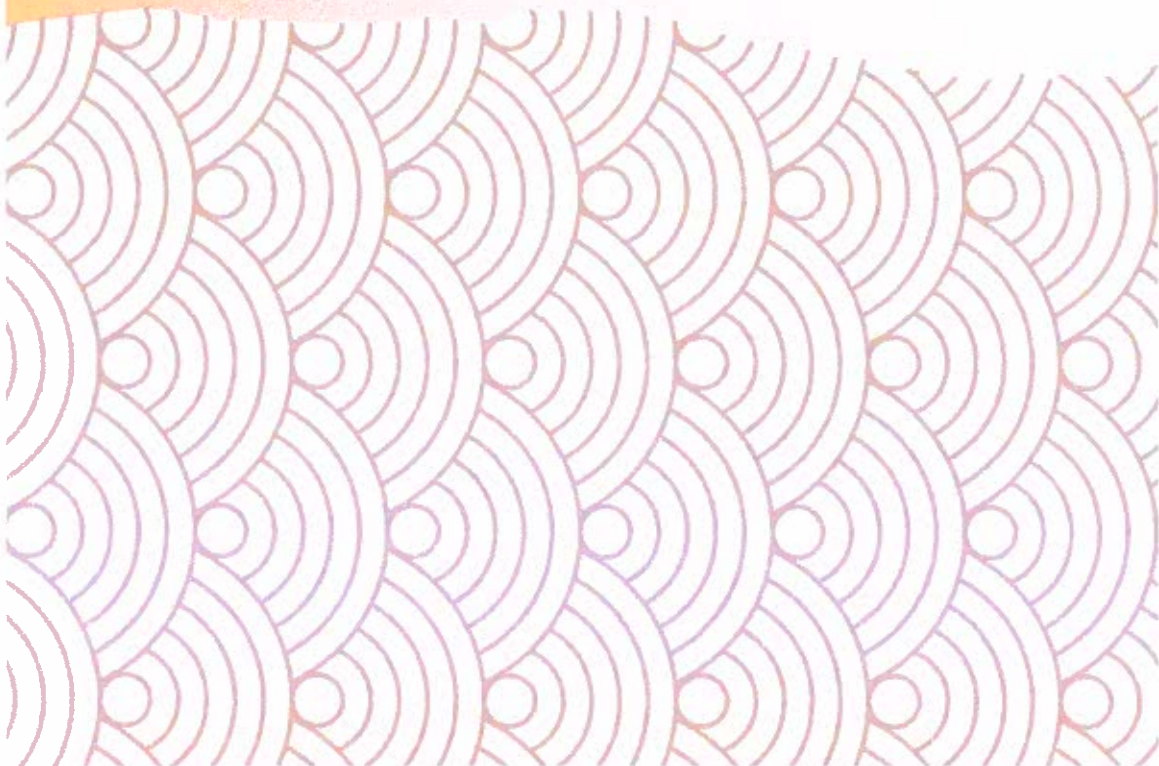




Pastor Emeritus



Delaney made his way into the squad as he was accustomed to entering any room, noting where people and things were located, as isolated entities or as part of the fabric of the entire scene. The habit got him through twenty-four years and eight months on the force. Four months to retire. No sense changing something that worked and had served him well, that's what he thought. He'd been among the best noticing what was odd or out of place, what did or didn't fit. Only problem lately was he couldn't help noticing that, more often than not these days, it was he that was odd and out of place. He who didn't seem to fit.

There were two phone messages from unsolved cases. His load was light. They were giving him low priority, low risk cases. Partly from superstition and partly because none of the younger detectives wanted to work with him. Most of his work now came from older "uniforms" who had never made detective grade and who still respected Delaney. A few had known him in his Pacific atoll and island-hopping days as a Marine, before the GI Bill and his graduation from the Academy, just before the Korean conflict. None of them worried to figure if that respect was because of who he was yesterday or what he had become today. Whatever. It worked. And if it worked. Well, then ...

The captain of the squad signaled from across the way. Delaney was now off in a corner—so it was "a way" from his desk across the cluttered, message-stacked, work group stations of the younger men and women in the squad. They had computers and printout stations in their work modules. Delaney had a phone and his favorite typewriter.

"Roger." The captain insisted upon using Delaney's first name. He'd known Delaney, used to call him "Delaney" in fact, when he first made detective grade. That was ten years after Delaney had his gold shield. But *Delaney* had become a term of ridicule and derision, so his captain avoided it out of respect. An easy case in the squad had become known as a *Delaney*. "Roger, I have something for you. But only if you want it."

Delaney's interest was piqued, but he reacted more defensively than inquisitively. "What do you mean? What's it in a tough neighborhood, or something?"

The captain paused, looked up, shook his head and then pierced Delaney with an eye-to-eye, man-to-man stare. "Hey, Roger. I don't deserve that. Don't pin their tails on this donkey. I can make an ass of myself without their help. And this donkey's never treated your Irish ass with anything short of the respect the good Sisters taught us both. So listen to what I'm saying instead of wrapping me up in the same package you put the rest of the squad in."

"You're right. And, I'm sorry. And you know how long it's been since I apologized to anyone around here. So you know I mean it. Should I go out and come back in again so we can start this right, or should I just sit down and shut up?"

"Stay. Sit. But don't shut anything off. Especially your eyes and your heritage."

They both caught their breath during the pause before the captain started again. "This case I want you to take involves someone you used to know. Monsignor Edmond Concannon. Old sod. What the chancery calls FBI ... Foreign Born Irish. You knew him when you were footing it in blues, if you remember. I'm sure you do."

"I'm sure, too." Memories flooded. Were forced away. "What's the case?"

"The Monsignor's dead. Found about a half hour ago. Out in the suburbs. He was to retire today. Local police aren't interested in going any deeper than natural causes. But there's some aspects that looked like a ritual thing to the mayor out there. He wants us to look into it. He's slowing down the investigation on site to give us time. Says he'll support your story that he was helping us with an old case, and we need to review his last few days' activity. Interested?"

"Won't be easy. But you know I owe him. Hell of a way to make it up to him."

Delaney got up to go. Just before he left, he looked back at the captain. Their eyes met.

"Dennis. Thanks."

"Yea. Just go and take care of it. We'll hold down the fort here for your other stuff. Just go and take care of the Monsignor."

ii

Blue and red blinking lights still bounced their beams off the rounded windowless sides of the brick church. St. Patrick's. No better name under which Edmond Concannon could serve out his priesthood. Shaped like a shamrock, the building housed all the accoutrements of what Delaney's generation was taught by Concannon as "the practice of the faith."

Delaney strode in. Habitually, he dipped his fingertips into the holy water font—an elaborate fountain used to cool the foyer and to fill the nearby baptismal pool. A far cry from the city churches where they'd each grown up—stone or metal cisterns with a little dish of water at each door.

The familiar rattle of the gurney wheels approached from the right, and Delaney turned to face the medical examiner's team transporting the earthly remains of the dead Monsignor to the morgue, having finished a two-hour investigation of the scene. Delaney held up his badge and, accustomed to the gesture, the medics stopped the gurney so yet another detective could view the remains and look for whatever clues they could reveal about the demise of the deceased. But this particular officer of the law caught their attention. His ways were different.

He didn't allow them to unzip the body bag. He didn't slip on his latex gloves to avoid contact with the Monsignor's blood. There was a rumor circulating in the City about blood and some new disease. He meticulously zipped the bag open, to make sure the zipper didn't catch inside on the corpse's face or clothing. He folded the two open sides of the bag back carefully, all the time watching the Monsignor's face. Like all the others he noted the flesh discoloration typical of a cardiac arrest. But he reached out and stroked the Monsignor's unkempt hair—what was left of it at the temples and just over and around the ears—to make it more presentable. He bent over and, it seemed, smelled the Monsignor's hands, while looking at his vestments and shoes. He raised each successive layer of the old man's garb—the hand-sewn, embroidered chasuble; the alb bound with cincture around the ample waist; the stole, decorated to match the chasuble; and under all that his black cassock with its purple cloth covered buttons and full-dress street clothes under that. The medics saw him review the corpse, surprised he spent more time on the vestments than

looking for entry wounds through the clothes, which activity had preoccupied the other detectives. And lastly, each layer of vestments Delaney disturbed, he now straightened out and neatened, finishing off the work with a measured flattening motion such as attendants might be doing with the sheets and blankets on their gurney after they left the body at the morgue. And then, to each one's surprise, Delaney placed his right hand alongside the dead man's face, from his temple to this cheekbone, and with his thumb made the sign of the cross on the Monsignor's forehead. He then patted the priestly, smooth-shaven cheek twice in farewell, nodding as he faced the closed eyes before him. He looked up only after gently zipping the bag. "Thanks, fellas. Give him a nice ride. Not too bumpy." And stopping after taking two steps away, Delaney turned to face the medics again. "And guys. On the parkway. Put on your flashing lights for a mile, would you? He always loved the lights. Was chaplain for the fire department, back when."

