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This play is dedicated to all the brave theatre companies who took a chance on producing a new work, including Branch County Community Theatre, Las Cruces Community Theatre, Eunice Players and Fontana Mummers, among others.

And to my mother, who's one of the funniest Catholics I know.

Cast of Characters

SISTER PHILAMENA, 20-50s

SISTER AUGUSTA, 20-50s

GEORGE, 20s

MOTHER SUPERIOR, 40-50s

PAUL, 24

SALLY, 20s

SISTER MARY CATHERINE, 24

FATHER CHENILLE, 40-50s

Time / Place

1920s-60s—you choose.

The convent of the Sisters of Perpetual Sewing.

Acknowledgments

Drinking Habits received its premiere at Branch County Community Theatre in Coldwater, Michigan on February 19, 2004, after winning the Robert J. Pickering Award for Playwriting Excellence. It was directed by J.R. Colbeck with the following cast and crew:

SISTER PHILAMENA Jennifer E. Colbeck
SISTER AUGUSTA Deborah Jersey
GEORGE Marc W. Pebernat
MOTHER SUPERIOR Irene Grimes-Butdorf
PAUL Dustin Morton
SALLY Charlene N. Rucker
SISTER MARY CATHERINE Rhonda H. Pebernat
FATHER CHENILLE Carl D. Rifenburg
Set Design J.R. Colbeck
Costume Design JoEllen Summitt
Lighting Design Susan Merrill
Sound Design Ken Delaney
Properties Design Lauri Rowe and Rege Rupp
Producer Irene Grimes-Butdorf
Stage Manager Marisue Taylor

Acknowledgments (continued)

A subsequent production occurred at Las Cruces Community Theatre in Las Cruces, New Mexico, on April 8, 2005. It was directed by Larry Chandler with the following cast and crew:

SISTER PHILAMENA	Laura Rohle
SISTER AUGUSTA	Erin Williams
GEORGE	Darin R. Cabot
MOTHER SUPERIOR	Lynda Abshire
PAUL	Jeremy Gwin
SALLY	Jackie Coleman
SISTER MARY CATHERINE	Indrani Rauth
FATHER CHENILLE	Richard Rundell
Assistant Director	Joe Pfeiffer
Set Design	Larry Chandler
Costume Design	Jeanne Luper
Lighting Design	Heather Pfeiffer
Sound and Props Design	Tom Smith
Stage Manager	Avra Elliott

DRINKING HABITS

by Tom Smith

ACT I

Scene 1

(The main room in the convent of the Sisters of Perpetual Sewing. In the center of the room is a small table with a few wooden chairs. Doors lead to the following: the outside, the grape pressing room, the high holy closet, the kitchen, and a hallway leading to Mother Superior's room and the rest of the convent. At rise, GEORGE, a sweet, good-natured groundskeeper, is carrying in a large trunk. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA are seated at the table stitching robes.)

GEORGE. Sisters, I couldn't find a box big enough, but I found this trunk downstairs. It's the one leftover from the charity magic show a few years back.

(They say nothing.)

Remember, from Father Chenille's act?

(They say nothing. He shrugs.)

Anyway, I just heard on the radio—

(AUGUSTA motions him to shush.)

Oh right! Sorry!

(He quiets down. AUGUSTA points across the room. GEORGE pulls the trunk over and sets it down. He starts to wildly mime. AUGUSTA gets PHILAMENA's attention and they start to gesture to GEORGE, asking questions. GEORGE looks confused. GEORGE starts to gesture wildly. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA look confused. GEORGE opens his mouth to talk, but PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA cover it. Finally, church bells ring and GEORGE breathes a big sigh of relief.)

Sorry. I forgot the bells had rung and we weren't allowed to talk.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Today hasn't been so bad, has it? Only three times.

GEORGE. When I grew up in the orphanage, I would always get in trouble for making too much noise.

SISTER PHILAMENA. George, I didn't know you were an orphan!

GEORGE. I am?

SISTER PHILAMENA. You just said you were.

GEORGE. I did?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Yes. You said you grew up in an orphanage.

GEORGE. Oh, but I wasn't an orphan. My father was the grounds-keeper and we lived on-site. An all girls orphanage, which was an awfully nice place to grow up, if you catch my meaning. There was one girl in particular: I never knew her name, but I saw her watching me out her window all the time. Even when I was just eating lunch or reading, she'd stare at me in my old monogrammed work shirt and smile. And I'd smile back, and kinda wave, like this, and then she'd wave back, like this, and then I'd give her my Valentino eyes, like this, and she'd—

(AUGUSTA and PHILAMENA look embarrassed.)

Sorry, Sisters.

SISTER AUGUSTA. What is it you wanted, George?

GEORGE. Wanted?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, you know...

(She repeats some of GEORGE's mime.)

GEORGE. Oh, right! They said on the radio that a heavy frost is expected tonight.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Frost?

SISTER PHILAMENA. So soon?

SISTER AUGUSTA. We'll have to drop everything and harvest the grapes!

SISTER PHILAMENA. But what about these robes? Mother Superior told us to get them repaired and shipped out by tomorrow. There's no way we can pick grapes and finish all this sewing.

GEORGE. I can help with the grapes. I don't mind.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh, George, could you?

GEORGE. Sure, I've already finished my chores. Besides, if those grapes go bad you won't be able to make any of your juice for the poor.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Glory be! Sister Philamena, we'll skip dinner tonight and go help George. Then we'll come back and rush through the rest of this sewing. We'll get our buckets and meet you in the fields, George.

GEORGE. All right.

(He starts to exit.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. George! What's that in your pocket?

GEORGE. I almost forgot! Mother Superior got a telegram. From Rome!

(He hands it over.)

It's marked "Importante." That's Italian! I wonder what it means...?

(They stare at him for a second. He thinks really hard. Finally, he [thinks he] gets it.)

Ohhhh! "Imported!"

SISTER AUGUSTA. "Important," George. It means "important."

SISTER PHILAMENA. We'll see that she gets this right away!

GEORGE. Good! I'll see you in the vineyard!

(He rushes off.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Calling after him:)* Orchard, George! Remember, Mother Superior doesn't like us to call it a vineyard.

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Placing the telegram on the trunk.)* Once we pick those grapes, Augusta, we'll have to start making our... *(Looking around and whispering:)* ...wine. But we don't have enough bottles. Or space! Or time!

SISTER AUGUSTA. What choice do we have? Our... *(From this point on, everyone whispers "you-know-what" or a similar euphemism instead of "wine.")* ...you-know-what... is the only thing that keeps money coming into this convent. Without it, the church would close us down for sure. Now, c'mon, Philamena, we have to go help George with that grape harvest.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR enters from her room, unseen.)

We can't let it go bad.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Let what go bad, Sisters?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Mother Superior!

SISTER PHILAMENA. We didn't see you come in.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Let what go bad?

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Terrified:)* ...uh...uh...

SISTER AUGUSTA. George, Mother Superior! We can't let George go bad.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What do you mean?

SISTER AUGUSTA. We were just talking to him, Mother Superior, and he seems to be treading the path of sin. Isn't that right, Sister Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What sin, Sister Augusta?

SISTER AUGUSTA. I saw him drinking...alco—

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Cutting her off sharply.*) Don't say that word, Sister Philamena! You know how much I despise that word!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Sorry, Reverend Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. But George lives here on the grounds. Where on earth could he get...you-know-what?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

SISTER AUGUSTA. He sneaks into town at night, Mother Superior, and buys bottles of that...devil's delight...that seems to be so popular among the locals. Sister Philamena and I were going to skip dinner and counsel him.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. This is terrible! George has been our groundskeeper for years. He's never once given me a moment's worry. Perhaps I should speak with him personally.

SISTER PHILAMENA. No, Mother Superior, you can't!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Why not?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

SISTER AUGUSTA. He doesn't know that you know, Mother Superior, and it might embarrass him. He so looks up to you. It would be much easier coming from Sister Philamena and me.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Perhaps you're right. But remember, you may counsel, but don't preach. Change must come from within. And hurry back: we're expecting that new addition to our convent tonight: Sister Mary, who has been sent to us by Cardinal Redding himself!

SISTER PHILAMENA/SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I see George has found a trunk to ship the robes off in. Oh, it's Father Chenille's old magic trunk. That man is the worst magician I've ever seen: the only thing he can make disappear is an audience.

(She sees the telegram on the trunk.)

What's this?

SISTER AUGUSTA. George brought in a telegram for you, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. From Rome!

(She starts to read. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA look over her shoulder. She closes the telegram.)

Don't dawdle, Sisters! George needs salvation!

(She exits into her room, reading the telegram.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. You lied to Mother Superior!

SISTER AUGUSTA. What choice did I have? We couldn't let her know we've been making...Satan's mouthwash...instead of grape juice and selling it to save the convent.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I've never lied in my life, much less to a Holy Mother!

SISTER AUGUSTA. A lot of help you were! You just stood there with your mouth open!

SISTER PHILAMENA. I can't help it! I can't lie even if I wanted to! Whenever I try, all that comes out is, "...uh...uh..." That's why I became a nun: here my disability is actually an asset.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But still! You could have looked less guilty!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Why did you lie in the first place? Why not just tell Mother Superior about the frost? She'd think we were picking grapes for our juice.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I got flustered; it was the first thing that came to my mind. Now listen, we've got to press those grapes tonight or it will be too late! You remembered what happened last time we waited, don't you?

SISTER PHILAMENA. The mice came in and ate most of them.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Right! So we didn't have enough grapes to make both juice and...Lucifer's libation. So we only made juice, and we almost had to close our doors! You don't want that to happen again, do you?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Of course not! This convent is the only home I've ever known.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Then let's figure out a plan. How many empty... you-know-what...bottles do we have left?

SISTER PHILAMENA. None! They're all full. We were going to sneak into town this week to sell them.

SISTER AUGUSTA. It's past six so the store where we buy our bottles has already closed. Do we have any empty juice bottles left?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh, yes! At least a dozen. Plus two full ones.

SISTER AUGUSTA. So this is what we'll do: we'll fill the juice bottles with...the you-know-what that we press tonight.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But Mother Superior serves grape juice from those bottles. She'll find out!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Nonsense! You said there are still two full bottles of grape juice. We'll just make sure that we use those until we get the other bottles from town tomorrow. Tomorrow we can transfer the...you-know-what...back into the...you-know-what...bottles, and then fill the grape juice bottles with real grape juice.

SISTER PHILAMENA. That sounds awfully risky!

SISTER AUGUSTA. What choice do we have? Now, go grab some buckets and meet me in the orchard!

