

HOLY HELL

She knows it's written in The Book of the Prophet that the great day of the Lord is near, and hastens greatly, a day of wrath, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of trouble and distress, a day of trumpet and alarm. Yet she tells the Patrons in her speakeasy that it's not the End of the World, it's just the beginning of President Hoover's hard times, which look brighter through the bottom of a glass.

Still she knows the day of the Lord is near, and hastens greatly. But for now, the night belongs to her.

Father Culangelo is the young pastor of Holy Sepulchre parish. Father Duffy is his older, cynical colleague. Each night, Culangelo strips to the waist and has Duffy whip him with an old cat o'nine tails as penance. For this he is paid the day's take of the poor box, which is always ten dollars. The ringing of a simple kitchen timer tells Duffy his job is done.

He grabs his daily bread and races across town against the piercing February night. Unknown to Culangelo, Duffy's a regular at The Grotto, the speakeasy owned by a woman called Our Lady, by her staff and customers. She looks fifty-something but is probably ten years younger. Also unknown to Culangelo is that Duffy is Our Lady's lover. As soon as he arrives, they stage their own little passion play back in the storeroom.

Later, in The Grotto, whilst "The Sheik of Araby" squawks from the radio, Duffy gets drunk on bootleg whiskey that Our Lady insists he buy with cash money. Meanwhile, Culangelo prepares for tomorrow's Ash Wednesday Masses and the soup kitchen, with the ticking timer his only companion.

Upstairs in her one room apartment, the drunken Duffy goes down on Our Lady. After she climaxes, they lie together. Tomorrow may be Ash Wednesday, but tonight is still Saint Valentine's. When Our Lady gives Duffy an elegant, heart shaped greeting card, he becomes restless. Our Lady asks Duffy what

he'll give up for Lent and adds, What would Father Culangelo do? Duffy tells her that he's giving her up—permanently—and leaves. She shreds the Valentine.

The next morning Our Lady attends an Ash Wednesday Mass celebrated by Culangelo and secretly slips ten dollars in the poor box. Afterwards, with Culangelo, she prepares the soup kitchen lunch in the church basement. Upstairs, Duffy offers Mass, and is revived by the Blood of Christ, which conveniently retains the form of an alcoholic beverage. He then enthralls the Congregation with a powerful homily on Lenten sacrifice. An envious Culangelo watches—and Our Lady watches Culangelo.

In the afternoon the two priests and Our Lady take hot coffee to the striking trolley car workers outside the train yard. Duffy emboldens them with a speech sacred yet socialist—ideas Our Lady planted and watered the night before. Electrified, beatified and joe inside, the Strikers hoist Duffy on their shoulders. The kitchen timer reminds Culangelo it's time to get back to the church.

Our Lady joins him on the walk back. Once there, as they pray The Rosary, she reveals her love for Duffy and their affair. She intentionally fails to tell Culangelo that Duffy broke it off. He pleads for her to go and she leaves.

In the evening, Culangelo reproaches Duffy about his behavior. Enraged, Duffy punches his pastor, knocks him down, even chokes him with the cat o'nine tails. It's pointless: the masochist enjoys it. Still angry, Duffy rushes to The Grotto where he attempts to strangle Our Lady. She is saved with a well-aimed whiskey bottle. Cops arrest the unconscious Duffy.

Culangelo also goes to The Grotto. After all, what would Father Duffy do? He places the timer on the bar and explains that he suffers from Saint Ormund's Knee. If he stands or kneels for longer than a half hour, he becomes paralyzed. Our Lady serves Culangelo a few drinks and soon he tries to take

Duffy's place in her bed. Our Lady lets him try. In her room, she undresses him but the sight of the whip scars on his back shocks her. Our Lady embraces him as if he was her child and holds him through the night.

Having cooled off in a jail cell, a paddy wagon drops Duffy at Holy Sepulchre, as arranged by Our Lady. Culangelo is not there and he decides to cook the soup.

At dawn Our Lady walks a still tipsy Culangelo back to the church. On the steps they meet a Striker who came to warn Duffy that scab-workers are ready to roll out the trolley cars. Culangelo instructs Our Lady to tell Duffy the news while he hurries off to the train yard. After all, what would Father Duffy do?

Our Lady finds Duffy asleep in the kitchen. She tries to wake him when suddenly the timer goes off in her bag. She tells him about the news and they head out. But of course, Our Lady has to run back in and turn off the gas burner under the soup

Culangelo enters the train yard along the tracks just as the first trolley car rolls towards the gate. He stands in its way. The amateur at the throttle cannot brake in time. Culangelo is run over.

Duffy and Our Lady arrive too late to save him. Culangelo dies cradled in her arms. The Strikers are angry and Our Lady urges Duffy to prevent a riot. Duffy quiets them with a speech in which he portrays Culangelo's death as their victory.

That night, in the kitchen at Holy Sepulchre, Duffy and Our Lady prepare silently the soup for the next day. He thrusts the cat o'nine tails into Our Lady's hands, kneels down and begs her to be merciless. Before she takes a swing, Our Lady demands to know how he'll pay her. After all, what would Father Culangelo do? Duffy assures her he'll think of something. She pulls off his shirt and whips him with all her might.