

Eclipsed

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Wordsonthetreet

Location: *Interior of Convent-Laundry*

Time: *Act 1 Scene 1 and Act 2 Scene 6 are set in 1992. All other scenes are set in 1963.*

Characters: *Sister Virginia (White-veiled novice)*
Mother Victoria (Black-veiled Mother Superior)

The nuns are dressed in veil-coif-domino-guimpe (armour-like pre-Vatican 2 clothing with large black Rosary beads and long black leather belts).

Juliet: A seventeen-year old orphan.

Rosa: Daughter of Brigit, who has been adopted and raised by a well-to-do American family.

Penitent Women (Unmarried mothers)

Cathy

Nellie-Nora

Mandy

Brigit

The penitents are dressed in shapeless worn-out overalls with white aprons, black laced-up shoes and thick black stockings.

Nellie-Nora to be aged for Act 1 Scene 1 and for Act 2 Scene 6.

Set

Purple muslin drapes/cobwebs/washing hang from top of set. Centre hanging/drape covers basket downstage, other hanging drapes are spaced at intervals upstage. In **Act 1 Scene 2** the drapes are used as background/cloister for **Morning-Call** in convent and chapel.

At opening of **Act 1 Scene 3** the drapes are pulled away energetically by the women to reveal work-room in laundry. Door up centre leads to corridor with convent/cloister on right and washing-machine area of laundry on left.

Sound

Orchestral introduction to *He was despised* from Handel's Oratorio *Messiah* and part of the contralto aria *He was despised*, sung by Kathleen Ferrier are used in **Act 1 Scene 1** and in **Act 2 Scene 6**.

Plain Chant and Elvis songs may be recorded.

PROLOGUE

Act 1 Scene 1

Time: 1992

Sound: *Orchestral Introduction to He Was Despised from Handel's Messiah continues with lines sung by Kathleen Ferrier "He was despised. Despised and rejected. Rejected of men."*

(In darkness Nellie-Nora and Rosa come down stairs into dusty, cobwebby basement. Nellie-Nora with dragging-slipper-walk carries torch and a bundle of large keys. Large laundry basket covered with suspended drape down centre. Nellie-Nora, breaks through cobwebs /drapes. Small cupboard with shelves down left. An old St. Brigit's Cross hangs on cupboard. Old radio on top shelf. Nellie-Nora searches for light-switch, puts on light. Music stops. Rosa is dressed in to-day's fashion.)

Nellie-Nora: You've come such a long distance! From London (Boston, New York, Los Angeles)!

Rosa: It's not so far, Nellie-Nora! It's only an hour (5 hours) on the plane!

Nellie-Nora: I hope you find something to help you.
I hope you find what you're looking for.

Rosa: I hope so, Nellie-Nora! When I found her name, Brigit Murphy, and this address in my adoption papers, I had to come!

Nellie-Nora: Anything that's left from those times is in this basket!

(Rosa moves to basket. Nellie-Nora opens basket. Creaks of old basket. Pause. Nellie-Nora takes out a nun's black habit, holds it up, folds it across her arm. She then takes out Sister Virginia's pinned together white coif-veil-domino, holds it up. Taking habit and veil-coif, she shuffles/fades towards exit, but stays at exit.)

Rosa: Thank you, Nellie-Nora!

(As Nellie-Nora shuffles towards exit, low lighting shows shadowy shapes of Mandy, Brigit, Sister Virginia and Cathy behind drapes. Very shadowy scene. Rosa searches in basket and takes out an old apron, a sheet and mannikin's head. In an old Black Magic chocolate box, she finds black-and-white photographs, examines them, turns one over and reads.)

Rosa: "To Mandy Prenderville with all my love.
Yours forever and ever and ever. Your Darling, Elvis Aron Garon Presley."

Ghostly women's voices sing one line of Elvis' song.

"Well, since my baby left me"

(Rosa smiles. Turns over another photograph and reads)

Rosa: "Rem. the Carnival in Cillnamona, the great craic, Brigit!
Yours forever, John-Joe." – Brigit!
"To Brigit from John-Joe." – John-Joe!
Who is he?