(PHILAMENA exits into the pressing room as AUGUSTA heads out the front door.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering, nearly hysterical:)* Merciful heavens! What will we do? Sister Philamena! Sister Augusta!

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Re-entering:)* What is, Mother Superior?

(PHILAMENA rushes back in carrying two buckets.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Rome has sent out a decree ordering all insignificant convents be immediately closed! They'll be sending out someone—someone not of the church—to check each and every convent and report back to Rome!

SISTER AUGUSTA. But, Mother Superior, why are you so worried? Surely Rome doesn't mean us!

SISTER PHILAMENA. We've been entrusted with a sacred duty to the church!

SISTER AUGUSTA. How can we be considered insignificant?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sisters, I have a confession to make to you. All these years I have never told Rome how small our order is. In fact, I've made it a point to disguise that fact. That's why you've been trained to sew as fast as 20 nuns. And we certainly don't make enough money to be considered significant. One look at us and Rome

will close us down! We'll be forced to join The Sisters of Grueling Hard Labor! What are we to do?

(Notices the buckets.)

What are those buckets for, Sister Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Unsuccessfully trying to hide them:)* ...uh... uh...

SISTER AUGUSTA. They're for George, Mother Superior. In case we find any of that horrible...devil drink...in his cabin, we'll pour it into these buckets, and then pour it into the gutter.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Good thinking, Sister Augusta! Keep up the good work, girls. Fight the evils of...Satan's toilet water...at every turn! Now, go help that lost soul while I try to figure out what to do about this spy!

(PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA exit.)

Oh, dear! What are we to do? I've got to come up with a way to save this convent!

(MOTHER SUPERIOR exits back into her room.)

PAUL. *(Entering from the outside with SALLY:)* That was close; they almost saw us!

SALLY. But they didn't. Geez, Paul, you're as nervous as a marshmallow at campout. Calm down.

PAUL. Easy for you to say! You didn't spend 12 years in Catholic school! You have no idea what these nuns are like! Sally, I feel really strange about all this...

SALLY. Why? This is just like any other story we've been assigned.

PAUL. Oh really? What other story required us to do an exposé on nuns?

SALLY. Well, somebody in this town has been making wine and they just won a half-million dollar prize. Besides, this will only be an exposé if these nuns are the ones making it.

PAUL. Still, this doesn't feel right...

SALLY. Listen, the chief promised whoever cracks this a year's worth of front-page stories. Front page, Paul! Do you know what that could do for our careers?

PAUL. I know, but...spying on nuns!?!

SALLY. Aren't you tired of writing for the Society section? I don't know about you, but I took this job to report hard news, not cake-walks and charity luncheons.

PAUL. Fine; let's just take a quick look and get out of here.

(Looking around:)

This place gives me the creeps. I've never been in a convent before.

SALLY. You just said you went to Catholic school!

PAUL. I did, but we never actually saw where those nuns lived. For all we knew, they were like bats and slept upside down in coat closets. Boy, I don't miss those days at all. Those nuns used to scare me to death: always staring, not saying anything. You'd confess to anything, guilty or not, just to stop that staring. There was this one nun at my high school: she gave me the willies so bad that I'd stutter; I couldn't get anything out. It was horrible!

SALLY. Don't you mean, horri-b-b-ble?

PAUL. That's not funny!

SALLY. *(Opening the high holy closet:)* Hey, look at this. *(She pulls out a white robe.)* Boo!

PAUL. Don't touch that, it's holy! *(Quickly putting the robe away:)* The nuns in this order sew and repair all the robes for the Church. If the Pope rips a hem, he sends it here to get fixed. These are very sacred things.

SALLY. *(Looking around more:)* This place isn't so bad; it's simple and kinda cozy. You know, I always thought that we'd have something like this for our summer home: a little vineyard, a lot of quiet.

PAUL. We would have—if you didn't leave me at the altar.

SALLY. Oh, Paul, you're not still sore, are you? What choice did I have? Cracking that Dillon Boys story finally got me noticed! I was the only reporter who covered it!

PAUL. Because everyone else was at our wedding, waiting for you to show up!

SALLY. Look, Paul, we both agreed not getting married was the best thing to happen to our relationship.

PAUL. I know, I know! But it hasn't been easy since we started being assigned the same stories. The chief sure has a sadistic side...

SALLY. Thanks a lot.

PAUL. You know what I mean, Sally. It's just difficult sometimes... I still care about you. A lot.

(There is a brief charged moment where it looks like they may kiss. SALLY breaks away.)

SALLY. So, all they do here is sew?

PAUL. They say they can pattern, cut, and sew a robe in less than five minutes.

SALLY. Not me. I flunked Home Ec so many times they made me take Woodshop with the boys instead. Where is everyone anyway?

PAUL. The chief said that there were just three nuns here. We saw two heading outside. Which means—

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Off:)* I've got to think!

PAUL. That must be the Mother Superior! Quick, hide! She can't know that we're here.

(SALLY rushes to the door leading out, as PAUL hides in the holy closet. SALLY sees PAUL isn't behind her.)

SALLY. Paul? Where'd you go?

(PAUL opens the door but quickly shuts it as MOTHER SUPERIOR enters. SALLY is caught.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering:)* Hello?

SALLY. Hello. You must be Mother Superior. I'm—

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No need for introductions! I know who you are!

SALLY. You do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Of course; I got the letter from Cardinal Redding. But come now, Sister Mary, where are your wimple and veil?

SALLY. But I'm not—

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Looking disapprovingly at Sally's clothes:)* You must be from one of those more modern orders, Sister. Here, you'll find us traditional in our dress.

(She opens the closet. PAUL hides deeper into the clothes. She does not notice him. She pulls out a nun's gown.)

This is what you'll be expected to wear here, Sister.

SALLY. I think you must be mistaken. I'm not—

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Not what?

SALLY. (*Thinking twice:*) Not...this size.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Well, there are plenty of gowns in the high holy closet, Sister. If you can't find one that fits, I'm sure you can sew your own quickly enough. Now I'll go make sure your room is ready.

(*She exits.*)

PAUL. (*Coming out from the closet:*) She thinks you're a nun!

SALLY. Isn't that wonderful!

(*She starts to put on the gown.*)

PAUL. Why didn't you correct her?

SALLY. And blow my cover? Are you kidding me? She just handed me a golden opportunity!

PAUL. But you just lied...to a nun!

SALLY. I did no such thing! I just didn't tell her the truth.

PAUL. It's the same thing!

SALLY. Listen, if she thinks I'm Sister Mary then I'll be Sister Mary. This way I can meet the other nuns, gain their trust, and find out firsthand if there's any funny business going on around here.

PAUL. Do you realize how many sins you'll be committing if you impersonate a nun?

SALLY. Paul, listen: the chief doesn't take either one of us seriously. Why else would he send us here? Do you actually think there's a snowball's chance that three nuns are making award-winning wine? But if by some crazy miracle it's true, then I want to be the one to blow the cover off the story! Now you can either join me, or you can go back to writing about the cake walk at Shady Glenn Retirement Home.

PAUL. I'm not going to leave you here alone. But this is crazy!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Off:*) Sister Mary!

SALLY. She's coming back. Hide!

(*He hides back in the closet.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Mary, I almost forgot. One of the things we honor here is a period of silence each day. When you hear the church bells chime, you must remain silent and work in prayer and meditation. When the bells chime again, you may resume speaking.

SALLY. What time does that happen?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Oh, it varies. If it's a high holy day, the bells might chime seven or eight times. On other days, just two or three times. We figure it's the least we can do for He who has sacrificed so much.

SALLY. Who's that?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Surprised; pointing up:*) Him.

SALLY. (*Looking up:*) There's a second floor to this building?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Confused:*) Jesus, dear.

SALLY. Oh, right. Him.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What is the name of the order you transferred from again?

SALLY. The order...?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, dear.

SALLY. Oh, the order! I transferred from the order of...alphabetical.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The...Alphabetical Order?

SALLY. Yes, we...filed things.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I've never heard of it.

SALLY. We work quite closely with the...Numerical Order...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Shaking off her confusion:*) Well, I'll let you get settled in. Where are your bags?

SALLY. I don't have any. I mean... I gave away everything I own before I arrived. I take my vow of poverty very seriously.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How charitable!

SALLY. Yes, the poor need so much more than I.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Holding up Sally's coat:*) I see you kept this old, plain coat.

SALLY. Plain? That happened to cost me 50 bucks— (*Catching herself, and taking back the coat:*) —and I'm holding on to it to give it to a family in real need.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Let me take it, dear. There are numerous orphanages in Rome that could use it.

(There is a brief tug-of-war. MOTHER SUPERIOR takes it and puts it in the trunk.)

You'll be an excellent addition, Sister. Now, I'll leave you be. I'm sure you'll want to spend some quiet time praying.

SALLY. Yes, of course. Praying.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Breakfast is served at four thirty. I'll see you then.

(She starts to exit.)

SALLY. Excuse me! Did you just say four thirty? Four thirty in the morning? That four thirty?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Horrible, isn't it? We're embarrassingly lazy around here. Good night!

(She exits.)

SALLY. Paul?

PAUL. *(Coming out of the high holy closet:)* We're getting out of here—now!

SALLY. Are you nuts?

PAUL. We can't do this!

SALLY. We can't *not* do this!

PAUL. This is ethically—morally—religiously—wrong!

SALLY. You know what your problem is, Paul Billings? You're too scared to go after the hard news! At the first sign of danger, you run.

PAUL. That's not true!

SALLY. Isn't it? You got the same tip I did about the Dillon Boys. But you chose to not follow up on it.

PAUL. I didn't follow up on it because we were getting married an hour later!

SALLY. But I did, and that story is what won me a Pickering Award.

PAUL. Fat lot of good that did you! You're still covering the same second-rate stories I am. Only instead of a husband to commiserate with, you've got a trophy.

(Beat.)

You never even tried to reschedule the wedding.

SALLY. There was no time! I had all those other leads I had to follow-up on. I was running around like mad!

PAUL. You weren't running around, Sally, you were running away. Just like you always do when someone gets too close.

SALLY. I do not!

PAUL. Why don't you just admit it: you're the one who's too scared! You don't want anyone to see the big, brave reporter let her guard down and admit she's got feelings.

SALLY. Feelings don't win you a Pickering. And they certainly don't get you the front page!

PAUL. No, but they do make you human.

SALLY. Paul, I— I mean, I'm...

PAUL. Forget it. Let's just do our job and get out here.

SALLY. Sure. Grab my coat first, though, will you? It's in the trunk.

