

# Unto Dust

A play in two acts

by John Scavone

Contact:  
John Scavone  
67 Lincoln Ave.  
Sheboygan, WI 53081  
(312) 451-6245  
scavj@outlook.com

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**Characters** (in order of appearance)

Father William Riley, 35-40 years old

Monsignor Benson, 50-55

**Setting:** The sanctuary and sacristy of Holy Savior Catholic Church. The altar is upstage, approximately center, atop several broad steps. The tabernacle is center on the altar, backed by a large crucifix and flanked by unlit candles. Also present on the altar are a missal, an unadorned chalice covered by a stiff linen pall, a paten (gold plate) and the altar linens. At one end of the altar or on a small table beside it are water and wine cruets, with a small dish and towel which are used during the "Lavabo" (hand washing) portion of the Mass. There may be assorted statuary, flowers, candles and decoration to either side of the altar, as well as elsewhere upstage and at the wings. Downstage and to one side of the altar is a pulpit; nearby is a bench where the altar boys sit while the priest sermonizes. On the opposite side of the altar is a cut-away of the sacristy, where the priest's and altar boys' vestments and various implements and supplies are kept; there should be a sink and one or two chairs in the sacristy.

Note: The setting is easily adjusted to accommodate space limitations. For example: the altar may be smaller than envisioned here and raised only a step or two; the pulpit can become a lectern; the sacristy can be represented by an armoire and chair at one side of the stage.

The general atmosphere is mysterious, harsh. Pools of light define acting areas, as from overhead fixtures. There should be a Sanctuary Lamp which is always lit, and there may be lit votive candles at the feet of statues or elsewhere, other than on the altar. Patches of color might suggest stained-glass windows, one or more of which could serve as a background to the altar.

Costuming- Both men wear the priest's black suit with black shirt and Roman collar. The younger Riley and the different characters Benson portrays are to be suggested physically and vocally by the actors.

**Time:** The present.

## Unto Dust

### Act I

*Morning. Father William kneels in prayer before the altar, his back to the audience. Monsignor Benson enters, carrying a briefcase. He stands aside.*

FR. WILLIAM

Confiteor Deo omnipotenti, et vobis fratres, quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo, opere et omissione: mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. Ideo precor beatam Mariam semper Virginem, omnes angelos et sanctos, et vobis fratres, orare pro me ad Dominum Deum nostrum. Amen.

*(tr.-I confess to almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned in my thoughts, words, deeds and omissions: through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. I ask blessed Mary ever Virgin, all the angels and saints, and you my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God. Amen.)*

BENSON

Excuse me.

FR. WILLIAM

Dear God, I pray You, do not visit the sins of a miserable creature on this innocent child. I beg You with all my heart, please spare him-

BENSON

*(louder)*

Excuse me, I don't mean to interrupt.

FR. WILLIAM

Who-? Father, I didn't hear you come in.

BENSON

Don't let me interfere with your prayers.

FR. WILLIAM

You're not, not at all. I've just finished.

BENSON

I used to say the Latin Confiteor, too, first thing every morning. I'm sorry to admit I've fallen out of the habit, I really should try to get back into it. I always felt like I

was starting the day off right. It's true what they say, confession is good for the soul, even if one has nothing new to confess.

FR. WILLIAM

Can I help you with something, Father?

BENSON

It's Monsignor, Monsignor Benson. They told me at the rectory I'd find Father Riley here.

FR. WILLIAM

I'm Father Riley. Hardly anyone calls me that anymore, everyone in the parish calls me Father William. Except the teenagers, they prefer Father Billy.

BENSON

You've been the pastor at Holy Savior over ten years, as I recall.

FR. WILLIAM

Twelve years, next month.

BENSON

You must have made a lot of friends in that time.

FR. WILLIAM

I've tried my best. It's a poor parish, Monsignor, a lot of these people need a friend.

BENSON

That's really the parish priest's calling, isn't it? Much more than saying Mass and administering the sacraments. I've always found the priest who's really cut out for the job has a knack for making friends, intimate friends. He wants his flock to trust him, to depend on him to give them what they need. You might say a good priest is a true father to his parishioners, no pun intended.

*(sits on the altar steps)*

Ah, it feels good to sit. Bad feet, the circulation down there isn't what it used to be. I came by train, and somehow I thought Holy Savior was close to the station.

FR. WILLIAM

No, you were misinformed, it's about two miles.

BENSON

At least that far.

