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Cast of Characters

SISTER PHILAMENA, 20–50s

SISTER AUGUSTA, 20–50s

MOTHER SUPERIOR, 50s

GEORGE, 20s

PAUL, 25

FATHER CHENILLE, 50s

SALLY, 20s

KATE, 25

Time

1940s–1960s—you choose.

Place

The Convent of the Sisters of Perpetual Sewing.

Father Chenille's Levitating Card Trick

There are a few ways to accomplish this, but this is the simplest.

Cut a length of sturdy but bendable clear plastic the same length as a playing card and about one-half inch wide. Affix the plastic strip to the back side of the card with double-stick tape. The tape must connect only the middle of the strip to the middle of the card. The ends of the plastic strip should not be taped to the card.

Hold the card in your palm with one end of the strip in the pad of your palm and the other in the pad of your ring finger. The face of the card should be towards the audience.

To levitate the card, slowly open your hand while pressing together the ends of the plastic strip. This will cause the plastic strip to bend upwards and the card to rise away from your hand.

Voilà!

Acknowledgments

Drinking Habits 2: Caught in the Act received its premiere at Arlene's Broadway on Buffalo in Conneaut, Ohio on November 13, 2015. It was directed by Clay Nielsen with the following cast and crew:

SISTER PHILAMENA Tammy Hagstrom
SISTER AUGUSTA Ave Warren Perts
MOTHER SUPERIOR Charlene Smith
GEORGE Dennis Dixon
PAUL Bradley R. Jewell
FATHER CHENILLE Mark Pendleton
SALLY Stephanie Bucci
KATE Rebecca Green-Holmes
Lighting Design Clay Nielsen
Sound Design David Bucci
Stage Manager Jacob Perts

A subsequent production occurred at Hard Road Theatre in Highland, Illinois on January 21, 2016. It was directed by Tom Varner with the following cast and crew:

SISTER PHILAMENA Linda Collman
SISTER AUGUSTA Breanna Noe
MOTHER SUPERIOR Mary Knebel
GEORGE Chad Korte
PAUL Evan Fifer
FATHER CHENILLE Rob Bowman
SALLY Gentry Nessel
KATE Megan Jakel
Producers Evan Fifer and Tom Varner
Set Design Evan Fifer
Costume Director Rebecca Eaton
Lighting Design Bob Gullede
Sound Design Carlos Munguia
Scheduling Linda Collman
Stage Manager Beth Augustin



Drinking Habits 2, Hard Road Theatre, Highland, Illinois (2016).
Photo: Bill Sullivan.

DRINKING HABITS 2: CAUGHT IN THE ACT 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, SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA are seated at the table mending church robes. SISTER PHILAMENA lets out a long sigh. Then another.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Sister Philamena, whatever is the matter?

SISTER PHILAMENA. What do you mean?

SISTER AUGUSTA. You've been— *(Sighs like PHILAMENA)* —ing all morning.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'm sorry, Sister Augusta. It's just that things have gotten so quiet around here.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Now that we're not making wine?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Exactly! That wine won an international prize that prevented our convent from having its doors closed. But now . . . ?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Things are back to normal again.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh, I know I should be content mending these holy garments for the Church . . . but I'm not. I mean, the last exciting thing that happened to us was when you shrieked during mass.

SISTER AUGUSTA. You know I can't hear the story of Adam and Eve! Snakes terrify me.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I just wish things were less . . . *(She sighs)* dull.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I understand, Sister Philamena. And I feel the same way.

(They both sigh.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Entering from the hallway, cleaning off her eyeglasses:*) Good morning, Sisters.

SISTER PHILAMENA / SISTER AUGUSTA. Good morning, Reverend Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. It looks to be another glorious day! I thought mass was especially good this morning, didn't you? Well, I shall be in the kitchen preparing breakfast for Father Chenille and Paul. Toodle-oo, girls!

(*Hums a little tune as she exits into the kitchen.*)

SISTER AUGUSTA. That's another thing: Mother Superior. What's gotten into her?

SISTER PHILAMENA. She's happy, Augusta. For the first time in years. Ever since she was reunited with her family, Reverend Mother has been as happy as a kitten under a leaky cow.

SISTER AUGUSTA. It still seems so unbelievable. Finding her children, Kate and Paul, after all those years. Discovering Father Chenille was the husband she thought had died. It's like some crazy novel.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Or play.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I'm surprised Mother Superior hasn't written one. She's always telling us about that play she wrote in high school.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Well, I'll gladly take this Reverend Mother over her old self. She hasn't yelled at us in months!

GEORGE. (*Entering from the kitchen:*) Good morning, Sisters.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Good morning, George.

SISTER AUGUSTA. How are the vineyards? Will today be the last harvest of the season?

GEORGE. Oh, yes. I'll be sending the grapes into town as soon as I get them off the vine. We've been blessed with more than usual because of the long summer.

SISTER PHILAMENA. How wonderful!

GEORGE. But don't worry: I'll remember to set aside a few boxes so you can make your grape juice. I've got a mind like a steel . . .

(*He struggles to think of the word.*)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Trap.

GEORGE. (*Nervously looking around:*) Where?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Thank you for saving some grapes for us, George.

GEORGE. Say, have either of you seen Kate?

SISTER AUGUSTA. She took the truck into town to pick up some grape boxes. She should be back soon.

GEORGE. Picking up boxes? She shouldn't be doing that!

SISTER AUGUSTA. I said the same thing, but she insisted.

GEORGE. Well, when you see her, please let her know I'm looking for her.

(*Exits.*)

SISTER AUGUSTA. (*Hanging up a finished robe in the high holy closet:*) George and Kate make such a lovely couple. Of all the sewing we've ever done, Philamena, Kate's wedding dress was my favorite.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I liked sewing Sally's dress, with all that antique lace.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Those were exciting times.

(*Both sigh.*)

Sister Philamena? Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

SISTER PHILAMENA. I don't know. Are you thinking about what life would have been like if you'd married Cary Grant?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Well I am now! No, I'm thinking that our pressing room has gone unused for almost a year.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Because we only use it to make grape juice after the final harvest.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Only because Mother Superior doesn't allow us to make wine.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Because alcohol is what separated her and Father Chenille when they were married, before they had their calling. That's why we had to make wine in secret.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Remember those days? Sneaking around at night. Breaking rules. We made a lot of people happy with our wine . . .

SISTER PHILAMENA. What are you getting at, Sister?

SISTER AUGUSTA. What if we did it again?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Made wine?

SISTER AUGUSTA. But not like before—this time just a few bottles, and only for fun. You heard George: we have a bumper crop of grapes this year, so it isn't like there won't be enough. No one would have to know. And, when it's ready, we'll bring the wine to Mr. Piedmont to sell and donate the money to the poor.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh, Augusta, should we?

SISTER AUGUSTA. No, and that's why it'll be so much fun! After everyone's gone to bed tonight, we'll sneak into the pressing room and get to work. Now, let's double-time these garments so we can figure out the rest of our plan.

(They start sewing double-time as FATHER CHENILLE enters with PAUL.)

PAUL. Good morning, Sisters!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Good morning, Fath— Oops! I almost said "Father Paul."

PAUL. Soon, but not quite yet.

FATHER CHENILLE. Where's Margaret? Preparing breakfast?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Yes, Father Chenille.

FATHER CHENILLE. Excellent. Could you please tell her Paul and I will be there in a minute?

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Puts down her sewing:)* Certainly, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. And, Sister Augusta, perhaps you could go as well?

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Getting the hint he wants privacy:)* Oh, certainly Father, of course.

(PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA exit into the kitchen. As they do, AUGUSTA slips back in, hiding and listening to the conversation amongst the robes and gowns on the sewing table.)

FATHER CHENILLE. You were very good this morning, son. Every part of the mass was handled just right. Except, of course, for—

PAUL. I know, I know!

FATHER CHENILLE. We simply must get you over your debilitating stage fright so you can deliver a proper sermon. Last week, you stuttered like a broken record before bursting into tears. This morning, you spoke three words before passing out. For the first time in history, parishioners are complaining that mass is too short!

PAUL. I just can't speak in front of people, Pop. My nerves take over and I stutter or I freeze. It's just how it is.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well, if you're to take over the parish when I retire, you'll need to get over it. Immediately!

PAUL. I want to, more than anything, but—

FATHER CHENILLE. Bishop Knight and I worked very hard to convince our new cardinal, Cardinal Bluejay, to allow me to mentor you in lieu of attending traditional seminary. Because of the insignificant size of our parish and its remote location, he has allowed it just this once. How would it be if I had to tell him his courtesy amounted to nothing?

PAUL. I know, Pop. And I want to take over the parish for you. It's just that ever since Sally left me—

FATHER CHENILLE. The first time or the second time?

PAUL. —I've come to realize that maybe I'm not the kind of guy a girl wants to marry.

FATHER CHENILLE. As your father, I say that's complete hogwash. But, as Father Chenille, I must say that the priesthood is a wonderful calling and I'm sure it will be the right place for you.

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Entering from the kitchen:)* Father? Mother Superior said your breakfast is getting cold.

FATHER CHENILLE. Coming.

(Exits with PAUL into the kitchen.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Sees something moving under the robes and shrieks:)* A ghost! A . . . Holy Ghost!

(AUGUSTA comes out of hiding.)

Augusta, what were you doing in there? Were you spying on Father Chenille and Paul?

SISTER AUGUSTA. I can't help it, Sister Philamena. You know I've prayed about it.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Well, you simply must stop! If anyone were to ever catch you . . .

SISTER AUGUSTA. No one has so far.

SISTER PHILAMENA. That's not the point! Spying will get you into trouble one day. Now, come along. Kate's back and needs help unloading the boxes.

SISTER AUGUSTA. (*Exiting:*) I'll go. You stay and work on the robes so we don't fall behind.

(*PHILAMENA gets back to work sewing double-time. As she does, SALLY cautiously pops her face through the front door.*)

SALLY. Sister Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Sister Mary Mary! I mean, Sally. Sorry, old habits.

SALLY. (*Entering:*) Disguising myself as a nun wasn't my finest moment...

SISTER PHILAMENA. What are you doing here? We haven't seen you in eight months. Ever since you left Paul at the altar.

SALLY. Also not my finest moment. I've come to speak with Kate.

SISTER PHILAMENA. She's unloading boxes out back with Sister Augusta. Would you like me to get her?

SALLY. If you would, please.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Shall I tell Paul you're here? He's just gone in for breakfast.

SALLY. (*Ducking up against the high holy closet:*) Paul? I thought he'd still be at mass. No! I... I can't see him. I only showed up in person because you don't have a phone.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But we—

SALLY. Promise me you won't tell Paul I'm here! Or Mother Superior. Or even Father Chenille. I can't face any of them after what I've done.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh, Sally, please don't ask that of me. You know I can't lie. Every time I try, all that comes out is "uh... uh..."

SALLY. Just don't say anything.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But that's a lie of omission!

SALLY. Then don't go through the kitchen; that way you won't see anyone. Please, Sister Philamena, it's very important I speak with Kate.

SISTER PHILAMENA. All right, I'll go out the front and walk around back. But please, Sally, won't you reconsider and tell Paul you're here? I'm certain he—

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. It's Mother Superior!

SALLY. I can't let her know I'm—

(*Runs into the high holy closet.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Entering:*) Sister Philamena, why aren't you helping unload boxes? Kate shouldn't be doing something so taxing.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Augusta said she would help and I know it's important to stay on top of our mending.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Priorities, Sister! You can sew after the boxes are unloaded. Now, go.

(*PHILAMENA hesitates.*)

What is it, Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Uh... uh...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Suspicious:*) Philamena...?

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I recognize that stammer! What is it you're not telling me?

SISTER PHILAMENA.... uh...!

(*Suddenly rushes out the front door.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I shall keep my eye on you, Sister Philamena. You're hiding something and I intend to find out what.

(*She exits back into the kitchen.*)

(*SALLY exits the high holy closet. The front door starts to open. She quickly scrambles back into the closet.*)

GEORGE. (*Entering:*) Sister Philamena? Sister Augusta?

SALLY. (*Off:*) George? Is that you?

GEORGE. Who... who said that?

SALLY. (*Off:*) George, it's me.