(PAUL opens the trunk. The voices of PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA are heard offstage.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Off:)* Mother Superior, she's arrived!

(PAUL has no time to go elsewhere, so he hides in the trunk. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA enter with SISTER MARY CATHERINE.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Seeing SALLY:)* Oh, hello! Who are you?

SALLY. I'm Sal— *(Stops herself and extends her hand.)* Sister Mary.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Sister Mary?

SISTER AUGUSTA. But this is Sister Mary.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Mary Catherine. Which one are you?

SALLY. Excuse me?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Which Mary? I'm Mary Catherine, and you're Mary...?

SALLY. Mary?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Sister Mary Mary?

SALLY. Well, Bloody Mary was already taken.

(PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA look shocked.)

That's just a little joke.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Oh, I get it! Like the cocktail!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Shhhh...you mustn't talk about...you-know-what...here. Mother Superior feels drinking is one of the greatest sins one can commit.

SISTER PHILAMENA. She says it leads to a life of vice and sin. She's quite passionate about it. She won't even let us say the word.

We have to say “you-know-what,” or “Satan’s bathwater” or “the devil’s hair tonic,” or something like that.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I didn’t know. Please forgive me!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Sister Augusta and I didn’t know you were living with us as well, Sister Mary Mary.

SALLY. Yes, I was sent here by, um, Cardinal whatshisname...

SISTER AUGUSTA. Redding?

SALLY. Yes, Cardinal Redding!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What a coincidence! He’s responsible for my being here as well! And what a coincidence we’ve arrived on the same day! And we have almost the same name! You’re not an orphan too, are you?

SALLY. Can’t say that I am.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh, Sister Mary! You’re an orphan?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. My entire family was killed in a terrible car accident outside of Paris. I was brought up in an orphanage for girls. Every one of us became nuns. It was sort of expected.

(Beat.)

Except for one girl. She started a softball team.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I’ll tell Mother Superior you’ve arrived, Mary Catherine.

SISTER PHILAMENA. And I’ll prepare another room.

(They exit.)

SALLY. *(Awkward silence. Finally...)* So, Sister Mary Catherine... how’s nun life treating you?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Can you keep a secret, Sister Mary Mary?

SALLY. You’d be amazed!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I’m not really a nun! I mean, I’m training to be one, but I’m still a novice. I talked with Cardinal Redding and he’s allowing me to stay here while I finish up my training. They don’t take novices at this order, so I’m pretending that I’ve already entered the Sisterhood. I’ve been saddled with guilt ever since I replaced my novice whites with this gown. Please don’t tell Mother Superior! I don’t want to have to go back. I just know that The Sisters of Perpetual Sewing is my destiny!

SALLY. Honey, I won't tell a soul. The way I see it, it's sort of like living with your boyfriend before marrying him.

(Seeing the shocked look on MARY CATHERINE's face.)

Spiritually, I mean.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. How long have you been a sister, Sister Mary Mary?

SALLY. Oh, uh...it seems like such a short time. But I guess it's been since I was...uh...nine?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Nine! I've never heard of anyone that young being allowed into the Sisterhood.

SALLY. Oh, well, uh...I was in the program for exceptionally pious kids. My brother became a priest when he was seven.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Oh my! It must seem almost a burden to have so much goodness in you.

SALLY. It's the cross I bear. *(Realizing her gaffe:)* Which isn't to make light of the cross Jesus bore. Uh, I think I'll just pray quietly for a moment.

(She begins to cross herself, but realizes she doesn't know the order in which to do so. MARY CATHERINE looks on, slightly confused. SALLY smiles, then tries a different order. She is still confused. She does an elaborate series of hand movements then drops to her knees to pray.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering with AUGUSTA:)* Sister Mary Catherine? I'm afraid I wasn't expecting you.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Cardinal Redding said he'd sent a letter. Perhaps it hasn't arrived yet.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Mother Superior, wasn't that the letter you got last week?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Augusta, could you please show Sister Mary Catherine to her room? She'll be in the room next to Sister Mary—oh dear, what's your second name?

SALLY. Mary.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No, dear, your second name?

SALLY. Mary.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. It's Sister Mary Mary, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Mary Catherine will be next to Mary Mary. Then bring Sister Philamena back in here here. I mean, back in here. I would like to speak with you both.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother Superior.

(All exit, save for MOTHER SUPERIOR who paces the room. PAUL opens the trunk for a breath of fresh air. He sees MOTHER SUPERIOR and slowly creeps out of the trunk. She turns around. He hides behind the trunk. She continues pacing. He silently makes his way to the closet and hides inside. She sits on the trunk, thinking. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA re-enter.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. You wanted to see us, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, we've caught ourselves a spy, Sisters.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Who, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Mary Catherine. She seems so innocent, so pure. But I could tell the minute I saw her that she was the spy that was sent from Rome! Did you see how nervous she looked? She's definitely hiding something. Now listen, we mustn't tell her a thing. If she asks, we must commit sin and fib a little. Tell here there are many others in our order, but that they are all on retreat. We can't let her know it's just the three of us. Well, four of us now with Sister Mary Mary.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Yes, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Augusta, I want you to watch Mary Catherine closely. Report to me anything you see that seems suspicious.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But, Mother, I haven't the time!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What do you mean? You and Philamena are almost done with the holy robes.

SISTER AUGUSTA. It's, uh...well, we still need to talk with George and, uh—

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Nonsense! You may speak with him later; this is important! Sister Philamena, I want you to keep Mary Catherine occupied. Take her on a tour of the grounds. Bring her into town. Just keep her busy!

SISTER PHILAMENA. But, Mother Superior...!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Do it! We'll make sure she's too exhausted to spy! Oh, poor Sister Mary Mary! To come to our convent when such deceit is going on!

(She exits.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. How can we make...you-know-what...with Mary Catherine poking around?

SISTER AUGUSTA. We'll just have to stay up and do it while she's sleeping.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But it's already so late. We won't get to sleep at all!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Would you rather they closed down the convent?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Of course not, it's just—

SISTER AUGUSTA. Then go! You tell George he's to finish picking the grapes; I'll go make sure Mary Catherine isn't snooping around!

SISTER PHILAMENA. I just know this is God's way of punishing us for lying!

(They exit. SALLY enters and rushes to the trunk, kneeling beside it.)

SALLY. Paul? The coast is clear.

(PAUL starts to come out of the closet, unseen by SALLY, but rushes back in as FATHER CHENILLE enters.)

FATHER CHENILLE. Oh, hello! You must be the new Sister! I'm Father Chenille. I'm the priest of the local parish.

SALLY. Hello, Father.

(Rises. Unsure how to greet him, she does an elaborate curtsy.)

FATHER CHENILLE. My, it was rather formal where you came from, wasn't it? Well, perhaps you can help me? It's a high holy day tomorrow, and I seem to have ripped my cassock. I was wondering if you might be able to mend it for me?

SALLY. Wouldn't it be easier to take it to a seamstress?

FATHER CHENILLE. But Sister, you're a seamstress.

SALLY. Oh, yes, of course. Just leave it here. I'll get to it a little later tonight.

FATHER CHENILLE. It's only a small tear. I don't suppose you could fix it now? I have a sunrise service in the morning.

SALLY. Well...certainly I could. It's just a small tear.

(Gathers sewing supplies and focuses so intently on threading the needle she ignores FATHER CHENILLE.)

FATHER CHENILLE. How do you like the convent so far? Rather small, but they really do good for the community. I see Sister Philomena and Sister Augusta go into town every week with their grape juice, and it seems to brighten up the spirits of every soul in town. I don't know how this order has remained open, with so little money coming into it. But I suppose our sisters are thrifty. Having some trouble?

SALLY. I can't thread this stupid needle. I was never any good at this.

FATHER CHENILLE. You're joking! I'm well aware Cardinal Redding sends only those divinely gifted in the art of sewing to this convent.

(He sees the trunk.)

What's this?

SALLY. *(Still trying to get the needle threaded:)* Almost got it...

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Examines the trunk.)* Well, I'll be!

SALLY. *(Finally getting the needle threaded:)* There we go!

FATHER CHENILLE. My old magician's trunk! I haven't seen this in years!

SALLY. *(Begins to sew.)* Hey, this isn't so hard...

FATHER CHENILLE. I'll be right back; I just need to get a few things from the kitchen.

(He rushes off.)

SALLY. Now, what were you saying about the trunk?

(She sees he's left, shrugs, and continues sewing. Suddenly, she remembers:)

Paul!

(She heads over to the trunk. PAUL starts to enter, again unseen, and rushes back in the closet as MARY CATHERINE enters.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Oh, Sister Mary Mary! I've been overwhelmed with guilt since we last talked. You will keep what I told you about being a novice secret, won't you? They'll send me back if they find out. And I feel certain that God wants me here.

(SISTER AUGUSTA sneaks in.)

SALLY. Your secret's safe with me, Mary Catherine. No one will ever know you're not really a nun.

(SISTER AUGUSTA hears this and reacts.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Oh, thank you! Good night!

(She exits. SISTER AUGUSTA trails her on tiptoe.)

SALLY. *(Goes back to the trunk, seeing AUGUSTA:)* Sister Augusta...?

SISTER AUGUSTA. It's all right, Sister Mary Mary. Mother Superior knows all about Sister Mary Catherine. I've been told to keep on eye on her so she doesn't get into trouble. Imagine, deceiving nuns like that!

(She rushes off.)

SALLY. Yeah...imagine. *(Remembering:)* Paul?

(PAUL tries to re-enter but rushes back in as FATHER CHENILLE re-enters.)

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering with a bunch of large kitchen knives and crossing to the trunk. SALLY rushes back to the sewing.)* I used to be quite the amateur magician.

(He does an elaborate show that the knives are solid.)

Perfectly solid knives.

(He knocks on the trunk.)

A perfectly solid box. And yet... Abraca-luiah!

(He pushes a knife through the trunk.)

SALLY. *(Thinking PAUL is still inside:)* What are you doing!?!?

FATHER CHENILLE. Amazing your senses! *(Pushing through two more knives:)* Abraca-luiah!

SALLY. *(Rushing over and pulling the knives out of the trunk:)* My God! Stop it!

FATHER CHENILLE. What's wrong, Sister? It's only a parlor trick.

SALLY. *(Pulling the knives out of the trunk:)* Paul! Paul!?!?

FATHER CHENILLE. Who's Paul?

SALLY. He's— Oh God, he's...

(PAUL comes out of the closet, waving he's ok, pops back in as FATHER CHENILLE turns around.)