FR. WILLIAM

Wouldn't you be a little more comfortable in a pew?

BENSON

This will do for the moment. The Lord knows I don't mean any disrespect. He's well aware of my feet, I complain about them six or seven times a day.

FR. WILLIAM

Then I'm sure He doesn't mind you resting right where you are.

BENSON

So what were we talking about? Oh yes, the parish priest. It's been twenty years since I've had the privilege of serving a parish. I'm unfortunately blessed with an aptitude for administrative work, and you know how the diocese is, having discovered my talent, it's the only kind of work they'll assign me. I spend my time stuck in an office, other than when I'm asked to visit one of our parishes. Truth is, I look forward to getting out, not that I resent my job. But I get to feeling removed from the world, it's not good to be cooped up all the-

FR. WILLIAM

Monsignor, not to be rude, but is there something specific you want to see me about? Outside of our annual audit, we don't get many visits from the diocese, and that was done a few weeks ago. Was there some problem with it?

BENSON

No, as far as I know, your books checked out fine, and I wouldn't have been sent if they hadn't, I'm no accountant.

FR. WILLIAM

Then, why are you here?

BENSON

Directly to the point, I admire that in a man. I suppose you have to be abrupt once in awhile, with all the work it is running a parish. The typical pastor likes to stop and chat, but he rarely has the time, especially in a parish like this, with so many people needing your help.

FR. WILLIAM

So you understand, Monsignor, I do have calls to make.

BENSON

Oh, of course I understand, perfectly.

*Pause.*

FR. WILLIAM

Then, sir, would you mind?

BENSON

Not a bit. What did I do with my briefcase? Here we are. The bishop came across a newspaper story over breakfast. Eggs benedict, cold cereal, buttered pound cake, juice and coffee, the man loves a big breakfast. A big lunch and dinner, too, not that I'm telling any tales. I've warned him not to eat that way, but he is the bishop, not much a simple clerical worker can tell him. Where's that clipping? I'm sure I brought it with me.

FR. WILLIAM

Please, Monsignor, just tell me.

BENSON

Here it is. Tucked it in my breviary so I wouldn't lose it.

*(gives clipping to Fr. William)*

It's about the boy who was injured on your church grounds. We live in an astounding time, almost nothing goes unnoticed by the world at large, even when it happens in a small town like this.

FR. WILLIAM

Yes, Timmy Dugan. He was found by the river, apparently took a fall down a steep bank. A broken arm, cuts and bruises, a serious head injury, I'm afraid. It didn't happen on church grounds, though.

BENSON

No?

FR. WILLIAM

Nearby, it's an easy mistake. We border on the forest preserve, and there's no fence in that area. He was actually found a few hundred yards off our grounds. Such a shame, he's a good kid, a sweet boy. And that family doesn't need any more trouble than they already have.

BENSON

No family needs something like that to happen.

FR. WILLIAM

He's still in the hospital. They're optimistic he'll recover, but it's very touch-and-go.

BENSON

You've seen him, then?

FR. WILLIAM

No, I haven't been able to. He's in the ICU, immediate family only, unless they send for me. I pray that doesn't happen. I understand he's been going in and out of consciousness. God help him, it's three days since the accident.

BENSON

So they're sure it was an accident?

FR. WILLIAM

What else could it have been?

BENSON

I don't know.

FR. WILLIAM

*(gives clipping back)*

Monsignor, why the interest? I'm surprised a story like this would make it into a city newspaper.

BENSON

It was buried in the Metro section, they probably had space to fill.

FR. WILLIAM

But why would the bishop be interested? Why send you way out here to ask about it?

BENSON

Well, just as you're concerned about your parish, the bishop has to be concerned about things that happen in his diocese. He wants to make sure everything is alright, you know, that there aren't any extenuating circumstances he should know about.

FR. WILLIAM

Circumstances?

BENSON

The story involves a nine-year-old boy. I believe he's nine,

is that right?

FR. WILLIAM

Eight, nine, something like that. So what?

BENSON

You're an intelligent man, Father. Given the climate these days, you can understand how the bishop might be a little apprehensive when a priest and a nine-year-old are involved. As I said, this world we live in-

FR. WILLIAM

Hold on! You're not seriously suggesting- the bishop doesn't honestly think that I had anything-

BENSON

The bishop only wants me to get the details.

FR. WILLIAM

And the story gives them to you! So if there's nothing else, Monsignor, you can just go back home and tell the bishop to-never mind. I'm sorry you wasted your time coming here.

