

(Brigit sings in contrast but uses same tune.)

“On top of old Smokey
All covered with snow.
I lost my true lover
From courtin’ too slow.”

Mother Victoria:

Aperi, Domine, os nostrum ad benedicendum
nomen sanctum tuum – Stop that rubbish!
Stop, Brigit! You’re a disgrace! In front of
this innocent young girl too! – How do you
like the laundry, Juliet?

Juliet: ‘Tis – alright, Mother Victoria! Thank you!

Mother Victoria:

Very good, Juliet! Is His Lordship’s linen
ready, Brigit? Tablecloths for the crimson
gold dining-room? Did you double-check
the mending?

Brigit: Aren’t we busy with the Athlone scrubbin’,
Mother Victoria?

Mother Victoria:

His Lordship must be looked after first!
Remember he’s a Prince of the Church!

(Brigit and Nellie-Nora exchange smiles.)

Mother Victoria walks to and fro downstage. Slight pause.)

Mother Victoria:

Aperi, Domine, os nostrum ad benedicendum
nomen sanctum tuum: numda quoque or
nostrum ab omnibus vanis, perversis et
alienis cogitationibus: intellectus illumina/
alienis cogitationibus: intellectus illumina/

Brigit: Nellie-Nora is knitting crimson combinations
for His Lordship to keep him comfortable
during those chilly evenings in Rome. Isn’t
that right, Nellie-Nora?

*(Nellie-Nora is in shock. Mother Victoria looks at Nellie-
Nora. Pause.)*

Nellie-Nora: It’s not a combinations, Mother! It’s a
jumper!

*(Mother Victoria continues to walk to and fro as she reads
office.)*

Mother Victoria:

– Ab omnibus vais, perversis et alienis
cogitationibus: intellectus illumina, affectus
inflamma, ut digne, attende ac devote hoc
beatae Virginis Mariae valeamus et exaudiri
mereamur ante divinae conspectum
Majestatis tuae –

Brigit:

“On top of Old Smokey
All covered with snow,
I lost my true lover
From courtin’ too slow.”

Mother Victoria:

Per Christum Dominum nostrum!
I’m saying my office, Brigit! Mmmn!
Mmmn!

Brigit: Yes, Mother! I’m sorry, Mother!

*(Mother Victoria exits in disgust. Pause. Brigit takes a piece
of linen, puts it on her head and imitating Mother Victoria’s
walk and voice says,)*

Brigit: I’m saying my office, Brigit!

(Women continue to wash, iron and sew.)

Cathy: *(sings softly)*

“And I give to you
And you give to me
Love forever true.” –

Brigit: Love forever true? Huhh!

*(Lights down. Brigit, Cathy, Nellie-Nora and Mandy freeze.
Machine sounds up for three seconds, then fade as Plain
Chant Credo comes up. Mother Victoria stands for a moment
at doorway upstage, inspects women, then exits.)*

Act 1 Scene 5

CREDO SCENE

Sound: One soprano voice sings
"Credo in unum Deum,
Patrem omnipotentem,
Factorem coeli et terrae,
Visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Et in unum Dominum, Jesum Christum,
Filium Dei unigenitum.
Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine.
Deum verum de Deo vero, genitum non
factum,
Consubstantialem Patri –

(Stage in darkness except highlight on Sister Virginia as she enters "convent chapel". She dips finger in Holy Water Font and makes Sign of Cross. Glow from stained-glass windows and Sanctuary Lamp. Sister Virginia walks downstage and kneels. She then lies prostrate, arms spread out in shape of cross for five seconds. She kneels in highlight and prays the Credo.)

Sister Virginia:

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Creator of Heaven and earth and in Jesus
Christ His only Son Our Lord, who was
conceived by the Holy Ghost – I believe
in God – God? – I believe in God – I try –
I believe in God the Father Almighty,

Creator of Heaven and earth and in Jesus
Christ His only Son Our Lord, who was
conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the
Virgin Mary –

Voice of Brigit:

Keys, Sister! My John-Joe is getting married
next week! He doesn't know about our baby!

Sister Virginia:

Creator of Heaven and earth and in Jesus
Christ His only Son Our Lord who was
conceived –

Voice of Brigit:

Keys! My baby, Rosa! I have to find my
baby!

Sister Virginia:

Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under
Pontius Pilate was crucified, died and was
buried –

(Sound of Cathy's breathing during asthma attack.)

Voice of Mandy:

It's Cathy! She's chokin', Sister!

Voice of Nellie-Nora:

A kettle! Steam! Hurry, Sister! Hurry!

Sister Virginia:

Was crucified, died and was buried. He
descended into Hell.

Voice of Mother Victoria:

Mandy thought she could leave if she wasn't
pregnant, so she performed an abortion on
herself!

Sister Virginia:

He descended into Hell. The third day He
arose from the dead.

