

SPINOZA'S REVENGE

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - DAWN

FATHER CHRISTOPHER PAUL (30s), smiles as he double-checks his appearance in a half-length mirror by the front door of his tiny and tidy apartment. He wears black slacks and a black shirt with a white Roman Catholic collar. He looks more like a young altar boy than a priest.

He glances back at his studio to see that it is orderly. His one dinner dish and breakfast bowl are drying. His coffee cup is ready for one last sip. His twin bed is neatly made, and his desk has his Bible and tablet ready for a long day of service.

As if it were choreographed, he takes the last sip of coffee and rinses the cup. He grabs the salt shaker from the table pours a pinch of salt in his right hand and tosses it over his shoulder. He spins and grabs the tablet and Bible, and heads out the door with a look of perfect peace and tranquility.

EXT. STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

He sweeps the walkway with a broom and smiles as he walks next door to St. Mary's Church in a small mountain town with forest trees all around.

He waves at an elderly couple (70s) across the street, but they ignore him. He waves and yells.

FATHER PAUL

Top of the morning to you, Mr. and  
Mrs. Flannigan.

Again they ignore him. He shrugs and smiles and walks along.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

He sweeps pine needles and dirt from the steps of the church, stopping only to smile and wave at passersby. We see two, thick, waist-high shrubs in planter boxes at the bottom and sides of the steps.

He stops sweeping as a new BRAND electric sedan pulls up to the steps. He smiles politely, a bit perplexed.

A beautiful scientist, MARIA RODRIGUEZ (30s), hops out holding a photo in one hand and a briefcase in the other.

She's a brunette and wears a sporty white blouse and a short beige skirt. She yells to the priest as she stares at the photo.

MARIA  
Christopher Spinoza?

Father Paul sees Maria is beautiful and shyly looks away.

FATHER PAUL  
Father Christopher Paul. Just  
Father Paul.

Maria slams the door to her sedan.

MARIA  
You the janitor too?

FATHER PAUL  
More pine needles than  
parishioners.  
(smiles)  
That's how I got the job.

Maria tilts her head, perplexed by the comment.

MARIA  
You're a hard man to track down.  
Name change, three location changes  
in two years...

Father Paul steals glances of Maria as she steps up to shake his hand.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I'm Maria Rodriguez, executor of  
your grandfather's estate.

Father Paul laughs.

FATHER PAUL  
No estates in our family's history.  
You have the wrong guy. My  
grandpa...

MARIA  
In what state?

FATHER PAUL  
Massachusetts. He lived in an old  
home smaller than my apartment  
behind the church.

MARIA  
 (serious)  
 Can you name your grandfather for  
 me?

The priest smiles at the easy question and answers proudly.

FATHER PAUL  
 George Spinoza.

MARIA  
 And your parents?

FATHER PAUL  
 Stephan and Ava Spinoza. Volunteers  
 with Doctors without Borders until  
 they were killed by drone strikes  
 in Gaza two years ago. Lived in a  
 tent.  
 (bows his head)  
 God rest their souls.

He slowly takes something from his pocket.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 I inherited his sole possessions.  
 This, and his empty wallet.

He opens his palm to reveal a badly burnt rabbit's foot key  
 chain with one old key on it.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 Don't know what the key's for.

He smiles at Maria who studies the curious man.

MARIA  
 Lucky you. But that's exactly what  
 I found out. Sorry for your loss.  
 Did you know you are your  
 grandfather's next of kin?

FATHER PAUL  
 Next of kin?

Maria eyes his features and smiles.

MARIA  
 Not the words my mom and grandma  
 would use. They're lawyers. They  
 kicked this executorship down to me  
 for science reasons.

FATHER PAUL  
Science? I don't know much...

Maria opens her briefcase, waves a stack of legal documents at him, and pulls out a DNA Test Kit.

MARIA  
My background's in science. This case requires a DNA test. A half a test tube of saliva.

Father Paul steps back and smiles.

FATHER PAUL  
Sorry, no. I'm not interested in any inheritance. Vow of poverty.

Maria tilts her head, perplexed and annoyed.

MARIA  
You could leave it to charity. Or to your seemingly struggling church. I don't care either way. But even if you don't collect on the inheritance, I've got to determine who is the most closely related person to you, so spit in the goddamn test tube!

Father Paul backs away further, a bit frightened by Maria.

FATHER PAUL  
May I see some ID?

Maria stomps to the sedan, grabs her purse, and stomps back with a business card and her driver's license.

Father Paul examines them and nods.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
I should check with the Bishop, but he was relieved of his duties.

Maria laughs and looks up to heaven.

MARIA  
You could talk to Him.

FATHER PAUL  
I try every day!

Maria paces angrily.

MARIA  
Look, your Grandpa...

FATHER PAUL  
George.

MARIA  
Came into possession of certain  
valuable historical documents.  
Where they end up was his primary  
concern.

FATHER PAUL  
He was a kook. Nobody liked him.  
Even my dad.

MARIA  
Yes, he disowned and disinherited  
your father.

FATHER PAUL  
(proudly)  
Because he quit the priesthood, got  
married, and had me.

MARIA  
Life's not a popularity contest as  
your ancestors know too well.

Father Paul looks perplexed by her last comment.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Jewish ancestry! This case gets  
more ironic with every turn.

Maria looks around at the shabby church and shrugs.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
My dad used to say the hell we  
create is in our minds.

Father Paul is unconvinced and he smirks.

FATHER PAUL  
What kind of valuable historical  
documents?

MARIA  
I can't say unless your DNA checks  
out.  
(sweetly)  
I need your help, so I can fulfill  
your grandpa's dying wish.

Father Paul looks up to the heavens, then into Maria's eyes. They share a moment.

We HEAR the click of an iPhone camera.

FATHER PAUL  
Okay. I'll do it.

She pulls out the test tube in a flash.

MARIA  
Fill to the line. No More. No less.  
(seductively)  
Please.

FATHER PAUL  
I don't see what this proves.  
Everybody can spit.

Maria leans in close to Father Paul to observe.

We HEAR another the click of an iPhone camera.

MARIA  
Genes don't lie, but people do. My  
mom always said, "And the truth  
shall set you free!"

Father Paul finishes filling the vile.

FATHER PAUL  
John 8:23. It's from the Bible.

She snatches the vile from his hands.

MARIA  
Huh. Learn something new every day!  
(laughs, looks around)  
Boy, are you in for a surprise if  
this checks out. Back soon, Padre.

She races to her sedan, and her short skirt rises a bit.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
This could be the most ironic  
inheritance in world history!

FATHER PAUL  
Wait! Why is that? Ironic, I mean?

She grabs a sketch drawing from her passenger seat and races it to the priest. It reads, "Baruch Spinoza 1633-1672."

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
What am I supposed to do with this?

MARIA  
(laughs)  
He's probably family. Better tape  
it on your refrigerator.

She practically skips back to her car. Her skirt rides up.

We HEAR another click of a smartphone camera.

Father Paul's eyes open widely before he must look away.

FATHER PAUL  
Nice meeting you, Miss Rodriguez.  
Mass every Sunday at eight and ten.

She chuckles as she gets in the car.

Father Paul turns away embarrassed mumbling to himself.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Mass every Sunday at eight and ten?

He turns back to see Maria's hand waving to him as she drives  
off. He smiles and smirks.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
I forgive you, Dad.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Father Paul stands on a ladder and washes the church's  
windows.

SUPER: The next day.

A shiny late-model, silver luxury car rolls up to the church  
steps.

HELEN ROBBINS (60s), a strict businesswoman in a black  
pantsuit holding a large envelope. She has gray hair and  
wears a silver crucifix. She never smiles.

She steps toward Father Paul.

HELEN  
Father Paul, do you remember me?

He steps off the ladder and reaches out to shake hands.

She stops and takes a step back.



FATHER PAUL

Yes, you're Helen Bobbins, advisor to Archbishop Mahoney. You lectured us on church and dioceses financial and legal health at the seminary.

HELEN

Good memory for such a poor student.

FATHER PAUL

Poor student?

HELEN

Last in your class.

The priest smiles proudly.

FATHER PAUL

That's why I was sent here. The Bishop liked me.

HELEN

A little too much. That's why the Bishop was sent away.

Father Paul tilts his head, perplexed.

FATHER PAUL

What can I do for you?

Helen gets stern and rips three photos from her envelope.

HELEN

You can explain yourself.

She forces fuzzy photos into the priest's hands.

He glances at each fuzzy photo with an innocent look. We see that the photos do not look innocent.

He looks totally bewildered.

FATHER PAUL

A complete stranger, Miss Rodriguez, stopped by yesterday to ask me questions about my family.

HELEN

Church can't afford another sex scandal.

The priest hands the photos back, but Helen won't take them.

FATHER PAUL  
Good thing we didn't have sex.

HELEN  
Who is she?

FATHER PAUL  
She's was looking for the heir to  
my grandpa's estate.  
(smiles)  
Nice photos. Did you take them?

HELEN  
Don't be ridiculous. One of your  
parishioners probably saw you in  
these compromising positions.

FATHER PAUL  
Just being polite and giving her my  
saliva.

Helen is in a huff and begins to stomp away.

HELEN  
The Archbishop wants a full written  
report of your interactions with  
this hussy on his desk by tonight.

She hands him her business card. We see "Ph.D., LL.M." after  
her name.

FATHER PAUL  
Hussy on his desk by tonight. Yes,  
Ma'am.  
(corrects himself)  
I mean, Doctor Robbins.

HELEN  
Send your email to me, and I'll  
discuss your case with the  
Archbishop.

FATHER PAUL  
My case?

HELEN  
Somebody may be working with your  
little tramp there to stick it to  
the Church.

She stops at her car and yells back.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
You're being set up!

Helen gets in the car and speeds off.

FATHER PAUL

Set up?

Helen's car passes a new red sports car heading to the church. Helen sees it's driven by a gorgeous redhead in a red dress with dark sunglasses and a large diamond necklace, bracelets, and earrings.

Helen does a double-take, but sees the red sports car race past the church.

She glares toward the church, before driving on.

Moments later, Father Paul is high up on the ladder when the red sports car returns to the church.

Father Paul nearly falls off the ladder as the redhead, ANGELA ABRAMS (30s), exits the sports car. She wears the tightest V-neck dress he's ever seen. She holds a tablet computer with a thin paperback book beneath it: "*The Ethics*" by Benedictus de Spinoza.

Father Paul's voice quivers with nervousness.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)

You must be lost.

ANGELA

Chris Spinoza? Originally from Massachusetts?

The priest rolls his eyes, smiles, and continues washing windows.

FATHER PAUL

It's Father Paul now.

Angela walks under the ladder giving the priest a view of her cleavage.

ANGELA

I'm Angela Abrams with the Spinoza Restitution Foundation.

FATHER PAUL

Restitution Foundation?

ANGELA

Tracking down stolen art and artifacts and returning them to the Jewish families they were taken from.

FATHER PAUL  
I didn't steal any art, and I'm  
Catholic.

Angela sees holes in the souls of both of the priest's shoes.

ANGELA  
No one suspects you.

FATHER PAUL  
That's a relief.

Angela flips on her tablet and shows it to the priest.

ANGELA  
Didn't see the Times today?

The priest looks down at the headlines: "Have Baruch Spinoza's letters been found?"

FATHER PAUL  
Spinoza? Same last name!

ANGELA  
Philosopher. You don't know if  
you're directly related, do you?

The priest looks away, hesitates, then answers.

FATHER PAUL  
Not that I know of, yet. But I did  
spit in a test tube.

Angela looks away suspiciously.

ANGELA  
She's doing the DNA test.

FATHER PAUL  
But everybody can spit.

Angela looks curiously at the handsome priest.

ANGELA  
You weren't curious given your  
surname?

