

Your Word Against God's

A Play

Written by

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"YOUR WORD AGAINST GOD'S"

Characters

THOMAS COOPER - late 50's - mid 60's - handsome, silver-haired retired Catholic priest. A charming, avuncular man with a kind face and a calming manner and voice that gave comfort to many of his parishioners. Smart and well spoken.

JENINE WELLER - late 30's - a woman whose face shows the strain of years of hard living. While likeable, there's a haunted quality about her.

TIME

The Present

PLACE

The living room of a small, San Francisco Bay Area tract home.

Your Word Against God's

SETTING: Evening. The living room of a small tract house. A credenza holds a 32" flat screen TV. An expensive mahogany desk rests against one wall. A blue sofa faces two floral print easy chairs. Over the sofa hangs a 12" crucifix. Behind the chairs are two windows with curtains that are drawn closed. A fireplace with a brick front and brass fireplace tools is at one end of the room. The front door opens directly into the living room. Two interior doorways lead to other rooms in the house.

Father THOMAS COOPER sits at his desk reading from a laptop computer. Several books rest atop the desk. A walking stick rests against the desk. A BEAT, then a knock at the door. Father COOPER walks to the door and opens it revealing JENINE WELLER. She carries a large purse.

Father Cooper? JENINE

Yes. Are you Jenine? COOPER

Yes. JENINE

Welcome. Welcome. Come in. Come in. Please. COOPER

Thank you for seeing me at this hour. JENINE

Oh, it's no problem. I just finished dinner. COOPER

(LOOKING AROUND) Nice place. JENINE

Thank you. It belonged to my parents. I was very fortunate to inherit it, otherwise I'd never be able to afford living here. COOPER

I bet. I hear the housing market here is impossible. JENINE

COOPER

Beyond the reach of most ordinary folks I'm afraid.

JENINE

Well, thank you so much for agreeing to see me.

COOPER

Of course. Please, have a seat.

He moves to the desk and
retrieves his wine. JENINE
sits on a chair.

COOPER (CONT'D)

It's not often someone wants to interview me for a magazine article. In fact, you're the first.

JENINE

Well, as I said on the phone, it's specifically about priests who are authors.

COOPER

Well, it's just one book.

JENINE

Very few people can write a book. Even just one.

COOPER

I suppose that's true. Although these days, with the internet, everyone seems to be a writer.

JENINE

Or at least thinks they are.

COOPER

After you called I tried looking you up on the internet. I hope you don't mind.

JENINE

Oh no. Of course not.

COOPER

But there were quite a few Jenine Wellers. I couldn't tell which one was you.

JENINE

Yeah, I know. And I spell Jenine a little different. It's J-E, not J-A.

COOPER

Oh. Well then I never would have found you.

JENINE

No, I don't think so.

COOPER

And you mentioned this would be for either Catholic Digest or Catholic Family News.

JENINE

Yes. I've been in touch with a number of Catholic publications. Those are the two that have expressed interest but they won't commit until they see the article.

COOPER

So you're a freelancer.

JENINE

That's right.

COOPER

That must be difficult. You do the work but there's no guarantee you'll get paid, right?

JENINE

That's about it.

She digs in her bag, pulls out a pen and pad.

COOPER

May I get you something to drink? Water? (RE: HIS GLASS) Wine?

JENINE

Oh, no. I'm good. Thanks. Water and wine. How sacramental.

COOPER

(AMUSED) Yes, I suppose.

JENINE

Yeah, so, tell me. How does a priest come to write a book called "The Spirituality of Science?" Isn't science the opposite of religion?

COOPER

Actually there have been many priests throughout the ages who've made contributions to science. They studied everything from astronomy to anatomy. In fact, in the seventeenth century, Bernard Bolzano, a mathematician, studied metaphysics, along with concepts of what is truth.

JENINE

Wow. I'm googling him as soon as I get home.

COOPER

Some of what's in my book has been drawn from the writings of these earlier priests.

JENINE

And you said on the phone that you're doing a revision?

COOPER

Yes. Unfortunately, since all these accusations have come out about abuse in the church, and so many that took place quite a long time ago, my publisher thought it would be a good idea to write a chapter on the issue of post-traumatic stress and its affect on memory. More specifically, can PTSD affect memory in a way that distorts reality.

JENINE

Are they saying these people who are making these accusations might be lying?

COOPER

Not lying. But possibly confused.

JENINE

Confused.

COOPER

Yes. There's been quite a bit of research that's come out the past few years in this area that I've just begun digging into.

JENINE

I see.

COOPER

So. What made you want to write an article about priests who are authors?

JENINE

Well, I'd come across a novel by a priest named Andrew Greeley.

COOPER

Oh, of course. I've read some of his books.

JENINE

I'm sorry I wasn't able to meet him before he died. Who would have thought a priest would write crime novels?

COOPER

We can be an interesting bunch.

JENINE

Yeah. I mean you have to think like a criminal to write one and who would ever think a priest would want to think like a criminal? I would think that's like some kind of sin.

COOPER

(AMUSED) Not at all. Understanding human behavior and its motivations is extremely valuable for a priest. Especially when we work with counseling our parishioners.

JENINE

I guess. So after I read a few of his books it got me wondering if there were other priests who wrote books and I was surprised to find that there have been quite a few.

COOPER

Most people only see us in the context of the church. But we can be so much more than that. And yet, these days I'm afraid all people seem to want to focus on is this abuse scandal.

JENINE

Yeah. I know. You know what's sad? The one thing every priest I interviewed so far has told me? They feel like they're under attack because of all this abuse stuff. Even though they've done nothing wrong.

COOPER

That's the media. Only interested in the negative. I suppose that's what gets them big ratings. I'm lucky I'm retired. Some priests I know are having a heck of a time with their parishioners.

JENINE

I don't mean to sound cynical, but there's been so many, you can't help thinking some of these people are just making stuff up, trying to get money out of the church.

COOPER

Well, I suppose it's possible. But we have to be careful NOT to be cynical. I'm sure the vast majority are being truthful. And if some aren't, well, it helps to be mindful that the Lord forgave even those who crucified him.

JENINE

"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

COOPER

Exactly. Are you Catholic?

JENINE

I was raised Catholic. And I went to Catholic school.

COOPER

Wonderful education.

JENINE

Yeah.

COOPER

Where did you grow up?

JENINE

We moved around a lot. My dad was in construction. Right now I'm in the D.C. area.

COOPER

And you came all the way out here to interview me.

JENINE

Well, there aren't a lot of priests in this country who are authors and even fewer who are still alive. Where did YOU grow up?

COOPER

In a small town in Eastern Kentucky. My parents moved out here after I left for the seminary. In fact, it was my move out here that I think motivated me to write my book.

JENINE

Why is that?

COOPER

I don't know...new beginnings, new possibilities. It's ironic that the day after I spoke with you, my publisher called to ask if I'd do this revision. I wrote that book ten years ago, so that was like two bolts from out of the blue.

JENINE

God works in mysterious ways, right?

COOPER

He certainly does. Now. What can I tell you about myself?

JENINE

Well, my research shows you worked back east before you came out here, is that right?

COOPER

Yes. I spent quite a bit of time at parishes in and around the Baltimore area.

JENINE

When did you come out here?

COOPER

I was transferred to Saint Joseph's in ninety six. And, don't quote me on this, but I love California much more than Maryland.

JENINE

Your secret's safe with me. So how do you spend most of your time these days? Are you continuing to write?

COOPER

Not really. Other than this revision I'm doing, these days I find a lot of comfort in several hours of daily prayer and meditation.

JENINE

Uh-huh. On the phone you told me you retired because of you had problems with your hip.

COOPER

I fell off my bike several years ago and had to have hip surgery. Should never have been trail riding at my age. But it didn't heal properly and...well recently they found an area of bone that was dying. So now they want to do a hip replacement.

JENINE

I'm sorry to hear that. But aren't the advances medical science has made, amazing?

COOPER

They are. But I have...some heart issues. And I've been told it's not an easy surgery or recovery. Apparently the doctors are concerned there could be... well, they're worried this old ticker might not be able to handle it.

JENINE

Oh. I'm sorry. So it must have been hard to retire and leave your parish when you weren't ready.

COOPER

It was. I really loved engaging with my parishioners. Although, like I said, I'm probably lucky I retired when I did.

JENINE

Because of all the problems priests are dealing with today.

COOPER

Exactly. Although I did have my share of problems. It wasn't as bad as it is now, but there had been enough in the news that made some of my parishioners pretty angry. I remember one night several of them actually came banging on my door at the rectory.

JENINE

At night?

COOPER

Gives you an idea how angry they were.