None of the tenderness and care escaped the notice of Betty McGann, the church sacristan. In the same way she was relieved when the gurney was being rolled down the middle aisle, she was now re-agitated by this show of recognition and affection. It brought the whole horrible morning back to her like a bad dream.

Mrs. Betty McGann. Turned the right way in the morning sun, she wouldn't even cast a shadow of her former self. She was physically frail. She was haunted by the memories of all the friends and the children and the husband she had outlived. And now, the last link with her past and her faith, Monsignor Edmond Concannon, was dead and gone.

iii

Delaney made his way further into the church. One cloverleaf was the sanctuary repository for the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated bread and wine from the Mass, or Eucharistic Liturgy as it was now called. The second featured a replica of Michelangelo's Pietà: the mother of Jesus cradling his dead, crucified body. Along the walls in this circular extension of the church were the Stations of the Cross. Jade and emerald statuettes, mounted in sculpted relief on Connemara marble, each telling the story of one portion of the Savior's passion and death, composed the wall decorations in the semi-circular pattern along which meditators would journey. The floor was purposefully not flat along the base of the wall, but was gradually contoured up and down to recreate the effect of walking along the outdoor terrain that Jesus traversed on his way to Cavalry. The central circle and the heart of the clover were filled with the assembly's seats that surrounded the raised platform at the central core of the church, upon and toward which the altar of the Eucharistic Liturgy dramatically captured the attention and drew the eye of even the most casual visitor.

Delaney noticed two things that were out of place. At each Station of the Cross and next to the Pietà, there were a music stand and a candlestand. The music stands were obviously relocated from the choir section of the church, next to the altar. The fifteen candlestands were not made for the undulating floor of the Stations, some leaning a bit to the side—with their candles melted off at an angle. All of them still flickered beneath their glass cylinders that crowned the top of the gold candlestands.

As he glanced at the Pietà, his concentration broke as a gruff voice addressed him, "May I be of some help? You really aren't supposed to be here right now. The police have told me I can't have parishioners in my church right now. So, I'll have to ask you to make your visit another time."

Delaney's truly smooth movement of withdrawing his business card from his jacket pocket, rather than his badge, was a courtesy to the priest. It also gave him a chance to look at the source of the authoritarian voice which hadn't been able to spare a visitor his expression of anger toward the police.

"Oh. Another one. And why in God's name does the City have to be here?"

"Knew the Monsignor."

"So?"

"His friends on the force will appreciate your condolences on the loss of the Monsignor," was all Delaney said. He made his way around the priest and walked the circle around the Pietà without disturbing the carpet at the closer perimeter along the wall where anyone praying the Stations would walk. The priest simply stood, amazed. Delaney ignored him ostensibly but paid close attention to the message his body language conveyed. He stood and watched the detective without so much as a word. Delaney came across what he was looking for at the ninth Station. Back on the far side of the Station, beyond where the floor had a slightly abrupt increase in its upward movement, he saw the ruffled carpet, the melted wax on the base of the candlestand and the carpet, and the heel mark impression of a flattened and hardened piece of wax on the way to the next Station.

Satisfied he now knew where the wax on the Monsignor's right shoulder and left shoe had come from, Delaney finished the Stations walk and looked toward the Pietà and the priest standing behind it. Delaney liked to control situations, so he broke the ice. "Amazing replica. I've always been amazed by Michelangelo's instincts to convey just how much this woman suffered. How the peace of death seemed to make them both—mother and son—relieved that the struggle was over for Him." As he walked around the pedestal, Delaney faced the priest directly. "I went through the Vatican pavilion half a dozen times on one day alone at the World's Fair in '63, just to see the real thing as much as I could. From each level of the spectators' moving walkway, it looked just the slightest bit different. You had to see it from more than one angle just to appreciate all that Michelangelo had to say and wanted you to feel." And then, with the smoothest of ease, he extended his hand in greeting and introduced himself. "Roger Delaney. Detective. Lower East Side."

"Peter McAllum. Pastor. St. Patrick's." Both smiled a bit as they shook hands.

"Disturbed your morning mass schedule, did they, Father?"

"Quite."

"Well. The Monsignor's worth it. You'll have time to memorialize him when the local cops are gone. In the meantime, I'll look around some more, so I don't cause a longer inconvenience." With that he walked away. He'd leveled the playing field on purpose. He might need this Father McAllum later in the morning and couldn't afford to let him get too alienated.

The altar looked in order. But it was obviously the scene of a recent service. Candles were still lit. The books for the service were still on the altar, though closed, as if they were finished being used, or hadn't been used at all. Yes, the altar looked in order, but was definitely out of place. It should have been in the center of the platform. Yet it was a good

thirty feet away, near the back far edge. And the presider's chair was also relocated to face the altar, with its back to the assembly's seats. That troubled Delaney. No end.

The local police investigator was taking a few more pictures. Delaney made his way over in her direction. "Morning, Miss." Delaney could be sweet when he wanted. She looked his way. "Roger Delaney is my name. I'm from the City and was asked by some old timers to look in on the Monsignor. They miss him since he left and felt funny about just leaving him to an obituary to memorialize."

"And they'd love a set of glossies to make sure we don't mess up the investigation out here in the sticks, huh?" Her hips projected the hard time she was ready to give Delaney.

"No, Miss. This isn't country mouse and city mouse. It's just that a number of people felt they owed it to the Monsignor to look in on him, the same as if he was hurt or sick in the hospital. That's all." Delaney held the line. She'd drawn it. If he stayed within bounds, he was sure to get what he wanted. "I didn't have a mind to ask for pictures. Mind you, I wouldn't turn them down, all the same. No, I was wondering more to know what you and your partners found when you arrived. You see..." And here he took the desperate chance—reaching out to hold her upper arm and then to look around behind him conspiratorially—to be seemingly interested that no one else could hear his lowered, confidential tone, but mostly evading any eye contact too soon ... "You see, some of the boys aren't sure some nasties the Monsignor crossed some years ago didn't pay him a visit the first chance they had to, shall we say, have the occasion to be out and around in the country air."

Her eyes widened. He knew he had her.

"Well, my partner was first on the scene. He's a good cop. I'm sure if he saw anything he'd let me know. What are you looking for? Anything special?" Delaney felt almost ashamed at how easy she had been to turn. He'd only wished some of the young badges at the squad had been here to see it. But he forced the distraction away.

"You mentioned pictures. Did you take any by the Stations of ..."

"The what?" She would be a different challenge than Delaney expected. And maybe no help at all, other than he could sneak some stuff by her if he needed to do so.

"By the Stations over there," Delaney indicated the Pietà.

"No. The deceased was in the chair here. We focused our picture taking on this part of the church. Why?"

"Along the wall there's small sculptures. Each is numbered and is called a 'Station.' By the ninth one, marked with the roman numeral, ix for nine, there's some wax on the carpet with a heel mark pressed into it. I don't have jurisdiction here. But the boys and I would be glad to know if it was the Monsignor's shoe heel imprinted into that wax and not some punk's sneaker tread. A picture to show where it is on the floor and a removal of it as evidence to compare with the shoes the Monsignor's wearing would go a long way to help me settle those fellows in the City down some."

"Done." She walked off in a roundabout way, to make it appear the investigation were continuing according to plan, rather than backtracking to cover her shortcomings.

That taken care of, Delaney headed for the chair the woman identified as where they found the Monsignor. Careful not to touch anything, he took it all in. It was tremendously troublesome. But Delaney knew no one else thought it was. Or at least they weren't saying. Again, his concentration was broken by the pastor's taunting voice. "Thought you were

going to cut this short? Seems your lady friend's taking a new interest in the Pietà. Funny. Before you came over here, she looked like she was ready to leave."