FATHER PAUL  
Spinoza is common throughout Spain,  
Mexico, and the U.S. Never gave it  
a thought.

The priest can't take his eyes off Angela's cleavage as she speaks.

ANGELA

Baruch Spinoza was born in 1632 and raised a Jew in Portugal until the family immigrated to Amsterdam when he was six years old to escape the Spanish Inquisition. Studied at the Talmud Torah school where he stood out as brilliant. He became the most radical and the most ignored philosopher of his time. His views about God and nature got him excommunicated from his Jewish faith at the age of twenty-three.

The priest smiles.

FATHER PAUL

That figures. My crazy dad told me our name Spinoza translates to thorny and difficult, but I don't have thorns.

Angela laughs, then follows the priest's line of eyesight.

ANGELA

If you're done, you can come down from the ladder.

The priest sheepishly steps down, and looks away embarrassed.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Anyway, Spinoza's book *The Ethics* challenged organized religions suggesting God was Nature nothing more. God doesn't meddle in our lives, demand obedience, or reward or punish us.

The priest laughs weakly. He's confused.

FATHER PAUL

God doesn't want our prayers and devotion? That puts me out of job.

ANGELA

Put him out of a job. Only scholars read his works. Common people ignored him entirely.

FATHER PAUL

(laughs)  
Sounds like my sermons.

The priest climbs the ladder again, so she gives him a better view of her cleavage.

ANGELA

I think you should learn all you can about Baruch Spinoza.

She hands him Spinoza's tiny 117-page book on "*The Ethics*." He looks at the cover and laughs.

FATHER PAUL

My Bible is tens times thicker than this!

Angela smiles confidently.

ANGELA

I think he knew that!  
(beat)  
I'll leave my card. Give me a call if they find Spinoza's last letters! We think they magically disappeared when the Swiss Guard visited him before his death.

Angela leaves her card on a step on the ladder, and turns to walk away.

FATHER PAUL

Magic? Swiss Guard?

ANGELA

That's the rumor. No proof yet. Might be in his letters. My organization would really love to see them and share them with the world!

FATHER PAUL

Share evidence of a theft by the Swiss Guard?

ANGELA

Or Pope.

The priest's eyes open widely.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Size eleven medium shoes?

The priest lifts and turns a shoe to see the hole, almost falling from the ladder.

FATHER PAUL  
(proudly)  
Eleven and a half. My shoes are  
fine.

ANGELA  
So's the rest of ya.  
(winks)  
See ya, Father.

Angela struts back to her sports car giggling.

From the top of the ladder, the priest sees Maria's car,  
speeding away.

FATHER PAUL  
Sweet Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Now  
I really forgive you, Dad.

He scratches his head and descends the ladder.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The sketch of Spinoza is taped to his fridge. Father Paul wears a white T-shirt, black slacks, and black socks. His apartment includes a small kitchenette and a separate bathroom. He has a small desk with a Bible, tablet, and yellow legal pads and pencils. There is a microwave and electric tea kettle next to the sink.

Father Paul lays on his twin bed and thumbs through the book "*The Ethics*" without reading it.

He tosses the book on his floor, grunts, and turns off his bedside lamp.

He begins to pray.

He's so surprised to hear a KNOCK on the door that he almost knocks over the lamp on his way to the door.

He turns on the kitchen light and opens the door to see Maria in a long white winter coat and white leather boots. She's holding two boxes.

MARIA  
Found these on the church steps,  
Father. Thought they might get  
stolen. It's barely nine o'clock.  
Were you sleeping?

FATHER PAUL  
Nightly prayers.

Father Paul looks behind Maria nervously. It's dark and he sees nothing suspicious.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Can this wait until morning? Were you spying on me this morning?

MARIA  
No and yes.

Maria puts a foot in the door, but she's blocked by the priest.

FATHER PAUL  
I'm sorry. It would be improper...

Maria pushes past him into the room.

MARIA  
That was Angela Abrams in that red sports car!

FATHER PAUL  
You two know each other?

Maria looks around and shakes her head.

MARIA  
This takes the vow of poverty to a whole new level. Ms. Abrams has been hounding me to include her foundation in every step of the execution of the will.

FATHER PAUL  
What's that mean?

MARIA  
Reading of the will, distribution of assets, security...

FATHER PAUL  
Security?

The priest opens a box containing new shoes like his old ones.

MARIA  
Angela knows what the world is waiting for!

FATHER PAUL  
(smiles)  
New shoes? The Second Coming?



Father Paul opens the second box and finds an Iridium GO! Satellite Phone Terminal and Prepaid SIM Card.

MARIA

Baruch Spinoza's last letters, if that's what they are. They could be old notes from his book. It wasn't published until after his death.

They both stare at the Satellite Phone Terminal.

Father Paul looks back at the book on his floor.

FATHER PAUL

I can't accept these gifts, or the book Miss Abrams gave me earlier.

Maria grabs the priest by the shoulders and gets in his face.

MARIA

She gave me his book too. He said that God is not the creator of the world, but that the world is part of God.

He glares at the sketch on his fridge,

FATHER PAUL

That's his opinion. I hear lots of people ignored him, and I will too!

MARIA

That made him very angry. Almost insane from what I heard.

Father Paul is unconvinced.

FATHER PAUL

He's not right. Says so in the Bible.

MARIA

He got a lot of smart people taking and made a lot of other people angry. Whatever's in his letters could be dangerous.

Father Paul instinctively grabs her shoulders softly.

FATHER PAUL

You don't know I'm the heir yet!  
And you don't know what people are looking for in life.

(beat)

(MORE)

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)

I have what I'm looking for. A life  
of devotion and service to my God.

He releases her, smiles, and opens the door for her to leave.

Maria doesn't budge.

MARIA

You still don't get it. I'd hook  
that satellite phone up, research  
your blood relative, and form a  
plan -- with security! And watch  
out for Angela Abrams.

(beat)

She doesn't play by your rules.

Maria stomps out.

EXT. STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

In the forest, we HEAR the click of a smartphone camera, as  
Maria stomps away.

Angela looks down at her seductive sleek red dress, pauses,  
then slips away quietly to her sports car.

She pops the trunk and opens her suitcase. She finds a pair  
of jeans, green silk blouse, and tennis shoes.

She changes, unabashed, by the car. She leaves the top two  
buttons on the blouse unbuttoned at first, pauses, then  
buttons them.

She removes her diamond earrings, necklace, and bracelets.

She has two thermal warming bags in the back seat. One is  
labeled "chicken cordon bleu" and one is labeled "hamburgers  
and fries."

She opens a cooler with chilled white wines and a six-pack of  
soda.

She grabs the hamburgers and fries bag, then grabs the soda  
and walks confidently to the priest's door.

She KNOCKS on the door.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Father Paul leaps to the door and swings it open.

FATHER PAUL  
Hi again, Miss Rodri...

He sees it's Angela and freezes.

ANGELA  
Glad you're not on a first-name  
basis with that one.

She looks at the fridge to see the sketch of Spinoza.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
She give you that?

FATHER PAUL  
Yes.

ANGELA  
(looks at the kitchenette)  
Hungry?

She steps in past the priest and puts the food on the table.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
I needed to apologize for my  
appearance earlier.

FATHER PAUL  
This is more uncomfortable for me.

ANGELA  
The gifts. They are from the  
Foundation. And no one should be  
without double-encrypted local Wi-  
Fi.

FATHER PAUL  
It's not that.

ANGELA  
The shoes? You needed them.  
(looks around)  
And much more, but I'll stop with  
the gifts.

He smiles weakly and their eyes meet.

FATHER PAUL  
It's not that either.  
(looks away)  
I was happy and at peace until all  
this talk of my inheritance.

Angela steps closer, maintaining eye contact, and softens.

ANGELA  
I understand, and I can help.

FATHER PAUL  
How?

Angela opens the bag and the aroma captures his attention.

ANGELA  
Let's talk about it over burgers  
and fries.

The priest fills two glasses with ice for the soda, and they begin to eat and talk.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
I mentioned my foundation helps to  
return stolen art and antiquities  
to their rightful owners.

FATHER PAUL  
Uh-huh.

ANGELA  
My research found that Spinoza's  
letters may once have been in the  
Vatican.

FATHER PAUL  
The Holy Father had them?

ANGELA  
At one time. But we don't know how  
he came into their possession.

FATHER PAUL  
Who funds you to find out?

ANGELA  
Billionaires and scholars  
worldwide.

The priest stops chewing and looks serious.

FATHER PAUL  
How can you help me?

ANGELA  
Help each other. You have a vow of  
poverty and I protect valuable  
historic texts from being sold off  
to private collectors.

The priest's face is contorted, totally confused.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
Who might keep them buried!

The priest smiles weakly, still not getting it.

Angela smiles at the priest.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
You'll get there!

FATHER PAUL  
(changing the subject)  
What about Maria?

ANGELA  
She probably earns a flat fee as  
executor of the will plus a  
percentage of the purchase price if  
you sell Spinoza's letters.

FATHER PAUL  
Huh?

ANGELA  
She'll seek the highest price.

FATHER PAUL  
I've never had that much money.

ANGELA  
Donate the letters to us, and we'll  
post them on the web for free to  
the world.

The priest stands, still having difficulty understanding.

FATHER PAUL  
His book was too hard to read. I  
need to find his videos with your  
new Wi-Fi gadget I'm... borrowing.

Angela smiles.

ANGELA  
That's why I loaned it to you.

Angela stands and begins to exit.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
You get your life back, and the  
world rescues a historical  
treasure.

(serious)

(MORE)

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
Or you'll be hounded by thousands  
of potential buyers.

He opens the door, but she steps in closer to the priest, who smells her intoxicating perfume.

FATHER PAUL  
What about Maria again?

Angela looks deep into his eyes.

ANGELA  
I bet there was nothing underneath  
that white coat of hers!

The priest's eyes open widely as he mumbles.

FATHER PAUL  
Thanks for the shoes.

He nudges Angela out the door, shuts it, and leans his back against it.

He HEARS her footsteps walking away slowly.

He sighs with relief.

He races to satellite phone and sets up the Wi-Fi.

He gets online with his tablet computer.

He types in "Spinoza videos."

His tablet redirects him to a porn site.

His eyes opens widely again.

EXT. STUDIO APARTMENT - LATE MORNING

Helen Robbins skids to a stop outside the priest's door. She steps out of her car in a black pantsuit, and stomps to the priest's front door holding a newspaper.

She KNOCKS, but there is no immediate answer.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Father Paul's head is on the table, next to his tablet computer and a coffee cup. He slowly stirs awake.

He HEARS a second round of heavier KNOCKS on the door.

He struggles to stand and answer the door with that awful, early-morning look.

He opens the door a crack to see the mean-looking Helen.

FATHER PAUL  
Ms., I mean, Doctor Robbins...

HELEN  
(interrupts)  
Get your act together. We have something to discuss.

FATHER PAUL  
Would you like to come in?

HELEN  
You know guests aren't allowed!

Father Paul glances at the sink and sees two sets of dishes, silverware, and glasses.

He glances at the new satellite Wi-fi on the table, then smiles at Helen.

FATHER PAUL  
I'll meet you in the church in five minutes.

He quickly shuts the door and races to the bathroom.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Father Paul trudges in sleepily to see Helen kneeling in prayer in the last pew.

He whispers upon reaching her.

FATHER PAUL  
Yes, Dr. Robbins?

She makes the sign of the cross, stands, and sits down.

HELEN  
Please sit down, and don't bother whispering. Not a soul around.

He smiles.

FATHER PAUL  
Business picks up closer to Sunday.

Helen doesn't smile as he sits next to her.

HELEN

We should hope so.

She pulls out a newspaper.

FATHER PAUL

The Spinoza inheritance. I read a little about it on the web. Very confusing.

She glares at him.

HELEN

There were five Spinoza families in the U.S. in 1880. All in Massachusetts. Now, thousands of families all over.