JENINE

What did they want?

COOPER

Answers. How could the Bishops let this happen? Are the accused going to be prosecuted? What kind of punishment do they deserve?

JENINE

What did you tell them?

COOPER

It's funny you should ask me that.

He rises and walks to a credenza.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Just last week an old friend came by to visit. I hadn't seen him in years. He was just passing through on his way to Australia. He gave me this.

COOPER opens a drawer and pulls out a t-shirt. He holds it up to show JENINE. On it is written repeatedly 70X7.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Do you get it?

JENINE

Not really.

COOPER

"Lord how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Seven times? Jesus said unto him, not seven times, but seventy times seven." That's Matthew.

JENINE

Wow. What a great shirt. So is that what you told those people?

COOPER

Absolutely.

JENINE

I'm a little embarrassed to admit I'm not really as up on the Bible as I probably should be.

COOPER

Well you're certainly not alone in that regard.

JENINE

What about the victims of abuse?

COOPER

What about them?

JENINE

Did you have to counsel any of *them*?

COOPER

Oh yes. And I told them the same thing.

JENINE

(INCREDULOUS) You told them to forgive the priests who abused them?

COOPER

That's the healthiest thing they can do. That doesn't mean the abusers shouldn't suffer the appropriate consequences. But I would counsel the victims to look to the Bible. That's why we HAVE a Bible. So when something like that happens, they'd be able to find compassion and forgiveness. It's the only way they'd ever be able to free themselves from the pain.

JENINE

Some of these victims have said they've suffered long term severe mental and emotional issues. You think that's because they haven't been able to forgive their abusers?

COOPER

I really can't say. But I pray for them every day.

JENINE

(BEAT) Can I ask you something, Father? I know this is off topic, but I was always confused about the part of the Bible that says an eye for an eye. That's like the exact opposite of the seventy times seven stuff that Jesus taught.

COOPER

Ah, I've often been asked that question. In Matthew, Jesus says, "Ye have heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say whosoever shall smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

JENINE

Turn the other cheek, right. Of course. That Jesus was quite a guy, wasn't he?

COOPER

(SMILES) Well, he's the Son of God. I would *think* he's quite a guy.

JENINE

Yeah. So that eye for an eye thing. That's the Old Testament.

COOPER

That's right.

JENINE

And Jesus was a Jew and the Old Testament is the Bible the Jews still follow today, so it sounds like Jesus wasn't a fan of everything in his own Bible, was he?

COOPER

That's a wonderful question, Jenine. But I'm afraid it's one for a much longer discussion than we have time for today.

JENINE

Yeah. I guess. But I've always had these questions and you're so easy to talk to. I mean other priests, when I'd ask questions like these, they always seemed uneasy and tried to avoid answering them. I hope you don't mind.

COOPER

Not at all.

JENINE

Just one more. So if Jesus rejected some of the things in the Old Testament, like the eye for an eye thing, but we're not supposed to reject anything in OUR Bible, in the New Testament, in that way, we can't be like Jesus, can we?

COOPER

I like you Jenine. You like to question. That's good. That's how we learn. I'm the same way. So many people today, I think too often take things at face value.

JENINE

Yeah. (BEAT) But the Jews still live by that eye for an eye thing, right?

COOPER

Most people aren't aware of the true meaning of that passage. It actually meant that qualified judges would impose retribution for an offense to the extent to which the offense was deliberate.

JENINE

Oh. So, in other words if someone *deliberately* blinded somebody, then that person's punishment would have been to be blinded also, right?

COOPER

I can see you're a deep thinker. But again, a question like this could be the basis for an entire seminar. And we seem to have gotten off the track of your article.

JENINE

I'm sorry. My mind just starts spinning and... I have a tendency to over think things. But I gotta' be honest with you, Father. Sometimes I think God had it right the first time around. Before he sent his only son to change it to that seventy times seven stuff.

COOPER

Jenine, what Jesus was saying was that anger and revenge are toxic to the soul.

JENINE

But what about that saying "revenge is sweet."

COOPER

"Revenge, at first though sweet, before long recoils on itself." I'm paraphrasing, but that's from "Paradise Lost."

She just stares blankly at him.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Milton's "Paradise Lost?" Did you read it in college?

JENINE

No. I uh...I didn't go to college.

COOPER

Really. I'm surprised. You certainly seem bright enough.

JENINE

Yeah. I wanted to. I really did. But, uh.... I guess you could say life kinda got in the way. But I can tell YOU'RE really smart. And you seem to have a really good memory. Whipping out all those quotes.

COOPER

Well, it's not as good as it used to be. Age and time has a way of stealing some of our memories.

JENINE

Uh-huh. (CHECKS HER NOTEPAD) So, one of the parishes you served at was Saint Bernadine's, in Baltimore, right?

COOPER

That's right. I spent a few years there.

JENINE

And you were assigned to a Bishop Kenny High School at the same time. Right?

COOPER

Yes. It was just a few blocks from Saint Bernadine's.

JENINE

(CHECKS PAD AGAIN) You were there from ninety three to ninety five?

COOPER

I'd have to think a minute. (BEAT) Yes, yes that's right. I remember I got there exactly fifteen years after I was ordained.

JENINE

Do you happen to remember a student at Bishop Kenny by the name of Theresa O'Connor?

COOPER

(A BEAT) Well, the name's fairly common but I can't say I recall anyone specifically with that name. Why?

JENINE

She was at Bishop Kenny the same time you were. Brown hair, about five seven. Pretty girl. Really smart. On the quiet side.

COOPER

That would describe a lot of young girls.

JENINE

Yeah, I guess so. Well she remembers you.

COOPER

Well everyone knew who I was. But we're talking over twenty five years ago and there were over a thousand girls at that school. I couldn't possibly have met them all while I was there, let alone remember them. She a friend of yours?

JENINE

No. Not really. And you were the guidance counselor, is that right?

COOPER

I was the Chaplain. But I did act as guidance counselor among other roles. I don't see how this is relevant to your article.

JENINE

Knowing as much as I can about your background helps round out your profile in the article and gives a fuller picture of the person. So you were like the school psychologist, right?

COOPER

No. No, what I provided was spiritual guidance.

JENINE

Oh. Spiritual guidance. Right. So what kind of things would teenage girls want to talk to a man about?

COOPER

Well, they didn't come to me directly. They were referred by their teachers. And most of them came from broken homes and were troubled or had psychological problems. But I'm really not at liberty to reveal that information. Most of my work was confidential. I'm sure you can understand.

JENINE

Right. Of course. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...

COOPER

(AMIABLE) It's perfectly all right. No need to apologize. So. Shall we get back to my book?

JENINE

Yes. Yes of course. (BEAT) But...

She Stops. Seems troubled.

COOPER

(CONCERNED) What is it?

JENINE

Honestly, Father. I've been under a lot of stress lately.

COOPER

I'm sorry. Would you like to talk about it?

JENINE

It's like every time I turn around there's another one of these reports about some kind of abuse somewhere. And I think these interviews have just brought it much closer for me.

COOPER

I understand it can be extremely upsetting. But it's not something you have to go through alone. Have you spoken with your parish priest?

JENINE

I couldn't do that.

COOPER

Why not?

JENINE

How would I know if he's one of these abusers? Maybe a child molester. It's impossible to know anymore who's lying and who's telling the truth.

COOPER

I can assure you the vast majority of priests have not been involved in any of this. They're good, honest men.

JENINE

Even if they haven't done anything wrong, how do I know they're not protecting their friends who did? And then they may not be straight with me.

COOPER

If you'd like, I can refer you to a priest in your area who I know would be--

JENINE

No. Please don't take this the wrong way, but you said you didn't know any priests who were abusers. How could you not? It's like they're everywhere.

COOPER

What can I say? I just don't.

JENINE

I don't know how anybody can trust ANY priest anymore. No offense but I actually thought about canceling this interview and the whole article.

COOPER

Jenine, maybe it would be best if you came back another time, when you're not so upset. I'd be more than happy to talk--

JENINE

No.

COOPER

(CONFUSED) What?

JENINE

I can't come back.

COOPER

I see. Well, that's up to you. But considering how you're feeling, I think perhaps it would be best if we end this for now. And when you're feeling better, call me. We could do this on the phone. All right? Come. I'll see you to the door.

COOPER starts for the door.

JENINE doesn't move.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Jenine? (NO RESPONSE) Miss Weller, please.

JENINE

Sit down.

COOPER

Excuse me?

JENINE

Sit down.

COOPER

Miss Weller, I understand you're troubled, and I've offered to help, but since--

JENINE

(FIRM) Sit...down.