GEORGE. (*Gasps and falls to his knees:*) God?

SALLY. (*Off:*) Not quite.

(*Exits the high holy closet.*)

GEORGE. Sally!

SALLY. Hi, George! It's been a while.

GEORGE. Since you left Paul at the altar. Who knew anyone could run that fast in a wedding dress?

SALLY. Well, I had practice from the first time I did it.

GEORGE. What were you doing in the high holy closet, Sally?

SALLY. Moving in. Rent where I live is so expensive.

GEORGE. You're going to live in there?

SALLY. No, George, I'm just— I came up to talk to Kate and I didn't want anyone to see me.

GEORGE. Oh, sorry! *(Covers his eyes so he doesn't see SALLY.)* Do you want me to get her? I saw her drive around back.

SALLY. Sister Philamena went to get her for me. *(Pulling his hands off his eyes:)* And I don't mind you seeing me. You're one of the nicest guys I know!

GEORGE. Aw . . . Hey, Sally, have you heard the news? A few months ago, we found out that Kate—

(Suddenly, FATHER CHENILLE and PAUL are heard off. SALLY rushes back into the closet and shuts the door. Confused, GEORGE also rushes into the closet and shuts the door. A second later, the door pops opens and GEORGE is pushed out. Not knowing what to do, he puts his hands back over his eyes. He stands there as FATHER CHENILLE and PAUL enter.)

FATHER CHENILLE. I have a copy of it in the closet.

(GEORGE quickly leans against the closet door, protecting it.)

Good morning, George. Why are you covering your eyes?

GEORGE. Oh, no reason.

(He drops his hands down. He nervously and continuously shifts positions, guarding the closet.)

Good morning, Father. Very suspenseful sermon this morning, Paul. Only three words.

FATHER CHENILLE. We were just discussing that.

GEORGE. Can't say I minded. It got me into the vineyards nearly an hour earlier than usual.

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Noticing GEORGE protecting the closet door:)* What's going on here, George?

GEORGE. What do you mean?

FATHER CHENILLE. Why do you look so nervous?

GEORGE. Oh, do I?

FATHER CHENILLE. Like a hundred-pound turkey in November.

GEORGE. I'm just smiling. Sometimes my smiling face looks like my nervous face. *(He attempts a smile which comes across nervous and a little crazed:)* See?

FATHER CHENILLE. Kate and Sister Philamena need your help out back.

GEORGE. Yes, Father.

(He takes a few steps towards the kitchen, then sidles back to the closet, unsure whether to go or stay. He repeats this a few times.)

FATHER CHENILLE. Well?

GEORGE. Didn't I hear you say there was something you needed in this closet?

FATHER CHENILLE. Yes, a book. It's on the shelf.

GEORGE. I'll get it for you.

(Opens the door, but SALLY is clearly visible. He immediately closes the door.)

Nope, it's not in there.

FATHER CHENILLE. You didn't even look.

GEORGE. I did, Father. I have . . . very fast eyes. In school they taught me to speed-see.

FATHER CHENILLE. Speed-see?

GEORGE. It's like speed-reading, only you don't have to . . . read anything.

FATHER CHENILLE. I'm certain my book is in there.

GEORGE. *(Opens the door and immediately closes it again:)* Nope. No book.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well, perhaps it's at home somewhere. Now, go along, George.

GEORGE. Yes, Father.

(Exits, making the same crazed nervous face as he goes.)

PAUL. Do you really think hypnosis is the answer, Pop?

FATHER CHENILLE. I swear by it. I got hypnotized ten years ago to stop smoking and I haven't had a cigarette since. I am certain I can hypnotize you and suppress your stage fright.

PAUL. I'll try anything at this point.

FATHER CHENILLE. I'm just certain that my hypnosis book is in that closet.

(He opens the door. SALLY is nowhere in sight. He starts looking for the book. Suddenly, it falls to the floor, being thrown, unseen, by SALLY who is hiding behind some robes.)

Ah, here it is.

(He takes the hypnosis book, leaving the closet door open. Under the following, SALLY tries to shut the door without being seen, almost getting caught once or twice by PAUL and FATHER CHENILLE.)

I'll just skim through it this afternoon and review how it's done. Now, let me see something . . . *(Flips through some pages.)* Ah, yes, right. We'll need to hypnotize you at night.

PAUL. How come?

FATHER CHENILLE. You need to be in a completely relaxed state. Generally, it's best right before bedtime. That way, the suggestion will continue to sink in as you sleep. We can do it tonight.

PAUL. All right.

FATHER CHENILLE. I'll come up with your trigger word.

PAUL. What's that?

FATHER CHENILLE. It's a word that reinforces the hypnosis if it ever starts to weaken. Meanwhile, you should come up with a welfare word: something to snap you immediately out of the hypnosis should anything go wrong.

PAUL. What was your welfare word?

FATHER CHENILLE. I can't tell you; you want me to start smoking again? But whatever word you choose, just make sure it's something uncommon. You don't want to be snapped out of your hypnosis by accident. Now, let's go home and get to work on next Sunday's sermon. You'll be giving it yourself.

(They exit out the front door. SALLY exits the high holy closet and looks after PAUL. There is a look of regret on her face. KATE calls from the kitchen.)

KATE. *(Off:)* Sally Andrews? Is that really you?

(Enters, very pregnant.)

SALLY. Kate! *(Turning around:)* And child.

KATE. Children, actually. Twins.

SALLY. You always were an overachiever. When are you due? Right now?

KATE. Not for another month.

(They hug. With KATE's belly, it's a bit difficult so they end up doing a sideways hug.)

It's good to see you again, Sally. It's been too long. Ever since you left—

SALLY. *(Cutting her off:)* Yeah, yeah.

KATE. We have an amazing wedding picture of you. Just a little white blur in a cloud of dust!

SALLY. Looks like you and George got right to it, starting a family.

KATE. It happened on our wedding night.

SALLY. He's an overachiever too.

KATE. Oh, please tell me you've come back to reconcile with Paul, Sally!

SALLY. I wish I could. I have something to tell you, although it affects Paul as well. Look, I don't want the others to know I'm here. Is Mother Superior lurking about?

KATE. Oh, no, she went out for her morning walk. She'll be gone for an hour, assuming those clouds don't hold any rain.

SALLY. Good. Now, I don't know if you've heard, but I was recently promoted to editor-in-chief. The first woman in the history of that old birdcage liner.

KATE. Congratulations! I had no idea.

SALLY. As editor, I get pitches for stories all the time. A lot of times it's some society event or a sob story about a runaway dog. But last week, I got a call I thought you should know about.

KATE. What is it?

SALLY. A crooked accountant ran off with an orphanage's money. They can't pay their landlord for all the back rent so the orphanage is being forced to close down. Over a hundred kids with nowhere to go.

KATE. How horrible! Those poor children . . . !

SALLY. Now the thing is, this orphanage: it's the same one you and Paul grew up in.

KATE. Oh no! That was our home for almost eighteen years. It's saved thousands of children. If it were to close—oh, I can't even think about it!

SALLY. Which is why I'm here, honey. I was thinking that maybe you could convince the sisters to use some of their prize money to keep it open. The orphanage needs five thousand bucks, which is a drop in the bucket compared to all that prize money they won for their wine.

KATE. But that money was sent off to Rome months ago. All of it.

SALLY. I hate to be the bearer of even worse news, then, but that orphanage is going to be shut down in four weeks unless that five grand comes in. I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, Kate. I thought you'd want to help if you could.

KATE. I do. Thank you for letting me know, Sally.

SALLY. Well, I should get going. I don't want to run into Paul.

(Starts to exit.)

KATE. Is it better, Sally?

SALLY. What?

KATE. Life without Paul?

SALLY. . . . No. But it's the life I chose.

KATE. He misses you.

SALLY. It's best this way. I've got a job that doesn't allow time for a husband. And Paul's taking a job that doesn't allow for a wife.

KATE. So you know he's entering the priesthood?

SALLY. I overheard him and Father Chenille talking about it.

KATE. It's not too late. Heck, I was going to be a nun until I met George. Paul won't officially be a priest until he's ordained. There's still time, Sally!

SALLY. That ship has sailed, kid. With all my baggage. I'll see you around.

(She exits. Immediately, she rushes back in.)

Mother Superior's coming up the walkway!

KATE. But she hasn't been gone ten minutes . . .

SALLY. Well, she's back!

KATE. *(Opening the pressing-room door:)* Quick! Hide in the pressing room!

(SALLY hides in the pressing room as MOTHER SUPERIOR enters.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Kate, please get off your feet. The doctor told you to rest as much as possible.

KATE. These days standing is more comfortable than sitting.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. If the Lord wanted expecting women to be comfortable, Kate, Mary would have been given the presidential suite instead of a stable. Now, sit!

(KATE sits. MOTHER SUPERIOR begins to head towards the pressing room.)

KATE. What are you doing?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. It looks like rain. I left my umbrella in the pressing-room sink yesterday to dry.

KATE. But there isn't rain in the forecast.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. God isn't obliged to tell the weatherman all his secrets, dear.

(Continues towards the pressing room.)

KATE. Don't go in there, Mother! Please!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Why not?

KATE. Because!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Because why?

KATE. *(Desperately thinking:)* Because . . . Because . . . I'm going into labor!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What!?!

KATE. Yes, in fact, I'm having my first contraction. *(Dramatically crying out:)* Ohhhhh! Yep, there it is.

(KATE pants loudly.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Rushes over to KATE:)* But it's a month early! We've got to get you to the doctor!

(Tries to help KATE up.)

(The pressing-room door opens and SALLY begins sneaking out.)

KATE. *(Seeing SALLY and falling back into the chair:)* Not yet. Just give me a moment to catch my breath.

(Furiously signals behind MOTHER SUPERIOR's back for SALLY to hurry out. SALLY begins to exit the front door, but sees

someone coming and runs back inside, unsure where to go next. SALLY rushes into the kitchen.)

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering from the front door:)* I seem to have lost my reading glasses . . .

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Lawrence, come quickly! Kate's in labor!

FATHER CHENILLE. What? Well, what do we do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. We've got to get her to a doctor! Immediately!

(Tries to help KATE up again. As KATE rises, she sees SALLY rush in from the kitchen, looking for where to go next.)

KATE. *(Crying out as she points towards the high holy closet:)* Ohhhhhh!
(Falls back into the chair:) One more moment.

(SALLY hides in the high holy closet. She slams the door which catches the attention of MOTHER SUPERIOR and FATHER CHENILLE.)

FATHER CHENILLE. What was that?

KATE. *(To cover the door slam, loudly smacking her foot on the ground repeatedly as if the pain is immense:)* Ohhhhhh!

FATHER CHENILLE. Is it normal to be in this much pain?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Help me get her to the truck, Lawrence, or she'll end up having the babies right here.

(They try to lift her up again but KATE resists.)

FATHER CHENILLE. How can we get her to the truck if we can't even get her out of this chair?

(PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA enter from the kitchen, followed by PAUL.)

PAUL. He thought he left them— *(Sees KATE and rushes over to her:)* What's going on?

FATHER CHENILLE. Your sister's about to give birth!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Mother Superior, what should we do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How would I know?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Well, you're the only one here who's gone through it yourself . . .

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Twenty-five years ago! Lawrence, what should we do?

FATHER CHENILLE. How should I know? I was in the waiting room handing out cigars!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Augusta, boil some water on the stove!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother Superior!

(Rushes off.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Philamena, get some towels. The softest you can find.

(PHILAMENA runs off down the hallway.)

Paul, find George and tell him he's about to become a father.

(PAUL rushes out the front door.)

FATHER CHENILLE. Margaret, do you realize? We're moments away from becoming grandparents!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Given our line of work, who would have ever thought that?

FATHER CHENILLE. Is there anything we can do to ease your pain, Kate?

KATE. *(Looking back at the closet:)* Um . . . *(An idea comes to her.)* Hold my hand, Father.

(He grabs her hand.)

You too, Mother.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR grabs her other hand.)

Now, let's pray.

(FATHER CHENILLE and MOTHER SUPERIOR look up towards Heaven.)

Let us bow our heads, with our eyes very tightly closed so that we can't see anything, and ignoring any strange sounds we may happen to hear, let us pray!