The patron saint of straight seams. Oh God and St. Paul, please bless this seam and let it be straight and true.

SALLY / FATHER CHENILLE. Amen.

(SALLY doesn't know how to explain pulling out the knives. She grabs one and pretends to cut off some thread.)

My scissors are dull.

FATHER CHENILLE. You sisters always do go above and beyond: blessing a simple ripped seam!

SALLY. Here you go, Father.

(She holds up the cassock. She has sewn the sleeve into the seam.)

FATHER CHENILLE. You're probably still tired from your trip. Perhaps there's a robe I can borrow from the high holy closet.

(He starts to cross to the closet.)

SALLY. *(Remembering PAUL is in there:)* No, Father, don't go in there! *(Blocking the closet:)* Why don't you go make yourself a nice cup of tea, and before the water's boiling I'll have this fixed!

(She leads him towards the kitchen.)

FATHER CHENILLE. You're sure it's not an imposition?

SALLY. None whatsoever.

(FATHER CHENILLE exits with the knives.)

Paul?

(He enters, dressed like a priest, holding his coat and tie.)

What are you wearing?

PAUL. I heard him coming over to the closet so I threw this on. We've got to get out of here and figure out a plan.

SALLY. Just let me just fix this first. I don't want to blow my cover.

(She struggles at great length to pull apart the sleeve. After a moment, PAUL takes the garment, handing SALLY his clothes. Not sure where to hide them, she places them in the trunk. PAUL quickly unstitches the sleeve, threads the needle, and re-sews the garment.)

Who taught you that? I thought you said your mother died when you were young?

PAUL. I'm full of surprises. What about you? I thought all girls knew how to sew.

SALLY. I told you I flunked Home Ec. All five times.

PAUL. *(Handing back the finished garment:)* Now, c'mon, give it back to him and let's—

FATHER CHENILLE. (*Entering:*) Sister Mary Mary, I'm having trouble finding the— Oh, hello, Father.

PAUL. Hello, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. I'm Father Chenille.

PAUL. I'm Father...Paul.

FATHER CHENILLE. What brings you to Shady Glenn, Father Paul?

PAUL. Well, I've... I've come to visit... That is to say, Sister Mary...

SALLY. Father Paul is my brother.

PAUL. Yes, of course! This is my sister, Sister Mary Mary. I just wanted to make sure she arrived safely.

FATHER CHENILLE. How very thoughtful. Will you be staying long?

PAUL. A day or so. (*Pointedly to SALLY:*) Probably less.

FATHER CHENILLE. I see. And what parish do you work at?

PAUL. Well, that's kind of hard to say...

SALLY. He sort of floats around...

PAUL. ...I go where they need me.

FATHER CHENILLE. Oh, I see. (*Full of disdain:*) A Jesuit.

SALLY. Here's your robe, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. Such splendid sewing. I can see now why you were sent to this order. Perhaps you and your brother the Father would like to join me for tea, Sister Mary Mary? I've got an entire kettle heating.

SALLY. (*Simultaneously with PAUL:*) That would be lovely.

PAUL. (*Simultaneously with SALLY:*) We were just on our way out.

SALLY. Nonsense, Paul, we have time for a cup of tea with Father Chenille. Besides, I'd like to ask him a few questions.

FATHER CHENILLE. Questions?

SALLY. Yes, I'm so curious about this convent.

PAUL. But Mary Mary—?

SALLY. Paul—!

(She pushes PAUL towards the kitchen.)

FATHER CHENILLE. You two run ahead. I'm just going to remind Reverend Mother about services tomorrow.

(They exit.)

Mother Superior! Mother Superior!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Entering:*) Father Chenille, what a nice surprise!

FATHER CHENILLE. I'm in crisis, Mother Superior, crisis!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What is it?

FATHER CHENILLE. Cardinal Redding is trying to get rid of me! He's sent a young priest by the name of Father Paul to replace me!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What are you talking about?

FATHER CHENILLE. I just met him. He's the brother of Sister Mary Mary. Perhaps that's why she was sent here: to pave the way for her brother, the Father, to take over my parish.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I can't believe that's true.

FATHER CHENILLE. Surely you've heard the rumors that Rome is sending out spies, checking things out?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I thought they were only interested in convents.

FATHER CHENILLE. Why stop there? I know our little church isn't raising a lot of money. I try to get the congregation to open their hearts—and wallets—but I can only do so much! I'm only one man!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father Chenille, we don't know any of this for certain.

FATHER CHENILLE. If only there were some way to find out why Father Paul suddenly arrived like this! Mother Superior, could you help me?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I have troubles of my own, I'm afraid.

FATHER CHENILLE. What is it?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Mary Catherine. The one with the shifty eyes. She's reporting our every move to Rome.

FATHER CHENILLE. Another spy? First Father Paul and now Sister Mary Catherine! What is this world coming to?

GEORGE. (*Entering:*) Oh, hello, Mother, Father. I was looking for Sister Augusta.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. She's helping Sister Mary get settled. I'll tell her you're looking for her.

GEORGE. Thank you, Reverend Mother.

(She exits. GEORGE starts to exit.)

FATHER CHENILLE. Wait a minute! George?

GEORGE. Yes, Father?

FATHER CHENILLE. Might I ask a favor of you?

GEORGE. Certainly, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. There's a new priest here, a Father Paul. I can't explain what I'm about to ask you; I can only say that it would mean a great deal to me if you would comply. I want you to spy on Father Paul!

GEORGE. Spy, Father?

FATHER CHENILLE. The fate of the entire church is in your hands. Here's what I'd like you to do...

(He begins to whisper a plan as the lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(The next morning. The trunk has been moved out of the way. AUGUSTA and PHILAMENA are working on finishing the robes. Both are exhausted.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. I can't believe I fell asleep in my oatmeal. Mother Superior must think I'm narcoleptic.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I don't know why you're so tired! I had to press and bottle all the...you-know-what...no thanks to you!

SISTER AUGUSTA. I was in Mary Catherine's room all night, putting subconscious thoughts into her head. I read about it in a book last month. This woman wanted to stop smoking, and she made a recording that she played when she slept telling her, "Stop smoking. Stop smoking." And when she woke up the next day, she gave up smoking.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But Sister Mary Catherine doesn't smoke.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I know that! But I wanted her to expose herself as a spy. So I snuck into her room and whispered over and over, "Confess! Confess!"

SISTER PHILAMENA. Did it work?

SISTER AUGUSTA. We'll find out this morning.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Well, we finished and that's the important thing. Now remember, the bottles with the red labels are the... you-

know-what...and the ones with the white labels are the real grape juice.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Red: you-know-what, white: grape juice. I'll remember.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I put the last two bottles of grape juice on the very edge of the shelf so we'll remember to take those first. The whole pressing room smells like...you-know-what...so we must keep Mother Superior out of there if we can. At least until I can clean it up this morning.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Got it! I'm going to go find George ask him to go into town and pick up our bottles.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Can't we go? If he happens to look in the box...

SISTER AUGUSTA. We still have all these robes to repair. We'll just get George to do it for us; he's very trustworthy.

GEORGE. (*Entering, dressed as a priest:*) Good morning, Sisters.

SISTER PHILAMENA. George!

SISTER AUGUSTA. What are you wearing? That's sacrilege!

GEORGE. Oh, no. It's a cassock!

SISTER PHILAMENA. George, why are dressed like that?

GEORGE. Father Chenille's put me on a secret mission. From now on, I'm Father George.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Father George?

GEORGE. Until he tells me it's ok to be groundskeeper George again.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I don't understand.

GEORGE. I can't explain it to you just yet. Just remember, I'm Father George.

SISTER PHILAMENA. All right. Now, George— (*He clears his throat. She corrects herself:*) —Father George, we have a favor to ask you.

SISTER AUGUSTA. There's a box of bottles we've ordered that needs to get picked up from town. Can you get them for us this morning?

GEORGE. I don't know. Father Chenille told me to stay here all day.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Please! It's very important we get those bottles today.

SISTER PHILAMENA. We'd go ourselves, but we have to finish our sewing.

GEORGE. Well, Father Paul was still asleep when I left my cabin this morning... Maybe if I go right now I can be back before he's up.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Thank you, Geo—

(He clears his throat.)

Father George.

(He exits as MARY CATHERINE enters.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Good morning, Sisters.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Good morning, Mary Catherine.

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Moving to the other side of MARY CATHERINE and checking her out.)* Good morning.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Is something wrong, Sister?

SISTER AUGUSTA. How are you feeling this morning, Sister Mary Catherine? Anything you'd like to tell us?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What do you mean?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Anything to...confess?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Actually, there is.

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Excited:)* I knew it!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I drank the last of the grape juice at breakfast this morning.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Is that all?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. *(Unsure:)* And...I'm sorry? Listen, Sisters, may I ask you something? Is this building very old?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Not really. Why?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I heard strange noises all night last night. I thought maybe it was building settling.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Noises? What kind of noises? Did the noises make you want to...tell us something!?!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I know this sounds silly, but they sounded almost...human. Like a voice, telling me the strangest things.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Oh, really? Like what?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. They just kept saying, "confess, confess."

SISTER AUGUSTA. Maybe you have a heavy heart about something. Perhaps a secret weighing you down? Something you need to...confess?

(Both Sisters stare at MARY CATHERINE.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. *(Very nervous:)* I think I'll take my sewing outdoors. I'd like some quiet time to reflect.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I'll come along.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I don't mean to be impolite, Sister Augusta, but I'd like to go alone.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Good, me too. We can go alone together.

(As they exit, AUGUSTA whispers behind her: "Confess! Confess!" MARY CATHERINE turns around but AUGUSTA stops, pretending to scratch her head. It continues as they exit.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering, heading towards the pressing room:)* How's the sewing coming along?

SISTER PHILAMENA. We should be done very— Mother Superior, where are you going?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The pressing room. We've run out of juice.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'll get you some.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Nonsense. You keep sewing.

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Pushing her way in front of the pressing room door:)* Mother Superior, wait! The pressing room's a mess.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm just retrieving some bottles, Sister Philamena, not photographing it. Unless there's some other reason you don't want me to go in there?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

(MOTHER SUPERIOR nudges PHILAMENA aside and enters the pressing room.)

Grab the bottles with the white labels on the edge of the shelf! They're...more what you're looking for.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. All right.

(A small crash is heard.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. What happened?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* It's all right. Just a little spill. *(Coming out with red label bottles:)* Could you please get a mop and bucket and help me clean up the broken glass?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Mother Superior, I told you to get the bottles with the white labels!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The ones with the white labels fell off the shelf. Someone put them dangerously close to the edge.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But—

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The mop and bucket are in the kitchen. Grab them and put these bottles away and we'll clean up that mess before it stains. I've spilled a little on my gown and need to wash it off.

