Francis stood up and came round the table. He held out his hands to Hawkeye, who looked at them, and then up at Francis's face. "I think you should go back to bed."

"I'm fine." Hawkeye stood up. "No, really, I'm fine. What do you want to do today?"

"I want to look over my plans for this week's classes," Francis said.

"Okay. I'll – I've got a surgical journal to read. I'll do that. Take you out for lunch?"

The bed in his room was stripped. Hawkeye stood looking at it, knowing where the clean sheets were, somehow not even wanting to start. He wandered back through to Francis's room, surgical journal in hand, made the bed sloppily and fast, and lay down on top of it, trying to look as if he were only there by chance. He picked up the journal and turned to the article. In the middle of the introduction, the page fell on to his face and the print swallowed up his eyes.

He opened his eyes again a moment later: the light had changed in the room. Francis was sitting at his desk, not looking at Hawkeye: his face was intent and focussed, bent over his work. Hawkeye rolled on to his side and watched him.

He was able to look at him for some time before Francis sighed and looked up, catching Hawkeye's gaze. There was a smile that began almost invisibly, tucked into the corners of his mouth and glinting in his eyes, as if Francis were trying to suppress it – and failing, every time. It always looked as if Francis had never smiled like that before.

"What shall we have for lunch?" Francis asked.

"Lunch?" Hawkeye twisted himself round to look at the clock. "Oh." It was after noon. "I was going to take you out." He sat up. He was feeling better, after even a couple of hours sleep, and quite startlingly hungry. "Italian?" He liked the pasta at Dino's, and it was only two blocks away.

"I could make spaghetti," Francis said.

"Let's go out."

"I don't want you to buy me lunch," Francis said. "I meant what I said. I don't want to fight with you about it."

Hawkeye eyed him. "Talk about it?"

"You mean talk me into it? Nothing you can say is going to change my mind." He stood up. "I mean it," he added, heading for the door. "I'll start the spaghetti while you shower."

"That's not fair," Hawkeye said, to Francis's back. He was grinning, not even sure why he was happy. "I can't talk you into anything if you keep turning your back on me."

Francis made a sauce from a couple of tomatoes, a slice of bacon they hadn't had for breakfast yesterday, an onion, and bits of hard cheese. It tasted great.

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“Let’s go out,” Hawkeye said.

“Where?”

“Central Park? Buy me coffee?”

Francis glanced out of the window. “I need to get some laundry done, and then we could go.”

“Mrs Bradford can see to that tomorrow.”

Francis looked at him. “No,” he said.

“No,” Hawkeye said. “Look – not letting me buy you stuff is one thing. But I’m going to pay Mrs Bradford to do this *anyway*. What difference does it make if she does it just for me or does it for you too?”

“I don’t pay her to do it,” Francis said.

Hawkeye stood up restlessly. The Christmas tree still smelt very faintly of pine forests: the needles were falling, more every day. He ran a finger along one twig, disturbing the silver bauble that hung from it, watching as it shivered and swung. Needles fell easily from the dead wood. The decorations that had sparkled on the trees he and Dad had cut down and brought home for Christmas, year after year, were stored in a box in the attic in Crabapple Cove: he’d tell Sarah where they were for next Christmas, if she and the kids wanted them. On Thursday night he and Francis would pack all this glitter away, carefully, and come next Christmas they’d take it out again and decorate another tree. Each year, every year. From now on. *Please*.

He turned round. “Do you still think we’re going to split up in a couple of years?”

Francis was still sitting at the table. He got to his feet, looking uneasy. “I – don’t know.”

Hawkeye wouldn’t have believed anything more. *I don’t know* was still better than *I hope so*. “Can we be partners till then?”

“Partners?”

“I’m not your landlord. You’re not my tenant. You didn’t move in with me because I had a spare room at a rent you could afford. Why do we need to pretend anything different?”

“What does this have to do with getting my laundry done?” Francis asked.

“Why should you spend time indoors washing your socks when the sun is shining, it’ll be sunset in a few hours, and you can get your socks washed tomorrow?”

Francis looked back at him. The uneasiness on his face was genuine distress, Hawkeye realised. He put out a hand without looking, brushing the dry twigs, feeling the light needles fall. “Okay,” he said. “Lead me to your socks.” The sooner they got whatever Francis wanted done, the sooner they could go out.

He was heading past Francis on his way to the door when Francis caught at his arm. He looked at Hawkeye and said, though with some difficulty, “Let’s just go out.”

It was cold out, but they both walked fast. Talking and walking meant both of them walking with their heads cocked to one side: it had felt awkward at first, but Hawkeye was getting used to it, at least on the empty paths in Central Park. Francis seemed to have an instinct for not bumping into people.

Hawkeye was meditating a question on the lines of *This is better than washing socks?* when Francis asked “Do you often have nightmares?”

“Only when I eat cheese too late at night,” Hawkeye said. He looked straight ahead, rubbing the back of his neck as if he had a crick in it. Francis wouldn’t leave him because he had screaming nightmares – not even if he wet the bed. Of all the reasons he hoped Francis might have for staying with him, pity for the nightmares was definitely last on the list.

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On the other hand, it was definitely on the list.

"I did warn you about the nightmares," he told Francis, catching his eye.

"I knew you used to have them in Korea," Francis said.

"You did?"

Francis's mouth twitched. "Sometimes you were pretty loud."

"How loud?"

"You remember that plane that used to drop propaganda leaflets?"

"Sure."

"Well, sometimes after you had a nightmare they'd drop complaints about the noise," Francis said. "In Chinese."

Hawkeye stopped. Francis came to a halt, looking at him with a wide-eyed expression of absolute innocence. It made Hawkeye want to kiss him.

"You don't mind about the nightmares?" he asked instead.

Francis tilted his head to one side. "The same way you mind about me being deaf."

Hawkeye pushed his hands down by his sides, to remind himself not to grab Francis. *Or* kiss him. It felt like he'd been hit by a large soft blow to the chest. *You love me*, he nearly said out loud. *You really love me*. He said out loud, almost stammering, "About once a week – or ten days. Or less often. Usually. I don't know – I can't tell you when I'm going to have one. When I'm afraid I'm going to – I sometimes have a slug of booze before I go to sleep, and then I generally don't. It doesn't really have anything to do with cheese."

Francis nodded. He was looking at Hawkeye now with such depth of acceptance that Hawkeye twitched from not looking over his shoulder to check there was no one standing behind him. For once he was lost for words. *When you look at me like that I know I don't deserve you*. After a long moment, he said "Do you dream about Korea?"

Francis started to walk uptown again, and Hawkeye fell into pace beside him, head cocked on one side.

"I don't remember," Francis said at last. He glanced sideways. "I don't remember what I dream."

He sounded unhappy. They had passed six churches on their way to Central Park, at least two of them Catholic, but even the Baptist church had given Hawkeye guilty twinges. "You have quiet dreams, anyway," Hawkeye said, almost at random.

"I snore," Francis said.

"I use ear plugs," Hawkeye said. "Did you snore like that when you were a kid?"

Francis looked startled. "I don't know. My brothers never mentioned it."

"Did you ever get hit in the face when you were a boxer?"

"Sometimes." Francis shrugged.

"Maybe you have a deviated septum," Hawkeye said. "I know an E.N.T. man who might be able to fix that."

"I couldn't –" Francis started.

Hawkeye caught his eye. "I'm the one who has to sleep through your snoring."

There was a pause. They both went on walking.

"I suppose so," Francis said at last.

Hawkeye opened his mouth to argue some more, and closed it again, since he seemed to have won. "Really?"

Francis looked as if he were smiling almost despite himself. "Really," he said. "I got thrown out of my seminary dorm once for snoring so loudly. I suppose it would be an act of charity to fix my ...septum, if that's possible."

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Hawkeye walked on, shooting a sudden wide grin at the trees ahead. “Buy me some coffee before we go in?” he said, turning his head again.

With an effort of will, Hawkeye said nothing when he saw Francis sorting his laundry for Mrs Bradford: he kept his mouth shut and didn’t start singing till he was in his bedroom, re-making his bed with clean sheets.

He was still singing – something from *Così fan tutte*, with words that fit the tune, he’d never learned Italian – when he realised Francis was standing in the doorway. He didn’t look disapproving: but he didn’t look happy.

“I didn’t mean to interrupt,” Francis said. Now he was smiling: the kind of cheerful look that was a careful mask. “What shall we have for supper?”

*Let’s go out*, Hawkeye nearly said. He swallowed it. “What have we got? I should cook. You made lunch. *And* breakfast.” He headed towards the door and Francis retreated into the hall.

“You didn’t eat breakfast.”

“You still cooked it,” Hawkeye said, wrapping an arm around Francis’s shoulders and turning this into a close hug. He rubbed his face against the fair hair, and said, feeling the curve of his skull with one hand, the bones of his back with the other, “I only burned the toast.”

Francis pulled away. He went through into the sitting room. When Hawkeye followed, Francis was sitting on the couch looking at the surgical journal Hawkeye had left there yesterday. He looked as if he were studying it closely. He looked as if he were telling Hawkeye to shut up.

Hawkeye stood still. “What did I do?” he said out loud, knowing Francis wouldn’t even know he was talking.

This might be the first Sunday in years – in decades – that Francis Mulcahy hadn’t gone to Mass. If he wanted to randomly sulk in all directions, he was entitled.

Hawkeye stood and thought about it. He couldn’t imagine Francis behaving like that. *He* might, but Francis wouldn’t.

He sat down on the couch and neatly twisted the journal out of Francis’s hands. As Francis looked up at him, he asked “What did I do?”

“What?”

“Why are you telling me to shut up?”

Francis looked at the journal. He opened his mouth, as if to protest that he had been reading it, and shook his head.

“I’m sorry,” he said, and smiled. He started to get up, and Hawkeye put a hand on his shoulder.

“No, really, what’s wrong?” Hawkeye felt the muscles under his hand tense and relax. Francis shrugged. He was still smiling, a little awkwardly now.

“Really, it isn’t anything, I shouldn’t – ”

“What did I do?”

“You’re making me feel like an – an idiot.” His voice wasn’t level.

“Good, so it’s mutual. What did I *do*?”

Francis’s shoulder muscles moved again, as if he were thinking about getting up. He looked away. Finally he said, in a rigidly controlled voice, “I hate it when you say something to me when you know I can’t hear you.” He glanced back. The control was cracking. “It’s – it’s grossly unfair to be angry with you just because – I can’t hear – but I can’t *hear*.”

Hawkeye stared, astonished. He had been consciously – almost over-consciously – speaking only when they were face to face, even when it meant walking with his neck

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twisted round and the wind blowing right into his ear. Francis had walked in on him singing, but surely he didn't mean that. "But – " he was going to protest, when he remembered. *I burned the toast*, he'd said, and his mouth had been touching Francis's hair. "But – it wasn't *important*."

"No," Francis said. He smiled again. The rigid control was back in his voice. "I don't suppose it was."

An echo of disaster was rolling around inside Hawkeye's head. "I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have – look – let me – " Crawl, he was going to say.

"I know if it was important you'd make sure I could see your face," Francis said. "I shouldn't – I'm sorry. I shouldn't have let it make me angry." He stood up, taking hold of Hawkeye's hand. "Let's make supper."

Crawling wouldn't do any good. They made supper together, moving around the kitchen, and Hawkeye thought Francis glanced at him too often, and he knew he was uncomfortably conscious of the need to make sure Francis could see his face. He hadn't felt this uncomfortable, working with Mulcahy, in... years.

He could promise not to do it again. And Francis would politely accept the promise. And he'd still think he ought not to be angry. He'd beat himself up. He wouldn't yell at Hawkeye. Whether because he really felt Hawkeye didn't deserve it or because he was – Hawkeye looked at it uncomfortably – feeling that he owed Hawkeye too much to tell him off when he deserved it; he wouldn't.

Hawkeye said finally, over the table, "I'm sorry."

Francis took another forkful. "Tastes fine."

"I'm sorry I say things when you can't hear."

Francis smiled. "It doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does." Hawkeye went determinedly on with his meal. "You should be – you should be yelling at me or punch me or something – "

Francis's control slipped. He half-laughed, looking tickled and embarrassed. "I don't think I could."

"Or teach me signs."

"What?"

"Teach me how to use signs."

Francis put down his fork. "I don't think I could."

"Sure you could."

"I'm not – I'm not nearly good enough. Besides, they use signs rather differently here than they did in Philadelphia. Anyway, why would you *want* to learn?"

"To talk to you," Hawkeye said. He grinned.

"We're talking now," Francis said after a moment.

"Yes," Hawkeye said. "But – " He could think of a dozen protests, but none of them seemed likely to convince Francis. He watched Francis watching him, intent and focussed, and was aware of the degree of concentration that Francis brought just to be able to hear Hawkeye talking nonsense. If he mumbled or laughed or turned his head away or his face was in shadow or any of a dozen other things, all Francis's concentration went for nothing, and he was left guessing. "Okay, where can I learn?"

"I suppose at the local Deaf Club," Francis said, almost as if reluctantly. "That's how I learned, at first."

"Do I have to fake being deaf to join?"

"If you wrote and asked, someone might offer to teach you," Francis said. He picked up his fork and started to eat again. "I'll find the address for you when I go back to school."

"Okay," Hawkeye said. "How do I say 'I burned the toast' in signs?"

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Francis stared at him with unusual concentration. “Is this something you’re going to want to say often?”

“Probably.” Hawkeye grinned.

Francis lifted his hands, and, his fingers crooked in a V, tapped one side of his hand, then the other. “Toast.” His left hand had dropped to his lap. His right hand jabbed back towards his chest, “Me,” and lifted again to his forehead, almost as if he were going to salute Hawkeye. He drew a line across his forehead just above his eyebrows with his forefinger. “Black.”

Hawkeye frowned. “Do that again.”

Francis repeated the hand movements. He didn’t look comfortable, even though the signs looked quick and assured. He didn’t repeat the words.

“Why ‘black’ and not ‘burned’?”

Francis frowned, lifting both his hands, fingers tilted upwards, and shook them, his fingers moving. “I suppose because ‘burn’ seems too much – ” he looked down at his hands, briefly, almost as if surprised, and his hands fell to his lap again. “It’s not as if the toast is in flames.”

“It might be,” Hawkeye said.

Francis looked at him without taking the joke. “I don’t know what the sign for ‘char’ is.”

Hawkeye lifted his hands and made a V shape with his fingers. He followed what he remembered Francis doing: it felt odd, but precise and satisfying.

They did the dishes. Hawkeye stopped Francis as he was about to leave the kitchen, putting both his hands on Francis’s arms: Francis looked up at him, without visible impatience.

“I don’t mean to say something when you can’t see me.”

“I know that.”

“You don’t have to hit me if you don’t want to, but can you do *something*?”

Francis looked down. When he looked up again, it seemed as if he were keeping down his exasperation. He lifted one arm, breaking Hawkeye’s grip on it easily, and took hold of Hawkeye’s forearm. Without looking at him, as firmly and as deftly as a nurse, he steered Hawkeye to the couch in the sitting room. “I want to hold you,” he said, still without looking at Hawkeye.

Hawkeye felt as if his joints had gone loose. He sat down on the couch by Francis, and shifted his weight as the other man’s hands directed: he lay back and felt Francis solid and warm behind him, Francis’s arms round him. He felt enfolded.

“I love you,” Francis said at last. He sounded tired, but matter-of-fact, as if speaking of a concrete reality. “I don’t want to be angry with you.” His arms tightened round Hawkeye’s chest, not for long. “I know you’d make sure I heard you if it was important.”

Hawkeye put his hands over Francis’s hands, trying to press communication through: he couldn’t even write the words at this angle. Held like this, he wanted to be held forever: and he wanted, badly, to *talk* – to give Francis anything. If he’d stay. If he’d keep on loving him.

Promising Francis anything and everything wasn’t making him happy. Hawkeye lay still, looking up at the ceiling, trying to think, wanting to sleep inside the circle of his arms.

After a while, Hawkeye sat up carefully and turned round, keeping contact with Francis. “What would you like to give me?” He felt uncomfortable asking the question, and was relieved when Francis did not immediately laugh and turn it away.

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Francis tilted his head back and looked at the ceiling light. His glasses reflected it, making his eyes invisible. He said, after a moment, “Can you tell me how – ” he swallowed “ – how to give you a better – better blow-job?”

Hawkeye felt heat run up into his face. He wanted to protest *not that*, he wanted to smile glibly and say something smooth and confident: nothing came to mind. He had talked more men – and women – than he could think of right now through a blow-job: he could riff on it for hours, or at least for as long as his self-control held out. He wanted to protest he couldn't, because he didn't believe he could: he couldn't talk to Francis like that – or at all – while the other man's mouth was on his cock, because Francis wouldn't be able to see him.

Francis sat up. He was smiling, a little awkwardly. “I never thought I could make you blush.”

“I'm not – ” Hawkeye protested.

Francis put the palm of his hand against Hawkeye's face. He was still smiling. His hand felt cool. Hawkeye leaned forward before Francis could say anything and pressed his forehead against Francis's, feeling the cool metal and glass against his face, warm skin, warmer breath. He had knocked Francis's glasses askew, he saw when he drew back. Francis put up a hand to settle them. His lips were firmly set together, not nicely parted.

*It doesn't matter*, Hawkeye nearly said, and swallowed it down. It did. “Let's go to bed.”

Francis had dibs on first shower. When Hawkeye came back from the bathroom, he was lying on the bed – on top of the covers, not under them. He was wearing his pyjamas: Hawkeye was naked under his bathrobe. They had always managed to manoeuvre around pyjamas before: Hawkeye shrugged his robe off, dropped it over the chair, and sat down on the bed.

“Okay?”

Francis nodded. He sat up and began to pull his pyjama jacket off.

“Hey.” Hawkeye caught hold of his wrists. “I want a kiss first.”

Francis looked at him oddly, but tilted his head forward and sideways, meeting Hawkeye's mouth. He had brushed his teeth; his mouth tasted of toothpaste. Hawkeye put everything he'd got into kissing him: his hands knew the job he wanted them to do.

He got Francis out of his pyjama jacket, and was starting to unpeel the lower half, when Francis pulled back. His tongue came out briefly to touch his upper lip: he looked –

Uncertain and unhappy.

Hawkeye's hands were still. He stared down at Francis.

“This isn't something you have to do,” he said, though his cock was insistently demanding otherwise.

“Please don't keep telling me that,” Francis said.

“There isn't a final exam. And if there was, you could cheat. Or just bribe the examiner. I'm open to all offers.”

Francis went on looking at him, his eyes wide behind his glasses. Usually, even if the light was still on when they started making love, he took them off. To save them from getting bent or cracked, Hawkeye had assumed: to stop himself from being able to see what they were doing?

“I want,” Francis said. He didn't finish the sentence. “I don't want,” he said, and didn't finish that sentence either. He swallowed. “I know... you must find me very...

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not very good at any of this. I would like to... I really would prefer if you could show me how – to do – to do this better.” His eyes were still fixed on Hawkeye’s face, with a visible effort of will. “And I thought,” he stopped again. “I thought we could start... with a blow-job,” he didn’t quite stutter when he said it, “but just as you prefer.”

Hawkeye put his face down against Francis’s shoulder and locked his arms around him. “Okay,” he said at last, and lifted his head. “Okay. Listen.”

“I’m good at that,” Francis said gravely.

Hawkeye stared at him, speechless. He put his head down again and laughed, unable to stop himself. It was a short, painful fit: he lifted himself, propping himself up on his elbows. “Look...”

“I can do that, too.”

“When I was a freshman I met this guy, name of Tommy. He was a senior. We hung out together for a year. He showed me... Well, by the end of the year I could have graduated *summa cum laude*,” he put Tommy’s punning slur on the Latin, “if I’d majored in male anatomy.”