(They all bow their heads and tightly close their eyes, KATE sneaks a peek over her shoulder and speaks loudly to signal SALLY:)

Dear Father in Heaven, thank you for this blessed event. It is as beautiful as the oceans you created with the *(Strongly emphasizing:)* clear coasts.

(Waits for SALLY to get it but the closet door stays shut. Louder:)

Coasts that are clear.

(Still no SALLY.)

Coast is clear!

(SALLY sneaks out of the closet and heads towards the front door.)
May I prove worthy to love these dear children I'm about to give birth to and may I always, always, always—

(SALLY is out the front door. KATE quickly ends the prayer.)

—be-a-good-mother-Amen!

MOTHER SUPERIOR / FATHER CHENILLE. Amen.

GEORGE. (Off:) Cross your legs! Don't have the babies without me!

KATE. George?

GEORGE. (Running in from the kitchen, with PAUL, PHILAMENA, and AUGUSTA right behind:) Am I too late?

KATE. No! (Lying badly:) It seems my contractions have stopped. False labor, I guess.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Are you certain, my dear?

KATE. Yep. Everything's good.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (Huge sigh of relief:) Glory be!

KATE. Well, almost everything. The orphanages you and I were left at, Paul, merged and now that orphanage is in peril. In fact, it will be shut down within a month unless we can raise five thousand dollars!

PAUL. What?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Dear me!

KATE. Hundreds of orphans with no one to take care of them. We've got to do something!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Do you think we could ask Rome for our money back?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I guarantee it's already been spent.

FATHER CHENILLE. Then we must raise the money ourselves.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Five thousand dollars in a month?

PAUL. I have a little in savings. It was going to go towards my honeymoon.

FATHER CHENILLE. Which one?

GEORGE. And Kate and I will give what we have.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. But the twins! You'll need that money.

FATHER CHENILLE. I could do a magic show! It wasn't long ago I brought the entire town in with my magic act.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. And they all demanded their money back.

PAUL. Well, think, everyone. There must be a way.

SISTER AUGUSTA. (Pulling SISTER PHILAMENA aside for a private conversation:) Philamena, you and I were going to make a few bottles of wine tonight for fun. Let's make a hundred bottles, and sell them for fifty dollars apiece—

SISTER PHILAMENA. We never sold them for anything close to that price before!

SISTER AUGUSTA. That was before we won that award. Mr. Piedmont says there's been requests from around the world and we've never made another bottle. Think of the demand we've created!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Even if we did, fermenting takes time. We'd have to press and bottle everything tonight. And we'd have to use all the grapes—not just the boxes George set aside for us.

SISTER AUGUSTA. It's the only way! Now, I'll worry about getting the grapes. You make sure we have all the supplies we need.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But it's so risky. If we get caught—

SISTER AUGUSTA. Weren't you the one who said you wanted excitement, like the old days? Well, the two of us making wine without anyone knowing: it's exactly like the old days!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh . . . All right! But only because it might save those orphans.

FATHER CHENILLE. I've got it! We'll do your play, Margaret! *The Visions of Bernadette*.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Oh, Lawrence! I can't believe you remember that!

SISTER AUGUSTA. (Muttering to SISTER PHILAMENA:) How could he not? She talks about it all the time.

FATHER CHENILLE. Seeing you play Bernadette is what made me fall in love with you. Your mother was an excellent dramatic actress before entering the sisterhood.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Well, one mustn't brag, but I was once called the Greta Garbo of Saint Bernard High School.

FATHER CHENILLE. Her senior year she wrote and produced her very own play. Standing ovations. Rave reviews in all the papers. You can reprise your most famous performance, Margaret. And I can even throw in a bit of magic. Abraca-luiah!

(He pulls a bouquet from thin air.)

PAUL. *(Aside:)* You just always keep that up your sleeve?

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Aside:)* Exactly for moments like this!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Oh, I couldn't! Could I? Should I?

FATHER CHENILLE. You must!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Then it's settled! But we'll need two more actors: one male, one female. Kate, you'd be perfect for the role of the Blessed Mother. If you're feeling up to it . . .

KATE. I'd love any distraction from all this. *(Motioning to her belly.)*

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Looks at PAUL:)* And for the male role . . . ?

PAUL. Don't look at me! I'm about to faint just thinking about it.

KATE. George, how about you?

GEORGE. I suppose I could give it a try.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Philamena and I will make the props and costumes.

PAUL. And I'll direct. All right then, it's settled! We'll begin rehearsals tonight. Now, hurry along everybody. We have a lot to do before we get started. Mother, I'll need you to get me a copy of the script and—

(Everyone starts to excitedly chatter about the show as the lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(Later that night. The table has been moved to the side to make room for rehearsal. PAUL sits on a chair directing the action. MOTHER SUPERIOR, reading from script in hand, performs opposite GEORGE and KATE. FATHER CHENILLE stands to the side, anxiously awaiting his entrance. Sisters PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA watch, rapt.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Overacting a bit. More than a bit:)* "And that is why I, Bernadette Soubirous of France, celebrate my final moments on Earth. I have had seventeen visions of the Blessed Mother, and at this moment I see her one last time. Take me home, dear Mother, take your innocent, beautiful Bernadette home."

(Dies a very dramatic death.)

GEORGE. *(Monotone:)* "Sweet, sweet Bernadette Soubirous. I drink once to your life and once to your untimely passing."

(Mimes drinking twice but with too much force. It looks more akin to arm spasms.)

"Though your life is now over, your afterlife in Heaven begins, dear Bernadette, sweet and noble Bernadette."

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering with a dramatic pose as he sees the dead Bernadette:)* Abraca-luiah!

(He pulls a bouquet from thin air and places it in her hands. He gets back into his dramatic pose.)

PAUL. And . . . scene!

(MOTHER SUPERIOR rises, no longer in character.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Mother Superior, I know that was just the first rehearsal but you were wonderful!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Thank you, Augusta.

SISTER PHILAMENA. No one dies on stage like you.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. You're not the first person to have said that.

FATHER CHENILLE. Paul, I was wondering if you might want doves rather than flowers when Bernadette dies?

PAUL. I don't think that's necessary, Pop. I like the flowers. They're more . . . understated.

FATHER CHENILLE. In a good way?

PAUL. Believe me, we can use some understatement in this production.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well, then, how about we find a moment where I saw Bernadette in half? You know, show the audience how good of a magician I am.

PAUL. Oh, I think they know how good of a magician you are, Pop. For now, just stick with the flowers.

(FATHER CHENILLE goes to speak with SISTER AUGUSTA.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Crossing over to PAUL:)* Son, may I have a word?

PAUL. Certainly, Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(She pulls him aside:)* Now, I know you're the director and I'm just an actress—albeit the leading actress, the playwright, and the producer—but I feel something must be brought to your attention, while there's still time to fix it.

PAUL. What is it?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. It's George! He's atrocious!

PAUL. It's only the first rehearsal, Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. A corpse moves more naturally. That table is less wooden! Audiences can smell bad acting from a mile away, Paul. It's a stench they never forget: like a skunk eating rotting fish at a sewage plant. You'll simply have to play his part.

PAUL. Mother, you know I can't. Besides, he'll get better. I'm sure of it.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. We'll need the entire town to raise five thousand dollars, Paul. With not one of them demanding their money back!

PAUL. He's that bad?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Let me put it this way: George is as good an actor as your father is a magician.

PAUL. There's no one else. I certainly can't do it, and unless you want Pop to play the role of a dignified monk—

(FATHER CHENILLE is seen subtly picking his nose with his pinky.)

—George is our only option.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Well, if he must be in the show, he must! But we'll need more rehearsals. (Muttering as she crosses away to speak with KATE:) And a miracle!

PAUL. Great rehearsal, everyone! We'll do it again tomorrow night, same time.

SISTER AUGUSTA. (Crossing over:) Paul, Sister Philamena and I have a question.

PAUL. Sure. Shoot.

SISTER AUGUSTA. It says in the script that Bernadette Soubirous is fourteen years old.

PAUL. That's right.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Fourteen!

PAUL. (Confused:) Un-huh . . .

SISTER AUGUSTA. Well, we understand that this is only a play, and that a certain amount of dramatic imagination is required, but even imagination has its limits!

PAUL. I'm not sure I understand.

SISTER AUGUSTA. How can we possibly make Mother Superior look fourteen?

PAUL. Ah, good question. Very good question . . .

SISTER AUGUSTA. Mother Superior didn't look fourteen when she was fourteen.

PAUL. We'll just use some makeup.

SISTER PHILAMENA. The Church doesn't allow makeup on nuns!

PAUL. Well, then we'll have to come up with something else. I'm sure there's a way to make her look fourteen.

SISTER AUGUSTA. (As she and PHILAMENA cross away:) Build a time machine?

PAUL. (Crossing over the GEORGE:) Nice work, George.

GEORGE. I'm not very good.

PAUL. You're fine.

GEORGE. I'll get better, I promise! I've never acted before.

PAUL. I wouldn't have known.

GEORGE. It's harder than it looks. I'm not sure how I'll be able to remember all these lines.

PAUL. You can practice with Kate.

GEORGE. At least now that the grapes have been harvested, I'll have free time. She's very good, isn't she? Reverend Mother?

PAUL. She . . . puts a whole lot into it.

KATE. Come on, George, time to go home. Goodnight, everyone!

PAUL / FATHER CHENILLE / MOTHER SUPERIOR. Goodnight!

(KATE and GEORGE exit through the kitchen.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Come along, girls. Four thirty will be here before we know it.

SISTER PHILAMENA / SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother Superior.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR exits down the hall, followed by Sisters PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA. PAUL and FATHER CHENILLE exit the front door, turning off the lights as they go. Moonlight streams into the room. A long moment passes.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. (Reentering with AUGUSTA, both checking to make sure the coast is clear:) Has everyone gone?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Shhhh! Yes.

(They sneak in.)

I thought for sure we'd get caught sneaking in all those grapes after dinner.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Thank goodness we didn't! What did you tell George?

SISTER AUGUSTA. I said someone came and picked up the grapes so he didn't need to bring them into town tomorrow. Which is true.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I feel bad taking advantage of his trust.

SISTER AUGUSTA. It's for the greater good. Now, get in there and start washing the bottles. I'll get the labels we made.

(Rushes down the hall as PHILAMENA goes back into the pressing room. FATHER CHENILLE enters with PAUL but does not turn on the light. He has a flashlight in his hand.)

PAUL. I still don't understand why we have to do this here.

FATHER CHENILLE. We need perfect quiet for hypnosis to work. That old furnace in our place bangs away all night long. Now, keep your voice down. We'll be in and out in no time. Sit down.

(PAUL sits.)

Do you have your welfare word?

PAUL. Here.

(Hands FATHER CHENILLE a piece of paper. FATHER CHENILLE does not yet look at it.)

FATHER CHENILLE. Now, let's begin. Relax . . .

(PAUL does.)

Take a deep breath in and out as you clear your mind.

(AUGUSTA reenters, sees FATHER CHENILLE and PAUL, and begins to spy on them.)

Take a deep breath in . . . and out. In . . . and out.

(PAUL does so. FATHER CHENILLE "magically" pulls a coin from behind PAUL's ear and moves it in a large circle in front of PAUL, shining his flashlight on it.)

Now look at this coin. Follow it around and around and around.

(PAUL follows the coin with his head. SISTER AUGUSTA does as well.)

I want you to focus on the thing you're most afraid of, the thing that gives you the greatest anxiety. In your mind's eye, focus on that one thing. Focus. Focus. Nod your head if you see it . . .

(Both PAUL and SISTER AUGUSTA slowly nod.)

Good. Now whisper what that one thing is . . .

PAUL. *(Whispering:)* Public speaking.

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Whispering, unnoticed by FATHER CHENILLE:)* Snakes.

FATHER CHENILLE. Now, that fear is disappearing, slowly but surely disappearing. It's getting smaller and smaller and smaller. And that fear is now . . . gone! Should it ever return, whenever you hear the word "focus" it will disappear again. "Focus."

PAUL / SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Whispering:)* Focus.

FATHER CHENILLE. But when you hear the word . . .

(Opens the piece of paper. Has a hard time reading it.)