FATHER PAUL

My odds sound very slim.

HELEN

But only one law firm is involved in the inheritance.

FATHER PAUL

Maria Rodriguez. But she's checking out hundreds of possibilities.

HELEN

She rented a fancy hotel room in town for the week!

Helen checks her notes.

FATHER PAUL

Did they advertise Color TV?

Helen glares at the priest.

HELEN

Have you spoken to anyone else...

Maria enters the church and both Father Paul and Helen turn around to see Maria in her long, white coat, a headscarf, and dark glasses.

Helen doesn't recognize Maria from the fuzzy photos, but the priest's eyes are locked on to the white coat.

MARIA

I'm sorry, Father. I hate to bother you, but I need to talk.



He smiles briefly at Helen, then at Maria.

FATHER PAUL  
Certainly, my dear. The  
confessional is right this way.

Maria looks perplexed, which Helen doesn't see, as he leads Maria to the confessional.

The priest opens Maria's door to the confessional.

Maria reluctantly enters.

Father Paul turns to Helen and whispers.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
This may take a while.

Helen looks at her watch and glares at the priest.

HELEN  
I'll wait.

INT. CHURCH CONFESSIONAL - CONTINUOUS

Father Paul opens the confessional window immediately.

FATHER PAUL  
Do you have any idea who that is  
out there?

MARIA  
Wicked Witch of the West?

FATHER PAUL  
That's Dr. Helen Robbins, financial  
assistant to the Archbishop!

MARIA  
How did she find out? I got the DNA  
results just now!

FATHER PAUL  
Somebody took photos of you in that  
short skirt really close to me.

Maria speaks too loudly.

MARIA  
Angela Abrams. That bitch.

FATHER PAUL  
Shhh. Quieter. And we'll have to  
add swearing to your list of sins.

MARIA  
What?

FATHER PAUL  
You usually begin with "Bless me  
Father for I have sinned. It's been  
three weeks or whatever since my  
last confession."

MARIA  
Bless me father for I have sinned.  
It's been... one thousand weeks  
since my last confession.

FATHER PAUL  
Over 20 years?

MARIA  
I'm not here for confession! I'm  
here to tell you that your DNA  
matched.  
(louder)  
But there's also your first cousin  
in Massachusetts. Your dad may have  
fooled around! Identical DNA!

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - SAME

Helen struggles to hear them speaking but can't quite make it  
out.

BACK TO:

INT. CHURCH CONFSSIONAL - SAME

FATHER PAUL  
(louder)  
Yes, clear the air. Get it off your  
chest.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - SAME

Helen glares at the confessional.

BACK TO:

INT. CHURCH CONFSSIONAL - SAME

FATHER PAUL  
(whispers)  
We must be very quiet.

MARIA  
If you inherit, we'll auction the letters at Sotheby's. Ten million easy. I get my three percent, and you donate yours to charity or to the Church.

His chin drops.

FATHER PAUL  
Can't do it. By collecting my share, I break my vow of poverty.

MARIA  
Only for a while.

He looks away.

FATHER PAUL  
Eternity is longer than a while.

MARIA  
(angry, loud)  
I won't let you give the letters to the church straight away. They'll bury it in the Vatican's Secret Archives or the tomb of St. Peter, and I'll be out my commission! And I won't let it go to your bastard first cousin!

Maria opens the door to see Helen standing just outside.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Father Paul exits his door in time to see Maria kick Helen in the shin before storming out of the church.

FATHER PAUL  
(weakly in Maria's direction)  
For penance, you should say three Hail Mary's, and three Glory Be to the Fathers.

HELEN  
 I thought I recognized her!  
 (yells at Maria)  
 You Jezebel! You Hussy! You Harlot!

Father Paul drops his chin to his chest, and steps back into the confessional and shuts the door.

FATHER PAUL (O.S.)  
 (weakly)  
 Next.

EXT. CHURCH - A LITTLE LATER

Father Paul walks quickly on the walkway back to his studio apartment, but Helen is right behind him yelling all the way.

HELEN  
 You will copy me on every email,  
 include me on every phone call, and  
 invite me to every meeting  
 regarding your inheritance.

Father Paul walks faster.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
 You don't have the money to pay  
 inheritance tax, and never will.

Father Paul walks faster.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
 You will transfer your inheritance  
 to the Church before receiving it!  
 Do you understand?

He reaches his door, opens it, and turns back to Helen.

FATHER PAUL  
 Sorry, no visitors allowed.

HELEN  
 (yells)  
 You can expect an email from the  
 Archbishop, even if I have to write  
 it myself!  
 (beat)  
 You'll be reassigned to Timbuktu!

He gets in and shuts the door.

She raises a fist, and yells.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
 We should have known. The name  
 Spinoza is cursed with blasphemy!

She turns in a fury, and stomps away.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Father Paul paces nervously. He repeats the word "blasphemy"  
 in his head.

FATHER PAUL (V.O.)  
 Blasphemy?

He glares at Spinoza's book on the table and looks puzzled.

FATHER PAUL  
 God is the universe?  
 (beat)  
 Nothing is intrinsically good or  
 bad?  
 (laughs)  
 He's crazy!

He stands and paces angrily.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 Spinoza's God is indifferent to  
 Man! He doesn't concern himself  
 with us!

He panics.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 Then worshiping God or praying to  
 Him is senseless!

He collapses in a chair and covers his face with his hands.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 Then who did I make my vows of  
 chastity, poverty, and obedience  
 to?

He removes his hands from his face, looks up to the heavens  
 with a smile, and stands up to dance wildly.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 But nothing is intrinsically good  
 or bad, right?

We HEAR thunder outside the studio apartment and see a flash  
 of light.

He continues to dance.

EXT. STUDIO APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Angela stands under a large umbrella in a light mist, and pounds on his door with no answer. She wears a bright red and yellow sundress, and carries a picnic basket.

ANGELA

I know you're in there, Father Paul! Come out!

She hears his low, disgruntled voice.

FATHER PAUL (V.O.)

Go away.

ANGELA

I brought a picnic lunch. I thought the weather was supposed to be sunny and dry.

FATHER PAUL (V.O.)

Maybe God doesn't care what you think?

Angela pauses and looks to the side.

ANGELA

What's this about?

FATHER PAUL (V.O.)

That blasphemous distant relative! He's gonna have the Archbishop breathing down my neck! Maybe the Pope!

ANGELA

I know. Sorry!

The priest opens the door a few inches. His T-shirt is untucked, he's unshaven, and his eyes are bloodshot.

FATHER PAUL

Am I in trouble?

Angela shows Father Paul the picnic basket.

He lets her in.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Angela steps to the table and removes sandwiches from the picnic basket.

ANGELA

I stopped at the deli because I'm famished.

She takes a big bite of a sandwich, and slides his sandwich across the table.

The priest salivates at the sight of the toasted tuna sandwich.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

I got us toasted tuna salad 'cause it's Friday.

FATHER PAUL

We can eat meat on Fridays, except on Good Friday and during Lent.

He sits down and reluctantly grabs the sandwich.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming and bringing me the sandwich. I haven't eaten all day.

He takes a big bite.

ANGELA

You would have loved the teen at the deli. Had a name tag on that said his name was the Deli Llama -- L-L-A-M-A.

Father Paul produces a weak smile and keeps chewing.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

I laughed and he flirted with me as he made the sandwiches. I told him I needed an extra sandwich for a priest and he suggested deviled egg.

She hands him a bottled water from the basket and he takes a sip.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Cute kid.

Angela turns serious.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

I still don't know what Spinoza's literary work in your inheritance entails.

She looks the priest in the eyes and sees he's exhausted.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

You look tired.

He puts down the sandwich and water.

FATHER PAUL

I've had strange dreams. They woke me up. It was like the sketch on the refrigerator was talking to me.

Angela leans back, puzzled.

ANGELA

You don't believe in ghosts, do you?

Father Paul looks away for a second.

FATHER PAUL

Just the Holy Spirit and demons.

ANGELA

You're in good company. Forty-five percent of Americans believe the same.

FATHER PAUL

You don't?

ANGELA

No.

FATHER PAUL

I used to hear my parents' voices after they were killed.

(looks away)

Last night, I thought I heard Baruch Spinoza.

Angela looks at the priest with pity.

ANGELA

I'm sorry.

He looks back, and into her eyes.



FATHER PAUL  
You don't believe me.

ANGELA  
I rely more on reason and require  
evidence.

The priest abruptly stands.

FATHER PAUL  
Reason and evidence will set me  
free? Is that it?

Angela gets in his face.

ANGELA  
I met your first cousin. He's  
contesting your grandfather's will!

FATHER PAUL  
He's in town?

ANGELA  
Yes, and he gave me a copy of the  
will. That nutcase Maria never did!

FATHER PAUL  
My first cousin is here?

ANGELA  
Your mom's identical twin sister's  
son, Arnold Nesmith, and why does  
he have your identical DNA?

FATHER PAUL  
My cousin Arnold is a drunkard and  
a liar.

Angela forces a legal-sized envelope into his hands, and she  
sternly warns him.

ANGELA  
You'd better read the will!

He tries to hand the envelope back but she resists.

FATHER PAUL  
Don't want it!

She puts her hand on her hips and turns angry.

ANGELA  
You don't want to control your own  
destiny?

(MORE)

ANGELA (CONT'D)

You want your cousin, a sleazy  
community college general education  
teacher, to brand you as the  
dumbest guy on earth and drag your  
church down with you? Fine!

She rips the envelope from his hands and turns to leave.

FATHER PAUL

What do you mean drag my church  
down with me?

She stops and pauses before turning and speaking like an  
authority.

ANGELA

There's a clause your grandfather  
inserted that the inheritance goes  
to the next of kin, who aligns most  
closely to the philosophical  
leaning of Baruch Spinoza...

She waves the envelope in front of him, and continues after a  
pause.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

At the time of the formal reading  
of the will!

FATHER PAUL

Not me! That will never be me!

Father Paul lifts an imaginary glass of champagne.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)

Here's to my first cousin!

ANGELA

You're the certified lunatic here!  
Good day, Father Paul! May our  
paths never cross again!

She storms out with her picnic basket and the envelope.

Father Paul waves goodbye, equally angry, and slams the door.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

He immediately turns to the sketch of Spinoza. He can't take  
his eyes off Spinoza's wry smile.

FATHER PAUL

What have you got me into?

Then he smirks like a child.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Na-na-na-na-na! May faith is  
stronger than you!

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

In the dark room, Father Paul tosses and turns in his small twin bed. He forces his eyes closed.

He kicks off the thin blanket and sheet. He lays on his back wearing his V-neck T-shirt and black boxers, his arms at his sides, paralyzed by agony.

With his eyes closed, he moves lower in his bed.

He stretches his arms back and his legs out and apart, as if he were on a Medieval torture rack.

He grunts in pain and his head moves back and forth, but he can't move his arms and legs.

He HEARS the voice of Baruch Spinoza as if standing over him.

BARUCH SPINOZA (V.O.)  
Reason!

The priest grunts in pain and his head moves back and forth in agony. He yells.

FATHER PAUL  
No!

His eyes open widely as if he'd seen a ghost. He's sweating.

He looks around as he pulls his arms to his side, and lifts his knees.

He slowly props himself up on his elbows to focus on the sketch on the fridge.

He gets out of bed, trudges to the fridge, and stares at the sketch, like a frightened child.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Reason?

His hands tremble.

He turns to the crucifix on another wall and finds comfort.

He makes the sign of the cross as he trudges back to his bed.

He takes his lucky rabbit's foot from his nightstand and clutches it.

LATER

At the earliest sliver of sunrise, he wakes on his stomach, naked, when he HEARS a truck with a loud muffler cruising down the street. He hears the truck stop and one door shutting.

