

SCENE 3: CLASH

(Frank is seated at his desk as Nora enters. Organizing his papers, he looks up and gestures to a chair.)

FRANK

I assume you saw him out.

NORA
(sits down)

Yes.

FRANK

He make a scene?

NORA

No. He was fairly upset though.

FRANK
(scoffs)

That's to be expected. The man is a damn pest.

NORA

A pest whose motivation knows no bounds.

FRANK

One must wonder: Is he coming here as a detective or a friend?

NORA

Neither are appealing.

FRANK

My sentiments exactly. It's mind-boggling how he was assigned to her case. Alice doesn't need any distractions. Her treatment is reaching a critical juncture.

NORA

Has she told you why she murdered her son?

FRANK

Not exactly. Though she did mention something new.

What? NORA

FRANK
Prior to killing the boy, she said a goddess came to her.

NORA
Does this goddess have a name?

FRANK
She wouldn't say. When I pressed her, she simply laughed. "She only comes to me," she whispered. As if it was some secret.

(Nora shifts uncomfortably in her seat.)

NORA
(disgusted)
Blasphemous.

FRANK
Don't start.

Frank starts to write something on a piece of paper.

NORA
Alice needs more than these talks you're giving her.

FRANK
She's starting to open up.

NORA
But how will that help her in the long run? How will she be redeemed?

FRANK
Curing her through redemption is only a fraction of what she needs. This isn't a case solely for God's work.

NORA
God's work is more potent than you think.

FRANK
I'll be sure to take that into account, sister. Thank you.

NORA

I'm serious.

(Frank stops writing and looks at Nora.)

FRANK

As am I.

(A beat.)

He looks away and resumes his task.

NORA

A memo arrived from the board.

FRANK

About?

NORA

Cost reduction.

(Frank laughs bitterly; he tosses the pen aside.)

FRANK

We're already teetering on the edge of overcrowding. Cutting costs will send us into the poorhouse.

NORA

They've also made the suggestion that this year's Christmas celebration be canceled.

FRANK

Now that's not a bad idea. We're understaffed as it is.

NORA

The Monsignor will be disappointed.

FRANK

Sad you won't have your photo op with him this year? Only time I see you actually smile.

NORA

Good publicity is never a bad thing.

FRANK

Especially if you're on the front page. 'The Merciful Mother.' Name hardly suits you.

The people of this town recognize my good works. As does the board.

FRANK

Then I can expect you'll extend some of that mercy towards the women tonight. Some of them can't hold a spoon without flinging it across the room.

NORA

Not all of them behave that way.

FRANK

I'm aware. Celia Roberts is a prime example. She came in here a savage, but now...

NORA

Savagery is inherent of the Negro race. She may act lady-like, but that is just a guise.

FRANK

Harsh words, sister.

NORA

To you, maybe.

FRANK

Has she no chance of redemption then?

NORA

Of course, she does. But she'll never be free of the burden.

FRANK

What burden?

NORA

The Curse. Negroes have a predestined place set by God Himself. Whatever progress she makes is arbitrary to that fact.

FRANK

Foolish. Celia is more adept at-

NORA

I find Mary-Louise to be a much better example.

FRANK

The woman routinely shits her bed.

NORA

But cursed she is not. That's what matters.

FRANK

If you weren't a nun, I'm sure you'd be studying eugenics.

NORA

What I speak is only the truth. God's truth.

FRANK

All I hear are fallacies, and they're beginning to irk me.

(Nora is visibly annoyed with Frank's comment. Several awkward beats pass as Frank gets up. He walks over to his record, inspects it. Finally, Nora speaks.)

NORA

Is it not odd, Frank?

FRANK

What?

NORA

Your sessions. Specifically their duration.

FRANK

Hardly.

(turns around)

The work I do sometimes require sessions to run over a bit.

(Frank walks back to his desk and sits down.)

NORA

Understandable. But as of late sessions with the other patients, particularly female, have seemed relatively long.

FRANK

What are you implying?

NORA

I'm not implying anything. I'm merely stating my past observations.

FRANK

And these observations pertain to what exactly?

NORA

Your professional sensibilities. Or possibly lack thereof.

FRANK

I must have hit a soft spot earlier. You're getting a bit careless with your words.

NORA

I can assure you, Frank, that I'm perfectly fine. Unlike you.

FRANK

Tread carefully. I'm not too fond of this conversation.

NORA

Neither am I.

FRANK

Yet here we are.

(Nora gets up, smoothing out her dress. She rests her hand on the back of the chair, facing Frank.)

NORA

I want to start treating Alice.

FRANK

You have no business treating the women.

NORA

I feed them, clothe them, pray over--

FRANK

That's not what I mean. You're not a doctor. You lack my expertise to adequately deal with a girl like Alice.

NORA

The newspapers state differently.

FRANK

The newspapers embellish your role here, you know that.

NORA

If that's how you view me, so be it. But I will start treating Alice. It's imperative her daughter be found.

FRANK

Absolutely not. You--

NORA

Or shall I enlighten the Board to your unseemly behavior towards the patients?

FRANK

Whatever you may think is happening, I guarantee you that--

NORA

I may be old, but I'm not ignorant. If you think what you've been doing has gone unnoticed, then you're sorely mistaken.

FRANK

This is quite unbecoming of you. Maybe your imagination has run amok. It's quite common in the elderly.

NORA

Hiding behind words will not save you.

FRANK

I'm not hiding from anything.

NORA

Nor will lying.

FRANK

You are aware that I can have you removed from this hospital.

NORA

You can try, but with the backing of Monsignor Henderson, that may prove to be difficult.

(gets up)

The Board appointed me here personally, so be prepared to have sound reasoning for my dismissal.

FRANK
(abruptly rises)

You've never shown much of an interest in Alice. Why now?

NORA

I want to help her.

FRANK

You're lying.

NORA

As you say. I'll leave you to your work, doctor.

FRANK

Stay away from her.

NORA

What shall transpire will be between a servant of the Lord and a heathen of the Devil. You have no say in the matter.

FRANK

I am the Head Doctor. Every--

NORA

Yes, you are. But you're not God. I'll be sure to keep those observations to myself. Have a blessed day.

(Nora exits.)