. . . I really need to find my reading glasses. Whenever you hear the word "silly" . . .

(Soft sound of a gong.)

. . . your fear will return and you'll be like you were before. "Silly."

(Soft sound of a gong.)

Now, when I snap my fingers you will feel refreshed with no memory of this at all. Three, two, one.

(He snaps his fingers. Both PAUL and AUGUSTA snap awake.)

How do you feel?

PAUL. Fine. Did it work?

FATHER CHENILLE. We'll find out Sunday.

(They exit.)

(SISTER AUGUSTA goes into the pressing room as SALLY sneaks in, cold and wet. She looks around. She goes down the hallway. The pressing room door opens.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. It's just a small spill!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Go get a blue towel so the stain won't show. The last thing we need is evidence of what we're up to.

(PHILAMENA goes down the hall to retrieve a towel. A moment later, a small shriek. She enters with a blue towel, clutching her heart, followed by SALLY.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. I thought you were a ghost.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (Off, groggy:) Sister Philamena, is that you?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Go back to sleep, Mother Superior. I'm sorry to have awakened you.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (Off:) Why did you cry out like that?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Uh . . . uh . . .

SALLY. (Rolling her eyes and imitating PHILAMENA's voice:) I thought I saw a mouse.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (Off:) Why are you out of bed?

SALLY. I wanted a drink of water! Goodnight, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (Off:) Goodnight, Philamena.

SISTER PHILAMENA. How did you change your voice like that?

SALLY. I started in radio. Two employees and eight hours of programming to fill. You still can't lie?

SISTER PHILAMENA. It's an asset for a nun!

SISTER AUGUSTA. (Opening the door of the pressing room:) What happened? Who are you talking to? (Exiting the pressing room:) Sally, is that you?

SALLY. It's not the tooth fairy.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Didn't you go home hours ago?

SALLY. I tried. My car wouldn't start. I've been hiding outside until I could get you alone. Can one of you drive me into town?

SISTER AUGUSTA. We only have the one truck and George has it.

SALLY. Then I guess I'll walk down to his house and see if he can take me.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Nonsense! You're wet and shivering from the rain. Here, use this to dry off.

(Hands her the towel. SALLY begins to dry herself.)

I'll go get the truck and drive you back.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But, Sister Philamena, the you-know-what! It has to be done tonight.

SISTER PHILAMENA. It'll just have to wait.

SALLY. Are you two— Are you making wine again?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Uh . . . uh . . .

SALLY. You are! I should have known: why else would you be in the pressing room in the middle of the night? (Looks in the pressing room. A bit too loudly:) Some things never change! Incredible!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (Off:) Who is that? Who's out there?

(SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA grab SALLY and the three enter the pressing room, SALLY's towel dropping on the floor on the way in. SALLY quickly exits the pressing room and rushes towards the towel.)

SALLY. My towel!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (Entering in a robe and nightclothes:) Sister Philamena?

(SALLY ducks as she grabs the towel and throws it over her head to hide herself, the towel like a veil. MOTHER SUPERIOR puts on her glasses.)

Philamena, is that you?

(SALLY slowly rises. The jig is up. She keeps her back to MOTHER SUPERIOR.)

A woman . . . in a blue veil! It's the Blessed Mother! I'm having a vision, just like Bernadette! (Falls to her knees:) Oh, speak, Blessed Mother. Why have you come to me? What is it you want to say?

SALLY. (Disguising her voice:) You have been chosen!

(Lights fade to black.)

Scene 3

(Two weeks later. Another rehearsal. PAUL is examining a monk's robe for the show.)

PAUL. This looks just fine.

SISTER PHILAMENA. The Church maintains excellent records of holy garments. We created a perfect replica of a monk's robe from 1858.

PAUL. But it looks exactly like a contemporary one. Couldn't you have pulled a monk's robe from the high holy closet and used that?

SISTER PHILAMENA. It's not the same shade of brown. The new ones are russet, not chocolate.

PAUL. Ah, my mistake.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I told you he wouldn't notice!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Someone in the audience might.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Who? How many hundred-year-old monks are coming to the show?

PAUL. And this must be the gown for the Blessed Mother.

SISTER AUGUSTA. We've had to let the seams out twice already. Kate keeps gaining weight.

SISTER PHILAMENA. We made a second gown in case she outgrows this one.

PAUL. Well, it looks splendid. And, since Bernadette was a nun later in life, Mother Superior will simply wear her own vestments.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Have you given any more thought as to how we can make her look younger?

PAUL. Maybe we could get her different glasses? Speaking of, how is she today?

SISTER PHILAMENA. The same. Mother Superior truly believes she had a vision and that the Blessed Mother came to her with a message. She's been praying nonstop for another visit ever since.

SISTER AUGUSTA. She says she's been chosen, but she doesn't know for what.

PAUL. Well, I'm not sure what she thought she saw that night, but I hope she gets back to normal soon. She's been sleeping less and less since it happened. Now, about the props: we seem to have everything except for the wine the monk drinks.

SISTER AUGUSTA. We'll use grape juice. George can use the bottle for rehearsals but we thought we'd save the juice until opening night. We'd hate to add anything that might confuse him.

PAUL. Good thinking. Thank you again, Sisters, for all your work on this. I couldn't have done it without you.

(He goes off to check on a few props on the table.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. About that juice . . .

SISTER AUGUSTA. Don't worry, Sister Philamena. We had two boxes of grapes left over after we made the wine. I pressed them today—just pressed them, nothing else—and put the grape juice in bottles with white labels. The hundred bottles of you-know-what all have red labels.

SISTER PHILAMENA. White label is grape juice. Red labels, wine.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Exactly. As an extra precaution, I hid the red-label bottles away.

SISTER PHILAMENA. How do they look?

SISTER AUGUSTA. From what I can tell, they'll be ready just in the nick of time.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Glory be!

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering from the kitchen and crossing over to PAUL at the table:)* Paul!

PAUL. Hey, Pop. What's up?

FATHER CHENILLE. I've been working all day on a new trick. I thought there might be a more interesting way to make Blessed Mother appear.

PAUL. More interesting how?

FATHER CHENILLE. Like this!

(He unfurls a scroll-like banner.)

Abraca-luiah!

(He drops the banner to reveal nothing.)

(KATE waddles out from the kitchen, much, much larger than before, eating a roll. She has an apple in her other hand.)

KATE. Sorry! I saw these in the kitchen— *(Holds up the food)* —and they looked so good. My goodness, these cravings! They come out of nowhere!

PAUL. I'll think about it, Pop. But for now—

FATHER CHENILLE. I know, I know. Just stick with the flowers.

KATE. Does anyone have a dill pickle? Or a pork roast!

FATHER CHENILLE. By the way, I ran into Mr. and Mrs. Ripp at the market. They were highly complimentary of your sermon this morning.

PAUL. All thanks to you. Two weeks in a row now. That hypnotism seems to have worked.

FATHER CHENILLE. I think we're finally ready to invite Cardinal Bluejay to observe you so you can be ordained.

PAUL. After the show opens, Pop, all right? One major event at a time.

KATE. Or watermelon! Does anyone have a watermelon?

SISTER AUGUSTA. (*Aside to SISTER PHILAMENA:*) It looks like she's smuggling one under that dress.

PAUL. All right, everyone, let's get started. Opening night is only a week away!

(*Everyone looks a little nervous.*)

Tonight's our deadline to be off-book. I'll be following along with the script, just in case anyone needs prompting. Let's all have fun and break a leg!

(*Everyone does final preparations. PAUL looks around the room.*)

Where's George?

GEORGE. (*Entering:*) Sorry, I was in the kitchen running lines. Did your trick work, Father Chenille?

FATHER CHENILLE. Not even close.

KATE. (*Holding up the remains of her food:*) My fault. I took a detour.

PAUL. Has anyone seen Mother Superior?

SISTER PHILAMENA. She was in her room a few minutes ago. Praying for another vision.

PAUL. (*Calling down the hallway:*) Mom, come on out. You can pray all you want after rehearsal.

(*During the following, SISTER PHILAMENA helps GEORGE with his monk's robe, which goes over the top of his normal clothes. SISTER AUGUSTA puts the Blessed Mother's gown over KATE, who doesn't want to put down her roll or apple. FATHER CHENILLE grabs his magician's cape and top hat from the high holy closet and puts them on.*)

SISTER PHILAMENA. Here, George, let me help you.

SISTER AUGUSTA. This would be much easier if you put your food down.

GEORGE. Thank you, Sister Philamena.

KATE. Could you get me some butter for my roll?

SISTER AUGUSTA. I'm not a waitress, dear.

PAUL. Now, let's take it from the top and work our way through. Mother? Where's that vibrant, young Bernadette?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Entering:*) Here I am.

(*She looks utterly exhausted. Her moves are sluggish and she yawns every now and again.*)

PAUL. Mother, you look like you've hardly slept.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I try, but instead I come out here in hopes of seeing her again. (*Big yawn.*)

PAUL. You'll make yourself sick. Please get some sleep tonight. I'm worried about you.

FATHER CHENILLE. The boy is right, Margaret.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. And miss the chance of receiving another holy message? Never! Now, let's begin. The sooner rehearsal is over, the sooner Blessed Mother may come back to me.

PAUL. All right, everyone. Places for the top of the show.

(*Everyone gets into their proper places.*)

So, there's music, music, music. Music fades, curtain opens and . . .

(*FATHER CHENILLE walks center stage and quickly turns to see the audience.*)

FATHER CHENILLE. (*In a strange and unidentifiable accent—maybe British, maybe New England—definitely not his normal voice:*) "Why, hello there! What a mighty fine-looking crowd!"

PAUL. Pop, you're doing that thing with your voice again.

FATHER CHENILLE. What thing?

PAUL. Just use your regular voice.

FATHER CHENILLE. I am. (*Back to the strange stage voice:*) "What a mighty fine-looking crowd. And you, madam, why you're just as pretty as a— (*Magically produces some flowers*) —bouquet of spring flowers. Oh, no, that wasn't a miracle you just saw. It was a trick. An expertly executed magic trick by one of the greatest magicians the world has ever known. One whom you can hire for birthday parties and other celebrations at a reasonable price."

PAUL. Stick to the script, Pop.

FATHER CHENILLE. "A miracle is something very few people have ever seen. But I know someone who not only encountered a miracle, but eighteen of them. I'm referring, of course, to the sprightly and spirited young girl, fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous."

(*He rushes off. SISTER PHILAMENA silently applauds his performance.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Entering heavy-footedly and speaking in monotone:*) "Tra-la-la. Tra-la-la. Hear me sing my song."

PAUL. Mother, you're supposed to be skipping in. And singing.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Ignoring him:*) "In my fourteen years of life I have had nary a care or worry in the world. Although poverty-stricken and sickly, I know that there is a great and wonderful plan for me. I am filled with song and life. I am youth, personified. Why, look, it's the friendly monk from next door."

GEORGE. "Hello there—" (*Unable to remember his line.*)

PAUL. If you need your line, George, just say "line."

GEORGE. Line.

PAUL. Right.

GEORGE. Line.

PAUL. That's right.

GEORGE. No. Line?

PAUL. Oh. "Bernadette."

GEORGE. "Hello there, Bernadette. How lovely to see—" Line.

PAUL. "You."

GEORGE. "—You." Line.

PAUL. "Where are you going?"

GEORGE. Nowhere. I thought I'd say my line right here.

PAUL. No, that's the line.

GEORGE. Oh, right. "Where are you going?"

MOTHER SUPERIOR. "I'm off to the grotto to dip my toes in the water."

GEORGE. "Enjoy your—" Line.

PAUL. "Self."

GEORGE. "—Self. I drink—" Line.

PAUL. "To your youth."

GEORGE. "—To your youth." Line.

PAUL. Now you drink.

GEORGE. "Now you drink."

PAUL. No, just drink.

GEORGE. "Just drink."

PAUL. No, George, you drink from your bottle now.

GEORGE. Oh, right.

(*He takes a drink, expecting liquid that isn't there.*)

There isn't anything in it.

PAUL. There will be. For tonight, just mime it.

GEORGE. Got it.