(She exits into her room. PHILAMENA exits into the kitchen, frantic. PAUL and SALLY enter from the hall.)

PAUL. You look awful!

SALLY. Do you know the last time I woke up at four thirty in the morning, Paul? Never! That's when!

PAUL. Now, look, we've both agreed: ask a few questions, find out nothing's going on, and leave, right?

SALLY. I still don't know why you're so nervous about all this.

PAUL. Look at me! Do you know how many rosaries I'll have to say for impersonating a priest?

SALLY. You know, you look pretty good in uniform!

PAUL. *(Flattered:)* You think so? This robe doesn't make me look fat?

SALLY. No, not at all. It accentuates your broad shoulders.

PAUL. Thanks. I've been doing a little weight-lifting with the fellas after work lately, and— *(Remembering his mission:)* Sally, I'm serious! Let's just do this and get out of here.

SALLY. All right, all right. I'll check on Sister Mary and Sister Augusta. You find Mother Superior and Sister Philamena. We'll meet back in an hour, trade notes, and figure out what to do from there.

(She exits outside as PAUL rushes back out the hall.)

(FATHER CHENILLE enters from outside.)

FATHER CHENILLE. George? Where are you?

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Entering from the kitchen with a mop and bucket. She sees FATHER CHENILLE who is faced away from her.)* Father George? Are you back with the bottles already?

(FATHER CHENILLE turns around.)

Oh, good morning, Father Chenille.

FATHER CHENILLE. I take it you've been informed about "Father" George then?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Yes, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. Have you seen him this morning? I've been looking for him everywhere.

SISTER PHILAMENA. He ran into town to do a quick errand, Father, but he'll be back soon.

FATHER CHENILLE. But he's supposed to be here looking after Father Pa— Never mind! He's just supposed to be here, is all.

SISTER PHILAMENA. There's tea if you'd like to wait for him in the kitchen, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. I would indeed.

(He exits to the kitchen.)

(PHILAMENA enters the pressing room. MOTHER SUPERIOR re-enters and also enters the pressing room. She is immediately escorted out by PHILAMENA.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. You're certain?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Yes, Mother, I don't want you smelling—I mean, stepping on any glass. I can clean this up myself.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Thank you, Sister.

(PHILAMENA re-enters the pressing room. MOTHER SUPERIOR is met by PAUL.)

Ah, Father Paul.

PAUL. Good morning, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I trust your accommodations with Father George were acceptable?

PAUL. Yes, quite nice.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Excellent. We want your stay to be comfortable. I see you missed breakfast this morning. There's still tea, if you'd like.

PAUL. I'm fine, thank you.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father Paul, may I ask you a rather...odd... question?

PAUL. Of course, Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Can you tell when a person is lying?

PAUL. I beg your pardon?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. In confession you see sinners all the time. Say that there was a person who had committed a great sin: they disguised themselves as a member of the Church to spy on someone. Could you tell just by looking at that person?

PAUL. I d-d-don't know what you mean...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I believe I have that gift. I can spot a phony right away.

PAUL. Mother Superior, I d-don't know who you're ref-f-ferring to.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. May I be frank with you, Father Paul?

(PAUL *nods nervously.*)

There is a deceiver in this very convent!

PAUL. Wh-wh-wh-what?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father, you're stuttering.

PAUL. I j-j-j-j-just, I mean, I j-j-j-j-... (*Desperately composing himself:*) A deceiver?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Imagine Sister Mary's audacity to lie in a house of charity!

PAUL. (*Horrified:*) Oh. So you know about Sister Mary, then?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. It is painfully clear that Rome sent Sister Mary Catherine to spy on us.

PAUL. Mary Catherine?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, Father. She arrived late last night.

PAUL. (*Greatly relieved:*) Oh! Mary Catherine!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father, as much as I abhor myself for what I'm about to ask you, I feel I must, for the good of this convent.

PAUL. What would you like me to do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Disguise yourself as a nun!

PAUL. I beg your pardon?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I need you to dress up like a nun so you can spy on Sister Mary Catherine. Oh, I know it sounds sinful, and I must sound crazy, but I'm desperate! I need someone to watch her and let me know what she's up to. She's already met everyone else, or I'd never ask you to do this. Please, Father, the future of The Sisters of Perpetual Sewing depends on it!

PAUL. But isn't that deceitful? You were just saying...?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I said what she is doing is deceitful: a lay-person dressing as clergy. But you're clergy dressing as clergy. Please, Father! You're my only hope!

(Hearing voices off:)

Here she comes. Hide in here!

(She shoves him in the closet.)

I don't want her to see you.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR hides in the pressing room.)

PAUL. *(Within:)* I don't want to do this!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Please, Father!

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

(MARY CATHERINE walks in and picks up spool of thread. AUGUSTA, trailing behind, hides behind the trunk and whispers:)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Confess! Confess!

(MARY CATHERINE screams, drops the thread and rushes off, scared to death. AUGUSTA follows.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Opening her door:)* Please, Father!

PAUL. *(Opening his door:)* No!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I beg of you!

PAUL. No!

(MARY CATHERINE rushes back on. MOTHER SUPERIOR and PAUL close their doors. MARY CATHERINE cautiously picks up her thread.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Please!

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

(MARY CATHERINE looks up towards Heaven on the next Pleases and down towards Hell on the following Nos.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Please!

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Please!

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Pleeeeeease!

PAUL. *(Within:)* Noooooo!

(Thinking they're voices from both Heaven and Hell, MARY CATHERINE runs off screaming. AUGUSTA rushes by whispering "Confess!" MOTHER SUPERIOR and PAUL re-enter.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. But, Father, the orphans need our assistance! If we close down, there'll be no charity for them.

PAUL. Orphans?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. In addition to our sewing, we hold charity events to raise money for orphans. Please, Father.

PAUL. I didn't know about the orphans... Of course, I'll help!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Go back in the high holy closet and wait for me. We'll find you a wimple and veil, and I'll come right back with my sewing kit and fit it to you. Don't let anyone see you go into the closet. Discretion is imperative!

(She rushes off into her room. PAUL crosses to the closet. He is just about to enter it when PHILAMENA re-enters from the pressing room. He stops cold.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. Father Paul?

PAUL. Sister Philamena, right?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Yes. I was wondering who Mother Superior was speaking to.

PAUL. Oh! Did you hear what we were talking about?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Not really, why?

PAUL. No reason. Anyway, I suppose I should go and pray or something and you should go empty that bucket. Goodbye.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Goodbye, Father.

(Neither leaves.)

PAUL. I'll see you later.

SISTER PHILAMENA. All right.

(Neither moves.)

PAUL. I suppose I'll just go back to Father George's then.

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Unsure why he isn't leaving:)* ...Ok.

(He waits and waits and, unwilling to walk into the high holy closet, finally heads out the front door. PHILAMENA shrugs, turns around to go towards the kitchen, leaving the mop by the pressing room door. PAUL quickly re-enters and runs into the holy high closet. PHILAMENA turns around remembering her mop just in

time to see PAUL sneak in. She slowly exits with the mop, utterly confused.)

(MARY CATHERINE runs in from the hallway, and bumps into FATHER CHENILLE, who enters from the kitchen.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Father Chenille!

FATHER CHENILLE. Hello there, Sister!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I need to speak with you. It's urgent!

FATHER CHENILLE. Can't it wait? I'm in desperate need to find Father George!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. God is speaking to me!

FATHER CHENILLE. What!?!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. It's a divine miracle! I hear voices. Last night God told me to confess, and this morning he said "please."

FATHER CHENILLE. Really?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. But then— Oh, Father, I also heard "his" voice!

FATHER CHENILLE. Whose?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. *(Pointing down:)* His.

FATHER CHENILLE. His? What did he say?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. God kept saying, "confess, confess, please, please" and the devil kept saying "no, no!" It's as if they're fighting for my very soul!

FATHER CHENILLE. Are you certain? Perhaps you only thought you—

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I heard those voices with my own two ears! Oh, Father, what should I do?

FATHER CHENILLE. Have you anything to confess? Something that is burdening your heart? Perhaps that's why you think you heard— *(Pointing downward:)* —his voice.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Yes, there is something I need to confess. Right away.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well, you'll have to find Father Paul, I'm afraid. He can take your confession. I must find Father George.

(He exits outside.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Yes, I'll confess to Father Paul!

(Starts to rush out, but quickly runs back.)

Who's Father Paul?

(GEORGE enters with a box of wine bottles.)

Oh, Father!

GEORGE. Excuse me?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I need to make a confession. Quickly, before it's too late!

GEORGE. But I'm not— I mean...I have to deliver these bottles to Sister Augusta and Sister Philamena.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. But my eternal soul is in peril!

GEORGE. I would if I could. Honestly! But I'm not qualified to...

(MARY CATHERINE starts crying. GEORGE softens.)

Maybe not a formal confession. Maybe we could just go outside and talk?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Yes, Father, I'd like that.

GEORGE. *(Putting the box of wine bottles on the trunk:)* You look familiar. Have we met before?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I don't think so...

(They exit outside.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering, seeing the box of bottles:)* What's this?

(Opens and sees many empty wine bottles. She pulls one out.)

It's worse than the Sisters led me to believe! There must be a dozen bottles in this box. All empty! It's true: George is a you-know-what-aholic. Oh, I only hope the Sisters were able to intervene in time!

PAUL. *(Stepping out of the closet, with his nun clothes askew:)* Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Right, sorry.

(She goes into the closet.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Entering from outside:)* Mother Superior! Mother Superior!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Re-entering:)* What is it, Augusta?

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Looks momentarily confused about MOTHER SUPERIOR coming out of the high holy closet, but plows on anyway.)* Mary Catherine has gone off with George. She was going to give a confession!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Well, then, give her some time alone and resume following her when she's done.

SISTER AUGUSTA. A confession, Mother Superior. To Father George.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, so you've said.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Father George, Mother. George!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Oh dear! But he's not a real priest!

SISTER AUGUSTA. I know!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Stop them!

SISTER AUGUSTA. How?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I don't know. Just do it!

SISTER AUGUSTA. But how?

(A bell chimes. Everyone and everything goes silent—except for a little musical underscoring.)

(MOTHER SUPERIOR points to AUGUSTA to exit and follow GEORGE and MARY CATHERINE. AUGUSTA exits.)

(MOTHER SUPERIOR re-enters the closet.)