Pause. Takes another photograph. Reads.

Rosa: My baby Rosa. My beautiful baby.

(Rosa stares at photograph. Takes a large battered ledger from basket, opens it, flicks through pages, stops, opens other pages, stops. Reads.)

Rosa: Penitent women in Saint Paul's Laundry, Killmacha, 1963 Dempsey, Mary Kate – a boy, James. Signed in by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Dempsey. O'Donnell, Betty Ann – a girl, Agnes. Signed in by her parents. McNamara, Cathy –

Voice of Cathy:

Twin girls, Michele and Emily. Signed in –

Rosa: Langan, Nellie-Nora –

(Rosa turns to Nellie-Nora as Nellie-Nora exits.)

Rosa: Nellie-Nora?

Woman's Voice:

A stillborn boy. Signed in by her employer,
Mr. Persse. –

Rosa: Mannion, Julia –

Voice of Juliet:

A girl, Juliet. Signed in –

Rosa: Prenderville, Mandy –

Voice of Mandy:

A boy, premature, stillborn.

Rosa: Murphy, Brigit –

Brigit's Voice: A girl, Rosa.

(Searches and finds baby-photograph in chocolate box.)

Rosa: *(puzzled)* Brigit Murphy – a girl, Rosa? –
My Mother! – Penitent?

(Rosa moves to small cupboard down left, searches through shelf, touches St. Brigit's Cross, old radio and, as if following Nellie-Nora, exits through drapes.)

Straight into Morning Call, Act 1 Scene 2

Act 1 Scene 2

MORNING CALL

Time: 1963

Sister Virginia, holding lighted candle, moves between cloister-drapes and rings small handbell.

Sister Virginia: *(Chants)* Benedicamus Domino!

Voice of a nun: *(Chants)* Deo Gratias!

(At each "cell door" Sister Virginia repeats morning call and a voice answers.)

Four Calls.

(Sister Virginia quenches candle and exits through drapes.)

Straight into Act 1 Scene 3 Cathy's Birthday.

Act 1 Scene 3

CATHY'S BIRTHDAY

Time: 1963

Lighting: *Low. Straight from Scene 2 Morning Call. Nellie-Nora, Brigit and Mandy enter energetically through purple drapes. Mandy and Brigit pull down drapes, fold them rhythmically and put them on shelves up right. Colour of drapes contrasts with darkness of walls. Old shop mannikin wearing Bishop's crimson soutane with white surplice folded across shoulder up left. Energy, light!*

Sound: *Women sing "Heartbreak Hotel" (Elvis style)*
"Well, since my baby left me
I found a new place to dwell.
Is down at the end of lonely street
At Heartbreak Hotel.
I'll be so lonely, baby!
Well, baby, so lonely!
Well, baby, so lonely I could die!"

(Nellie-Nora works at ironing-board down left.)

Mandy: Any sign of him, Nellie-Nora?

(Nellie-Nora runs down centre, and stands on chair, her back to audience. She balances old cracked mirror towards imaginary window as she tries to see the outside world in response to Mandy's query.)

Mandy: *(excitedly)* Is he here yet?

Nellie-Nora: Aahk! The window's too high up, Mandy! There's no light! The glass is too thick! It's like the bottom of a jam-jar! This mirror's cracked too! Shh! – I thought I heard something! – Maybe it's himself! – No! – No!

Brigit: *(imitating Mother Victoria's voice)* Whaaat are you doing, Nellie-Nora? You're a disgrace! What about His Lordship's linen?

(own voice)

Careful! If you break that mirror, you'll have seven years bad luck! *(Mandy smiles.)*

Nellie-Nora: Sure I must have broken a lorry-load of mirrors to end up in this saltmine!

(Nellie-Nora blesses herself and manipulates mirror again. Mandy genuflects towards Brigit.)

Nellie-Nora: No sign of him, Mandy! Maybe he got a puncture! Ahh! I thought I might see a little sunshine between the iron bars. Mother o'God! Back to penance!

(A convent bell rings. Mandy takes mirror and tries to see the outside world.)

Brigit: Never mind that fella, Mandy! Sure you don't even know his name!

