

Sister of the Dark Heart

A Detective Story

by

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SUMMARY:

Sister Clara, a nun, volunteers for a surgery so she can swap hearts with an abused, destitute woman. Clara hopes the heart-exchange can provide the woman a pure heart and thus an opportunity to redeem her life. But before the surgery, the destitute woman's infant son was deliberately drowned. The play opens when a detective knocks on the door of the convent seeking more than clues to a murder.

CAST (4f)

Clara, 33.

Ava, 20s.

Slater, 30s.

Abbess, late 50s or 60s.

PRODUCTION:

Sister of the Dark Heart was performed at Drawn (Eugene, OR) as an immersive dinner theatre production in February and March 2018.

ABBESS'S OFFICE

Detective SLATER stands in a doorway to the ABBESSES's office. She wears shapeless clothes and totes a large handbag.

ABBESS

Yes?

SLATER

Hi! My car broke down out on 126.

ABBESS

How unfortunate.

SLATER

It *is* unfortunate! That's exactly the word, *unfortunate*.

ABBESS

We don't allow visitors at this hour.

SLATER

Now that is also unfortunate.

ABBESS

Goodnight.

SLATER

Really I can't use your phone for like 5 seconds? There's nothing else around for miles.

ABBESS

A service station lies 2 miles east on 126. Goodnight.

SLATER

Please, just 5 seconds.

ABBESS

Fine. I will call you a truck.

SLATER

No, it costs too much. Gotta get a friend to drag me. (*having moved inside, she sees the ABBESS's rotary phone*) Wow, rotary! Haven't seen one of these since the Middle Ages. Kidding. Middle school. —Do you mind?

ABBESS

Miss, my convent closed to visitors 3 hours ago.

SLATER

I get it. I'll be superfast.

ABBESS exits. SLATER ensures she's left the room to finish dialing.

SLATER

(-) Hey I'm in.

No I haven't seen her, just the abbess.

I told you. She's gunna confess.

Shut up Jamaal. Just be ready.

ABBESS reenters.

Right my car's right out front. See you when you get here! (x) I woke him up. He's crabby.

ABBESS

He was sleeping at six in the evening?

SLATER

Nightshift.

ABBESS

The nightshift.

SLATER

Uh huh.

ABBESS

I do not believe you.

SLATER

Wow!

ABBESS

Your car has not broken down. You do not need a tow. You will leave right now.

SLATER

You haven't you returned my calls Abbess.

ABBESS

(*beat*) Excuse me?

SLATER

I left 6 messages.

ABBESS

I do not—. What messages?

SLATER shows her badge and I.D. to ABBESS.

ABBESS

I planned to call. But there were more pressing priorities.

SLATER

No there's no more pressing priority than talking to a Cypress City Police officer.

ABBESS

What would you know about my priorities? You barge in. You disrupt my evening. You—.

SLATER

I talked to Dr Kaleka.

ABBESS

Who?

SLATER

Cmon abbess.

ABBESS

No I'm sorry but this is. You knock on my door and pretend to be distressed. You *lie*. You got into my convent on a lie.

SLATER

I'd think you'd be happy to see me. You're carrying a heavy burden.

ABBESS

Do not tell me I'm carrying a burden. You do not know about burdens. Now please what do you want?

SLATER

I'm hear to speak to Sister Clara.
(*places her bag and relaxes into the room*)

ABBESS

Please make yourself at home.

SLATER

Thanks! —Sister Clara's story. Wow.

ABBESS

I do not know what you're talking about.

SLATER

Cmon Abbess. I told you. I spoke to Doctor Kaleka. He told me everything. He told me about Clara's operation.

ABBESS

There was nothing illegal about it.

SLATER

See, you do know! And you're right. There was nothing illegal about the operation.

ABBESS

So what do you want?

SLATER

To speak to Sister Clara.

ABBESS

I can't imagine what you would speak about. Clara has hardly left these walls in 15 years.

SLATER

But she did leave at least once. She left 3 months ago for an operation. And she brought something back. Could we sit?

ABBESS

I am quite comfortable standing.

SLATER

Not me. I love sitting. Don't I look comfortable? Because I feel comfortable. Look, my shoulders are loose. My breathing is deep. This is me in a relaxed state. That's what my therapist says. Relaxed is the opposite of perturbed. That what my therapist says. She says when I don't get what I want, I get perturbed. It means anxious or unsettled. It's something I'm working on. Not getting perturbed. But right now I'm getting perturbed because I want to speak to Sister Clara.

ABBESS

You don't talk like a detective.

SLATER

Perturbed perturbed perturbed.

ABBESS

May I see your badge again?

SLATER

(showing badge and business card) The number to the front desk is right there. How long do you think you can do this? How long do you think you can postpone me abness?

ABBESS has retreated to her desk and opened a phone book.

SLATER

You're smart! You figured that if I was lying I'd feed you a fake number. But why would I make this up? No reason. If I was a junkie, I'd be looking for cash in that desk or hidden in these books. But I'm not doing that. I'm going to speak with Sister Clara.

ABBESS

(-) I would like to confirm the identification of one of your detectives. Badge Number 44-818.

Would you describe Detective Slater's appearance.

(SLATER flips her hair as ABBESS listens to the description.)

Thank you. (x)

SLATER

I'll bet it was Jamaal. He does dispatch on Friday nights. I bet he described my hair. He loves my hair.

ABBESS

How may I help you, detective?

SLATER

I told you.

ABBESS

Because if you do not state your business you are obliged to leave.

SLATER

I'd like to speak to Sister Clara.

ABBESS

Clara is indisposed.

SLATER

Indisposed means not available, right?

ABBESS

That's right.

SLATER

Darn! I'm so sorry to hear that she's indisposed. Why is she indisposed?