(SALLY enters looking around. She sees the box and starts to look in but hears a noise from the closet and quickly enters the pressing room.)

(MOTHER SUPERIOR exits the closet and looks around. She signals PAUL to remain for a moment, then rushes into her room.)

(PHILAMENA enters and slowly peeks into the closet. She slams the door, shocked to see a nun. She rushes away, but stops, noticing the wine bottles. She opens the box, and looks for GEORGE. Not seeing him, she opens the door to the pressing room.)

(SALLY re-enters from the pressing room and indicates that she was lost. PHILAMENA hides the box. SALLY exits outside.)

(PHILAMENA is headed back towards the pressing room with the box when She sees MOTHER SUPERIOR entering from her room. She puts the box of bottles inside the trunk, closes the lid, and sits on it.)

(MOTHER SUPERIOR enters, scolds PHILAMENA and motions her to leave. PHILAMENA, unwilling to leave the box in the trunk, waits. MOTHER SUPERIOR shoos her away. PHILAMENA exits.)

(MOTHER SUPERIOR enters the closet as AUGUSTA enters. AUGUSTA looks for MOTHER SUPERIOR. AUGUSTA exits into Mother Superior's room.)

(MOTHER SUPERIOR re-enters, bringing out PAUL, dressed as a nun, from the closet. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA both enter to see this. They look at each other confused. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA re-exit.)

(PAUL accidentally runs into the trunk. It makes the sound of glass bottles. MOTHER SUPERIOR opens the trunk. She sees the bottles and pulls them out. She goes ashen as she thinks they are more bottles that GEORGE has drunk. She pulls the box out and hands it to PAUL. She motions PAUL to go outside and throw the bottles away. She exits into her room, praying.)

(PHILAMENA re-enters and sees PAUL taking out the box. She takes the box from him. He thinks she's just being nice, and takes the box back. AUGUSTA enters and takes the box from him. He again insists on taking the box back. He exits, PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA following behind.)

(SALLY enters and rushes to the closet. She sees nothing. She looks in the trunk. She sees Paul's and her clothes and picks them up. She sees GEORGE and MARY CATHERINE enter. She hides in the pressing room, Paul's coat getting caught in the door.)

(GEORGE enters with MARY CATHERINE. MARY CATHERINE is significantly calmer. He motions that he will go get her something to drink, and she sits on the trunk. GEORGE exits.)

(MARY CATHERINE hears a noise. It is SALLY, trying to pull the coat through the door.)

SALLY. Come on, come on...

(MARY CATHERINE, terrified, looks down towards Hell.)

COME ON!

(MARY CATHERINE rushes off, screaming silently.)

(SALLY opens the door, and pulls the coat inside as PAUL enters. PAUL sees SALLY and opens her door. She doesn't recognize him. He takes off his veil. He begins to explain in hand signals, and he and SALLY share a hearty silent laugh. There is another charged moment between them. He sees PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA re-entering. He pulls SALLY in the pressing room and closes the door.)

(PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA re-enter with the box of bottles. MOTHER SUPERIOR enters, and sees PHILAMENA and AU-

GUSTA *with the box*. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA *try to hide the box, but* MOTHER SUPERIOR *opens it, pulling out an empty bottle.*)

(FATHER CHENILLE *enters, looking for* GEORGE. GEORGE *enters, and* MOTHER SUPERIOR *rushes over to him to counsel him about his drinking*. MARY CATHERINE *rushes on, crossing to* FATHER CHENILLE *to explain the voices she has heard*. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA *try to block* MOTHER SUPERIOR *from* GEORGE. *In the melee, the door to the pressing room opens, and* SALLY *exits*. PAUL [*still dressed as a nun*] *follows, grabs her, and kisses her passionately.*)

(*All are stunned*. MOTHER SUPERIOR *faints on* GEORGE. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA *rush to her side*. MARY CATHERINE *silently screams hysterically*. FATHER CHENILLE *crosses himself*. *The bells chime.*)

ALL. (*Screaming:*) Aaaaahhhhhh!

(*Blackout.*)

End of Act I

ACT I

Scene 1

(Later that day.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Please know, Father, that I'm not a prude, but I was shocked seeing Sister Mary Mary and Sister Paula kissing like that.

GEORGE. But, as Mother Superior explained, Sister Paula is from France.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I suppose they do greet people differently there. I wonder if that's what they call a French kiss?

GEORGE. Oh, no, a French kiss is with tongue. I mean, so I've been told. In confession. I don't know myself. I'm a priest.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I just hope Sister Paula doesn't greet all of us that way.

GEORGE. Sister Mary Catherine, may I ask you something? Something...personal?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Certainly, Father.

GEORGE. Have you ever been in love?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What do you mean?

GEORGE. Before you became a nun, wasn't there someone in your past to whom you felt the least bit of attraction?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Why, yes there was, Father. At the orphanage I grew up in, there was a groundskeeper who had a son, a beautiful young man with whom I was quite smitten. He used to read books on his breaks: Tolstoy and Shakespeare and Bronte.

GEORGE. Charlotte or Emily?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Both. I used to watch him for hours on end, but I was too shy to ever talk to him. Then one day he was gone. A new groundskeeper came. I never knew what happened to that boy, but I've always felt in my heart that if he were to ever return to me, I would remember what it's like to be in love once more. It's a silly memory, Father. Why do you ask?

GEORGE. It's not a silly memory at all! The boy—did you ever know his name?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No. But he had his initials monogrammed on his shirt: GD. *(Reverently:)* If you try to pronounce it, it sounds like "God."

GEORGE. Perhaps that boy is still out there, looking for you. Perhaps he always knew he was being watched, because he was always watching you too. Perhaps he remains a groundskeeper to this very day, searching every window for signs of that lovely young girl!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Perhaps. But I suppose I'll never know for certain. Besides, it's too late now. I'm a nun. (*Beat.*) Almost.

GEORGE. Almost?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Father, there is something I've wanted confess to you. I'm not really a nun.

GEORGE. You're not? That's wonderful! I mean, what do you mean?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I'm just a novice. Cardinal Redding has allowed me to finish out my time here, since I'm so skilled at sewing. I'm not really supposed to tell anyone. But I've been plagued with guilt ever since I arrived. I feel sacrilegious wearing these garments before I've officially taken my vows.

GEORGE. I have something to confess to you as well: I'm not really a priest! I've just been telling you I was!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What!?!

GEORGE. Father Chenille put me up to it. He's worried that Father Paul has been sent to take over the parish. I'm supposed to spy on him, and report what I see. So, you see, I'm not really a priest at all!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Then who are you?

GEORGE. I'm the groundskeeper!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. The groundskeeper? But I just gave you confession!

GEORGE. I know. And it was just wonderful!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. So you're just pretending to be a priest? You're a sick man!

GEORGE. I only did it because Father Chenille asked me to.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I don't care! You should never have agreed to it!

GEORGE. You don't understand, Mary Catherine...

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I trusted you with my most private secret. I thought you were bound by the Church to keep my confession confidential. But now you'll tell everyone!

GEORGE. No I won't! I swear!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. How do I know that's not just another lie?

GEORGE. Mary Catherine!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. You're perverse! You and Father Chenille both.

FATHER CHENILLE. (*Entering;*) Did I hear my name?

(*MARY CATHERINE glares at him.*)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Shame on you, you...you... (*Unable to think of an insult;*) You!

(*She storms out.*)

FATHER CHENILLE. What was that all about?

GEORGE. She knows I'm not a priest!

FATHER CHENILLE. You told her? But it was supposed to be a secret! Oh, well, as long as she doesn't go telling anyone. Now, what have you found out about Father Paul?

GEORGE. I haven't got time now, Father! I've got to go convince Sister Mary Catherine not to become a nun!

(*He exits.*)

FATHER CHENILLE. But she's already a—oh, never mind. Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Entering;*) Yes, Father?

FATHER CHENILLE. I trust you're feeling better?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Fully revived, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. Good, then I wonder if you'd mind telling me what in Heaven's name is going on? Who is this Sister Paula? Where did she come from? Is she the spy sent by Rome?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No, of course not!

FATHER CHENILLE. How can you be certain?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Well, she's... That is to say, she's...my sister.

FATHER CHENILLE. You have a sister?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes. My sister is also a Sister. She's in town for a few days.

FATHER CHENILLE. Quite a coincidence your sister knowing Sister Mary Mary.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes. She's French.

FATHER CHENILLE. Who, Sister Mary Mary?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No, my sister, Sister Paula. That's why she kissed Sister Mary Mary like that. She's French.

FATHER CHENILLE. But you're not.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No. (*Struggling to form a lie:*) But I was. I... grew out of it.

FATHER CHENILLE. I don't understand.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm afraid I don't either, really.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well, regardless, have you seen Father Paul around? I've been looking for him all day. I wanted to ask him if he'd like to say late afternoon mass with me. You know what they say: keep your enemies close.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm sure he's around here somewhere.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well if you see him, please send him over to me at the church.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Will do.

FATHER CHENILLE. Oh, and Mother?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, Father?

FATHER CHENILLE. (*Calling her out on her obvious lie:*) I expect I'll see you in confession tomorrow?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I expect you will, Father.

(*FATHER CHENILLE exits as PAUL enters.*)

Father Paul, I must speak with you at once!

PAUL. Please, call me Sister Paula while I'm dressed like this. I don't want to have to make up another lie!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Very well. Sister Paula, your discovery has forced me to commit a grave sin: I have lied to a priest! To save you embarrassment, I must inform you of the circumstances I have created. You are my sister, you're French, and you kiss everyone like that when you first meet them.

PAUL. I do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Now, Father, I realize no one in this matter is above reproach, but what in Heaven's name were you doing kissing Sister Mary Mary in the pressing room?

PAUL. That's a good question. Awfully good. What was I doing kissing Sister Mary Mary in the pressing room? Well, here's the thing... That is to say...

(MOTHER SUPERIOR *stares at him.*)

You m-m-m-make me very nervous st-st-st-staring at me like that. Could you please look away from me for a m-m-m-minute?

(*She does.*)

I wasn't actually kissing Sister Mary Mary.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Looking back at him:*) I saw you with my own eyes, Father.

PAUL. Y-y-y-y—

(*Motioning for her to turn back around. She does.*)

You only think you saw us kissing. In fact, Sister Mary Mary is plagued with allergies. When she was younger, she almost died from a bee sting. Anaphylactic shock. Well, this morning, a bee stung her on her lip. She started gasping for air. I walked in and knew exactly what happened. So, to save her life, I ran over to her and tried to suck the stinger out of her lip. We rushed into the pressing room to look for a phone to call an ambulance but there wasn't one around. I continued to suck on her lip until we could find a phone. Luckily, the shock of everyone screaming got her adrenaline pumping and it worked the poison out of her system, thus saving her life.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I had no idea! Why didn't you say something?