Father Paul shakes in fear and pulls his pillow over his head to return to sleep.

EXT. CHURCH - SAME

There's just a sliver of the coming sunrise when an ordinary man (later identified as Arnold Nesmith, 40s) exits the pickup truck with a large business envelope in his hand.

From behind a nearby tree, we sense "someone" is watching the man stare up at the church doors from the bottom step.

Seconds later, we see a black glove holding a nightstick strike the man squarely on the back of the head.

The man is stunned and wobbles as the killer strikes the man again and again before he collapses onto the church steps, blood gushing from his crushed skull.

EXT. CHURCH - LATE MORNING

Father Paul walks sleepily from his apartment around to the front of the church, sweeping as he walks.

He freezes when he sees the chalk outline of a human body on the church steps with the right hand outstretched, and the index finger of the chalk figure pointing to the church door. There is yellow police tape bordering the steps and around the two shrubs in planter boxes at the bottom and sides of the steps.

He sees the giant red bloodstain by the outline of the victim's head.

His mouth and eyes open widely. He remains frozen.

Finally, he looks to the side of the steps to see DETECTIVE KLINE (40s), an African American in a gray business suit, with a badge on her hip, looking equally surprised. She holds a copy of the will and the envelope it came in.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
And who might you be?

FATHER PAUL  
Father Paul. This is my parish.

She looks at the will, then puts it behind her back.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
You got one less parishioner.

The priest makes the sign of the cross.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
May I assume that Christopher  
Spinoza is synonymous with Father  
Paul?

FATHER PAUL  
It's just Father Paul now. What...  
what happened?

DETECTIVE KLINE  
I'll ask the questions. Where were  
you at dawn this morning?

FATHER PAUL  
Asleep. I have a small studio  
apartment behind the church. Except  
I heard a loud truck stop and one  
door shut.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
What time?

FATHER PAUL  
I was afraid to look.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
What time do you regularly rise?

The priest is proud.

FATHER PAUL  
Up at dawn every day to sweep the  
church steps.

The Detective checks her watch.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
'Bout four hours late today. Why?

FATHER PAUL  
Didn't sleep well last night.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Why?

He shrugs, bewildered.

FATHER PAUL

Nightmares with a ghost?

The Detective takes a step back, and sees his Roman collar.

DETECTIVE KLINE

The Holy Ghost?

FATHER PAUL

No. He's referred to as the Holy Spirit now. It was the ghost of Baruch Spinoza.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Now, we're getting somewhere.

(steps closer with  
handcuffs)

I think you should come with me to the station where we can...

Suddenly, Helen's car races to the front of the church and slams on the brakes.

Helen leaps from the car to come to Father Paul's aid.

HELEN

You must be Detective Kline.

The Detective tilts her head.

DETECTIVE KLINE

And you are?

HELEN

Helen Robbins, LL.M. That's Master of Laws degree.

DETECTIVE KLINE

I know what it means.

FATHER PAUL

I thought you were an economist.

Helen glares at Father Paul, and hands the Detective her business card. The Detective stares at the card.

HELEN

I'm the special assistant to the Archbishop.

(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

I just received word of this terrible tragedy when your department called out of common courtesy.

DETECTIVE KLINE

I see.

HELEN

(sternly)

Do you, Detective? Your Captain, Sean Sullivan, assures me that incidents occurring on church property will be dealt with quietly and judiciously to prevent unnecessary damage to the Church's reputation.

DETECTIVE KLINE

I was going to ask the priest a few follow-up questions. You see, my vic this morning was a Mr. Arnold Nesmith from Massachusetts.

Helen shrugs, but the priest's eyes open excitedly.

FATHER PAUL

Hey, he's my first cousin!

He stares down at the chalk outline and blood.

HELEN

Let's step into the church, shall we? To avoid a public spectacle.

(smiles insincerely)

Don't make me call Sean.

The priest looks across the street and sees the same elderly couple he sees every day. He waves and yells.

FATHER PAUL

Top of the morning to you, Mr. and Mrs. Flannigan.

They pay him no attention, as Helen whisks him into the church.

The Detective shakes her head in disgust as she follows them in.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

We see but don't hear Helen doing all the talking. The Detective takes notes and glares at Father Paul who looks oblivious to the discussion.

Every time Father Paul opens his mouth, Helen steps on his foot and puts her index finger to her lips.

The Detective shuts her notebook in disgust and storms out of the church.

The priest gets lectured to by Helen before she points to the altar.

The priest takes out his rosary beads and trudges to the altar.

Helen grunts as she storms out.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The priest sits at his desk with a small lamp providing light to his legal yellow pad and pencil. He wears a V-neck T-shirt and black boxer shorts.

We SEE the title at the top of the page, "Sunday's Sermon."

He writes, "1. Thou shalt not kill."

He ponders for a second, then scratches it out.

He writes, "1. Impure thoughts."

His phone rings, he sees it's Maria, and reluctantly answers.

FATHER PAUL

Hello?

MARIA

I need to see you, but I see someone in an unmarked police car watching your front door.

He pauses to think.

FATHER PAUL

There's the bathroom window on the side of the house, but...



MARIA  
(interrupts)  
Open it. I'll be there in five  
minutes.

Click. The call ends.

He ponders for a second, then scratches out "Impure thoughts."

He goes into the bathroom and opens the tiny window, and waits patiently.

LATER

Maria is outside the bathroom window in a skintight, all-black, yoga outfit.

She sees the tiny window and whispers angrily.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I can't fit through there!

Father Paul leans his lips out the window and whispers.

FATHER PAUL  
Use the back door.

She rolls her eyes in disgust and sneaks around to the door.

Maria enters the backdoor, as Father Paul moves to a light switch for the overhead light.

Maria leaps to stop him and whispers.

MARIA  
No one must know that I'm here.

Father Paul, just inches away from Maria, is overwhelmed by her beauty and figure. He stares at her breasts as she whispers.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
The Detective interrogated me  
today. I told her everything.

She tilts his chin up to look him in the eyes.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
She thinks you or Angela Abrams  
killed your cousin to secure the  
inheritance.

FATHER PAUL

That's ridiculous. Angela would never do something like that, and I don't want the inheritance. And what are you wearing? I can see your...

MARIA

Focus on my eyes, Father Paul!

Father Paul's eyes wander up slowly.

FATHER PAUL

Yes. That. Those. That!

MARIA

You better have a good lawyer. I could ask my mom.

FATHER PAUL

Helen Robbins is the Archbishop's lawyer. She has to be good.

She nudges closer to Father Paul to whisper in his ear.

MARIA

Tomorrow at 1 PM is the reading of the will. The Detective will be there. I came here to tell you to be very careful about what you say or she'll put you away for life.

Father Paul is overcome with emotions and hugs her.

FATHER PAUL

You care about me?

His hand clumsily move from her back down to her butt.

Her eyes open widely as she's pulled to his groin.

His hands continue to fondle her, as he bends his head to kiss her.

Finally, she pushes back, alarmed.

MARIA

Look, Father. I want my sales commission, and you're going to help me get it!

The priest's eyes open widely.

FATHER PAUL  
But, my vow of poverty!

MARIA  
You'd be bending the vow of poverty  
for one day, but that wasn't the  
vow you were about to break!  
(points at his crotch)  
Save that for Angela Abrams.

The priest looks away, embarrassed.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
You've got nothing to be  
embarrassed about. Don't admit to  
killing anyone, and we'll get those  
Spinoza papers to Sotheby's right  
after reading the will tomorrow!

She turns and walks toward the back door.

FATHER PAUL  
Good, but...

She giggles.

MARIA  
Thanks, Father.

She exits as the priest returns to his desk chair, trying to ignore his erection.

He writes, "1. Giving to the Poor."

Moments later, he HEARS a light tapping sound on the backdoor.

He stares toward the backdoor, then down at his erection.

He whispers nervously.

FATHER PAUL  
Come in?

Angela sneaks into the apartment like a cat-burglar wearing all-black leotards like Maria wore.

The priest turns to her with eyes wide open.

He stays seated and crosses his legs, which is difficult given the small desk.

Angela moves behind him and immediately sees the cause for his discomfort, then looks at his notes for sermon ideas.

ANGELA

Sorry to bother your writing.

She puts her hands on his shoulders and he moans with a guilty pleasure.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

She was here, wasn't she? Giving to the poor?

He nods yes, unable to speak as she rubs his shoulders.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

I thought I would remind you that the reading of the will is tomorrow at 1 PM.

His mumbles sounds like soft moans.

FATHER PAUL

Uh-huh.

He watches her as she saunters toward the kitchenette.

ANGELA

Good idea keeping the lights low. I know she's out there. That Detective interrogated me today. I told her everything.

His eyes open widely.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

She thinks you or Maria Rodriguez killed your cousin to secure the inheritance.

She lifts and carries a kitchen chair and sets it directly behind his desk chair.

He moans softly as she sits in the chair and places her hands on the priest's hips.

He instinctively uncrosses his legs and looks up, and she leans her head on his left shoulder.

He moans again.

She rubs his hips inching closer to him.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
Your troubles can all disappear  
after the reading of the will if  
you transfer you inheritance to my  
foundation.

His mumbles add a quivering sound.

FATHER PAUL  
Uh-huh.

She leans closer to massage his manhood.

ANGELA  
You know that you're not breaking  
your vow of chastity as long as you  
don't touch me!

He looks back and sees her licking her lips seductively.

FATHER PAUL  
Huh?

He looks into her eyes, moaning one last time.

He quivers and explodes, but she keeps rubbing him.

ANGELA  
You will transfer your inheritance  
to my foundation, won't you?

The priest exhales all his breath as she wipes her hand on  
his boxer shorts, then sneaks out the back door.

The priest musters all the strength he has left to scratch  
out "1. Giving to the Poor" and to pencil back in, "1. Impure  
thoughts."

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - PRE-DAWN

Father Paul tosses and turns on his bed for another agonizing  
night. He wears only boxer shorts.

He HEARS an ominous voice.

BARUCH SPINOZA (V.0.)  
Evidence!

He springs up shaking in fear to see an empty room. He glares  
at the sketch on the refrigerator and puts his hands on his  
hips, tilting his head a bit confused and disoriented.

FATHER PAUL

Evidence?

As he trudges back to bed, he HEARS a car screech to a stop outside. He HEARS two doors shut.

He lays flat on his stomach in bed and covers his ears with his pillow.

EXT. CHURCH - SAME

There's just a sliver of the coming sunrise when Archbishop Mahoney, in full robes and cap, says a prayer as he looks at the chalk outline of the body on the church steps.

Seconds later, we see a black glove holding a nightstick strike the Archbishop squarely on the back of the head.

The Archbishop is stunned and wobbles a bit and the killer strikes the man again and again before he collapses on the church steps, blood gushing from his crushed skull.

EXT. STUDIO APARTMENT - LATE MORNING

The priest sleepily sweeps the steps of the walkway to the church with even less vigor than the day before.

As he gets to the front steps of the church, he freezes at the sight of another chalk outline of a body. Yellow police tape again borders the church steps and the two shrubs in planter boxes at the bottom and sides of the steps.

The priest's mouth and eyes open widely as he sees that the outline of the second body indicates that the victim wore robes and a skullcap called the zucchetto worn by top clergy. The outline of the victim's body shows him with one arm and his index finger pointing to the church.

Detective Kline stands over the chalk outline waiting for the priest to acknowledge her.

He finally looks up in shock.

DETECTIVE KLINE

I was just about to hunt you down.

The Father's voice shakes as he speaks.

FATHER PAUL

That looks like...

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Your Archbishop?

FATHER PAUL  
Could it be anybody?

The Detective notices that he's unshaven, but properly dressed, and that he's wearing his new shoes.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
His skullcap was magenta.

FATHER PAUL  
The cap is called a zucchetto. If I play my cards right...