COOPER

(WARY) All right. Whatever's troubling you, I'm happy to talk more about it if you feel it would help.

COOPER returns to his seat.

JENINE

What's troubling me is what happened to that girl. Theresa O'Connor. You don't remember her, maybe I can help jog your memory. Theresa O'Connor was thirteen... or fourteen. A student at Bishop Kenny. And one day she went to confession. And she got you.

COOPER

(BEAT) You're not here to write an article about me, are you?

JENINE

What Theresa O'Connor revealed to you in confession that day, was that she was being abused by her uncle. Sexually abused. That's something you'd remember, isn't it?

COOPER

I've served in a number of parishes over the past thirty years and heard thousands of confessions. People confessed all sorts of things. And sadly, more than one spoke of abuse.

JENINE

And what did you tell them?

COOPER

I couldn't possibly remember. I suspect each one was different.

JENINE

I think you'd remember what you told Theresa O'Connor.

COOPER

Miss Weller, I couldn't possibly remember what I told someone over twenty five years ago. Look, this has gone on--

JENINE

She was one of those troubled kids. You know. From a broken home.

COOPER

Like I said, that was most of the students I helped.

JENINE

Well there's no question she needed help. That's why she went to confession that day. But what happened in that confessional I thought seemed a little strange. That's why I'm surprised you don't remember.

COOPER

I honestly have no idea what you're talking about. I told you, I've heard thousands of confessions since then. Do you honestly think I could remember one in particular that long ago?

JENINE

When she said her uncle was abusing her, do you remember asking her to step out of the confessional so you could see her?

COOPER

What? Who told you that? That's absurd.

JENINE

And then when you saw her, you asked her name.

COOPER

I would never do that. No priest would. It would violate the sacrament of reconciliation. I don't know where you got this information, but I can honestly tell you, without a doubt, that is absolutely not true.

JENINE

Do you remember telling her she needed counseling? And that you wanted to see her in your office at school on Monday?

COOPER

That is not how students came to me for counseling. I told you they were referred by their teachers. I can assure you whoever told you this has given you incorrect, and if I may say, slanderous information about me.

JENINE

Slanderous. Really.

COOPER

Miss Weller, I don't know what you're after but what you're suggesting is extremely insulting. If you're just some muckraking journalist trying to make a name for yourself, I'd like you to leave. Now.

COOPER rises from his seat.

JENINE doesn't move.

JENINE

There are a few more things I need to ask you, Father.

COOPER

And I've asked you to leave.

JENINE doesn't move.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Miss Weller.

A BEAT as they stare at each other.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Must I call for help?

No response.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Fine. Have it your way.

COOPER starts walking toward his desk. JENINE BOLTS PAST HIM and grabs the cell phone off his desk.

COOPER (CONT'D)
(PATIENTLY) Please give that to me.

JENINE
I don't think so.

COOPER
You're going to hold me hostage in my own home?

JENINE
That's nothing compared to what you did to that innocent young kid.

COOPER
Where did you get this information? Who told you these horrible lies?

JENINE
Did you abuse her?

COOPER
I told you I don't even know who she is.

JENINE
Did you abuse her?!

COOPER's calm begins to fray.

COOPER
I've never abused anyone.

JENINE
DID YOU ABUSE HER?!

COOPER
NO!

JENINE

LIAR!

COOPER

How dare you come into my home under false pretenses and accuse me of sexually abusing a child. Who do you think you are?

JENINE

THERESA O'CONNOR!

A BEAT as they stand motionless,
staring at each other.

COOPER

Look, Miss whoever you are--

JENINE

Theresa Jenine O'Connor. Bishop Kenny class of ninety six.

COOPER

All right. You went to Bishop Kenny. Fine.

JENINE

Look me in the eye and tell me you don't remember me.

COOPER

I'm sorry, but I honestly don't.

JENINE

I was one of those troubled girls you had come to your office.

COOPER

I've counseled thousands of students over the years. Not only at Bishop Kenny but other schools as well. You think I can remember them? I'm sorry I don't remember you but if I did counsel you--

JENINE

Oh you counseled me all right. But since you conveniently don't want to remember, I'm gonna' tell you how you counseled me. The sick things you said to me, and did to me, that no one but me could possibly know. Things so awful it took me years before I could even allow myself to admit they happened.

COOPER

Miss Weller...

JENINE

Theresa O'Connor!

COOPER

All right. Theresa. It seems you may be suffering from---

JENINE

You're damn right I'm suffering.

COOPER

From some form of post traumatic stress but---

JENINE

You're goddamn right it is. PTSD. Go to the head of the class, mister spiritual counselor.

COOPER

I understand that you're hurting and in need of help--

JENINE

STOP! Holy shit. I can't believe you're just gonna' stand there and lie right to my face.

COOPER

I am telling you the truth.

JENINE

Yeah, well in my experience truth has never been a virtue of the Church.

COOPER

I'm sorry you feel that way.

JENINE

Y'know, a smooth talking priest can really twist the brain of an impressionable young girl. I was so naive. You could tell me whatever you wanted and I believed it. And you knew that. And you used it. But I'm not a naive little girl anymore.

COOPER

Theresa, PTSD victims, especially those who've experienced sexual abuse--

JENINE

Not sexual abuse. Rape.

COOPER

That is a horrible thing to happen to anyone.

JENINE

I was thirteen! (UNCERTAIN) Or...or fourteen.

COOPER

I am so sorry. So very sorry you went through that. But please, listen to me. It's very possible your memories have been conflated.

JENINE

What the hell does that mean?

COOPER

It means our memories, especially painful ones, often get blended together. So we don't remember accurately. We remember one person and connect it to something another person did.

JENINE

Oh really. Is that a chapter in your book?

COOPER

I told you that for this revision I've been doing research on memory recall, specifically the repressed memories of trauma victims.

JENINE

How convenient. Well this memory is not "conflated."

COOPER

We're talking about an event that took place over twenty five years--

JENINE

Event? It wasn't an event. You raped me!

COOPER

Theresa. I never abused you or anyone else. Now you said you were abused by your uncle, didn't you?

JENINE

Yeah. And I didn't know where to go or who to tell so I went to confession for help.

COOPER

I believe you're conflate... collapsing several memories into one. Believing it was me who did the horrible things your uncle actually did.

JENINE

Bullshit! (SEARCHES HER MEMORY) I...you...the rug!...you had a rug. With flowers. A blue rug... in your office. With little orange and white flowers.

COOPER

(GENTLY) Theresa, I never had a rug in any of my school offices. They would have been a trip hazard. A liability for the school.

JENINE

(THINKS A BEAT) There were... I had rug burns from that rug. On my knees. I know damn well I did.

COOPER

It's easy to understand with all you've been reading and hearing lately that it would bring up long buried, painful

(MORE)

COOPER (CONT'D)

memories. And even why you might believe it was a priest and not your uncle who did these terrible things.

JENINE

You better start saying raped or I'm going to--

COOPER

Please, Theresa--

JENINE

You lied to me. And you scared me. And you confused me so much I actually believed what you told me. That raping me was what I deserved. That it was the only way God wouldn't punish me. How sick is that?!

COOPER

(CALM) You are emotionally overwrought right now and I understand---

JENINE

You don't understand shit.

COOPER

I'm a priest and I--

JENINE

You're not a priest. You're a criminal!

COOPER

Theresa, please, I'm only--

JENINE

Don't call me Theresa! I'm not your friend. It's Miss O'Connor to you.

COOPER

Fine. Miss O'Connor. Please...let me get you something to drink. Water. Or tea?

JENINE

Have you been listening to me?! What the fuck are you doing!?

COOPER

All right. Let's take a breath and see if we can have a civil conversation. Believe me, I feel for you. I honestly do. And I believe I might be able to get you the help you need.

JENINE

Man, you are a fucking master of denial. Tell me. How did you live with yourself? Did you just go to confession every week, get some penance, say a few prayers and your conscience was clear? Over and over and over? Is that how you could sleep at night?

COOPER

I had nothing to confess.

JENINE

Isn't confession a great little game Catholics invented? You gotta love it. You never have to worry about committing a sin. And it doesn't matter what kind of sin it is, like lying, or, I don't know. Rape? Either way, you go to confession, tell the guy behind a screen what you did. I bet you always went to some parish far from your own so you wouldn't get a priest who might know you. But he's not shocked because he's probably doing it too. Then he tells you to say a few prayers, and poof! Like magic, your cleansed. And free to go back out and do it again. Because you know you can just go back next week and get cleansed all over again. Come Saturday, all is forgiven.

COOPER

That is not why we have the sacrament of reconciliation.