Mandy: He's a smasher, Brigit! Did you never hear him whistling to me?

(Nellie-Nora searches her pockets.)

Nellie-Nora: Where did I put that butt? A match, Mandy! A match quick!

Mandy: Here, Nellie-Nora!

(Nellie-Nora lights cigarette butt and keeps it between her lips as she speaks.)

Nellie-Nora: Mmn! That's better!

Mandy: Aah! No sign!

Nellie-Nora: Keep trying, Mandy!

Brigit: Shhhh! She's coming!
(Brigit and Mandy rush to wash-board-basins and pretend to work. Nellie-Nora puts out cigarette, hides it in fold of her short stocking and returns to ironing-board down left. Mother Victoria enters, nose high in the air and stands down centre.)

Mother Victoria:
 I hope His Lordship's linen is ready, Brigit!
 Show me that surplice, Nellie-Nora!

(Nellie-Nora comes forward with surplice. Mother Victoria examines it.)

Mother Victoria:
 Mmn! Careful with this Carrickmacross lace!
 Are His Lordship's shoes cleaned and mended? Buckles shone?

Nellie-Nora: They're nearly ready, Mother Victoria!

Mother Victoria:
 Mmn! His Lordship is leaving for Rome on Tuesday!

Brigit: Rome! The lucky beggar!

Mother Victoria:
 Did you say something, Brigit?

Brigit: No, Mother! Yes, Mother! I said "Rome", Mother!

Mother Victoria:
 His Lordship'll be talking to His Holiness. Maybe he'll say a prayer for you, Brigit! I'll be back!

(Exit Mother Victoria. Women continue to work.)

Brigit: Rome! Sunshine! Wine! And look at us!
 That rip Victoria! God, how I hate her!
 Some day I'll put her through the washing machines! Then I'll smather her with red hot irons! Herself and His Lordship with his buckled shoes!

Mandy: Get her keys first, Brigit!

(Brigit moves towards mannikin as she says)

Brigit: Himself with His High Falutin' pretence!
 Dressing up in foll-de-doll lace and flying off to Rome!

Nellie-Nora: But he's a Prince of the Church, Brigit!
 Mother Victoria told me!

Brigit: So, Brigit here will be Prince of the Church too! Get me my crozier, Mandy! – The mop! Quick!

(Brigit puts on surplice. Mandy doesn't move.)

Nellie-Nora: Ah, Brigit! be careful!

Brigit: I'll get it myself!
(Nellie-Nora and Mandy watch Brigit. Brigit uses upside down mop as crozier.)

Brigit: Gawd bless you, my scrubbers! Don't squint at me, Nellie-Nora! Stand up straight all of you! Knees together! Say, "Good awfternoon, my Lord!"

Nellie-Nora and Mandy:
 Good afternoon, my Lord!

Brigit: Will you forget your bog accents! Say "Good awfternoon, my Lord!"

Nellie-Nora and Mandy:
 Good awfternoon, my Lord! *(They bow.)*

Nellie-Nora: What, my Lord, are you doing in Purgatory?

Brigit: A good question! Here's a tenner, Nellie-Nora, for cigarettes. Your favourite Woodbines! I like a smoke myself – a cigar of course! Say "Thank you", Nellie-Nora!

Nellie-Nora: You're very generous, my Lord!

Mandy: What about me, Brigit? – I mean, Bishop, Brigit.

Brigit: My dear, Mandy I bless you! You are now head Bottle-Washer. And you, Nellie-Nora, the Most Reverend Mother! This Big Shiny

Key (*mop*) opens the pantry and cellar!
You'll find plenty of cream-cakes, roast beef,
French Wine – and Port!

Mandy: French Wine! Mmn!

Nellie-Nora: Roast beef!

Brigit: Port!

(*Mandy finds an underpants. Nellie-Nora lights a cigarette butt.*)

Mandy: My Lord! Your underpants! Freshly starched
and trimmed with Carrickmacross lace!

(*Brigit takes underpants and pulls it over Mandy's head.*)

Brigit: I told you, Mandy, that the handling of my
underpants is a Mortal Sin!