DETECTIVE KLINE  
You might get off easy with life in prison.

He laughs and waves his arm like he thinks she's kidding.

FATHER PAUL  
No, silly. I might get to wear magenta or even red someday!

She sees he's not kidding, and turns angry.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Where were you at dawn this morning? And don't tell me you were sweeping the steps.

FATHER PAUL  
I'm afraid I slept in again. Except that I heard two car doors shut instead of one.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
With no corroborating witnesses. And for the second body... excuse me, day in a row?

FATHER PAUL  
Uh-huh. Yes. Why do you ask?

The Detective paces angrily as the priest's cellphone RINGS.

He reaches in his pocket, pulls out his phone, and sees that it's the Archbishop's Office.

He puts a finger up to his lips.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 Archbishop's office. I'd better  
 take this.

He answers the phone to HEAR Helen crying in hysterics.

Helen continues crying, so Father Paul interrupts.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
 It's okay, Dr. Robbins.  
 (the Detective's eyes open  
 widely)  
 I'll take his call. Put him on!

The Detective leaps to the priest and takes away his phone,  
 and points to the second chalk outline of a body.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
 He's dead. You're coming with me!

She tosses his broom aside and slaps handcuffs on him, just  
 as the elderly couple walks by across the street and stops to  
 see the two chalk outlines and the priest in cuffs.

FATHER PAUL  
 Top of the morning to you, Mr. and  
 Mrs. Flannigan.

The elderly couple ignores the priest, as the Detective  
 pushes the priest to her car.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
 (yells)  
 Move along. There's nothing to see  
 here!

FATHER PAUL  
 Actually...

DETECTIVE KLINE  
 You have the right to remain  
 silent...

The Detective shakes her head in disgust as she loads the  
 priest in the back of her car.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

The room has a table and four chairs. The Detective sits  
 opposite Father Paul and waits patiently as he enjoys a cup  
 of coffee, drinking it with the handcuffs on. He smiles.



FATHER PAUL

I never have a second cup...

The Detective puts her finger to her lips to request silence.

Helen is escorted into the room by a uniformed Policewoman (30s).

HELEN

Is my client charged with any crime?

DETECTIVE KLINE

Not yet...

HELEN

Then please remove the handcuffs.

The Detective removes his handcuffs.

FATHER PAUL

Hi, Dr. Robbins. What's this all about?

The Detective speaks loudly and clearly.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Beginning the video interview at eleven AM. Father Paul, AKA Christopher Spinoza, is joined by council, Dr. Helen Robbins.

Helen sits next to the priest and whispers in his ear.

HELEN

You are not to speak one word.

The priest's eyes open widely.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Father Paul is a person of interest in two homicides, including Mr. Arnold Nesmith and Archbishop Martin Mahoney.

Helen leans across the table in a threatening way.

HELEN

Have you found any evidence that places Father Paul at the exact scene of the crimes at the times of death?

DETECTIVE KLINE

Not yet...

HELEN

Have you recovered the murder  
weapon or weapons?

DETECTIVE KLINE

Well, no, but we're looking...

HELEN

Then you could not possibly link  
either of these two unfortunate  
incidences to Father Paul.

DETECTIVE KLINE

We have motive and opportunity. I  
have a copy of the last will and  
testimony...

Father Paul gets excited and speaks out.

FATHER PAUL

I knew that Grandpa died.

The Detective and Helen turn to glare at Father Paul.

The Policewoman knocks on the door and steps in to face the  
Detective sadly.

DETECTIVE KLINE

(to the Policewoman)

Find anything?

POLICEWOMAN

The CSI team reports soiled boxer  
shorts; a sketch and a book by a  
subversive philosopher, Baruch  
Spinoza; and the Holy Bible.

The priest's eyes open widely as Helen glares at him.

POLICEWOMAN (CONT'D)

They weren't able to break into his  
double encrypted Wi-Fi.

The priest breathes a sigh of relief.

POLICEWOMAN (CONT'D)

But you were right about his phone  
records. They indicate recent  
conversations with a Ms. Maria  
Rodriguez and Ms. Angela Abrams.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
No murder weapon?

POLICEWOMAN  
No, but my partner is looking  
everywhere for it.

Helen turns angrily to the Detective.

HELEN  
I suggest you release my client  
immediately and go after a real  
killer!

The Detective motions with her head that they could all go.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
(angry)  
This concludes the interview at  
11:07 AM. I'll see you all at the  
reading of the will! I'll get to  
the bottom of this!

Helen angrily yanks the priest out of the room.

HELEN  
Soiled boxer shorts?

The priest shrugs with a perplexed look on his face.

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Maria sits behind a beautiful desk. She wears a formal white business suit, buttoned-up white blouse, her hair in a bun, and reading glasses.

Angela enters wearing a modest red pantsuit, sensible black shoes, her hair in a bun, and reading glasses. She carries a high-end leather briefcase.

Maria looks up from the will on her desk, and smiles insincerely. A clock on the wall reads, "12:55."

MARIA  
Ms. Abrams, please come in and take a  
seat. You're early.

Five armchairs face the desk in a semi-circle and Angela selects the center chair.

The ladies check out each other's appearance like vipers ready to strike. They snarl at each other.

ANGELA

No skin-tight yoga pants today?

MARIA

No skin-tight leotards?

They both sit higher in the chairs, lifting their chins.

ANGELA

You left the kind priest in an uncomfortable state last night. I knew you would straighten him out.

MARIA

I'm certain you were able to handle the situation, from what the Detective told me.

They both stand and their hands form claws.

They claw at each other like tomcats, but fail to land lethal blows.

They grab each other by the arms and shake each other madly until both sets of reading glasses are crooked on their noses.

They HEAR footsteps approaching and immediately sit down and adjust their glasses.

Father Paul is shoved into the room by Helen, who is a few steps behind him.

Both women realize their claws remain out, and they relax their hands and turn with fake smiles.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Father Paul, Dr. Robbins, please come in and take a seat.

ANGELA

So nice to see you two again.

Helen enters in a black pantsuit, hair in a bun, and with reading glasses. She forces a smile at the two women, while Father Paul smiles sincerely at everyone. Helen carries a large, old lawyer's briefcase.

FATHER PAUL

Hi, everyone.

Helen elbows Father Paul in the gut to force him to shut up, as Detective Kline enters in a gray business suit, hair up in a bun, and reading glasses.

Helen forces Father Paul in the end seat, as she sits between Angela and the priest.

Helen snarls at Angela.

MARIA  
Thank you for joining us,  
Detective.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
(sarcastic)  
Uh-huh!

The Detective takes the far seat, leaving an empty chair between her and Angela.

The Detective looks at the women, snickers, and shakes her head in disgust.

Maria regains her composure.

MARIA  
I've affirmed that each of you has  
read the will.  
(looks over her glasses)  
Regardless of how you obtained your  
copies.

She glares at Angela which is obvious to others.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Where did you get your copy of the  
will, Ms. Abrams?

Angela shrugs calmly.

ANGELA  
I don't recall.

Father Paul looks at Angela perplexed.

FATHER PAUL  
Didn't...

Helen elbows Father Paul in the chest and knocks the wind out of him.

Everyone turns to the priest.

MARIA  
We're all business people here. We  
should let him speak!

Helen glares at Maria.

HELEN

Get on with it, you hussy! I remember you in that church!

DETECTIVE KLINE

What's that about?

Father Paul speaks with great difficulty.

FATHER PAUL

Things said in the confessional are between the parishioner and priest, and...

Father Paul gets another elbow in the chest.

Maria tries to hurry things along.

MARIA

The will was being contested by Father Paul's first cousin, Mr. Arnold Nesmith.

(points to the empty chair)

He had no heirs of his own, so that's no longer an issue.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Except that he's dead, and his killer is still at large!

Helen stands and opens her briefcase.

The Detective draws her pistol and aims it at Helen, who glares at the Detective.

Helen slowly withdraws notarized documents.

HELEN

I have here notarized documents that the Spinoza letters in question were in the possession of the Holy Father as early as 1797.

Helen tosses the documents on Maria's desk.

Angela immediately stands to object.

ANGELA

The misguided attorney for the Archbishop...

DETECTIVE KLINE

Also dead!

ANGELA

Fails to account for how the Vatican came into possession of Spinoza's letters. There is no bill of sale or letter of surrender or as a gift to the Pope.

MARIA

I'm afraid that's correct.

ANGELA

We have reason to believe they were in the possession of Napoleon's army who cataloged then stole over 500 paintings, statues, books, and manuscripts from the Vatican.

FATHER PAUL

Wow! What happened to them then.

ANGELA

When Napoleon became emperor, and in 1813 he ordered the entire Vatican Archive transferred to Paris including more than 3,000 crates of artifacts.

Father Paul is beside himself with excitement.

FATHER PAUL

What a mystery!

DETECTIVE KLINE

(sarcastic)

Not to mention our two dead bodies.

ANGELA

But in April 1814, following Napoleon's defeat, the new government in France ordered the archive returned to the Vatican. That's where it gets interesting.

DETECTIVE KLINE

I doubt it.

ANGELA

The Vatican couldn't afford to collect them all so they sold off about one-fourth to one-third of the crates to pay for the return of the rest.

MARIA

I read about that. They sold the unopened crates by weight. Who knows what treasures went into private collectors around the world?

DETECTIVE KLINE

We're getting nowhere!

ANGELA

Spinoza's letters may have been tracked down by one of the five Spinoza families that immigrated to Massachusetts in the late-1800s.

FATHER PAUL

And passed them down to Grandpa?!

MARIA

We don't know that.

Angela takes out notarized legal documents from her briefcase and tosses them on Maria's desk.

ANGELA

Exactly, which is why our attorneys are serving you with a Writ of Provenance.

FATHER PAUL & DETECTIVE KLINE

What's that?

Maria picks up the Writ of Provenance and studies it.

HELEN

(angry)

Provenance is the chronology of the ownership, custody or location of a historical object.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Oh!

FATHER PAUL

Huh?

ANGELA

It means that the Vatican must cease claims of ownership of the Spinoza Letters unless it produces an original bill of sale or gift signed by Baruch Spinoza.



MARIA

And it requires a thorough accounting of historical ownership and possession of the letters through time.

DETECTIVE KLINE

And who does that?

Maria stops reading and freezes for a moment.

MARIA

Ms. Abrams, Father Paul, and myself. Sequestered. In private. No phones or computers.

Angela holds up her briefcase.

ANGELA

(glares at Maria)

You now have the Church's records and I have everything else.

Helen puts her claws out and goes after Angela in another catfight.

HELEN

I know about his soiled underwear.

Angela tries to look innocent.

ANGELA

Moi?

HELEN

You Jezebel! You harlot! You tramp!

Angela shrugs, then tears after Helen again.

ANGELA

Where's your bill of sale for the letters, you Papal prostitute?!

Father Paul and the Detective try to break up the fight.

The Detective finally breaks the ladies apart, and grabs some documents from her black briefcase.

She serves warrants to the priest, Angela, and Maria.

DETECTIVE KLINE

These are warrants for us to search your living quarters, offices cars, and anywhere else we deem appropriate. I suggest you sequester in a single-entrance hotel suite, because I'll have an officer outside your door.

The priest's eyes open widely.

HELEN

That's totally inappropriate.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Three-bedroom suites are available downtown.

The Policewoman outside will escort you now.

POLICEWOMAN

I'll swing you by your living quarters to pick up your frilly nighties.

The Policewoman enters and begins to guide Father Paul, Angela and Maria out.

HELEN

What about me?

MARIA

(laughs to Helen)

I suggest you start looking for a bill of sale!

ANGELA

(to Helen)

I doubt you own a frilly nightie.

DETECTIVE KLINE

(yells)

If I find the murder weapon, one of you will be sequestered for life!