Francis nodded. He didn’t seem to have picked up on the pun. Hawkeye briefly thought about making it again, but only briefly. BJ would have thought it was funny, if Hawkeye had ever told him about Tommy.

“Sometimes,” Hawkeye said. He was getting to the painful nub of it. “Sometimes you... I used to make it with Tommy wherever he... we wanted. I loved everything we did. He showed me a whole new world. He sent me over the moon. I’d love to do that with you. But sometimes you... you look as if you... as if whatever I’m doing, no matter how much pleasure I think I’m giving you, you’re not happy about it.” He grinned, though it wasn’t funny. “And sometimes, of course, I’m asleep.”

Francis didn’t say anything for a minute. “I’m sometimes not happy,” he said. “There wasn’t... there isn’t anything you can do about it, but it’s not caused by anything you do. I wish I didn’t have to tell you that so often.”

“What about after we make love?” Hawkeye stared down into Francis’s face. “What about yesterday morning?”

“That wasn’t...” Francis stopped. He looked away. His throat was working. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I don’t really –” He stopped again, and looked back at Hawkeye. He was smiling, but it looked both painful and vulnerable. “I remembered how often I’d taken pleasure without giving it, and it upset me.” He curled his hands up around Hawkeye’s shoulders, holding on, not pushing away. “You... you can overwhelm me. It makes me feel – I feel so incompetent. Show me how to do what you do.”

Hawkeye nodded. He was still not sure he could talk. He cleared his throat. “Okay.”

He didn’t want to let go of Francis, or feel Francis let go of him, but he got them both rearranged on the bed, lying on their sides facing each other.

Francis put his arm over Hawkeye. He still looked as if he were on the edge of tears, but his voice was teasing and amused. “You’re the expert, but isn’t this the wrong position –”

“No,” Hawkeye interrupted. He was feeling rough himself, but he’d had an inspiration, if he could carry it through. He lifted his hand, forefinger and middle finger pressed together, the other two fingers curled round to meet his thumb, and touched the tips of the first two fingers against Francis’s mouth. “This is my dick.”

Francis’s eyes nearly crossed. His mouth parted in an odd grin. “Yours is bigger than that.”

Hawkeye heard himself laugh. “Start small, work up.” He slid the tips of his fingers between Francis’s lips. “This is the head of my dick. You can feel the foreskin

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covering the head of the glans, and on the underside, you can feel a ligament – it’s like the one that joins your tongue to the underside of your mouth – that’s called a frenulum.” He knew he was talking like an anatomy lecture. This wasn’t like murmuring hot instructions to someone whose mouth was already filled with his cock. Francis looked serious and focussed. He had always made Hawkeye feel he could do a little better than his best. “If you kind of swirl your tongue round the foreskin and lick at the frenulum – ”

Francis’s eyes were fixed on him. Hawkeye felt his tongue against the tips of his fingers. He almost lost his breath: if not for the necessity to keep talking, to focus on what he was saying, it felt as if he could have come only from the look in Francis’s eyes and the feel of his mouth against Hawkeye’s hand.

### Friday 21st January, 1955

#### 1. Peg

Peg put her hands on BJ’s shoulders and pushed. He closed his mouth and backed out of the room. In the hotel corridor, she looked him over, and straightened his tie.

“Erin will be fine.”

BJ glanced back at the room door, and said “You didn’t let me ask her if she knew what to do if there was a fire.” He didn’t mean Erin, who was as solidly asleep as a three-year-old could be.

“The instructions are posted on the back of the door, and the hotel said she was one of their most reliable sitters.” Peg let herself sound patient.

“I just want to make sure she’s all right.” There was an abrasiveness in BJ’s voice that Peg didn’t like.

“I just want to go out to dinner with my husband,” Peg said. She looked him over again. They were alone by the elevator in the hallway. “You look beautiful.”

BJ smiled, a sudden flash of teeth. “Isn’t that supposed to be my line?”

“I was beginning to wonder.”

BJ’s face relaxed. “You look beautiful.” He lifted her hand to his mouth, and kissed her fingers. “Especially in that dress.”

“I want to go shopping tomorrow,” Peg warned him.

“Shopping for....?”

“Clothes,” Peg said. “I want to buy a dress from a New York boutique.”

BJ nodded. The abrasiveness was gone from his voice. “Well, that shouldn’t take long,” he said. Smooth and a laugh buried deep.

“You can look after Erin all day,” Peg suggested. The elevator was arriving. “What if New York was attacked by – by squid-riding bandits from the ocean? You’d want to know she was all right.”

They stood side by side in the elevator: a sideways-up glance at BJ’s face showed Peg he was bottling up a fit of laughter. She looked straight ahead, keeping her own giggles in. They could not arrive in the foyer of the hotel looking as if they were drunk and disorderly.

It was five to, and BJ had arranged to meet with his friend from Korea at eight: but the moment they stepped out of the elevator, a voice said “Beej?”

“Hawk.”

The man’s face looked as if it had more bones in it than the usual run, and they stood out more: he had a beaky nose, a big mouth, and lines scored into his cheeks

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and his forehead. He had black hair, going grey in flecks and splatters, and although – she realised as he reached them – he was taller than her, almost as tall as BJ, he stooped – he seemed naturally to walk with his head held forward. She'd seen photographs of him, and hadn't realised how the features would look in real life. He was ugly.

BJ took his hand off her arm, and took hold of the man's arms. They looked at each other for an instant, before BJ pulled him into a hug.

They hugged like brothers. It wouldn't have looked so odd if they *were* brothers: they held each other, briefly but closely, as if... Peg had no other word for it. As if they were kin. When they pulled apart, their hands still on each other's arms, Peg saw BJ's eyes were wet.

"God, I missed you," BJ said. His voice was warm and relaxed. He reached out and took hold of her arm again. "Peg, this is Benjamin Franklin Pierce. Hawk, this is Peg."

The man held out his hand. He was smiling. "Hawkeye," he said. "And you're Mrs Hunnicutt."

"Doctor Pierce," Peg said. She was amused. At least, she was more amused than anything else.

"Doctor Hunnicutt," Pierce said. He held out his other hand to BJ.

"Doctor Pierce," BJ said, taking his hand and shaking it enthusiastically. "Can you tell me what we should do if New York is attacked by squid-riding bandits from the ocean?"

"Offer them a martini?"

Peg laughed, startled, and Pierce looked at her and smiled – sudden and open-mouthed, as if he were laughing without noise.

"And speaking of which," he added, letting go of their hands and gesturing back towards the foyer, "I booked a table here for eight-thirty, and the barman makes a pretty fair dry martini."

"We're eating here?" BJ looked at Peg. They had spent over ten minutes upstairs with the sitter explaining that they would leave the number of the restaurant where they were eating at the reception desk. It had taken BJ at least ten minutes to explain this to his satisfaction, and Peg had summarised it briefly because she had a suspicion the sitter had switched off by the time BJ had finished explaining.

"We're eating here," Peg said, keeping any comment out of her voice.

Pierce looked from one of them to the other. His eyebrows were raised. He said, sounding curiously apologetic, "I booked a table here – one of the doctors at Bellevue tells me the food's good, and it's well lit – but we can go somewhere else, if you'd rather."

"We're eating here," BJ said, and grinned. "Good lighting makes all the difference."

"I like to be able to see my food," Pierce said, to her. They were moving towards the foyer. "Picked up the habit in the army – if you didn't keep an eye on the food in the mess tent, it was likely to eat you."

"I'd have thought you'd have picked up the habit earlier," BJ said. He sounded innocent. Peg looked at him suspiciously, and caught Pierce giving him the same look.

"Why's that?" Pierce asked.

"You're from Maine."

"What difference does that make?"

"I thought Mainers only ate sea food," BJ said.

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Pierce looked away and caught her eye. He shook his head. “You know, puns like that are considered grounds for divorce in forty-two states, Mrs Hunnicutt. I can put you in touch with a good lawyer.”

The bar was the other side of an archway from the foyer, and the restaurant beyond the bar. A waiter came up to them.

“Pierce. Table for four. I mean three.”

“This is your party, sir?”

“Yes, one lady, one gentleman, and one trained ape,” Pierce said, ticking them off. “Do you serve apes here?”

Their table would be ready in twenty minutes, apparently, and they could have aperitifs in the bar: Pierce and BJ both ordered martinis. Peg shook her head and ordered orange juice.

“What’s it like working with the medical pin-up of the year?” BJ said.

“He’s a terrific surgeon,” Pierce said. “Better than me. Which of course makes me hate him. But he’s a good guy. Though he likes making jokes about the front lines being a great place to send surgeons for training.”

BJ laughed. Peg glanced at him. Something she’d found hard to pinpoint came home to her: over the past six months – over the past two or three weeks, on this long quiet vacation – the level of tension in BJ had been ratchetting up, so gradually she’d been finding it normal all along, noticing and covering for the quirks, but never registering the tenseness in BJ, strung tight. Until it loosened, all at once, when this man showed up.

She put her orange juice down without tasting it. “Are you married, Dr Pierce?”

“Hawkeye,” Pierce said. He was still smiling. “No. Where did you go on your way here? It’s a great idea, just taking off like that – what states did you cross?”

BJ started telling him about their route. He was relaxed and happy: you wouldn’t know, listening to him, that the funny story about the burst tyre in Oklahoma and Erin’s bumped head had been two hours of tears, screaming, and sulks in the middle of mud-soaked nowhere. BJ told it about a bumbling bear of a husband who got everything wrong, and it would have been funny. You had to not be there.

“...so then I checked Erin for concussion while Peg changed the tyre, and a few miles down the road we found a motel. We nearly sent Erin in to book us a room: she was the only one of the three of us who wasn’t *covered* in mud. You should have seen us: me trying to hide behind Peg and Peg trying to hide behind me, and Erin with a bump on her head that made her look like a unicorn.”

Pierce laughed. He looked at Peg. “I was hoping to meet Erin,” he said. “I even booked the table for four.”

“She’s asleep,” Peg said. She was smiling despite herself. Somehow Pierce looked less ugly now than he had at first sight. “We were planning to stay in New York for three nights, and BJ’s going to look after Erin all day tomorrow, aren’t you?”

“My wife wants to buy herself a dress,” BJ said solemnly. “I keep telling her, that shouldn’t take more than twenty minutes. Half an hour, at most. You just walk into a shop, point at a dress, tell them you want that one if they’ve got it in your size, and pay for it. I ask you – ” He was smiling now. “ – how can that take all day?”

The waiter came to tell them their table was ready before Peg had answered him.

They tried – both Pierce and BJ – to keep her part of the conversation, and when they were talking about BJ’s practice or Pierce’s post at Bellevue, it was easy enough to be part of it. Not possible when they were talking in surgical Latin. BJ didn’t talk about Korea very often, but Peg had expected him to talk about it with his friend.

## Sins and Virtues

“Do you ever hear from Klinger?” BJ asked.

Pierce shrugged. “I got a Christmas card last year about six months late. I guess he’s still in Korea.”

Peg kept track of their Christmas card list. There had been a stack of Christmas cards in 1953 from all over the US: doctors and nurses and corpsmen and patients. Not so many last year.

“Yeah, Christmas cards,” BJ said. He was smiling. “Some letters, too.”

“A couple even from me,” Pierce said. He was grinning. “Not that you answered.”

“I’m hopeless at writing letters, you know that,” BJ said. He was grinning, too.

“You know what this guy did,” Pierce said to her. “Wrote me a goodbye note in *rocks*.”

“Rocks?”

“Yeah, the army had rocks whitewashed to mark off the paths in the compound. When we broke up the camp, I went out by chopper, and I looked down and BJ had written ‘goodbye’ across the chopper pad in white stones. Must have taken him hours.”

“Not quite,” BJ said. He laughed, but he had tensed up again. “Do you ever hear from Margaret?”

Pierce shrugged. “Christmas cards. You?”

“Christmas cards,” BJ agreed. “Do you ever hear from – ”

“Probably,” Pierce said. He sounded faintly exasperated. “Shall we just list off the entire 4077th and tick off who we got Christmas cards from? Winner buys the next bottle?” Peg was still nursing her first glass of wine: the two men had almost finished the bottle.

“What about Father Mulcahy?”

“What?” Pierce looked comically astonished. He shook his head. “What?”

“Well, do you ever hear from him?”

“What is this – roll call?”

“Seriously,” BJ said. He was half-laughing, but he was serious: Peg could tell. “I wrote to him a couple of times, I figured if we were across this side of the country we could take in Pennsylvania, but he never wrote back.”

“When was this?”

“The first time I wrote to him was last July, right after Erin’s third birthday party. Remember the picnic we had at the 4077th, with the cake – the birthday cake for Kim and Erin?”

“Yeah,” Pierce said.

BJ had written about the picnic in the last letter he’d sent her from the 4077th: a party arranged by his unit for the local orphanage, with one small child who was about the same age as Erin.

“It made me think of Father Mulcahy – I wanted to find out how he was doing.”

“Not me?” Pierce’s voice was edged.

“Well, I felt kind of responsible,” BJ said. “You see – no one knew this,” he said to Peg. He looked at Pierce. He was embarrassed, though Peg couldn’t see why he should be. “Father Mulcahy was deaf. He’d lost his hearing almost completely.”

Pierce had put his knife and fork down. He was staring. “How... how do you know?” His voice had lost its edge: he sounded stunned. “When – when did he – how did you find out?”

“I was there when it happened.”

“You were there?”

BJ nodded.

## Sins and Virtues

“You were there?” Pierce repeated. He looked down at his plate, and picked up his glass, drinking from it. “Listen, Peg – can I call you Peg? – there’s one thing I’ve wanted to know ever since I met you. It’s a rather personal question, but I hope you won’t mind me asking.”

“What?” Peg looked at BJ, wanting rescue. Pierce’s voice was light, fast, twitchy.

“How did you get BJ to shave off that cheesy moustache?”

Peg managed a polite laugh. “I didn’t like it, so he shaved. His first night back.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” Pierce sounded vague. “That’s nice.” He looked back at BJ, and emptied his glass. “When did it happen? How did it happen? Unexploded munitions?”

“His eardrums were damaged, and I think the nerve centre was damaged. I don’t know how much residual hearing he had left by the time we all left, but it wasn’t much.” BJ had stopped eating: his voice was odd, constricted in some way. It was unfamiliar, like hearing a stranger speak out of her husband’s face. “By the time I left to go home – the first time – he couldn’t hear my watch ticking. He had tinnitus in both ears.”

Pierce picked up his glass, looked at it, and looked across the room, an abrupt turn of his head. The waiter came over.

“I want a Martini,” Pierce said. “A very dry Martini.”

“I thought we were going to have another bottle,” BJ said.

“You can have another bottle. Bottle of anything you like,” Pierce said. “I want a very large, very dry Martini.” He put the wine glass down again and looked at BJ. “Go on. How did it happen? When did it happen?”

“A shell landed in the compound – just a few feet from where he was standing. Blew him off his feet.” BJ spoke awkwardly. “When he came to – mild concussion, skin abrasions, he was only out for twenty minutes or so – he was hard of hearing.”

“Unexploded munitions,” Pierce said, out loud, but quietly, as if to himself. “When did it happen?”

“We were all hiding under a table in the mess tent – the Colonel and me and Father Mulcahy, and I think Margaret was there too – and then we all realised no one had got the PoWs out, they were still penned up there right by the tank. It was the day I got my orders – the first set – to go home.”

Pierce leant back in his chair. He tilted his head up, and said, to the ceiling. “It was when I was in Tokyo, right?” He looked at BJ again. His face was a grotesque mask: he was scaring Peg, and it was all the more frightening that BJ didn’t seem to notice anything: this wasn’t a story he’d ever told Peg, but he went on talking as if Pierce were reacting normally, as if Peg were the only one who was seeing the nightmare.

“I got my orders to go home, and I’d – I’d just talked Potter into saying I could go if we could find a surgeon to replace me – and Father Mulcahy ran out before we could stop him – we were yelling at him to come back – and he let the PoWs out. They all got out. We had a couple of dozen PoWs penned up in the compound until the tank arrived and we had to move them. You remember that tank we had sitting in the compound?”

“I remember. I drove it into the garbage dump when I got back from Tokyo. Why didn’t any of you think of doing that?”

BJ shrugged. He smiled. “No one else ever had your direct approach,” he said. He was looking cheerful, but he was getting tense, whatever his outward appearance.

“Would have saved a world of trouble,” Pierce said. His voice dragged. “So this happened – he was deaf – Father Mulcahy was deaf when I came back from Tokyo and you were gone on your way home? You just – you just went home? Without telling anyone?”

## Sins and Virtues

“Father Mulcahy made me promise not to,” BJ said. “He was – you knew him, Hawkeye! – he was worried about what would happen to his orphanage. He cleaned out practically the whole of the 4077th, everything he could loot, even the Colonel’s horse, everything went there before we all left. He thought if he was sent to the evac hospital they’d send him home, and he was worried about his orphans. I told him he had to go home, but I couldn’t – and besides, I thought, someone was bound to notice. I didn’t see how he could keep it to himself that he couldn’t hear.”

The waiter appeared with an outsize cocktail glass. Pierce took it from him, looked at it, and drank, a long swallow. He lifted the glass and looked at its remaining contents. “Finest kind,” he said, very quietly. He looked at BJ again. “So you just went home, knowing – and when you came back, you didn’t tell anyone?”

“I couldn’t see how he’d managed to keep it a secret,” BJ said again. He sounded bewildered.

Pierce drank again. He had emptied the glass of two-thirds of its contents in two swallows. His voice was rough. “He’d just nod, and smile.”

“Right. Hawkeye – ” BJ half-laughed. He was really upset now, and tense as wire. “Listen, maybe we should take this somewhere else. Are you all right?”

“Me?” Pierce grinned. It was patently not amusement. “I’m fine. Why wouldn’t I be fine? Just fine. Finest kind.”

“Let’s go back up to our room and talk,” BJ said.

Peg shifted a little. She didn’t want Pierce in the same room as Erin.

Pierce shook his head. He took a last drink of his Martini, putting down the empty glass. “I don’t think so.” He stood up. “Excuse me,” he said to Peg, and went out, walking quite steadily.

Peg let out a breath she hadn’t realised she’d been holding. She wanted this dinner to be *over*, and she didn’t want to meet Pierce again. He had put a scare in her.

BJ was looking after him. “I wonder – ” he said, and shifted his chair. He had nothing but concern on his face.

“Don’t,” Peg said. She was feeling half-ashamed of herself. BJ’s protectiveness, of herself and of Erin, was so strong that it could even be irritating: if he wasn’t afraid of Pierce, there was nothing to be afraid of. “Your story upset him. He’ll be back in a few minutes.”

“I hadn’t realised – ” BJ didn’t finish. “I never told anyone about that before.”

Peg nodded. Some of BJ’s war stories had polish and finish and he told them well, if rarely: some he’d only ever told to Peg. None of them had been as disjointed as that.

“I promised Father Mulcahy. And then I didn’t think about it – I was trying not to think about any of it. But he’s right, I should have told *someone*.”

“Well, you can’t change that,” Peg said, trying to be matter of fact. “But maybe you can do something now. We can go back through Pennsylvania. You should have told me how much it mattered to you before.” She put her hand over BJ’s, clenched on the table. “I’ve always wanted to see Philadelphia,” she offered, untruthfully.

“When we all left,” BJ said, “Father Mulcahy couldn’t hear anything anyone was saying to him, and no one knew it except me.”

“You made a promise. It can’t be wrong to keep a promise.”

“It can if you’re a doctor,” BJ said. He looked at her, and smiled a little. “You’ve really always wanted to see Philadelphia?”

“Yes,” Peg said valiantly. “There’s lots of things there I’ve always wanted to see.”

“We’ll go, then,” BJ said. “You can tell me all about them on the way.” He glanced round again. “Where *is* Hawkeye?”