PAUL. She gets embarrassed about her allergy. She didn't want to make a bad impression.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. That poor dear!

PAUL. Yes, it's awful.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Hugging PAUL:*) How good it was that you were here to help her.

PAUL. Yes!

(*PHILAMENA walks in, is momentarily surprised to see MOTHER SUPERIOR and PAUL hugging. She clears her throat, and the hug breaks up.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, Sister Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Mother, Sister Mary Mary is inconsolable! She's locked herself in her room and refuses to come out!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. She must be horribly embarrassed. Please, tell her that everything's all right and invite her to join us for some tea.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I've tried everything, Mother, but it's no use. She's very distraught! I'm scared she might do something... drastic!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'll go talk to her. You get back to your sewing. I'll speak with you later, Fath—Sister Paula.

(She exits.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. France has some interesting customs.

PAUL. Yes— *(Clears his throat and lightens his voice to sound more feminine:)* Yes, it does.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I should like to visit it one day. What a wonderful way to say "hello!"

(She sighs longingly and hastily exits.)

SALLY. *(Entering:)* Paul, thank God.

PAUL. I thought you locked yourself in your room.

SALLY. I crawled out the window. What are we going to do now? Our cover was almost blown.

PAUL. I did some quick thinking and convinced Mother Superior that I was sucking a bee stinger out of your lip. I told her you were allergic.

SALLY. She bought that?

PAUL. Would a priest lie? Look, I haven't seen anything here that makes me think that anyone associated with this convent is making wine. Let's just call it quits.

SALLY. Are you kidding me? What about that pressing room? Do you really think they're just making grape juice in there?

PAUL. Who cares? Let's just tell the chief there's nothing here and call it quits before things get any more ridiculous. Look at me! I'm a reporter dressed like a priest dressed like a nun! Now, let's go.

(He starts to exit.)

SALLY. Wait! Why did you kiss me?

PAUL. Can we talk about that later? Like when I'm not wearing a dress?

SALLY. No, I want to talk about it now. We rushed in there and the next thing I know you're kissing me.

PAUL. I don't know. It was just the rush. I was flustered.

SALLY. It felt like something more than that.

PAUL. Well, it wasn't. It shouldn't have happened. As you said, we both agreed that breaking up was the best thing to happen to our relationship.

SALLY. So you're sure it was accidental? Just the heat of the moment?

PAUL. When I do dream about kissing you, we aren't both dressed like nuns!

SALLY. You dream about kissing me?

PAUL. Sally, this isn't the time!

SALLY. Paul...!

PAUL. Ok, fine! Yes, I dream about you. I think about you a lot, Sally...every moment of every day, in fact. And I promised myself that if you ever told me that you loved me again, I'd whisk you away to Vegas before you had the chance to change your mind. Do you really think it's just coincidence the chief assigns us the same stories? I asked him to. I can't imagine a day in my life without you in it. Look, Sally, there's something I've wanted to ask you—well, ask you again actually—but I've been too scared. Will you—

SALLY. Shhhh...do you hear something?

(Voices are heard. They hide under the table as PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA enter.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'm so nervous about all this!

SISTER AUGUSTA. There's nothing to be nervous about. Just go get any bottles of grape juice that George has in his cabin, and replace the bottles of...you-know-what...that Mother Superior brought into the kitchen this morning. We'll have more than enough time to make juice tonight after everyone has gone to bed.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But what if—

SISTER AUGUSTA. Just go! I'll make sure that no one tries to open those bottles for lunch!

(They exit.)

SALLY. Pay dirt!

PAUL. Ok, you go find out for sure what's in those bottles in the kitchen. I'll tell Mother Superior that I'm through playing Sister Paula. Then I'll pretend that Father Paul has to go back to his parish, so I can spy in my own clothes again.

SALLY. I'll meet you back here in ten minutes.

PAUL. Fine. Now go.

(She exits. He opens the pressing room, and pulls out his coat. He looks around the room.)

Now where'd my tie go?

(He opens the trunk, pulling out a few robes in the process. Voices are heard. In a panic, he rushes towards the closet. Seeing he still has a Cardinal's robe and hat in his hand, he rushes back to the trunk to put it away, but sees the approaching GEORGE and MARY CATHERINE. He rushes back into the closet with the garments as GEORGE and MARY CATHERINE re-enter.)

GEORGE. Please, won't you just listen to me?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. There's nothing you can say that is of any interest to me.

GEORGE. I'm sorry!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I don't believe you!

GEORGE. I didn't mean it!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I don't care!

GEORGE. I love you!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I can't— ...What did you say?

GEORGE. I love you. I've always loved you. From the first moment we met.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. We only met this morning.

GEORGE. Mary Catherine, it's me: George Donnelly. GD, the son of the groundskeeper? It's me!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. George?

GEORGE. Yes!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. It is you! I thought you looked familiar but I couldn't remember from where!

GEORGE. And now we've found each other again!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. It's a miracle!

GEORGE. I wanted to tell you before but I had to be sure it was really you!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. And did you love me, George? As much as I loved you?

GEORGE. I've thought about you every day since.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Oh, George!

GEORGE. Oh, Mary Catherine!

(They begin to kiss, but he pulls away.)

You're sure you're not really a nun?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I'm not a nun!

GEORGE. Halleluiah!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. *(They begin to kiss, but she pulls away.)*

And you're not really a priest?

GEORGE. I'm not a priest!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Amen!

(They kiss as AUGUSTA enters.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Sister Mary Catherine!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Sister Augusta?

SISTER AUGUSTA. George?

GEORGE. Sister?

(MOTHER SUPERIOR, FATHER CHENILLE, and SALLY rush on.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Augusta?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Mother Superior!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Mary Catherine?!?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Mother Superior?

FATHER CHENILLE. George?

GEORGE. Father Chenille!

FATHER CHENILLE. Mother Superior?!?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father Chenille...

SALLY. Father George?! Sister Mary Catherine?!?

GEORGE. Sister Mary Mary...

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Entering with box of grape juice from George's cabin. Upon seeing the MARY CATHERINE and GEORGE together, she drops the box, breaking the bottles inside:)* George?

GEORGE. Sister Philamena?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Philamena!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Mother Superior!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Philamena...?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Augusta...!

(PAUL enters from closet.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Cardinal Redding?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. *(Confused:)* Cardinal Redding?

ALL. Cardinal Redding!!!

PAUL. My children!

(Lights blackout.)

Scene 2

(Later that evening. A small party has been organized. The sewing has been replaced with a table cloth, and a punchbowl partially filled. MOTHER SUPERIOR, PHILAMENA, and AUGUSTA are putting plates, napkins and cups on the table. It is clear they are anxious to talk. After a moment, the bells chime.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. How is it possible that we didn't even know he was coming?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Perhaps they sent a telegram, but George forgot to give it to us. It's happened before.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father Chenille's to blame! If he hadn't convinced George to pretend to be a priest then George would have remembered things like delivering telegrams and none of this would have happened. Oh dear, I wish we had more time to put together a proper reception for Cardinal Redding.

SISTER PHILAMENA. It's too bad Sister Paula left this afternoon.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I found it very strange that she left without saying goodbye. Just that note left in the kitchen.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm sure she had things to do.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Still, it kind of makes me wonder...

SISTER PHILAMENA. Wonder what?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Is it possible Sister Paula was the spy?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Do you think?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Nonsense! Mary Catherine is the spy sent from Rome. Sister Paula had nothing to do with it.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But how can you be sure, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I just am. Let's leave it at that.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But still, it does seem awfully suspicious...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Less chatter and more work! Now get back to the kitchen and finish the appetizers. Cardinal Redding will be back from saying afternoon mass with Father Chenille soon, and I want everything ready for his arrival.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother.

(She and PHILAMENA start to exit.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Philamena, I want you stay. I need to talk to you.

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Nervously looking to AUGUSTA as AUGUSTA exits.)* Yes, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Philamena, what was in that box you brought in earlier today?

SISTER PHILAMENA. The box, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The cardboard box that made the sound of shattering glass.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Those were just bottles of grape juice, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. From where?

SISTER PHILAMENA. George's cabin.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What were you doing with juice from George's cabin, Sister?

(PHILAMENA starts to sweat.)

Sister, I asked you a question. Why did you take his juice?

SISTER PHILAMENA. I took it because...because...we needed to replace the bottles in the kitchen.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Why? What's wrong with the juice in the kitchen?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister, answer me!

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(In agony:)* ...uh...uh...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I've asked you a question!

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Barely able to stay standing:*) ...UH...UH...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What's wrong with the grape juice in the kitchen?

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Finally breaking, unable to lie:*) It isn't grape juice, Mother Superior! It's wine! Yes, wine! The devil's hair tonic! Satan's aperitif!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Unable to say the word:*) Wi-wi-wi...

SISTER PHILAMENA. Now please don't ask me any more questions!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How did our grape juice come to be replaced with wi-wi-wi...you-know-what?

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Struggling:*) ...UH...UH...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Tell me this instant!

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Pouring out of her:*) Sister Augusta and I have been secretly making wine for years and selling it to the locals to make money for the convent! We knew you'd stop us if you found out the truth, so we've been lying to you all this time! We're horrible, disgusting liars!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How dare you! You know how I feel about... you-know-what!

SISTER PHILAMENA. If there were any other way, we would gladly have done it. But there wasn't! We were only selling so many bottles of juice, but once we started selling the...you-know-what... well, it was a miracle. People bought it by the case! We were going to stop at some point, but it proved to be the only way to keep the convent open! Oh, this all would have been so much easier if I was able to lie!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. After Cardinal Redding leaves I will dole out punishment for both you and Sister Augusta! In the meantime, keep your mouths shut! I don't want anyone to find out the truth, especially Sister Mary Catherine. Rome will close us for certain if that sneaky little spy finds out! Tell no one! Do you understand?

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'm so sorry, Mother!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Now, go help Sister Augusta. We'll talk about this later!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh dear! (*She starts to exit, then sneaks back in and whispers:*) You will forget what I just told you! You will forget what I just told you!

(MOTHER SUPERIOR glares at her and PHILAMENA runs off screaming.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Saints forgive us!

(GEORGE enters, no longer dressed as a priest.)

Well, well, well. I suppose you're French too?

GEORGE. What do you mean, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Kissing Sister Mary Catherine like that! Shameful!