BENSON

I hope it is a waste of time, I really do hope it is. But if I may, Father Riley, I notice you left out one of those details in the story. Not purposely, I'm sure.

FR. WILLIAM

What detail is that?

BENSON

You're the one who found Timmy.

FR. WILLIAM

Does it say that? Let me see.

BENSON

It's right here in the last paragraph. "The boy was discovered by Father William Riley, church pastor." Here it is, right here.

FR. WILLIAM

Yes, I must have missed it.

BENSON

Already being familiar with the story, you only skimmed it. But it should have been natural for you to say, "I was the

one who found him." In fact, twice you said "he was found" as if it hadn't been you who found him.

FR. WILLIAM

I wasn't hiding the truth, Monsignor. Obviously, I read the phrase "the boy was discovered" and started describing what I remember, that's all. I got ahead of myself.

BENSON

That's quite reasonable. The whole incident must have been very emotional for you. Seeing it in print must still recall the confusion, the- what's the word- the anxiety you felt finding him that way.

FR. WILLIAM

It was emotional, seeing him all beat up like that. I hardly knew what I was doing, it was like a dream, a nightmare.

BENSON

Would you like to tell me about it? As much as you feel you can.

FR. WILLIAM

Monsignor, have I been accused of something?

BENSON

No. Why would you think that?

FR. WILLIAM

You're questioning me as if I'm under some suspicion. If there's anything you want to know, ask me straight out.

BENSON

And so I have. I'd like to know about how you found Timmy.

FR. WILLIAM

I'm not ashamed of anything, I didn't do anything wrong, and I resent the implication that I did!

BENSON

Father Riley, please relax. I'm implying nothing. I do wish I could get out more often, I'm not used to being with people, I guess I tend to be a little curt. I'm sorry.

FR. WILLIAM

No, I'm sorry, Monsignor. Anger is a sin, and I'm guilty, forgive me. It's like you said, the incident was very emotional for me.

BENSON

Then maybe it will help you to talk about it. Why don't you tell me what happened that morning? It was morning, wasn't it, when you found him?

FR. WILLIAM

Yes. I like to run early in the morning, I usually go out through the preserve before breakfast. I find the fresh air cleansing, the quiet helps me think...

*Light change, focusing on Fr. William, running in place. He stops suddenly upon seeing something.*

What in the world? My God, that looks like-

*(scoots down the altar steps as if a drop to the river)*

It can't be, please don't let it be him! No! Timmy! Timmy, what happened to you? Open your eyes, Timmy, please!

*(checking pulse, breathing)*

Alive, he's alive! Thank You, Lord, thank You. Call 9-1-1. Damn me, as usual, my phone! Alright, alright, I can carry you- no, I shouldn't move you, worst thing to do. Oh, God, help me, help me! Here, here, I'll cover you with leaves to keep warm. Stay warm, Timmy, keep breathing! I'll be back in a few minutes, keep breathing!

*Light change, full set.*

I ran to the rectory as fast as I could to call the paramedics. I waited for them, took them out to Timmy. Just as I left him, still breathing, still alive. They put him on a gurney, it was such a long way, they went so slowly back to the ambulance. I rode with them to the hospital. They took him right into surgery. I don't know how long it was, I just waited. And prayed.

*Light change, Benson as the Doctor.*

Doctor, how was the surgery? Will he be alright?

DOCTOR

He's resting, we've got him in intensive care. We'll keep him there a few days, so we can monitor his condition.

FR. WILLIAM

But he'll make it, he has to.

DOCTOR

Let's say we're guardedly optimistic. The MRI showed a subdural hematoma near the skull fracture. We'll do additional surgery if we have to, but it's in a dangerous location, and he's already been through a lot, so for now, we're just going to wait and see what happens. We're hoping it will clear itself.

FR. WILLIAM

Clear itself. Wait, we'll just have to wait.

DOCTOR

All we can do for now.

FR. WILLIAM

Has his family been notified?

DOCTOR

We don't even know his name, Father.

FR. WILLIAM

Timmy, it's Timmy, I mean Timothy, Timothy Dugan.

DOCTOR

You know him.

FR. WILLIAM

Yes, the family is Catholic. Timmy's one of my altar boys.

DOCTOR

Do you know their phone number? We should get in touch with his parents right away.

FR. WILLIAM

It's- I'm not sure, I can't think of it. I have it back at the rectory.