Only the priest is smiling.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Father Paul remains in his priest outfit. Maria is in baggy gray sweatpants, sweatshirt, and tennis shoes. Angela is in bright, short, red silk running shorts and short tank top.

The priest can't take his eyes off Angela as she paces in the suite's huge main room. He covers his lap with a yellow pad that reads "Sermon ideas."

MARIA

I hope one of you isn't hiding the murder weapon! They are going to look everywhere!

Father Paul glances at his yellow pad on his lap.

Angela glares at Maria.

ANGELA

I think the Detective sequestered us together hoping one is a serial killer to solve her case!

Father Paul looks confused.

FATHER PAUL

How would that... oh!

Angela and Maria look with pity on Father Paul, until Angela changes the subject.

ANGELA

We've waited patiently for almost 350 years for this major literary discovery and we won't sit idly by while the Church makes a power grab at ownership!

(beat, yells)

Provenance!

The priest is obviously distracted with Angela's belly button.

FATHER PAUL

(mumbles)

What's provenance again?

Maria glares at Angela as she removes her sweatshirt. Angela and the priest see that Maria has duct-taped a plastic document-protector to her belly.

Angela is overcome with excitement.

ANGELA

The letters!

The priest is distracted by Maria's lace bra as she slowly peels back the tape holding the document-protector to her body.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
Brilliant. That policewoman outside  
didn't search us.

Maria glares at Angela.

MARIA  
You couldn't have hidden a postage  
stamp with that outfit!

The priest looks back and forth at the women.

Maria places the letters on the table and puts her sweatshirt  
on.

Maria points to the letters and finally answers Father Paul's  
question.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
(glaring at Angela)  
Provenance is the chronology of the  
ownership of historical objects.

FATHER PAUL  
Okay.

Angela inches closer to the letters.

ANGELA  
Baruch was the original owner,  
obviously.

MARIA  
Then the Vatican gained possession,  
but we don't know how.

Angela is now inches from the letter bag.

ANGELA  
Then Napoleon?

MARIA  
(to Father Paul)  
Yes. I have the original Napoleonic  
leather letter bag, dating to 1800  
in my mom's wall safe.

ANGELA  
Authenticated?

MARIA  
Yes, and there are two gold  
Napoleon coats of arms on the  
carrier.

ANGELA

That's enough to prove possession.

MARIA

(to Father Paul)

Then the letters disappear until your grandpa. My grandma, the attorney, and your grandpa were... close.

Father Paul's eyes open widely.

MARIA (CONT'D)

She says she stored the letter bag containing the letters with his will in her safe deposit box since 1955.

ANGELA

Any notes or clues about the purchase of the letter bag?

MARIA

None.

The priest looks at the letters and makes the sign of the cross.

Angela is giddy with anticipation.

ANGELA

Gloves, please. I need to see the letters!

Maria holds a finger down on the letters and turns to the priest.

MARIA

Did your grandpa ever discuss the letters with you?

Father Paul can't take his eyes off Angela.

FATHER PAUL

(mumbles)

I don't remember.

Maria stands and gets in Angela's face.

MARIA

(angry)

Maybe he could remember if he wasn't so distracted!

Angela looks down at herself and storms to her bedroom.

Maria walks to her bedroom and returns with three pairs of white cotton gloves.

Angela enters moments later in red sweatpants and a sweatshirt.

Father Paul exhales all his breath, disappointed, as the three gather around the table.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Ground rules. The letters don't leave the table. Never pick them up. They will remain in the plastic covers.

The priest and Angela nod 'yes.'

MARIA (CONT'D)

We all wear white cotton gloves at all times around the documents. I brought three pairs. We only touch the corners. No food or drinks on the table.

The priest and Angela nod 'yes' as they lean in closer.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Father Paul's grandpa put the letters in individual plastic covers that weren't invented until the early-1950s.

FATHER PAUL

Grandpa used them for sheet music.

Everyone puts on the white cotton gloves.

Maria carefully removes six plastic-covered letters from the plastic document cover.

Angela is immediately disappointed.

ANGELA

They're in Latin!

Maria is equally sad.

The priest smiles.

FATHER PAUL

I read, write, and speak Latin. My dad taught me, right along with English. It was my only skill as a child. Horrible at sports.

Maria yank's the priest's yellow pad from his hands and holds it to the table.

MARIA

Get busy!

The priest begins to translate the first letter.

He writes, "Benedict de Spinoza, January, 1677."

Maria and Angela smile.

ANGELA

One month before he died at the age of forty-four of lung disease.

The priest writes the title of the letters as "My Revenge."

The three of them stare at each other, stunned.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - SAME

The Detective tears apart the priest's room, emptying everything from cupboards to drawers. The bed is flipped up, and the floor is littered with papers and books.

She gets on her radio.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Harris, anything in or around the church!

(yells)

Anything?

A highly professional POLICE OFFICER HARRIS (35) answers.

POLICEMAN HARRIS (O.S.)

Blood-checked and dusted every candlestick and crucifix. Nothing outside either! Checked everywhere!

DETECTIVE KLINE

Keep looking! He's our killer, I know it!

She paces angrily.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
 Acts like an idiot, but he's just  
 playing us. He's after the money  
 and fame, and the sex that goes  
 along with it!

POLICEMAN HARRIS (O.S.)  
 I agree, Detective. I'm one of his  
 few parishioners. I've listened to  
 his stupid sermons for two years  
 now.

(beat)  
 Going to Hell would be bad luck?  
 Why weren't there more  
 Commandments? How much altar wine  
 is too much? He's an embarrassment  
 to the Church.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
 (yells)  
 Tear the place apart! Find me that  
 weapon!

BACK TO:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

The priest looks shaken as he completes the translation of  
 the first letter.

Angela picks at the yellow pad and shares reading it with  
 Maria.

ANGELA  
 Benedict de Spinoza, January 1677.

MARIA  
 My revenge.

ANGELA  
 I have been excommunicated by the  
 Jews, condemned as a heretic by  
 Christians, ignored by Islam, and  
 shunned by them all.

Maria looks away.

MARIA  
 He sounds so bitter.

ANGELA  
 Angry.



FATHER PAUL

It gets worse.

Angela reads on.

ANGELA

I have been incorrectly labeled an agnostic, a pantheist, and an atheist: labels that insult my intelligence and only serve to prove my current definitions, axioms, and propositions as absolute truth. Therefore I beg my colleagues to silence *The Ethics aeternum*.

Father Paul looks away.

FATHER PAUL

Aeternum means something stronger than "forever." Silence was his exact word: silentium in Latin. No confusion there! Bury would have been sepelite.

MARIA

He didn't want it dug up later.

ANGELA

Possibly.

MARIA

*The Ethics* was only published after his death by his closest colleagues. Is he saying that he didn't want it published?

ANGELA

It means that these letters contain a far more controversial philosophy than God is nature, and God is everywhere, but he's unconcerned with our daily troubles.

Maria looks at the six total letters.

MARIA

What could he possibly say in only six short letters that would set the world on fire?

Father Paul shakes in fear. He pushes his chair back from the table.

FATHER PAUL

I can't go on.

Father Paul stands and staggers to his room.

ANGELA

You must not quit!

MARIA

It could be the discovery of a  
lifetime.

Father Paul reaches his bedroom door shaking his head 'no'  
like a mad man.

FATHER PAUL

Or damnation aeturnum.

He slams the bedroom door.

Maria and Angela stare at the letters in silence.

Angela walks over the landline phone in the kitchenette.

She presses "0" for the operator.

ANGELA

Concierge's station, please.

Maria looks at Angela with a worried look.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Hi handsome. This is Angela Abrams.  
Remember me in the red shorts? I  
saw you had two tablets at your  
workstation, you multitasker you.

Maria rolls her eyes in disgust.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

A-huh! I need to hop online for a  
couple hours, but the wicked  
policewoman outside our door  
doesn't want us to have one. Can  
you be a dear and put your spare  
one in between two busboy bins in  
the kitchen and put them under our  
room service cart when they bring  
us our dinner in about 30 minutes.  
We'll make it worth your while when  
we leave tomorrow morning.

Maria shakes her head 'no.'

ANGELA (CONT'D)

What was your name again for my review comments?

(beat)

Yes, Ernesto, I'll return it personally.

She hangs up.

MARIA

We didn't order Room Service!

Angela picks up the phone and dials "3."

ANGELA

Room service, send up four full steak and lobster dinners, and four hot-fudge sundaes to suite 1405. The concierge, Ernesto, is sending me a love letter between two busboy trays under the room service cart. Look the other way and get a big tip. Also, one of the meals and sundaes is for that nice policewomen outside our door. Thanks. Charge it to the room.

Maria looks disgusted with Angela.

MARIA

You're going to try a Latin-to-English translator, aren't you?

Angela smirks and points to the priest's door.

ANGELA

You want to know what these letters are all about too! The priest isn't going to tell us, and I for one, want to back these up digitally.

Maria gets in Angela's face.

MARIA

In case something happens to us?

ANGELA

You never know.

Both sets of claws come out again.

MARIA

I photographed the letters just in case.

Angela pushes Maria.

ANGELA

They weren't yours to photograph!  
That's grand theft!

Maria pushes Angela.

MARIA

These aren't the Dead Sea Scrolls!

ANGELA

One more body and they will be!

They glare at each other.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The Detective sulks on the church steps between the two chalk outlines. She stares at the two, thick, waist-high shrubs in planter boxes at the bottom and sides of the steps.

She picks up her radio and speaks into it.

DETECTIVE KLINE

That's it? All of you found  
nothing?

Silence (or crickets).

Finally, the Policewoman at the hotel speaks up.

POLICEWOMAN (O.S.)

I found the steak and lobster to be  
delicious, and the hot fudge sundae  
was to die for, but the suspects  
haven't budged.

DETECTIVE KLINE

(controlled anger)

I was referring to the murder  
weapon!

Silence (or crickets).

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

The rest of you, report back to the  
station immediately.

POLICEWOMAN (O.S.)

What do I do about the suspects?

DETECTIVE KLINE

Don't let 'em leave. We're bugging their homes and phones now. You'll let 'em go in the morning. Each will have a tail, and one of them is bound to slip up! We'll catch our killer!

She turns off her radio.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LATER

The women have eaten, but the priest's food is outside his room on a tray.

The translation of the second letter is in progress.

ANGELA

De Deo, means concerning God.

MARIA

That's how his book *The Ethics* started.

Angela is stunned.

ANGELA

That's followed by de Deorum, concerning gods.

MARIA

The priest isn't going to like this.

ANGELA

Definitions. By God, I no longer mean nature. By God, I mean an imagined deity like the Hindu God, Brahma thousands of years before the God of Abraham; the Greek God, Zeus; and the Roman God, Jupiter.

MARIA

Uh-oh! I know where this is going.

ANGELA

By Ancient Texts, I mean any works of art, carvings, or literature referring to specific Gods created by the believers of those Gods.

MARIA

Oh, dear.

ANGELA

By Superstitions, I mean a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, the false conception of causation, or an irrational belief in supernatural...

Maria leans in to read the letter.

MARIA

De Deo et de Deorum.  
(looks at Angela)  
God or Gods?

Their chins drop to their chests in sadness.

After a moment of silence, Angela continues.

ANGELA

Axioms. I. All natural events have a natural cause. II. The names of the Gods have changed over time, and the beliefs that Gods influence natural events have continued despite the lack of evidence linking cause and effect.

MARIA

Oh Geez!

ANGELA

Listen to this: Not understanding the causes of natural events does not prove the existence of divine intervention. If I do not understand the natural cause of lightning, I cannot infer that it must have been caused by Zeus, Jupiter, of the God of Abraham.

MARIA

Spinoza discovered the Divine Fallacy!

ANGELA

Aristotle came upon the Begging the Question Fallacy two thousand years ago, but Spinoza is applying it to organized religion.

(snickers)

The Torah and the Bible are written by God, because it says so in the Torah and the Bible.