## Sins and Virtues

Peg started eating again. The food on her plate wasn't quite cold. BJ started to eat, too, but he kept looking over at the doorway Pierce had gone out of.

The waiter came over again. "Mrs Hunnicutt?"

"Yes?" Peg was startled. "Is there – did the sitter in our room call?"

"No, ma'am," the waiter said. "The gentleman who was dining with you left this for you."

It was an envelope – marked with the name of the hotel – stuffed with a thick amount of paper. Her name was written across the envelope, in a large quick scrawl.

"He left?" BJ asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"He didn't say, sir," the waiter said.

Pierce had paid for the meal before he left. They paid off the sitter. Erin was deep asleep. Peg sat down on the edge of bed, and opened the envelope. There was a thick wad of lined paper, folded over, that looked as if it had been taken out of a notebook, and a single piece of notepaper, again marked with the name of this hotel. The handwriting on the notepaper was difficult to make out: after a minute, Peg handed it to BJ, who was standing over her, chewing his impatience.

"Dear Mrs Hunnicutt," BJ read, "It was good to meet you. I was hoping to give this to Erin, but you'll have to decide when she's ready for it. Best wishes, B. F. Pierce.' What is it?"

Peg had unfolded the paper. "Names," she said.

"What?"

The handwriting here was much clearer. "It's a list of names." It took a minute to figure out what sheet the list started on: it was only partially in alphabetical order, and sections seemed to have been written at different times by different pens. "There's a message here for Erin." It looked as if Pierce had been trying to write more clearly: sometimes the list staggered, but it wasn't the scrawl of the notepaper, and the message to her daughter, on a rough-cut slip of paper folded in with the list, was written with painstaking clarity. "He says these are the names of young men you operated on in Korea," Peg said. She folded the paper again, shielding the words from the light. It seemed almost too private for anyone to read. "It's for Erin," she said again.

BJ was holding out his hand. "What is it?"

Peg shook her head. "It's for Erin," she repeated. There were so many names on each page, so many pages: how long had it taken Pierce to write it out? "I'll give it to her... when she's a little older."

BJ sat down on the bed. He looked rocked to his foundations. "Hawkeye's writing private letters to my daughter about my patients? And you're –" he spluttered "– you're *letting* him?"

"Yes," Peg said. She felt the weight of the paper in her hand, dry and rough. It was an astonishing labour of love. "Yes."

"I'm not sure I like this," BJ said.

"You don't have to," Peg said. "I do."

They stared at each other.

BJ half-smiled, finally. "I was going to say – I want to go find Hawkeye. Now I have two things I want to talk to him about."

## Sins and Virtues

“Well, we were going to spend tomorrow and Sunday here, anyway,” Peg said. “I can take Erin with me when I go shopping tomorrow. And we could stay a day or two longer, if you want to.”

BJ glanced at his watch. He gathered himself, getting ready without actually moving. Peg felt her stomach fall. “You want to go *now*?”

“Yes,” BJ said. He met her eyes again. “I’m – I know how this must sound, but I’m worried about Hawkeye.”

They had talked about this. Just once, the evening after Erin’s third birthday, when Erin was asleep, worn out with excitement. That night had been the only time they talked about it: Peg had wondered, sometimes, especially when BJ proposed the cross-country trip to New York, but – BJ had never brought it up again, and Peg had thought it best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Peg brought her hands together, holding the letter to Erin carefully between them. “BJ, was there ever anything... anything *more* than we talked about?” Which hadn’t sounded like so much: two drunk men finding themselves on the same narrow bed, fumbling in the dark and stopping before anything really happened. Whatever could happen.

BJ put out his hands, enclosing hers and the letter between them. “He was – he is – he was my best friend, next to you,” he said. His voice was thick. “I – I *love* him, Peg. I worked with him, I knew him – I knew him better than I ever got to know anyone. Except you. I want to make sure he’s all right.”

“Is he queer?”

BJ’s hands twitched. His eyes looked away, then back at her. “I don’t know. He told me he was – once he told me he liked men as well as women. But I never saw him – he’d make jokes about it all the time, so did I, we all did, I guess – but I never saw him – ” BJ paused. “There were rumours about him and another doctor, a guy who left before I got there. Well, jokes, more than rumours. No one seemed to take it seriously. I don’t know. Does it make a difference, if he is?”

*To Erin Hunnicutt. This is a list of all the young men your daddy took care of while he was in Korea. Many of them have him to thank for being alive today. I want you to understand why he had to be away during those first years of your life. I hope I have the chance to give you this person, but around here you never know.*

“Not to me,” Peg said. She withdrew her hands from BJ’s. “Hadn’t you better change before you go out again?”

## 2. BJ

The address proved to be a modern apartment block, not far from the subway. Probably walking distance to Bellevue. Living like this wouldn’t suit BJ – when the new baby arrived, he and Peg were already talking about moving from the small house to somewhere larger, with a bigger yard – but he could see the convenience of it.

If Hawkeye didn’t answer – BJ rang the doorbell again. Was there any way to find out if he was home and ignoring him or still out? No reason the neighbours would have noticed, one way or the other.

BJ heard footfalls from inside the apartment, and the noise of a lock being undone. He had to figure out how to face Hawkeye, and he had to do it now.

Even before the door fully opened, he said urgently, “I know you’re mad at me, and I deserve it, but – ”

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Father Mulcahy stood in the doorway, blinking at him.

BJ stopped talking. His mouth fell open. He looked down at the envelope in his hand, checking the address, and up again at the door number.

“Father – ” he said, startled and delighted. He stepped forward. “Father!”

Mulcahy stepped back. “You’d better come in,” he said, and added hastily, “Close the door.”

BJ advanced on him, intending to hug the priest harder than he’d ever been hugged. “I don’t care if this isn’t – ” He kicked the door shut. Mulcahy had already retreated down the hall.

“Would you like coffee?” Mulcahy offered. He was standing by the sofa in the living room. There was something different about him. BJ stood still, taking him in. Mulcahy was staring at him.

“Can I take your coat?” Mulcahy said.

BJ shrugged off his coat. Mulcahy approached him, oddly, his eyes fixed on BJ’s face. “Would you like something to drink?” Mulcahy said. He took the coat and backed off, keeping himself turned towards BJ.

BJ turned and looked around the room. Fixed high in one corner was a light like a spotlight, with a red slide to cover the bulb. Across the room from it was a large mirror.

“You’re still deaf,” BJ said. He hadn’t realised how much he had been hoping it wasn’t true. He turned towards Mulcahy. “That light’s wired up to the doorbell, isn’t it? That’s how you could answer the door.”

Mulcahy’s mouth tightened. He had always had a pleasant face and manner, but he looked somehow bleak. “Yes,” he said. “I’m sorry, BJ.”

“*You’re* sorry?” BJ shook his head. “I am – Father, I’ve been trying to find you since last July to tell you – to ask you – to find out how things were going for you and ask you – tell you how sorry I am. I should have told Colonel Potter before I ran away.”

“You couldn’t,” Mulcahy said. His voice had all its old familiar simplicity and authority. “I made you promise not to. I did realise – when the doctor my bishop sent me to wanted to know why I hadn’t been treated sooner, I did understand what I’d laid on you. But not before. I’m sorry, BJ. But I had to stay.”

BJ opened his mouth. He wanted to say *But you didn’t. All you had to do was tell Klinger – Margaret – the Colonel – Hawkeye – and the orphans would have had everyone looking out for them* – Klinger, who had fallen so suddenly and unexpectedly in love? Margaret, who had been thinking about nothing but where to go next? The Colonel, who was Regular Army to his backbone and his boots, and disapproved of looting on principle even in a good cause? Hawkeye, who had been on the edge of going crazy, and couldn’t bear to be around small children? BJ himself, too desperate to go home to write a note for his best friend?

Father Mulcahy hadn’t trusted anyone but himself to make sure the orphanage was fully supplied. And it was too late, and too cruel, to convince him he’d been wrong.

“That doesn’t matter,” BJ said, swallowing everything else he might have said down. “How are things going for you now? What are you doing in New York? I thought you were still in Philadelphia – Peg and I were going to take it in on our way home. Peg says she’s always wanted to go there.”

“Really?” Mulcahy smiled.

BJ grinned and shrugged. He glanced round. “I came here – ” He remembered to turn towards Mulcahy. “Peg and I were having dinner with Hawkeye tonight, and this *is* his address.”

## Sins and Virtues

"I'm working as a teacher at a school for the deaf, and taking night classes towards a New York teaching certificate," Mulcahy said. "I – Hawkeye invited me to stay in his spare room. At a – a very reasonable rent. He's a very good landlord."

"I'm sure you're a very good tenant," BJ said, grinning. "Why didn't you come to dinner with us this evening? We're here till Sunday – what about dinner tomorrow? Why didn't Hawkeye tell me you were here?" He glanced round again. Mulcahy's eyes were fixed on his intently, and his mouth had tightened again into bleakness. "Where is he?"

"I don't know," Mulcahy said. "He – he met you for dinner?"

"Sure. Didn't he tell you? I wrote him at the beginning of January, and I called him yesterday when we knew for sure we'd reach New York today." BJ was frowning now. "He acted at dinner like he didn't know anything about you – he does know you're deaf?" BJ glanced up at the spotlight again. "Stupid question, sorry. But he acted like he had no idea –"

"Did you tell him how it happened?" Mulcahy's voice was rough.

"Sure –" BJ broke off.

Mulcahy losing his temper had usually been quite a funny sight: the relentlessly self-controlled man blowing his top, like a polite kettle letting off a jet of apologetic steam. On a couple of occasions, Mulcahy's anger hadn't been funny at all, and BJ found himself recalling them.

"BJ, you *promised* –" His voice rose. BJ thought for an instant that Mulcahy was going to hit him. "*Now* you break your promise – you *idiot* –" He turned away, abruptly, and went out of the room. When he walked quickly, BJ saw, you could see he'd lost the runner's easy stride. Nerve damage in the inner ear would have spoiled his balance. BJ stood still. He looked up again at the light and the mirror.

Mulcahy was gone a little longer than was necessary to hang up a coat and a hat. When he came back he didn't look angry, except for being a little more red in the face than before. "BJ, what did you tell Hawkeye? What did he do when you told him?"

"I just told him what happened –" BJ was confounded. "Why didn't he tell me he knew where you were?"

"Did you tell him I was deaf by the time he came back from Tokyo?"

"Well, I wasn't sure exactly how deaf you were. You weren't cooperating with hearing tests, remember?"

"Please don't prevaricate. This is too important for that. I couldn't really hear anything when you left, and you knew it. Did you tell Hawkeye that?"

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"He had a Martini and walked out," BJ said. "Why didn't he tell me where you were?"

Mulcahy took his glasses off. He took a minute to polish the lenses, his head bent, and it dawned on BJ that the priest had found by this a means, as relentless and polite as anything else about him, of telling everyone else to stop talking to him.

BJ sat down. When Mulcahy hooked his glasses back on his ears and looked at BJ again, BJ said "You mentioned coffee?"

"Yes," Mulcahy said. He made an abortive, clearly instinctive movement towards the door that presumably led to a kitchen. "When did Hawkeye walk out?"

BJ glanced at his watch. "A couple of hours... getting on for three hours ago." BJ had wasted more time than he'd thought looking into all the nearby bars. "Father, what's going on? Is Hawkeye all right? He wasn't acting... it wasn't just he didn't

## Sins and Virtues

mention you. Is he all right? If he's – why didn't he *tell* me? Is he – ” BJ wasn't going to say *crazy* if Mulcahy didn't.

“I suppose I have to tell you,” Mulcahy said at last. He sat down. “You shouldn't call me ‘Father’. I'm suspended from the priesthood. I'll be laicized permanently very soon. Hawkeye didn't tell you he knew where I was because I asked him not to – I'm not supposed to let people who knew me when I was a priest find out – I'm not.”

“Laicized?” BJ seized on the unfamiliar word, hoping the translation would make sense of everything else.

“Defrocked,” Mulcahy said.

“Not a priest?”

Mulcahy shook his head. He still had the bleak look on him, but he was watching BJ with an odd kindness. “I'll make you some coffee,” he said, and got up.

BJ sank his head into his hands and ground the heels of his hands into his eyes. He could not imagine Father Mulcahy as anything but a priest. Deaf – *crippled* – but a priest. Teaching deaf children – but a priest.

Mulcahy came back with two mugs of coffee, and handed one to BJ. “Do you take sugar?”

“No,” BJ said. The coffee cleared his head. “Father – Sorry, what do I call you?”

Mulcahy smiled, briefly. “Francis, if you like, BJ.”

“Francis, I need to find Hawkeye. I'm worried about him. He was acting pretty disturbed when he left. Now, do you have any idea where he might be?”

Mulcahy shook his head. “None at all.”

“Where he goes drinking? Favourite bar?”

“No,” Mulcahy said.

“Friends?”

Mulcahy shook his head again. “I know the names of one or two of his colleagues at Bellevue, but I don't believe he'd have gone to see them.”

“Is he seeing anyone – you know what I mean,” BJ said. “Does he have a girlfriend?” He grinned. “Well, this is Hawkeye, he's probably got half a dozen. Anyone special?”

Mulcahy drank his coffee. “I don't believe so,” he said. Priest or not, he still looked uncomfortable at this kind of talk.

“There's got to be some way we can find him,” BJ said, frustrated. “Isn't there *anything* you know about where he might have gone?”

Mulcahy's headshake was little more than a twitch. His mouth was tightly compressed. When he said “I'm sorry I can't be of more help, BJ,” his voice was unnaturally even and light. “I am worried about him, too, but I think you'd better go back to your hotel. I'll – ” He glanced at the phone. “Well, I'll ask him to call you.”

“I want to see him,” BJ said.

“I'm sure he'll want to see you.”

“I'm not,” BJ said. He laughed, a little painfully. The expression on Hawkeye's face as he'd said *It was when I was crazy, right?* had reminded BJ, somehow, of the look in Hawkeye's face when they'd met in the small dull high-ceilinged room in Tokyo with the wired-in window, when Hawkeye had shouted him out of the room. He finished the coffee. “I want to see you again, too,” he said. “Hear all about what you've been doing.” *Find out why you're not a priest.* “Tomorrow? Sunday? Peg'll want to meet you, too. And you could meet Erin.”

“I'd like that,” Mulcahy said. He stood up and collected BJ's mug, setting it down with his own on the table. “It's quite late.”

“So it is,” BJ agreed, standing up. “Dinner tomorrow night?”

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"I usually work at the school on Saturdays," Mulcahy said.

"Sunday? How about a big Sunday lunch? Ask Hawkeye –" BJ stopped. He could hear, down the hall, the sound of someone trying their keys in the lock. "Sounds like he's back," he told Mulcahy.

He went past Mulcahy, moving fast, intending to say to Hawkeye *I know you're mad at me, and I deserve it, but listen to me*, and with very little idea of what he could say after that.

Hawkeye shoved the door open, saw him, and his face twisted in disgust and anger. He said, past BJ, to Mulcahy, "What's he doing here?" He was, by his voice, so drunk that BJ was surprised he was still on his feet.

"I know you're mad at me, and I deserve it, but –"

Hawkeye looked at him. "Get out." His voice was slurred, but the hate in it was clear. His gaze slid away from BJ to Mulcahy. "What's he doing here? Never mind." With a lurching kick, he slammed the door shut, and his fist sliced at BJ's face. BJ didn't even need to dodge: he stared at Hawkeye, startled beyond measure. Hawkeye lifted his fist again, almost experimentally, and Mulcahy caught his arm.

"You hold him, I'll hit him," Hawkeye said. He jerked his arm, and Mulcahy moved behind him and caught at his other arm. "Hey –" He was twisting his head, looking as if he were trying to see behind himself. "Let go of me –" He lunged forward: BJ saw Mulcahy's face.

"Hey," BJ protested.

"Let go of me," Hawkeye said. He was struggling, and Mulcahy looked as if he was having a hard time keeping his balance, but he was gripping hard at Hawkeye's arms and didn't let go. Hawkeye's mouth opened in a snarl. He was staring at BJ, and when his head dropped and a noise came out from deep in his throat BJ thought for a moment Hawkeye was embarrassed. Then Hawkeye threw up.

He went down on his knees and bent over and retched again: Mulcahy, evidently almost at the end of his resources, nearly fell with him. BJ crouched down.

"BJ," Mulcahy said, sounding on edge. "I think you need to go now."

"Shut up," Hawkeye said, cutting across what Mulcahy was saying, his voice thick and dead. He was swaying on his hands and knees, staring down into the puddle of gin-stinking vomit on the carpet. "Shut up, you fucking liar, I'll get up in a minute and I'll punch Beej and then I'll..." His voice was slurring, slowing. BJ caught at his shoulders in time to push his face away from landing in his own vomit. He still wasn't quite unconscious, but almost there: he made a noise, something between gagging and sobbing, and stayed there with his face in the carpet.

"God," BJ said. He knelt up, one hand still on Hawkeye's shoulder, and came face to face with Mulcahy. "He often come home like this?"

Mulcahy shook his head. He looked horrified.

"Don't worry about what he said." BJ was trying to sound reassuring. "It's not him, it's the gin. Look, I'll get him to bed. I've done it before. He'll be asleep in a few minutes. Well, unconscious, anyway."

Mulcahy lifted his shoulders in a slow shrug. "Okay," he said after a moment, and got himself carefully to his feet – you could see how carefully he had to move. "I should clean this up."

"If this was the Swamp, we'd just bury it and pile some fresh dirt on," BJ said.

Mulcahy smiled, almost ghost-like. "I'm afraid that would be even worse for the carpet."

Hawkeye was a familiar weight. He was all but unconscious now, but not relaxed: he was nearly falling over, and it seemed like he kept falling over in the wrong

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direction. BJ had found him easier to steer in the past, but he got Hawkeye, stumblingly uncooperative, into his room and over to the bed. BJ tugged his coat off, and his jacket, and Hawkeye landed on his back, his arms falling out and twitching. “Beej?” he said, his voice thickly slurring.

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“Soon as the room stops spinning, I’m going to flatten you.”

“Sure you are.”

Hawkeye’s head rolled to one side. “What are you...” he said, and his voice faded out.

BJ finished pulling off Hawkeye’s shoes. He rolled Hawkeye onto his side, in case he threw up again, and stood back. There was an empty tumbler on the other side of the bed: BJ walked round to pick it up. He stood looking a moment at the bed, the small cabinets either side, each with a reading light and their own small clutter, trying to place something in his mind.

Mulcahy was scouring the stained area of the carpet. He looked up when BJ’s feet came within his field of vision, not before. “Everything all right?”

“Sure. He’s not going to feel happy when he wakes up, though. I was just going to leave him a glass of water.”

“Of course. You’ll find the kitchen through the living room.”

Hawkeye was still unconscious, probably, rather than asleep, when BJ came back with the glass of water. He was still lying on his side, mouth open, on the right of the bed. BJ put the glass down on the nearest cabinet, trusting it was out of reach of Hawkeye’s flailing arm. It was obviously the side Hawkeye usually slept on.

Mulcahy was still working on that spot on the carpet. BJ strolled over and looked. “I think you’ve got it clear.” He repeated himself when Mulcahy looked up.

“I hope so,” Mulcahy said. “I don’t like to think of Mrs Bradford having to deal with this.”

“Mrs Bradford?”

“She’s – Hawkeye employs her as a maid.”

“Just a maid?” BJ raised his eyebrows.

“I’m sorry?” Mulcahy looked puzzled.

“Does she sleep here?”

“No,” Mulcahy said. He sounded mildly shocked. “She’s a married lady – a very nice woman. Her oldest daughter takes notes for me at my Wednesday night class. She’s usually here when I’m out at work, but I met her the first week of the new year – No,” he finished abruptly.