Voice of Mother Victoria:

We give them food, shelter and clothing.

We look after their spiritual needs. No one else wants them! No one else wants them!

Sister Virginia:

The third day He arose from the dead. –

Voice of Mother Victoria:

A vow of Obedience, Sister! Blind Obedience!

Sister Virginia:

The third day he arose –

Sister Virginia:

Is it just a story from the East – from St. Paul?

A story? – The women need help from you, the Risen! But, did you rise from the dead? – You're supposed to be a Loving Father! Are you a God of Love? – A God of Justice? – I thought I'd be working for the poor! Am I being brain-washed? Will I become dehumanised too, if I stay here long enough? Locked in by Obedience? The Rule? Why are there changes in Our Holy Founder's Book? Was early Christian History rewritten too? Woman's witness submerged? – Christ Crucified! Help them! For a woman bore you, carried you for nine months! Mother of Jesus, do something about Cathy, Mandy, Nellie-Nora and the others! When you arose from that tomb, women were your first witnesses! Your first miracle was performed at your Mother's request! – Help us! – Help me!

(Sister Virginia makes sign of Cross, stands and exits. Lights up for Act 1 Scene 6 Effigy)

Act 1 Scene 6

EFFIGY

Hum of huge washing-machines. Bleach smells. Brigit and Mandy work at wash-tubs with wash-boards right of centre. Nellie-Nora at ironing-board down left. Mannikin dressed in Bishop's soutane (surplice folded across shoulder) up left. Cathy and Juliet are mending at work-table up centre. Large Laundry Basket down right. Linens on shelves up centre. Mannikin's head on lower shelf. Cathy has breathing difficulties.

Brigit: Spit out your troubles, Cathy! They'll rot your brain if you don't! 'Tis far from this dirt you were reared!

Cathy: Thanks, Brigit!

Nellie-Nora: Troubles you can't talk about – they're the bad ones *(shows Cathy a small mirror.)* I'm tellin' you, Cathy, you're better lookin' than Grace Kelly! Sure if Cary Grant, Bing Crosby or Frank Sinatra himself saw you, they'd all fall in love with you!

Mandy: But not Elvis! Remember he's mine! He belongs to me!

Cathy: You can keep your Elvis, Mandy! Thanks, Nellie-Nora!

Mandy: Elvis! That voice! Just to see him would be heaven!

Nellie-Nora: We'll all go to heaven when we die!

Brigit: Mmmn! What the hell good will that be?

Mandy: I want my heaven now with Elvis!

(Mandy takes out her scrap-book and examines snapshots.)

Mandy: I'll ask Sister Virginia for snaps of Elvis!
And one of Frank Sinatra for you, Cathy!

Cathy: Sister Virginia is not allowed look at filmstars.

Brigit: Only at Father Durcan! Some filmstar that fella! Face like the back of a bus!

Nellie-Nora: Mother o'God, Brigit! Don't forget he gave us the old radio!

Mandy: I could write to Elvis in Hollywood!

Brigit: No! Not again!
(Nellie-Nora blesses herself.)

Mandy: Juliet! Will you give me a pencil! Quick!

Juliet: You're going to write to a filmstar in America? Will he get the letter?

Mandy: Of course he will! Elvis gets all my letters!
(Juliet gives pencil to Mandy and looks on as Mandy writes.)

Mandy: Now! *(Slowly as she writes)*
"My dearest Elvis, Thank you for your beeeautiful wonderful photo! I'll keep it under my pillow! Please send me more photos of yourself for my scrap-book too. You're gorgeous! All my love and – a hundred kisses!

Juliet: A hundred kisses?
(Mandy puts crosses on letter.)

Mandy: Yours forever! – No! Yours forever and ever and ever! Your darling Mandy! Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!

Nellie-Nora: Your sweetheart sounds nicer!

Juliet: Maggie Brennan was writing a letter to a boy and she wrote S.W.A.L.K. – sealed with a loving kiss! Will you put that in too, Mandy?

Mandy: Yes! That's a great idea!

(Mandy writes S.W.A.L.K. She and Juliet giggle. Brigit is scornful.)

Brigit: Yours until hell freezes! And now the address! Your address, Mandy? Your address?

(Brigit snaps letter and reads)

Brigit: Saint Paul's Home for Penitent Women!
Home for the unwanted. The outcasts! Saint Paul's Home for the women nobody wants!

Mandy: No, Brigit! No! Give me my letter!
(Brigit and Mandy push one another. Mandy falls to floor.)

Brigit: How do you think that sounds? What'll he think? Ha? You'd be finished with him!
Finished forever and ever!

Mandy: *(sobbing)* No, Brigit! No address! Elvis will find me! Elvis will find his Mandy!

Brigit: Nobody wants you! Nobody wants any of us!
(Brigit throws letter on floor. Cathy stares at Brigit. Nellie-Nora walks towards Brigit.)