(*Enter Sister Virginia. Her white veil is pinned back.*)

Sister Virginia:
Brigit! Stop! Stop immediately!

(*Brigit takes off surplice. Nellie-Nora places it on shoulder of
mannikin.*)

Nellie-Nora: Yes, Sister Virginia! Sorry, Sister!

Sister Virginia:
Please, Mandy! Put that away!

Mandy: Sorry, Sister Virginia!

Sister Virginia:
Mind that cigarette, Nellie-Nora! You might
burn the precious Carrickmacross lace!

(*The women smile. Keys rattle. Mother Victoria enters with
Cathy. Cathy rubs her head and is in tears.*)

Mother Victoria:
Back to work immediately, Cathy! You've
wasted the morning! Hurry with the Athlone
baskets! Hurry! To your tub, Mandy, and tie
back that hair! Mmn! – Do I smell cigarettes?
Is anyone smoking here, Sister Virginia?
Mmn! This area is in a dreadful mess! It's a
disgrace! What would His Lordship say?

Have it cleaned immediately, Sister!

Sister Virginia:
Yes, Mother Victoria!

(*Exit Mother Victoria. Sister Virginia picks up small threads
from floor and exits. Brigit grimaces. Mandy and Nellie-Nora
approach Cathy, who stands at table up right of centre.*)

Mandy: What happened, Cathy? You didn't – did
you – you didn't try it again?

Nellie-Nora: Mother o'God, Cathy! Did you?

Cathy: Mmn! (*Moans*)

(*The women resume work. Pause.*)

Cathy: (*slowly*) After Mass – while Mother Victoria
– was serving Father Durcan's breakfast – I
hid in the Confession box! Father Durcan
left to collect his car. He never closes the
front door. – He drove off without closing
the main gate either! I hid behind the beech
tree! And I got out! Out on the main road!

Mandy: Outside? Oh, Cathy! Outside!

Cathy: Yes! Outside on the road! But I was like this!
No coat! As I walked up the hill, I could
smell the sea! The sun was shining on me at
last! – A fella passed on a bike – whistling!
Mandy: A fella whistlin'! Oooh, Cathy, what
happened? Did you see any smashers when
you were out?

Cathy: No smashers, Mandy! No! A few children
pointed at me, laughed and called me
names. A laundry van passed, turned around
and came at me. I fought. I bit them. I
screamed. – But they brought me
back. – Mother Victoria gave me a mug of
strong tea and the usual sermon! (*She rubs
her head.*) – But I'm getting out! I'll keep
trying! I'm getting out!

Brigit: Bastards! That rip Victoria has her spies everywhere!

(Is interrupted by Sister Virginia who returns with clip-board and pen. Pause. Mother Victoria enters with a bundle of letters.)

Mother Victoria:

Give these letters out at tea-break, Sister!
Not until tea-break! His Lordship's linens first! Then the Athlone baskets! They mustn't be delayed!

(Exit Mother Victoria. Brigit looks at Nellie-Nora.)

Brigit: It's a gallon o'bleach I need!

Mandy: To-day is Cathy's birthday, Sister! The letters, please!

Sister Virginia:

Will you not wait? It's almost tea-break, Mandy! *(looks at watch)* These tablecloths must be

Mandy: *(interrupts)* Aah, Sister, please!

Brigit: Do you hear that, Nellie-Nora? His Lordship's tablecloths must be snow-white!

Nellie-Nora: I washed them by hand, Sister!

Brigit: And just the right amount of starch, Nellie-Nora!

Sister Virginia:

Starch, Nellie-Nora?

Nellie-Nora: I starched them myself, Sister!

Sister Virginia:

Thank you, Nellie-Nora!

Brigit: The ironing of His Lordship's tablecloths?

Mandy: The letters, please!

Nellie-Nora: I ironed them too, Sister!

Brigit: Raise up yer hearts, ye washerwomen! The Palace tablecloths are pure-perfect! Alleluia! Alleluia!

(Sister Virginia checks tablecloths as Mandy tries to peep at letters. Tea-bell rings. Sister Virginia gives out letters.)

Sister Virginia:

One for you, Mandy. Posted in New York!

