

her holiness

by

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DO contact ORiGiN™ Theatrical if you have any questions about anything. At all. And we mean anything. One of us that works here (not me) has a peculiar interest in recording the unusual bird calls of the adult hoatzin (a species of tropical bird found in wet forest and mangrove of the Amazon and the Orinoco delta in South America) so we should be able to answer any questions you have about the Hoatzin. Plus we know some things about some other things too.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

COMPANY

Mary Mackillop/Anna Detweiller
Bishop Sheil
Julian Tenison Woods
Sister Monica
Sister Angela
Sister Francis Xavier
Joanna Barr-Smith
Father Joseph Tappeiner
Cardinal Moran
Bishop Reynolds
Bishop Quinn
Pope Pius IX
Monsignor Kirby
Monsignor Kinsella
Pope Benedict XVI
Doctor Fraser
An apparition of the Virgin Mary
Rosie, a prostitute
A beggar
Chief of Police
Guards

Mary and Anna can, if desired or necessary, be played by the same actor, and generally, there is considerable possibility for multiple doubling of roles.

The action takes place in South Australia and Rome, in the 1860s and in the early 21st Century.

The world premiere of *her holiness* took place on 31 May, 2008 at the Downstairs Theatre, Seymour Centre, Sydney, produced by Stage Directions and Bakehouse Theatre Company with the following:

Mary/Anna	Bernadette Ryan
Julian Tenison Woods	James Ludgon
Pope Benedict XVI	Alan Dearth
Bishop Sheil	Tony Stock
Bishop Quinn	Tony Stock
Sister Monica	Cat Martin
Sister Angela	Megan Thomas
Sister Francis Xavier	Kate Shearer
Joanna Barr-Smith	Alisa Hawkins
Father Joseph Tappeiner	Matt Treddinick
Cardinal Moran	Ben Wood
Doctor Fraser	Matt Treddinick
Bishop Reynolds	Matt Treddinick
Monsignor Kirby	Ben Wood
Monsignor Kinsella	Ben Wood
Pope Pius IX	Alan Dearth

Prostitutes, beggars, servants, police, guards, chaplains, apparitions were played by the company.

Director	Suzanne Millar
Production Manager	John Harrison
Set design	Suzanne Millar
Sound Design	George Cartledge
Lighting Design	Martin Kinnane

The production immediately transferred to Parramatta Riverside Theatre with the original cast, John Harrison replacing Ben Wood.

"A stunning new play, topical and thought-provoking. Australian work at its finest."
-Arts Hub.

"A confronting, moving and very entertaining piece of theatre."
- Australian Stage.

"A powerful play, a riveting spiritual journey that is full of surprises and riveting demonstrations of poignant faith."
- Islamic Education.

"This is not a world of black and white themes. Entertaining and evocative, it avoids cheap pieties and shallow sentiments. Mackillop is a tough but gracious woman, shrewd but

deeply compassionate, leaving the audience with a sense of admiration. What transpires is surprising and satisfying."

- The Aquinas Academy.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

Bruckner's Os Justi, from the Sacred Choral Music. It yields to the soundscape of the Australian bush.

Penola, South Australia, 1867. A special light discovers MARY MACKILLOP, in simple civilian dress, praying.

MARY: Oh, God, help me to know you in all your creation. In every humpy, let me see a manger. In every larrikin, the face of young Jesus. In every fallen street girl, the courage of our Mother, Mary. In every tramp and swagman, the dignity of Joseph, our Foster Father, in whose name I would advance. Make my love burn fierce as the outback sun. Drench my pains and labours in the storm of your grace. Harden me to survive both tempest and desert. Make me your explorer, sure of my direction, scornful of all comforts, joyful in endurance and trusting of all my fellow travellers. Help me to put knowledge in the minds of the young. And, this above all, dare me to cross this great continent and open its heart...

Lights cross fade. The din of the soundscape becomes intense, and gradually yields to the sound of a violin.

Lights reveal FATHER JULIAN TENISON WOODS (JULIAN) playing the violin. He stops, staring out.

