

“... Why do you worry? What good would it do you if I told you she is indeed a saint? I cannot make saints, nor can the Pope. We can only recognize saints when the plainest evidence shows them to be saintly. If you think her a saint, she is a saint to you. What more do you ask? That is what we call the reality of the soul; you are foolish to demand the agreement of the world as well. . . .’

“But it is the miracles that concern me. What you say takes no account of the miracles.

“Oh, miracles! They happen everywhere. They are conditional. . . . Miracles are things that people cannot explain. . . . Miracles depend much on time and place, and what we know and do not know. . . . Life is too great a miracle for us to make so much fuss about petty little reversals of what we pompously assume to be the natural order. . . . Who is she? That is what you must discover . . . and you must find your answer in psychological truth, not in objective truth. . . . And while you are searching, get on with your own life and accept the possibility that it may be purchased at the price of her, and that this may be God’s plan for you and her.”

ROBERTSON DAVIES,  
*Fifth Business*

## Agnes of God

ACT ONE

SCENE I

*Darkness. A beautiful soprano voice is heard singing.*

AGNES. *Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison.  
Christe eleison. Christe eleison.  
Kyrie eleison.*

*(The lights softly rise on DOCTOR MARTHA LIVINGSTONE.)*

DOCTOR. I remember when I was a child I went to see Garbo’s *Camille*, oh, at least five or six times. And each time I sincerely believed she would *not* die of consumption. I sat in the theater breathless with expectation and hope, and each time I was disappointed, and each time I promised to return, in search of a happy ending. Because I believed in the existence of an alternate last reel. Locked away in some forgotten vault in Hollywood, Greta Garbo survives consumption, oncoming trains, and firing squads. Every time. I still want to believe in alternate reels. I still want to believe that somewhere, somehow, there is a happy ending for *every* story. It all depends on how thoroughly you look for it. And how deeply you need it. *(silence)* The baby was discovered in a wastepaper basket with the umbilical cord knotted around its neck. The mother was found unconscious by

the door to her room, suffering from excessive loss of blood. She was indicted for manslaughter and brought to trial. Her case was assigned to me, Doctor Martha Livingstone, as court psychiatrist, to determine whether she was legally sane. I wanted to help . . . (this young woman, believe me.)

## ACT ONE

## SCENE 2

MOTHER. Doctor Livingstone, I presume? (*MOTHER laughs at her own joke.*) I'm Mother Miriam Ruth, in charge of the convent where Sister Agnes is living.

DOCTOR. How do you do.

MOTHER. You needn't call me Mother, if you don't wish.

DOCTOR. Thank you.

MOTHER. Most people find it uncomfortable.

DOCTOR. Well . . .

MOTHER. I'm afraid the word brings up the most unpleasant connotations in this day and age . . .

DOCTOR. Yes.

MOTHER. . . . or it forces a familiarity that most are not willing to accept, right off the bat.

DOCTOR. I see.

MOTHER. So you may call me Sister. I've brought Sister Agnes for her appointment. They're allowing her to stay at the convent until the trial.

DOCTOR. Yes, I . . . (know.)

MOTHER. And I wanted to offer my help.

DOCTOR. Well, thank you, Sister, but I haven't even met Sister Agnes yet. If there's anything unclear *after* I speak to her, I'd . . . (be happy to talk to you.)

MOTHER. You must have tons of questions.

DOCTOR. I do, but I'd like to ask them of Agnes.

MOTHER. She can't help you there.

DOCTOR. What do you mean?

MOTHER. She's blocked it out, forgotten it. I'm the only one who can answer those questions.

DOCTOR. How well do you know her?

MOTHER. Oh, I know Sister Agnes very well. You see, we're a contemplative order, not a teaching one. Our ranks are quite small. I was chosen to be Mother Superior about four years ago, just prior to her coming to us. So I think I'm more than qualified to answer any questions you might have. Would you mind not smoking?

DOCTOR. Yes, I'm sorry, I should have asked if it bothered you. (*The DOCTOR does not put out the cigarette, but waves the smoke in another direction.*)

MOTHER. Never offer an alcoholic a drink, isn't that what they say?

DOCTOR. You were a smoker?

MOTHER. Two packs a day.

DOCTOR. Oh, I can beat that, Sister.

MOTHER. Lucky Strikes. (*The DOCTOR laughs.*) My sister used to say that one of the few things to believe in in this crazy world is the honesty of unfiltered cigarette smokers.

DOCTOR. You have a smart sister.

MOTHER. And you have questions. Fire away. (*silence*)

DOCTOR. Who knew about Agnes' pregnancy?

MOTHER. No one.

DOCTOR. How did she hide it from the other nuns?

MOTHER. She undressed alone, she bathed alone.

DOCTOR. Is that normal?

MOTHER. Yes.

DOCTOR. How did she hide it during the day?