Delaney chose not to respond. He might not want to alienate this pastor yet, but he wasn't going to be bullied by him either. For a younger man, the priest seemed to show little respect for Delaney's age. Obviously, the urban bond of Delaney's younger days between the police and the clergy was nonexistent out here as it was back in the City. Too bad. This McAllum fellow would never have what Monsignor Concannon had going for him with the friendship of the cop on the beat and the chief down at the station. And neither, he thought, would the woman detective who was busy breaking every one of McAllum's rules about cameras and flashbulbs in church.

"Watch movies much, Detective?"

"Some. Why?"

"You just make me think of an old Spencer Tracy movie. That's all. Looking around here for something about the old man like you were two ancient warriors, cop and priest, against the world."

"I'll stick with Michelangelo, Father. There's truth in rock and stone. Celluloid's too transient for me, most of the time." It was a stinging rebuke, but perceptive enough to provoke the pastor if he was of a mind to be challenged. Delaney thought he was arrogant enough to be. And he was right. "Tell me, Father. Is this the normal arrangement of your sanctuary?"

"No. Matter of fact, it isn't."

"Did you happen to mention that to the local detectives?"

"I didn't hear them asking. So I had nothing to say."

"Being that I asked, mind telling me what you think?"

"Well..." and the pastor caught himself up in a smirk of self-satisfaction. "...the chair reminds me of Rod Taylor's in the film of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*."

"How's that?"

"Don't worry, detective, it's not written in stone. It's only a movie." With that, he walked away. "I'll be over at the rectory if you need me."

The detective with the camera came over. "He's a real sour puss, ain't he? Pain in my ass. Trying to rush us out of here ever since we got here." She looked at Delaney. "Thanks for the wax thing." She smiled and reached out to shake Delaney's hand. "Cheryl Gold. Guys call me Cheri. Got a card? I'll send you that set of glossies."

Delaney handed her his card. "Miss Gold, all the boys at the squad are in your debt." He bowed slightly, but kept eye contact.

They exchanged a mutual smile—silently agreeing to accept Delaney's quaint style of respect.

"I'm done here," she said. Then stepping closer and mimicking Delaney's earlier conspiratory glance over the shoulder, "unless there's more." She smiled and waited.

"Goodbye. And thanks for the pictures," Delaney returned the smile and waved.

Delaney himself started to leave but caught a quick movement at a door closed stealthily in the range of his peripheral vision. By the time he got to the door, it was locked. Sacristy doors were almost never locked in churches in the daytime. Had he better hearing, Delaney might have sensed the pounding of the scared old heart slamming into the fragile breastbone barely holding Betty McGann upright against the door.

It was too early for lunch and the late breakfast plates were gone in the rectory. When Delaney asked to see the pastor, he was told to sit in a parlor waiting room. His first respondent was not the pastor. Was not even a man.

"I'm Sister Evylyn. I am the Pastoral Assistant here at St. Patrick's. Father McAllum told me about you as we were finishing breakfast." Delaney made a mental note that he was not offered any refreshments, even as breakfast was being mentioned. "Father had to prepare for a meeting tonight and asked me to help you if there is anything you needed."

"I do have some questions. Mostly just about some background. Did the Monsignor always go over to church so early? I can't remember his personal habits in that regard. And it's been a long time since he left the City that I wondered what he's been like out here."

"I doubt the Monsignor's anything like when you knew him. He's failed with age. The changes in the Church were hard for him to accommodate. He couldn't really stand that a nun had a position of authority once reserved for men. He couldn't see there's a difference between 1975 and 1962. That's when most parishes started feeling the worship changes. Are you Catholic, Mr. Delaney? It would be easier explaining this to a Catholic."

"As it happens, I am ma'am." Delaney wondered what response he would get by purposely not addressing her as 'Sister.' She wasn't the least bit pleased. He noted it.

"Yes. Well. As I was saying. He couldn't stand that a woman ..."

"By 'he' you would be meaning the Monsignor?" One more test to see if she could dish it out but not take it. Delaney began to see why this woman and the pastor got along so well that he sent her out to do his dirty work.

"Quite."

Delaney had his third affirmation. Three strikes. She was out.

"As for the Monsignor," she spoke now with just enough sarcasm to respond in an upper-handed manner, "he stood in the way of most of the things we're trying here. You know people really are responding. The music's catching on. People know what's being said to them, now that it's in English. There's programs and activities the Monsignor would never have dreamed of back in the City."

"Was there anything in particular about his health lately or his demeanor that changed. Was he getting depressed or bitter. Anything that would make him contemplate suicide?" There it was. Delaney floated it out on the air like incense from a funeral Mass. It hung there. She was stunned. She shifted, pulled at her calf-length, pleated skirt, and crossed one leg over on the other. Then she nervously moved them again, switching which was on top.

"Why would you say such a thing?"

"Was there anything?" Delaney knew he was at his best when he unsettled people who were accustomed to being so sure of themselves. That's when he told himself to drive it home to finish what he had begun before they could recover. And that's what he had himself doing now.

"Why, no," she spoke haltingly. "Not that I know of. Unless..."

"Unless *what*?" He drove deeper, manipulating her with his tone.

"His retirement. Today we were to bring him to the diocesan seminary where he was to live out his retirement."

"Who are we?"

"Why, Father McAllum and I. Of course."

"Did you have a going away party? A special dinner last night, for the Monsignor?"

"Monsignor's been taking his meals alone lately. In his room"

Disgusted, Delaney stood up. "Then that's where I'd like to go next, please."

"Where?" She started to react badly.

"To Monsignor Concannon's room." He was firm.

"That would have to be approved by ..."

"Now. *Sister!*" Delaney's eyes blazed. She was absolutely fear struck by his intensity.

"This is highly irregular ..." but she was beginning to lead the way out of the parlor room. He pushed the issue by following her lead, but then striding by to be in front of her. As she tried to catch up, he propelled them faster down the hall.

"What is highly irregular are the dry eyes around here, Sister. What is highly irregular around here is the unnoticed passing of a man who meant a great deal to a great many people, Sister. So just lead the way before the inconvenience of those who are concerned ruins your whole day, rather than just upsetting your travels plans."

v

Delaney shut the door behind him carefully and pushed in the lock button on the knob, still seeing the flushed, flabbergasted face of Sister Evylyn Assistant Pastor in his memory.

He stood, reverently, in the room, just lightly lit by the late morning sun filtered through the white linen curtains. Irish linen, no doubt. He caught his own breath. It was getting harder in his advanced years to treat people the way he just had. It drained him of his energy. It wasn't an act, or a game, as it might have been when he had a partner. He was alone now. And only anger propelled him to these levels. Getting back down from those levels was becoming more increasingly difficult.

But there was a serenity, almost infectious, in the rooms of Edmond Concannon that settled him. The first room was a sitting room and a workspace with desk and book shelves. Now Delaney drew on the latex gloves from his jacket pocket and slipped them on. The books were there. Spiritual reading. A couple of bibles. Photo essays of Ireland. A few books about John Kennedy, empty shelf spaces, and boxes neatly stacked in the corner, with the top cartons still open and not yet full. The last few friends, favorites, still out and around. Hard to put away and enclose in these cardboard coffins, labeled in a neat and steady hand to be donated to the seminary library. "Because your new room will be too small, or ...?" was the question Delaney's mind posed to the presence of Edmond Concannon, palpably standing beside him.

The walls had lightened rectangles where photos used to be. But still there hung a framed black and white portrait of Fiorella LaGuardia and one in color of Cardinal Spellman. A landscape depicted an abruptly rising mountain set within a lush countryside. Delaney thought he recognized it, but took a few steps closer, switched on a small desk lamp and pointed it toward the wall to focus enough light for him to see the square block letters below the print: BEN BULBEN. And there on the desk lay a collection of poems by

William Butler Yeats, opened to "The Municipal Gallery Revisited." Delaney read it, in the light of the day softened by the curtain, and was shaken by the last lines:

You that would judge me, do not judge alone
This book or that, come to this hallowed place
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends.

