

Cathy: Can I do it myself, Brigit? Please?
(Brigit gives Cathy lipstick. Cathy paints her lips.)

Juliet: Will you put some on me, Cathy?

Cathy: Of course, Juliet! Stand here!
(Cathy paints Juliet's lips.)

Brigit: It suits your eyes, Juliet!

Juliet: My eyes?

Mandy: Don't heed her, Juliet!
(Brigit takes lipstick from Cathy and moves towards Nellie-Nora.)

Brigit: Come on, Nellie-Nora! A bit o' war-paint for you! It'll cheer you up!

Nellie-Nora: No! Oh no!
(Brigit insists.)

Nellie-Nora: Noooo! Not lipstick!
(Nellie-Nora screams, wipes her lips and backs away. Brigit is upset. The others stare. Nellie-Nora is very agitated. Pause.)

Nellie-Nora: He – He – made me wear lipstick – and perfume. He – wanted me to be like a city girl. – No! No! He – He – in the room – No! No, Mr. Persse! No! – Before he – he hurt me! He wet me! No! No!
(Nellie-Nora takes sewing-basket from table and throws it to floor.)

Nellie-Nora: It's all your fault! All your fault!
(Nellie-Nora falls to floor. She hugs her knees then starts to rock her body. Sister Virginia enters carrying a box of Black Magic chocolates. She rushes to assist Nellie-Nora.)

Sister Virginia:

Brigit: Now, what have you done, Brigit?

Juliet: Nothing, Sister!

Juliet: It's only lipstick, Sister!

Mandy: Rose Red lipstick. A bit o' colour, Sister!

Brigit: It's this place! This dungeon! This cage! And you, Sister! Locking us up with your two

sets o' keys!

Sister Virginia: I've chocolates here, Nellie-Nora! Take some!

Nellie-Nora: Get away from me!

Sister Virginia: Here, Cathy! Mandy! Chocolates! Juliet?
(The women refuse chocolates.)

Brigit: Chocolates! Hhh! Keep your bloody chocolates. The keys, Pasty Face! Give me the keys!

Sister Virginia: I – I can't! You know I can't give you the keys, Brigit!
(Brigit's outburst)

Brigit: *(imitating Sister)* "You know I can't give you the keys, Brigit! I'll pray for you, Brigit!"
(Brigit blocks escape route.)

Brigit: Pretending to help! You're just like the rest o' them! You think if you keep us locked up, that we'll forget about living! About being alive! Don't you? That our heads will go soft and mushy from hymns and prayers! You think that we won't see what your crowd is up to! Well, Pasty Face! Brigit Murphy here sees through you! Sees through the whole lot o' you! Mother Superiors, Bishops, Popes and all!
(Sister Virginia fingers her Rosary Beads. Brigit approaches her.)

Brigit: Look at yourself, Pasty Face! You're a woman – Aren't you? Did you ever have a lover? Tell us that now, Sister! Ha? – Would you like a bit o' lipstick, Sister?
(Brigit holds lipstick menacingly. The women move away. Sister Virginia tries to escape, but Brigit pins her against wall.)

Brigit: You don't know anything! Never had a lover! Never had a baby! So you're white and shining, Sister! Not the same as us, are you? Whose side are you on anyways? Why aren't our lover-boys locked up too? One law for them and another for us! Scab! Spy! I'll daub it on the walls of Hell!

(Brigit scribbles "Scab" on wall with lipstick, as she struggles with Sister Virginia. She drags off Sister Virginia's veil and shouts)

Brigit: I'll daub it on your baldy skull! Scab! Spy! Informer!

(She throws Sister Virginia to floor. Sister Virginia falls on top of soiled linens. Juliet sits on floor and bites her nails. Mandy hides behind basket. Nellie-Nora sobs and rocks her body.)

Brigit: *(change of tone)* All sweet smiles and "Here's chocolates"! But you're as bad as the rest! You're young and you keep the keys! Stiff and starched you go back every night to your nice white bed in your nice white cell! You say your nice sweet prayers to your Nice Clean God! Prayers and Hymns and heaven when we die! No! No! No! Now is what matters! We're alive now! It's no use when we're dead! We want to live now!