Brigit: From Elvis himself, I suppose!

Sister Virginia:

One for you, Cathy! Look at the size of it!
And one for you, Brigit! Sorry, Nellie-Nora!
None for you.

Nellie-Nora: It's alright, Sister! If I got a letter now, I'd die of shock! I'll get the tea to-day, Cathy!

(Nellie-Nora exits. Brigit tears open letter, sits on basket down right and reads. Cathy and Mandy turn their backs and open letters. Cathy turns to Sister Virginia.)

Cathy: Look, Sister! From my twins! A beautiful birthday card! "To Mammy on her birthday. Love, Michele and Emily."

Sister Virginia:

(sadly) Happy Birthday, Cathy.

(Sister Virginia exits. Cathy stares at card and traces the words with her finger.)

Cathy: Am I ever going to be a mother to them?
(Brigit crumples her letter and stuffs it into her pocket.)

Mandy: He's coming! He's coming to visit! Elvis is coming!

Brigit: But he was to come last Christmas, Mandy!

Mandy: *(excitedly)* This time Elvis is coming for sure! My cousin Betty-Ann in America says so! Look here in this letter! I'll have to get ready! *(change of tone)* I'll have to be beautiful for him!

(Nellie-Nora returns with tray on which are old mugs, an old tea-pot and a plate of bread and jam.)

Nellie-Nora: Come on, girls! We'll have a party!

(The women take mugs of tea and bread. They eat hungrily. Brigit sits on basket. Mandy sits on ground. Cathy sits on side of table. Nellie-Nora stands. Pause as they eat. Nellie-Nora gives Cathy a small medal.)

Nellie-Nora: It's only a small Holy Medal, Cathy! Wear it around your neck!

Cathy: Thanks, Nellie-Nora! I'll always wear it!

Brigit: A present for you, Cathy! A few love-hearts!

Cathy: Oh, Brigit, thanks!

(Cathy opens paper-bag, takes out a sweet and reads "Forever and ever." Mandy moves towards Cathy.)

Mandy: Happy birthday, Cathy! I made it myself!

It's a pink lacy hanky!

Cathy: It's gorgeous, Mandy! Thanks! Grand-Aunt Elizabeth used to teach me lace-making before I – before I came here!

Mandy: It's only shop-lace, Cathy! Nobody ever taught me how to make lace! – I'd love to make a long lacy dress for myself!

(Mandy moves around rhythmically)

Nellie-Nora: A long lacy dress would suit you, Mandy!

(Cathy is quiet as she looks at presents.)

Mandy: Yes, Nellie-Nora! – Pretend we're in – in Paris! And we're having a huge party for Cathy!

Sound: *(Voice of Elvis "It's now or never!" in distance.)*

Mandy: The moon is shining on the Seine! People sit outside under the stars, drink wine and sing. Painters wear big hats and look for beautiful models.

Brigit: Elvis drops in! Sees our Mandy in her long lacy dress and falls madly in love with her!

Nellie-Nora: They dance all the way to the airport and fly off to Hollywood!

(Mandy, in fantasy, takes up a shirt and dances downstage. Nellie-Nora and Cathy dance and sing. Brigit dances with upside down mop.)

Sound up. *(Voice of Elvis)*

"It's now or never!

Come hold me tight!

Kiss me, my darling.

Be mine to-night.

To-morrow will be too late

It's now or never.

My love won't wait.

When I first saw you

With your smile so tender,

My heart was captured.

My soul surrendered.

I spent a lifetime

Waiting for the right time.

Now that you're near,

The time is here at last.

It's now or never.

Come hold me tight.

Kiss me, my darling.

Be mine to-night.

To-morrow will be too late –

For who knows when

We'll meet again this way."

(Music stops abruptly. Dancing stops. Mandy is disappointed.)

Pause.)

Cathy: I'd love a slice of home-made cake with sultanas and big juicy cherries!

Mandy Close your eyes and pretend! It'll be true if you pretend!

(The women close their eyes.)

Brigit: Grisreens and black-puddings! The smell of turf-smoke!

Mandy: Frilly fried eggs and potato-cakes!