Delaney slowly looked at the clothes in the closet in the first room. Most were sweaters, coats, and outdoor wear. All black. Or black and white. Including a beautiful cable stitched sweater that bore a label from Shannon Airport. Edmond Concannon had been a huge man. Delaney would swim inside any of these recently hung or folded items. The umbrella, walking stick, and shoes along the closet floor were aligned neatly, as were his two birettas, one with a black tuft of the priesthood and the other with the purple pom of "the Monsignori."

Everything in the private bath was orderly and clean. It appeared the Monsignor had showered and shaved, before going over to the church. The damp towels and not-quite-dry shaving brush were in their proper places.

The bed was made. The alarm set for two forty-five. Delaney made a note that he should check if the Monsignor was in the habit of taking an afternoon nap, what he'd done after lunch the day before, and what his usual wake up time was in the morning.

The walkway from the back door to the rectory was visible out the bedroom window. A frail woman was just then shuffling her way back from the rectory to the single door in the facing wall of the church. It occurred to Delaney the door led to the sacristy. He watched as the woman fished keys from her pocket, unlocked and opened the door, and entered.

The telephone on the nightstand was in his hand, instinctively, before he even thought about making the call. "Operator? Local police, please. Not an emergency." The connection made, he asked for Detective Gold and identified himself when she answered.

"Hi. I don't have the pictures yet," she laughed. "This isn't the City, you know. I'll have them to you tomorrow morning, though. Promise. Even if I have to drive them in personally."

"Miss Gold. I never asked how the Monsignor's body was found, Could you tell me without compromising your investigation?"

"Delaney. There is no investigation underway. Yet. If you think there should be, we'll have to talk about it and see why you do. Right now, this is being treated as death by natural causes. Do you think differently?"

"No. No. I'm just going over some last items and I'd be embarrassed to tell the guys at the station that I didn't know who found the Monsignor. That's all." Delaney was not a convincing liar when he was preoccupied. Gold seemed to know it.

"The report we have is that the pastor went over to church for the morning Mass and found the Monsignor in the chair I showed you. Hey, Delaney, you got something else?"

"No. Was any mention made of the elderly lady who was at the church today?" Delaney waited while he heard pages flipping.

"Not in my notes. My partner's at the ME now. When he comes back I can check. You know, Delaney, if you've got something you should tell me. I can listen." She waited.

"There is one thing." They each waited out the pause. "Just if your partner is still at the morgue, though. Don't ask him to go back or make a special trip or nothing." Another pause. So, he tried his luck. "I was wondering if under the Monsignor's broken fingernails, there's two on his right hand, if there's any furniture fabric under them. It would be green. From the chair he was in."

The knock on the door was an impatient one. The pastor was deeply upset that the city cop was in the Monsignor's room. He thought Sister would dismiss him. But the last straw was his using the phone. Doing so lit the button for the line on the pastor's office phone. That had brought the priest, running.

Delaney was heading for the door anyway, his look at Monsignor Concannon's room and his phone call now finished. He had mulled over all the letters on the Monsignor's nightstand, his requests and the bishop's denials, of waiving the automatic retirement at age seventy-five. And McAllum's letters—at least the copies here of six written over a ten week period—stating over and over again a lack of support for the Monsignor's staying on at St. Patrick's after his retirement. At the sound of the knock, Delaney changed his direction and left the room by the adjacent door, from the bedroom into the hall, purposefully leaving the angry pastor facing a locked and unanswered door and looking down the hall to see Delaney.

"Good day, Father. I'll be over at the church if you need me." The veteran cop did not bother to wait for an answer. He thought about all the guys like this McAllum he'd met. All smoke, no fire. And he was right. He stepped out the back door going toward the sacristy door he wanted to enter before the elderly woman escaped his interrogation. There was not a word out of the pastor's gaping mouth.

vi

Delaney knew rectory cooks and sacristans were the most reliable grapevine for the intramural gossip in the Catholic Church in America. Since he wasn't offered any refreshments, and since the Monsignor had to eat alone in his room, it was clear the cook was solidly in the pastor's and the nun's camp. That left him with the sacristan, who might have avoided him twice already this morning, her speed belying her age.

He lightly tapped on the sacristy door, which had no outside knob, just a lock and fixed handle for security. The door opened less wide than the space between the bars on a canary's cage. The frail body and stern face housed the eyes of a sad and frightened old woman.

"I need to talk to a friend of Monsignor Concannon. And this old cop who knew Edmond Concannon thinks you're the only soul around here in whom he found a kindred spirit. Now, if I'm wrong, I'll be the laughingstock of all the young detectives back in the squad. So, please, tell a tired, old cop he'll be spared that indignity." With all the strings

pulled and buttons pushed, Delaney stood and waited. He never took his eyes off the old woman's.

"Kissed the Blarney Stone in your time, have you, Detective Delaney." It was more a statement than a question. And it wasn't lost on either of them that Delaney realized she was telling him she had already checked up on him to see who he was. "Well, step in before the two of them see you out there gawking." She stepped aside to let him in. "If it were my house I'd be in, I'd be having you to tea. But this being the Lord's, what they have here to eat and drink's not for having right now."

"I knew the Monsignor when he was a priest. He helped me a few times when he was a pastor. And I owe him a personal debt from a time when he wore his cassock with the purple buttons."

"It's been a while since he's worn it here."

"That bother you as much as it bothered him?"

"And how would you be knowing what bothered him, Mr. New York City?"

"I could tell by the things in his room a little. But you just confirmed it." He didn't actually smile, but their eyes still looked into the other's—measuring, feeling, judging, and to a different degree for each, hoping.

"And being that you weaseled your way into his room, what might you have learned about the Monsignor?"

"Mostly, I'm troubled by what I didn't learn. I didn't find two books, whose spaces were still open on the shelf with his bibles. I figure one is in his office. He must have used it each day—or else why would he get up at three in the morning, if not to pray the hours for matins?"

A glimmer of recognition and her furtive glance toward the dressing table across the sacristy floor was quick, but conclusive anyway. Delaney took the cue and started toward the recessed counter atop the wide, thin drawers that held the priests' garments for worship services. "And which drawer would be his?"

She fought the urge to run, simply pointing. "Third one down." To herself she asked her God, "*Why did you go and send a Catholic cop? A nice atheist would have done just fine.*"

Delaney slid the smoothly quiet drawer open and stepped back to take inventory. Everything seemed to be there, if his altar boy memory served, except for the vestments he'd seen on his dead friend earlier that morning, and one book. In the corner of the drawer, next to the box with the black rosary was the relatively new book embossed with the words *Liturgy of the Hours* across the front. It was out of place. Another had to be there or Delaney would have to come to grips with the terrifying conclusion that he'd been following the wrong path. He carefully slid white linens aside and found what he was looking for, nearer to the front of the drawer. It was a well-worn, leather-covered volume, with the stylized Gothic letters stamped in the now cracked and dull gold against the faded black jacket: **The Divine Office**. Here with its 1957 copyright date was the first book Delaney expected to find. He closed the cover and tapped the book with the pointer finger on his left hand. "Now where do you suppose the second missing volume might be?" Delaney's look was as direct as before, but more purposefully intense.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." But her nervous glance broke away from the detective's for the first time and her right hand began to tremble.

Delaney didn't dare lose her now. "You know, I'm supposed to have a few glasses of water a day according to the department doctor. Would you have a cup of water and a chair

I can rest in for a bit while we talk?" Delaney was already heading for the sacristy sink, making her response more automatic than thought out. He thanked her for the drink, offered her one also, which she accepted. Then he sat down, as did the sacristan. Their mutual glance over the rims of their paper drinking cups was an affirmation of Delaney's gentle kindness that gave his aged witness a chance to regather her strength and her wits.

"Did Monsignor get up every day as early as he did today, or was this retirement thing the reason for losing sleep?"

She nodded, wordlessly, and her face told him to go on. So, he did.

"That nice detective lady from town, Miss Gold. She told me that Father McAllum discovered the Monsignor when he came over for morning Mass. She was able to be fooled by whomever told her that because—bless her soul as one of God's children—she's Jewish."

Betty McGann stared at the Irish cop and marveled within herself. She'd spent a lifetime around insensitive Irishmen who'd just as soon pay attention to themselves and no one else. "*This one must have been a real charmer when he was in his prime,*" she heard herself thinking. Again, she nodded, allowing and inviting Delaney to go on.