Sister Virginia:

But I want to help, Brigit! I am on your side!

Brigit: No! You're not! I'd kill you, but you're not worth it!

(Brigit throws lipstick at Sister Virginia, takes box of chocolates and throws contents on top of Sister Virginia. She moves towards basket. Sister Virginia gets up slowly, tries to smooth her habit, then, with dignity, walks through exit. Her white coif/veil is on floor downstage. Brigit stands at basket.)

Brigit: Rosa! Rosa! *(Second 'Rosa' a keening scream. Pause. Mandy peeps out from behind basket, finds scattered chocolates, eats one and puts some in pocket of her apron.)*

Mandy: She'll tell Mother Victoria on us!

Cathy: No. She mightn't tell. Sister Virginia mightn't! But we'll have to clean up the wall. Quick, Mandy! Get a bucket of hot water and a bottle of bleach. Hurry, Mandy!

(Mandy exits. Cathy tries to clean off lipstick from wall. Brigit hurriedly throws some clothes from basket. Visual rhythm of clothes thrown high in the air.)

Brigit: I'm going out now! In the basket! Come on! Quick! Help me!

(Cathy turns as Brigit speaks. Mandy returns with bucket.)

Mandy: I put half a bottle of bleach in, Cathy.

(Brigit steps into basket and kneels as she tries to cover herself with clothes.)

Brigit: I'm goin' out now to find my baby, Rosa. Cover me with clothes and push me into despatch! Quick! Stop staring at me! Help me!

(Cathy moves to Brigit.)

Cathy: But, Brigit! I wanted to! Please, Brigit, let me come with you! I'm so long trying!

Brigit: No! I'm going to find my Rosa!

Cathy: My twins, Brigit! Please!

Brigit: *(screams)* No! I'm going alone now!

Cathy: *(screams)* My Emily! My Michele!

(Brigit tries to close basket. Cathy is hyper-ventilating. Mother Victoria enters, looks at writing on wall and walks around slowly as she speaks)

Mother Victoria:

What's all this about? Get out of that basket, Brigit! Stand up, Nellie-Nora! Stop that

snivelling, Cathy McNamara! Back to work immediately, Mandy! You too, Juliet! – Where's Sister Virginia? Why isn't she here? Why?

(Brigit steps out of basket. The others obey automatically. As Mother Victoria exits, she sees Sister Virginia's veil/coif on floor. She picks it up. The stiffly starched empty veil/coif held on high by Mother Victoria looks like a head-trophy. She turns to Brigit.)

Mother Victoria:

What's this, Brigit? This? – To my office immediately, Brigit Murphy! His Lordship will hear about you!

Brigit: No! No! I'm not going!

Mother Victoria:

(shouts) To my office now, Brigit Murphy!

(Brigit walks reluctantly in front of Mother Victoria towards exit.)

Mother Victoria:

I always knew you were an evil woman!

(Cathy gets idea of going out alone in basket. She waits until Mother Victoria has gone.)

Cathy: *(excitedly)* I can go now! Me! Help me, Mandy! Please, Nellie-Nora!

(Cathy steps into basket. Nellie-Nora moves to help her.)

Cathy: Cover me! Will you help me, Juliet? Hurry! Hurry!

Nellie-Nora: Are you sure, Cathy? Are you alright?

(They cover Cathy with bundles of clothes. Nellie-Nora places a purple drape on top)

Cathy: Hurry! Please! Hurry! The van will be gone!

Mandy: We'll be thinking of you, Cathy!

(They close basket. Nellie-Nora opens basket to say)

Nellie-Nora: Have you that Holy Medal I gave you?

Cathy: Hurry! Hurry!

(They close basket, fasten metal locks and push it hurriedly through exit.)

Lights lower.