(*Puts the bottle down and mimes drinking from it.*)

PAUL. No, I mean you can use the bottle, just mime the— Never mind!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. "Goodbye, dear monk. Why look, the Grotto Massabielle. I'll dip my toes in the waters, just a bit."

(*SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA have small strips of silk on sticks they wave back and forth as Bernadette's vision [KATE] appears.*)

KATE. (*Saying her line with her mouth full of food and spitting a bit:*) "Good evening, Bernadette Soubirous. I am the Blessed Mother."

(*MOTHER SUPERIOR takes off her glasses to wipe off some food which KATE has accidentally spit on them.*)

"Have you ever seen a vision so beautiful and benevolent?"

(*This time, food hits MOTHER SUPERIOR in the eye.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Breaking character:*) She spit food in my eye! First on my glasses and then—

KATE. I'm so sorry!

(*She takes a step towards MOTHER SUPERIOR but gets tangled in the silks.*)

SISTER PHILAMENA. Wait!

SISTER AUGUSTA. The silks!

KATE. Oh no!

GEORGE. I'll help you, Kate.

(*Accidentally kicks over the bottle he left on stage.*)

The bottle!

(*Picks up the bottle.*)

SISTER AUGUSTA. (*To KATE:*) Stay still!

KATE. Sorry!

FATHER CHENILLE. Paul, I've got an idea!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Using her veil to wipe her eye:*) Does anyone have a tissue?

(*GEORGE bumps her as he rushes to KATE. She drops her glasses.*)

My glasses!

(*Starts feeling around for them.*)

GEORGE. Sorry, Mother Superior!

(*Puts the bottle down next to KATE and comes back to help MOTHER SUPERIOR get her glasses.*)

KATE. (*Getting free and rushing to GEORGE:*) George!

(*KATE accidentally kicks the bottle.*)

The bottle!

(*Tries to pick up the bottle but can't.*)

Oh, my!

GEORGE. (*Rushing back to KATE, grabbing the bottle and helping KATE back to her place on stage:*) Kate!

FATHER CHENILLE. (*To PAUL:*) I think you're really going to like it.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Still rubbing her eye and feeling around for her glasses:*) A handkerchief? Anything?

KATE. Sorry, everyone!

GEORGE. Line!

(*SISTER AUGUSTA hands her silks to SISTER PHILAMENA as they rush over to MOTHER SUPERIOR.*)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Don't move, Mother Superior!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Your glasses!

(*MOTHER SUPERIOR freezes. SISTER AUGUSTA grabs her glasses. SISTER PHILAMENA gets caught in the silks.*)

FATHER CHENILLE. I can make the Blessed Mother levitate in!

GEORGE. Line!

FATHER CHENILLE. All I need is some wire!

GEORGE. Line!

PAUL. All right, stop! Everybody just stop! Stop!

(*Everyone freezes in their exact position.*)

Mother, you've got to get some sleep. Bernadette looks like a zombie.

(*MOTHER SUPERIOR starts to say something but PAUL rails on.*)

And George. You called line for "self"? The second syllable of a word? And, Pop, it's already a stretch we have a magician in the show. But you can't keep showing me tricks that don't work. And Kate, it's one thing to ask the audience to believe that the Blessed Mother is with child—twins no less!—but it's another to ask them to believe she can't stop eating for ten seconds. Now, I'm sorry everyone. I know we're all doing the best we can. But if this is our best—it's not good enough. We're out of time, and . . . This won't work. None of this will work! We have to cancel the show.

KATE. Paul, no!

PAUL. I don't see any other way. We gave it a shot. We tried. But with one week to go, and the massive amount of work we'd have to do to make this show anywhere close to acceptable—not even good, just acceptable—I don't see how we can do it. I mean, unless there's some miracle; some grand sign from above telling us to go on with the show—

(*The front door bursts open. Bright lights silhouette a shrouded figure as angelic music plays. It is the BLESSED MOTHER. She holds out her arms.*)

BLESSED MOTHER (SALLY). Go on with the show!

(*Blackout.*)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

(Hours before opening. SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA are seated at the table mending church robes.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. We all saw this one. And this time it wasn't Sally. Sally wasn't anywhere near the convent.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But how can it be that Blessed Mother came to all of us?

SISTER PHILAMENA. It was a miracle!

SISTER AUGUSTA. And then she just disappeared. Without saying another word.

SISTER PHILAMENA. She didn't need to. Blessed Mother told us everything she needed to.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Well, miracle or not, the show is in a few hours and it's no better today than it was a week ago. George barely knows his lines. Mother Superior can't stay awake. And Kate can't go two lines without wanting a five-course dinner.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Praise be we have wine to sell. We'll need that money more than ever now. But even so, we'll need to sell every single bottle.

SISTER AUGUSTA. That shouldn't be a problem. Mr. Piedmont said the demand's so high he's going to open his store early. He's absolutely certain we'll sell all one hundred and have our money by Monday's deadline. We'll just sneak it into the ticket money and no one will be any the wiser.

SISTER PHILAMENA. How did you get the cases of wine to him?

SISTER AUGUSTA. I had George bring them.

SISTER PHILAMENA. You told him what we did?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Of course not! He thinks he was bringing Mr. Piedmont grape juice for the poor.

PAUL. *(Entering.)* Well, Sisters, I can't believe the big day has finally arrived. Everything ready on your end?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Everyone has their costumes and the props are good to go.

PAUL. *(Pacing.)* Excellent, excellent.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Are you nervous, Paul?

PAUL. Opening jitters. There's a lot riding on this one performance. Where is everybody?

SISTER PHILAMENA. George is running lines. Kate is around here somewhere.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Emptying the pantry, no doubt.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Mother Superior is in her room.

PAUL. Napping?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Praying.

PAUL. I told her to get some sleep. She'll be in no condition to perform.

SISTER AUGUSTA. She's been drinking coffee to stay awake. All day long.

PAUL. She doesn't need caffeine, she needs rest. One day soon she's going to crash.

SISTER PHILAMENA. She's been extra-fearful she'll miss the Blessed Mother since she's already come twice!

PAUL. If, indeed, that's who it was.

SISTER PHILAMENA. What do you mean?

PAUL. We saw someone. Whether it was the Blessed Mother, I have my doubts.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Who else could it be? We saw her glowing light! Heard angels singing!

PAUL. Anyway, the audience should be arriving in about an hour. It's time to set up the chairs and the stage.

SISTER PHILAMENA. We'll bring our sewing to our room and try to convince Reverend Mother to take a quick nap.

PAUL. Good luck with that.

(They exit with their sewing. PAUL pulls the table over to one side of the room.)

SALLY. *(Entering from the front door:)* Need a hand?

PAUL. Thanks, that would be— Sally?

SALLY. That would be Sally.

PAUL. What are you . . . ? I didn't think . . .

SALLY. Cat-echism got your tongue?

PAUL. What are you doing here?

SALLY. I heard about the show. And why you were doing it.

PAUL. The curtain's not for another two hours.

SALLY. I know. I came to see if I could help.

PAUL. With what?

SALLY. Oh, I don't know. You need anyone backstage or running sound cues or anything?

PAUL. I've got it handled.

SALLY. Eight months no see! What have you been up to? I'm still at the paper.

PAUL. I suspected.

SALLY. Only I'm not a reporter anymore. The chief stepped down. For some crazy reason, the publisher chose me to replace him. Been editor for six months now.

PAUL. Congratulations. I didn't know.

SALLY. Do you miss it? Being a reporter?

PAUL. I miss the job. I don't miss the stress, the long hours, the—

SALLY. People?

PAUL. No, I miss them most of all.

(There is a charged moment between them.)

You look good, Sally.

SALLY. Tell me something I don't know. You look good too, Paul.

PAUL. A simple life agrees with me.

SALLY. I hear you're up for a new job.

PAUL. Well, you know, Pop's been trying to retire for a few years now. He wants to move somewhere warmer. The problem is there hasn't been anyone to take his place.

SALLY. Until now?

PAUL. Believe me, it isn't where I saw myself either. But, it seems like the right thing to do.

SALLY. For you or for him?

(PAUL doesn't reply.)

You've always hated public speaking.

PAUL. Yeah, well, I've changed, Sally.

SALLY. Too bad. I always liked the old you.

PAUL. Just not enough.

SALLY. No, Paul: too much. I got scared.

PAUL. We've talked about this before, Sally. After the first time you got cold feet.

SALLY. The first time, I ran off because I wanted to break the story about the Dillon Boys. This time, it was different.

PAUL. Not for me. I was still on an altar in a tuxedo watching you run away. For me, it was exactly the same.

SALLY. I'm sorry about that. I am.

PAUL. Look, I know you didn't come here to hash out the past. Why are you here?

SALLY. I told you, I want to help. When I heard about the orphanage, I had the paper run full-page ads for your show, free of charge. I wanted you to sell out.

PAUL. I appreciate that, Sally. I really do. See, that's not fair! When you do things like that, you make me remember how much I—

(Gets a bit sad. Starts to exit.)

SALLY. How much you what?

PAUL. . . . I've got a few things to do before the show. Thanks for coming by. It was nice seeing you again.

(He rushes off, passing KATE and GEORGE as he exits. KATE is gigantic.)

GEORGE. Where is Paul rushing off to?

SALLY. Anywhere but here, I guess.

KATE. Did you come to see the show, Sally?

SALLY. I wouldn't miss it, honey. My gosh, Kate, you've gotten so . . .

KATE. I know. I can't help it. It's these cravings; I can't stop eating. I'm counting the days 'til my due date.

SALLY. Which is when exactly? Six months ago? How are you, George? Ready for your big stage debut?

GEORGE. I hope so.

KATE. He's nervous about his lines. He's been so focused on them he's neglected all his chores.

SALLY. You'll be fine, George. I have faith in you.

GEORGE. Thanks, Sally. That means a lot.

KATE. You came awfully early.

SALLY. I wanted to see if there was anything I could do to help.

KATE. There might be something you could do backstage. What did Paul say?

SALLY. I'm like the cannibal who came late to dinner: he gave me the cold shoulder.

KATE. Give him time.

SALLY. I don't know why I was expecting anything more. It's just that ever since I found out he's becoming a priest, I've been thinking about what could have been.

KATE. It still can be, Sally.

SALLY. I don't think so, kid. But I like it when you say that.

KATE. George, why don't you see if Paul needs any help hanging up the curtains or putting out the chairs?

GEORGE. All right.

(He gives KATE a quick kiss and exits.)

KATE. Now, Sally, just between us girls . . . I've only known you to be a confident, focused, motivated woman. I've never seen you not go after what you want. Why is this so different?

SALLY. Because Paul is different.

KATE. It's obvious you still love him. And he loves you.

SALLY. I'm not too sure about that.

KATE. You left him; his feelings for you haven't changed. He's just stuffed them away. Tell him what you feel. Figure out the rest later.

SALLY. Easier said than done.

KATE. No, Sally. Love is the only thing easier done than said.

(She exits.)

(Lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(Opening night. The table and chairs have been moved to the side. The table has a record player and a few props on it. An unseen stage curtain is closed. FATHER CHENILLE double-checks the props in his magic case as SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA set props on the table.)

PAUL. Places! Places for the top of the show! *(Checking the prop table:)* Are all the props set?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Almost.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Let's see. We have the book for Scene Four . . .

PAUL. *(Crossing to FATHER CHENILLE:)* Pop, where's Mom?

FATHER CHENILLE. She was in her room getting ready last time I checked.

PAUL. Sister Philamena, will you please tell Mother Superior we're at places?

(SISTER PHILAMENA exits down the hall.)

George?

(GEORGE enters in costume.)

There you are. We're at places.

GEORGE. It's completely sold-out. We ran out of chairs. People are standing along the back.

PAUL. Fantastic! Now all we need to do is put on a great show.

FATHER CHENILLE. Paul, I know we're about to start, but I was wondering if there'd been any final decision about my performing just one more bit of magic? I've taken the liberty of bringing my own props . . .

PAUL. Pop!

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Pulling items out of his magic case:)* I have a new trick that involves a saw, a deck of cards, and these rubber snakes.

PAUL. Put those away! You know Sister Augusta is terrified of snakes. Even fakes ones.

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Crossing over:)* Paul, are we planning on—

(Sees the snakes.)