Nellie-Nora: Brigit!
(Brigit catches Cathy's accusing eye.)

Nellie-Nora: *(Louder)* Brigit!
(Pause.)

Brigit: I'm sorry, Mandy!
(Pause.)

Brigit: Sorry! I'm really sorry!
(Juliet picks up letter and tries to comfort Mandy. Nellie-Nora lights a cigarette and offers it to Mandy, who is very distressed.)

Juliet: I'll write the address for you, Mandy.
(Juliet writes)

Juliet: Ireland!
(Pause. Brigit moves towards basket.)

Brigit: I've a great idea! We'll post Mandy off to Hollywood! Come on, Mandy!

Mandy: No! No! Leave me alone, Brigit!

Brigit: Into this basket with you, Mandy! Give us a hand, Nellie-Nora!
(Brigit opens basket and moves it down centre stage.)
Nellie-Nora: Yes, Mandy! Come on!
Brigit: Hop in, Mandy! Now's your chance! Off to Hollywood! Come on, Cathy! We'll pack her off to the U.S.A.!
(Mandy reluctantly gets into basket.)
Brigit: Let down your hair!
(Mandy unties her long hair.)
Mandy: How do I look?
Nellie-Nora: You look gorgeous! Just like a filmstar!
Brigit: Off you go! First class!
Nellie-Nora: Watch that door, Juliet!
Brigit: Are you ready, Mandy?
(Brigit and Nellie-Nora hum as they move the basket to and fro to the tune of "Wooden Heart".)
Nellie-Nora: Are you watching that door, Juliet?
(Juliet is more interested in business with basket.)
Juliet: I am, Nellie-Nora!
(Mandy twirls in basket.)
Mandy: But, Brigit! Where's my Elvis?
Brigit: Wait a minute, Mandy! Where's our Wooden Heart Fella?
(Brigit rushes upstage to mannikin. She takes off soutane and surplice, throws them on table, stands behind mannikin and walks it towards Mandy in basket.)
Brigit: *(Elvis Voice)* Hi there, Mandy! You sure are lookin' pretty to-day! *(own voice)* Help me, Cathy, Nellie-Nora! Help me to dress him up like a "Big Shot Filmstar"!
(They giggle and laugh.)
Nellie-Nora: Hurry! Give us a shirt, Cathy!
Mandy: Yes! A colourdy shirt, Cathy! A gorgeous shirt for my Elvis!

(Cathy moves to shelves and finds a multi-coloured shirt.)
Cathy: Here's a nice cotton shirt, Mandy!
Mandy: A tie! He needs a tie!
(Brigit searches shelves and finds a blue tie.)
Mandy: A Paris Blue tie for my Elvis!
Mandy: Trousers!
(Nellie-Nora finds trousers on a lower shelf.)
Mandy: Oh no! Not those old trousers!
Nellie-Nora: These are great trousers, Mandy! Hold him up and we'll put them on!
(They pull on trousers and lift mannikin into basket as Mandy complains.)
Mandy: His head! He has no head! Elvis's head?
Cathy: Get that old head from the press, Nellie-Nora!
(As Brigit and Cathy button shirt and zip trousers, Nellie-Nora finds old head and puts it on mannikin.)
Juliet: He's like a doll! He is!
Nellie-Nora: Stay at that door, Juliet!
Mandy: His hair! His black shiny hair!
Brigit: Hair? What will we do about hair?
Juliet: Shhh! There's someone comin' down the corridor!
Brigit: Take her out! Quick!
Cathy: Out of the basket! Hurry, Mandy!
(The women, in a state of panic, close the basket on the Elvis figure. His head protrudes. They return to work. Pause. Brigit exits towards cloister. Pause. She returns.)
Brigit: False alarm! Come on, girls! Hair for this beautiful bachelor from Hollywood! Hurry. Take him out of the basket.
Cathy: What about a piece of Mother Victoria's winter shawl?
Nellie-Nora: No! Mother o'God! No! Just pretend, Mandy! Pretend he has beautiful black shiny hair! Now, Mandy, back into the basket!

(Mandy steps into basket. She covers her eyes with her hands.)

Mandy: Yes, Nellie-Nora! Yes! Now I can see his shiny hair! And look, Cathy! His eyes! His gorgeous come-to-bed eyes!

Cathy: He has long curly eye-lashes, Mandy!

(They laugh.)

Mandy: And lips! Big and wide!

Cathy: Smiling! a dimple in his chin!

Nellie-Nora: And clean fingernails!

Cathy: A gold pin for his Paris Blue Tie!

(Cathy takes a hairgrip from her hair and fastens his tie.)

Brigit: Ears! For whisperin' in!

Juliet: He's very nice, Mandy!

Nellie-Nora: Stay at that door, Juliet!

Mandy: Yes! Isn't he a smasher, girls?

