

MADDIE. It is! Mom runs all over you, all of us, and you just smile and act like it's all fine.

BILL. Well, I'm sure it's not that big a deal...

MADDIE. You're doing it again. You're doing it right now. Stop it.

THOMAS. Maddie, can I destroy the family first? I did have a reservation...

MADDIE. I'm sorry, go ahead. Wreak havoc.

RUTHIE. What are we talking about, Father Thomas?

(He steels himself and begins.)

THOMAS. I'm sure you've read about all the changes and problems the church has been going through.

RUTHIE. What problems? I haven't heard about any problems.

THOMAS. As you may know, for a long time there's been a push to liberalize things, be more inclusive.

RUTHIE. Oh yes, I've heard about that. You know, ever since they changed the mass from Latin things have been going downhill!

BILL. Ladybug, what's wrong with saying it in English? You never knew what they were saying before.

RUTHIE. And I liked it that way! In Latin it sounds important. In English it sounds like a set of instructions. "Take this and eat of it... wash hands before returning to work..."

RICHARD. "If condition lasts for more than four hours, see your doctor...?"

MADDIE. *(Funny aghast!)* Richard!

RICHARD. Sorry...

BILL. So, the changes are going on, and...?

THOMAS. Well, there's also been a push for women to have a larger role in things...we have lay people helping us serve communion and like that.

RICHARD. Lay people... *(Snorts.)*

THOMAS. *(Trying.)* And there are some very nice women that have volunteered.

BILL. Well, this doesn't sound like a big problem.

THOMAS. Well, it is.

BILL. Why?

THOMAS. One of them was very nice.

RUTHIE. How nice?

THOMAS. Very.

RICHARD. Uh oh...

MADDIE. Now who needs a drink?

ALL. Me.

RUTHIE. Thomas, you just need to pray a little harder is what! Sin is everywhere. Whisky!

THOMAS. I don't see this as sin.

RUTHIE. Well, look again! Neat!

BILL. Son, this is a huge step. I think that all your mother is saying, is are you sure?

THOMAS. Pop...do you have any idea how much I love being a priest? Every day I get up, and I know I've got something important to do. That people need me and I need them. I just put that other thing away, like I was supposed to. And then Helen came to volunteer. You think you know what you're doing in life and then... She was nice, we laughed a few times, really that's it. And then once I found her crying in church. It was nothing, a thing with her boss. I comforted her, and she turned to me. She took my hand and looked at me, and I didn't even hear what she was saying because this thing...this thing wasn't put away anymore. It got so quiet and I looked around at the church, and I could tell it was going to be different, I knew... right then. It even looked different, the candles, the pews, all looked familiar but like I was looking at an old picture, like walking past a house you used to live in. You know, pretty soon I'll be some story about a priest who "fell." That's how they'll say it, I "fell." And that's about right, because it feels like gravity pulling me... I have to do it...

RICHARD. *(After a long pause:)* I have got to meet this woman.

(RICHARD gives RUTHIE her drink. She drinks it like water in the desert.)

MADDIE. Mom, maybe you'll get those grandchildren now...

THOMAS. You know, I thought about that at the oddest time recently. I was performing a baptism a while ago...and I looked down at this wonderful, sweet little girl in my arms and I thought, isn't having a child, giving back to the church?

RUTHIE. There are plenty of people who can have babies! Besides you're over forty. How many babies can you have? The church needs priests!

THOMAS. What about what I need?

RUTHIE. Oh you, you, you. You're just like your brother.

RICHARD. Wait, what?

RUTHIE. Richard, I love you but you are so very self-centered. So is Maddie and now Father Tom...Tom is too!

THOMAS. Mom, I'd like to stay a priest. But they won't have me like this. You know to be honest, I know it's a tradition, but I've never completely understood why priests can't marry...

RICHARD. Me neither!

RUTHIE. It makes perfect sense. How could you confess to some married priest? If the priest was married they might tell their wife who might tell the milkman who might tell the butcher.

MADDIE. You've got a milkman?

THOMAS. Psychiatrists don't tell what they hear. Doctors, lawyers, they don't. But the point is the church won't have me. So, it's a bit of a process, but my separation from the church, I mean from the priesthood, becomes final next month. And then, we're going to... well, I want to marry her.

RUTHIE. Oh God.

BILL. Have you given any thought to what you'll do? I mean for a living.

THOMAS. I've applied for some teaching positions and I think I've got one for next year. In the meantime, I've got a job at the Home Depot to make ends meet.

RUTHIE. Home Depot?! My priest son is going to work at the Home Depot?

(She stands up in shock.)

MADDIE. Father Tom, please part the wet clean up aisle six.

RICHARD. Father Tom, there's a serpent in the Garden Center. Please drive it out.

RUTHIE. I have heard enough.

THOMAS. Mom...

BILL. Honey...

RUTHIE. No! What is with these kids we've raised? Where did we go wrong? And by the way, I'm not ever going to have that Jezebel in my house! I'm not having it!

BILL. It's not up to you.

RUTHIE. What did you say?

BILL. I said it's not up to you.

RUTHIE. What do you mean?

(The cold eye again.)

BILL. Let's all just sit down and talk...

RUTHIE. You sit down, I will not sit down with this...

BILL. Please, let's sit down.

RUTHIE. This is outrageous!

BILL. Ruthie...

RUTHIE. I don't have to—

BILL. Sit down and listen to me for once in your life, God-DAMN it!! *(Beat.)* Now!

(She slowly sits. MADDIE takes RICHARD's drink and downs it.)

RICHARD. Pop, I believe you've got the floor.

BILL. I believe I do. Now Ruthie, you're a big...a big...personality, you know that? You always have been. But this isn't your call. Tom didn't come here to check with us, he's not here for us to punch his ticket. He just wants us to hear it from him first but I don't think he's here to clear it with us or anything. You have to forgive her, Tom. She was a convert, they're the worst. *(He shudders.)* Ruthie, I for one am not going to stand around and have you drive off another one of our kids.

RUTHIE. I never...

BILL. Yes, you did! And personally I've had enough of only calling Maddie when you're out or going down to the basement to pretend it's someone else. Ten years, ten years I meet her, and her friend Sandy at the Denny's for a secret lunch and I'm done with it. You do your best and then the birds fly the way they fly. Now, today is a new day, first day of the New Year of a new century. "Should old acquaintance be forgot!" La lala! Everyone is going to get along now. That's it. Starting right now, go ahead! Get along!

RICHARD. Who needs a drink?

ALL. Me!