(Pause. Mandy, Brigit and Nellie-Nora return to set up for Act 2 Scene 4 Office 2)

Sound up for Plain Chant Magnificat sung by one soprano voice.

Act 2 Scene 4

OFFICE 2

Set as in Office 1 may be used, but a small table with telephone a little to left of centre is sufficient. Lights down except for highlight on Mother Victoria, who is standing centre stage. She taps her office-book with crucifix.

Sound: Plain Chant "Magnificat" sung by one soprano voice as in Act 2 Scene 1. Plain Chant fades as Sister Virginia stands at 'door of office.'

Mother Victoria:

Come in!

(Sister Virginia enters, pauses.)

Mother Victoria:

What delayed you, Sister? – On your knees!

(Sister Virginia hesitates.)

Mother Victoria:

On your knees, Sister!

(Sister Virginia kneels, head bowed, then looks straight at Mother Victoria.)

Mother Victoria:

I told you to keep aloof from those women!
I warned you about Brigit Murphy!

Sister Virginia:

But they are our Sisters in Christ, Mother Victoria!

Mother Victoria:

Our Sisters!

Sister Virginia:

Yes, Mother Victoria! Part of His Mystical Body!

Mother Victoria:

You are lucky you are not scarred for life!

Sister Virginia:

We are scarred! We, their jailers!

Mother Victoria:

Scarred! You disobeyed me again, Sister!

(Takes open letter from office-book and pushes it towards Sister Virginia.)

Mother Victoria:

This letter! Sealed without my permission!

(Pause.)

Sister Virginia:

Yes, Mother Victoria! His Lordship should come to this laundry! He should see things as they really are!

Mother Victoria:

His Lordship, the Bishop, in that laundry talking to – those – those – sinful women!

Sister Virginia:

Yes, Mother Victoria!

(Sister Virginia stands.)

Mother Victoria:

On your knees, Sister!

(Sister Virginia kneels.)

Mother Victoria:

(reads letter) "My Lord Bishop, as you are patron of this laundry, I invite you to visit us at our workplace. You should see and speak to the mothers, who are locked in here. Out of the goodness of your heart, you will, I am sure, allow them weekly visits to the orphanage. Their conditions of

Letter
to
Bishop

work and diet need to be improved immediately. Because of the deterioration in the health of a woman called Cathy McNamara, I beg you to come before you leave for Rome. I am, my Lord, your obedient and humble servant Sister Virginia O'Brien."

(Pause.)

Mother Victoria:

Why didn't you give me this letter before you sealed it? Why?

(Sister stands.)

Mother Victoria:

On your knees!

(Pause. Sister kneels.)

Sister Virginia:

You'd quote Rules, Mother Victoria! You'd -

Mother Victoria:

(interrupts) During my thirty years in this community, I've never come across such - such impudence! A white novice takes it on herself to invite that holy man to visit those - those - !

(She crumples letter and throws it to floor.)

Sister Virginia:

Permission to say more, Mother Victoria?

Mother Victoria:

More to say, Sister Virginia? Is that
* seminarian putting ideas into your head?

Sister Virginia:

I can think for myself, Mother Victoria!

(Telephone rings. Mother Victoria answers as she points her hand to silence Sister Virginia.)

Mother Victoria:

(softly) Hellooooo! Yees! *(sharper tone)*

Oh, Sister Perpetuo! — Ring the Mass Bell now! — And breakfast for that missionary priest in the small parlour! Tea and toast will do him!

(Mother Victoria bangs down telephone.)

Sister Virginia:

Maybe I should write to His Holiness!

Mother Victoria:

Did you say something, Sister Virginia?

(A Mass bell rings.)

Sister Virginia:

I must write to His Holiness! It takes a long time for news of change to reach this island, this laundry!

(Pause. Mother Victoria straightens her back.)

Mother Victoria:

Now I have something to say to you, Sister Virginia O'Brien! Your brother, Father John, is saying Mass in the side-chapel!

(Sister Virginia stands up.) On your knees, Sister! *(Slowly Sister kneels.)* He has asked for you from the Altar! Imagine! From God's Holy Altar!