JULIAN: *(Smiles, gently)* Is it you? You with your virgin cloth of roses and your burning hair? Can I hear your voice of light? Show me your cloak of white silver and your palms of gold. Reach through me with your arms of perfect marble and your eyes of love.

MARY MACKILLOP *appears behind him, young, energetic, uneasy at finding JULIAN in this private moment. She is secretly amused and puzzled at his intense invocation.*

MARY: Hello there.

JULIAN loses the moment. He sighs, letting the violin and bow sink to his sides.

JULIAN: I was invoking the Queen of Heaven.

MARY: *(laughs)* And all you got was a plain old Scot. Mary Mackillop. How do you do?

JULIAN: Oh. Yes. I'm Julian Tenison Woods. *(They find each other attractive so he adds)* Father Julian Tenison Woods. Your parish priest.

A nervous pause.

MARY: Our Lady's arms are not made of marble, you know. That's just a statue.

JULIAN: I am also a poet.

MARY: (*laughs*) That doesn't absolve you from the truth.

JULIAN: No, but it admits of more variety.

MARY: I thought you were a scientist, Father Woods.

JULIAN: The two are not incompatible. But yes, I'm a geologist of sorts.

MARY: Oh. Why geology?

JULIAN: The earth is our garden. And I like to set a limit to my ignorance. You?

MARY: I'm a Christian. I like to set a limit to my happiness.

A sensual tension.

JULIAN: So then. What are her arms made of, if not marble?

MARY: I believe in work. Therefore her arms are made of flesh and blood. Her eyes are made of suffering; her hair is made of desert grasses, and the soles of her feet are worn through from sorrow and the need for hope. Her soul is made of love.

JULIAN is transfixed. He moves closer to MARY.

JULIAN: You said you believed in work. I am in search of such women.

MARY: I know. I mean, I heard.

JULIAN: Why?

MARY: Why?

JULIAN: Why do you believe in work?

MARY: It is the simplest force on earth. I believe we should glorify it. Poverty is Goliath, and I am David, searching the land for a stone big enough to bring it down.

JULIAN: Where do you propose to find this stone?

MARY: You'll do.

His sacerdotal gravitas is offended

JULIAN: I beg your pardon.

MARY: I said, you'll do, Father

A pause

You see, I have this image, well a sort of vision I suppose.

JULIAN: David and Joan of Arc.

MARY: An order of women. Teachers. Dressed in brown, the colour of the earth itself.

JULIAN: At the service of what, a colonial God?

MARY: At the service of educating the children of the poor. Because if we don't do it, no one else will. They should be taught to know themselves, their world and their God.

JULIAN: An army of brown virgins....their habits sunburnt in the searing service of Christ. And always simple, always poor, always pathetically begging and downtrodden.

(*Excited now*) Yes, I like this very much. Rejecting the values of this world. Leading the poor children from the dusty dry plains to the flowing river of knowledge.

MARY: Fine poetry, Father Woods, but for the moment, I'm an army of one.

JULIAN: Yes, and I assume with no property.

MARY: There is an old stable next to the church.

JULIAN: It's rather primitive, I'm afraid. Even the horses left in disgust.

MARY: With a little labour, it could serve well as a schoolroom.

JULIAN: Labour? Who exactly?

MARY: I must recruit the women.

JULIAN: Yes, but from where?

MARY: Anyone who will listen long enough to be curious.

JULIAN: Very well. I agree. I will be your foundation stone.

An awkward pause

JULIAN: Well, you don't imagine for a moment that you yourself can be founder? The Bishop wouldn't hear of it. And no Bishop, no order. So: do we have an understanding?

MARY: I suppose we do.

JULIAN: I will speak to Bishop Sheil.

MARY: Thank you, Father Woods.

JULIAN: Is that all?

MARY: Well you could play me a melody on the fiddle.

JULIAN: Mary Mackillop - this is no Irish fiddle. This is an English violin.

He plays, beautifully. The lights begin a transition, as the music fills the space.

SCENE ONE

The violin yields to a small organ. A country chapel.

The Profession of Sister MARY MACKILLOP is in progress. BISHOP SHEIL presides in full regalia. JULIAN assists him.