DOCTOR

Would you call them? They should know as soon as possible, they're going to be worried sick. We think he must have been out there for several hours, they probably woke up this morning and found him missing. They could have the police out looking for him.

FR. WILLIAM

God forgive me, I hadn't thought of that. I'll call as soon as I get home.

DOCTOR

I'll call the police, just in case.

FR. WILLIAM

They'll want to know what happened to him, too. The police, I mean.

DOCTOR

I'm sure they'll put it down as an accident, that's what it looks like.

FR. WILLIAM

An accident, a terrible accident.

DOCTOR

Father, do you have any sleeping pills at home, any mild sedatives?

FR. WILLIAM

What? No, I don't, I don't use them. What for?

DOCTOR

Make the call first, by all means. But then I think you should get some rest, you've had a pretty good shock yourself. Maybe try some hot tea, something like that.

*Light change, Benson as himself.*

FR. WILLIAM

Rest. I was in shock, I hadn't realized. I've seen some awful things happen to people, Monsignor, but it's worse when it's a child, especially one you- one you know. I'm ashamed to admit I had panicked.

BENSON

There's no shame in that, Father Riley. Any normal adult might react that way, I think. You called the parents when you got home?

FR. WILLIAM

As soon as I found the number. Luckily, I got Mrs. Dugan, she's more level-headed than her husband. I was a lot calmer by then, I think I made it as easy as possible on her.

BENSON

That's good. Well, it all sounds straightforward to me. An unfortunate occurrence, these things happen sometimes. (pause) I am curious about one aspect of the story, though.

What kind of boy would you say Timmy is?

FR. WILLIAM

What kind?

BENSON

Is he mischievous? Gets into trouble often? Minor trouble, I mean, likes to play pranks, that type of thing?

FR. WILLIAM

Pranks? No, Timmy's not like that. He can be a little adventurous, I suppose, like any boy his age, but he's a good boy, really a very sweet child.

BENSON

Yes, you described him that way before. I wonder what he was doing in the forest preserve at night.

FR. WILLIAM

Who can tell? He might have been hunting night crawlers for fishing bait, a lot of the boys do that.

BENSON

Alone, late at night? My brother and I used to hunt worms early in the morning when I was a boy. Our parents wouldn't have let us go out in the woods at night.

FR. WILLIAM

Maybe it was morning when he left, we have no way to know for sure.

BENSON

It was morning when you found him, and you quoted the doctor as saying he'd been there for several hours.

FR. WILLIAM

Several, a few, a couple, the doctor can't really be sure, either.

BENSON

They can usually be fairly precise, narrow it down to within an hour or so. Several means five or more to me.

FR. WILLIAM

Maybe he wasn't hunting worms, maybe he was up to something else. Maybe he let his friends talk him into sneaking out and doing something foolish. Even good boys do foolish things, especially when they're with their friends.

BENSON

But if he was with his friends, why didn't any of them call for help when he fell? Why didn't they come here right away? The rectory would be the closest place, and they know you.

FR. WILLIAM

Then he must have been alone!

BENSON

No need to get excited again, Father Riley. I'm just wondering how he got out there.

FR. WILLIAM

And I'm only saying, Monsignor, there could have been any number of reasons why he was out there.

BENSON

I suppose that's true. Good boys do foolish things, you're right about that. I did a few, I'm sure you did, too.  
(pause) Do you think something might have happened at home? Could he have been running away, for instance, something foolish like that?

FR. WILLIAM

I wish I could say no, but it is a possibility.

BENSON

Oh? What's his home life like? Did he ever talk about it?

FR. WILLIAM

Not straight out, children tend to keep things like that inside. But there were hints, I suspected home wasn't paradise for him.

BENSON

Suspected?

FR. WILLIAM

It became a lot more than that one morning when he was late to serve Mass. The seven o'clock on a weekday, the boys are almost always a little late for those. I don't really mind, I expect it, it's hard enough getting them to school on time. I have to say something, but they know I'm not mad at them. Timmy was moody when he came in, hardly said a word, rushed around getting things ready. I thought it was because he was late and hoping to avoid my lecture. Turned out he was trying to avoid me, or rather, looking at me. I didn't even notice the black eye until we were halfway through

Mass. I sat him down afterward.

*Light change, the sacristy,  
Benson as Timmy.*

This shiner is why you were late this morning?

TIMMY

Kinda.

FR. WILLIAM

What happened, Timmy?

TIMMY

It's nothing, Father.