Sister Virginia:

Permission, please, to serve my brother's Mass!

Mother Victoria:

No! You may not serve his Mass! No! You may not speak to him afterwards!

Sister Virginia:

But I must see my brother! I must speak to him!

Mother Victoria:

No, Sister! You may not see him!

Sister Virginia:

I must speak to him! I must! I must speak

Mother Victoria:

Back to the laundry! Now! Remember
Blind Obedience, Sister Virginia O'Brien!
Blind Obedience!

*(Sister Virginia rises from her knees and leaves office. Pause.
Mother Victoria picks up crumpled letter, looks at it and says)*

Mother Victoria:

A white novice says, she'll write to His
Holiness! – *(puzzled and worried)*. My Lord
Bishop, what is happening to our Holy
Church?

(Mother Victoria turns and leaves office. Lights change.)

Sound: Plain Chant Magnificat as women set up for **Act 2 Scene 5, Discovery.**

Act 2 Scene 5

DISCOVERY

*Afternoon of next day. Same workroom set. Nellie-Nora and
Mandy sew at table centre left. Laundry basket up right.
Brigit scrubs at wash-board centre right. Folded sheets and
blankets on shelves.*

Sound: Low hum of washing-machines.

Nellie-Nora: Such a hullabaloo last night! Aach! Must be
a lot o' sore heads this morning!

Mandy: I couldn't sleep!

Nellie-Nora: One fella kept shoutin', "Goodnight,
Reverend Mother! Sweet dreams, Reverend
Mother! Sleep tight! Don't let the fleas bite,
Reverend Mother!"

Brigit: I wonder if the fellas from Cillnamona were
up! Dark suits over farmer tans! Pioneer pins
pushed under lapels, foolin' their mothers!

Mandy: I heard the drums and the saxophones. But
why didn't they play Elvis's music?

(Mandy breaks down in tears.)

Nellie-Nora: I couldn't sleep either, wonderin' about
Cathy! Aach, don't cry, Mandy! What's the
use? There's broken hearts out there too!
Elvis'll send you another photo! He'll write
to you! He will!

(Nellie-Nora gives Mandy her Elvis scrapbook.)

Mandy: *(change of tone)* No! He won't! I know he
won't! *(Mandy throws scrapbook onto floor.)*

*Outside
world*

My only chance is to do what Cathy did!
Would she be there now?

Nellie-Nora: She should be! Mother o'God, she should!
(Nellie-Nora picks up scrapbook and puts it on table near Mandy. Mandy pushes it away.)

Brigit: Mother Victoria can't drag her back this time! The Black Viper threatened the Big House on me! She's the one that should be in there! Power mad! Money mad! More money-for-the-Bishop mad!

Mandy: Puttin' poor Juliet back in the orphanage!

Brigit: The rip says we're bad company for a young girl! – Ugh! They're all the same! Virginia! Victoria!

Nellie-Nora: Poor Sister Virginia! She didn't tell!

Mandy: Yes, Brigit! She didn't tell on us!

Brigit: Hasn't she two eyes? Two ears? Can't she see what's going on?

(Enter Sister Virginia carrying broken sunflowers. Daisy-like flowers if sunflowers not available. She notices Mandy's distress.)

Sister Virginia:
Put these in water, Mandy. Please.

Brigit: Flowers here? Flowers from the sun? No, Sister! Keys!

(Mandy takes flowers and proceeds to pull petals away one by one as she says.)

Mandy: "He loves me! He loves me not. He loves me. He loves me not."

(Mandy repeats this chant as she tears flowers and stalks into fragments, throws them on floor and stamps on them, picks them up and tears them apart.)

Sister Virginia:
Where's Cathy? – Is she in the steam-room?

(Sister Virginia looks into side-rooms and returns.)

Sister Virginia:
Have you seen her, Mandy?

Nellie-Nora: No, Sister!

Sister Virginia:
Brigit?

(No response from Brigit.)