Nellie-Nora: A big bit o'bacon!

Cathy: Almond icing off the Christmas cake!

Mandy: Flaky and crunchy chocolate!

Nellie-Nora: Loads of big floury potatoes!

Brigit: Smothered in butter!

Mandy: No! With nuts!

Brigit: Potatoes with nuts?

(They laugh.)

Cathy: Read my cup, Nellie-Nora! Here I'll give it another twist!

(Nellie-Nora takes mug. Pause.)

Nellie-Nora: *(hesitantly)* You'll be going on a long journey, Cathy! I see a crowd – a crowd of people! There's a lot of sweetness – lots of letters – and flowers. – Yes – I see sunshine! – Is that alright, Cathy?

Foreshadowing

Cathy: A long journey? Sweetness, Nellie-Nora! Thanks!

Mandy: Now mine, please! When is he comin'?
(Nellie-Nora is distressed by what she has seen in Cathy's cup/mug.)

Nellie-Nora: Wait a minute, Mandy! – Now – Ohhh, lucky stars are shining for you, Mandy! – Mother o'God, I see diamonds! Lucky diamonds!

Mandy: It must be Elvis! Has he blue-blue eyes? Shiny black hair? He's tall and – slim? Elvis? It is my Elvis!

(Mandy takes cup/mug and looks into it.)

Brigit: Stop, Nellie-Nora! stop!

Mandy: Ahh, Brigit! Go on, Nellie-Nora! How is he? My Elvis? Isn't he always thinking of me when he sings?

Brigit: Such fools!

Nellie-Nora: I'll read your cup, Brigit?

Brigit: No! Just tell me, that I'll find my baby! Never mind that cup o' tea-leaves!

Mandy: Do you love your John-Joe, Brigit?

Brigit: Love? What's love, Mandy? Love's a trick!

Cathy: Love. Forever and ever!

Mandy: True Love! *(Sings)*

“And I give to you
And you give to me
Love forever true!”

(speaks)

Richard used to sing that song to me – Every night after the dance he took me home in his shiny red car – We always folded down the seats in the back! – Lovely velvety seats. Every Sunday night! But, when I told him about the baby, he never spoke to me again! Ever! – I only saw him once in the distance after that. Before they brought me here. Oooh! I miss that shiny red car!

Brigit: Bastard! Didn't I tell you, Mandy! Love is a trick!

Nellie-Nora: Now you have your own Elvis, Mandy!

Mandy: Yes I have, Nellie-Nora! He's a smasher! Isn't he? – Why don't you read your own cup, Nellie-Nora?

Nellie-Nora: Aach! I know what's in my cup, Mandy!

(Work-Bell rings. Nellie-Nora collects tray and exits. She returns quickly and goes to ironing-board down left. Mandy takes out her scrap-book, kisses photographs and immediately

puts it back in apron-pocket. Brigit takes photograph, her paper-baby, from her apron-pocket, stares at it for a moment and returns to work at wash-board up right.

Machine **sound** up. Time passing. **Lights** lower.)

Straight into **Act 1 Scene 4 True Love**.

Act 1 Scene 4

TRUE LOVE

Set same as for Act 1 Scene 3. Purple drapes folded on shelves. Brigit, Cathy, Mandy and Nellie-Nora on stage. Sister Virginia enters with Juliet, a seventeen-year old girl. Juliet carries a bundle of linen. Sister Virginia takes a white apron from a hook and gives it to Juliet.

Sister Virginia:

This is Juliet. She'll be working with you for the next few months.

(Women stare at Juliet.)

Brigit: They're getting younger all the time! When is it arriving, Juliet?

Juliet: When is what arriving?

Nellie-Nora: The baby of course!

(Nellie-Nora takes bundle of linen from Juliet.)

Sister Virginia:

Juliet is from the orphanage! No baby, Nellie-Nora!

Cathy: Hello, Juliet!

Mandy: Juliet!

Nellie-Nora: Welcome, Juliet!

Brigit: Howya!

Cathy: The orphanage? St. Anthony's?

Juliet: Yes!

Cathy: Do you know my Michele and Emily? My twins? They're six years old. Do you know them?