PAUL. Catch her, Pop, she's going to . . . faint?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Hunh! I've always been afraid of snakes. *(Grabs one.)* Somehow I'm not anymore. *(Shrugs it off.)* Anyway, Paul, are we planning to start on time?

PAUL. Yes.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Well, that was five minutes ago.

(She walks away.)

(PAUL and FATHER CHENILLE look at each other, stunned. FATHER shrugs.)

GEORGE. *(Calling off:)* Kate? It's time!

KATE. *(Entering slowly, eating:)* I just needed a little something to tide me over. *(Feels a twinge in her belly:)* Whew! It's like they're auditioning for the Rockettes.

GEORGE. You're sure you can do the show, Kate?

KATE. Of course, George. I feel great.

GEORGE. After tonight I want you to take it easy.

KATE. But, George—

GEORGE. No arguments. I'll look after you for a while.

(They kiss.)

Is this weird? A monk kissing the Blessed Mother?

(They shrug and kiss again.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Dragging on an almost-asleep MOTHER SUPERIOR:)* A little help here . . .

PAUL. What happened?

SISTER PHILAMENA. I went into her room and found her asleep. On her knees praying!

PAUL. Mom? Mom, you need to wake up. We're at places.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm fine, Paul. I'll be—

(Falls asleep standing up.)

PAUL. Sisters, go splash cold water on her face. We've got to keep her awake.

(They exit down the hallway with MOTHER SUPERIOR.)

Everybody else, we'll start the show the moment she gets back!

GEORGE. Look, Kate. I'm trembling.

KATE. You're going to be wonderful, George.

GEORGE. What if I forget my lines?

KATE. I asked Sally to sit offstage with the script. She'll cue you.

(Eats a bit of food.)

GEORGE. Ah, Kate, you're always looking out for me.

KATE. *(Speaking with her mouth full:)* Because I love you, George.

(GEORGE goes in to kiss her at the exact same moment she brings more food to her mouth.)

PAUL. Use this time to check your props!

(FATHER CHENILLE opens up his magic case.)

Approved props.

(FATHER CHENILLE closes his magic case.)

(GEORGE goes to the table. Looks inside his prop wine bottle.)

GEORGE. Sister Philamena forgot to fill my bottle.

KATE. She's helping Mother Superior right now. Just get some juice from the kitchen.

(He rushes off to the kitchen with the bottle.)

And bring me back something to nibble on.

SALLY. *(Entering:)* I'm here! Sorry, everyone! I had to fight my way through that crowd! Looks like the ads worked too well.

PAUL. Sally, what are you doing backstage?

KATE. I asked her to help, Paul. She'll be on book in case anyone needs a line.

PAUL. I suppose that's not a bad idea.

SALLY. You got the script, honey?

KATE. *(Grabbing it from the props table:)* Here.

SALLY. Thanks!

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Crossing to them:)* Paul, what is she doing here?

PAUL. Be nice, Pop. Sally's helping with the show.

SALLY. Hello, Father Chenille. It's good to see you again.

FATHER CHENILLE. Can you stay for the entire performance, or do you have to run off somewhere?

PAUL. Pop, this isn't the time. Go get into places. Mom will be out any minute now.

(FATHER CHENILLE walks away.)

And put away that case.

(He puts it under the prop table. During the following, he slowly works his way back over, eavesdropping on their conversation.)

Sorry about that. Believe it or not, he really likes you. He's just disappointed things didn't work out between us.

SALLY. I understand. I'm disappointed myself. *(Beat.)* Disappointed in myself.

PAUL. Sally?

SALLY. I made a mistake, Paul. A huge mistake. I miss you, every single day.

PAUL. Then why did you leave?

SALLY. It won't make sense.

PAUL. Try me.

SALLY. You're practically perfect, Paul. You've got this wonderful family: your mother the mother, your father the father, your sister who used to be a sister. You got good friends, like George. And you do things for others not because you'll get something out of it but because it's the right thing to do. I'm not like that. I wish I was, but . . . I'm selfish. I'm suspicious. I have a hard time letting people in. I don't even have friends, not really, just coworkers who treat me like one of the guys. But sometimes a girl doesn't want to be one of the guys. Sometimes, she wants to be a girl.

(FATHER CHENILLE sneaks off.)

PAUL. Oh, Sally . . .

(Goes in for a kiss but is interrupted. SISTER AUGUSTA enters, helping SISTER PHILAMENA support MOTHER SUPERIOR, who is stumbling in with her head down.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. She can't stay awake!

PAUL. Mom?

SISTER PHILAMENA. She'll wake up, say a few words, and then fall back asleep. We've tried cold water, coffee, everything!

PAUL. I knew she would crash. But why did it have to happen tonight?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Lifts her head to reveal gigantic eyes painted on her glasses:)* Is it time to start the show?

PAUL. What in the world . . . ?

SISTER AUGUSTA. We didn't want the audience to see her eyes were closed. And it was the only thing we could think of to make her look fourteen.

(They continue to talk about MOTHER SUPERIOR as GEORGE rushes on and crosses to the prop table with a red-label bottle.)

KATE. We're ready to start now, George.

GEORGE. I couldn't find any juice in the kitchen. Then I remembered that Sister Augusta gave me a hundred bottles of juice this morning. They were still in the back of the truck.

KATE. You forgot to deliver them?

GEORGE. I meant to. But then Father Chenille asked me to find his magic case and Paul wanted help finding enough chairs and . . . I'll bring them to town tomorrow. But I'll use this one tonight.

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Rushing on:)* He's here! I can't believe it!

PAUL. Who, Pop?

FATHER CHENILLE. Cardinal Bluejay! He's in the front row!

GEORGE. Really?

KATE. Oh, my!

PAUL. Why is he in town?

FATHER CHENILLE. I have no idea . . .

PAUL. Pop?

FATHER CHENILLE. . . . Unless it was because I asked him to observe you at mass tomorrow morning so you could be ordained.

PAUL. We agreed to do that after the show was over!

FATHER CHENILLE. Well, the show will be over tonight.

(PAUL throws up his hands.)

Don't be mad. You'll be fine. As long as you . . . *(Magically pulls out a coin from behind PAUL's ear and slowly moves it in a circle:)* Focus, Paul. Focus.

(PAUL follows the coin for a brief moment, then relaxes.)

PAUL. Ok, everyone, places for the top of the show.

(Everyone rushes into their places. MOTHER SUPERIOR is having a hard time seeing through her painted lenses.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. Can you see, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Only if I look below the lenses. What did you do to my glasses?

PAUL. Remember everyone: whatever happens, just keep going. Ready?

FATHER CHENILLE / KATE / GEORGE. Yes.

SISTER PHILAMENA / SISTER AUGUSTA / SALLY. Ready.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR snores once.)

PAUL. Music.

(SISTER PHILAMENA turns on the record player.)

And curtain!

(SISTER AUGUSTA rushes off and the curtain opens. [Note: the opening and closing of the curtain could simply be a change in lighting.] FATHER CHENILLE walks center stage and, in character, suddenly notices the audience.)

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Still with his strange and unidentifiable accent:)* "Why, hello there! What a mighty fine-looking crowd! And you, Cardinal Bluejay, why you're just as handsome as— *(Magically produces some flowers)* —a bouquet of spring flowers. Oh, no, that wasn't a miracle you just saw. It was a trick. An expertly executed magic trick by the father of one of the greatest soon-to-be priests the world has ever known."

PAUL. *(Whispering:)* Pop! Stop improvising!

FATHER CHENILLE. "A miracle is something very few people in the world have seen. But I know someone who not only encountered a miracle, but eighteen of them. I'm referring, of course, to the sprightly and spirited young girl, fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous."

(Rushes off.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering skipping and singing, a little unsure in the glasses:)* "Tra-la-la. Tra-la-la. Hear me sing my song."

(Stops skipping. Her words become slower and her head heavier as she continues.)

"In my fourteen years of life I have had nary a care or worry in the world. Although poverty-stricken and sickly, I know that there is a great and wonderful plan for me. I am filled with song and life. I am youth, personified."

(She is asleep.)

PAUL. Mom, wake up! Mom!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Quickly jerking awake:*) "Why, look, it's the friendly monk from next door."

GEORGE. (*Speaking as loudly and quickly as possible:*) "Hello-there-Bernadette.-How-lovely-to-see-you.-Where-are-you-going?"

(*Takes a big sigh of relief. Looks off at KATE, who gives him a thumbs-up.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Shaking out the ringing in her ears:*) "I'm off to the grotto to dip my toes in the water."

GEORGE. (*Lightning-fast and screaming, as before:*) "Enjoy-yourself.-I-drink-to-your-youth." (*Takes a huge swig of the wine:*) Whoa, mama!

(*GEORGE goes offstage opposite PAUL and signals there's something wrong with the juice. PAUL, unable to understand him, gives him a supportive thumbs-up.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. "Goodbye, dear monk. Why look, the Grotto Massabielle. I'll dip my toes in the waters, just a bit."

(*Again, she falls asleep. KATE enters. SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA have small strips of silk on sticks they wave back and forth as before.*)

KATE. "Good evening, Bernadette Soubirous. I am the Blessed Mother. Have you ever seen a vision so beautiful and benevolent?"

(*No response from the sleeping MOTHER SUPERIOR.*)

"Good evening, Bernadette Soubirous. I am the Blessed Mother. Have you ever seen a vision so beautiful and benevolent?"

(*No response.*)

"Bernadette Soubirous!"

(*SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA attempt to help by crossing to MOTHER SUPERIOR and lightly hitting her with their silks.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Waking up, regarding the silks:*) What is this? How did I get in a car wash?

(*SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA return to their places by KATE.*)

KATE. (*Sneaking a quick bite of food she has brought on with her:*) "I am the Blessed Mother. Have you ever seen a vision so beautiful and benevolent?"

MOTHER SUPERIOR. "Blessed Mother. Why have you . . ."

(*Snores. This time, she's not waking up.*)

KATE. "Come to you? Because, dear Bernadette, you are a special soul. Though only fourteen, I have chosen you to receive a special message."

(*A sharp twinge. She drops character.*)

Oh my!

(*Takes a deep breath and gets back into character.*)

"A special message. Are you ready to—"

(*Another sharp twinge. She drops character.*)

Woo, woo, woo!

PAUL. Kate, what's wrong?

KATE. (*Takes a deep breath. Everything seems normal again:*) "Are you ready to receive it?"

(*MOTHER SUPERIOR snores.*)

"I know this seems like a dream to you, Bernadette. But it is not. Are you ready to receive my special message?"

(*No reply. Unsure what to do, she throws her roll at MOTHER SUPERIOR. Still no reply. She looks to PAUL for help.*)

SALLY. Paul, do something!

FATHER CHENILLE. (*Taking charge:*) Close the curtain, Sister Augusta. I'll go out front and distract them with a little magic.

(*SISTER AUGUSTA rushes off and closes the curtain.*)

PAUL. Pop, no!

FATHER CHENILLE. (*Rushes off:*) "Many things seem like a dream. Like these miraculous magic tricks I'm about to delight you with . . ."

KATE. I threw food at Saint Bernadette. I didn't know what else to do . . .

PAUL. (*Rushes over to MOTHER SUPERIOR:*) Mom, wake up.

(*MOTHER SUPERIOR rises and starts to walk down the hallway, her arms straight out from her body.*)

SISTER AUGUSTA. She's sleepwalking.

PAUL. (*Chases after her:*) Mom?

SISTER PHILAMENA. No, Paul, it's dangerous to wake someone up when they're sleepwalking.

PAUL. What can we do? We'll have to cancel the show.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But the Blessed Mother came to us in a vision and said we had to do it.

KATE. And what about the orphans?

PAUL. Then what do we do?

SALLY. Everybody think!

PAUL. Sally!

SALLY. What?

PAUL. You can take her place!

SALLY. Me? I'm no actress.

PAUL. You did radio for years. Sisters, pull a habit and gown from the high holy closet.

(They do.)

SALLY. Radio isn't acting. It's reading dramatically. Besides, I don't know the lines.

PAUL. Use your script. We can hide it in this.

(Grabs the book from the prop table.)