Cathy: He needs a pure silk hanky!

Brigit: Where's that purply hanky, Cathy: Wait a minute – here it is!

(Cathy fixes silk hanky in shirt-pocket.)

Juliet: A pure silk hanky?

Brigit: Now, Mandy! Here's your Elvis!

(Mandy stares at mannikin, kisses it.)

Mandy: *(sings)*

“Have I told you lately

That I love you?

Could I tell you once again somehow?

Have I told with all my heart and soul

That I adore you?

Well, Darlin', I'm tellin' you now!”.

(Mandy hugs mannikin as she sings. Women watch her, then they return to work. Lights are rose-coloured.)

Brigit: He's askin' you to marry him, Mandy!

Mandy: I will! Oh, yes! I will!

Nellie-Nora: I've a great idea! We'll dress Mandy for her

weddin'! Hurry! Hurry! Mother o' God!

He might change his mind!

(Cathy takes Mandy's white apron and fastens it veil-like on her hair, then drapes a long white sheet over her shoulders as a train. Juliet helps.)

Cathy: A pure white veil! A long satin train!

Juliet: You're very posh, Mandy!

Nellie-Nora: You look gorgeous, Mandy!

Mandy: I am! I'm gorgeous!

Brigit: Remember! I'm the Bishop! I'll do this important wedding!

(Brigit moves table to left-centre, jumps on to table and dresses in crimson soutane. She puts surplice/mitre on her head, while women finish dressing Elvis. They lift Elvis into basket beside Mandy and sing)

“Daisy, Daisy!

Give me your answer. Do!

I'm half crazy all for the love of you!

It won't be a stylish marriage.

We can't afford a carriage

Won't you look neat upon the seat of a

bicycle made for two?”

(Brigit deepens her voice as she says)

Brigit: Silence!

(The women push basket towards Bishop/Brigit. Juliet holds long train.)

Brigit: Do you, Mandy Prenderville, take this Elvis Presley as your lawful husband to have and to hold in sickness and in health until death do you part?

Mandy: I do! Oh, yes! I do!

Brigit: And now, Elvis Presley, do you –

Mandy: *(interrupts)* But, Brigit, his real name is Elvis Aron Garon Presley!

Brigit: Do you, Elvis Aron Garon Presley, take

Mandy Prenderville -

Nellie-Nora: He does! He does!

Brigit: Don't interrupt, Nellie-Nora!

(The women smile.)

Brigit: Do you, Elvis Aron Garon Presley, take Mandy Prenderville as your lawful wedded wife to have and to hold in sickness and in health until death do you part?

(Nellie-Nora rocks Elvis's head in assent. Cathy is in tears. Sister Virginia stands at doorway in background, but the women do not notice her.)

Brigit: I now pronounce you man and wife.
Bless you!

Nellie-Nora, Brigit and Cathy:

Congratulations, Mandy!

(Mandy begins to kiss Elvis, but Brigit interrupts)

Brigit: You – may kiss the bride, Elvis Aron Garon Presley!

(Mandy kisses Elvis. The women cheer.)

Nellie-Nora: Have as many babies as you want now, Mandy!

(Sister Virginia exits.)

Nellie-Nora: A honeymoon! We'll send them on their honeymoon!

Mandy: *(sings)*

“My heart would break in two
If I should lose you
I'm no good
Without you anyhow!
Dear, have I told you lately
That I love you?
Well, Darlin' I'm tellin' you now!”

(Mandy hugs Elvis as she sings. The women push basket in a circular movement and sing with Mandy)

“Have I told you lately that I love you?
Could I tell you once again somehow?
Have I told with all my heart and soul
How I adore you?
Well, Darlin', I'm tellin' you now!
Tellin' you now!
Have I told you lately when I'm sleepin'?
Every dream I dream is you somehow?
Have I told you why the nights are long
when you're not with me?
Well, Darlin', I'm tellin' you now.
Tellin' you now!”

*(Lights down as Elvis's voice comes up over women singing.)
Elvis sings*

“Dear, have I told you lately
That I love you
Could I tell you once again somehow
Have I told with all my heart and soul
That I adore you
Well, Darlin', I'm tellin' you now!
Tellin' you now.
My heart would break
In two if I should lose you.
I'm no good without you anyhow!” etc.

(Continue during interval.)

Act 2 Scene 1

OFFICE 1

Sound: Plain Chant "Magnificat". One soprano voice.

"Magnificat anima mea Dominum.
Et exultavit Spiritus meus. In Deo salutari
meo.
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae.
Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes
generationes.
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est
et sanctum nomen ejus. –"

Small office in convent laundry. Mother Victoria sits on high-backed chair at desk up centre. Two bibles, a telephone, keys, a crucifix and office book on desk. A stool at right of desk. Photographs of Bishops and a Pope on walls. If using same set as in laundry workspace, a chair, small table with telephone and stool will do. Lighting effects change the set. A gentle knock is heard.