JENINE

You know why the Church invented the confessional box? They didn't always use it, y'know. I did a little research. It used to be face to face. But sometime around the fifteen hundreds they started using it to keep the person's identity a secret. Know why? Because priests were sexually abusing women who came to them for confession! How do you like that? Ironic, huh? So they come up with the idea of the box. So priests wouldn't know the woman who was confessing. (BITING CYNICISM) Unless they ask them to step out of the box.

COOPER

Miss O'Connor, please. Sit down. Let me get you some water.

He starts for another room.
She moves quickly to stop him.

JENINE

What have you got? Another phone inside? Gonna' call the cops?

COOPER

Of course not. I'm really on your side.

JENINE

The fuck you are.

COOPER drops his gaze,
disheartened by her resistance.

JENINE (CONT'D)

What? Not the kind of language you'd expect from a nice Catholic school girl? Yeah well after I graduated I got some post secondary education that was...let's just say, a little more worldly.

COOPER

Did you know that most children who are victims of abuse are victims of family members? As you were by your uncle.

JENINE

Yeah, so what?

COOPER

Was your uncle Catholic?

JENINE

He went to church every Sunday like all good Catholic hypocrites. You know what a priest once said to me. Going to church doesn't make you Catholic any more than going to your garage makes you a car.

COOPER

None of us are perfect. We're all only trying to--

JENINE

Why were you transferred out here? Someone finally report you?

COOPER

I requested the transfer.

JENINE

Sure you did. Got a letter to prove that?

COOPER

I don't have a copy. I'm sure one exists at Saint Bernadine's.

JENINE

I got a good laugh reading those Bishop's letters in that Pennsylvania report. Letters they wrote when they were transferring one of you. Using words like "predicament" and "misconduct" and "troubling." They did everything they could to avoid telling the truth. Maybe if a grand jury investigates Maryland we'll all get to see what kind of letters the Bishops wrote about you.

COOPER

There are no letters.

JENINE

Did you notice how those Bishops never used the word rape? And their solutions. Send you for "evaluations." "Therapy." "Temporary leave of absence." What excuse did your Bishop use for you?

COOPER

Like I said. I requested the transfer. Have you spoken with a therapist about this?

JENINE

I don't need a therapist.

COOPER

Are you resisting therapy because you're afraid of what might be revealed?

JENINE

Don't try to psychoanalyze me. (BEAT) Why'd you become a priest, anyway?

COOPER

What?

JENINE

Why did you decide to become a priest?

COOPER

I really don't see what that has to do--

JENINE

Was it because you knew you could have sex with kids?

COOPER

Miss O'Connor...

JENINE

Was it to make Mommy happy? Or Daddy? Or maybe YOU were molested when you were a kid. I read that people who sexually abuse kids were abused themselves. I hear that happens a lot where you grew up. East Kentucky, right? Did your mommy take you into her bed and make you do nasty things?

COOPER

There's no reason to speak like---

JENINE

Was it because you couldn't live with the shame? So you thought you could hide away inside the seminary. Was that it?

COOPER

This is your pain speaking.

JENINE

You're damn right it is. So why'd you become a priest?

COOPER

I became a priest to serve the Lord.

JENINE

Bullshit.

COOPER

It's a calling.

JENINE

Yeah, so I've heard. A calling to what? It's a calling to power, isn't it?

COOPER

No. That is not what it is.

JENINE

Sure it is. You probably had a fucked up childhood. You didn't have any friends. Girls probably didn't like you. You felt powerless. Maybe you had thoughts of revenge. Then you see these priests walking around. The shepherds of their flock. People fawning over them. Sucking up to them. Doing whatever they tell them to do because they've been taught that priests are God's representative on earth. That's gotta' be some powerful shit for a fucked up kid to believe, huh?

COOPER

I don't know where you got these ideas--

JENINE

You get a lot of time to read in prison.

COOPER

Prison?

JENINE

So little Tommy sees these all-powerful priests and thinks, THAT'S for me. Nobody's going to take advantage of ME anymore. I'll show them. I'm gonna' be the one holding the power. Is that what it was?

COOPER

You have a very rich imagination. Not uncommon in bright, sensitive people.

JENINE

Yeah, that's me. Bright and sensitive and all fucked up.

COOPER

And when abuse is involved, that imagination can go to extreme places for refuge. Research has shown there's so much going on inside the mind of a victim, especially a teenager, that they begin to have trouble differentiating truth from fiction.

JENINE

You got all the answers, don't you?

COOPER

Miss O'Connor, if you don't want to believe me, and you don't want my help, what is it you do want? You obviously came a long way seeking something.

He waits. JENINE just stares at him.

His PHONE begins to RING. COOPER rises. JENINE leaps to block his way.

Siddown! JENINE

It could be important. COOPER

They can leave a message. JENINE

You are not going to stop me from answering my phone. COOPER

He starts to move around her. She steps in front of him again. Inches apart. The PHONE keeps RINGING.

(Threatening) I said. Sit down. JENINE

I need to answer it. COOPER

He raises his hand as if to push past her.

Just try putting a hand on me. Go ahead. JENINE

COOPER STOPS.

JENINE (CONT'D)
I'm not afraid of you anymore. I met women in prison a lot scarier than you. One tried to rape me with a broom handle. I jammed a fork into her chest. Never came near me again. Now siddown.

A BEAT, then COOPER backs up. The phone STOPS RINGING. COOPER moves to a chair and sits.

Why were you in prison? COOPER

Which time? JENINE

COOPER

More than once?

JENINE

Why was I in prison? Let's see. I guess the road to prison leads back to you. Because of the things you did and said to me that fucked up my brain. Made me think I was a horrible kid. The first time I told you my uncle was abusing me you called me a whore. Remember that?

COOPER

I would never say such a thing.

JENINE

You said I tempted him. That the devil was in me. You called me a Jezebel. I didn't even know what that was.

COOPER

I would never use Jezebel as an analogy. And certainly not about a child.

JENINE

I was so screwed up by all that shit, by the time I started dating, whenever I met a boy I liked, I didn't think I deserved him. I thought I had to have sex with him because that was the only way I'd get him to like me. And then when some of them would get rough with me, and some of them got pretty rough, I just thought that's what sex was supposed to be like. Know where I learned that?

COOPER shakes his head in
dismay.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Don't shake your head like you pity me.

COOPER

I don't pity you. I only have compassion. But this memory...I suspect that was your uncle.

JENINE

(INCREDULOUS) My uncle? You are unbelievable. (MIMICKING HIM) "Trauma can re-wire the teenage brain. Can't tell truth from fiction." Really. And what about smells? Can the teenage brain remember smells? Because I'll never forget the smell of your Ralph Lauren cologne.

COOPER

Miss O'Connor, priests don't wear cologne. Certainly not while working. And I never wore it.

A flicker of doubt crosses
JENINE'S face.

JENINE

Bullshit! That is total...I don't believe that.

COOPER

Would you like to search my medicine cabinet? Or my dresser?
There is no cologne.

JENINE doesn't respond.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Did your uncle wear cologne?

JENINE

I...I don't remember.

COOPER

(BEAT) You haven't told me why you were in prison.

JENINE

Drugs. I started doing drugs to numb myself out from the nightmares. The pain. Then my oh so Catholic mother decided she didn't want an addict living with her. So she threw me out. I ended up living on the streets. And when you don't have a job, and you got a big drug habit...the first time was for B&E. That's breaking and entering. I laughed when I heard that. I thought, that's exactly what rape is. (BEAT) And the reason you break into someone's house is because you need money. To support the drug habit you have, that numbs you out from the emotional trauma you suffered from your wonderful Catholic education. See how that works?

COOPER

What type of drugs were you doing?

JENINE

I started with pot. Then cocaine. And when that wasn't enough I started shooting up.

COOPER

Heroin.

JENINE nods.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Are you clean now?

JENINE

I got clean in prison.

COOPER

That couldn't have been easy.

JENINE

You have no fucking idea. Talk about hell on earth. There were times I thought I was losing my mind.

COOPER

Yes, I've heard some harrowing stories. Congratulations on overcoming it.

JENINE

Don't patronize me.

COOPER

As smart as you are, I'm sure you've researched the effects of heroin on memory. (BEAT) You said you were in prison more than once.

JENINE

Twice.

COOPER

Also burglary?

JENINE

Armed robbery. (OFF HIS SURPRISE) Yeah. I actually stole my uncle's service revolver and used it. The uncle who used to abuse me. Ironic, huh.

COOPER

Was your uncle a police officer?

JENINE

Yeah. (REMEMBERING) Wait. You had a gun too, didn't you? That's right. It was in your desk. A black gun. You pulled it out once and showed it to me to scare me.