SALLY. *(As SISTER PHILAMENA puts her into the gown and habit and SISTER AUGUSTA rushes down the hall:)* It will never work. Look, maybe you should tell everyone what's happened, Paul.

PAUL. Tell them my mother has visions of the Blessed Mother and hasn't slept in two weeks?

(Booing is heard from the audience.)

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Rushing back on:)* We'd better move along. It sounds like a convention for ghosts out there. People have already asked for their money back.

PAUL. Please, Sally!

SALLY. All right, Paul, I'll do it for you.

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Rushing back on:)* Here, don't forget these.

(Puts MOTHER SUPERIOR's glasses on SALLY then rushes off to open the curtain.)

SALLY. I can't see anything!

(The curtain reopens. SALLY looks terrified. She opens the book to read her lines but can't see them through the glasses. She moves the book very close to her waist and lifts her head up until she can see it under the lenses.)

"Blessed Mother, why have you come to me?"

KATE. "Because, dear Bernadette, you are a special soul. Though only fourteen, I have chosen you to receive a special message. Are you ready to receive it?"

SALLY. "Yes, Blessed Mother. Let me hear your sacred words and be better for it."

KATE. "Return tomorrow and drink the water in this grotto and bathe in it. If you do this as penance, clear water will flow to your village evermore."

SALLY. "I will, Blessed Mother. I shall do as you say."

KATE. "Glory be, young Bernadette!"

(KATE exits along with SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA and their silks.)

SALLY. "I shall skip home and tell of what I saw." *(Starts to skip and sing tentatively, with one arm out for guidance:)* "Tra-la-la. Tra-la—"

(Because she cannot see, she bumps into the prop table.)

Ow! Sonuvab— *(Stops herself from cursing.)* "B . . . lessed Mother!"

(GEORGE turns SALLY back towards the stage and reenters.)

GEORGE. *(Again speaking quickly and loudly throughout:)* "Dear-Bernadette-you-have-returned.-Why-do-you-look-so-amazed?"

SALLY. *(Looking in the wrong direction:)* "I have had a vision, brother. Blessed Mother spoke to me."

GEORGE. *(Slowly turning her to face him:)* "It-cannot-be!"

SALLY. "But it is."

GEORGE. "A-hearty-drink-then-to-rejoice-in-your-goodness."

(He tentatively drinks, just a sip. PAUL motions for him to drink more. GEORGE shakes his head "no." PAUL motions again. GEORGE drinks a big swig.)

Whoa, mama!

(Tries to shake it off. Dreading his next line:)

"And-a . . . heartier . . . one . . . still."

(Shaking his head "no" desperately. PAUL shakes his head "yes." GEORGE shakes his head "no" more emphatically as PAUL continues to shake his "yes" more emphatically until GEORGE's "no" morphs into a "yes" and he takes a long, long drink.)

Oh boy! *(Speaking loudly, over-enunciating, and slowing/slurring his words:)* "I shall tell the people in the village what you have seen."

(Staggers off, drunk.)

SALLY. "Bless you, kind—"

(GEORGE reenters and staggers off the other direction. SALLY's gaze with her painted eyes follows him until he exits.)

"Bless you, kind monk."

(Struggles offstage, still unable to see.)

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering:)* "The village rejoiced upon hearing the news of Bernadette's vision. People were amazed by what she had seen. Almost as amazed as if they had witnessed— *(Pulls out a playing card and levitates it:)* A playing card floating in mid-air!"

PAUL. *(Whispering:)* Pop!

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Putting the card away:)* "Bernadette returned to the grotto the next day."

(SALLY makes her way back out, heading dangerously towards the audience before FATHER CHENILLE stops her. He helps her to her knees as SISTER PHILAMENA rushes out with a small bowl of water and sets it on the ground in front of SALLY.)

"She did as she was told. She drank from the grotto."

(After feeling around a moment to find the bowl, SALLY puts some water in her hand and tries to bring it to her mouth but misses.)

"She bathed in the grotto."

(Unsure what to do, SALLY splashes a little water under her arms.)

"And the Blessed Mother returned once more."

(SISTER PHILAMENA takes the bowl and helps SALLY up. SALLY knocks the bowl with her book as she turns away, splashing water all over SISTER PHILAMENA. SISTER PHILAMENA quickly exits to get her silk sticks. KATE enters as before with SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA.)

KATE. *(Walking slow and breathing hard:)* "Dear Bernadette, you have done as I've asked. I— I—" Ay-yi-yi! "Where's the monk? I need to talk to the monk!"

(SALLY quickly flips through her script, looking for these lines. SISTER PHILAMENA and SISTER AUGUSTA look at PAUL, who shrugs. GEORGE enters drinking from the bottle, quite drunk, pushed on by FATHER CHENILLE.)

GEORGE. *(Unsure what's happening:)* Why are you pushing me? "Oh, look, it's Blessed Mother! Are you still hungry?"

KATE. "Monk, I need your help. Walk with me."

GEORGE. I don't know these lines . . .

SALLY. *(Flipping through the script:)* That makes two of us.

KATE. "I know you have a truck, dear monk. I need you to drive me to the . . ." *(Doubles over in pain:)* Haaaw . . . !

GEORGE. Haaaw-liday Inn?

KATE. "To—" Haaaw . . . !

GEORGE. Haaaw-nolulu?

SALLY. *(Taking off her glasses and calling to PAUL:)* Hospital! She needs you to— Holy moly, Blessed Mother's having her babies!

PAUL. Sister Augusta, the curtain! Pop, you're on!

FATHER CHENILLE. Yes! *(Grabbing his case as he exits:)* "Think of a saint, any saint . . ."

SALLY. *(Rushing over to KATE:)* You're going to be ok, honey. George, go start up the truck.

(He rushes off through the kitchen, leaving his bottle on the prop table as he goes.)

Keep breathing, Kate. Quick little breaths. Let's get this costume off you . . .

(Escorts her out through the kitchen.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. What do we do now?

PAUL. Go see if there's any way to safely wake Mother Superior. Then Sally can do Kate's role and Mother Superior can do her own role.

(SISTER AUGUSTA rushes off down the hall.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. How long do you think Father Chenille can keep the audience's attention before everyone starts asking for their money back?

PAUL. I don't know. How long does he keep their attention during mass?

SISTER PHILAMENA. We've got one minute to come up with a plan!

(She and PAUL begin to pace as they think. She notices the wine bottle.)

What's that?

PAUL. George's bottle.

SISTER PHILAMENA. No it's not! We gave him a bottle with a white label. This has a red one.

PAUL. So?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Where did he find—?

(A loud crash of a hundred breaking bottles.)

SALLY. *(Reentering with KATE's costume and holding up a drunk GEORGE who carries an unopened red label bottle with him:)* It's all right. Some bottles fell out of George's truck, that's all. He forgot to put up the tailgate and they all just slid right off. Turns out George can't drive. He's three sheets to the wind.

PAUL. What?

GEORGE. It only takes one sip of wine to get me drunk. The trouble is, I don't know if it's the thirty-third sip or the thirty-fourth.

PAUL. How did this happen? Where did he get wine?

SISTER PHILAMENA. *(Slowly sneaking away:)* Uh . . . uh . . .

PAUL. Sister Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'll drive Kate to the hospital!

(She grabs the keys from GEORGE and rushes off.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Rushing in:)* What was that noise?

PAUL. Bottles George had in the back of his truck.

GEORGE. They just jumped right off!

SISTER AUGUSTA. George, are those the same bottles I asked you to take to Mr. Piedmont?

GEORGE. Yes, Sister Augusta. But it's ok. This one survived.

(She takes the bottle from him. Booing.)

PAUL. Pop's dying out there. Any luck with Mother Superior?

SISTER AUGUSTA. None.

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Rushing back in, stuffing white feathers into his hat:)* . . . It's not my fault those doves were in my hat too long!

PAUL. Pop, we're licked. We've completely run out of options. I'll go tell everyone—

SALLY. Nothing. You'll tell them nothing. Sister Augusta, put this on.

(Hands her KATE's costume which she gets into.)

Paul, get George's robe. We're going to finish this play!

PAUL. How, Sally?

SALLY. Together. I won't run away this time, Paul. And I won't let you give up.

PAUL. But I'm no actor. It's one thing to give a sermon, but it's another thing entirely to—

(He starts getting a panic attack.)

Oh, gosh! I can't breathe!

FATHER CHENILLE. You'll be fine, Son. If you just . . . *(Pulls out a coin:)* Focus . . . focus . . .

PAUL. *(Regaining control:)* Let's do this!

(Goes over to GEORGE, who has passed out, and tries to remove his costume.)

George, help me out . . . He's out cold.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Wait.

(He opens the high holy closet and pulls out a monk's robe.)

Just act like it's the right color.

(PAUL puts on the monk's robe.)

SALLY. Paul, how well do you know the script?

PAUL. Enough to get by.

SALLY. Great. And you, Sister Augusta?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Not a word.

(PAUL looks at SALLY, alarmed.)

SALLY. Don't worry, Paul. I've got a plan. Now, let's cut our losses and skip ahead to right before the final scene. Father Chenille, open the curtain.

(He rushes off as SALLY and PAUL take their places.)

PAUL. Thank you, Sally.

SALLY. For what?

PAUL. For being here when I needed you most.

SALLY. Of course, Paul. Don't be silly!

(A gong sounds. PAUL is un-hypnotized. SALLY puts her glasses back on. Curtain opens.)

SALLY. "Today, dear monk, Blessed Mother told me to plant crops by the grotto. She shall nurture them to maturity and food shall be plentiful in our village once more."

PAUL. "Ber-Ber-Ber . . ."

(PAUL is frozen, scared to death. He stares straight out.)

SALLY. *(Sneaks a peek over the top of her glasses and whispers:)* Paul, what's going on? I thought you were over your stage fright.

PAUL. "Ber-Ber-Ber . . ."

SALLY. "You say that you appreciate all the blessings I have given this village?"

PAUL. "Ber-Ber-Ber . . ."

SALLY. "Kind monk, I am only a conduit for the Blessed Mother. Now, off to the village with you."

(PAUL stares straight ahead, not moving. SISTER AUGUSTA comes out and slyly pushes him offstage.)

FATHER CHENILLE. "The next day, Bernadette returned to the grotto. The Blessed Mother appeared to her for the seventeenth time."

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Rushes into place:)* What's your plan? I don't know the lines.

SALLY. Just move your mouth and gesture a lot.

(During the following, SALLY says both sets of lines, Bernadette's and Blessed Mother's, in different voices as SISTER AUGUSTA moves her mouth and gestures wildly. She masks her face during Blessed Mother's line with the book. The effect is like a poorly dubbed film.)

(As Blessed Mother:) "Dear Bernadette, sweet Bernadette, lovely Bernadette. After today you shall see me but once more."

(As Bernadette:) "But why, Blessed Mother?"

(As Blessed Mother:) "There are others who need my help. But you must prove your devotion by performing one last task."

(As Bernadette:) "I shall do anything you ask of me."

(As Blessed Mother:) "Live your life in service. Help others as I have helped you. Do this to honor me."

(As Bernadette:) "I shall. You said I would see you but once more. When shall that be? Tomorrow?"

(As Blessed Mother:) "Not as soon as that. But you shall indeed see me once more, dear Bernadette Soubirous."

(SISTER AUGUSTA exits, but there are more lines.)

(As Blessed Mother:) "And when you do, you shall be"—

(SISTER AUGUSTA rushes back on.)

(As Blessed Mother:) "happy."

(SISTER AUGUSTA hesitantly exits.)

(As Blessed Mother:) "So very, very happy."

(SISTER AUGUSTA rushes back on again and opens her mouth, but misses the final line. SALLY blindly exits as SISTER AUGUSTA awkwardly follows.)

PAUL. One more scene to go!

FATHER CHENILLE. Paul, there's still time. One final trick. I know I can win them over. *(Opening his case and pulling out his props:)* It's called Cleopatra's Cards. I cut this deck of cards in half using this saw.

(Hands PAUL a deck of cards and a saw.)

PAUL. What are you—

FATHER CHENILLE. I tape half of each card to a snake— *(Pulls out a handful of fake snakes)* —and throw them in a pile. Then I wave my hand and—

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Rushing over:)* Father Chenille, it's your cue!