Juliet: Oh! The twins! Blonde curly hair and blue eyes?

Cathy: Tell me about them please!

Juliet: Have you not seen them lately?

Cathy: No! No, Juliet! Are they growing fast? Do they eat enough?

Juliet: Yes! They're growing very fast. They'll be making their First Holy Communion next year!

Cathy: My babies making First Holy Communion! I must see my babies!

Sister Virginia:
(gently) Will you check the Athlone blankets for me, Cathy? Please? – Now we'll fold the sheets, Juliet. First we find the code. It's in the corner in red thread – see! We fold carefully this way. Corners together so!

(They stand down centre and fold sheets rhythmically. Women work in background.)

Sister Virginia:
You're seventeen now, Juliet. Have you been out at all – outside?

Juliet: No, Sister! I don't want to live out there!

Sister Virginia:
Why, Juliet? Your life's ahead of you!

Juliet: My Mammy lived here until she died. I want to stay in here!

Sister Virginia:
But you can't make a choice until you've been out.

Juliet: I'd hate to live out there! All those men!

Sister Virginia:
What men, Juliet? There are fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters – families!

Juliet: But look what happened to Mammy! No! No babies for me!

Sister Virginia:
Most men are good, Juliet!

Juliet: They're not! Men are oversexed! Mother Joachim said so, when I was working in the convent!

Sister Virginia:
Mother Joachim! Why did she say that?

Juliet: When I answered the side-door. When I screamed!

Sister Virginia:
You screamed! But why? Tell me, Juliet!

Juliet: You see, Mick, the vegetable man! He grabbed me here! Pushed me against the wall. Said he'd murder me – break my neck if I moved! Old Mother Benedict was just in time! She hit him a wollop with her big rosary beads, but Mother Joachim wouldn't believe me – that I didn't lead him on!

Sister Virginia:
(lifting sheets) He was just one man, Juliet! You mustn't stay in here! Take a job outside! Go away and see new places! Read the great books! Earn your own money. We're on an island here!

Juliet: But, Sister, I was never on a bus or a train! I'd be afraid!

Sister Virginia:
Put the sheets on the shelves now, Juliet. Cathy will give you something to sew. I'll – We'll pray for you.

Juliet: Thank you, Sister!
(Sister Virginia moves towards Cathy.)

Sister Virginia:
 Will you give Juliet something to sew,
 Cathy? *(Lowers her voice.)* See that she eats,
 that she finishes her meals.

Cathy: Yes, Sister! Can you sew on buttons, Juliet?

Juliet: Yes, Cathy!

Nellie-Nora: Look, Sister! More shirts from the seminary!
(Nellie-Nora gives Sister a bundle of white shirts. Sister Virginia examines them.)

Sister Virginia:
 Mmn! Buttons missing!

Juliet: Would there be many students in the
 seminary, Sister?

Sister Virginia:
 Yes, Juliet! Nearly every mother west of the
 Shannon has a son studying for the
 priesthood. Where I grew up all the fine
 young men enter a seminary!

Juliet: They never go out in the world?

Sister Virginia:
 Some go to Maynooth. Others prepare for
 the Foreign Missions.

Juliet: I'd like that! Teaching black babies!

Mandy: All those nice young men! What a waste!

Sister Virginia:
 They go to the Far East. Others to the
 States. Some to Africa. My three uncles, my
 cousin in Galway and my brother John are
 priests. Grand Aunt Teresa and Aunt Mary
 are nuns. The Island of Saints and Scholars
 is now an island of priests and nuns.

Cathy: My Uncle Jeremiah is a Canon!

Brigit: For all the good that'll do you, Cathy! Sure

my uncle is an Archbishop and look at me!

Sister Virginia:
 Will you help sew buttons on the shirts,
 Brigit?

Brigit: Buttons! Yes, Sister! I'll sew on a hundred
 buttons, if you give me the keys!

Sister Virginia:
 You know I can't –

Brigit: Ah, Sister! This letter I got from my cousin
 Katie in Cillnamona says that John-Joe is
 getting married next week! He doesn't
 know about Rosa! She's his baby too, Sister!
 I have to tell him! Please, Sister! The keys!