FR. WILLIAM

You can tell me. Were you in a fight?

TIMMY

No, I- I had an accident, I tripped and fell.

FR. WILLIAM

You must've landed on someone's fist.

TIMMY

It's okay, Father. He didn't mean it, honest he didn't.

FR. WILLIAM

Was it one of your brothers? You know it's especially wrong for brothers to fight.

TIMMY

Nah, it wasn't my brothers. Please, Father, it was an accident. I'm okay, it don't hurt much.

FR. WILLIAM

It doesn't hurt much. Alright, I believe you. But I hope you're not making things worse by lying to me.

TIMMY

I ain't lying, Father, honest. Can I go put out the candles now?

FR. WILLIAM

Sure, go ahead.

*Light change, Benson as himself.*

I thought he was fibbing, but I let it go. Kids can be simple and complicated at the same time. I didn't want to make any harsh judgments, I just kept it in the back of my mind. After that, I tried to make a point of being interested in him, you know, I'd ask how he was doing in school or how things were at home. I wanted to show him he had a friend. It seemed like he needed someone.

BENSON

And did he?

FR. WILLIAM

I saw it first-hand a few days later, when I met his father. A lot of these people have it hard, Monsignor, I'm aware of that. Some for so long, they get mad at life. They don't know why they're mad, and they don't know how to take it out. Mr. Dugan is that kind of man.

*Light change, Benson as Mr. Dugan. He takes the chalice from the altar to represent a glass of beer.*

DUGAN

So what can I do you for, Father? I'm pretty busy.

FR. WILLIAM

It's a little early in the day for alcohol, Mr. Dugan, isn't it?

DUGAN

My day starts at four-thirty a.m. It's an hour 'til my dinner, and I'm having a beer to relax. What do you want here?

FR. WILLIAM

It's about Timmy.

DUGAN

What'd the kid do wrong?

FR. WILLIAM

Nothing, nothing. He's a good boy.

DUGAN

So what about him?

FR. WILLIAM

The altar boys' outing is next weekend-

DUGAN

Going to the city, the ball game or something, ain't it?

FR. WILLIAM

Yes. Last year we went to Great America. A lot of the boys don't get much chance to do things like that. It's a way to thank them for serving Mass all year.

DUGAN

Nice of you.

FR. WILLIAM

Timmy says he can't go with us.

DUGAN

That's right, he can't.

FR. WILLIAM

Well, sir, I was wondering why he can't. I know he wants to go, he's been looking forward to it.

DUGAN

He has, huh?

FR. WILLIAM

It's all he's talked about.

DUGAN

I'm sorry, Father, and I told the boy I'm sorry, too. But none of us can afford a vacation right now, I told him, we can't afford the lost time. He's got plenty to do for me next Saturday. Church gets him on Sunday, school gets him all week. Life is rough, I told him, you don't like it, too damn bad. Pardon me, Father.

FR. WILLIAM

A boy needs some fun, Mr. Dugan. What does he have to do that can't wait a week?

DUGAN

We run a family farm. Twenty-five acres of lousy farm, stuck between a shopping center and an industrial park, not to mention two freeways. Pardon me again, Father, but it takes a hell of a lot of work to make this place produce what little it does, and I can't afford to hire any help. Whole

family's gotta pitch in, they know it, just the way it is.

FR. WILLIAM

A lot of small farmers have it very hard these days, I understand that-

DUGAN

How could you understand? Ever try to run a dying business?

FR. WILLIAM

No, I never have.

DUGAN

I bust my hump every day to make enough money to pay the mortgage on this lousy place, just so I can do it all over again next year. Wouldn't be so bad if I could feed my family on what I make, but I can't. So I work a lousy swing shift making lousy machine parts when I can, but that's only when they're taking on extras at the factory, and the lousy economy ain't handing out any big contracts these days. Don't tell me you understand, don't dare tell me that!

FR. WILLIAM

Mr. Dugan, I'm sorry. I don't mean to offend you.

DUGAN

Apology accepted.

FR. WILLIAM

I do understand, though, that a boy Timmy's age-

DUGAN

Got any kids?

FR. WILLIAM

You know I don't.

DUGAN

Then you don't understand that, either. (*hiccup*) 'Scuse me.

FR. WILLIAM

How many of those have you had?

DUGAN

Two, three, what's the difference?

FR. WILLIAM

Whatever your problems are-

DUGAN

I just told you what my problems are!

FR. WILLIAM

Drinking won't solve them.