GEORGE. But she's not— I mean...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Save your breath, George. I know Sister Mary Catherine isn't really a nun!

GEORGE. You do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Of course! But that still doesn't give you any right to do what you did! And in front of Cardinal Redding!

GEORGE. Begging your pardon, Mother Superior, but don't you find it odd how much Cardinal Redding looks like Father Paul?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I hadn't noticed.

GEORGE. Hadn't noticed?!? They could be twins!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I suppose they do bear a slight resemblance.

GEORGE. It's more than just a resemblance. And, besides, we've never actually seen the two of them together...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Mary Mary did. She told me Father Paul was taking a nap in your cabin when the Cardinal arrived.

GEORGE. Still...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What are you saying, George? That Father Paul dressed up like Cardinal Redding?

GEORGE. Not at all. I'm saying that maybe Cardinal Redding dressed up like Father Paul. Maybe Cardinal Redding's the spy...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Preposterous! I hardly think Rome would send someone as prestigious as a cardinal to spy on us.

GEORGE. Maybe not...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Now listen, George, when Cardinal Redding gets back I don't want you spouting any more of your crazy theories about him being a spy! It would be incredibly insulting!

GEORGE. Yes, Mother Superior...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm going to go finish up the food. I need you to pour cups of punch.

GEORGE. Yes, Mother Superior.

(She exits. GEORGE tastes a little punch.)

A little bland... Maybe if I add a little grape juice from the pressing room.

(He enters the pressing room, and comes out with two bottles of wine. He adds half a bottle, pauses, and decides to add the rest of it. He pours himself a glass and drinks it down.)

Better.

(He adds the other bottle. He pours another glass and chugs it down.)

Twice as better! Wow, this grape juice makes all the difference!

(He pours three or four glasses, drinking more of the punch between each pour. Soon, he is drunk. MARY CATHERINE enters as GEORGE continues to pour.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. George! Oh George! What are we going to do?

GEORGE. What do you mean?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. We were caught kissing! I can't lie any more. I've got to tell Mother Superior everything!

GEORGE. Don't get so worked up. Have some punch.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass and refills it.)

Oh, George, this isn't at all how things were supposed to go!

GEORGE. I know, I know. Here, you look thirsty.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass and refills it.)

I didn't know what to do so I just ran off and prayed. Now I know that I need to tell Mother Superior I'm really still a novice.

GEORGE. Ok, ok, whatever you say. Are you sure you don't want to try any punch? It's really good!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass.)

I'm going to go find her right away. Wish me luck, George.

GEORGE. Good luck.

(He kisses her passionately. She is stunned. She quickly exits into the kitchen.)

I've got to get the recipe for this punch.

(He passes out behind the table.)

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering with PAUL dressed as the Cardinal:)* I must say, that was one of the more...interesting...masses I've ever attended, Cardinal Redding. Until your sermon, I didn't realize Moses even had a dog.

PAUL. Yes. Saint Bernard. He was actually responsible for putting out the fire in the burning bush.

FATHER CHENILLE. And the way you sort of crammed all those prayers and songs together. Your mass only took ten minutes!

PAUL. Yes, well...I suppose I was still flustered by all that happened this afternoon.

FATHER CHENILLE. Quite understandable. I don't want you thinking that what you saw was at all tolerated! I can assure you that this is a chaste and pure convent, and whatever you witnessed between Sister Mary Catherine and George was completely shocking to us as well.

PAUL. As it should be. Now, if you'll excuse me I would like to walk around for a few moments. Make sure there aren't any other...in-fractions or anything. Perhaps talk to...Sister Mary Mary.

FATHER CHENILLE. Certainly, Cardinal Redding, certainly.

(PAUL exits down the hall. FATHER CHENILLE sees the punch.)

Ah, punch!

(He drinks a quick glass.)

My, this is quite tasty.

(He refills it and drinks another.)

Quite tasty, indeed!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering with a tray of hors d'oeuvres:)* Father Chenille! Where's Cardinal Redding?

FATHER CHENILLE. He's around here somewhere. This is really good punch!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Thank you.

FATHER CHENILLE. No, I mean, it's really good.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Thank you. Would you be so kind as to help me bring out the rest of the hors d'oeuvres?

(They exit, FATHER CHENILLE refilling his glass on the way.)

PAUL. *(Entering with SALLY:)* It was one thing when I was pretending to be a priest. It was another when I was pretending to be a nun. But a Cardinal? That's the last straw!

SALLY. Paul, I know this is crazy, but just buy me another hour. I'm going to sneak into that pressing room and check it out. I think we found our secret winery!

PAUL. I don't care anymore, Sally! These nuns are good people: they aren't hurting anybody. I'm not going to turn them in just to get better writing assignments. Now, c'mon, let's get out of here.

SALLY. Are you kidding me? We're so close!

PAUL. Sally, let's go!

SALLY. I want to check out the pressing room first.

PAUL. *(Grabbing her and pulling her toward the exit:)* Now, Sally!

SALLY. *(Breaking away:)* What's wrong with you? This is our big break! We get this story, we're serious journalists. No more fluff pieces! No more sitting around in the bullpen, listening to them all laughing at us behind our backs! We'll finally be up there with the big boys. Don't you want that?

PAUL. Not if it means hurting people.

SALLY. Those nuns? Nothing's going to happen to them, except they'll be a half-million dollars richer!

PAUL. I'm talking about us, Sally. Don't let another story get between us.

SALLY. Is that what all this is about?

PAUL. That Dillon story broke us up. I've spent the last year working with you day-in, day-out, just hoping you'd look at me one day and realize what a mistake you made.

SALLY. Paul...

PAUL. I love you, Sally. There, I said it: I love you! You're more important to me than anything else in this world. I didn't go after the Dillon story, Sally, because nothing—not success or the front page or even a Pickering Award—is more important to me than you are! You're my front page news!

SALLY. Oh, Paul!

PAUL. The only thing I've ever asked from you, Sally, is your hand in marriage. But now I'm asking for one more thing: if you care for me at all, let's let these nice people be and go home.

SALLY. I do care for you, Paul. Very much.

(She kisses him tenderly.)

But I've got to get this story.

(She rushes into the pressing room as voices are heard.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering with AUGUSTA, PHILAMENA, and FATHER CHENILLE:)* Oh, Cardinal Redding! Let me tell you once more how thrilled the Sisters of Perpetual Sewing are to have you visit us today. It's only too bad that the other sisters are on retreat and are unable to join us.

FATHER CHENILLE. Let me propose a toast.

(They all grab filled punch glasses.)

To Cardinal Redding. A blessing on his visit, and a blessing on his health. Cheers!

(They all drink. AUGUSTA, PHILAMENA, and MOTHER SUPERIOR spit-take. The men drink.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sisters! A word!

(She pulls AUGUSTA and PHILAMENA away.)

What is the meaning of this?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Mother Superior, I had no idea!

SISTER PHILAMENA. George must have gone into the pressing room!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Do you realize what we have just done? We have served...you-know-what...to a Cardinal!

PAUL. You were right, Father Chenille, this is good punch!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Quick, do something before he drinks another glass!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Cardinal Redding, the juice in this punch has gone sour. Let me get you something else to drink.

PAUL. Nonsense, this is fine.

SISTER PHILAMENA. No, really, it's not very good.

PAUL. Are you kidding me? This might be the best punch I've ever tasted!

FATHER CHENILLE. I agree. Here's a little trick from my days as an amateur magician. (*Raising his glass:*) I'll make this punch disappear! (*He quickly drinks it.*) Here, Cardinal Redding, let me pour you another glass.

(He reaches to pour another glass. Suddenly, the lights change and action takes place in slow-motion. PHILAMENA screams "Nooooooooo!" MOTHER SUPERIOR shakes her head, saying "Stop him!" AUGUSTA runs over, like a Secret-Service agent, and knocks the ladle out of Father Chenille's hand. She dumps the punch bowl off the back of the table. The lights restore and action resumes in real time.)

Sister Augusta! What is the meaning of this?

SISTER PHILAMENA / SISTER AUGUSTA. (*Whispering:*) You will forget about the punch. You will forget about the punch.

GEORGE. (*Rises, soaked with punch and still a little drunk:*) Can't a man sleep in peace?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. George! What are you doing down there?

GEORGE. Trying to take a nap. I've been working like a dog all week: picking grapes and getting bottles and pretending to be a priest. Oh, hello, Cardinal Redding!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. George, that's enough. Go back to your cabin at once!

GEORGE. (*Sitting on the trunk:*) Not until I talk with Mary Catherine. I'm not leaving without her.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What on earth is happening to everyone?

SALLY. (*Entering, having removed her wimple and veil, and smelling an open and full bottle of wine:*) Well, well, well. Look what I found!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. George, have you been drinking in the pressing room?

GEORGE. No, I've been drinking out here!

SALLY. This isn't George's, Mother Superior. It's yours.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Mine?

SALLY. This is proof that this convent has been making wine and selling it to the locals.

SISTER PHILAMENA. We're sinners! Forgive us!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Big mouth!

FATHER CHENILLE. What is she talking about?

SALLY. The Sisters of Perpetual Sewing have been secretly making and selling wine for years.

SISTER PHILAMENA. It's true! But we had to! There was no other way to save the convent. It's just the four of us...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. It's true, Cardinal Redding. Please, please forgive me for lying to you! I was scared that if you knew this was such a small convent you'd close us down. We know you sent Sister Mary Catherine here to spy on us and report back to Rome!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. (*Entering:*) What? I'm not a spy!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Of course you are, dear.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No really! I'm not even a nun!

FATHER CHENILLE. What?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I'm still a novice. Cardinal Redding allowed me to come here disguised as a nun until I take my vows next month. But I'm not going to take them anymore. I've fallen in love with George!

(*Everyone gasps.*)

Oh, it's all right. Since I'm not really a nun, there's no sin involved.

FATHER CHENILLE. Cardinal Redding, I don't know how I can explain any of this to you—

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. He's not Cardinal Redding.

ALL. He's not?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No. Cardinal Redding is 80. And Japanese. With an eye patch. I don't know who he is.

(*PAUL takes off his Cardinal's cape and hat.*)

ALL. Sister Paula!

(*PAUL takes off his nun's habit.*)

Father Paul!

(*PAUL takes off his priest's gown revealing his own clothing.*)

PAUL. Actually, just Paul. I'm a reporter. I work for *The Times* and I was sent here to find out the truth about a local underground winery.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. And you, Sister Mary Mary?

SALLY. (*Stepping out of her nun's gown:*) Sally Andrews. I work with Paul.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. But I was so certain—

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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