COOPER

I never owned a gun. And a priest having a gun in his desk at work? Do you realize how ridiculous that sounds? Isn't it possible it's your uncle's gun you're remembering?

JENINE hesitates. Starts recreating the memory.

JENINE

You took it out one time and showed it to me. But you took the bullets out... and then...you put that gun right against my head. I was terrified. Then... you pulled the trigger. Yeah. I'll never forget the sound of that click. And you said, if anyone ever found out what I was doing with you, my uncle wouldn't take the bullets out.

COOPER

Miss O'Connor, your last sentence doesn't make any sense.

(MORE)

COOPER (CONT'D)

You said it was my gun but your uncle wouldn't take the bullets out. Don't you see how you're confusing your uncle's actions with me?

JENINE searches her memory,
trying to test the truth of
his suggestion.

COOPER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to say your story is not uncommon. Especially in cases where the abuser is a family member victims often try to deny to themselves that it happened. Or that it was a family member. (BEAT) Did you like this uncle?

JENINE

Yeah. I liked him. He was fun. Until...

COOPER

And it would make perfect sense that you wouldn't ever tell anyone.

JENINE

I told my mother. I told her right after the very first time. I told my very devout Catholic mother, who I was sure would help. You know how she helped me? She flew into a rage. At me! How dare I make up such a lie. She slapped me across the face. And even though they were divorced, she called my father and told him. He actually came over the house. He hadn't been there in over a year. Since they got divorced. But he came over, came into my room and beat me. He wanted to make sure I never made up stuff like that again. So... after that, I was afraid to tell anyone. No matter what happened to me.

COOPER

I am so sorry. That must have been extremely painful. (BEAT) Consider this. Your father, your uncle and I were all present in your life at that time. We were all male authority figures. Your uncle was a police officer. He had a gun, which to a young girl can be a very frightening thing. We know both your uncle and your father abused you. Your uncle sexually, your father, physically. Do you see how you could have collapsed all these memories?

JENINE

(A SUDDEN MEMORY) The black cassock!

COOPER

What about it?

JENINE

I can still see it...through my legs. THAT wasn't my uncle.

COOPER

(BEAT) Do you remember another priest who was at Bishop Kenny the same time I was? A Father Magnussen.

JENINE

Yeah. I think so. I don't know what he did there.

COOPER

Administrative work. Sometimes he'd accompany a teacher and her class on a field trip.

JENINE

Yeah, so?

COOPER

He also heard confessions.

JENINE searches her memory.

JENINE

Any of the girls you counseled say he was abusing them?

COOPER

If they had I would have reported him to the Bishop. But if he was abusing any of the girls, they probably wouldn't have felt safe telling me because--

JENINE

Because you're like cops. You all protect each other.

COOPER

No. But that is often the perception.

JENINE

Perception? What the hell do you think these Bishops have been doing? (BEAT) Is he still alive?

COOPER

He passed several years ago.

COOPER'S phone starts RINGING.

JENINE

Well, aren't you popular.

COOPER

May I see who's calling?

JENINE

No.

COOPER

Miss O'Connor...

JENINE

I said no!

A tense impasse. A few more
RINGS and then it stops.

COOPER

You said this happened when you were thirteen or fourteen. During the teenage years, there's a great deal of developmental brain activity going on. That's when the brain's wiring is most malleable. That's why teenagers can seem so erratic. And when you subject that malleable brain to the type of trauma you've experienced, it can actually re-wire the teenage brain. Add to that the drug use, it's not surprising your memories have gotten jumbled and confused.

JENINE is unmoved.

COOPER (CONT'D)

How long were you in prison?

JENINE

Ten years. Two for B&E and eight for the robbery.

COOPER

Prison itself is traumatic.

JENINE

No shit.

COOPER

Are you on parole?

JENINE

What do you care?... Y'know I almost killed myself at one point. Right before I went to prison the second time. Only reason I'm still here is I wasn't very good at it. I didn't take enough pills. Either that or I have a very strong constitution.... That's why I pulled that armed robbery. I needed money to buy a lot more pills. But I got caught... My life is just full of irony....there are still times I feel like suicide would have been the right thing.

COOPER

No. No it wouldn't. When you got caught committing that crime, I would say that was God watching over you.

JENINE

Really? Where the fuck was he when I was being raped?

Another sudden memory flash.

JENINE (CONT'D)

The birthmark!

COOPER

What?

JENINE

You had a birthmark on your dick. It looked like the letter V. Now how would I know that?

COOPER

(GENTLY) I can assure you I don't have any such mark.

JENINE

Why should I believe you?

COOPER

After all I've just explained?

Now JENINE is clearly uncertain.

JENINE

Shit. (BEAT) I don't know. (BEAT) I...(BEAT) Pull down your pants.

COOPER

What?

JENINE

Pull your pants down.

COOPER

(GENTLY) I'm not going to do that. It will only embarrass you and me. I have no birthmark. If you want, you can call the police and have them examine me. I'm willing to submit to an examination by a man.

JENINE hesitates.

COOPER (CONT'D)

You can use my phone if you'd like.

She doesn't move.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

She just stares at him, frozen.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Tell me about this uncle. Was he married?

JENINE

No.

COOPER

Did he have a girlfriend?

JENINE

Not any I knew of.

COOPER

People like him are sick and in need of help.

JENINE

Help? They should be strung up by their balls.

COOPER

Is he still alive?

JENINE

No. The fucker died and got away with it.

COOPER

If we look to Jesus...

JENINE

(CYNICAL) Jesus. Yeah. Right. In Catholic school you hear a lot about what Jesus teaches us. That's how the Church controls you. Tells you what to think, what to believe. How to behave. Make sure none of the flock gets too smart. Right?

COOPER

No. That's not what we--

JENINE

That was the good thing about prison. The more I read the smarter I got. I read a lot about pedophiles. So fucking manipulative. It wasn't until a prison counselor told me about how they fuck with your mind that I realized I really wasn't a whore. That's what you...(BEAT)... What somebody told me. I was a whore and had to be punished.

COOPER

In sexual abuse cases the child is never at fault. (BEAT) Miss O'Connor, I'm curious. With all these victims coming forward, how come you never told anyone that you thought I was your abuser?

JENINE

Who was going to believe an ex-con repeat offender? It destroyed my life. Do you get that?

COOPER

I get that you've been through hell on earth. But no, I don't see that it's destroyed you. You're out of prison. Have enough money to travel to California. No doubt you have a job.

JENINE

(DEFENSIVE) Yeah. I got a job. Wasn't easy. People aren't exactly lining up to hire ex-cons.

(MORE)

JENINE (CONT'D)

The only job I could get was working with at-risk teens. First I thought, Christ, I'll never get away from this abuse. But then I realized, I wish I had somebody to help ME when I was their age.

COOPER

You are truly doing God's work. When I look at you, I see a strong woman who's leading a productive life in spite of all the adversity.

JENINE

"Adversity?" You have no fucking idea.

COOPER

I commend you for---

JENINE

You never get over the "adversity." When I got out of prison the second time, I met a guy. A great guy. I thought, finally. He asked me to marry him. He'd also been raised Catholic. And he accepted me, warts and all. I couldn't believe I could get so lucky. So I said yes. Finally, I'd have a normal life.

COOPER

So you COULD have a normal relationship.

JENINE

The marriage lasted two years.

COOPER

I'm sorry. What happened?

JENINE

Take a guess.

COOPER

He left you.

JENINE

(SHAKES HER HEAD) I left him. I just couldn't let myself be vulnerable. I could never have sex with him without all this shit coming up in my head. And the thought of having children? (BEAT) Then he started feeling it was his fault. That there was something wrong with him. Why couldn't I trust him? What was he doing wrong? Such a good man. A good, honest, caring man. But... I couldn't overcome my "adversity." And he deserved better.

COOPER

I'm so sorry.

JENINE sits on the sofa.

JENINE

You asked me before what I want. You know what I want? An apology. A big fucking mea culpa. An admission of guilt. Some kind of punishment. But my uncle's dead so...

COOPER

Even if that was possible, would it be enough?

JENINE

I don't know.

COOPER

There's a book called "Man's Search for Meaning." Written by a man named Viktor Frankl. He was a holocaust survivor. Tortured by the Nazis. In it he says that forces beyond our control can take away everything we possess except one thing. Our freedom to choose how we respond to the situation. We can't control what happens to us in life, but we can always control how we feel about it. What he's saying in effect is, no one can heal our emotional wounds. Only we can do that.