Mother Victoria:

Come in!

(Sister Virginia enters quietly. Her veil covers her shoulders. big sleeves cover her arms and hands. She carries a box of Black Magic chocolates in her big sleeves. She kneels on floor. The phone rings. Mother Victoria answers. Plain Chant fades.)

Mother Victoria:

Yes! – Yes, Father! I'll hold on! – Oh! –
Good morning, my Lord! – Yes! – I'm

Act 2 Scene 1

working on the ledgers now! – I should
have them finished by to-morrow, my Lord!
– I'll send on the cheque too! – Thank you,
my Lord!

(She smiles as she puts down phone.)

Mother Victoria:

You may sit down, Sister!

(Sister Virginia remains on her knees and takes a box of Black Magic chocolates from her big sleeves.)

Sister Virginia:

Thank you, Mother Victoria! May I keep
and dispose of this box of chocolates?

Mother Victoria:

Chocolates? Black Magic Chocolates?
Mmmn? Did that seminarian give you
chocolates, Sister?

Sister Virginia:

Yes, Mother Victoria!

Mother Victoria:

Aaam! Yes! You may dispose of them! Sit
down, Sister!

(Sister Virginia sits on stool.)

Mother Victoria:

How do you like the laundry? A change
from Spiritual Year in the Novitiate, I'm
sure! Are you happy? Tell me!

Sister Virginia:

The work – the women – I find it difficult,
Mother!

Mother Victoria:

Difficult, Sister!

Sister Virginia:

Yes, Mother! – It's very sad!

Mother Victoria:

Sad, Sister? You find them sad?

Sister Virginia:

Yes, Mother! The women need their children! – Is it really necessary to keep them locked away?

Mother Victoria:

Those women can't be trusted! They're weak, Sister! No control! They've broken the sixth and ninth Commandments!

Sister Virginia:

But isn't our God a Loving Father, a Forgiving Father? The men, who made them pregnant, broke the same Commandments!

(Mother Victoria stands and walks around office.)

Mother Victoria:

Men? You don't understand, Sister! No one wants those women! We protect them from their passions! We give them food, shelter and clothing! We look after their spiritual needs!

Sister Virginia:

They need medicines – vitamins, fresh air, sunshine! – Cathy's asthma! The attacks are more frequent! Brigit mourns the baby she gave up for adoption! She's a bitter woman! The others are –

Mother Victoria:

Well, Sister?

Sister Virginia:

Cathy has a constant headache, Mother Victoria.

Mother Victoria:

Headache, Sister?

Sister Virginia:

Cathy told me – you hit her around the

head, when the van-men brought her back yesterday.

Mother Victoria:

Cathy was hysterical! I had to slap her – to – bring her back to reality!

Sister Virginia:

I'm very worried about her. She needs help. She's very low in spirits!

Mother Victoria:

Custody of the eyes. You forget yourself, Sister! You are preparing to take vows! A Vow of Obedience! I know Cathy's tricks! She's a bit of an actress! She exaggerates! Give her a tonic! A spoonful three times a day. It'll build her up.

(Mother Victoria stands in shadows behind chair.)

Mother Victoria:

When I was nineteen, I had the same thoughts! I wanted to free the penitents – mothers of some of the women in the laundry now. You see, this weakness to sins of the flesh stays in the blood for seven generations! When you take Vows, Sister, you'll receive Grace and Understanding. Keep aloof from those fallen women! St. Paul says "People who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. – People of immoral lives – fornicators, adulterers."

Sister Virginia:

But St. Paul hated women! – Christ had many women friends!

Mother Victoria:

St. Paul, Sister! St. Paul may have been afraid of women! Women tempt men! Remember the Garden! Eve started it all!

Sister Virginia:

Eve? The Garden, Mother?

Mother Victoria:

Don't interrupt, Sister! Those women can be treacherous! I warn you to be careful in the laundry!

Sister Virginia:

They won't harm me, Mother Victoria!

Mother Victoria:

Just be careful, when Brigit is using bleach! Sister Luke has permanent scars on her face and hands!

Sister Virginia:

If I were Brigit or Cathy and my babies were taken from me, I'd tear down the walls with my nails! (*interrupted by*)

Mother Victoria:

Calm yourself, Sister! Calm! Wisdom will be given to you! Grace to do God's will. God's ways are not our ways! I'll pray for you!

(*Mother Victoria sits at desk and faces Sister Virginia.*)

Mother Victoria:

Have you been meditating properly, Sister?

Sister Virginia:

I try, Mother! But there are dark – dark clouds – doubts, Mother! The women are drudges, are bond-women! I – I didn't expect this!