“Okay,” BJ said. He thought about it. “Who – ”

Mulcahy looked down at the carpet. He scrubbed once more at the area where Hawkeye had thrown up, and picked himself and his cleaning items up, moving carefully.

“Does Hawkeye still have nightmares?” BJ asked.

Mulcahy’s face changed, a little: his smile became more tightly controlled. “I’m afraid so,” he said.

“How often?”

“He’s had two since I moved in, just before Christmas,” Mulcahy said. “He tells me... this is normal for him. Two or three times a month.”

“He still wake up screaming?”

Mulcahy nodded, looking worried and confused.

BJ nodded. His chest seemed filled to bursting. He could barely speak. Mulcahy went through to the kitchen, and BJ followed him: the soaked and smelly rags went

## Sins and Virtues

down the garbage chute, and Mulcahy was rinsing his hands in the sink, his back to the room.

BJ said, loudly, “How deaf *are* you?”

When Mulcahy turned again, he was smiling, diplomatically rather than sincerely. “I don’t want to seem inhospitable, BJ, but it’s very late. Perhaps it would be as well if you went back to your hotel.”

“How do you know?” BJ asked. He was trying to make his voice sound normal.

Mulcahy’s air of worry and confusion only deepened “What?”

“You can’t hear,” BJ said. He wasn’t sure why he was saying this, but he couldn’t stop himself. Even the dawning realisation – and shock – in Mulcahy’s face didn’t make him want to stop. “How do you know he wakes up screaming,” BJ wanted to believe his voice was teasing, amused, “unless you’re in bed with him?”

Mulcahy put his hand to his mouth. He spoke in a small, shattered voice. “Please don’t tell anyone.”

As if those four words had created a silence neither of them could break, they stared at each other.

A large part of BJ’s sense of self-worth was bound up in being a likeable fellow. He never knew how much until he saw Mulcahy looking at him as if he were the enemy. The double bed in Hawkeye’s room was obviously slept in by two people. BJ had seen that from the first moment he looked at it. He just hadn’t been sure, because he hadn’t known who. Now he was. He did. He wished he didn’t.

Mulcahy seemed to recover first. He folded his hands in front of him. He spoke in a voice become determined, his eyes fixed on BJ’s face: it was hard for BJ to look at him. “You see – you must see, the damage it could do to Hawkeye if it were known that he was... if people were to think he was a,” he swallowed, “a homosexual. He isn’t. I know it must look like that just now. But he does have the capacity to lead a normal life. And I hope he will. But just now he needs... he needs someone who knows about Korea, who cares for him, who... He needs someone. Don’t think too badly of him, whatever you think of me.”

“What about *you*?” BJ demanded. He was floaty with shock. “You really *are* – Is this why you’re not a priest any more?”

Mulcahy was bright red. He said, sounding both embarrassed and angry, “It’s a lot more complicated than that. I don’t want to talk about it with you.”

“I *know* Hawkeye’s a queer. I’ve known it since the first week I was sharing a tent with him. I found out about Trapper and he tried to seduce me. I didn’t know about you. *No one* knew about you. How did Hawkeye find out about you?”

“Oh, shut your trap!” Mulcahy’s voice rose. “You come here and break your promise and barge in here causing trouble – just *go away!*”

BJ walked out. He got as far as the living room, and stood there looking round. It was a small, comfortable space, dining-table in an alcove, big comfortable sofa, books shelved and the recently-read in stacks: and, like the double bed, you could see two people lived here together – if you were looking for it. There was nothing he missed about his years in Korea, except Hawkeye.

Hawkeye looking past him as if he wasn’t there, saying to Mulcahy *What’s he doing here?*

Hawkeye holding him, arms wrapped round him, head against his shoulder, one hand clasping his head – so familiar and so right it hadn’t occurred to him it might look strange until he saw Peg looking at them.

The kitchen door opened, and Mulcahy came out. He looked startled to see BJ still there, but he said “I wanted to ask you – to tell you –” He stopped.

## Sins and Virtues

“Yeah?” BJ wasn’t too fond of self-discovery.

Mulcahy stood still. He looked, again, more embarrassed than angry. “Don’t tell anyone,” he said. “Please. Not a word. For your friendship with Hawkeye – even if – even if right now you’re on the outs – not a word to anyone about what you – you figured out. Promise me, BJ. Please.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” BJ said. He knew he was saying it ungraciously.

“Your solemn promise,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah,” BJ said. He tried to make himself sound less uncooperative. “I promise. Not even Peg.” He knew it was the right thing to say, and he knew he had no right to say anything else. He dug up a smile. “You’ll trust my solemn promise, after what happened?”

Mulcahy didn’t smile. “I don’t see that we – I have much choice.”

“Right.” BJ nodded. “Okay. Look. I’ll go.”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

It was cold outside the apartment building. BJ caught a cab heading downtown.

Peg had gone to sleep with a reading light on. BJ showered, rough-dried, and got into bed beside her. She turned over, eyelids twitching, when he reached over her to switch the light off. BJ lay down with his arm over her and his face against her hair.

“BJ?”

“Who else?”

“Is Hawkeye all right?”

BJ had rehearsed this: it came out quite naturally. “Drunk as a skunk,” he said. “Very, very drunk. I rolled him into bed and left him with a glass of water. And Father Mulcahy.” He had to mention him.

“What?”

It would be easier to say it in the dark. “I found Father Mulcahy.”

There was silence. BJ thought Peg had gone back to sleep. She was lying still, not saying anything, breathing softly and regularly.

She sat up and switched the light on. BJ blinked at it.

“Father Mulcahy? The same one you were talking about?” Peg was blinking too in the sudden light. “How – what?”

“He moved to New York, he’s studying for a teacher’s certificate, he’s still deaf, and he’s rooming in Hawkeye’s apartment.” This too had been rehearsed. It was all perfectly true, after all.

“You found him?”

BJ shrugged. “It was easy. I just rang the doorbell, and there he was. And apparently he’s not a priest any more.” This too had to be said.

“Oh.” Peg frowned. “Oh, because he’s deaf, I suppose. I read about that somewhere.”

“Really?” BJ blinked. That hadn’t occurred to him, but it was the kind of thing Peg picked up. “Oh.” It would be easier not even to think about it.

Peg switched the light off and lay down, putting her arm over him. “I’d like to meet him.”

“I asked him to lunch on Sunday.” I may not be able to get him there.

“Good.” Peg kissed him, light and tickling. “So we don’t have to go back by Pennsylvania.”

Unexpectedly, through a tightness in his chest, BJ felt a laugh building. “I thought there were all those things there you’d always wanted to see?”

## Sins and Virtues

Peg made a fist and pushed her knuckles against his ribs. “I was trying to think of some before I went to sleep tonight.”

BJ laughed out loud. “Couldn’t you think of any?”

“I made a *list*. But I went to sleep and forgot to write it down.”

“Oh.” BJ slid his hand down Peg’s side. “How sleepy are you?”

“Very, very sleepy. I doubt if you could keep me awake if you tried all night.”

“Oh,” BJ said. He kissed her again. The tightness in his chest was easing.

He felt Peg about to say something, and braced himself for it: she knew he was on edge. “I’m all right,” he said, hastily, before she could speak.

There was a moment’s silence. Peg shifted a little, her hand pressing against his shoulder, moving herself and him in the familiar pattern. “I was thinking about all the different ways I love you,” she said at last. “You care about your friends so much.”

“You’re my best friend,” BJ said. Hawkeye, looking at him as if he hated him. Mulcahy, looking at him as if he were the enemy. “I haven’t done so well by my other friends – ”

“You can’t do everything,” Peg said. “But we’ll do what we can.”

“I love you,” BJ said, hearing his voice thick with arousal and tears.

## Weekend, 22nd-23rd January, 1955

Mulcahy got his rosary from under his socks: he couldn’t bring himself to go to bed, either with Hawkeye or in his own room. He sat on the chair in Hawkeye’s room, turning it so that he could see Hawkeye’s face, and counted his rosary beads. He realised, about halfway through the night, that he was not praying in Latin, but in English: the prayers Mam had taught him on her chaplet, years before he or anyone else ever thought of his being a priest. *Pray for us sinners*. He felt in need of prayers. *Hail, Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou...*

He slept several times, waking with a twitch to find his rosary still in his hands, losing count of beads and mysteries: had he reached the St Francis medal, or the St John? The St Patrick medal was differently shaped from the others, heavier, a present on his confirmation: he kept beginning again, from Francis or from John, and never reaching the end.

Hawkeye was still sleeping when Mulcahy woke for the third or fourth time, and saw that it was past seven in the morning. He got up from the chair, and went to make himself breakfast and coffee. He made a pot of coffee big enough for two, and only then realised that there was no point: Hawkeye was still deeply unconscious, and would not be appearing in the kitchen doorway with his eyes foggy with sleep, accepting a mug of coffee and thanking Mulcahy for it in the most extravagant terms.

Whatever Hawkeye had said – and BJ had said of it, *Don’t worry, it’s not him, it’s the gin*, – he hadn’t meant Mulcahy to understand him. *Whatever* he had said.

Mulcahy was almost at Central Station before it occurred to him that he hadn’t left a note for Hawkeye. If he went back he would miss his train and be late to Fanwood: the morning would be disrupted. Hawkeye would know where he had gone, where he always went on Saturdays. He could not have written down what happened with BJ in a note, anyway.

Mulcahy turned his mind away from Hawkeye when he was at the school: he always had.

## Sins and Virtues

He thought of him only once: running on the grass track round the playing fields, he fell. It still happened sometimes, and no harm done if he fell on grass or mud, but as he was down on his hands and knees, holding himself through a wave of dizziness, someone touched his shoulder.

*Hawkeye?*

It wasn't Hawkeye, of course: he'd only once appeared out of nowhere at the school. It was one of the boys he ran with. When Mulcahy looked at him, he signed *okay you?*

Mulcahy smiled and nodded. The other boys had stopped, too. He picked himself up and made the signs for *balance lost, fine, run*.

He walked the rest of the track, watching the boys run ahead, sending Hawkeye out of his mind. The children here used signs far more fluently than he did, and responded readily to him when he used signs to them, even though the signing he'd learned in Philadelphia was perceptibly different from here. He was still not sure of the ethics of it: it seemed like taking advantage of his deafness.

He managed not to think about Hawkeye again – or about BJ – until he was walking back from Central Station. When he did think about what had happened yesterday, he was standing outside the steakhouse just down the block from their apartment, and had to fight an unexpected temptation to go in and eat there. He stood on the sidewalk reading the menu posted outside, trying to look as if he really were making up his mind between a steak or a roast chicken dinner.

Hawkeye might not even be home. BJ might have called: Hawkeye might have gone out to meet with him.

Somehow Mulcahy liked that even less: but it made it possible to head for the apartment block. He would make himself dinner and go to bed early, if Hawkeye wasn't home. BJ and Hawkeye ought to make it up: they had been such good friends.

*I know Hawkeye's a queer, BJ's voice said. He tried to seduce me.*

*I got him drunk, I got my hands on him, I had him,* Hawkeye's voice – the one he heard inside his mind – was, in his mind, tired and explanatory: but he hadn't heard it with his ears. It could have been boastful, reminiscent, lubricious: he'd heard what he wanted to hear with his eyes.

The hall was empty. Mulcahy shut the door, trying to do it quietly. When he turned around, Hawkeye was standing a few feet away, dressed in his bathrobe. He had showered, or bathed, but he hadn't shaved.

It was like coming home. Mulcahy recognised the feeling. Hawkeye looked worn and red-eyed, his face was puffy and he didn't look very steady on his feet. He wasn't smiling. But he was looking at Mulcahy with an expression that usually made Mulcahy feel both uncertain and happy: he never knew what he did to cause it, and especially not this evening. It was as if something too good to be true had happened. It usually made Mulcahy smile, no matter how uncertain it made him feel. It was familiar. It was strange.

"Good evening," Mulcahy said. "You look terrible."

"Wages of gin," Hawkeye said. He dug his hands into the pockets of his bathrobe. "I don't remember last night too well, but I think I threw up right about where you're standing."

"I cleaned it up."

"I'm sorry about that. I hit BJ."

"Well, you tried. You missed."

"I'm sorry about that, too." Hawkeye might have meant that as a joke. "I called you a liar."

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Mulcahy stopped cold. “Oh,” he said.

“Just ‘oh’?” Hawkeye said. His face was expressionless. He leaned forward. “No denials? No prevarications? No more stories about unexploded munitions?”

Mulcahy swallowed, and shook his head. “BJ told me he’d told you how it happened.”

“Would you *ever* have told me if BJ hadn’t?” He rocked forward, giving emphasis to his words.

“Probably not.” Mulcahy eyed Hawkeye uneasily. “Do you think you should sit down? You still look a bit unsteady. I’ll start supper.”

“I ordered take-out from that Korean place.”

“You did?”

“It should be arriving right about now.”

As if on cue, the light in the hall began to flash. Someone was ringing the doorbell.

“Go wash your hands, Francis. I’ll get that.” As he passed Mulcahy on his way to the front door, his hand went out to Mulcahy’s shoulder, somewhere halfway between a clasp and a blow.

Mulcahy stood frozen a minute, watching Hawkeye’s back. He must be talking to the delivery boy; Mulcahy could smell spices and hot food. The blow had stung, no more. It was the measure of Hawkeye’s anger that hurt.

He got out his wallet before Hawkeye closed the door and turned round again. “What’s my share?”

“Forget it,” Hawkeye said. He shook his head, violently, when Mulcahy didn’t put the wallet away, and went past Mulcahy. He might have hit out again, but his hands were full.

When Mulcahy came through, Hawkeye was sitting at the table. Mulcahy sat down across from him, in his usual place. Hawkeye had transferred the food from the foil dishes the restaurant sent to china: he’d set the table with silverware and glasses. There was even a pair of chopsticks on Mulcahy’s side. Hawkeye picked up the wine bottle and poured Mulcahy a glass, as Mulcahy registered that there was a small china vase in the middle of the table with something in it – a piece of glossy paper, folded.

Hawkeye poured water for himself. He lifted his glass. “What shall we drink to?” He was smiling, but without humour. “Trust? Friendship? Honesty?”

Mulcahy picked up the paper. It was a picture of a rose, clipped from a magazine. “I can’t figure out if you’re angry with me or trying to romance me,” he said.

“How about both?” Hawkeye put his glass down without drinking from it. “You *lied* to me. You –” He stared at Mulcahy. “I never thought you’d do that.”

Mulcahy opened his mouth. He could have said, defensively, that he hadn’t so much lied as told the truth with intent to mislead. He realised, before the words were out, that splitting hairs wouldn’t help. “Yes,” he said. “I’m sorry. I didn’t see that it would make any difference, and there didn’t seem any point in upsetting you by telling you what actually happened.”

Hawkeye’s mouth twisted, and he shrugged hard. “Why didn’t you tell me when it happened?”

“You were....” Mulcahy’s voice trailed off. He stared at Hawkeye, feeling trapped.

“I was crazy.”

“You were in Tokyo.”

Both Hawkeye’s hands were gripping the table, his knuckles going white. “But I came back. And you didn’t tell me. You walked around camp for days letting everyone think you could hear, and you didn’t tell me. You let me say goodbye to you without telling me you couldn’t hear me.”

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Mulcahy sat still, silenced, not taking his eyes from Hawkeye's face.

"You didn't *tell* me," Hawkeye repeated. His mouth gave emphasis to the word.

"I'm very sorry," Mulcahy said. "I – perhaps I should have told someone – told you –" His voice dried up. He stared at Hawkeye. He had tried not to think about that awkward time, fumbling his way through encounters with people who didn't know he couldn't hear them. His last encounter with Hawkeye – when he'd expected never to see him again – had been both painful and embarrassing.

Hawkeye let go of the table. "I'm sorry," he said finally. "I didn't mean to badger you like this. Eat your supper."

"Aren't you going to eat?"

"I already had dry toast," Hawkeye said.

"Try some rice." Awkwardly, feeling some of the same tension and uncertainty he felt when he tried to comfort Hawkeye after a nightmare, he helped Hawkeye to food. Hawkeye didn't stop him.

"You ordered all the things I like," Mulcahy said. They'd ordered take-out from the Korean restaurant more than once, and he knew what Hawkeye would have ordered for himself. The food was good, and he was hungry.

He ate, and Hawkeye watched. Whenever Mulcahy looked up from his plate, Hawkeye was looking at him. An intent, predatory look. Not fond. It was disconcerting to see that look without the fondness.

"I meant to let you have supper before I started yelling at you," Hawkeye said. He was picking at the rice on his plate. He looked down and back up again. "Sorry."

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said again, feeling his way. "I don't see what else I could have done – at least, until the armistice was declared. I wanted to leave the orphanage as secure as I could. I suppose I could have told people after – after the war ended, before we all went home, but..." He could not imagine how he could have done it. "There would have been such a fuss."

Hawkeye grimaced. He opened his mouth, worked his jaw wordlessly a few times, and shut it again. He put his fork down to press his hands over his eyes.

"Hawkeye, if you're thinking what I think you're thinking –"

Hawkeye took his hands away from his eyes. "No," he said bluntly. "I don't think you have any idea what I'm thinking."

"That if I'd admitted what was wrong with me and asked for treatment, when it happened, my hearing might have been saved."

Hawkeye's jaw dropped, momentarily. He nodded. "Well, yeah, with a few additions that was pretty much what I was thinking."

"Doctor Lazar said nothing could have been done."

"I looked him up after you mentioned him last year," Hawkeye said. "Good ear man. But –"

"I don't think he was lying to me to make me feel better."

"How do I know *you're* not?" Hawkeye's finger jabbed out.

Mulcahy stared, disconcerted.

"I thought you didn't lie. I believed you. What else are you lying to me about?" Hawkeye reached out and grabbed at his hands, stopping him from taking his specs off. "No, you're going to listen to me, don't tell me to shut up –"

Hawkeye was leaning across the table, his face too close now to see what he was saying, twisted up. His hands gripped Mulcahy's hands, holding on tightly. He was still talking.

"I can't hear you," Mulcahy said.

## Sins and Virtues

Hawkeye let go and stood up from the table. One of the sleeves of his bathrobe had rice sticking to it; the other was stained with red sauce. He moved two steps away and turned his back. Mulcahy got up, no longer hungry, and went over to him.

“Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye turned round and put his hands out again. His nose was running. When Mulcahy took hold of him he was trembling. “Hawkeye...”

“Damn you,” Hawkeye said, and sat down on the sofa, still holding on to Mulcahy’s hands. He looked up at Mulcahy. “I can’t even have a good fight with you,” he said. “Every time I lose my temper you can’t figure out what I’m saying.” His hands clenched more tightly. “I love you. Right now I also hate you so much my guts are cramping up. Of course that might be the hangover.” He bent his head and leaned his face against Mulcahy’s forearms.

“Hawkeye?” Mulcahy got his hands out of Hawkeye’s grip, and sat down beside him, putting an arm round his shoulders.

Hawkeye turned his head. “I love you,” he said. “I really do love you. But I’m – ” he bent his head again. He was tense under Mulcahy’s hands.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said. “I thought it wouldn’t matter – I thought I’d never see any of you again, and it seemed – ”

There hadn’t seemed any way to suddenly announce, out of nowhere, “I’m deaf,” after so many days of pretending he could hear. The unit had been breaking up: Colonel Potter had been so busy. It had been easy even to avoid Hawkeye. Having to say goodbye, with a series of rehearsed speeches, trying to figure out what the opening and closing mouths were saying to him, had been wrenching. But once over, it should have been final. A priest’s life was meetings and partings. He hadn’t thought of this, but he had known he was coming to Hawkeye with needs he should have suppressed, or gone to a priest to confess and be forgiven –

He could feel Hawkeye’s muscles under his arm, hard with tension. Hating him. He lifted his arm from Hawkeye’s shoulders. “I should never have tried to see you again,” he admitted, finally, folding his hands together in his lap.