"Way I figure it was: Miss Gold didn't know the bulletin board over the rectory had Monsignor's initials as the celebrant for this morning's early liturgy. If she even went over to the rectory."

Betty McGann's sacristan hands trembled. Her bottom lip seemed ready to catch the disease. Delaney knew to tread lightly. "So this pastor, for whom no love seems lost for Edmond Concannon, tells the police he's first on the scene. He's either hiding something or protecting someone. He doesn't strike me as the type to protect anyone, especially a person fond of the Monsignor. So, I've got to figure he's hiding something. The letters in Monsignor's room show McAllum did nothing to help Concannon stay out of the seminary as a retirement compound. And Sister Evylyn sure won't miss having the Monsignor around. I don't want my wicked Irish cop mind even poking around in what all that means." He walked over and refilled his pleated cup with tap water. He motioned to Mrs. McGann, but she held up her not-so-steady hand to decline.

"That means someone else came upon the Monsignor. At least, that's what most people might think." He paused a long time, using the break to scan this room from his chair.

She sipped her drink and Betty McGann spoke for the first time in a while, unnerved by his prolonged silence. "But not Detective Delaney from New York." She smiled. "Right?"

"Right."

"So, what does Mr. Delaney think?" She was growing relaxed, much to her own surprise. This man was very winning.

"I think the person who found Monsignor didn't actually 'come upon him' in surprise. I think that person was already in the church with the Monsignor. I think that person helped Monsignor set up the candlestands by the Stations. I think that person helped Monsignor move the altar. But something happened. Monsignor must have moved the chair by himself. I think the physical strain of that, atop the stress of retirement, caused him to have a heart attack. Or something like that." He finished his water. He looked at Betty McGann. Quietly, he asked, "Did he go peacefully?"

"I don't have anyone anymore. Did you know that?" The sheen of tears stayed on her eyes. No drops fell. Her nose did not need to be dabbed with her tissue. She looked the old Irish cop in the eye. Another person might have thought her statement was a rambling *non sequitur*. But Betty McGann knew Roger Delaney recognized her words as an admission. Not of guilt. Just an admission. And he just sipped on his cup of water, saying nothing. Out of respect he simply stayed quiet. She inhaled deeply and began.

"He was my last friend. All the ladies I knew have up and gone. To nursing homes or back to God. My husband's dead for years. Only had one son. Cancer took him even before his dad passed. All of them waiting with the angels for me to have the good sense to let go and die. And now they've the good Monsignor to say their daily Mass and to plead my case before St. Patrick. You know he'll do that, old Edmond Concannon. He'll go right around St. Peter and find Patrick to get him in. And then me, when the time comes.

"And that leaves just me to be sitting here with you. What's a girl to do about such a thing, Mr. Delaney? Have you any words of wisdom to lend me on the subject? I seem to be at something of a loss." All the while she looked him in the eye. She never flinched, nor looked away.

Neither did he. "Unless there's something here you want to show me, we could go somewhere else, so we wouldn't be disturbed."

"And where would that be that you'd have in mind? The local lockup or your City jail?" Her eyes were still, but a little afire.

"Actually, that cup of tea in your kitchen was more of what I had in mind. Unless, of course, the neighbors would talk unkindly of Betty McGann for bringing a stranger into her home in broad daylight." He lightly smiled, but not too much.

"A stranger would be a problem. But a friend of Edmond Concannon come to pay his respects. Now that would be a different matter altogether, wouldn't it?" She gave him the same smile in return. That, and no more.

Delaney stood up. He wanted the missing book before he left. Coming back to this church was not what he ever wanted to do. "But before we go, I would like to have the second book Monsignor used. Do you know where it is?"

"What book do you mean?" Betty McGann was serious. There was nothing of her earlier coyness when he asked about the book of the Office.

"The Sacramentary on the altar was current, Only English. My guess is that Monsignor prayed his last Mass in Latin, seeing that he took the trouble to move the altar back to the 'old way.'"

"I'm not really sure what he used."

"Unless I miss my guess, it was an old missal with both Latin and English. There was a wide rubber band, red, with a lot of wear and smudges on it, on the floor next to the green chair you ... he ... was found in. I'm thinking he used that rubber band to keep the missal together, like maybe the pages were loose or the binding broken."

"I'm not really sure. But he did have such a book. I've seen it before. He carried it when he said Mass alone sometimes. Just sometimes. I couldn't figure out why." She was genuinely thinking her best. Delaney could tell.

"Mrs. McGann. Think if there were anything unique about the Monsignor's missal. You remember what they used to look like. Was his different in any way. Why might he need a rubber band to keep it together? And think why he didn't use it every day."

She tried to see it in her mind's eye, speaking aloud, slowly, "There was a rubber band. Indeed. It was one of those wide red ones." She looked up at him and smiled as recollections came. "It had the colored ribbons to mark certain pages. It had a black plastic type ..." and before she could say "cover," she stopped. "You're right again, Mr. Delaney. God bless you, you've got a mind and an eye I'd hate to be hiding from." She smiled. He gave a nod. "The ribbons. It's the ribbons I'd be remembering. Usually, those missals just had five. Colored for the seasons. Red. Green. White. Purple. Black. But in his ... yes, that's what I recall ... there were three sets. The book you're looking for has fifteen ribbons for marking places."

"Good for you. Now, we just have to find it. Where did he leave it, do you think? Because I have not seen it. I wonder if the police or the people over at the rectory have it. I know it's not in the Monsignor's rooms, because there were two empty spaces on the shelves, he was still using for books he was not going to give away."

"What?" Betty McGann became animated. "Giving his books away? Whatever for? He didn't mention anything about doing such a thing. He loved those books of his. Every one of them." She shot a perplexed look at Delaney. It was amazing to them both that she figured Delaney would have the answer.

"Leave that for later." Delaney did not want to lose the momentum or distract his willing partner from the immediate task at hand. "Before we go for that tea, help me out a bit outside in the church, please." He walked to the sanctuary door, opened it, and held it open for her to go through. She did, compliantly.

"Walk me through the way you helped him this morning. Maybe we'll find the missal doing that."

"First, we ..."

And there it was, she thought. She looked at the tired face of Roger Delaney. He hadn't so much tricked her into her confession. Rather, he made it easy for her to disclose what she had told herself she would never reveal. "You're very good at what you do, Mr. Delaney. My compliments. But also, my warning. From now on, the burden of this falls on you. I trust you to take care of myself now, as well as the good Monsignor's memory and reputation."

"I promise you I will comport myself with dignity and grace, Ma'am. We three will all come through this as clean and as fresh as the green hills of Ireland after a summer's storm."

"Rainbow and all?" She smiled.

"No gold. No leprechauns. You can bet on the rainbow, though." He held out his hand to point the way.

viii

"He asked me to meet him here at 3:30. I never asked why. I came in. He was already here. We opened the music stands and put them by each Station. We carried the candlestands from the storage room. They were heavier than I thought they would be.

I was very tired out by doing it. He asked me for one last thing. We pushed and pulled to move that altar. It pops up on wheels, but they're small and it's still awkward and heavy."

"Did you help him move the green chair?"

"No. As we moved the altar, the microphones started to make noise from the feedback. He sent me to turn them off. I was so tired I went back to the sacristy, and he went toward the Stations. I turned the switches on the announcing system and sat down to catch my breath. I'm afraid I fell asleep."

When I woke up, I came to in the sanctuary. It was almost three hours later. He was dead. It was about the time I usually come in each day to open the church, so I made believe I had found Monsignor when I came in. It took me three tries to walk away and leave him alone so I could go over to the rectory and get the pastor."

All the while she spoke, Betty McGann led Roger Delaney from one part of the church to the next, mimicking the deeds she recalled, accenting the tale with gestures. They stood on the center platform of the sanctuary so that they saw the straight, double-lined trail in the carpet left by the sliding of the green chair. It was, as the pastor said, an image Delaney now remembered from the film adaptation of *The Time Machine*. Tracks from the laboratory to the yard, marked in the early January snow of the present day: retracing the tracks from freedom within the imprisoning Sphinx of the future, into which the Morlocks dragged the time machine. Now, here was the Monsignor's vehicle through time. He pushed this chair from the present, back to the past, so he could ride it into the future. Not unlike Wells' time traveler had done, the Monsignor left the present day behind to settle its own problems, using its own devices. Here was where and how Edmond Concannon chose resurrection over retirement.