Mother Victoria:

Doubts, Sister! We all go through those dark nights! – Dark Nights! Try to remember that We Are Eclipsed! But that deep inside there is a Shining that is Immortal – a part of us, which is outside Time. Hold on to

that thought! Do not question the System! You want to change the Rule, the Church, the World! You must start with yourself! Change yourself first! Get rid of Pride! Obey the Rule, Sister! Remember – We are eclipsed. But Blind Obedience will carry you through!

Sister Virginia:

But, Mother Victoria! – Thank you, Mother! – I'll – I'll try!

(*Sister Virginia leaves office as lights change.*)

Plain Chant "Magnificat" sung by one soprano voice.)

Magnificat continued

"Fecit potentiam in bracchio suo:
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.
Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles.

Esurientes implevit bonis: et divites dimisit inanes.

Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatus misericordiae suae. –"

(*Fade to machine-sounds.*)

Act 2 Scene 2

FLOOR

Sound: Machine-sound up.

Enter Cathy, Nellie-Nora, Brigit, Mandy and Sister Virginia to set of Office 1. Table up left. Nellie-Nora places large dust-bin centre stage. Mandy and Brigit exit with chair and stool. They return immediately with sweeping-brushes, polishing-cloths. Sister Virginia pins back her veil and hooks up her skirt. Cathy brings on old wooden polishing-blocks and tin of polish. Mandy washes floor upstage with mop and bucket of water. Sister Virginia stands and watches.

Brigit: It'd take more than soap and water to clean up this place!

(The women sweep floor rhythmically. Cathy has attack of coughing. Cathy takes a polishing-block.)

Cathy: We need a machine for polishing instead of these old wooden blocks, Sister!

Brigit: We're the machines, Cathy!

Sister Virginia:

I'll speak to Mother Victoria about new equipment, Cathy!

(Cathy tries to use heavy polishing-block, but continues to cough. Sister Virginia takes block from Cathy and polishes down left beside Brigit. Nellie-Nora sweeps up right.)

Sister Virginia:

Take a rest, Cathy!

(Cathy sits on table up left. Church bell rings.)

Brigit: The prayer-bell, Sister! Shouldn't you be on your knees in the chapel instead of in here?

Sister Virginia:

To work is to pray, Brigit!

Brigit: We'll go straight up so. Won't we?

(After prayer-bell is heard, the rhythm of sweeping and polishing changes to rhythm of tune, which Cathy is humming, "The Irish Washerwoman" She uses table-top or washboard as bodhran percussion. Lighting changes to warmer tones.)

Brigit: Work! Work! Work! Work is God here! Washing, scrubbing, washing, scrubbing, scrubbing, labouring! *(rhythmically as she polishes)*

Nellie-Nora: Cigarette! Where did I put the matches? *(No answer.)*

Juliet: Where will I put the dust? *(No answer.) (Nellie-Nora lights cigarette butt. Puffs of smoke. Mandy kneels down centre, presses a polishing-cloth to her nose.)*

Mandy: Oomn! I love perfumy wax. Look! It's getting nice and shiny! Like a dance-hall floor! Look!

(Mandy begins to waltz-dance as Cathy hums. Others polish and brush to rhythm of Cathy's humming, which now grows slightly faster.)

Mandy: Ahh, but no fellas!

Brigit: No fellas! No trouble you mean! Do you hear me, Mandy?

Mandy: Still – nice trouble, Brigit!

(Brigit takes Mandy's polishing-cloth, stands behind dust-bin facing audience. Crimson high-light on dust-bin.)

Brigit: Into the bin goes Mandy! *(throws cloth into bin. Others continue to polish-sweep.)*

Brigit: Bin gobbles her up! *(She takes Cathy's cloth and throws it in.)*

Brigit: Bin gobbles up Cathy! Look at the smoke and flames rising from his huge jaws! Bin waits for your white bones, Sister Virginia!

Sister Virginia:

I'm not ready for Purgatory yet, Saint Peter!
There are things I must do here first!

Nellie-Nora: *(chants)* Purgatory is a place or state of
punishment, where some souls suffer for a
time before they can enter Heaven!

Brigit: *(looks into bin)* Richard's in here, Mandy!
Come on! Have a look!

Mandy: No! No, Brigit! I don't want to see him!
*(Mandy continues to waltz-dance around stage. Rhythm
grows faster.)*

Brigit: Hello, Mandy! Hello, Richard! It's gettin'
hotter, is it? Did His Lordship arrive yet,
Richard? He did! He's in there! Good! In
you go, Nellie-Nora!

(Brigit takes dust from Juliet and throws it into bin.)

Brigit: Mandy and Richard are waltzin' away in the
red-hot flames!

*(Rhythm of music grows faster. Brigit takes a brush and bangs it
into bin.)*

Brigit: Ha, Mother Victoria! No! Not in here!
You've to go to the other place! The hotter
place! No, Mother Victoria, I've no keys!
No keys for that place. Goodbye! For all
eternity! Goodbye, Mother Victoria!
Forever and ever!