Hawkeye lifted his head and stared at him. “Do you mean that?”

Mulcahy swallowed. He was feeling tears prickling at him. “I never meant any of you to find out – I never meant to hurt you. I just wanted to – I was very – very upset,” He swallowed again, and got the words out. “I came to Maine because I hoped you’d seduce me again.”

Hawkeye’s mouth opened. “You wouldn’t let me,” he said after a minute’s silent, open-mouthed staring. “You wanted – and you wouldn’t let me even kiss you?”

“I knew it would be wrong.”

“Wrong?” Hawkeye’s eyes were getting wider. “Wrong? Do you think this is wrong?” Hawkeye leaned forward. “Do you think you’re going to hell for living with me?”

Mulcahy stood up. “Hawkeye, please don’t,” he said, and walked out of the room. He was at the door of his own room when he remembered taking the rosary out of his sock drawer last night: it was probably still on the chair in Hawkeye’s room.

It wasn’t there. He had been searching for it for about five minutes, under and beside the chair, before he looked up and saw Hawkeye standing by the door, holding his beads between his hands. “I found them when I woke up,” he said.

Mulcahy nodded. He got to his feet and held out his hand. Hawkeye handed him the rosary.

“So, what’s the verdict? Do you believe you’re going to hell for living with me?”

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy's hands closed round the cool, familiar weight. "I don't know," he said, through a tight throat. "Please, Hawkeye, I don't want to talk about this with you." In the ordinary way of things he could deal quite well with Hawkeye's black jokes about his faith, but not about this. "I know it looks foolish to you –"

"It doesn't," Hawkeye said. "You told me that before, and you're wrong. I don't think how you believe is foolish." He spoke angrily, his hands digging into his pockets. "I'm not joking and I'm not making fun of you, I really want to know – do you think you're going to hell?"

Mulcahy hooked the beads round his wrist for safekeeping. He supposed he had to answer Hawkeye as if he were serious, even though he probably wasn't. "Do you know the difference between hell and purgatory?"

Hawkeye looked startled, and shrugged. "No."

"If a person dies in a state of mortal sin, unreconciled with God, his soul goes to hell. In hell there is no further hope of contrition or forgiveness – it's said that this is the worst torment of hell, to know that you are forever exiled from God. The church says I am living in mortal sin with you." Saying it out loud reminded him again of BJ, and it was a moment before he could go on. "I don't believe I am. I don't – I don't *feel* unreconciled with God."

Hawkeye didn't laugh. He nodded. "So what is the difference between hell and purgatory?"

"They say, it's all the torments of hell, but God's grace at the end of it. Sounds like the Korean war."

Hawkeye nodded again. He still didn't smile. He pointed at the rosary. "What brought that on?"

Mulcahy swallowed. "BJ – last night, BJ –"

Hawkeye's face changed. "Did he do something *else* to you?"

*Please don't tell anyone.*

"He worked out –" Mulcahy glanced over his shoulder at the double bed. They slept here more often than in his room. "He worked out that we were sleeping together," he said, trying to make his voice matter-of-fact. "I asked him – he promised not to tell anyone."

"BJ," Hawkeye said. His face was expressionless. "He rang twice today, you know? Wanted to meet you for lunch tomorrow. I told him to go to hell."

"Should you have done that?"

Hawkeye laughed abruptly. "Look, whatever I think of BJ, and since about nine last night I think he's so low you could fit him under a carpet without leaving lumps, he's not a blabbermouth. He won't talk."

"I meant – you're friends," Mulcahy said, cautiously.

"No," Hawkeye said. "We're not. Not after what he did to you."

Mulcahy stared, baffled. "He kept his promise. I made him give me his solemn promise not to tell anyone, and he didn't break it, though he wanted to."

"He should have. He *didn't* want to. If he wanted to, he would've. I would have."

"A solemn promise?"

"Sure. Even if it wasn't you. I've done it before, I'd do it again. I'd have told. BJ was –" Hawkeye's hands were tapping against his legs. "He wasn't thinking about *you*." Hawkeye's fists hit his thighs. "He wasn't thinking about his oath as a physician or his responsibility to a patient or even to a *friend*." He hit his thighs again. "He was thinking about his happy family in California, nothing else. He just ran off and left you behind to go deaf without even leaving a damn note."

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Mulcahy managed to grab at Hawkeye's wrists. Hawkeye stared at him. "Don't do that," Mulcahy said.

"Do what?"

"Hit yourself."

"I'm not hitting myself."

"Yes, you were," Mulcahy said. "BJ wanted to go home – he wanted to go back to his wife and daughter. I wanted to stay in Korea and protect my children. If you're going to blame anyone, you have to blame me, as much as BJ, more so, because I *could* have told you – and I didn't. I'm sorry. But there's nothing any of us can do about it now, and it's not worth your hitting yourself over."

Hawkeye turned his hands to take hold of Mulcahy's wrists. The rosary beads shifted, cool smooth weight next to Hawkeye's warm grip.

"Last night – and when I woke up, this afternoon – I kept remembering," Hawkeye said slowly. "When I said goodbye to you at the 4077th, I thought we'd never see each other again. There we were, standing in the middle of a crowd, and – I told you that there was something I'd always wanted to say to you. I was hoping to get some kind of reaction out of you – like a blush, or the cute way your eyes would get wider when you thought I was going to do something – say something – that was over the line. But you had a perfect poker face, and I said my line and nothing changed. So I made a stupid joke, about your collar being on back to front, and you were just – nothing. I thought – you'd gotten over me."

"You laughed," Mulcahy said. He had been able to feel Hawkeye's body shaking, through Hawkeye's hug. BJ had signalled that Hawkeye was laughing. That was when he had realised that whatever Hawkeye had said, it had been supposed to be a joke.

"So did you."

They stood there and looked at each other. Hawkeye's face was a mess, and his eyes were bloodshot, but his gaze was steady. "You're the best thing that ever happened to me." He lifted Mulcahy's hands, firming his grip. "I love you."

"I love you," Mulcahy said. He stopped, hunting for words. "Last night – I told BJ -- "

"I don't care what you told him," Hawkeye interrupted.

"I told him I – " Mulcahy realised he was turning his face away from Hawkeye, as if he didn't want to see Hawkeye's response. He didn't.

Hawkeye changed his grip to hold on to Mulcahy's arms, and backed him gently across the room to the bed. It had been roughly made – it looked as if Hawkeye had hauled the covers straight, no more. "You want to talk?" he said, and sat down on the edge of the bed with Mulcahy. "Talk. I'm a captive audience." He lay down, pulling Mulcahy down with him, tugging him to lie with his head on Hawkeye's shoulder, his arms round Mulcahy, holding him.

"I told him I didn't think – that you're not a homosexual. Whatever it looked like." Mulcahy felt Hawkeye's chest shake under him, as if he was suppressing a laugh or a comment. "I told him – that I hoped you'd – lead a normal life. Someday."

Hawkeye let go of him, sat up, and backed away, all in one jerky action. He looked as if someone had hit him. "There isn't anything I can say, is there?" He shook his head, still looking as if a punch had landed. Mulcahy's heart lurched. "A 'normal' life?" His hands jerked. "You still think I'm going to leave you?"

"You – you've been in love with so many people, it's – " Hawkeye and Trapper had been a unit for as long as Captain McIntyre had been with the unit, virtually inseparable, behaving as much like twin brothers as lovers; Hawkeye and BJ had

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been... not quite the same kind of inseparable unit, but a devoted pair; and Carlye Walton. Three that Mulcahy had seen, and Hawkeye had mentioned three more.

“I thought – I thought if you were in love with a woman, it would be bearable – if I could think of you leading a normal life.”

“A normal life?” Hawkeye said again. He looked dazed. “You – ” He shook his head. “I – ” He was sitting with his shoulders hunched, and his face crumpled.

“Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said.

“Shut up,” Hawkeye said. He folded his arms and put his head down.

“I think you – ”

Hawkeye lifted his head again. “Shut up. I don’t want to hear this from you. I know you could do better than me. I’m neurotic, I’m bad-tempered, I drink too much, I wake up with screaming nightmares every week or so, and you don’t have to remind me that you watched me going through, down on, or to bed with half of the 4077th in three years.” He smiled crookedly. “And if the war had lasted six years instead of three, I’d have gone through half the rest. But I’m not going to be talked out of this. You’re the best thing that ever happened to me, and anyone who tries to tell me otherwise is going to get flattened. Including you.”

Mulcahy stared at him, silenced.

Hawkeye leaned forward and touched the side of his face with his fingers: a brief, oddly clumsy caress. “I know it’s not the same for you,” he said. His hand brushed down the side of Mulcahy’s face like a dry kiss. “You want to be a priest, you don’t want to be deaf, this is all – this is second-best. If I can’t be more than second-best, I want to be the best second-best you could ever have.”

“I love you,” Mulcahy said, though his mouth felt half-numb. “I wanted to tell you – what I told BJ last night – because I know, I knew when I said – it wasn’t what I wanted. I feel at home with you. You’re my home. You make me feel that it doesn’t matter that I’m deaf, I’m not a priest, I’m a failure – ” He might have stuttered. His tongue felt awkward, saying the words. “I love you terribly. More than – more than Mass.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “No – ” He was shaking when Mulcahy took hold of him, trembling violently. “No,” he said, before his face was too close to understand what he was saying, and he was kissing Mulcahy, rough and clumsy and desperate.

What filled Mulcahy’s mind at that moment was the thought of going down on Hawkeye. The taste of him: the feel of his dick solid under soft-velvet: the smell of him: the appearance of his dick, approached mouth-first from close quarters. The taste of his fingers in Mulcahy’s mouth, the look of his words on his face, the tenderness of his hands that transformed to a shaking, uncontrolled grip when Mulcahy knew what he was doing. The smell of his warmth: he smelt like sleep and sex and home. Communion without words.

Hawkeye was undressing him, quickly and expertly – the rosary beads went carefully to his bedside table, and all the rest was going here and there. Hawkeye was good at this, even when his hands shook, and he never stopped kissing. He was talking between kisses, but Mulcahy didn’t have to decode what he was saying: he knew what Hawkeye meant. Mulcahy managed to get Hawkeye out of his robe and was trying to ease off his boxer shorts when Hawkeye finished getting him naked, pinned him down by his shoulders, and began a swift journey of arousal, mouth and fingers, from his throat to his chest to his stomach to his dick –

Mulcahy curled his hands around Hawkeye’s head, made helpless, turning his head against Hawkeye’s thigh, feeling all his muscles clenching up and his mouth opening,

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making noises he could feel through his throat and his jaw as he felt Hawkeye's throat contracting around his dick –

He was boneless with pleasure. Hawkeye was smiling. Either he or Mulcahy had turned around: he was lying belly to belly with Hawkeye, and Hawkeye was looking down into his face, and smiling. It took Mulcahy some time to work out that he had no recollection of moving, and the ceiling behind Hawkeye's head was the ceiling as it looked from this end of the bed. Hawkeye was still wearing his boxer shorts: Mulcahy could feel the fabric.

"You never showed me how to do that." He yawned in Hawkeye's face, most impolitely, but Hawkeye didn't look offended.

"You're a quick study," Mulcahy thought he said, and laughed: Mulcahy could feel it down through his stomach.

"Isn't it extraordinary," Mulcahy said.

"What is?" That came through clearly.

Mulcahy was so intent on the unfocussed look of Hawkeye's face, he had forgotten how he meant to end the sentence. It took a moment before he remembered. "Oh yes. Extraordinary. How great pleasure takes away your sense of time as much as great pain. More so. Extraordinary," he said, and a wave of warmth slid drowsily over him and carried him down.

When he woke, Hawkeye was still lying over him, propping his weight on elbows and forearms. "Morning."

"What – how long did I sleep?"

Hawkeye's eyebrows signalled *gotcha*. "Ten minutes."

Mulcahy twitched. "You've just been watching me sleep?" For ten minutes?

"Of course not. I did the *Times* crossword, and read an article about total repair of tetralogy of Fallot." Hawkeye grinned. "And I put your specs back on." After a long moment, he said, "I could tell you weren't deep asleep. Figured you'd either wake up or go deep, and you woke up."

"You want to – I should –" Mulcahy could feel Hawkeye's body pressed against his, all the way down, and Hawkeye's dick was soft behind his shorts. "Did you –?"

"What?"

"You didn't... didn't let me do anything."

Hawkeye frowned. "Yeah," he said. "It's okay."

Comprehension dawned. "Were you... are you..."

"I'd tell you this has never happened before," Hawkeye said, still with a frown that looked increasingly like embarrassment, "but you'd know I was lying."

"Oh." Mulcahy was hit by what he was sure was an inappropriate – impolite – unsympathetic, anyway – urge to giggle. Worse, if he did start laughing, Hawkeye could not fail to feel it, even if Mulcahy managed to keep it inside. He was finding it hard to keep the impulse buried. "I'm sorry," he said out loud.

Hawkeye frowned down at him. Possibly he felt Mulcahy's stomach muscles clenching to resist laughter. "You see if you think it's so funny when it happens to you," he said.

"It has," Mulcahy said, still struggling. "Only I used to think of it as a blessing." He surrendered, and let himself laugh. After a moment, Hawkeye dropped his head on to Mulcahy's shoulder and stayed as still and warm and heavy as if he had gone to sleep. He didn't move until after Mulcahy had stopped laughing.

"Okay," he said. He looked both amused and embarrassed. "Okay. Are we done now?"

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“Well, I am,” Mulcahy said. “Shall we get up?”

“It’s not really morning.”

“We left all that food on the table.”

“Are you hungry?”

“No, but – ”

“Then let’s leave it till morning.”

“That would be a waste.”

“I don’t care.” Hawkeye locked his hands behind Mulcahy’s head. “Did you think when I said I wasn’t hungry I was being polite? Do you really want to eat leftovers for breakfast?”

Mulcahy put his hands up and pushed at Hawkeye’s shoulders. Hawkeye sat up slowly, eyeing him. “We can’t leave it there on the table overnight,” Mulcahy said.

His own bathrobe was through in his own room: Hawkeye’s needed to go into the laundry. It did not occur to Mulcahy till they were both clearing up the dishes and plates from the table that left to himself Hawkeye would probably have walked through to the kitchen in his shorts, or naked, not pulled on his pyjama jacket to match Mulcahy putting back on his shirt and his undershorts.

Naked and unashamed. Hawkeye had walked into the mess tent naked from his shoes to his cap: a bet from McIntyre.

Faced with BJ’s knowledge, Mulcahy had said – had whimpered *Please don’t tell anyone*.

Faced with the knowledge that BJ knew, Mulcahy hadn’t been able to lie down beside Hawkeye.

“Are we done now?” Hawkeye asked again.

Mulcahy stared at him.

“Can we go back to bed now?” Hawkeye looked at him, wide-eyed.

Mulcahy swallowed. “Hawkeye, can you do me a favour?”

“Sure, anything. What?”

“Call BJ for me and tell him – ask him where to meet them for lunch tomorrow.”

Hawkeye’s willingness disappeared. “You don’t want to see him.”

*No, I don’t.* “I think I should. I need to tell him – I didn’t think to tell him what Doctor Lazar said.”

“Good.”

Mulcahy waited. Hawkeye said nothing more.

“Please call BJ for me,” Mulcahy said at last. He didn’t want to have to get dressed again and go downtown to the hotel where BJ was staying.

Hawkeye’s eyes looked hollow with shadows. Finally, he said “I don’t want to talk to him again.”

Mulcahy tried to smile. “Perhaps Mrs Hunnicutt will answer the phone.”

Hawkeye’s mouth twisted. He turned and went out of the kitchen. He was standing holding the phone, jabbing his fingers into the dial, when Mulcahy followed him out.

“What do you want me to say to him?”

“When can I meet them tomorrow.”

“It would be easier,” Hawkeye said, looking away from the phone, “if I just passed on the message about what Doctor Lazar said.”

“Just when. And where.”

“I’ll tell them where,” Hawkeye said. “Okay.” He seemed to be talking to the operator at the hotel; but when his face was turned toward the phone receiver, it was impossible to tell what he was saying. His hand was tapping, but not against his leg; against the wall. He finished, and put the phone down.

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“I told them one o’clock,” Hawkeye said. “Rico’s, down by Battery Park, faces south, I’ll call and book a table for the three of you by the front window. Try the pesto chicken, it’s great.”

“Four,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah, you’ll get to meet Erin Hunnicutt. I’ve already heard all about her. In detail.”

“I want you to come with me.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. He gave the telephone directory an immovable, insolent look, and went on flipping through it. When he had made the second phone call – to the restaurant, Mulcahy thought – he dropped the directory on the floor by the shelf, and walked out of the room.

Through in his bedroom, Hawkeye was sitting on the edge of the bed with his hands locked together between his knees. He looked up as Mulcahy came in. “Tired?” Mulcahy stopped. Hawkeye’s face held no invitation. He looked tired.

“Are you all right?”

“I hate BJ. I want a drink. I’m impotent. You want any more?”

Mulcahy came closer, uncertain. “You didn’t seem to mind before...?”

Hawkeye shrugged. He put his hand out and caught hold of Mulcahy’s wrist. “I minded,” he said. “It just didn’t seem to matter that much.”

“I wanted –” Mulcahy came closer. “I want to give you a blow-job.” It was the first time he had ever said anything so explicit, and he was conscious of his face burning, but he met Hawkeye’s eyes with determination.

Hawkeye shifted his hand further up to grasp at Mulcahy’s elbow. “No point,” he said, and tugged, bringing Mulcahy down to sit on the bed beside him. “Just wear your mouth out without getting anywhere.” He leaned sideways and kissed him. “I want you to do me a favour.”

“Anything, if I can,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye was looking at him with a kind of steady-eyed desperation. His hands were moving a little on Mulcahy’s arms, shifting and uncertain.

“I want to take you out to breakfast tomorrow,” he said.

Mulcahy nodded, surprised.

“After you go to Mass.”

Mulcahy jerked his hands back. He shook his head. Hawkeye was on his feet, hands out. Mulcahy discovered he was three feet further away from Hawkeye than he’d thought, and feeling dizzy. He kept himself on his feet. Hawkeye’s hands fell to his thighs.

“What –”

“Mass,” Hawkeye said. “At that church down the block. Or somewhere else. They do mass at that church at seven in the morning and at half past ten. I didn’t look at the boards outside the other churches, but –”

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“You haven’t been to Mass in four weeks. Four weeks tomorrow.”

*Five.* Mulcahy opened his mouth, closed it again. “Why?”

“You want to go to Mass.”

“I *can’t*.”

“You can.” Hawkeye’s face had taken on that look of immovable insolence again: it was *different* when it was directed straight at you, Mulcahy realised. “You said you couldn’t because anything you said about how you were living would be a lie.”

Mulcahy opened his mouth.

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Hawkeye's hand came at him with savage punctuation. "You can't tell them you work at the New York School for the Deaf? You can't tell them you're spending far too much of your spare time studying for your New York teacher training certificate at CUNY? You can't tell them you're sharing this apartment with Doctor Pierce, who you worked with in Korea, and who sub-lets his spare room to you? What part of any of that is a lie?"

"They won't know..." Mulcahy's voice trailed off. "I can't tell them..." He had fought with Hawkeye before, and won or lost: he had never tried to face down Hawkeye in this kind of mood. Hawkeye had never looked at him like this. "They'll notice... people do notice...that I don't – can't take Communion."

"Will they ask you why?"

"The priest will," Mulcahy said. He would have. "It's the kind of thing a good priest... does."

"What if he does? Do you have to tell him? What's he going to do if you just don't tell him? What if you do tell him – he can't tell anyone else, can he?"