JENINE

(BEAT) You know what keeps running through my head? What I can't stop thinking? Why was I so weak? How could I be so stupid to just let it happen, over and over? Sometimes I wonder if maybe I WAS partly responsible. Was it because I liked him so much I gave him the wrong idea?

COOPER

No. You were in no way responsible.

JENINE

You don't understand. No one can. It's just so... unless you've been... aw, fuck. (BEAT) Y'know... whether it was you or not, I can't change my "conflated" memory. I can't get this shit out of my head. (BEAT) Y'know when I came here, yeah, I guess I was looking for revenge. I wanted to rip your face off. Make you suffer.

COOPER

You realize now, that would not have freed you from this torment.

JENINE

Yeah. (BEAT) Yeah. That's what it is. Torment.

JENINE stares at the floor a long BEAT.

JENINE (CONT'D)

You believe in hell, Father?

COOPER

Do you mean do I believe in a place that's eternally burning?

JENINE

Isn't that what we're taught as kids?

COOPER

There are places in the bible that make reference to a "Lake of Fire" or "Furnace of Fire." But the Catechism depicts Hell as essentially separation from God. It's an eternal emptiness and isolation beyond anything we can fathom. The pain of Hell is real, but it's a pain of loss. A pain from the inside out.

JENINE

When I was in prison, they used to say a person will go insane if they're kept in isolation too long.

COOPER

Our spirit longs for human connection.

JENINE

So that's what happens to child molesters. They end up in this Hell of eternal isolation.

COOPER

That is where those who reject God will find themselves in the afterlife.

JENINE

To inflict that much pain on someone, especially an innocent kid, and then your punishment is...isolation... I don't know.

COOPER

As you said. Isolation can drive a person insane. Imagine an eternity of insanity...with no escape.

JENINE reflects on this a BEAT.

JENINE

Hmph.

COOPER

Can I get you that glass of water now?

JENINE

Yeah. Sure.

COOPER exits through an archway.
JENINE moves to his desk and looks at his laptop. She reads what's on the screen. Then she looks at two books resting next to his laptop.

COOPER returns with a glass of water. Hands it to JENINE.

COOPER

Here you are.

JENINE

Thank you.

She takes a sip.

COOPER

Miss O'Connor. Theresa. I want you to know I'm going to keep you in my prayers. Would you... like to pray with me now?

JENINE

(HESITATES) Mmmm. I uh...I don't think so. But thanks anyway.
(BEAT) I see you're reading something called "The Neurology of Traumatic Amnesia."

COOPER

It's part of my research. The brain is such an amazing creation.

JENINE

Yeah. Yeah, I guess so.

COOPER

Theresa, if you'd like, I can give you the name of a therapist I know in the Baltimore area. That's not too far from you, is it?

JENINE

No.

COOPER

She specializes in victims of abuse.

JENINE

Sure. That uh...that'd be great.

COOPER starts walking toward his desk.

COOPER

Good.

COOPER reaches his desk. As he reaches down and starts to open the top drawer JENINE SUDDENLY RUSHES AT HIM FROM BEHIND.

JENINE

NO!

SHE SHOVES HIM ASIDE. He
stumbles backward but keeps
his balance.

COOPER
What in God's name are you doing?

JENINE
(CONFUSED; BREATHLESS) Ohmigod, I...I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.
I just...I just had like a...saw something that...

She stares at him, confused.

COOPER
What is it? (BEAT) Are you all right?

JENINE
Uh...yeah. Yeah. Fine. Are you okay?

COOPER
Yes. I was just going to get a pen and paper.

JENINE
I'm so sorry. I'll get it.

She turns and starts opening
the desk drawer.

COOPER
No! That's all right, I'll...

JENINE freezes. COOPER freezes.
She whirls around to face
COOPER.

JENINE
You motherfucker! You lying sack of shit!

She reaches into the drawer
and PULLS OUT A BLACK REVOLVER.

JENINE (CONT'D)
You never owned a gun?! Is this the same gun!? The same fucking
gun you kept in your desk at Bishop Kenny!? The same gun you
put against my head!? It is! Isn't it?! Same fucking little
revolver. Real creature of habit, aren't you?

JENINE levels the gun at him.

JENINE (CONT'D)
I oughta blow your fucking brains out right here.

COOPER is frozen.

JENINE (CONT'D)

You knew who I was as soon as I said Theresa O'Connor, didn't you?... Didn't you!?!... Answer me!

COOPER'S demeanor turns matter of fact.

COOPER

Whether or not I knew who you were hardly seems the question at the moment.

She slowly advances on him, the gun pointed at his chest. COOPER slowly backs away.

JENINE

Still the same smooth talking son-of-a-bitch you always were.

Backing away, COOPER stumbles and FALLS TO THE FLOOR. He starts to get up. She shoves him back with her foot.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Stay down!

COOPER stares defiantly at her.

JENINE (CONT'D)

I gotta' hand it to you, Tommy boy. You are one master fucking manipulator. With your phony compassion. And your psycho-babble bullshit. You actually had me doubting my sanity. I didn't "conflate" *anything*, did I?

COOPER doesn't answer.

JENINE (CONT'D)

It WAS you who called me a whore... and said it was my fault my uncle raped me. Right? YOU said I had to be cleansed. You even... you...you had the balls to tell me...to tell me your cum was the Holy Spirit flowing through you. And stupid me. I was so fucking scared, I believed you! (BEAT) Because you were a priest and no one would ever dare question a priest.

COOPER

What do you want?

JENINE

I want to hear you admit what you did to me. Admit what a fucked up pedophile you are. I want to hear you say you're sorry! For raping me. Over and over and over.

COOPER

You traveled across the country for this?

JENINE

I would have gone to the ends of the earth to find you.

COOPER remains motionless.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Tell me you're sorry, Goddamnit!

COOPER

If you expect me to indulge you in your little psychodrama--

JENINE

You narcissistic prick! You don't have the decency even now to admit the truth. You know what you are? I just realized. You're a fucking sociopath. Yeah. You got all the classic traits. Superficial charm, pathological lying. Can't feel remorse or shame. Or guilt. Not a clue what empathy is. That's how you could fool so many people for so long. And get away with it. (BEAT) So. How many young girls did you rape out here?

JENINE goes to the CRUCIFIX
AND RIPS IT OFF THE WALL.

JENINE (CONT'D)

With this?!

COOPER

Give that to me!

COOPER gets to his knees.

JENINE

Take it easy, Tommy. I'm not going to do anything sacrilegious with it. Not like you did with me. This the same one?

COOPER uses the WALKING STICK
next to his desk to help him
get to his feet.

COOPER

Give it to me!

JENINE

You used Christ on the cross! If that doesn't send you straight to hell...

He moves toward her. She stands
her ground.

COOPER
(DELIBERATE) Give me that crucifix.

JENINE
Or what?

COOPER
Give it to me.

JENINE
This can do a lot more damage than a fork. Sit down.

He doesn't move. She moves toward him, the gun aimed at his face.

JENINE (CONT'D)
I said sit down!

He moves to the chair and sits.

JENINE drops the crucifix on his desk. With the skill of an expert in firearms, she releases the cylinder and empties the cartridges onto the desk. Then, using tissues from his desk, wipes the gun clean and tosses it back into the drawer.

JENINE (CONT'D)
How do you sleep at night? You just block all that shit out? I guess me bringing it all back up, that's gotta be pretty unpleasant, huh?

COOPER stares straight ahead. Not looking at her. A Beat. JENINE's tone softens.

JENINE (CONT'D)
I guess if I think about it, you're a victim too. Right? You can't possibly feel good about what you've done. That's probably why it's so hard for you to admit it. You're just a victim of a lot of sick shit rattling around inside your head, aren't you? (BEAT) Y'know, you're right about one thing. Anger IS fucking toxic. And no one can heal our wounds but ourselves.

COOPER
(NOT LOOKING AT HER) I'm glad you finally realize that.

JENINE
In prison the counselors would constantly remind us anger never solved anything. Guess I haven't mastered that lesson yet.

She picks the crucifix up off
the desk.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Look, I came here looking for an apology. Not a screaming match. (BEAT) I want to let go of all this anger. It's making me sick to my stomach. (BEAT) I really do want to heal. But it's so fucking... It's just so hard.

COOPER

(MECHANICALLY) Things that are worthwhile doing are often difficult.

JENINE

Yeah yeah. So... what? How do I do that? Am I supposed to see you as someone who's mentally ill, instead of a...a pedophile? Am I supposed to try seeing you as a troubled soul? A soul in need of compassion and understanding, instead of punishment? Am I supposed to forgive you? I guess that's what Jesus would say. Right?

COOPER

Yes.