Sister Virginia:
When did you see her last?

Nellie-Nora: Last night, Sister!

Sister Virginia:
Not since last night? Why didn't somebody tell me?

(She moves towards cloister.)

Nellie-Nora: But sure, you were in the kitchen all mornin', Sister! How could we?

(Sister Virginia notices blankets on shelf.)

Sister Virginia:
Those blankets should have gone in the Athlone basket! Will you parcel them, Brigit? Put a label on them?

(No response from Brigit.)

Sister Virginia: I'll do it myself! – Maybe Cathy is sick! Where could she be? – Maybe – I must speak to Mother Victoria!

(A bell tolls. Keys rattle. Mother Victoria enters, walks slowly to Sister Virginia and whispers. She offers overall to Sister Virginia, who refuses to take it. The women pretend to work. Mother Victoria turns to women, puts apron on table and moves down centre.)

Mother Victoria:
I – I – We must all pray now. We must pray for Cathy!

Brigit: She got to Galway? She did?

Nellie-Nora: What's wrong, Mother?

Mandy: Did she get the twins? Tell us, Mother!

Sister Virginia:

In the basket! May she rest in peace!

Brigit:

Rest in peace? Cathy? No! No!

Mandy:

Cathy? She got out! She's outside! She got to Galway!

Sister Virginia:

They found her in the basket! Her asthma!

Nellie-Nora:

It's a mistake, Sister! It's not our Cathy! No! No!

Mother Victoria:

We must pray!

(Sister Virginia confronts Mother Victoria.)

Sister Virginia:

Her asthma, Mother! Cathy suffocated!
I told you she needed attention! Her attacks were ...

Mother Victoria:

It was an accidental death! We must pray for her soul! The first sorrowful mystery, The Agony in the Garden. Our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth.

(Brigit and Nellie-Nora walk around in a confused state. Nellie-Nora calls out Cathy's name. Mandy, kneeling and holding broken flowers, moves from Mother Victoria to Sister Virginia.)

Brigit:

I should have gone! I was goin' first!
I wouldn't have suffocated!

Nellie-Nora:

No! No, Brigit! I should've stopped her! –
No! It's a mistake! It's somebody else! It's not our Cathy!

Mother Victoria:

Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and *(small bell rings)* forgive us our

trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Finish the prayers, Sister Virginia! My bell calls.

Nellie-Nora: Amen!

Sister Virginia:

Yes, Mother Victoria. Hail Mary full of grace! The Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus.

(Mandy and Nellie-Nora sob and contradict one another. Brigit moves and stands menacingly behind Sister Virginia.)

Brigit:

The keys, Sister! You'll give us the keys!
We'll get out now! Won't we, Sister?

Sister Virginia:

Pray, Brigit! We must pray for Cathy! Hail, Mary full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art Thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus!

(Sister Virginia turns to face Brigit. They stare at one another. Pause. Sister Virginia unclips keys from her belt and praying "Holy Mary, Mother of God" etc, gives keys to Brigit. Brigit grabs them.)

Brigit:

Ye're the ones that are dead, Virginia! Dead inside yer laundry basket hearts!

(Shouts as she runs through audience and away.)

Brigit:

Yer laundry basket hearts!

(Sister Virginia, praying softly, moves upstage to wall. Mandy prays "Hail Mary" and "Holy Mary Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" continuously, distractedly, as she washes clothing in basin.)

Lights lower.

Sound: Voice of Kathleen Ferrier

"He was despised.
Despised and rejected.
Rejected of men.

YouTube 3:02

A man of sorrows.

A man of sorrows

And acquainted with grief.”

(as Nellie-Nora in Slow Movement takes purple drapes from shelves and covers/shrouds Mandy, Sister Virginia and table. She puts Cathy's apron into basket and moves it down left. (Same position as in Act 1 Scene 1.) She slowly looks around laundry space and exits.)

Sound up of *He was despised.*

Straight into **Epilogue, Act 2 Scene 6)**

Epilogue

ACT 2 SCENE 6

Time: 1992

Lights: Low after Discovery Scene.