"Unless I tell him in confession, of course he can," Mulcahy retorted.

"Just don't tell him, then," Hawkeye said. "He can't make you talk." His face changed as if he were laughing, but so briefly it might have been a grimace. "No one can make you talk."

"But it's still a lie."

"Because you're letting them believe something that isn't true?" Hawkeye loomed closer. His face was distorted. "You were willing to lie to me." He was too close to understand, but Mulcahy could fill out the rest of what he was saying.

"Why are you doing this to me?" Mulcahy asked again. He felt numb and astonished.

Hawkeye moved back. "I want you to go to Mass," he repeated.

"Hawkeye – " Mulcahy wasn't sure whether the feeling in his throat was a sob or laughter. "Why? It makes – it makes no difference to you – "

"You want to go to Mass," Hawkeye said, again.

Mulcahy pushed down on his anger. "You can't – " He fought to be able to say it in a calm voice. "You're a very generous man. I know you don't like me to be unhappy. But you can't – you can't give me – you can't change something like this."

"I don't want to change the entire Roman Catholic church," Hawkeye said. "I just want you to go to Mass."

"You're not listening to me," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye's face twisted. "I don't even know how much of this you're getting."

Mulcahy swallowed. "Enough to know you want me to go to Mass – and you're not listening to me when I tell you I can't."

"You can," Hawkeye said. "The only reason you don't is because you care more about not telling the whole truth about something that's none of their business to a bunch of people who don't even know you – " He was yelling. There was nothing clear after that.

Mulcahy sat down in the chair and put his head down in his hands. When he lifted his head after a minute, Hawkeye was sitting on the edge of the bed again, looking at him.

He hadn't wanted to meet with BJ, because he was ashamed that BJ knew. Not fear of what BJ would do – he didn't suppose that BJ would do or want to do anything with the information that Mulcahy was a homosexual, was living with Hawkeye – having sex with Hawkeye – and not honest guilt at having sinned: the flinch he felt when he thought of lunch with BJ tomorrow was shame, painful and childish.

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He didn't want to go to Mass because he was ashamed.

He'd known he couldn't refuse to meet with BJ out of shame. "I'll go to Mass," he said.

Hawkeye looked at him. "I'm sorry," he said, after a minute. "What I said – was over the line."

Mulcahy shook his head. He was shivering, he realised, even though he knew the room was warm. "I didn't hear half of it." He managed a smile. "I expect you were right, though."

"Meek and stubborn," Hawkeye said, after a moment. "I really hate that."

Mulcahy stared. After a moment, he got out a shuddery laugh. It was a joke. It wasn't even the worst possible joke Hawkeye could have made. He stood up. So did Hawkeye.

"I should," Mulcahy said, fumbling. "I should take a shower." He turned his back on Hawkeye and walked out.

He was showering, looking down at his body, staring at his dick. There was nothing to show that Hawkeye had taken it deep into his mouth – into his throat: there was no visible difference on his body. He could walk into the church tomorrow and no one would see. No one would know.

*Dear Lord*, he thought, and couldn't think any other words to the prayer. *Dear Lord, dear Lord...*

He was dried and towelling his hair when Hawkeye came in. Mulcahy looked up, smiled, nodded and went out again. He stood in the hall for a minute.

Hawkeye had overwhelmed him, exactly as he had the first time. The only difference was that he hadn't tried to fight it – and he hadn't tried – hadn't even thought of trying to do anything in return. He had fallen asleep.

He hadn't gone to sleep like that in years. Perhaps he never had.

Some part of him wanted to turn left, not right, go to his cold tidy bed and lie there using his familiar strategies for going to sleep without thinking about – what he should not think about, if he wanted to be able to serve Mass in the morning.

He wouldn't be serving Mass in the morning, or ever again. He wasn't a priest any more.

*Fly fornication. Every sin that a man doth is without the body: but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Or know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God: and you are not your own?*

*Dear Lord, help me.*

He turned right and went into Hawkeye's room. The bed was a mess: he pulled at the bedding to straighten it.

Mrs Bradford knew. If BJ could figure out two people were sleeping in this bed after only looking at it for a few minutes, Mrs Bradford must know.

Mulcahy lay down on his usual side of the bed. He turned on his side and folded his arms to pillow his head. When the centre light was turned off, and he felt Hawkeye sit down on the edge of the bed and move to lie behind him, not touching him, he did not move.

Hawkeye didn't turn the bedside lights off. Mulcahy lay there, wishing he could hear Hawkeye breathing. When he turned, Hawkeye was propped on one elbow, watching him, with a sad and doubtful expression that changed, as Hawkeye saw him turn, to a careful smile.

Mulcahy reached out to turn his bedside light off. Hawkeye shrugged a little, and reached to do the same. Safe from conversation, Mulcahy lay down again, on his

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back, feeling Hawkeye's weight shift on the mattress at his side. He fumbled for and found Hawkeye's hand, and lay still, holding on, waiting to go to sleep.

It was well after seven when Mulcahy woke. Hawkeye was still asleep. In his sleep he had turned over and curled his arm over Mulcahy's chest, holding on as if he could do something to protect Mulcahy. They usually seemed to move together in their sleep: it had not occurred to Mulcahy to wonder about that, until this morning when it seemed as if he hadn't moved in the night, but lain as still and straight as a sleeper on a monastery bed, or an army cot.

Mulcahy got up. He made his way to the kitchen, and began, automatically, to brew coffee: enough for two.

Hawkeye appeared, bleary-eyed, but looking better than yesterday. He accepted the big mug of coffee, looking as if he was still more asleep than not, and drank. He looked as if he were about to say something, and then didn't.

They moved through to the living room, without talking about it, and sat down on the sofa. Hawkeye said finally, "You don't –"

Mulcahy shook his head, hard. "Don't," he said. His hand went out, fending off whatever it was Hawkeye was going to say.

Hawkeye drank his coffee. "I was going to say," he said, though Mulcahy was fairly sure that wasn't what he had meant to say, "you don't want breakfast – till afterwards?"

"I don't have to fast," Mulcahy said. "Or I couldn't drink this."

"Coffee *counts*?" Hawkeye's eyebrows moved with his grin. He glanced at the clock. "We've got an hour – you want pancakes?"

"I'm not hungry."

Hawkeye shrugged. He got up before his coffee mug was half-emptied and took himself and it to the kitchen. He came back a few minutes later with a refilled mug and a plate of toast. Mulcahy ate one slice, then another; Hawkeye ate the rest.

If Hawkeye had asked, Mulcahy would have said no. He was fairly sure of that. But they left the apartment together, and walked towards the church together, and Hawkeye never asked: unless the under-eyebrows glance and shrug could be called a question.

Mulcahy tried not to look at him and he could not hear him, but he was conscious that Hawkeye was there, shadowing Mulcahy. He genuflected, dipped his fingers in the holy water stoup, crossed himself, and repeated, lacking any other prayer in his mind, *Dear Lord*.

He knew, though he didn't turn his head to look, that Hawkeye had stopped when he stopped, but hadn't made any other motion – an agnostic Protestant, it seemed unlikely Hawkeye had ever been to High Mass.

*Dear Lord, help me.*

*No one has to know. No one can know.*

He found a half-empty pew, not too far back or forward, and saluted the altar, feeling a coldness grip him. He felt Hawkeye sit down beside him. He fixed his eyes on the window above the altar – Christ crucified, Mary his mother to his right and St John to his left, Mary the Magdalene kneeling at his feet – and tried to pray.

The congregation stirred, and Mulcahy saw the priest enter with the deacon and sub-deacon and choristers following after. From then on, he knew the ritual of the Mass, changeless in time or place, whether or not he could hear the priest's Latin or the responses; but it required more concentration than prayer to know when to stand,

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to sit, to kneel, to cross himself. In a church where they were not used to deaf parishioners, he did not try to repeat any of the prayers or the Creed out loud.

The priest raised the cup. Mulcahy knew the words: he should not say them, out loud or in intention. The bread and the wine were the body and the blood: the real presence of Christ was on the altar.

*Dear Lord.*

He was conscious, vividly conscious, of Hawkeye next to him. Hawkeye had knelt when he had knelt, as he had stood when Mulcahy had stood, as if he could be Mulcahy's reflection, not his shadow.

He was as vividly conscious of the presence of Christ in the church: an intense – intent brightness, the light through the stained-glass window, the hairs lifting on the back of his neck, the remembered taste of watered wine and unleavened bread.

*He knows.* Mulcahy sat still. He knew himself completely vulnerable, and utterly secure. He was held, and prayer was easy.

*Dear Lord, you know I love Hawkeye. You know how I love Hawkeye. Forgive me my sins. Bless Hawkeye, and have him always in your keeping. Bless us, dear Lord, and our friendship.*

The congregation – the communicant part of the congregation – were lining up. He and Hawkeye were not the only two left behind on the pews, but they were the only two on this one. Hawkeye glanced at him. Mulcahy nodded reassurance, and bent his head again to repeat an act of contrition.

Mass ended. Mulcahy stood up: after a glance at him, Hawkeye stood. He looked as if he had a dozen questions, all coming to the top of his mind at once.

The priest was shaking hands with his congregation on their way out the door. Mulcahy didn't try to dodge past: Hawkeye shot him a glance, but stuck next to him. This priest didn't have as kind a face as Father Saunders: but armoured in confidence, Mulcahy met his eyes and shook his hand.

Out on the street the sunlight reached him: he blinked at it. Hawkeye struck out across the road and Mulcahy followed. He was sitting at the dining table, a mug of coffee in front of him, before he remembered. "Weren't you going to buy me breakfast?"

"I'll make you French toast in a minute," Hawkeye said. "You want to tell me what happened in there?"

"You were right," Mulcahy said. "I can go to Mass."

Hawkeye rubbed the side of his face with his knuckles. "I pushed you," he said. "I'd been thinking about it every Sunday morning, but you know why last night was the first time I brought it up?"

"You were angry with me," Mulcahy said.

"Yeah," Hawkeye said. He dropped the flat of his hand to the table.

"I'm sorry I had to ask you to call BJ."

Hawkeye shrugged. "I'm sorry you had to ask me twice."

Mulcahy looked at his watch. "I'll have to leave in half an hour to meet them. Is there any way I can persuade you to come with me?"

"No," Hawkeye said. "What *happened* in there? You were – I was worried about you. You were acting like a sleepwalker – you were – you seemed to be –" He fumbled and dropped the closing noun. "I was afraid to let you cross the street by yourself!"

"Is that why you came to Mass?"

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“I wanted – ” Hawkeye looked away, looked back again. “You were acting like you were – I’ve never seen you like that. I was afraid to let you cross the street this morning. I was afraid I’d pushed you too far. But something happened in there – ”

“I was ashamed,” Mulcahy said. He looked across the table at Hawkeye. “I’m – I was – ” He reached out and took Hawkeye’s hand in both of his. “I was ashamed that anyone else would know, or even guess, what we... that we make love. I forgot – ” He hesitated. “God knows I love you.”

Hawkeye’s grip was fierce and fast. He was smiling, an odd twist to his mouth, but his eyes were full of tears.

“I should have gone to Mass before,” Mulcahy said. “Thank you for pushing me into going. Thank you for coming with me.”

“You’re welcome,” Hawkeye said. He didn’t let go of Mulcahy’s hands. “You know that’s the first time – the very damn first time – you’ve ever said that we make love?” He put his head down, and lifted Mulcahy’s hands in his, dropping a kiss on the back of his hand, another on his knuckles. He raised his head, looking at Mulcahy. “Yeah, I was angry with you last night. But I’d been thinking... I keep thinking... if you had to choose between giving up your religion and giving up me, I know which I’d bet on in the long run.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “Hawkeye – ”

Hawkeye kissed his hands again. He looked up. “What?”

“I wish you didn’t think of yourself as second-best,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye shrugged. He wasn’t grinning any more. “Second-best to God,” he said. “Most men would be happy with that. I’ll try and deal with it. I wish you didn’t think of yourself as a failure.”

Mulcahy stared at him. “But I – ”

“You were the best priest I ever knew,” Hawkeye said. “Think of it like Charles always used to say: ‘I do one thing at a time, I do it very well, and then I move on to the next’.”

The laugh that broke out of him felt almost like a hiccup. Mulcahy gripped at Hawkeye’s hands. “But it always used to drive you crazy when he said that in O.R..”

“Let’s face it, it was a short drive.” Hawkeye was grinning again. “You want French toast or you want to take me to bed and make love to me? I’m feeling much better now.” He leered cheerfully.

“I’d really – ” Mulcahy shivered. He wanted nothing more. “I really – I really need to go meet BJ and Peg for lunch.”

“Fine,” Hawkeye said. He didn’t let go of Mulcahy’s hands. “You go see Mr and Mrs Happy from California.”

“Will you – ”

Hawkeye let go of Mulcahy at last, turning his hands palm down on the table. “If I see Beej again any time soon, I’m going to flatten him,” he said “And by ‘soon’ I mean any time in the next fifty years. You don’t want to know what I’d do if I were sitting across the table from him for an hour trying to eat lunch. Nor do I, but I don’t want to find out. I’m a man of peace, and BJ would be a man in pieces. You go. Fine. Go on.”

“Hawkeye – ” Mulcahy didn’t like this.

Hawkeye leaned back in his chair. “I mean it,” he said. “I’m not going. You go if you want to. Take your time. I’ll be here when you get back.”

Mulcahy nodded.

“I mean it. I’m not coming with you.” Hawkeye grimaced. “I can’t believe I said that.”

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy surprised himself by giggling. “You didn’t last night.”

Hawkeye’s mouth opened and his head went back. He was laughing too hard to speak for a moment. He looked at Mulcahy, and his eyes held almost more affection and admiration than Mulcahy thought he could bear.

He got up and went round the table: Hawkeye turned towards him. Mulcahy put his hands on Hawkeye’s shoulders, leaning on Hawkeye, feeling him still laughing. “I love you,” he said.

Hawkeye’s arms went round Mulcahy’s waist and he pressed his face in against his stomach. He didn’t say anything. He was still laughing a little: Mulcahy could feel his shoulders jerk and his body tremble.

When he let go and stood up, he was still smiling. “You sure you have to go?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. “I said I would.”

“Okay. I’ll walk down with you.”

Mulcahy looked at him.

“I’m not going to lunch with Mr and Mrs California,” Hawkeye said. “I’m just going downtown with you.”

The table the waiter showed him to was right in front of the window. Mulcahy sat down with his back to it and asked for a glass of water. He wasn’t sure if it would be easier or more difficult if Hawkeye *was* here, but he wished he was.

Knowing with certainty that he didn’t need to be ashamed didn’t mean he wouldn’t be.

The glass of water and the Hunnicutts arrived at the same time: Mulcahy stood up, shook hands with BJ, with Peg, with Erin – a tall child for three.

The waiter came back with telephone directories for Erin to sit on: Mulcahy reclaimed his seat with his back to the light. Menus were handed out. Peg seated Erin next to her, and BJ sat down next to Mulcahy.

“I’m told the pesto chicken’s good,” Mulcahy said. He glanced sideways at BJ, in time to see him nod and say something.

Mulcahy clenched his hands together under the table. He willed his voice to sound even. “Mrs Hunnicutt – ”

“Peg.”

“Peg, I’m profoundly deaf. I can’t hear unless I can see your face. I’m afraid we won’t be able to have much of a conversation unless you and BJ are both sitting across from me.” He had never said anything so explicit to anyone he had just met outside a school or a Deaf Club, without extreme need: but, without fuss, Peg said “BJ, why don’t you and Erin change places? Erin, be a good girl.”

Erin got down from the chair and smiled widely, saying something that made Peg – and BJ, Mulcahy saw – laugh. Peg turned to Mulcahy, as BJ was arranging the telephone directories and planting Erin on them, and said “She said she’s always a good girl.”

Mulcahy smiled. “It’s good to meet you at last – to meet you both. BJ talked so much about you when he was in Korea.”

“He wrote about you a lot,” Peg said. She must know, then, that he had been a priest, and wasn’t any more: but she said nothing about that.

They ordered lunch: neither BJ nor Peg asked why Hawkeye wasn’t there. Erin got a small bowl of pasta twists and plain green salad: when she’d finished both, the waiter came back with a plate of tiny pastries. Peg talked more than BJ: an easy flow of questions and small talk, the kind of conversation that made parish visits a pleasure.

## Sins and Virtues

Erin had sat still for twenty minutes, more or less: Peg paused her conversation sometimes to say a word to her, and sometimes BJ said something that was probably a response to something Mulcahy couldn't hear.

"Is Doctor Courmand really as special as BJ thinks?"

"I gather he's a very good surgeon." Hawkeye was passionate about him: resentful about his jokes, almost furious with admiration of his skill as a surgeon.

"BJ was saying there was a post open for a surgeon in San Rafael, but he didn't think Hawkeye would want to take it."

Mulcahy glanced at BJ, a little startled. BJ shrugged, looking embarrassed. "It was just an idea. I thought Hawkeye would like California. He said he wanted to be a family doctor in Crabapple Cove –"

"When did he say that?"

BJ looked, if possible, more embarrassed. "At the farewell dinner we had. Hawkeye said he was going to go back to work in Crabapple Cove. But he didn't stay there long, did he?"

"I didn't know," Mulcahy said. The only letter he'd had from Hawkeye, right after he had got back from Korea, had – he thought – been sent from Crabapple Cove, but then he'd done his best not to think about Hawkeye, and he hadn't kept the letter.

He'd missed something BJ had said.

"– there's no way he'd want to leave Courmand, is there?"

"I suppose not," Mulcahy agreed, mildly.

Out of the corner of his eye, Mulcahy saw Erin playing with the pastries: she had a glass of milk half-drunk that she put in the middle of the plate like a tower, and her game involved lining the pastries up around the glass, and picking one to eat and then rearranging the survivors. She was probably talking to herself, explaining the game out loud, given how her parents were responding: Mulcahy couldn't see her face. She ate the last pastry, and turned the glass on the plate.

"Drink your milk," BJ said.

Erin's head leaned forward.

"Drink your milk and I'll take you out to the park," Peg said.

Erin's head jerked forward, then back.

"No, you cannot," Peg said. She looked apologetically at Mulcahy. "I'm sorry. She's been very good, but –"

Mulcahy smiled. "I understand."

"We were planning to take the ferry ride to the Statue of Liberty," Peg said. "Want to come along?"

"Thank you," Mulcahy said.

"Then let's meet up by the ferry ride in about half an hour," BJ said.

"Make it an hour," Peg said. She smiled. "I'm going to try to get her to have an N A P."

BJ laughed. He reached out and caught hold of Peg's hand. Probably to Erin, he said "– your milk, then!"

The milk got drunk, and Erin got down from the table. She was smiling. She said something, and BJ got up to kiss her. She said something else, and Peg caught at Erin's hand and moved towards the door. Both of them turned to wave goodbye at the door.

BJ sat back in his chair and looked at Mulcahy. Mulcahy looked back at him. BJ looked sober, and under the sobriety, embarrassed. The unspeaking moment stretched. Mulcahy wanted Hawkeye here: whether he said the right thing or the wrong thing, at least he'd break the silence.

## Sins and Virtues

“Well,” he said. “Here we are.”

BJ looked as if he was half-laughing, still embarrassed. “I’m glad you came to lunch. I wasn’t sure you would.”

Mulcahy stared down at the remains of the pesto chicken on his plate. He looked up again. “I’m sorry Hawkeye didn’t make it.”

“Is he sober now?” At Mulcahy’s nod, BJ looked as if he were chuckling again. “He’d have flattened me.” He looked down at his own plate, and pushed it away. He folded his arms in front of himself. “I wish he had, though. I’m sorry, Francis.”

“I went to see a specialist when I came home from Korea. Dr Jonathan Lazar. He told me that nothing could have been done to save my hearing.”

“Is that true?”