PAUL. No, Pop! You hear me?

FATHER CHENILLE. It'll look great! *(Handing AUGUSTA the snakes as he crosses onto the stage:)* Hold these.

PAUL. Don't be silly!

(Gong.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Snakes!!!

(Immediately faints.)

PAUL. Sister Augusta?

SALLY. She fainted!

PAUL. But we need Blessed Mother for the last scene! (*With great trepidation:*) All right, Pop, now's your chance. One big trick. But nothing with snakes!

(*FATHER CHENILLE performs one last trick as SALLY and PAUL exit. Whatever trick is selected, it should cover the time needed for a quick costume change. At the end of the trick, SALLY enters and cues FATHER CHENILLE and he begins the last scene of the play.*)

FATHER CHENILLE. "Time passed. Bernadette joined the Sisters of Charity, where she spent her years working in the infirmary and embroidering vestments. Sickly all her days, tuberculosis opened the gates of Heaven to her."

SALLY. "And that is why I, Bernadette Soubirous of France, celebrate my final moments on Earth. I have had seventeen visions of the Blessed Mother, and at this moment I see her one last time."

(*Beat. PAUL comes out, dressed as Blessed Mother, waving his own silk stick.*)

"Take me home, dear Mother, take your innocent, beautiful Bernadette home."

(*Dies a dramatic death. PAUL stops waving the silks.*)

(*GEORGE slowly rises and walks over to BERNADETTE, crouches and holds her hand. He is not only sober again, but calm, relaxed, and giving an incredible performance.*)

GEORGE. "Sweet, sweet Bernadette Soubirous. Though your life is now over, your afterlife in Heaven begins, dear Bernadette, sweet and noble Bernadette."

FATHER CHENILLE. (*Enters, speaking in his own natural voice:*) Abraca-luiah!

(*He pulls a bouquet from thin air and places it in her hands. He stands above her. It is a nice and truthful moment.*)

Silence.

(*Still in his pose, FATHER CHENILLE inches his way off to close the curtain.*)

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 3

(*The next day.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. So that was you? With a blue towel over your head?

SALLY. That's right.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. All so you could mask Sister Augusta and Sister Philamena's deceit?

SALLY. I suppose so.

SISTER AUGUSTA. We're sorry, Mother Superior.

SISTER PHILAMENA. It was for a good cause. If those bottles hadn't broken, we'd have raised all the money we needed.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I shall deal with you two later. And the second time?

SALLY. Someone removed the battery from my car. I bought a new one and returned with the mechanic. We came late at night, so no one would see us. While he was installing the new battery, I poked my head in and heard Paul say he wanted to cancel the performance. I couldn't let him give up on helping those orphans. So I started to say something at the exact same moment my car started with the radio blaring and the headlights on. I wasn't pretending to be the Blessed Mother, not that time, but once I realized you thought that's who I was, I didn't exactly correct you. I had no idea you'd give up sleep for weeks because of it! I still can't figure out why anyone would take my car battery . . .

GEORGE. (*Entering with KATE, who holds her newborn twins:*) I can explain that.

SISTER PHILAMENA. George! Kate!

SISTER AUGUSTA. And the babies!

(*They all rush over to see them.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Shouldn't you be in the hospital, Kate?

GEORGE. The doctor ordered her to stay. But you know Kate . . .

KATE. (*Handing one off to each sister:*) This is Evelyn. And this is her baby brother, Adam.

SALLY. Adam and Eve?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. They're beautiful!

KATE. Tell her, George.

GEORGE. I took the battery out of your car, Sally.

SALLY. You? But why, George?

GEORGE. You hadn't come around at all since you left. You hadn't seen Paul. And I knew Paul's feelings for you. And I suspected yours for him. I needed you to stay a while longer to see if you and Paul still . . . Well, it wasn't the best plan, but it worked. You're back.

SALLY. I guess. But I'm still sending you the bill for my battery.

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering:)* May I present: Father Paul!

PAUL. *(Entering:)* Not yet, Pop. The ordination isn't for another hour.

FATHER CHENILLE. He was superb this morning! Both masses, knocked the sermon right out of the park.

PAUL. Thanks to the hypnosis.

SISTER AUGUSTA. *(Dawning on her:)* So that's it!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Congratulations!

KATE. We're so proud of you, Paul!

FATHER CHENILLE. The babies!

KATE. Evelyn and Adam.

PAUL. Adam and Eve?

SALLY. That's what I said!

(SISTER AUGUSTA hands one baby over to FATHER CHENILLE. SISTER PHILAMENA hands the other to MOTHER SUPERIOR.)

FATHER CHENILLE. Congratulations, Grand-Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. And to you, Grand-Father Chenille.

PAUL. Tell them the good news, Pop!

FATHER CHENILLE. Cardinal Bluejay loved the show!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Really?

FATHER CHENILLE. It turns out, he doesn't speak English. In fact, he liked it so much he promised to match all the money we made last night dollar for dollar!

KATE. How wonderful!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Glory be!

(Hands over her baby to FATHER CHENILLE, who sits and holds both.)

I'll get the proceeds so we count them.

(Goes into the high holy closet and pulls out an envelope.)

PAUL. I couldn't have done it without you, Sally. Whenever I doubt myself you find a way to make me believe I can do anything.

SALLY. You can, Paul. I mean, look: you're about to become a priest.

KATE. Dad, are you crying?

FATHER CHENILLE. They're beautiful, Kate. They're both so precious!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I knew your father would melt. He's always loved babies.

KATE. Aw, Dad . . . *(Motioning the envelope:)* Well, shall we?

PAUL. I suppose so.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR sits and removes money from the envelope and begins to count it. The others gather around watching intensely. Pulling SALLY aside:)

PAUL. Sally, I have a confession to make.

SALLY. Don't you need a priest for that?

PAUL. Pop hypnotized me so I could get over my fear of public speaking.

SALLY. Well, based on your performance last night, he's as good a hypnotizer as he is a magician. You froze colder than a polar bear eating a snow cone at Santa's workshop.

PAUL. I have a word that snaps me out of it. Pop asked me to choose something I don't hear very often.

SALLY. So that's it! After the show he kept going on and on about someone saying the word "silly."

PAUL. Yeah, but "silly" wasn't the word. Pop didn't have his reading glasses on so he misread it.

SALLY. So what was the word supposed to be?

PAUL. "Sally."

SALLY. Oh.

PAUL. It's just, I hadn't seen you for months. None of us had. I was still having a hard time without you.

SALLY. I get it, Paul.

PAUL. No, Sally, you don't. I thought things were over between us. I thought I'd never see you again. But then you came back and . . . I've never stopped loving you, Sally. Ever. But I need to know, once and for all. Do you still love me?

SALLY. I do.

PAUL. And can we make it work this time? Really make it work? Not let your job get in the way?

SALLY. It's not my job I'm worried about, Paul.

PAUL. Oh yeah . . .

SALLY. It's too late. Your father's retiring and moving away. But if this were different, then yes! I know we could make it work this time. Because you're the star of my show.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. All right, everybody. I have the final tally.

KATE. Well?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Including the money Paul and George and Kate have given, and the matching funds Cardinal Bluejay has promised, after selling every single ticket and considering all the refunds we gave back: we made a grand total of . . . *(Beat)* 3,120 dollars.

KATE. Oh, no!

GEORGE. That's barely half.

PAUL. That's with Cardinal Bluejay's match?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm afraid so.

KATE. *(Rushing over to hug PAUL:)* Oh, Paul . . .

PAUL. We did the best we could, Kate.

SISTER PHILAMENA. The money isn't due until tomorrow morning, when the bank opens. What if we did another performance tonight?

(Everyone stares at her.)

Or not.

PAUL. We tried. I'm proud of all us for that.

(Phone rings.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'll get it.

(Exits into the kitchen.)

SALLY. What was that?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The phone in the kitchen.

SALLY. Since when does this convent have a phone?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. We got it three months ago. I guess we're lucky you didn't know or you might not have come. Just like it was lucky someone called you about the orphanage.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR walks away as SALLY stares suspiciously at her.)

KATE. *(To FATHER CHENILLE, who is sobbing:)* Dad, it'll be ok . . .

FATHER CHENILLE. It's not that. I can't leave! I can't move away. Not with my precious grandbabies here.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Oh, Lawrence . . . !

PAUL. Pop, are you saying that you don't want to retire anymore?

FATHER CHENILLE. No, Paul, I don't. But I will. It's your turn now.

PAUL. But what if I told you I didn't want to be a priest?

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Hands the babies back to GEORGE and KATE:)* Don't you?

PAUL. I only said I did because you needed someone to take over the parish. But if you want to stay . . .

FATHER CHENILLE. But your ordination . . .

PAUL. We'll cancel it.

FATHER CHENILLE. But Cardinal Bluejay traveled all this way to conduct the ceremony.

PAUL. We'll give him a different ceremony to conduct instead. *(Dropping down on one knee:)* Sally Andrews, no one in this world makes me crazier than you. You are the first thing I think about in the morning, and the last thing I think about at night. I never want the fun we have to end. They say that good things come to those who wait. Well, I've been waiting for you for a very, very long time. So, Sally Ann Andrews, will you do me the honor of finally becoming my wife?

SALLY. Yes! Yes! A thousand times yes!

(They kiss.)

FATHER CHENILLE. Abraca-luiah!

(He pulls a bouquet from thin air and gives it to SALLY. To PAUL:)

Like I said, you never know when you need these!

(He kisses SALLY on the cheek.)

Welcome to the family!

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Running back on:*) It's a miracle!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What is, Sister Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. That was Mr. Piedmont on the phone. He was at the show last night. Afterward, he asked me why we didn't bring him the wine. He had over two hundred people wanting to buy it. I told him about the bottles falling off the truck, and how we only had one bottle left. He brought it to his shop this morning and there was a bidding war. He sold it this morning for five thousand dollars!

FATHER CHENILLE. Oh my Heavens!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Glory be!

SISTER PHILAMENA. We not only have enough to save the orphanage, but we can give them an extra three thousand dollars as well!

KATE. The orphans have a home!

(*She and GEORGE hug.*)

SISTER AUGUSTA. Our wine saved the day!

(*She and SISTER PHILAMENA hug.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm glad you're staying, Lawrence. It would have been lonely here without you.

(*She sits beside him, each with a baby in their arms.*)

PAUL. Well, soon-to-be Mrs. Billings, what do you think about all this?

SALLY. I think it's swell, Mr. Billings. Everything is just swell!

(*They kiss.*)

(*Lights fade to black.*)

End of Play

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Mr. Perfect

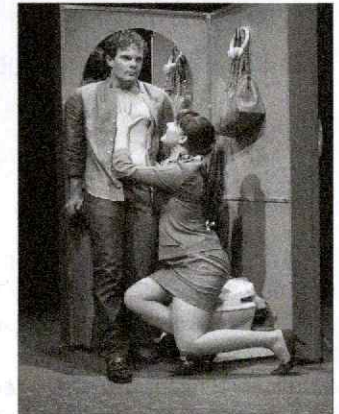
by William Missouri Downs

Comedy

70-90 minutes

2 f, 2 m

(4-5 actors possible: exactly 2 f, 2-3 m)



Flight attendant Zooeey is looking for a happy ending, but real life doesn't always cooperate. Even when she meets Jeffery, the hunky narrator of her favorite romance audiobook, he can't get her mile-high-club fantasy right. But everyone's trying to tell themselves a story: while Zooeey likes sweeping epics and heaving bosoms, Donna writes self-help books, and Ralph's working on a thesis about the ways people search for meaning. Set in the complicated dating scene of New York City, *Mr. Perfect* is a wry and quirky comedy that explores the notion of fate.



Consider the Oyster

by David MacGregor

Comedy

100-110 minutes

3 females, 2 males

(4-5 actors possible)

When Gene breaks his leg after proposing to girlfriend Marisa, he begins to feel some odd changes. It turns out the oyster shell that the doctor left in his leg to assist with his healing is causing him to slowly transition into a female—just the way an oyster does. Can Gene learn to live his life as a different gender, and will he—or she—be able to feel the same for his fiancée? *Consider the Oyster* is a funny and surprising exploration of gender and our changeable human nature.

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