Sound: Voice of Kathleen Ferrier
 “He was despised.
 Despised and rejected.
 Rejected of men.
 A man of sorrows.
 A man of sorrows
 And acquainted with grief.”
 from Handel’s “Messiah”.

Set as in Act 1 Scene 1 but drapes are not hanging. Rosa, carrying Laundry Register and Black Magic box, enters and moves downstage to laundry basket. Mandy and Sister Virginia shrouded-frozen in purple drapes. Highlight comes up on basket.

Sound: Music fades as Nellie-Nora (aged) shuffles on. Dragged-slipper sound.

Nellie-Nora: Did you find what you were looking for, Rosa?

Rosa: Brigit Murphy and a girl, Rosa?

Nellie-Nora: Yes!

Rosa: And this photograph, “My baby, Rosa”. Is this me?

(Rosa shows photograph to Nellie-Nora. Nellie-Nora examines it.)

Nellie-Nora: Ah Rosa, that’s just a photograph she found in an unwashed pocket! Brigit adopted that paper-baby. She let on it was you!

Rosa: So – It’s not – me. A paper-baby? She called

me Rosa! Everyone calls me Caroline! – But why, Nellie-Nora, why did she ever come here?

Nellie-Nora: Brigit was put in here! Her brother signed her in before he got married! When Cathy died, she disappeared. Not a word, not a trace of her since!

Rosa: Where did she go?

Nellie-Nora: I don’t know, Rosa! Maybe she went back to Cillnamona – to try to see John-Joe!

Rosa: John-Joe? Is he my father? Do you know his last name, his address?

Nellie-Nora: No, Rosa! She only ever called him, John-Joe! He must live near Cillnamona!

Rosa: Do you think he’s still there? Do you think she’s alive?

Nellie-Nora: I don’t know, Rosa.

Rosa: Would you have heard if –

Nellie-Nora: I don’t know! After Saint Paul’s closed that time, none of the women ever came back to visit. I suppose they wanted to forget this place.

Rosa: I must go to Cillnamona to-morrow!

(Rosa moves nearer to Nellie-Nora)

Rosa: Did Brigit talk about – going – to look for me?

Nellie-Nora: She always wanted to find you, Rosa! It broke her heart giving you up like that. You can be certain she tried! You can be certain she spent the rest of her life lookin’ for you!

Rosa: Can I take these? *(Black Magic Box with photographs and ledger.)* Would anybody mind? And the paper-baby too?

Nellie-Nora: Yes, Rosa! I don’t think anyone knows they’re still here.

(Rosa moves closer to Nellie-Nora.)

Rosa: Maybe I'll call to see you again, – if that's alright?

Nellie-Nora: Yes, Rosa! That'd be nice.

Rosa: Would you like to visit us at Shannon, Nellie-Nora? I'll collect you myself in the car?

Nellie-Nora: *(shaking)* No! No, Rosa! I – I – I don't go out much.

*(Nellie-Nora, head shaking and hand in tremor, turns away and crumples towards basket. Rosa looks at her for a moment, then hurries away into audience. Nellie-Nora suddenly looks out towards Rosa, then takes a long look at the old laundry workspace. As **sound** of Kathleen Ferrier's voice comes up*

“Despised, rejected.
Rejected of men.
A man of sorrows.
A man of sorrows
And acquainted with grief.”

(Nellie-Nora shuffles dragged-slipper-sound to light-switch on wall. As she switches off light, fade music, lower lights.

Sound: *Voice over: (Sister Virginia)*

In 1992, to make place for a building development at St. Paul's Home, the remains of Mary Kate Dempsey, Mary Jane O'Sullivan, Kitty O'Hara, Julia Mannion, Betty and Annie Gormley, Ellen McAuley, Cathy McNamara and three hundred other unnamed penitents were exhumed, cremated and reburied outside in Killmacha Cemetery. Mandy Prenderville has not left the local Mental Institution since 1963.

END