“I wouldn’t lie to you, BJ,” Mulcahy said. He felt his voice was a little flat, but BJ didn’t comment on it.

BJ’s expression didn’t change, but his body language did: he relaxed a little, and then he shifted his chair and his gaze flicked up and then down.

“I don’t think Dr Lazar was lying to me to make me feel better,” Mulcahy said.

BJ looked startled. “I – It doesn’t make any difference. I shouldn’t have kept that promise.”

“I shouldn’t have asked you to make it,” Mulcahy said. “But I can’t – I really can’t regret it.” Saying it out loud, he knew it was true. It might be more difficult to convince Hawkeye, but he had time. “If I’d gone to the evac hospital, and then to Tokyo, once they found out my hearing loss was permanent, they’d never have sent me back. I’d have left those children unprovided for.” He had never been sure what good he had done at the 4077th, but at least he’d helped to keep some of the orphaned children of the war fed and clothed. “I don’t regret staying – or anything about that promise, except if – except – ”

He found this unexpectedly difficult to say. *I got him drunk, I got my hands on him, I had him.* Hawkeye and BJ, leaning against each other, hugging each other with casual affection, making jokes – He took his specs off, reached for a napkin, and polished the lenses. “Except if this damaged your friendship with Hawkeye.” He put his specs back on. BJ was a very handsome man.

BJ looked as if he sighed. He leaned forward, planting his elbows on the table. “Hawkeye is mad as hell with me, and I deserve it. Look – I didn’t mean to bring this up, but – about you and Hawkeye – ”

Mulcahy kept his face still.

“You said the other night this was just – just a temporary thing. Is that because you’re planning to move on when you’ve got your teacher’s certificate and you don’t need to share an apartment any more?”

Mulcahy stared, completely blank with astonishment.

“What I mean is – ” BJ looked as if he was finding this almost as hard to say as Mulcahy found it to listen to “ – I had – I have some experience – I know how persuasive Hawkeye can be.”

Mulcahy swallowed. He remembered the look on Hawkeye’s face last night, as if someone had punched him, and wondered if he looked as shaken now. *Planning to move on?* Behind the astonishment was something else.

“I know,” BJ said, “because it – because he persuaded me. We didn’t – but it wasn’t because I wasn’t persuaded.”

*He can be overwhelming.* Mulcahy almost wanted to say that out loud, but he knew he hadn’t spoken.

## Sins and Virtues

“But I – Look, I’m not a – I know I’m not. I love Peg, and I...” BJ stopped talking. “Do you want coffee, or dessert, or anything?”

“No,” Mulcahy said.

“Okay,” BJ said. “Look, let’s go get – let me pay the check and go for a walk.”

Mulcahy shook his head. He took a breath. “BJ, I’m very sorry, but – ” He took another breath. “If you want to keep – if you want to keep talking about this to me, then I – ” Another breath. “I find it easier to follow what you’re saying if you’re sitting across from me in a good light than if I’m walking with you and trying to see your face.” The only thing worse than sitting listening to this would be walking along catching glimpses of what BJ was saying.

“Oh.” BJ stopped. “Okay.” He sat still for a minute, without saying anything. He looked around. The table in the window was slightly isolated from the others in the restaurant, and the large family at the table nearest theirs was getting up from it in a good deal of confusion, quite evidently paying them no attention. BJ leaned forward a little. “What I wanted to say was, I’m not a queer, but I – in some way, on some level – ” He stopped again, and went on slowly, “On every level, except the one right at the top of my mind, I knew that Hawkeye loved me. I knew he’d let me do anything to him, tease him, mock him, play jokes on him – so long as he knew I – ” BJ swallowed again. “I love him too, you see.”

Mulcahy nodded. None of this was news to him. He remembered Hawkeye with BJ.

“You said you didn’t think Hawkeye was a queer,” BJ said. “I don’t know if he is or he isn’t. But I think I found out on Friday night what he wouldn’t – he couldn’t let me do, and still – feel for me.”

Mulcahy nodded again. *And you miss him. And he’ll miss you.* He dropped his gaze from BJ’s face for a moment, and failed to catch the beginning of the next sentence.

“ – maybe you think that this is just something that happens when Hawkeye’s living with someone. Maybe it is. But I think – and I’d like you to tell him – that he’s mad as hell at me the same way I’d be mad if someone did that to Peg, and I found out about it.”

“You want me to tell Hawkeye – ” Mulcahy couldn’t process the end of the sentence. He felt for the notepad in the inside pocket of his jacket, flipped it open to a blank page, and pushed it at BJ.

BJ looked down at it. “You want me to write that down?”

Mulcahy nodded. When BJ looked up at him, he said “Yes.”

“Which bit of it do you want me to write down?”

“If you have a message for Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said, and took a breath, trying to keep his voice level. “If you write it down, I’ll – ” Another breath. “I’ll give it to him.” It was very hard for him to keep looking at BJ’s face. He was frightened by his jealousy. He hadn’t felt like this when he used to see Hawkeye with BJ at the 4077th: he didn’t understand why he was feeling it now as BJ, with odd looks at Mulcahy, wrote on his notepad. Mulcahy could read handwriting upside down pretty well, but he didn’t even want to try.

BJ pushed the notepad back to Mulcahy. He picked it up, flipped it shut, and slid it back. “I’ll give him your message.”

“Are you all right?”

Mulcahy nodded. He made himself smile, certain it looked false, but BJ smiled back. He looked concerned.

“Shall we go for a walk?”

“Sure,” BJ said. “But – can we talk?”

## Sins and Virtues

“Aren’t we done?” Mulcahy managed another smile.

“Well, I kind of wanted to find out why you’re not a priest.”

“It’s not something I like to talk about.”

“Peg thought it might be because you’re deaf.”

Mulcahy stared.

“I’m sorry,” BJ said.

“Why did she think that?”

“She said she read about it somewhere,” BJ said.

“Well – ” Mulcahy cleared his throat. He was, past all the muddle of his feeling, amused. “It’s true that my bishop thought it would be very difficult for me to continue being an active priest, and if I were born deaf I could never have been ordained, and -- ” He could not suppress a swift grin. “That’s actually a very comforting thought.”

“That they might have kicked you out for being deaf?”

Mulcahy nodded.

“That’s not a comforting thought for me.”

*God forgive me*, Mulcahy thought, still feeling a very uncharitable amusement. *I don’t really care*. He kept his face still. “I’m sorry I shouted at you last night. Please don’t blame yourself for what happened.”

It was as difficult to talk with BJ, walking in the park, as Mulcahy had thought it would be: it wasn’t a natural way to walk, with your face turned towards the other person, and BJ kept looking ahead, or around him at the view.

They found Peg sitting on a park bench, with Erin asleep with her head in Peg’s lap, and stood talking with her for a little while until Erin woke up and said something. BJ laughed, and said to Mulcahy, “She wants to go on the ferry ride now.”

Erin said something else. She was looking from BJ to Mulcahy.

“She asked if you were coming with us,” BJ said.

Mulcahy shook his head. He smiled at Erin. “It was good to meet you,” he said. He shook hands with BJ, with Peg, and waved a wordless farewell to Erin: he turned away before BJ could say anything. He had the message.

Mulcahy shut the door. He knew Hawkeye would hear him come in: when he turned around, the other man was leaning against the jamb of the door to Mulcahy’s room. They looked at each other. Mulcahy was still feeling a terrifying muddle of feelings, but as amusement had slid past the muddle, so did the certainty that he had come home.

“Were you in my room?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” Mulcahy was taking his jacket off.

“I missed you.” Hawkeye came forward into the hall, fitting his hands into his pockets. “The bedclothes on your bed don’t smell like you. I checked.”

“I don’t think I’ve slept in it since I changed the sheets.”

“We could make up for that now.”

Mulcahy hesitated. He felt for the notepad in the inner pocket, and took it out before he hung up his jacket. “I have a message for you from BJ.”

Hawkeye didn’t take his hands out of his pockets. “You want to flush it down the john, or shall I do it?”

Mulcahy held out the notebook. He couldn’t think of anything more to say.

“How was lunch?”

## Sins and Virtues

Mulcahy shrugged. He managed a smile. “The pesto chicken was delicious.”

“They gave you the table right in front of the window?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He was still holding out the notebook.

Hawkeye looked at it. “That’s a message from Doctor California?”

“Just a couple of pages.”

Hawkeye took his hands out of his pockets and rubbed them over his eyes. “Just get rid of it. He’s got nothing I want to hear.”

Mulcahy took two steps and put his arms round Hawkeye. There was a moment’s surprise in Hawkeye’s muscles, and then his arms came round Mulcahy and he was hugging him hard. His mouth and nose were pressed against Mulcahy’s hair, and his hands were gripping at Mulcahy’s ribs. He didn’t say anything.

“Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said. He felt Hawkeye try to pull back to be able to say something, and tightened his grip on Hawkeye. “I wish you’d read it.”

A minute or so later, Hawkeye did pull away. He looked at Mulcahy. His eyes were wet. “Why?”

“I’d rather you read it than you... you thought about it.”

“What’s in it?”

“I didn’t look.” Mulcahy was still gripping the notebook. He held it out to Hawkeye again, who took it and flipped through it. He tore out the two pages BJ had written on, and handed the notebook back. He stood holding the pages in his hand, looking at Mulcahy.

“Don’t you have lesson plans to look at for tomorrow, or something?” Hawkeye stepped back into Mulcahy’s room.

Mulcahy followed him. There were three surgical journals lying on his bed: Hawkeye sat down on the edge of it, still clutching BJ’s note in his hand.

“I was reading,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy looked at the lesson plans for next week on his desk. He sat down on the bed. Hawkeye looked at him, then down at the note. He frowned, turned the first page over – the other side was blank – and looked again at the second page. He looked up at Mulcahy and shrugged. “Why did you want me to read it? He’s just saying –” he crumpled the bits of paper up in his hand and threw them at the wastepaper basket by the desk, “– blah blah blah, sorry, blah blah blah.”

Mulcahy nodded. Hawkeye stared at him. “Francis?”

“He wanted you to come to California,” Mulcahy said. He took a breath. “He loves you.”

Hawkeye’s eyes went wide and startled. “What –” He laughed, lifting his hand to his face, and put it down again. “What?”

“Peg said – he wanted you to come to work at a hospital in San Rafael.”

“What, and live down the street from Doctor and Mrs Happy? Be asked round to dinner on Fridays? Be Erin’s Uncle Hawkeye?” Hawkeye was leaning forward, his eyes wide. “Yeah, I’d go for that. Don’t you – did you really think I’d want – did you think I’d pick that over what I’ve got here?”

“Cournand?”

“To hell with Cournand.” Hawkeye’s hands caught at his arms. “Don’t keep telling me to go away.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “I’m not.”

Hawkeye’s hands gripped more tightly. “You want to move to California, I’ll go with you. You want to go to Philadelphia, I’ll follow you there. You stay here, I’ll stay here. I’ll even go to Mass with you on Sundays, if you can wake me up in time.” He drew in a breath, his shoulders heaving up. “Me and you. Partners. Lovers.”

## Sins and Virtues

Forever. Don't keep telling me to go away, because I can't stand it." His hands were biting in.

"I'm not," Mulcahy said. "I'm – " He drew in a breath. *Whithersoever thou shalt go, I will go.* He wondered if Naomi had felt like this when Ruth told her: bewildered and overwhelmed and profoundly unworthy. "Hawkeye, you loved – you *love* BJ."

"I love you."

"Yes," Mulcahy said. "But – "

"No," Hawkeye said.

"You loved Captain McIntyre. And Carlye Walton. And you – you've mentioned at least three others. I just – don't see why you would want me for the rest of your life. You – "

Hawkeye gulped. It was hard to see whether it was a laugh or a sob: there were tears in the corners of his eyes. He got his mouth under control, and said "Take it on faith?"

Mulcahy put his arms round Hawkeye, feeling the painful grip loosen as Hawkeye's head came down on his shoulder. "I'm good at that."

He felt Hawkeye laugh again, briefly, and then the other man was still: Mulcahy could feel him breathing, quick and shivering. He was disappointed, but not surprised, when Hawkeye's hands came up and pushed him away.

"I want to hold you," Hawkeye said: he looked as if he were asking for something beyond the normal. Mulcahy nodded, startled, and Hawkeye lay down on the bed, pulling Mulcahy with him, on top of him. They couldn't talk like this: Mulcahy felt awkward. He was comfortable enough, but his full weight was on Hawkeye, he was lying on him as if the other man were a bed: it couldn't be comfortable for Hawkeye, but Hawkeye had his arms round Mulcahy, holding him there. He could feel Hawkeye's breath slowing, getting easier, through Hawkeye's chest into his back.

Mulcahy made himself relax. He let his head go back against Hawkeye's shoulder. He felt Hawkeye turn his head and kiss him, wordless affection, and, with the kiss, a sigh as if of absolute contentment.

He made Hawkeye content by being there. That felt, as it did when he woke with Hawkeye holding him, like a privilege he couldn't possibly deserve. Like he felt when he held Hawkeye like this. As if he was Hawkeye's, and Hawkeye's his: as if they belonged to each other.

He wanted to tell Hawkeye *I lit a candle for your dad at All Souls: I'll pray for your family with mine.* Later. For now, he only wanted to be held.

## Thursday 10th February, 1955

In good years, New York in February can be an early echo of spring. This was not one of those years. It was raining: it had been raining most of the past week, off and on. The sky was grey and grim and low, hanging heavy between the skyscrapers.

Hawkeye normally walked home from Bellevue, sooner than take the subway, but it was raining heavily, and he caught a cab. Francis had an evening class tonight: supper would be soup and a sandwich.

Francis's timetable was fixed by the commuter trains: Hawkeye could mostly tell to the minute when he'd walk in the door in the evening. He had time to heat a can of chicken soup and make sandwiches from the smoked ham and French cheese Francis liked and wouldn't let Hawkeye buy for him often enough.

## Sins and Virtues

Francis was five minutes late if he stopped to buy an evening paper: ten minutes late if he met a neighbour who wanted to chat: but fifteen minutes late, and he must have missed the train he meant to catch, and be on the next one.

The soup smelled good. Hawkeye fixed himself a bowl, and ate it, keeping an eye on the clock. If Francis had caught the next train, he was five minutes late. Then ten. Then fifteen.

Outside the living room windows, the city was bright, unquenched by the lashing rain: the buildings were outlined in golden rows of windows, and below, the streetlights beaded the sidewalks. It wasn't like Crabapple Cove on a rainy weeknight: there was plenty of light to see where he was going. There was no reason he should have fallen over, and it would be a pretty unlikely fall that would mean he hadn't been able to get up again.

When Francis was ten minutes late even if he'd missed the third train he could have caught, Hawkeye picked up the phone. He put it down again a few minutes later. He had the office number, and there was no one in the office at this time in the evening. There was probably an emergency number for parents to call, but he didn't know what it was.

The road down to the station from the school. What if Francis had fallen there? What if he'd broken his leg, or knocked himself out? What if he'd been attacked on the train?

Hawkeye found himself standing in the hall, breathing hard. Francis had a left hook that could flatten a much bigger opponent, but what if there were two – or three –

This was ridiculous. Francis wasn't even ninety minutes late. He could have got held up at the school, and decided to go straight to his evening class. There was no real reason to worry (unless Francis didn't come back from his evening class); this was wholly unnecessary panic. New York wasn't a war zone.

Hawkeye was staring at the row of coats for several minutes before he realised there was something wrong with it. Francis had two winter overcoats. Both of them were hanging up on their coat hooks behind the door, and one of them still had a woollen scarf trailing out of the one of the pockets. Hawkeye grabbed it. Scarf and gloves in one pocket. Keys and wallet in the other. Francis's hat was still on the hook, too.

He'd left early for the hospital this morning: he hadn't actually seen Francis leave the apartment. What if –

Hawkeye dropped the coat. His mouth felt cold and full of saliva. He was not conscious of shoving the door open, but he was standing in Francis's room, looking round: it was empty. He caught himself checking under the bed, in the wardrobe, behind the desk, panicked into stupidity. But if Francis wasn't in here – and he wasn't in the bathroom or in Hawkeye's room, Hawkeye had already looked in both –

He went back and looked again. No.

Francis had walked out without his coat, or his keys, or his wallet, or even his hat. It was cold. It had been raining off and on nearly all day. And he wasn't back yet. He knew when Hawkeye would be home – hell, he must know he could always ask the super to let him in –

Hawkeye was standing in the hall, his arms wrapped round himself, shaking. He ought to call the emergency rooms. He ought to call the police –

The doorbell rang. On the heels of his thought about calling the cops, Hawkeye's first thought was of a tall NYPD sergeant, staring at him, blank-eyed. *You're Francis*

## Sins and Virtues

*Mulcahy's landlord? Can you come down to the morgue to identify a body, sir, there's been an accident –*

He yanked the door open, and felt as if a straitjacket had been unbuckled from his chest. He could breathe properly. Francis was dripping wet, hair plastered to his skull, cold – Hawkeye caught at his hands, pulled him into the hall – cold and soaked and moving awkwardly as if his feet hurt. His jacket was wet, and so was his shirt under it, and his trousers were wet to the knee –

He needed a hot bath, and a hot drink, and by the look of exhaustion on his face, he needed to go to bed.

“And then I’m going to kill you,” Hawkeye said out loud. He was light-headed with anger.

Francis glanced at him: Hawkeye had his arm round Francis’s shoulders, and was steering him towards the bathroom. Being spoken to when he couldn’t see Hawkeye’s face properly always made him angry, but he looked too tired even for that, and Hawkeye was too angry himself to care. “You could have asked someone to call me,” he said, turning on the hot water taps and beginning to strip Francis. The other man’s hands moved awkwardly to help, and Hawkeye brushed them away. “I’m going to kill you. You could have asked someone to ring Bellevue and leave a message for me. You could have come over to Bellevue instead of walking around in the rain all day. You could have come back when you knew I’d be home – what were you thinking about, were you hoping I’d go out and let you sneak in?”

He had no idea how much, of any of this, Francis was getting. He’d have to repeat it all later. Or not. “I can’t wait to get good enough at signing to be able to pick a fight with you when you’re not lip-reading me.” He pushed Francis to sit on the lid of the john, and knelt down to ease off his shoes and socks. His socks were damp – wet through, in places – and stuck to his feet. He had blood-blisters on the balls of his feet, on his heels, and on his left big toe.

“You were walking all day,” Hawkeye said. He looked up at Francis, who was looking down at him with a face empty of everything but weariness. “I’ll dress these later. You need a hot bath.”

Francis nodded. He stood up, wincing a little. Hawkeye stood up, again brushing Francis’s hands away from the waistband of his trousers, and finished stripping him. He waited till he saw Francis lie down in the bath, and look at him: he signed *worry* and *negation*, and saw Francis half-smile, half-shrug.

He’d only had three Wednesday evening sessions with the man from the Deaf Club: he had no idea how to sign *chicken soup*. Or *stay awake, don’t drown*. He stood looking at Francis, feeling anger and tenderness. Francis’s glasses were crooked on his face. Hawkeye made the sign for *getting*, and reached down to take his glasses safely off. Francis blinked at him. The next thing Francis needed was a hot drink. The pan on the stove was still warm. The sandwiches were sitting on a plate on the counter. Hawkeye filled a mug and came back to the bathroom. Francis hadn’t moved.

Hawkeye held out the mug. Francis blinked at it for half a minute or so.

“Do I have to feed it to you?” Hawkeye said.

He was fairly sure Francis couldn’t see his face: but his hands came out of the water at last and took the mug. Hawkeye began to pick up the clothes scattered on the floor.

“There’s a letter,” Francis said.

“What?” Hawkeye lifted his head. Francis was looking at him, his eyes unfocussed: without his glasses he looked – vulnerable, but handsomer than ever. His skin had flushed pink with the hot water. Hawkeye wanted him, fiercely and urgently.