A small disturbance in the carpet, which Delaney at first thought to be a heel scuff, caught the detective's eye once more. He reached down to the scuff mark, and then went down on one knee. He extended his hand through the fabric apron at the base of the chair, to reach underneath. His fingers moved a solid object. He stepped back and withdrew his hand. He stood and tipped the chair off to one side, revealing the missing missal. Next to it on the floor were a few laminated requiem cards, the type set out at funeral homes during wake services. He gathered them up and set the missal and the cards on the altar.

As he did, Betty McGann drew near. It was as she had said. The cover was a black leatherette slipcover over the original, well-worn, pressboard binding. The indentations in the edges of the cover bore witness to where the rubber band held it, and the missal's contents, together for obviously a long time.

They looked at the book with awe and reverence. Each knew it was the last remaining relic of their departed friend, confessor, priest, and too much more to capture with a name or title. They looked at each other. Delaney's look posed a question. Betty McGann smiled, put her hand on his upper arm, patted it, and then nodded her assent that she, too, thought it proper and fitting indeed to open and study the Monsignor's missal.

The entire front of the missal, presenting Sundays of the Year, was without page markers. At the center, the Order of the Mass was set forth in facing pages—Latin on the left, English on the right. With directions and explanations about the rubrics of the ritual in red italic type. Each recognized the design. Each had used a similar text from childhood days when they first received Communion to the days of the Second Vatican Council and the changes in the Church's liturgy.

A pressed rose petal, of the deepest burgundy red, fell out from between a page and onto the white linen altar cloth Betty McGann and the women of the Altar Society worked endless hours upon to keep clean and pressed.

The missal fell open to an early page in the next section, that featured the daily Mass calendar for the year, arranged in chronological order beginning with the December days of Advent, and honoring all the numerous saints, doctors of the church, martyrs, deacons, and holy women, some lost to memory with the alteration of the Church's celebration of its heritage.

On the pages from which the remaining roses fell to the altar was the Mass for February 4. One of the fifteen bookmarks rested in the binding of the book at that page. Lastly, a laminated picture of the Blessed Mother, depicting Mary's assumption into heaven, slid off the page and flipped over as it fell to the altar. Facing the detective and the sacristan was the text of a prayer familiar to them both, which began:

My soul magnifies the Lord
My spirit rejoices in God my Savior

and above that prayer text, in bold letters, the card read:

In Loving Memory of
Mary MacAllister Concannon
February 4, 1958

Roger Delaney and Betty McGann swallowed hard and fought back their tears. For the first time, they didn't dare look at each other. A low alarm-sound emitted from the sacristy.

Delaney feared being discovered. Not because it was too crucial to his investigation that they be left undisturbed. Rather, it was just because this was simply too vulnerable a moment. He carefully replaced the card and rose petals in their rightful places, drew from his pocket the rubber band he'd found on the floor earlier, and wrapped the band around the missal and marveled as it assumed its accustomed shape so perfectly. The two headed for the sacristy.

To their mutual surprise, there was no one there. A small red light was blinking on the control panel of the microphone and amplifier system. Beneath it, a square yellow button with black type on it was lit. The lettering read "*Change carillon tape.*" Behind the glass viewport of the automated carillon system for the steeple, the tape reel sat, with the nicked end of the tape dangling and rhythmically slapping against the player heads. The second reel stood, a still and empty spool.

The signal silenced as soon as Betty opened the cover, stopped the spinning spool with her fingers, withdrew the tape-filled reel, reclosed the door, and depressed the yellow button to reset it. Ignoring Delaney's quizzical look, she crossed over the sacristy floor to a counter and opened a small drawer. She withdrew an instructional manual for the speaker system and set it out on the countertop so Delaney could see what it was and what she was doing with it. She ran her skin-wrinkled forefinger down the table of contents passed headings for "loudspeaker," "choir," "pre-recorded music," "carillon," "carillon, on timer," and stopped at the second appendix entitled "Using Your Sound System to Record Liturgies

for Special Feast and Observances.” She looked at Delaney and tapped the page at that point, in a way almost identical to that which he had tapped the copy of **The Divine Office**. She flipped to the back of the manual. She picked up the book so she could read the page. The manual vibrated in her shaking hands. She finished and quietly tucked the book back in the drawer. Delaney watched and waited, knowing that his newfound companion would speak when she could. And when it suited her to do so. He waited with a patience that Betty McGann blessed in her moment of prayer.

She turned softly and spoke. “If I understand what I just read, and I’m sure that I do, in the words of a very wise man—‘unless I miss my guess’—that tape in your hand will answer your questions about how peaceful he was in the end. You see, my sweet and patient friend, it seems I not only turned off the microphone this morning before I fell asleep. I also activated the system, so it recorded what was going on in the church. That is, if it worked with the mics off. But” ... and here she walked back to the control panel and tapped the front of the glass... “I only turned off the altar microphone that crackled with feedback when we moved the altar. So apparently some special remote microphones and those in the choir section were still on ‘record.’ And now, I think we should go and have that cup of tea.”

And with splendid style and verve, the aged sacristan Betty McGann extended her hand and stood so the soon-to-be-retired Irish cop from New York City could take her arm and escort her to his waiting car.

ix

The reel of tape and the missal and the Divine Office book rested on the kitchen table between them. They shared their tea as they waited for an old nun who knew the Monsignor to bring them a Wollensack reel-to-reel tape player from her nearby school. The nun was from a group convent that Edmond Concannon visited twice a week in the early morning to say a community Mass for the Sisters before they went their separate ways to teach, administer, nurse, and counsel. When the tea was done, and her spirits renewed, Betty patted the back of Delaney’s hand, still fingering his Belleek cup, set out in honor of the Monsignor. “Let’s bring these into the dining room.”

Before he was allowed to rest the items on the table, his hostess first spread out her finest tablecloth, as white and sharply pressed as the altar linens she spent so much time ironing right here on this very table, atop the pads custom cut to protect the wood.

First, they carefully set aside the rose petals and requiem card for the late Mrs. Concannon. Then by opening to each ribbon-marked page, they came upon another requiem card. Each of these featured not a saint’s picture, but rather the ordination photo of a priest. All but one were young men, looking to be in their late twenties. As with his mother’s card, the Monsignor had placed these in the missal at the date of the anniversary of the person’s death, noted on the back of the respective card. These cards were different on the back. There was a short scripture passage on all of them, with the words: “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizadek.” An ordination date of June 15, 1929 followed. It was the same on each card.

"This is his ordination class from the seminary," the hostess told her guest. I recognize a few of the names and there's two that died within the last year." It caused her to reminisce. "One day a month ago I was especially weepy. I was feeling very lonely. I told Monsignor, *'All my friends are gone. I've no husband left.'* I was sad and depressed. He put out those big arms of his and drew me to his chest just in time, so gently. I broke down and cried. He held me for five whole minutes until I stopped. He asked me if I felt better when I stopped. I told him I didn't, but that I was through crying anyway. And then he looked at me and said, *'I miss all my friends, too. This past year my last two living classmates died. I cried awhile. But then, my tears dried up. I tried to keep active. It worked. But with this retirement coming, I just don't know.'*

"He was a great big help to me. I will miss him. I feel all alone again. Maybe that's what we could become—*friends.*" Her eyes turned to Delaney, and she patted the back of his hand again.

Delaney was caught off guard by her directness. She knew it, too, and spoke to break the sudden awkwardness she'd created. "Now, forget all the 'boys back at the station' blarney, Mr. Delaney. Tell me what Emond Concannon did to touch you so much to earn that loyalty you're so driven to express—before the devil himself knows the good Monsignor to be dead."

"Quite simply, he saved me from despair and suicide when the hopelessness of solving a child's homicide drove me to the brink of self-destruction." He walked over to the window and looked back to his new friend. He smiled. "Yes, there's more." He came back to her and took her two hands in his. "Then he convinced my wife to take me back, even though she blamed my being a policeman as being the reason our daughter was taken from our home and murdered."