DUGAN

It helps.

FR. WILLIAM

And they're not Timmy's responsibility, either.

DUGAN

No, they ain't, I know they ain't. And I wish I could send the kid on the trip, honest to God, I wish I could. Maybe he can make it next time.

FR. WILLIAM

It's one afternoon. It won't cost you any money, we pay for everything.

DUGAN

It wouldn't be fair to the others. I told him, your brothers and sisters all got work to do, so do you. He gets it.

FR. WILLIAM

Does he?

DUGAN

He better, for his own good, he better. Life is rough, I told him, better get used to it. No complaints, or I promise I'll give you something to complain about.

FR. WILLIAM

That how he got the black eye?

DUGAN

Who the hell do you think you are? Get outta my house, or I'll throw you out, priest or no damn priest!

*Light change, Benson as himself.*

FR. WILLIAM

In some twisted way, Dugan probably thinks he's got his son's best interest at heart.

BENSON

But you don't believe it.

FR. WILLIAM

Do you?

BENSON

I'm not a parent, either. What he has at heart and how he shows it to his son could be very different things.

FR. WILLIAM

Or one and the same.

BENSON

You think Dugan beats his son.

FR. WILLIAM

I know he does.

BENSON

I agree it looks that way. On the other hand, sometimes a black eye is just a black eye.

FR. WILLIAM

I've seen Dugan with his family outside church on Sunday, and once or twice at parish social activities, when his wife can force him to go.

BENSON

How do you know she forces him?

FR. WILLIAM

Because that's the kind of man he is. He's not the type who likes to socialize. I doubt he's ever in a friendly mood, I've never seen him that way. You should see them on Sunday, he never stops telling those kids to do this or do that, no matter what they're doing. He's always loud about it, as if he wants to prove to everyone he's the boss in his home. If his wife tries to quiet him because she's embarrassed everyone's staring at them, he starts screaming at her. He looks for all the world like he wants to hit her. When they're home alone, I'm sure he does.

BENSON

Judge not, lest ye yourself be judged, Father.

FR. WILLIAM

Why are you taking his side?

BENSON

I'm not taking any side. But sometimes we humans tend to

form an opinion about someone else without really putting ourselves in his place. And a priest is nothing if not human.

FR. WILLIAM

Put yourself in Timmy's place. All he wants is his boyhood, a chance to grow up before he has to work like a man. A nine-year-old shouldn't have to do that. He should be able to enjoy God's world first. He should have a man in his life who wants him to have that enjoyment, even if the man himself doesn't feel it anymore.

BENSON

And that's what you tried to give the boy.

FR. WILLIAM

Someone had to. The first duty of every man is to love his fellow man.

BENSON

Especially the children.

FR. WILLIAM

Especially the children. What grave sin would I commit in ignoring him? How would I answer for that when I face my Creator?

BENSON

How, indeed. But it seems to me the problem we face is not to plan our answers for when we stand in judgment. The problem is what we actually do in this life. If we do right, our honest answers will be the correct ones.

FR. WILLIAM

And so we must follow our hearts.

BENSON

Yes, our ultimate guide and our downfall. And what did your heart tell you?

FR. WILLIAM

It went out to the boy.

BENSON

Naturally, it would.

FR. WILLIAM

Not just because I thought his father was treating him

badly, there were other reasons, too.

BENSON

Such as?

FR. WILLIAM

I started watching him. I don't mean that the way it might sound, like I was stalking him.

BENSON

Of course not.

FR. WILLIAM

Just if I happened to see him, you know, on the playground, at a school assembly, those times with his family. I sensed he was alone a lot.

BENSON

Alone?

FR. WILLIAM

For one thing, he's the baby of his family by two or three years. His brothers and sisters don't include him in any of their activities.

BENSON

That's no worse than normal.

FR. WILLIAM

Besides that, they're always teasing him, picking on him, I've seen it. They might not mean to be mean, but it hurts him, I know it does. Maybe they do it because their father is always picking on them. The other kids in school seem to like him well enough, and he'll usually go along with them when he's invited. But I've also seen him sitting alone reading while the others were playing kick ball. Or he'll stay after school to help his teacher erase the blackboards on a sunny day when they're all headed out to the lake. He's just, I don't know, a little shy, quiet. Cheerful when you get him talking, but quiet.

BENSON

Not what you'd call a popular boy, not one of the in crowd, if they still call it that.

FR. WILLIAM

No, he's not. He keeps to himself most of the time.