*(Brigit throws in more dust and twists brush in a circular
fashion. Rhythm of polishing/sweeping, singing and Mandy's
dancing grows still faster.)*

Brigit: Ha! Ha! John-Joe! Is it not hot enough for
ya?
No? Purgatory isn't hot enough for my
John-Joe! Oh! You're thirsty? You're all
thirsty down there? All we have here is dirty

water! No! We've no porter or whiskey!
Look, Cathy, Mandy, Nellie-Nora! They're
all thirsty! Richard, John-Joe, His Lordship,
your fella, Cathy! And Elvis!

(Activity stops suddenly. Pause.)

Brigit: They're all burnin' with thirst!

*(Sudden full sound of washing-machines as women exit with
brushes, polishers and return to set up for **Red Hearts
Scene.**)*

Act 2 Scene 3

RED HEARTS

Brigit and Mandy move large laundry basket to position a little to right of centre and at a slight angle. Basket contains bundles of unwashed linens. Nellie-Nora sews at table centre left. Juliet to right of Nellie-Nora. Sewing-basket containing pin-cushion, needles and threads on table.

Mandy: Where's this basket from, Brigit?

Brigit: Athlone – you know – all around there!
The middle of Ireland! Come on, Nellie-Nora!
Juliet, help us with these filthy yokes!
They're even worse than last week!

(Juliet moves to right of Brigit and Mandy at basket. Mandy examines label on unseen side of basket.)

Mandy: Do you not see the label, Brigit? This basket is not from Athlone! It's from Galway! From the City!

Juliet: From Galway? The City? But, this is a terrible job! Smellier than in the orphanage!

Cathy: Whites in this corner, Juliet! Coloureds over there! Socks in the middle!

Nellie-Nora: Search for cigarette-butts, Juliet! Don't forget trouser pockets! Mother o'God! Where did I put that last butt? – A match, Mandy! Quick!

Mandy: They're on the table, Nellie-Nora!

Juliet: Does Nellie-Nora smoke other people's cigarettes, Mandy?

Mandy: Yes! All the time, Juliet!

(Nellie-Nora finds a butt and matches. She lights butt. She keeps butt between her lips as she speaks. The others continue to sort dirty linens.)

Nellie-Nora: MMmn! That's better! Doesn't this lot come from your place, Cathy? Near the sea – ?

Cathy: Yes! Near the sea and the river. Though I can't smell salty seaweed!

(Turns her nose away.)

Juliet: Uuuch! Aah!

Brigit: I won't tell you what I smell! Do they ever wash themselves, Cathy?

Mandy: Would you look! *(Holds up white underpants covered with red hearts.)* From your place, Cathy? Look!

(Brigit grabs underpants and reads.)

Brigit: Made in the U. S. A.! Wouldn't you know! This fella doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve! He wears it on his Micky!

(Throws underpants in the air.)

Juliet: Oh no, Brigit! No! *(Dodges underpants.)*

Nellie-Nora: They're all below the waist!

Mandy: A smasher I'd say – a filmstar or an actor or – what do you think, Cathy?

(Mandy throws underpants to Brigit, who throws to Cathy and so on.)

Nellie-Nora: It's like what the Yanks would wear, Cathy!

Cathy: Yes! They wear funny clothes. Plaids, spots, stripes all mixed up together! I remember when the Yanks came home, when the second cousins from Boston visited! The colours they wore on the street!

Juliet: But – I thought you were off a farm, Cathy!

Nellie-Nora: No, Juliet! Cathy is from the city!

Cathy: *(dreamily)* A small city, Juliet! It's a lovely place –

(Cathy takes a man's silk dressing gown from basket, touches it lovingly.)

Mandy: A silk coat, Cathy? No! It's a dressing gown.
(Mandy touches the silk. Cathy is in a dream.)

Juliet: Why did you leave?

Nellie-Nora: She just couldn't stay, Juliet!

Mandy: The fellas – what were they like, Cathy?

Brigit: What're fellas always like? A few quick ones in a pub, then crowded like jack-daws at the door of a dance-hall, their minds as dirty as their fingernails!

Juliet: But Sister Virginia says only a few men are like that!

Brigit: Sister Virginia says! What does she know about it? Squeezing through the dance-hall door was awful! When you'd be in the crush, some big hand would come out and grab you!

(Cathy puts dressing gown aside carefully.)

Cathy: I didn't go to dances much!

Nellie-Nora: They were terrible at the back of the chapel and in the organ-gallery! They were all the same!

Brigit: And they think we're the dirty ones!

Juliet: A dance! I never went to a dance! I think I'd like to go to one!

Brigit: Our Canon stood at the back of the dance-hall and watched! On Sundays he'd shout, "Company-keeping is a Mortal Sin! Hell for all Eternity!" When Ellen Moran got pregnant, he walked up and down outside her house in broad daylight saying the Rosary!