They each needed the other's support. He rocked her with this disclosure, and he shook remembering it all. They embraced right there in the dining room. In full eyesight of the images of fourteen young, idealistic, hopeful priests, and the Blessed Mother herself. Only the doorbell broke the spell. And the embrace. But slowly. Each tried not to notice the other's furtive attempt to wipe away their tears with the base of their palms.

x

The reel-to-reel tape player sat atop the dining room table. The nun who brought the recorder was not invited to stay. She had been somewhat hurt that she wasn't invited to remain to take part in the use of the machine, but Betty McGann's easy manner and firmness were more than she could combat.

As they now sat, stunned, they listened to a Latin Mass prayed by this "stalwart and faithful servant of God" as he referred to himself in a moving soliloquy to his God before he started the Mass. His words moved them both to tears again—this time openly allowed to flow, with no regret, remorse, nor stealth. What got to them both was his opening entreaty:

"God, our, and my, heavenly Father;
this Mass is out of order. It is the Mass
for All Souls, even though this new morning,

which your darkness still hides while the world rests, is not in November. But that is where my brethren are, good Father, with you, beyond my reach and grasp, hidden from my view, but hopefully in the glory of your light and not in the darkness away from you.”

And then Edmond Concannon began what would become his last Mass:

“Introibo ad altare Dei.”

Almost instinctively, Delaney heard his own voice speak, from the depths of his altar boy memory, the response the voice on the tape was also saying, *“Ad deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.”*

“Judica, me, Deus, et discerne causam meam de gente non sancta: ad homine iniquo et doloso erue me.”

Delaney knew it was his cue to say the next response, but he said nothing. Partially because his memory failed. But mostly because the moment swept him away from himself entirely. It was unmistakably the voice of their friend and priest, Monsignor Edmond Concannon.

“Quia tu es, Deus, fortitudo mea: quare me repulisti, et quare tristis incedo, dum affligit me inimicus?”

“Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam: ipsa me deduxerunt et adduxerunt in montem sanctum tuum, et in tabernacula tua.”

They listened to his Latin pronunciations, perfectly inflected. Delaney found himself trying to remember the upcoming responses, realizing that he was stumbling over in his mind the same phrases of the lengthy *Confiteor* he did as a child. But he no longer tried to speak out loud, preferring to listen instead to the Monsignor’s intimate conversations with his God and Father.

After the scripture readings, the blessing of the wine and the bread, and their consecration into the Body and Blood of Christ, the tenderest *Pater Noster* Betty McGann had ever heard prayed, and the final Communion of Edmond Concannon’s life on earth, the witnesses to the celebration heard a marked change in the tone of the Monsignor’s voice. Perhaps it was the alteration of inflections back into English. Perhaps, it was something else.

“My Mass celebrated the remembrance of the Souls who have gone before me on life’s way. In commending the deceased to you this day and recalling all the souls you allowed me to touch in my years of priesthood, I leave your altar of sacrifice. This sacrifice commemorates the death and resurrection of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

“Come with me now, to commemorate not only his trials and journey and success, but those of the others you privileged me know as brother priests.”

His voice wavered as it was picked up by the remote microphone by the Stations.

For the next seventy minutes, Edmond Concannon absolutely mesmerized Betty McGann and Roger Delaney. At each Station of the Cross, he memorialized one of his original classmates with whom he was ordained. Delaney laid out the requiem cards of the priests on the dining room table. As each was the subject of Monsignor’s prayers and

reflections, Delaney or Betty McGann re-situated the cards in their respective order on the white linen. It was apparent from the tape that the music stands had been set out with one card on each, next to the candlestand so it could be seen and read.

xi

“Jesus Before Pilate. How much that reminds me of you, George Irons. You couldn’t stay stateside with the rest of us. No. You had to go over to the Maryknollers. And they sent you out to China. For us at home it was the time between the Wars. But not for you. You were caught up in a battle so few of us knew about, nor understood at first. How you must have felt like Jesus, standing in front of your accusers by some rural huts surrounded by rice fields, in the shadow of your church. We couldn’t believe what we heard they did to you. Our first martyr. God bless you, Georgie. Keep an eye out for me, the last to come home.”

“Jesus Takes Up His Cross. Peter. Peter. Peter. How you took on all our burdens. Our ‘father confessor’ of the class, even before ordination. Who was to know that the very one who would sit on the foot of our beds after curfew, listening to our fears and complaints while we tossed and turned about leaving the seminary, would one day listen to our shortcomings and help us find our way? And who was there to listen to you, good Peter? Someone we never knew, for sure. Someone you would never give the chance to know who it was about whom you confided. Oh, I can remember your furrowed brow and your wavy hair, grey before its time, for all the worrying we put you through. You bore us well, Peter. You bore us well.”

“Jesus Falls the First Time. You were the most tragic of us to go. There should have been no surprise. But we were shocked. You were the hardest drinker of the bunch, Patty O’Shaughnessy. In the hardest of times, at the height of exams, at the end of the Lenten fasts, at times of family celebrations we were forced to miss because they would not let us go home. That’s when the fabled O’Shaughnessy tap would flow. Always a bit of the bottle to get us through. And later, when we were in parishes, lonely, celibate, driving across the miles on a Friday night after the CYO dance for a drink with the best of friends we’d ever have. We’re all so sorry, Patty. We didn’t see in time the toll it was taking on you. Tell you what. Later this morning when I’m saying the second parish Mass. I’ll raise the cup to you. And Patty—I’ll be looking forward to sharing the same cup with you before too long. And it won’t be because we’re lonely or uncertain or wondering what to do with ourselves. It will be because we’ve all arrived and are back together again, in the company of the God we did our best to serve.”

“Jesus Meets His Mother. How could I forget you, Bobby Clark? Your excitement. Your anticipation. Your fear. Your hopeful face as we saw you off at the airport. Priest of Jesus, thirty-five years ordained. Fully an adult, yet still haunted by your being let out for adoption. There you were heading back to Europe to search for the mother you’d never known. Not knowing whether she’d close the door in your face, or bury yours in her bosom

as she embraced the man-child she'd not lain eyes upon since she gave you away when you were but two days old. You were always more cautious than the rest of us. Had to walk into the quarry pond to swim behind the Old Manse on the seminary grounds. You would never be the one to dive in headfirst, lest you'd strike your head on a rock. Always, that is, 'til the day you shook our hands, the five of us you asked to see you off, and turned, valise in hand and walked tall and proud down the gangway to that waiting Aer Lingus jet. Be waiting for me. Bobby. I may need your help soon to take me on my own walk into the unknown."

"Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus. You had so many names Malachi Aloysius Jones. Great-grandson of slaves. Proud grandson of sharecroppers. First college graduate of your male lineage. So many names. And God knows, many were not so nice. You opened our eyes. Our *dark-skinned conscience of the night* you once told us you were for all of us. And right you were. You told us of Rosa Parks. And you dragged the three of us down to Selma. I'd not trade it for the world—those horrifying days. The dogs. The fire hoses. You helped us trade that world in for a better one. One of hope. Where color was a badge of pride. You helped us call you *black*, not *colored*; with *Negro* somewhere in between. Thank the kind and merciful Lord, He brought you home when He did shortly after that, Malachi Aloysius. There's been so much back-sliding it would tear your heart out. Even your kind black face would wince were you to have to see and forgive some of what's going on. Oh, yeah. I have a bone to pick with you, too. I still can't shake the Selma hoses every time I go out on a call as chaplain for the fire department. I look around, expecting a growling dog to be barking and snarling at my pant leg or bringing me down by the sleeve, like happened that day we stood side-by-side. Joke's on me, though. All I see's a friendly old Dalmatian who seems to look pretty good in black and white. More of that irony you used to point out to me with your broad smile and sad eyes."

"Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus. You were the first of the group to go. We called you *The Old Man*. You joined us late. You had fifteen years on us. I remember when you showed up for classes at the beginning of theologate. We thought you were the teacher. What a way you had about you. Made us look into your eye every time you had something important to tell us. I've never forgotten your face, imprinted in my memory just as it is on this card, as indelibly as Christ's was on Veronica's veil. I long to see it again, your face: Charles Warling. And then you can take me to see His, unveiled."

