

(She sees the telegram on the trunk.)

What's this?

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. From Rome!

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

Don't dawdle, Sisters! George needs salvation!

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. You lied to Mother Superior!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. That sounds awfully risky!

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

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

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

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

(PHILAMENA rushes back in carrying two buckets.)

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

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

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

SISTER AUGUSTA. How can we be considered insignificant?

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

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

(Notices the buckets.)

What are those buckets for, Sister Philamena?

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

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

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

(PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA exit.)

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

(MOTHER SUPERIOR exits back into her room.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Looking around:)

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

SALLY. You just said you went to Catholic school!

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

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

PAUL. That's not funny!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SALLY. Thanks a lot.

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

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

SALLY. So, all they do here is sew?

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

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

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

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

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

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

SALLY. Paul? Where'd you go?

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering:)* Hello?

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

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

SALLY. You do?

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

SALLY. But I'm not—

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

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

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Not what?

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

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

(*She exits.*)

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

SALLY. Isn't that wonderful!

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

PAUL. Why didn't you correct her?

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

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

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

PAUL. It's the same thing!

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

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

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

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

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

SALLY. She's coming back. Hide!

(*He hides back in the closet.*)

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

SALLY. What time does that happen?

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

SALLY. Who's that?

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

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

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

SALLY. Oh, right. Him.

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

SALLY. The order...?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, dear.

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The...Alphabetical Order?

SALLY. Yes, we...filed things.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I've never heard of it.

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

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How charitable!

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

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

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

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

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

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

SALLY. Yes, of course. Praying.

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

(She starts to exit.)

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

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

(She exits.)

SALLY. Paul?

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

SALLY. Are you nuts?

PAUL. We can't do this!

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

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

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

PAUL. That's not true!

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

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

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

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

(Beat.)

You never even tried to reschedule the wedding.

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

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

SALLY. I do not!

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. Yes, Father.

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

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

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

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

FATHER CHENILLE. I would indeed.

(He exits to the kitchen.)

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. You're certain?

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Thank you, Sister.

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

Ah, Father Paul.

PAUL. Good morning, Mother Superior.

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

PAUL. Yes, quite nice.

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

PAUL. I'm fine, thank you.

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

PAUL. Of course, Mother.

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

PAUL. I beg your pardon?

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

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

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

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

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

(PAUL *nods nervously.*)

There is a deceiver in this very convent!

PAUL. Wh-wh-wh-what?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father, you're stuttering.

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

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

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

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

PAUL. Mary Catherine?

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

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

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

PAUL. What would you like me to do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Disguise yourself as a nun!

PAUL. I beg your pardon?

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

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

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

(Hearing voices off:)

Here she comes. Hide in here!

(She shoves him in the closet.)

I don't want her to see you.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR hides in the pressing room.)

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

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

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

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

SISTER AUGUSTA. Confess! Confess!

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

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I beg of you!

PAUL. No!

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Please!

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Please!

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Please!

PAUL. *(Within:)* No!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Within:)* Pleeeeease!

PAUL. *(Within:)* Noooooo!

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

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

PAUL. Orphans?

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

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

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

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. Father Paul?

PAUL. Sister Philamena, right?

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

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. Not really, why?

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. Goodbye, Father.

(Neither leaves.)

PAUL. I'll see you later.

SISTER PHILAMENA. All right.

(Neither moves.)

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

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

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

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

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Father Chenille!

FATHER CHENILLE. Hello there, Sister!

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

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. God is speaking to me!

FATHER CHENILLE. What!?!

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

FATHER CHENILLE. Really?

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

FATHER CHENILLE. Whose?

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

FATHER CHENILLE. His? What did he say?

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

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

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

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

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

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

(He exits outside.)

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

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

Who's Father Paul?

(GEORGE enters with a box of wine bottles.)

Oh, Father!

GEORGE. Excuse me?

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

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

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

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

(MARY CATHERINE starts crying. GEORGE softens.)

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

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

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

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

(They exit outside.)

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

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

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Right, sorry.

(She goes into the closet.)

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

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

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

ACT I

Scene 1

(Later that day.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Certainly, Father.

GEORGE. Have you ever been in love?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What do you mean?

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

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

GEORGE. Charlotte or Emily?

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

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

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

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

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

GEORGE. Almost?

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

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

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

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What!?!

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Then who are you?

GEORGE. I'm the groundskeeper!

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

GEORGE. I know. And it was just wonderful!

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

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

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

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

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

GEORGE. No I won't! I swear!

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

GEORGE. Mary Catherine!

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

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

(*MARY CATHERINE glares at him.*)

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

(*She storms out.*)

FATHER CHENILLE. What was that all about?

GEORGE. She knows I'm not a priest!

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

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

(*He exits.*)

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

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

FATHER CHENILLE. I trust you're feeling better?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Fully revived, Father.

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No, of course not!

FATHER CHENILLE. How can you be certain?

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

FATHER CHENILLE. You have a sister?

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes. She's French.

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

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

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

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

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

SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother.

(She and PHILAMENA start to exit.)

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

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

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. The box, Mother Superior?

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. From where?

SISTER PHILAMENA. George's cabin.

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

(PHILAMENA starts to sweat.)

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

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

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister, answer me!

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I've asked you a question!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Tell me this instant!

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

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

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

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

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'm so sorry, Mother!

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

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Saints forgive us!

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

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

GEORGE. What do you mean, Mother Superior?

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

GEORGE. But she's not— I mean...

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

GEORGE. You do?

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I hadn't noticed.

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

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

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

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

GEORGE. Still...

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

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

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

GEORGE. Maybe not...

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

GEORGE. Yes, Mother Superior...

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

GEORGE. Yes, Mother Superior.

(She exits. GEORGE tastes a little punch.)

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

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

Better.

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

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

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

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

GEORGE. What do you mean?

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

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass and refills it.)

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

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass and refills it.)

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

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

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass.)

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

GEORGE. Good luck.

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

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

(He passes out behind the table.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

FATHER CHENILLE. Certainly, Cardinal Redding, certainly.

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

Ah, punch!

(He drinks a quick glass.)

My, this is quite tasty.

(He refills it and drinks another.)

Quite tasty, indeed!

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

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PAUL. Sally, let's go!

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

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

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

PAUL. Not if it means hurting people.

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

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

SALLY. Is that what all this is about?

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

SALLY. Paul...

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

SALLY. Oh, Paul!