MARY, central, is prostrate at the foot of the altar steps before the celebrants. She wears the brown habit of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph. Also present are MONICA (ready to profess after MARY); ANGELA, (in undergarment, her habit over her arm); and FRANCIS XAVIER (who is in her house clothes but holding her habit in her hands). These represent the stages of accession to the Sisterhood.

JULIAN: (English accent) "...and there followed him a great company of women, and Jesus, turning unto them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but weep for yourselves and for your children."

SHEIL: (Irish accent) Sister Mary of the Cross, approach the altar on which we celebrate the mystery of Christ's passion.

MARY approaches and kneels. FRANCIS XAVIER (FX) is making some intrusive noise with her rosary beads. SHEIL declines to proceed until the interruption ceases. FX becomes aware and stops.

SHEIL: Dominus vobiscum.

MARY: (Australian accent with a hint of Scot) Et cum spiritu tuo.

The soundscape grows. SHEIL puts a crown of thorns on MARY's head and a huge cross over her shoulder. A special light intensifies on MARY.

SHEIL: Wear this crown of thorns on your head and in your heart, and carry the burden of this cross on your shoulder and in your soul.

JULIAN passes him the ring. SHEIL blesses it and puts it on MARY's finger .

SHEIL: On this fifteenth day of August, in the year of Our Lord, 1867, on the Feast of The Assumption, in the presence of Father Julian Tenison Woods, Founder of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, to which holy order you seek entry, I espouse you, Mary Mackillop, to Jesus Christ, Son of the Supreme Father.

MARY convulses. MONICA goes to assist. SHEIL reacts. MARY prevents assistance and tries to steady herself. A violent bleating of crows. The soundscape intensifies, drowning the rest of the ceremony. MONICA approaches to repeat the ceremony as beckoned by the Bishop.

SHEIL: Sister Monica, approach the altar on which we celebrate the mystery of Christ's passion.

Slow blackout. Full soundscape of birds, insects, frogs, crickets etc.

SCENE TWO

A simple rented dwelling in Penola, 1868 . A wooden table and some chairs. Tin tea mugs. On the table is a simple meal of bread, potatoes and turnips. Seated are MARY, JULIAN, MONICA and ANGELA.

MARY: You'll have some turnips, Fr Woods?

JULIAN: *(revolted)* Delicious, but... no.

MONICA: *(Irish. Direct)* Don't you like them ?

JULIAN: *(diplomatically)* Oh... well...

MONICA: It's alright. I'll eat yours. Whoops ! There I go ! Sister Greedy Guts. Old habits die hard.

She eats the turnip. It isn't very nice.

ANGELA: *(Australian)* I thought you hated those, Monica.

MONICA: Yes, but I have faith in them.

JULIAN: What I'd give for some apple pie.

MONICA: Apple pie! What a luxury.

JULIAN: My mother used to bake the best apple pie in the world. Still. Beggars can't be choosers.

FX comes in with a billycan of hot tea.

ANGELA: Ah, FX, I was hoping we'd have tea. Hard to come by out where I am.

MONICA: That must be the oldest billycan in South Australia. Amazing it still stands up.

FRANCIS XAVIER: *(Manchester accent)* Now, now. Charity to all. Mustn't speak ill of the old. Heaven knows, I polish it every bloody day.

Awkward silence. She pours tea into their mugs. They drink the tea

JULIAN: Lovely.

MONICA: Yes.

ANGELA: Mmm.

FRANCIS XAVIER: Good.

JULIAN: There's something... what is it? Some subtle flavour in the tea, Sister Francis Xavier. What is it exactly?

MARY: *(small pause)* Turnips.

Explosion of laughter by the sisters. JULIAN's smile stiffens.

MARY: And it's beautiful, FX.

JULIAN: Now, Sisters. Down to business. You've all had ample time to examine The Rule as I have drafted it in our Constitution. Unless anyone has anything further on that, I think we can hand over to Sister Mary for any points of discussion.

MARY: Thankyou, Father. Sisters, I have some good news. God has seen to our needs. *(Producing a legal document)* As you know, the stable continues to hold our first

schoolroom, and we have been using the small outback hut for our second. Sister Angela carries on her wonderful teaching work there without any assistance (*A stern glance from JULIAN*) - save from Our Blessed Lord. Well, the good news is that the very same hut has now most generously been bequeathed to us by will....