MARIA

Circular reasoning is mistaken for proof.

ANGELA

Exactly. No wonder the Pope wanted to bury these letters!

MARIA

He might not have been the only one!

ANGELA

Father Paul is gonna want to burn these.

Maria and Angela sigh, look into each other's eyes and share a moment.

MARIA

What are we going to do?

They hear a blood-curdling SCREAM from the priest's bedroom.

Maria kicks aside the priest's food tray.

Angela tries to push his door open, but it won't budge.

ANGELA

Father Paul, let us in!

MARIA

We can help!

Angela whispers to Maria.

ANGELA

You hide the letters.

Maria puts the letters in the plastic pouch and puts it in her pants, as Angela throws herself against the door, unsuccessfully.

MARIA

I'll get the Policewoman.

Maria unlocks the front door, and the Policewoman is gone. The plates and dishes remain with a note that reads, "Thanks for the food. You're free to go."

MARIA (CONT'D)

She's gone. We're free to go!

ANGELA

Help me push.

They push and push and finally push away the dresser that was blocking the door.

They enter to see Father Paul in boxer shorts, face-down, with his arms spread out like Jesus on the cross. In one hand is Spinoza's book, *The Ethics*, and in the other hand is the sketch of Spinoza. His body shakes.

Maria throws a blanket over the priest and comforts him, while Angela removes the sketch and the book to the other room.

Angela returns to see the priest sitting and wrapped in the blanket. Maria is sitting behind the priest, rocking him gently and reassuring him.

MARIA

You'll be okay, Father. You'll be okay.

Angela joins the priest on the ground and hugs him from the side.

ANGELA

We'll get you through this.

(to the priest)

Did you bring the book and the sketch?

He shakes his head 'no,' and speaks in a low, sad voice.

FATHER PAUL

One of you...

(beat)

I know what the letters say...

(beat)

My life is over.

He faints.

MARIA

(whispers)

I bet the Detective put the Policewoman up to it.

ANGELA

My thought exactly.

Angela and Maria hold the priest from falling over.

They glare at each other, but they don't speak.



EXT. CHURCH - PRE-DAWN

The lifeless priest exits the back of an Uber and shuts the door.

Maria and Angela lean out the window as the priest stops to stare at the pine needles on the church steps, partly concealing the chalk outlines of the two bodies.

ANGELA

That policewoman left us our cellphones at the front desk, so we can call each other for help.

The priest trudges toward the walkway leading to his apartment.

MARIA

Maybe we'll come by later and make sure you're okay.

The priest trudges out of sight and the Uber driver speeds away.

Across the street from the church, the Policewoman sits in an unmarked car and is now undercover in plain clothes. She drinks coffee and takes notes of the time: "5:45 AM priest dropped off in Uber shared by Ms. Abrams and Ms. Rodriguez.

She waits, watches, and drinks coffee as dawn approaches.

She dozes off.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - SAME

Detective Kline sits across the table from Dr. Helen Robbins.

HELEN

You'd better have probable cause to haul me in for questioning this early!

The Detective presses the button for the recording device.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Initiating the interview with Dr. Helen Robins who has declined council, is that right?

Helen is agitated and snooty.

HELEN

You know I'm an attorney.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Yes or no?

HELEN

Yes, I've declined representation.

DETECTIVE KLINE

What was your relationship with the Archbishop?

HELEN

He was my boss, my religious leader, my mentor, and my friend.

The Detective shows Helen phone records.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Yet you had many recent direct phone calls with the Vatican Librarian, at all hours of the day and night, some initiated by you, some by him.

The Detective stands.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

What were those phone calls about?

HELEN

Church business. None of your concern.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Actually it is my concern regarding Father Paul's inheritance of the Spinoza Letters.

HELEN

If you say so.

DETECTIVE KLINE

I do. In fact, I had a nice conversation with the Vatican Librarian who claims the Church is the second and final legal owner of the letters after Baruch Spinoza gave them willingly to Pope Blessed Innocent XI.

HELEN

I agree.

DETECTIVE KLINE

But he did not have evidence of the sale or gift. He claimed that the letters were of highly personal significance for the Pope's eyes only. They were, I quote, "Not to be gazed up by anyone else, or there would be serious legal ramifications from the Vatican."

HELEN

They belong to the Church. They have a right to keep the letters private.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Sounds like a threat to me. Was the Archbishop privy to your conversations with the Vatican?

HELEN

He was not.

DETECTIVE KLINE

So why did he visit St. Mary's that morning?

Helen looks away.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

What was he going to discuss with Father Paul?

Silence.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

(yells)

Where were you that morning at dawn?

EXT. CHURCH - SAME

The Policewoman startles herself awake. Her watch reads, "6:14."

She stares curiously at the church steps and chalk outlines of the bodies.

She spots the two, thick, waist-high shrubs in planter boxes at the bottom and sides of the steps.

She exits her car with her radio in hand and walks across the street to the church.

There's just a sliver of the coming sunrise when as the Policewoman paws through the two shrubs at the bottom of the church steps.

She paces the distance to the two chalk outlines.

She pauses to think, then calls the Detective on her radio.

POLICEWOMAN  
Detective Kline?

DETECTIVE KLINE (O.S.)  
Go ahead.

POLICEWOMAN  
I'm at the church. Priest got back thirty minutes ago. I had a question about the crime scene.

She looks to the doors of the church.

POLICEWOMAN (CONT'D)  
Did anyone search the two...

Seconds later, we see a black glove holding a nightstick strike the Policewoman squarely on the back of the head.

The Policewoman is stunned and wobbles a bit and the killer strikes her again and again before she collapses onto the church steps, blood gushing from her crushed skull.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - SAME

The Detective sits across the table from Helen when the Policewoman's call abruptly ends.

The Detective yells into her radio.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
All cars to St. Mary's Church now!  
Wait for me!

The Detective begins to exit.

HELEN  
Can I go?

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Stay seated. I'm bringing in your client! He'll need a lawyer.

The Detective races out of the room.

EXT. CHURCH - LATE MORNING

A third chalk outline is on the church steps, but this time the victim's arms are outlined by her side. The bloodstain is larger than the other two.

Policeman Harris sits off to the side of the church steps.

He unsuccessfully fights back his tears and sobs into his sleeve.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
We'll find your partner's killer  
today, I promise, Harris!

Policeman Harris doesn't make eye contact.

POLICEMAN HARRIS  
I should have been here.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
I sent you to bug the Rodriguez  
place. My fault. I should have  
never split up partners, but we're  
short-staffed as it is.

POLICEMAN HARRIS  
Not your fault, Detective.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
You called in the "officer down."  
What time was that?

POLICEMAN HARRIS  
Right after...

DETECTIVE KLINE  
See anybody leaving the scene?

He looks back at the Detective sadly.

POLICEMAN HARRIS  
Not a soul.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Did you see Rodriguez as you left  
her place from bugging it?

POLICEMAN HARRIS  
No, guess she wasn't back from the  
hotel yet.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
 At least she didn't see you.  
 (beat)  
 Keep tabs on any phone calls  
 between the suspects, if you're up  
 to it.

POLICEMAN HARRIS  
 Will do! I want to nail this  
 bastard!

The Policeman sets off to his police car.

EXT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON

The Detective sits in her car across the church studying the  
 crime scene.

She alternately studies her tablet computer on a web page  
 featuring Baruch Spinoza.

She gets a radio message.

POLICEMAN HARRIS (O.S.)  
 Detective, we're getting an  
 incoming phone call from Ms. Abrams  
 to Father Paul.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
 Patch it through.

POLICEMAN HARRIS  
 Will do.

ANGELA (O.S.)  
 (ominous)  
 Father Paul, we both know those  
 letters are worth killing for.  
 Grant me Power of Attorney and I'll  
 gift them to my Foundation, and you  
 won't be the next to die.

FATHER PAUL (O.S.)  
 (sad)  
 I just want to be a simple priest  
 and serve God. If this is the only  
 way...

DETECTIVE KLINE  
 Harris, I think we have our killer.  
 Pick up Angela Abrams and bring her  
 in!

The Detective smiles with pride, and starts up her car, but she hears the radio again and shuts off the car.

POLICEMAN HARRIS (O.S.)  
Detective, we got another incoming call from Ms. Rodriguez to Father Paul.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Patch it through.

MARIA (O.S.)  
(ominous)  
I have a buyer, Father Paul, and he's offering more money than you've ever dreamed of.

FATHER PAUL (O.S.)  
My vow of poverty...

MARIA (O.S.)  
Grant me Power of Attorney and you might not be the next murder victim!

FATHER PAUL (O.S.)  
(sad)  
Victim? Like my cousin and the Archbishop? I just want to be a priest.

MARIA (O.S.)  
Good! We can put this all behind us!

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Harris, I think we have two killers. Pick up Maria Rodriguez and bring her in, too!

The Detective starts up her car, when Helen drives up to the front of the church and gets out of her car with a yellow business envelope in her hand.

The Detective shuts off her car and races over to Helen.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
Excuse me, Dr. Robbins. May we talk?

HELEN  
Not now! I have to see Father Paul.

The Detective looks at the three chalk outlines and notices the Policewoman's bloodstain is larger, and that the figure's finger isn't pointing to the church like the others.

Helen tries to walk away toward the priest's apartment but the Detective roughly pulls her back and gazes at the yellow envelope before looking Helen in the eyes.

DETECTIVE KLINE

That isn't a Power of Attorney form, I hope.

Helen puts the envelope behind her back.

The Detective makes a call on her radio.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

Harris, bring the two suspects to the steps of St. Mary's church.

Silence.

Policeman Harris finally answers with a stern voice.

POLICEMAN HARRIS (O.S.)

Yes, Detective.

Father Paul sweeps his way to the front of the church. He freezes when he sees the Detective gripping Helen's arm.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Father Paul, nice of you to join us.

He looks at the steps of the church and counts off as he points to the chalk outlines. He's shocked.

FATHER PAUL

Three! Oh my God!

He makes the sign of the cross and Helen glares at him.

Policeman Harris pulls up in a patrol car with Angela and Maria in the back. He slowly gets out of the car.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Bring out the suspects.

He opens the door for Angela and Maria, who are handcuffed together.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

You can take the cuffs off.



Policeman Harris freezes.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
Go ahead. I figured it out.

Policeman Harris removes the cuffs, and Angela and Maria rush to the priest's side.

The Detective chuckles as she glares at Father Paul, Angela, and Maria.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
We tapped your phones.

Father Paul, Angela, and Maria look stunned.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
It threw me off when Ms. Abrams and Ms. Rodriguez asked the priest to grant them Power of Attorney.

Father Paul, Angela, and Maria look at each other.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
Until I read this morning what Albert Einstein said when he was asked if he believed in God.

Helen glares at the Detective.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
Einstein replied that he believed in the God of Spinoza.

Angela and Maria make eye contact and share a moment.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
I think Ms. Abrams and Ms. Rodriguez are very smart, are looking out for Father Paul, and are true followers of Spinoza. That is, they are not religious in the typical way the word is used.

HELEN  
That's irrelevant.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
I don't think so.

The Detective points to the first two chalk outlines.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

The first two victims were positioned to point to the church, implicating Father Paul, who, forgive me Father, is no Albert Einstein.

The priest looks perplexed, proving her point.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

I think our first two victims were killed by someone who fully understood the value of the Spinoza letters from the time Father Paul was identified in the will.

Everyone looks around.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

We have phone records indicating several direct phone calls to the Vatican Secret Archives made by and received by Dr. Robbins.

Helen is defensive.

HELEN

We discussed this...

DETECTIVE KLINE

(interrupts)

After I called you in for an early morning interrogation, with a perfectly timed murder at the church, so you had the perfect alibi.

Helen doesn't speak and tries to look calm.