JENINE

(BEAT) Yeah. Okay. Okay. Seems so fucking ironic. The victim forgiving the criminal.

COOPER

That's the only way we can heal our wounds.

JENINE

Yeah yeah. All right. I'll give it a try. Because I'm really fucking tired of carrying around all this anger.

She takes a deep breath and
exhales as if unburdening
herself at last.

JENINE (CONT'D)

So uh... I...I forgive you... for all the abuse. All the mean and nasty stuff you did. To me. All the lies. (BEAT) I... I forgive you.

Another long exhale and release.

JENINE (CONT'D)

And... I guess, while we're at it...I'm sorry for the way I...for all this shit...stuff, I've been saying to you. The cursing. Taking the Lord's name in vain. I'm sorry for aiming that gun at you. (BEAT) You gonna' forgive me?

COOPER doesn't respond.

JENINE (CONT'D)

C'mon. Father forgive me for I know not what I was doing. You said it yourself. I'm in pain and need help. So if you want to help me, how about you start by using that seventy times seven stuff?

COOPER

(BY WROTE) Fine. I forgive you.

JENINE

Not exactly heartfelt. I guess that's the best you can do.

A BEAT as she stands looking at him. Then she moves behind him. Her tone becomes ALMOST SEDUCTIVE.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Y'know, this is so weird. I came here looking for answers, for an apology. And yeah, maybe even for some kind of revenge. But all of a sudden, with this whole forgiveness thing...I swear this is really weird but...I'm getting turned on.

COOPER continues staring straight ahead, stone-faced.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Maybe it's because I hold the power now. Or because I don't feel threatened by you. Or maybe because the truth is finally all out in the open and I feel so relieved. I don't know. Life can be so crazy, you know?

She rests the crucifix lightly on his shoulder. He remains motionless.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Time has been kind to you. You're still a good looking man.

She gently strokes his cheek with the crucifix as she moves around and stands at his side. He doesn't look at her but it's clear he's getting roused.

JENINE (CONT'D)

I haven't been with a man in a long time. You still find me attractive?

COOPER'S breath becomes heavy. His eyes give away his arousal.

A BEAT, then JENINE takes one of his hands and SLOWLY LIFTS

IT UP, PUTTING IT ON HER BREAST.
COOPER lets out a small gasp.

JENINE (CONT'D)

C'mon, Father.

She guides him up out of the
chair.

JENINE (CONT'D)

This time we can both enjoy it.

She turns him to her. He looks
into her eyes.

JENINE (CONT'D)

I promise you won't be disappointed.

COOPER'S breathing is heavy.
She presses her body against
his.

JENINE (CONT'D)

You DO still find me attractive.

He starts leaning in to kiss
her when she VICIOUSLY SMACKS
HIM across the face. He recoils
backward, stunned.

JENINE (CONT'D)

How do YOU like being manipulated, you sick fuck!

COOPER

You whore!

JENINE

Hey. Was that actually a flicker of emotion I saw? What was
that? Shock?

COOPER

How dare you!

COOPER grabs his walking stick
and RAISES IT TO STRIKE HER.
As he brings it down toward
her head, JENINE'S HAND FLIES
UP AND STOPS HIM MID-SWING.

They stand frozen a beat, her
strength an equal match for
his.

JENINE

I'm not the weak little girl you remember. Prison'll do that to you.

She wrenches the walking stick from his hand and flings it across the room.

COOPER

You're sick. You're a sick woman.

JENINE

Oh I'm sick all right. And you're the reason.

She SMACKS him across the face again. He recoils.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Isn't this when you're supposed to turn the other cheek?

She takes a step toward him. He steps back. She edges closer.

COOPER

Get away from me.

JENINE

That doesn't sound like turning the other cheek, Father Tom.

She VICIOUSLY BACKHANDS him across his other cheek.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Now aren't you supposed to say, I forgive you? That's what Jesus would do.

COOPER'S face is red with rage.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Say it. Say you forgive me.

He just stares at her. She SLAPS him again.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Say it.

She SLAPS him again. He throws his hands up to protect himself.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Say it!

COOPER

(BACKING AWAY) Stop it!

JENINE

But you haven't forgiven me, Father. Seventy times seven. Remember?

Another SLAP.

COOPER

I said stop it!

JENINE

(FACETIOUS) I'm confused. I know you like rough sex. Why isn't this getting you turned on?

COOPER

You realize I will report you.

JENINE

Report me? To who?

COOPER

The police. This is assault.

JENINE

(LAUGHS) Assault? That's funny. That's really funny coming from you.

COOPER

A woman with a prison record assaulting a priest? You're already in a lot of trouble.

JENINE

I don't know about that. But it feels really good to finally get out some of this rage. Believe it or not I'm actually a little calmer. But keep talking. Maybe you'll give me a chance to get out a little more. Little Tommy fucker.

COOPER

Do not address me like that.

JENINE

I'm sorry. Did that upset you? How would you like me to "address" you? Little Tommy the rapist? Little Tommy with the bad mommy?

COOPER

Get out! I want you out! Now!

COOPER grabs the crucifix.
They struggle for control.

JENINE finally wrenches it away as COOPER STUMBLES TO THE GROUND.

She grabs some tissues off his desk, wipes her prints off the CRUCIFIX, then tosses it INTO A WASTEBASKET. COOPER reacts.

JENINE

Don't look so shocked. You've been doing that to him for years.

COOPER

You're evil. You are pure evil.

JENINE

If I am, I've got you to thank.

COOPER

What do you want? Money?

JENINE

Yeah, that's always the Church's solution. Shut 'em up with money.

COOPER

How much?

JENINE

You can't buy me. See? I'm NOT a whore. I remember a priest gave a sermon once in prison. He said when the devil comes, he won't have a pitchfork and horns. He'll be well dressed with a cell phone and a fancy car. He should have added a Roman collar.

COOPER

How long are you going to hold me hostage?

JENINE

I'm not holding you hostage. A hostage is an innocent person held against their will. You're a criminal. Think of this as punishment. Like you did to me.

COOPER

How long?

They stare at each other. Eyes burning with anger. JENINE moves to his walking stick on the floor, picks it up and returns to stand over him.

JENINE

Apologize for what you did to me.

COOPER stares defiantly at her.

JENINE JAMS THE BUTT END OF THE WALKING STICK INTO COOPER'S MID-SECTION.

COOPER

OOW!

JENINE

Apologize.

COOPER just glares at her.

JENINE (CONT'D)

You arrogant prick. Just won't give me the satisfaction, will you? Y'know for years I fantasized about this moment. You in a vulnerable position. Me in control. I'd lie awake at night dreaming up different ways to kill you. Some were pretty diabolical.

COOPER

You'll never get away with this.

JENINE

Christ, you sound like some old TV Western... Are you afraid of me, Tommy?

COOPER

Absolutely not.

JENINE

Give me a few minutes.

She grabs a tissue off his desk and wipes down the walking stick, tosses it away.

JENINE (CONT'D)

So what would be the most appropriate form of punishment? I was thinking along the lines of an eye for an eye. What was it you said? The punishment should be equal to the crime if the crime was intentional? I think we can agree what you did to me was intentional. So how was I going to destroy your life? The way you destroyed mine. I gave a lot of thought to castration.

COOPER

You're insane.

JENINE

Sexual abuse'll do that to you.

(MORE)

JENINE (CONT'D)

But then I figured at your age you're probably not trotting out that birthmark much anymore, so castration wouldn't really destroy your life. Which kind of defeats the whole eye for an eye thing.

COOPER

"Revenge coils back on itself."

JENINE

Yeah yeah. Milton somebody. And then it came to me.

She reaches into her bag and pulls out a 9MM semi-automatic.

Frightened, COOPER instinctively slides away from her.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Smith and Wesson. As a gun enthusiast I thought you'd appreciate it.

COOPER

You can't be serious.

JENINE

Hell hath no fury like a woman raped.

COOPER

You're bluffing.

JENINE

Bluffing? This ain't poker, Tommy.

She takes a step toward COOPER.

JENINE (CONT'D)

You're looking a little pale. Afraid of me now?

COOPER grabs the edge of his desk.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Stay down.

COOPER ignores her. Tries pulling himself up. JENINE jams her foot into his side.

He GROANS and falls back onto the floor.

COOPER

You'll rot in hell.

JENINE

Christ, now you sound like a Clint Eastwood movie.

COOPER

They'll give you the death penalty.

JENINE

You already did.

She lays the gun down on his desk and using some tissues, picks up his phone and wipes it off while she continues.

