

MOTHER. Agnes . . .

AGNES. That's because they're suffering. Suffering is beautiful. I want to be beautiful.

MOTHER. Who tells you these things?

AGNES. Christ said it in the Bible. He said, "Suffer the little children, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." I want to suffer like a little child.

MOTHER. That's not what . . . (He meant.)

AGNES. I *am* a little child, but my body keeps getting bigger. I don't want it to get bigger because then I won't be able to fit in. I won't be able to squeeze into Heaven.

MOTHER. Agnes, dear, Heaven is not . . . (a place with bars or windows.)

AGNES. (*cupping her breasts*) I mean look at these. I've got to lose weight.

MOTHER. (*reaching toward AGNES*) Oh my dear child.

AGNES. I'm too fat. Look at this—I'm a blimp! God blew up the *Hindenburg*. He'll blow up me. That's what she said.

MOTHER. Who?

AGNES. Mummy! I'll get bigger and bigger every day and then I'll pop! But if I say little it won't happen!

MOTHER. Your mother tells you this? (*silence*) Agnes, dear, your mother is dead.

AGNES. But she watches. She listens.

MOTHER. Nonsense. I'm your mother now, and I want you to eat.

AGNES. I'm not hungry.

MOTHER. You have to eat *something*, Agnes.

AGNES. No I don't. The host is enough.

MOTHER. My dear, I don't think a communion wafer has the Recommended Daily Allowance of *anything*.

AGNES. Of God.

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MOTHER. Oh yes, of God.

AGNES. What does that word mean? Begod?

MOTHER. Begod. You don't know?

AGNES. That God's my father?

MOTHER. Only spiritually. You don't know what that means? Begod?

AGNES. Begod. That's what *she* calls it. But I don't understand it. She says it means when God presents us to our mothers, in bundles of eight pounds six ounces.

MOTHER. Oh my dear.

AGNES. I have to be eight pounds again, Mother.

MOTHER. You'd even drop the six ounces. Come here. (*MOTHER reaches out for an embrace. AGNES avoids the embrace, keeping the one hand concealed in her habit. MOTHER stares at the hidden hand.*) Now what's wrong?

AGNES. I'm being punished.

MOTHER. For what?

AGNES. I don't know.

MOTHER. How? (*AGNES presents a hand wrapped in a bloody handkerchief.*) What happened? (*AGNES removes the handkerchief.*) Oh dear Jesus. Oh dear Jesus.

AGNES. It started this morning, and I can't get it to stop. Why me, Mother? Why me?

DOCTOR. How long did it last?

MOTHER. It was gone by the following morning.

DOCTOR. Did it ever come back?

MOTHER. Not that I know of, no.

DOCTOR. Why didn't you send her to a doctor?

MOTHER. I didn't see the need. She began eating again, and that's . . . (all that seemed important at the time.)

DOCTOR. You thought that's all there was to it? Get

some food down her throat and she's all better?

MOTHER. Of course not. Look, I know what you're thinking. She's an hysteric, pure and simple.

DOCTOR. Not simple, no.

MOTHER. I *saw* it. Clean through the palm of her hand, do you think hysteria did that?

DOCTOR. It's been doing it for centuries—she's not unique, you know. She's just another victim.

MOTHER. Yes, God's victim. *That's* her innocence. She belongs to God.

DOCTOR. And I mean to take her away from Him—that's what you fear, isn't it?

MOTHER. You bet I do.

DOCTOR. Well, I prefer to look upon it as opening her mind.

MOTHER. To the world?

DOCTOR. To herself. So she can begin to heal.

MOTHER. But that's not your job, is it? You're here to diagnose, not to heal.

DOCTOR. That is a matter of opinion.

MOTHER. The judge's . . . (opinion.)

DOCTOR. *Your* opinion. I'm here to help her in whatever way I see fit. That's my duty as a doctor.

MOTHER. But not as an employee of the court. You're to make a decision on her sanity as quickly as possible and not interfere with due process of law. Those are the judge's words, not mine.

DOCTOR. As quickly as *I see fit*, not as possible. I haven't made that decision yet.

MOTHER. But the kindest thing you can do for Agnes is to make that decision and let her go.

DOCTOR. Back to court?

MOTHER. Yes.

DOCTOR. And what then? If I say she's crazy, she goes

to an institution. If I say she's sane, she goes to prison.

MOTHER. *Temporary* insanity, then.

DOCTOR. Oh yes. In all good conscience I can say that a child who sees bleeding women at the age of ten, and eleven years later strangles a baby is *temporarily* insane. No, Sister, this case is a little more complicated than that.

MOTHER. But the longer you take to make a decision, the more difficult it will be for Agnes.

DOCTOR. Why?

MOTHER. Because the world is a very damaging experience for someone who hasn't seen it for twenty-one years.

DOCTOR. And you think the sooner she's in prison the better off she'll be?

MOTHER. I'm hoping that whatever her sentence, the judge will allow her to return to the convent and serve her time in penance there. (*silence*)

DOCTOR. Well, we'll see about that.

MOTHER. You wouldn't allow her to return . . . (to the convent?)

DOCTOR. I wouldn't send her back to the source of her problem, no.

MOTHER. *Your* decision has nothing to do with *where* Agnes will serve . . . (her sentence.)

DOCTOR. My *recommendation* has *everything* to do with *everything*.

MOTHER. Then you'd send her to prison?

DOCTOR. Yes, if I felt she was guilty of a premeditated crime, I would.

MOTHER. Or an asylum?

DOCTOR. If I felt it would help her.

MOTHER. It would *kill* her.

DOCTOR. I doubt that.