The Detective points to the third victim's outline.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

Bigger bloodstain, and hands at her side. Our poor Policewoman knew her attacker and was not positioned to implicate the priest. Different killer.

Helen and Policeman Harris are unmoved.

The Detective looks into one shrub on the side of the church steps.

Policeman Harris looks away quickly but then tries to look nonchalant.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
(to Policeman Harris)  
You were a member of Father Paul's congregation. We talked about that.

The Policeman nods weakly.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
You performed the sweep for the murder weapon right here for the first two killings, but you didn't find anything.

The Detective looks into the other shrub.

She takes out her radio.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
This is Detective Kline. Can I get blood sweep inside the two shrubs in front of St. Mary's?

Policeman Harris glares at Helen.

Helen glares at the Policeman.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
The morning Arnold Nesmith was killed, Father Paul reported hearing a loud truck and one door shutting. The morning the Archbishop was killed...

FATHER PAUL  
(interrupts)  
I heard two doors shut!

Helen glares at Father Paul.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Father Paul, that helped me very much.

Father Paul smiles.

The Detective takes her handcuffs and puts one on Helen's wrist.

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)  
Who was traveling with the Archbishop so early in the morning?  
(MORE)

DETECTIVE KLINE (CONT'D)

I spoke with the Archbishop the day before he died. He was about to demand Father Paul hand over the letters to sell, and bail out his struggling dioceses!

(glares at Helen)

You came with him the next morning, didn't you? With the Archbishop out of the way, you would control Father Paul for the Vatican!

(points to the shrub)

You knew Harris hid his nightstick in the shrub for your use, which he would retrieve and clean later.

She waves over Policeman Harris, who looks defeated at Helen.

POLICEMAN HARRIS

For the Holy See, you said.

(to Father Paul)

Bless me Father for I have sinned.

Helen is furious as the Detective puts the other handcuff on Harris.

The Detective shakes her head.

DETECTIVE KLINE

Two hyper-religious people wanted to bury the Spinoza Letters in the Secret Archives, probably forever. This was all in the name of organized religion, which Spinoza despised as asylums for the ignorant! Poor souls ready to kill or be killed for their manufactured versions of what's right!

MARIA

Wow, Detective Kline. That was intense!

ANGELA

You go, girl!

The Detective kicks Policeman Harris in the groin.

He yelps, twists, and falls, taking Helen down with him.

DETECTIVE KLINE

And, you Harris! You killed your partner!

INT. CHURCH - EVENING

Father Paul prays the rosary kneeling in the first pew.

The VATICAN LIBRARIAN (70s) in a Cardinal's robes and red cap, enters the church carrying a locking metal briefcase,.

He walks slowly down the aisle to sit behind Father Paul.

The Librarian leans forward to see Father Paul in anguish.

VATICAN LIBRARIAN

Are you keeping your vow of  
obedience, Father Paul?

Father Paul nods, 'yes.'

VATICAN LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)

Your father was weak. You are much  
more obedient and will turn over  
the Spinoza Letters to the Holy  
See.

Father Paul nods, 'yes.'

VATICAN LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)

You are worthy of much greater  
assignments. Perhaps a bigger  
church? Maybe a cathedral?

Father Paul reluctantly hands the Napoleonic letter bag over to the Vatican Librarian.

The Librarian examines the contents carefully, then he locks them in his high-end briefcase.

The Librarian pats Father Paul on his shoulder in a patronizing way, before he exits with a wry smile.

The priest drops his chin in sorrow.

The priest takes out his lucky rabbit's foot, perplexed.

FATHER PAUL

Dad was never superstitious like  
me.

(beat)

Didn't believe in the superstitions  
of walking under ladders, black  
cats, broken mirrors or anything.

(beat)

He didn't believe in ghosts or  
spirits like I do.

(beat)

(MORE)

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Why did he always carry this  
rabbit's foot?

He examines the rabbit's foot in the fairly dark church.

He smiles.

He grabs the old key and keychain part of the rabbit's foot  
and yanks off the metal cap.

He sees a small, rolled-up note in the hollow rabbit's foot.

He removes the note with his fingernails and unrolls it.

The note reads: "Vatican crate in dad's basement."

The priest studies the burnt fur on the rabbit's foot and has  
an epiphany.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Dad wanted this to come to me!

His eyes open widely as his cell phone BUZZES.

He races out of the church.

INT. VATICAN LIBRARY - NIGHT

We SEE inside the Vatican Library (file footage).

We HEAR a heavy bank vault close.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

In two elegant chairs, isolated in the corner of the lobby,  
sit Maria and a Businessman (60s) in a dark suit and  
sunglasses. We only see the man's back. Maria wears a blonde  
wig, dark sunglasses, and a large sun hat low on her face.

MARIA  
You can never reveal anything about  
this purchase: price, parties  
involved, or the transaction by  
BitCoin. Is that clear?

The Businessman nods 'yes.'

MARIA (CONT'D)

You understand these are not the original letters, but very high-resolution photographs of the actual six letters which I have shown you are in Latin, and signed by Benedict de Spinoza in January, 1677, one month before he died.

The Businessman nods 'yes.'

MARIA (CONT'D)

I can't promise these are the only digital copies of the letters, but they are the only ones in my possession at this time of sale.

The Businessman nods 'yes.'

MARIA (CONT'D)

You understand that Spinoza's rushed passage on page six may implicate the Swiss Guard as emissaries of Pope Blessed Innocent XI in the theft of Spinoza's letters. That was quite a surprise to us when we discovered it -- written in Portuguese, his native tongue, instead of Latin. I bet the Pope never saw that coming!

The Businessman nods 'yes.'

Maria hands the Businessman a small USB drive disguised as a rabbit's foot.

He smiles, puts it in his pocket, and shakes Maria's hand.

Maria takes out her smartphone and sends a short text message which reads, "We're clear."

She exits the fancy hotel.

EXT. OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Father Paul searches around the outside of a tiny secluded house.

He carries a flashlight and a large empty duffle bag.

He finds nothing on the first three sides of the old house.

On the last side, he finds a small iron door with a rusty lock on it. He laughs.

FATHER PAUL  
More like an old coal shoot door  
than a basement, Grandpa.

He pulls out the old key from his pocket and inserts it.

He turns the key but nothing happens.

He turns it the other way and the lock opens.

He lifts open the heavy iron door and finds a badly frayed rope tied to a rusty nail inside the door.

He slowly pulls a small, dirty wooded crate up the coal shoot.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Glad we don't burn coal anymore.  
That coal dust can kill ya!

He slowly pulls up the wooden crate to reveal that it's covered with wax. He laughs.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Old fashioned weatherproofing.

Suddenly, a flashlight shines in his eyes.

He looks toward the light but is blinded.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
Father Paul! You're under arrest  
for the suspected possession of  
property owned by the Roman  
Catholic Church.

Father Paul shines his light on the Detective. Behind the Detective is the Vatican Librarian, smiling.

FATHER PAUL  
It's my house now. Ask Maria. We're  
selling it next week.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
But that wooden crate's been  
missing from Paris, France, since  
1814.

FATHER PAUL  
You are exactly right, Detective.



The Vatican Librarian moves in to take the crate.

Out of the darkness, a brighter video-camera light shines on all of them.

Maria advances wearing a microphone and leading Angela, who is shooting the video.

MARIA

I have a bill of sale from the Vatican with the seal of Pope Pius VII for Crate Number MMDCCXXIV or Number 2,724 on the brass tag on the top of the crate. It was signed for by Mr. Ferdinand Spinoza, Father Paul's great-great-grandfather in 1814.

VATICAN LIBRARIAN

This is nonsense.

The Detective checks the number on the top of the crate, as the Vatican Librarian looks over her shoulder in disbelief.

ANGELA

Well-documented history. The Vatican needed to raise money to get 2,500 of the original 3,000 crates of artifacts removed by Napoleon as spoils of war. The idiots sold sealed crates by weight to the highest bidder.

The Detective checks the bill of sale, as the Vatican Librarian looks over her shoulder.

MARIA

This crate sold for about ten dollars in today's money; a year's salary back then.

The Vatican Librarian is furious.

DETECTIVE KLINE

It looks legit, unless the Vatican has a competing bill of sale.

The Vatican Librarian storms off.

Father Paul yells to him.

FATHER PAUL

Gee! I hope there's nothing valuable in there!

MARIA  
Sketches by Leonardo Da Vinci.

ANGELA  
Calculations by Copernicus.

Angela cuts the camera lights.

The Detective laughs as Father Paul, Angela, and Maria hug the Detective.

FATHER PAUL  
Thanks for tipping us off,  
Detective.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
I had to play it straight up for  
the record.

MARIA  
We understand.

ANGELA  
Don't be surprised if a valuable  
historical sketch or document finds  
its way to your mailbox someday.

FATHER PAUL  
As a gift. Enough to retire on, I'm  
sure.

MARIA  
With a signed gift receipt.

DETECTIVE KLINE  
(laughs)  
Provenance, I know!

They all laugh.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Angela has a tablet computer in front of her on the table with Father Paul and Maria looking over her shoulder. *The Ethics* book is next to Angela.

FATHER PAUL  
I hope you know what you're doing.

MARIA  
She knows.

ANGELA

We owe it to Baruch Spinoza and our Restitution Foundation to make his works freely available to all.

MARIA

All he ever wanted was not to be ignored.

They all stare at *The Ethics*.

FATHER PAUL

In a way, he's finally getting his revenge.

ANGELA

We're in agreement then. When I hit the return key, a copy of the letters will be posted on the Foundations website and almost every social media platform. Everyone in the world will have access to the letters along with a bill of sale from the Vatican to Ferdinand Spinoza in 1814, and a complete and notarized timeline of Provenance.

Angela pauses before striking the return key.

There is a sigh of relief as Angela stands.

Angela and Maria each kiss Father Paul on the cheek before putting on their coats.

The priest looks at them and smiles.

Maria suddenly kisses Angela on the lips in a soft, long kiss with their tongues exploring each other.

Father Paul's eyes are wide open, and his jaw drops.

MARIA

Bye, Father Paul.

ANGELA

Sleep tight.

The priest looks over at the sketch of Spinoza on his fridge and laughs.

## INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - DAWN

Father Paul smiles as he double-checks his appearance in a half-length mirror by the front door of his tiny and tidy apartment. He wears black slacks and a black shirt with a white Roman Catholic collar.

He glances back at his studio to see that it is orderly. His one dinner dish and breakfast bowl are drying. His coffee cup is ready for one last sip. His twin bed is neatly made, and his desk has his Bible and tablet ready for a long day of service.

As if it were choreographed, he takes the last sip of coffee and rinses the cup. He spins and grabs the tablet and Bible.

He opens the door and looks out. He's the picture of perfect peace and tranquility.

Suddenly, the priest sets his Bible on the table next to the English translation of Spinoza's Letters.

He pulls out the rosary beads from one pocket and drops them on the Bible.

He pulls out the rabbit's foot from his other pocket and drops it on top of the rosary beads.

He calmly removes and drops his Roman collar and drops it on the table.

He swipes the sketch of Spinoza from his refrigerator, grabs Spinoza's books and translated letters, and walks out the door with a smile.

FADE TO BLACK.

## ROLL CREDITS

## INT. EXOTIC BEACH RESORT LOBBY - DAY

Chris Spinoza (Father Paul), wearing new beach clothes and dark sunglasses, struts up to the registration desk at an exotic beach resort. Behind Chris are Angela and Maria with locked arms and wearing sexy beachwear and dark sunglasses.

Chris happily slaps the Spinoza book and sketch on the registration desk.

FATHER PAUL

Give us the best three-bedroom  
suite you have.

Maria and Angela cough politely.

FATHER PAUL (CONT'D)  
Give us the best two-bedroom suite  
you have for as long as it's  
available.

They all smile.

FADE OUT.

THE END