JENINE (CONT'D)

But I'm not going back to prison. I made sure it was dark when I got here. Nobody saw me come in. I didn't use the rental car's GPS and I even took the plates off before I drove down your street. And my prints won't be on anything. You pick up a lot of good stuff in prison. So you see, I can kill you, walk out that door and no one will ever know I was here.

COOPER

Please. If you leave now, I swear I won't tell anyone what went on here.

JENINE

Christ. You really do think I'm stupid.

She lays the phone down. Picks up the gun.

COOPER

Not stupid. Confused. Misguided. Please understand. I don't harbor any vengeance in my heart.

JENINE

YOU don't harbor vengeance. Fucking narcissist. Get on your knees.

COOPER stares at her. Fear in his eyes. He doesn't move. She levels the gun at his head.

JENINE (CONT'D)

On your knees!

He still doesn't move.

JENINE (CONT'D)

You're startin' to really piss me off. There's still a chance I could change my mind, but not if you don't do what I say.

He slowly gets to his knees
until he's kneeling next to
his desk in front of her.

JENINE (CONT'D)

I know how much you love quoting the bible. How about this one? "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea." Recognize that?

COOPER

Of course. Matthew.

JENINE

Chapter eighteen verse six. I actually thought about hanging a millstone around your neck and throwing you in the bay. Would have been so biblical. But the logistics just didn't pencil out.

COOPER

Look, I'll say whatever you want. I'll confess to whatever you say. Just don't shoot me.

JENINE

(BEAT) Tell me something. Why'd you pick *me*?

COOPER

What?

JENINE

Weren't there other girls who were prettier? Sexier.

COOPER has no answer.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Was it because you knew I was scared and vulnerable? An easy target? Was it because you knew the Church would protect you? I want to know what you were thinking. What you were feeling? Are you even capable of feeling? Anything?

COOPER

You wouldn't understand.

JENINE

Try me.

He just stares at her. She sticks the gun against the back of his head.

JENINE (CONT'D)

I said...try me.

COOPER

(INDIGNANT) I may be a priest. But I am also a man. Yes, I have feelings... and urges just like any man.

JENINE

Celibacy was in the job description. Nobody twisted your arm.

COOPER

You think it was easy watching all of you every day? With your little short skirts and tight blouses. Showing as much skin as you could.

JENINE

You sick bastard.

COOPER

I'm not sick. I'm human.

JENINE

You're not human! The things you made me do!? You're a monster!

COOPER

(GROWING ANGER) You think you bear no responsibility?

JENINE

Responsibility?! I was a child!

COOPER

You knew damn well what you were doing. All of you. Flaunting your virginal bodies in our faces like that.

JENINE

I never flaunted anything. I was a shy little kid!

COOPER

The way you would all walk. Teasing and flirting and taunting us because you knew we were priests and couldn't touch you. And wearing perfume. Why would you wear perfume at an all girl's school if not to tempt us? You think we didn't know that you'd go home and fantasize about having sex with us?

JENINE

I never did that!

COOPER

You WERE whores! Little whores who deserved to be punished.

She stares at him a BEAT. Then something occurs to her.

JENINE

Holy shit. Now I see it. You're a fucking Nazi.

COOPER

What?

JENINE

That's exactly what the Nazi's did. Convinced themselves that everything that was perfectly fine and normal was really evil. And everything they did was stamping out this invented evil. They turned good and evil on its head. That's how they could justify all the shit they did and still live with themselves.

COOPER

That's a very sophisticated concept.

JENINE

Like I said. You get a lot of time to read in prison. Grab a pen.

COOPER

What?

JENINE

Grab a pen.

COOPER

Why?

JENINE

Just do it!

COOPER reaches for a pen. JENINE slides a sheet of paper to him.

JENINE (CONT'D)

You're going to write an apology.

COOPER looks at her, confused.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Start writing. "To Theresa O'Connor."

He hesitates.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Write!

He writes.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Now. "I am truly sorry for all the pain I caused you every time I sexually assaulted you when I was at Bishop Kenny High School."

COOPER writes. Stops.

JENINE (CONT'D)

"I'm sorry for repeatedly raping you and forcing you to have oral sex, when you were thirteen years old."

He hesitates. JENINE moves behind him.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Write it!

He resumes writing as JENINE looks over his shoulder. It's clear he's resentful.

JENINE (CONT'D)

"I'm sorry for the sick and twisted things I made you do with a crucifix."

COOPER

I will not write that.

JENINE

You got that idea right out of "The Exorcist", didn't you?

COOPER doesn't move.

JENINE (CONT'D)

If it helps, think of this like the sacrament of reconciliation. Cleansing the soul. Might even help you in the after life. You don't want to spend eternity in the Hell of isolation, do you? Going insane for eternity. That WOULD be the perfect eye for an eye, though. Your insanity to match mine.

His hand is frozen. JENINE cocks the gun. Puts it against his head.

JENINE (CONT'D)

"I'm sorry for the sick things I made you do with a crucifix." Write it.

He starts writing. Stops.

COOPER

A confession at gunpoint is not admissible in a court of law.

JENINE

Write!

He finishes writing.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Now: "I should be defrocked and sent to prison."

COOPER
Is this really going to help you?

JENINE
Write it, Goddamnit!

COOPER writes. Finishes.

JENINE (CONT'D)
Now sign it.

COOPER hesitates.

JENINE (CONT'D)
Sign it!

He signs.

COOPER
Satisfied?

JENINE
(EYEING IT) The handwriting could have been a little neater.
But you're old. And really scared right now, aren't you?

He doesn't respond.

JENINE (CONT'D)
Aren't you?

Still no response. She jams
the barrel of the gun against
the back of his head.

JENINE (CONT'D)
Answer me!

COOPER
All right. Yes.

JENINE
I know a forced confession isn't admissible.

COOPER
Then why did you make me write it?

JENINE
So when they find your body, they'll all know what a scumbag
pedophile you were.

COOPER
You're not really planning to kill me, are you?

JENINE

No. I already did the planning. Now I'm going to do it.

COOPER

I'm not a well man. I told you I have a bad heart.

JENINE

You don't have a heart. You're the devil incarnate.

COOPER

Please. There's still time to redeem yourself.

JENINE

Redeem myself? Redeem MY-self? You're un-fucking believable. (BEAT) This gun at your head remind you of anything? That time you did this to me? You really scared the shit out of me. Even though you took the bullets out first. I still have nightmares about it. Twenty five years of nightmares.

COOPER winces in pain. His hand goes to his chest.

COOPER

I... I think I'm having a heart attack.

JENINE

Yeah, sure you are.

COOPER

Please. Call nine one one.

JENINE

You really DO think I'm a moron.

COOPER'S breathing becomes labored. She moves around in front of him and kneels so that they're facing each other, the gun aimed at his chest.

COOPER

I'm...this...is serious.

His breathing become short and fast.

JENINE

You never quit, do you? Just one quick thinking, manipulative son-of-a-bitch. When you put your gun against my head, you said it was to make sure I never told anybody what you were doing to me.

COOPER

I need...(COUGHS)... Doctor.

She grabs him by the hair and puts the barrel of the gun against his forehead.

JENINE

Now I gotta' make sure you never tell anybody what I'M doing. But since you're not a scared little girl, I can't trust you to keep your mouth shut. So, I had to leave the bullets in. But at least you won't be having any nightmares. See? That's the humanitarian in me. No nightmares for you.

COOPER

Please....

HER FINGER SQUEEZES THE TRIGGER. His eyes go wide in fear.

She pulls the trigger all the way. We hear a LOUD CLICK.

JENINE

How do YOU like it? Yeah, I lied. You ARE gonna' have nightmares.

COOPER stares at her a beat, then his eyes roll back in his head and he slumps to the floor. He lies motionless.

A brief moment, then JENINE reaches out and puts her fingers against his neck.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Shit.

She drops the gun and quickly begins CPR. She pumps COOPER'S chest over and over.

JENINE (CONT'D)

C'mon. C'mon you son-of-a-bitch.

More compressions. She stops. Puts her fingers against his neck. Nothing. She starts again. Now desperate to revive him.

JENINE (CONT'D)

Fucker! Do not die on me!...C'mon! Do NOT die on me!

She continues the compressions until finally exhausted, she stops. Feels his neck one more time. Realizes he's dead.

JENINE (CONT'D)

(SCREAMS) NO!

In frustration she pounds a fist repeatedly on his chest.

JENINE (CONT'D)

No! No! NO!

She looks up to the heavens, arms raised in protest and SCREAMS!

JENINE (CONT'D)

NO!!

Spent, she falls across his chest.

A beat as they both lie motionless. Two dead bodies. One physically. One emotionally. Then, she lets out a SOB. Then another. And as she continues to SOB...

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

END OF PLAY