## Sins and Virtues

“In my jacket,” Francis said. “You should probably read it.”

There were two sheets of heavy paper, different lengths and widths, folded together. The edges were crumpled and rubbed. The top sheet, when Hawkeye unfolded it, was in Latin, and it wasn't discussing human anatomy or a surgical operation, which meant he wasn't going to be able to read it. But the letter's heading said it was from the Vatican, and it was addressed to Fr. Francis John Patrick Mulcahy, O.J., and it was signed by a cardinal. Which meant he didn't need to be able to read it to know what it said: it was notice that Francis had been laicized.

He refolded both sheets, and looked up again. Francis was clutching the mug with both hands to the middle of his chest. His eyes were closed. He didn't look as if he were asleep. Hawkeye stood there looking down at him.

They had taken a devout and faithful man, kicked him out, and told him he was a failure. For being kind and decent and honest, too honest and too brave to lie.

“I've got him,” he said out loud, to the unknown cardinal, to the bishop he'd never met. “You didn't know what you'd got when you had him, and I do.”

He shoved the letter into his back pocket, finished clearing the clothes into the laundry basket, and got Francis's bathrobe. Francis had finished most of the soup. Hawkeye rescued the mug, and helped Francis out of the bath into the robe, wrapping it round him.

“Hawkeye, we – we need to talk,” Francis said. “Where are my specs?”

Hawkeye handed them back to him, and a towel for his hair. When Francis had his glasses on again, he looked determined, if very tired.

“You need to get into bed,” Hawkeye said. “I'll dress your feet.”

“I need to talk to you about the letter,” Francis said.

“Sure. Any time. But get into bed, okay?”

Francis gave him a puzzled look, but Hawkeye was steering him out of the bathroom, across the hall into Hawkeye's room – they mostly slept there, and Hawkeye's medical bag was stowed in the bottom of the wardrobe.

“There's sandwiches if you're hungry. Or I could heat more soup. Or we could order take-out. You're not going to your class this evening.”

Francis shook his head.

“No sandwiches? No soup? No take-out? You're *not* going to your class this evening.”

“All of the above,” Francis said, and smiled a little. “I'm not hungry.” He sat down on the bed, and after a moment turned round and leaned up against the headboard. Hawkeye was finding what he needed in his medical bag, and sat down at the other end of the bed, lifting Francis's feet on to his lap. The blisters looked painful, but if it were possible to persuade him not to go to school tomorrow, stay off his feet for a day, he'd be fine. Francis had good feet. Hawkeye finished taping a soft dressing to the last blister, and looked up. Francis was watching him, intent and serious.

“Did you read the letter?”

“Looked at it,” Hawkeye said. “It's in Latin – ” He was going to make a joke about the cardinal not using the medical dictionary, but Francis interrupted.

“The one from my bishop.”

The other sheet of paper was in English. It was addressed, again, to Fr. Francis J. P. Mulcahy, O.J., but the salutation was to *Dear son in Christ*, and it ended *Yours in Xto*, and was signed by someone who seemed to be a cardinal and a bishop and the Archbishop of Philadelphia. Hawkeye read in a jumble, his eye moving back and forth along the paragraphs. He began again at the top, trying to focus.

## Sins and Virtues

It was a joke. It was a very cruel joke, crueller than any even BJ had played. Hawkeye looked at the letter heading, and lifted the sheet to look at the heading of the letter from the Vatican.

He looked up at Francis, and back down at the letter from the bishop. Not a joke.

They hadn't laicized him. They'd forgiven him.

The bishop wanted him back.

Father Mulcahy was invited home to his diocese, where – *in prayerful contemplation* – they would decide how to –

How to let him be a priest. He would be a priest again. Hawkeye sat frozen, with his eyes on the page, no longer taking in the words on the paper. There was nothing else Francis Mulcahy wanted more than to be a priest, and they were letting him come back.

That on getting the news, he'd gone out, forgetting coat and keys and wallet, and walked for so long in the rain, ignoring the pain in his feet, was a measure of how much he loved Hawkeye, how upset he'd be at hurting Hawkeye – but it didn't mean he wanted Hawkeye more than he wanted – this. They would let him be a priest. He wasn't BJ or Trapper, to leave Hawkeye without a note because his heart's desire had come true: but Hawkeye wasn't his heart's desire, and never had been.

He looked back up at Father Mulcahy. His mouth was dry. "Okay," he said at last. "Okay. I'm –" He couldn't say *glad for you*. "You have to go." It wasn't like it was going to be easy for Francis – for Father Mulcahy – Hawkeye swallowed. There was no point making it worse. "You don't have to worry about me. I'll be fine. You'll –" He was clutching at Francis's feet, he realised, and let go of them, moving his lap out from under them. "You'll have to go," he said again.

Francis drew his feet up under himself, and moved, awkwardly, down the bed. "Hawkeye –"

Hawkeye stood up. He had an awful feeling that Francis – Father Mulcahy – meant to touch him or try to hold him, and he didn't think he could bear it. "No," he said. "I can't –"

"I'm not going."

Hawkeye stared. He shook his head. "Don't –" He couldn't find words for it. He couldn't. If he tried to, he was going to beg – he'd crawl – and it wouldn't do any good. He should call Billy and tell him, sorry, I'm sorry, sometimes crawling does no good. Push me into the pond again, this time I won't come up.

Francis stood up. He looked shaky on his feet, but determined. He came towards Hawkeye, backing him towards the door.

"I'm not going," he said. "Sit down. Listen to me."

"Get back to bed," Hawkeye said hoarsely, and turned away. Francis caught him by the elbows, tugged him round, and moved him into a hug. Hawkeye stood rigidly. Father Mulcahy. Not Francis.

*You want to be a priest.*

Francis was backing towards the bed. He was still hanging on to Hawkeye: Hawkeye found himself going with him. He would get Father Mulcahy into bed – his bed, the other bed – they could even have sex one last time if –

He was dreaming. It all was a dream.

"You're going to leave me," he said.

"No," Francis said. "Hawkeye, sit down." Francis was trying to pull Hawkeye down to the bed: he sat down himself. It seemed like too much trouble to keep fighting him off. Hawkeye sat down beside him.

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“You want to be a priest,” Hawkeye said. The letters had fallen to the floor: he bent to pick them up. “This says they’re not laicizing you. Your bishop wants you back.”

Francis took the letters out of his hand. “Yes,” he said. “They – Hawkeye, this isn’t –” He leaned back against the headboard. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean you to think... I need to explain...” he said, sounding flat, “When my bishop wrote to me last year, he told me, among other things, that if I applied for laicization, he’d support it. So I wrote to him...” His voice trailed off. “I’m not leaving you,” he said, again.

Hawkeye shrugged. “Okay,” he said. He didn’t believe it: he couldn’t let himself believe it. Hope would hurt too much.

“You believe me?”

“I’m listening,” Hawkeye said.

“I wrote back to him... asking him, consenting, to his putting forward an application for my laicization to the Holy See. And then I... dropped out of sight for a while, and they didn’t know where I was. But my bishop sent my application for laicization forward, I don’t... I don’t now know exactly when. Because the authorities who would have to approve laicization...” Francis looked at the letters. “You don’t read Latin, do you?”

Hawkeye shook his head.

“The Cardinal wrote that he can find no flaw in my ordination, that I’m too young to abandon the priesthood voluntarily, that I have committed no offence that would merit involuntary laicization, and that he is disturbed that I appear not to have received any prayerful counselling since my application.” Francis sounded as if he was reading aloud, though he didn’t unfold the letters.

“Good,” Hawkeye said, dry-voiced. “That’s all good, right? Your bishop got a lecture? He’s in trouble, you’re not?”

“You read the letter,” Francis said.

“He says he wants you to come home.”

“I was suspended from the priesthood for maintaining beliefs contrary to doctrine a year ago,” Francis said. “He doesn’t say – he doesn’t hold out any promise that he might reverse the suspension. He wrote to me last year... he said he should never have ordained me. He would never have ordained me if he’d known that I’m afflicted...” Francis tilted his head back. He closed his eyes. There were tears seeping out from under the closed lids.

Hawkeye sat frozen. *Afflicted.*

*It’s an illness, a sickness, a crime.* He’d never believed it. Not when he was a kid playing around with other kids. Not once Tommy took him in hand. He’d looked up the words in his dad’s medical dictionary and told himself they didn’t apply to him, because... because they *didn’t*.

“I burned the letter,” Francis said. His eyes were still closed. “I still... I can’t forget the things he said. He was... he ordained me. He said he wouldn’t have ordained me if he’d known I had these tendencies. That I couldn’t be celibate for the priesthood because homosexuals are bound to celibacy by natural law. He said...” Francis’s voice was shaking. “I couldn’t be a good candidate for the priesthood while I was suffering from this affliction.” There was an edge of raw pain in his voice. “I tried – when I was a boy, I prayed – I prayed to God to cure me, to stop these feelings, to deliver me from temptation. I prayed and I prayed, and God didn’t listen to me. Only when I prayed to be able to resist temptation, not to act on those feelings, God gave me strength. I tried. I failed. God took away my vocation.”

Hawkeye clenched his hands together. He wanted to hold Francis: he wanted to walk away and not have to listen to this.

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Francis's voice was stronger. "God doesn't want me to be a priest. My bishop doesn't want me to be a priest. All that would happen, if I went back, is that I'd spend time on retreat, suspended from the priesthood, until... until my bishop could persuade the Holy See to accept my application for laicization. That would..." He was speaking with rigid self-control. "Regularise the situation." He opened his eyes. His face was wet. He didn't seem to have noticed.

Hawkeye couldn't move. He swallowed a couple of times. "For how long?"

"At least three years," Francis said, after a moment. "I should think. I'd be forty in three years."

"Three years," Hawkeye echoed.

"At least."

The knuckles of Hawkeye's clenched fists had gone white. He looked down, observing the phenomenon without feeling it, and turned his face back towards Francis. "So. Going back," he said, as a statement because he could not quite bear it as a question.

"No," Francis said.

"– you want to take the chance? They could let you back in. You don't know for sure – there's so many people who'd tell your bishop you're a great priest –" Hawkeye was one of them, though it was unlikely on so many counts that anyone would ever ask him.

"No," Francis said again. He sounded bewildered. "I thought you'd be pleased...?"

"I don't want you to hate me," Hawkeye said. He felt helpless. "You'll wake up next to me someday and figure you could have gone back."

"No," Francis said. He swallowed. "I want to –" He was sitting up again. "Will you let me –"

Hawkeye bent his head and pushed his fingertips against the skin around his eyes. "Anything," he said. "Anything you want." His mouth was shielded by his hands: Francis would never know. He lifted his head and looked Francis in the eye. "Anything," he said.

"I'm staying," Francis said. "I can't – I don't want to leave you like this."

Involuntarily, Hawkeye shook his head. His muscles were going rigid. "You're not. You're –" He was shaking. "Going home." It was ridiculous, the number of times he got dumped by someone who had someone better to go to. He laughed, and managed to stop laughing to say "You can't give God up for me." His face hurt.

"Oh, for God's sake!" Francis was very near him now, and shouting. Hawkeye stared at him, confused. "Must you always be the one who gives? Can't you stand anyone *else* being generous? I'm not going because I can't stand what it would do to you, and you sit there and tell me I can't do it? What right do you have to tell me that?"

Hawkeye fumbled for, and found, something approximating a joke. "I'd find someone else," he said.

"I don't *want* you to find someone else!" Francis snapped it out, his face very close to Hawkeye's, and almost looked more startled than Hawkeye felt. He said, more slowly, "I don't want you to find someone else. I don't want to leave you for three years. Or at all. I couldn't bear to do that to you." He stopped. "I'd find it hard to bear, myself," he added. "But if..." He had dropped the letters on the bed, and glanced back at them. He was kneeling next to Hawkeye. "If I had gotten those letters in October, or before – if I had been thinking only of myself... I would still have known I couldn't be a priest any more, but I might..." He looked back at Hawkeye. "I would have gone. But not now."

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“Because of me,” Hawkeye said. His jaw muscles felt rigid. Francis was looking at him with a small frown, as if trying to puzzle out what he had said. “My fault. Your affliction.”

“My – ”

“If you’re suffering from this affliction, no need to make you suffer more.”

“Shut up,” Francis said. “I want to be with you, like this, for the rest of my life.” His hands were gripping hard at Hawkeye’s shoulders. His mouth against Hawkeye’s was awkward and not gentle and not sweet: his lips shoved at Hawkeye’s as if he were feeding on him, and his tongue slid in and found Hawkeye’s. Hawkeye’s cock reacted before his mind could: he was still trying to wrap his mind around Francis saying *shut up* in that tone of voice, saying *with you for the rest of my life*, and feeling the tip of Francis’s tongue caressing the inside of his mouth, and the solidity of his fingers almost biting, and all of that was overwhelmed by his cock hard – and his muscles no longer rigid. He fell back on the bed, and Francis went with him, landing clumsily on top of him and making his cock jump: his mouth was open to Francis and he heard himself grunt incoherently, *don’t stop*.

He would have begged, *don’t stop please don’t stop*, but he didn’t seem to have to beg. Francis went on kissing him, and his thigh between Hawkeye’s thighs was giving Hawkeye’s aching-hard cock some of the friction it wanted. Francis let go of Hawkeye’s shoulders: one hand curled to grasp at the back of Hawkeye’s neck, the other fumbled for his fly and found his cock. His grasp was perfect: Hawkeye grunted, twitched, and came.

Francis’s hand stayed on his cock, enclosing him. His face was pressed down into the curve of Hawkeye’s shoulder. He was a warm solid weight against Hawkeye, and his cock was hard against Hawkeye’s thigh. He smelled warm and clean and sweaty. Hawkeye blinked his eyes open and saw him.

*He’s staying.*

He was moving almost before he had his eyes open, going down: he felt Francis clasp his head in his hands, and opened his throat to Francis’s cock.

It took less time that Hawkeye would have liked to make Francis come. He had to let him go eventually. His knees hurt. His face felt painful. He was leaning against Francis’s legs at the edge of the bed. They stared at each other.

“It’s not an affliction, is it?” Hawkeye’s throat hurt.

Francis shook his head. He looked very serious.

“You’re not going to leave me?”

Francis shook his head again. He smiled faintly. “Anyway, if I did, you’d follow me, wouldn’t you?”

Hawkeye nodded. When he smiled, the skin around his mouth and his nose hurt. “To hell, if I have to.”

Francis was smiling more widely. “Through purgatory, maybe.”

“Maybe?”

“We’ll tell them we did our time in Korea.”

Hawkeye pushed himself up onto the bed. He kicked off his shoes, letting them lie where they fell on the floor. Francis unpropped himself from his elbows and lay down flat. He looked exhausted.

“You look terrible,” Francis said.

Hawkeye rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth, and took his hand away to say “So do you.” In fact, Francis looked as if he were struggling to keep his eyes open.

“Lie down with me,” Francis said. “Hold me.” He yawned.

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Hawkeye lay down beside him, and put his arms round him. Francis yawned again and fitted himself against Hawkeye. His breathing changed, tiny rough snores on inbreath and outbreath. Hawkeye lay in the tangle of clothing and bedding, breathing in the smell and sound and feel of Francis sleeping. He was here: he was going to stay here.

Hawkeye woke up: Francis wasn't snoring any more. He was as relaxed as if he were asleep, but he wasn't.

"Hawkeye?" He sounded half-asleep.

Hawkeye ruffled the hair on the back of Francis's head.

"What time is it?"

Hawkeye lifted his head and looked at his alarm clock. He tapped his fingers against Francis's shoulder, ten times.

"Oh." Francis didn't move. "Tonight or tomorrow?"

Hawkeye moved his hand. N, E, X, T, W, E, E, K, he wrote.

Francis laughed: he still hadn't moved. "Are you hungry?"

Hawkeye nodded. He traced Y.

"Me too."

Comfortable silence, broken only by a rumble from Francis's belly that echoed with a rumble from Hawkeye's.

Francis sat up. "I'm hungry," he said. "I can make you a sandwich."

"I made sandwiches," Hawkeye said. "Last week sometime."

"Where are they?"

"In the kitchen. Ham and cheese. The kind of cheese you like."

"I told you not to buy that for me."

"I bought it for me, I just let you share it."

"You don't even like it," Francis said.

"That's why I let you share it." Hawkeye sat up. "I'll get the sandwiches."

"I'll get them."

"Stay off your feet." Hawkeye slid off the bed and nearly fell over: he hadn't managed to get undressed. Francis did not laugh out loud: he only watched. The letters were lying on the floor. Hawkeye eyed them as he kicked himself out of his clothes, and put his bathrobe on. He caught Francis's eye.

Francis shrugged. "You want to flush it down the john, or shall I do it?" He spoke with an effort. The turn of phrase was more like Hawkeye's than his own: he must be quoting.

Hawkeye picked the letters up. "You really want to get rid of these?"

"Yes," Francis said.

"Hospital incinerators."

After a moment, Francis nodded. "Okay," he said. He swallowed. "Hawkeye, in my wardrobe, there's a carton – it was sent from Philadelphia."

"Yeah?" Hawkeye remembered. There had been one carton not unpacked.

"Can you – make sure that gets burned, too?" Francis's neck muscles were rigid, and his voice was controlled.

"If you want." Hawkeye stood still.

Francis moved his shoulders in an awkward shrug. He looked unhappy. "My vestments."

"If you want," Hawkeye said again.

"I had an idea about your vests," Hawkeye offered.

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Francis looked at him over a large sandwich. The set of his eyebrows said that if his mouth wasn't full he'd say *vestments*.

"Vestments," Hawkeye said. "Whatever. Mail them to your bishop."

Francis swallowed the mouthful of sandwich. He looked at Hawkeye. "I ought to write to him," he said. "It was... it was meant to be a very kind letter. I just..."

"It breaks your heart writing back to your sister," Hawkeye said. Francis looked startled. "As your personal thoracic surgeon, my medical advice is you shouldn't break your heart over your bishop, too. Send him a bagful of old clothes and tell him to get lost."

"I don't want to write to him at all," Francis said, after a long moment's silence. "I don't feel... very charitable towards him."

Hawkeye very nearly choked on his sandwich. He coughed, spluttering crumbs. Francis looked at him strangely.

"What would you do?"

"Mail him a dead fish," Hawkeye said. "Marked personal, to be opened by addressee only."

Francis looked at him in a moment's disbelief, and laughed. He glanced round. "Where –"

Hawkeye had put the letters down out of sight of the bed: he handed them to Francis, who held them in his hand a minute, looking at them, and turned them between his hands so that he was holding them sideways up. Carefully, he tore the folded letters down the width of the paper, from one side almost to the other. It was heavy paper, a double thickness, and Hawkeye saw the effort in his hands. Unfolded, both letters would be torn in three places.

Francis dropped them on the cabinet beside the bed, still folded. "I'll send that back to him."

"Good," Hawkeye said. He could not keep himself from grinning. *You didn't know what you'd got when you had him, and I do. I do.*

*April 2004-May 2006*

*89 942 words*

## Afterword

I owe a debt to many people, not least the person who advised me on researching Deaf culture and institutions in the 1950s, when ASL was not recognised as a language in its own right and deaf children were discouraged from using it by well-meaning hearing teachers in deaf schools. Thank you: “Such as We” would not have been as it was without your help.

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, and the other teachers at the school are entirely my own invention, not based on any real person.

Doctor Cournand was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1956, for his pioneering work in heart surgery. He was indeed at Bellevue in 1953, but I know and have used nothing of him but his name and something of his medical achievements: the other doctors named or referred to are all invented.

For those who care, Hawkeye’s apartment in New York is a block or two from where East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street meets Park Avenue: I am indebted to the New Yorkers who helped me work this out.

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

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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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