ABBESS

Because she is not available.

SLATER

Perturbed perturbed perturbed.

ABBESS

In 25 years as abbess of St Mary-on-the-Lake I have never been treated with such contempt. By an officer of the law, no less.

SLATER

Are you hiding her because you lied to Bishop Stanford?

ABBESS

I did not lie to Bishop Stanford.

SLATER

Sure you did.

ABBESS

No I did not.

SLATER

So if I call the bishop right now, he'll say he knows about the operation. Abbess is that right? (*producing papers from her briefcase*) I didn't know much about convent bylaws. Do you mind reading that highlighted section?

ABBESS

I am plenty familiar with our bylaws.

SLATER

Just the highlighted section please and thank you.

ABBESS

"Any significant health concerns among the sisters should be reported immediately to the supervising bishop."

SLATER

Thank you. I have the bishop's number as 338-1684.

ABBESS

This is what you do? You blackmail people? (*shouts out the door for--*) AVA!

SLATER

Blackmailing is illegal. This is applying pressure in the proper direction.

ABBESS

Applying pressure in the proper direction. Blackmail.

SLATER
We call it leverage.

In the doorway, Sister AVA appears.

AVA
Yes?

ABBESS
Bring me a tea.

AVA
Yes ma'am. (*remains in the doorway*)

ABBESS
What Ava?

AVA
How bout her?

ABBESS
Do you want tea?

SLATER
What? Yes.

AVA exits.

SLATER
Where were we?

ABBESS
You were leveraging me.

SLATER
Oh right, I was! We leverage a lot. Because people lie a lot. You're lying right now.

ABBESS
I am not lying.

SLATER
You're hiding the truth.

ABBESS
I am not!

SLATER
Abbess when it comes to spotting a lie I am a professional. You are lying.

ABBESS
You are calling me a liar.

SLATER

You're sharp! That's exactly what I'm doing!

ABBESS

How do you know I am lying?

SLATER

Because you have something to hide.

ABBESS

I have nothing to hide.

SLATER

Then why am I not speaking to Sister Clara right now?

ABBESS

I told you.

SLATER

She is indisposed.

ABBESS

Precisely.

SLATER

I'll make you a deal abness. Produce the sister in 5 minutes and I won't take her to the station. If you do I'll question her here. If you don't I'll take her to the station.

ABBESS

You have a subpoena?

SLATER

In the inside zipper pocket of my bag. If you make me get it out I'll take her to the station.

ABBESS

Now you are lying.

SLATER

If I take her to the station, the other officers will gossip. Police gossip goes into newspapers.

ABBESS

I fail to believe any newspaper would care about a sheltered nun.

SLATER

Sister Clara is no ordinary nun. Sister Clara had an operation. But no ordinary operation. An extraordinary operation.

(MORE)

SLATER (CONT'D)

Sister Clara surgically swapped hearts with a woman named Crystal Elaine McKinnon. See how much I know Abbess? Now do I need to get that subpoena from my bag? Because if you make me do that then I'm taking the Sister to the station.

ABBESS

There was nothing illegal about the operation.

SLATER

No there wasn't.

ABBESS

Then I fail to understand why you are harassing me.

SLATER

I'm here because the woman Sister Clara swapped hearts with was a criminal.

ABBESS

A criminal? (*sits for the first time in the play*)

SLATER

You didn't know?

ABBESS

I knew the other woman was troubled. That's why the Sister volunteered. But criminal?

SLATER

Criminal.

ABBESS

May I ask you something?
Did she ever bite a police officer?

SLATER

How did you know that?

ABBESS

Clara told me.
But as though she did it herself.
What do you know detective?

SLATER

I can tell you.
I can also keep the bishop out of this.
But I must speak to her.

ABBESS

What do you know detective?

SLATER

Okay. Six months ago, in an abandoned apartment on the East Side, we found this. (*a yellow stickie*) The apartment had been rented by Crystal Elaine McKinnon. We called the number written on it, not thinking much about it. Guess who answered? Dr Kaleka. But Dr Kaleka didn't wanna talk. Very evasive and distant. Kinda like my dad! I was like, "Hey, I need some one-on-one time!" He was like, "I'm too busy!" So I subpoenaed him. It doesn't mean as much when they *have* to talk to you. But he talked.

ABBESS

About his research.

SLATER

The heart-transplant stories? —Crazy! My favorite is the cafeteria worker. Did he tell you about the cafeteria worker? Oh the cafeteria worker is the best. (*pulls a journal from her bag*) He even gave me his article about it. Here we go. "After undergoing a conventional heart transplant, a 45 year-old white female cafeteria worker named 'Gloria' became preoccupied with violin music. Gloria never cared for violin music before. But after her heart-transplant, Gloria showed signs of obsession, listening to violin concertos sometimes for 6 hours a day. The subject even reported playing air-violin in the privacy of her bathroom." I love that -- her playing air-violin in her bathroom. "The subject presumed her new obsession had nothing to do with her new heart cause since her donor was a 17 year-old black female. And black females, Gloria assumed, were interested only in hip-hop and rap music." That cracks me up. A medical journal talking about hip-hop and rap. "But after placing a call to the donor's mother, Gloria discovered that the young black donor was a classical violin aficionado." Aficionado means expert, I looked it up. (*showing her the journal*) Dr Kaleka says there are about 5,000 heart transplants every year. Do they all get weird obsessions like Gloria? Like, do all 5,000 wake up wanting to eat corn dogs and watch sumo wrestling on the Internet? No. Only a certain type does. This type *transforms*. New memories, weird dreams, like a personality transplant. That type is most often a female with a high emotional IQ, artsy, non-dominant, and often religious.

ABBESS

Sister Clara.