Except for JULIAN, general expression of delight

MONICA: Deo gratias. (*Julian turns and glares at her*) The hut.

MARY: ...which means the rent saved there can be put towards plans for a third school for children even farther out.

Continued good cheer

JULIAN: (*coolly*) It is apparent to me that despite your assurances, none of you has absorbed the fundamental premise of my Constitution.

MONICA: Our constitution.

MARY: (*reprimanding*) Sister Monica.

MONICA: (*To MARY*) Well, you are the co-founder.

MARY: Father Woods is addressing our Congregation.

ANGELA: Our what?

JULIAN: Have I not made it perfectly plain that the Order shall not, under any circumstances, own property?

MONICA: Yes, but a gift....

JULIAN: Any circumstances whatsoever. Poverty is our highest state. Poverty, Sisters. Always poverty.

ANGELA: But a hut!

JULIAN: No gifts. No huts. No property.

FRANCIS XAVIER: (*Pointedly*) Maybe some tea?

JULIAN *glares at her.*

ANGELA: But are we to reject what God provides?

JULIAN: We are to reject what the Devil offers. Property corrupts the spirit. Property is of man, not of God. Property means security. Security means complacency. Complacency leads to pride. And pride is the magnet that draws the Devil. It's his fanfare. His ensign. His vestment.

They all speak at once and look to MARY.

MARY: Father has spoken. (*pause*) And we have listened to him.

JULIAN (*glowing*) However I do have some good news. We have been given a piano.

FRANCIS XAVIER: That's nice.

JULIAN: Nice? It is tremendous.

MARY: Twice in one day are we tempted by the devil.

JULIAN: Sister Mary?

MARY: Having just rejected one temptation to property, we're confronted by yet another.

JULIAN: Not property, Sister. This is a piano. It's... music. God's own language. The harmony of angels. A hut is an indulgence for the body; a piano is a legacy for the soul. Music joins the heavens to the earth.

MONICA: So a piano in this colony has a value far in excess of a hut?

JULIAN: Well...

FRANCIS XAVIER: I like pianos. I can play Fur Elise. I learnt it when I was eleven. I used to tune our piano and polish it!

JULIAN: (*Excited*) We could do duets.

MARY: Music, as Father says, is God's language, but as his instrument is the organ, and not the piano. No doubt we will find a suitable charity to take it from us.

JULIAN: Take it from us?

MARY: As pianos are usually for the drawing rooms of moneyed people....

MONICA: Oh, I don't know. I used to work bars that..

She mimes "Whoops!" JULIAN frowns.

MARY: and certain public bars. It would be good to find a poor family to whom it will bring comfort.

JULIAN: But this piano is...well...a sacred object.

MARY: And as our whole purpose is to teach, not entertain ourselves...

JULIAN: But....

MARY: We shall continue to educate poor children, not to re-create the drawing rooms of Edinburgh. As Father Woods has said, the hut, so generously left to us by one about to meet their Maker, is nonetheless property, and sadly it must follow that a piano is also a temptation from the devil and ought to be resisted with every fibre of our being...

JULIAN: Oh very well, we'll take the wretched hut!

MARY: Are you sure we should?

JULIAN: Yes, yes.

MARY: If you really think so...

JULIAN: I do. Now...

MARY: God is good. Now these dear little larrikins will be able to learn about the three cardinal virtues in a nice huttred environment, free from rent.

MONICA: (*Ponders*) Three cardinal virtues? Why is it always three?

MARY: Actually there's a fourth.

JULIAN: There is?

MARY: Good grammar. Oh, and knowing how many L's in 'parallel'. (*She makes a correction in the legal document*).

MONICA: So how many are there?

MARY: Three.

The Piano is brought in. Julian sits at it, plays.

SCENE THREE

Sound of sisters praying the rosary.