Nellie-Nora: A curse will fall on you, Brigit! Talking like that about the Canon!

(Mandy and Nellie-Nora bless themselves.)

Brigit: A curse! Don't be daft! I'm here – isn't that

enough? – The Canon's housekeeper bossed everyone in the parish! Bossed him too! Listened to all the gossip and gave the orders, pointing at us with her scarlet fingernails!

Nellie-Nora: I often think about Our Lady the time she got pregnant! Did the neighbours point at her too?

(Women smile.)

Nellie-Nora: She must have had a terrible time, when she began to show!

Mandy: But she had Saint Joseph! Didn't he stay with her!

Nellie-Nora: I wonder did the neighbours whisper and sneer?

Brigit: Gossiping neighbours going home from Mass like holy-water hens!

Bloody hypocrites! But the missionaries were the worst! Hellfire and brimstone every morning and evening!

Juliet: The dances, Mandy! Tell me!

Mandy: Well, Juliet! My second cousin, Jamsie loved women, but was afraid of courtin'. Halfway through the last dance, he'd say to his partner, – "I've to go now! Early start to-morrow! I've to drive my mother to teach in the Tech." He had no car of course! No mother either! All that fella had was an old crock of a bike! Poor Jamsie!

Cathy: In our city we had a glamour-boy, who did great business with tourists. He arranged with the ballroom porter to announce, "Dr. O'Connell is wanted urgently on the telephone! Dr. O'Connell! Dr. O'Connell!", while he was dancing cheek to cheek with

connected to Mary's pregnancy

Don't start

some gorgeous blonde! "Excuse me, my love", he'd whisper. "One of my patients is very ill. I must check! I'll be back! Wait for me!" Success! The "doctor" bit never failed! They'd be waiting for him, when he came back after his pint in a pub down the road! Believing every word!

Brigit: Johnnie in Cillnamona! Mirrors on the tops of his dancing shoes!

Juliet: Mirrors on his dancing shoes? But why, Brigit?

(Brigit comes forward, calls Juliet and demonstrates Johnnie's antics.)

Brigit: You see, Juliet! When Johnnie was dancing with a girl, he...

Nellie-Nora: No! No, Brigit! Don't look at her, Juliet!
(Brigit dances and sings.)

Brigit: "Oh, Johnnie! Oh, Johnnie! Heavens above!
Oh, Johnnie! Oh, Johnnie! How you can love!"

(A bell rings. A door bangs.)

Juliet: Shh! She's coming!

(Nellie-Nora goes to exit and listens to bell. Bn Bn. – Bn Bn.)

Nellie-Nora: That's Sister Virginia's bell! Mother Victoria's gone to his Lordship's Palace!

Brigit: Virginia! That piece of plaster!

Cathy: Aah, Brigit! I often wonder, why Sister Virginia wants to be a nun!

Brigit: She's probably afraid of men! Thinks it's easier to hide in here! But watch her! Soon she'll be strutting around like the others, waving her leather belt and treating us like dirt!

Nellie-Nora: No, Brigit! You're too hard on her!

Cathy: But she doesn't have to stay in here! She's

not afraid of men, Brigit! Priests and seminarians come to visit her!

Nellie-Nora: She can leave anytime she wants!

Brigit: Sounds daft to me, Cathy! Staying in this dungeon with that cage on her head! How can she think straight?

Juliet: I think I'd like to be a nun!

Cathy: Well, you can't go to dances if you're a nun, Juliet!

Nellie-Nora: I think you'd make a lovely nun!

Brigit: Sure, they wouldn't have Juliet! Her mother was one of us!

(Stunned silence, as they continue to sort dirty clothes.)

Juliet: Another cigarette-butt, Nellie-Nora! Look! Oh no! It's not! Look what I found!

Mandy: Show me! Ooh! It's lipstick! Ooh! Lipstick!

Brigit: In a trouser pocket!

Mandy: Look! "Outdoor Girl"! – Rose Red – Mmmn! Where's the mirror, Nellie-Nora?

Nellie-Nora: Here, Mandy!

Mandy: Will you get the mirror, Juliet!

(Juliet takes mirror, gives it to Mandy. Mandy pouts as she puts on lipstick. Brigit takes lipstick and puts two spots, (rouge) on Mandy. Mandy decorates Brigit. They laugh and joke. Cathy and Juliet crowd around them. Brigit looks in mirror.)

Brigit: Ach! Look at the cut o' me! You're like an Indian, Mandy! Rub it in! Like this!

(Mandy and Brigit rub one another's cheeks. They laugh, but Nellie-Nora remains detached.)

Mandy: Mmn! It tastes nice and perfumy! – How do I look?

Cathy: You're gorgeous, Mandy! If only Elvis could see you now!

(Mandy prints her lips on hands.)

Brigit: Now I'll paint you, Cathy.