"Jesus Falls the Second Time. Martin Fischer. How many wives and sons and daughters have you, all told? Seems the number always grew. I met a few of them, you know. It's curious, Marty, to see what one person considers a failure is what others call a success. It was a snowy, cold winter day. I had a funeral to do. Out at the cemetery I remembered you were buried a few sections away from the grave. When everyone had paid their respects, dropped their roses and handfuls of soil atop the coffin, set low in the grave, and turned and left, I walked across to your resting place. I recall now, standing here in the warmth of this church, that it was strange to think such a restless man, such a bundle of energy and tangle of nerves could really have a resting place. A fellow with tattered jeans and long tangled hair jammed up under his wool hat, with a red bandana around his arm, was sitting there in the snow. Yeah, I'm sure. *He was sitting in the snow*. Looking at your newly carved stone. He asked me if I'd known you. I introduced myself. We talked for an

hour, in the cold and damp. He said you were the kindest and most gentle man he'd ever known. Said you seemed cursed. The more you did to make things better for people you hardly knew, the worse you seemed to make things for the people closest to you. It was only at the end of the hour that he told me he was your son. Said he inherited your restlessness. Was trying not to let anyone get too close, fearing he'd hurt them by giving so much of his time and attention to needy strangers. He was shocked I had come to pay my respects. Said most every priest he'd met disclaimed his dad for leaving the priesthood. I'm not so sure I know who really fell, Marty. But I hope you've found some rest."

"Jesus Meets the Women. Chaplain to the Sisters of the Sick Poor. What a title, Kevin. I remember how the others were so jealous. No parish duties to face. Just Mass in the morning, even though it was at 5:30, and the Sister's confessions to hear each Wednesday and Saturday. But I know it was hard. Soon the seal of your confessions to me will be over, my dear and best friend. No one could imagine the frustration and despair those dear, sweet women bore as they watched people die. Polio taking little kids. Cancer crushing the dreams of families just starting out. And all the time being asked '*what kind of God, Sister, would let such a thing happen?*' And as if that weren't bad enough, Kevin, how strong you had to be. They may have been celibate, too. But nevertheless, they were women. Women who trusted you. Women who were vulnerable and in your care. What a marvel you conducted yourself with dignity and reserve and that you mutually respected one another. I don't know that I could have done it, back when I was young, Kevin. Thank God for our baptism classes, parish Mass schedules, CYO, altar boys' practice, and visits to grade school children to pass my time. I wouldn't have traded places with you for the world. But Kev. I'd like to trade this world now, for a place with you.

"Jesus Falls the Third Time. Whoa. Talk about falling. That's it, Concannon. Start a fire." There was a pause. A change came into his voice when he started up again. "How many fires burned within you, Daniel? You shocked us. Me especially. See, I never did really like you. You made me feel uneasy. But I thought it was me. Before your dismissal in the Roosevelt years, I'd never even heard the word *pedophile*. I prayed to God that stuff was not too common. I hoped you were few and far between. There was too much the rest of us had done for the good in our first fifteen years as priests. Yours was the kind of thing that could tear us apart, people from their priests. I could only hope. But it made me uneasy. And now today it seems all those hopes have been dashed."

"Jesus is Stripped of His Garments. You always looked up to the Berrigans after Catonsville. But like them, your policies got you into great disfavor, years before that. Defrocked. How ghastly. Like something out of puritanical colonial times. But there were the Carrolls of Carrollton. What about them? Clergy. Politics. Why don't they mix? Whom did you offend so badly to be dismissed? I followed your campaign for City Council after you were laicized. It was not a matter of shame to lose, I'll tell you that, Michael Powers. You did some good things in the City. The fire department guys knew we were classmates. Told me you did a lot to reclaim abandoned properties. Got people into them during the winter months so they didn't freeze to death on a subway grating somewhere, especially during that "Lindsay" snowstorm in '69. Turbulent times to be sure, Mike. You showed me fairness and justice were strange bedfellows. With little fairness shown to those who stood for justice."

“Jesus is Nailed to the Cross. I’ve not seen a character assassination as gross in my life before, nor since. What were the chances the guy who sat next to me in Aristotelian Philosophy, the guy I studied Plato with past curfew in the bathroom, where the only lights were permitted, would wind up arguing politics and philosophy in the spotlights of Joe McCarthy’s Senate hearings? Just your luck to be assigned to a church near the theater district. I just hope the radio waves in heaven are kinder to you than the ones here on earth were.”

“Jesus Dies on the Cross. That last day in the care of that new hospice service, Charlie, you said you were just so tired you could close your eyes and see the angels coming to bring you back to God. I’m frightened by death, Charlie. And I’m tired, too. I just wish they’d leave me be in peace. But they seem hell bent on jamming me into a small cell of a room. Hell. There’s not even room for my books. I’ll have to drag my tired old Irish ass down to the library at night in my robe and slippers, and hope some kid isn’t using the book I need to do a paper in his room. You were right, Charlie. They wait until you’re almost too tired to fight and then they come and get you. Who’d of thought, with all the bravado of eagles and all the talk of doves, that the last bird on the wing our church would send our way would be anxious for carrion? And our own, at that?

“Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross. They told me they found you in the alley behind the shelter, Tony. I asked my cop contacts. I asked around the fire houses. But nobody knew. Were you robbed on the way home, Tony? Were you going to meet someone in trouble? Was it some guy whose girl and baby you were harboring in the shelter? No one could tell me. When I see you next, I really want to know. I remember how they used to tease you because you didn’t like the girls when we were young and studying. I never thought too much about it then. But I started to when they plastered your picture, dead, bedraggled, broken, and bent—you were beaten so badly. And then thrown away among the garbage cans. Something deep within me needed to know why you died. Something deep within me wanted to know you died for a purpose, a reason. If it was random or casual violence that took you from those to whom you gave shelter, I knew it would make me sick with anger at the waste of your life. But if you saved some young girl or infant from that same wrath that crushed the life out of you, then it would not have been in vain. I haven’t thought of this in so long, Tony. But being with all you guys again tonight, before I have to face the sun coming up on another day, I find I need to know it had a purpose. Tell me, Tony, because I need to know the same about myself, too.”

“Jesus is Placed in the Tomb. It hasn’t been three months, Billy. My hands are trembling now as they did that morning when I stood alone and closed the cover of your coffin. No family left. And just the last of your classmates. One last friend. Funny how we were not that close until there were fewer and still fewer of us. How we learned, when we were too old for golf and tennis and had to settle for cards as our venue for entertainment. How your tropical fish and my stamp collection were the treasures we shared—by showing them and teaching each other about them. I took care of the fish the way you asked, Billy. But there’s no one to give my stamps to, Bill. I packaged them so they could be sold off as part of my estate. There’s no one to inherit them. I’ve baptized thousands of babies and married hundreds of couples, and not one of them belongs to me.”

There was a rustling sound on the tape. And then, this:

“What a marvelous piece of work, this Pietà. You hold each other so well. Here are the petals of my mother’s funeral bouquet, dear Lord. I’ve saved them all these years and stored them in my heart. Just as your mother treasured her memories of you.”

There was a pause for some time, but the tape was still playing. And then again, his voice, “Mothers are wonderful creations. You did well. We each had good ones. I’m going to go and finish the Mass now, and I’m going to sing to your mother. But before I do, I hope you do still understand. I’m not happy about this retirement thing, you know. But I’ve always gone where I thought it was your will for me to go. You know that. You do know that much.”

Again, a longer pause. “Please. Just one more thing. If my mother could hold me just one more time, as yours did. That would be nice.”

More rustling sounds. Delaney found he could recall the Latin they were hearing back from the other microphones up near the sanctuary. “*In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum ... in ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum, et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt ... et vidimus gloriam ejus, gloriam quasi Unigeniti a Patre, plenum gratiae et veritatis. Deo gratias.*”

Then there was a long scraping sound. Lastly, a humming sound was all they heard, but the tune was familiar. Then, in a controlled, yet breathless voice, Edmond Concannon began to sing softly.

*“Salve, Regina, mater misericordiae, vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Hevae. Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.”*

Abruptly, his song ended. There was a gagging sound. Then quiet. For a long time. But the two sat still. Listening. Avoiding each other’s gaze. Then, on the tape, the sound of a door clicked. A woman’s voice gasped. Footsteps. Then quick running steps. A door closed. The tape continued to run quietly for a while. Then, it reached its end.