Sister Virginia:
 I can't, Brigit! I'm not in charge! –
 I'm sorry!

(Sister Virginia exits.)

Brigit: Bloody nuns! They dont give a damn!
 Damn! Damn! Damn His Lordship! Damn
 the Pope and all the bloody lot o' them!

(Juliet moves closer to Cathy.)

Juliet: Did you know my Mammy, Julia Mannion?

Cathy: Julia Mannion! Yes! I was with her when –
 she – got the heart attack.

Juliet: They wouldn't let me see her!

Cathy: We'll look after you, Juliet!

(Brigit examines a seminary shirt.)

Brigit: A hedge-tear in a seminary shirt!

Mandy: They play football and hurling, Brigit!

Brigit: Hurlin's smashin'! I played camogie at
 school! Got my head opened once! I had to
 get thirteen stitches!

Mandy: Football's better! All those lads rollin' around
 in the mud cursin' and swearin'!

Nellie-Nora: Better than kickin' people!

(Cathy has a bad attack of coughing, but says)
Cathy: My head! Oh, my head! Oh, God!
(Cathy holds head in her hands and sways in pain.)
Brigit: Take a rest, Cathy!
Nellie-Nora: Stop the sewing, Cathy!
Mandy: Is it the asthma, Cathy?
Cathy: I'll ask Sister Virginia for an aspirin!
(Cathy stumbles to door and exits.)
Mandy: She needs more than aspirin!
Juliet: What's wrong with Cathy? She's not dyin', is she?
Nellie-Nora: Cathy's worn out, Juliet! Her heart's broke!
Brigit: Wasn't it a rotten bastard, who left her in the lurch! Cathy never talks about him!
Nellie-Nora: She keeps quiet about him!
Juliet: Who is he?
Brigit: The father of her twins! Told nobody! – Some Big Shot, I suppose!
Nellie-Nora: Sure, maybe he's married!
Brigit: Or a Bishop!
Mandy: Or a film-star!
Brigit: Seven years without tellin' anyone! Women are fools!
Mandy: Would you like to see my scrap-book, Juliet?
(Mandy takes scrap-book from apron pocket.)
Juliet: What's in it? – Oh, snaps! I've snaps too! In my prayer-book!
Mandy: Of Elvis?
Juliet: No! Of Audrey Hepburn!
Mandy: Audrey Hepburn?
Juliet: Yes! She's so thin! You see, she doesn't eat bread or potatoes! That's why! Oooh, I'd love to be that thin!
Brigit: But you're as thin as a wisp, Juliet!
Juliet: No! I'm not! I'm huge!

(Enter Sister Virginia and Cathy. Mandy hides scrap-book.)
Sister Virginia:
 Take it easy with the mending, Cathy.
Nellie-Nora: Yes, Cathy! I'll help you in a minute!
Cathy: Thanks!
(Mother Victoria enters, walks downstage, beads and keys rattling. She beckons to Sister Virginia.)
Mother Victoria:
 There's a visitor, a Father McCarthy, to see you, Sister Virginia! Says he's a friend of your brother, Father John! I've told them in the kitchen. Tea in the small parlour. Ten minutes. I'll give you ten minutes. And remember. Custody of the eyes, Sister! I'll see you afterwards in the cloister.
Sister Virginia:
 Thank you, Mother Victoria!
(Sister brings forward her veil, unhooks her outerskirt, puts on big sleeves and exits.)
Mother Victoria:
 We'll say the Rosary together for a special intention. "Thou, O Lord wilt open my lips."
Brigit: But we said the Rosary while we were ironing the sheets for His Lordship's Palace! Five and a half decades, Mother!
Mandy: And Nellie-Nora offered them up for His Lordship, Mother!
Mother Victoria:
 Very good indeed, Nellie-Nora! I'll say my office here. You may sing hymns if you wish. Softly please! Hmmm *(She intones)* "The bells of the Angelus are calling to pray. In sweet tones announcing the sacred Ave Ave, Ave, Ave Maria. Ave, Ave, Ave Maria."