SINGLE VOICE: *“The fourth Sorrowful Mystery, The Carrying of the Cross.”*

MARY: *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*

SISTERS: *(Responding) Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

MARY, *alone, cries out in the dark.*

Lights reveal her, seized with pain and clutching rosary beads. She calls out in spasms of prayer.

MARY: *... thy womb... thy womb..*

SISTERS: *(over)... blessed is the fruit of thy womb....*

MARY: *... Blessed art thou....*

SISTERS: *(over) ... among women....*

MARY: *... among women...*

“Women” reverberates. MARY’s pain becomes intense.

There is a persistent knocking on the door (Off) which she ignores.

She remains in pain which she must endure alone. The knocking continues and fades in the transition to:

SCENE FOUR

The Beatles' "Let It Be" fills the space. Roman sunlight. An inner chamber of the Vatican, 2008. There is a sense of ornament and classical splendour. As the Beatles' song fades, POPE BENEDICT XVI is discovered in his own space, playing a fine version of the same melody on what was Julian's piano. He plays well, with flourish.

Outside, MONSIGNOR KINSELLA appears, escorting a high profile Islamic visitor through the space. ANNA DETWEILLER, a German-Australian journalist, enters alone with an Ipod, taking in the space. (NOTE: She is the same actor who plays Mary Mackillop). KINSELLA joins her.

KINSELLA: Buon giorno, signora.

She doesn't hear him. He comes in front of her. She removes the ear-set.

KINSELLA: Non e normale per i visitatori di salutare il Papa con un Ipod.

ANNA: E normale dovere aspettare per quasi una hora per un appuntamento?

KINSELLA : (American) You're obviously not Italian.

ANNA: And you're obviously... ?

KINSELLA: Monsignor Kinsella. I'm His Holiness' Secretary of Appointments.

ANNA: It takes a monsignor to do that? Isn't there a mission somewhere – a favella?

KINSELLA: I'm sure glad we didn't keep you waiting *two* hours. His Holiness has been caught up in a dialogue with the Mufti of Milan. Which is the closest thing to war.

ANNA: There is a Mufti in *Milan*?

KINSELLA: My dear, there is a Mufti on Mars.

ANNA: Maybe His Holiness should be armed?

KINSELLA: Trust me: These days, His Holiness is totally bullet-proof.

ANNA: A good thing.

KINSELLA: (Anxious) You're a journalist.

ANNA: Relax. I'm also an historian. And that's my hat today.

KINSELLA: You won't mind if we shave five minutes off your audience.

ANNA: Because I'm an historian?

KINSELLA: This morning's really stuffed the schedule. How you managed to score twenty five minutes' private interface I'll never know. It must have been handed down from on high.

ANNA: I'm German.

KINSELLA: So who isn't round here? If you don't mind my saying, you don't sound German.

ANNA: My parents emigrated to Australia. I have an uncle in what used to be East Berlin.

KINSELLA: Now that's useful.

POPE BENEDICT's mobile sounds to the tune of Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring. He stops playing, takes the call. He rises, sweeping into the same space as ANNA and KINSELLA.

BENEDICT: (To phone) In quel caso, Eminenza, come sono Canadesi, dobbiamo rincontrare il Francofono prima del Anglofono. A lei a aggiustare.

He pushes down the antenna and fixes the phone to his belt. He now speaks in English with his German accent.

BENEDICT: My apologies, Anna. I've been held up all day. It started early this morning with Signora Mussolini.

KINSELLA: *(To Anna)* Her train was late.

BENEDICT: She's very demanding and won't take no for an answer. Runs in the family.

KINSELLA: Your Holiness is aware that you have the General of the Jesuits in *(stresses)* twenty minutes.

BENEDICT: Yes, yes. Please sit down, Anna. Be careful. That seat's got a wobble. I must get it fixed.

ANNA: Thankyou, Your Holiness.

BENEDICT: Grazie, Monsignor.

KINSELLA: *(leaving)* Prego, Santita. *(reminding him)* Venti minuti, Santita, non venti cinque.

BENEDICT: *(waves him off)* Prego. Prego. Prego.

ANNA: It's good of you to see me. I know you're busy.

BENEDICT: Not at all.

As they now are actually speaking German, there are no accents

ANNA: I heard the piano. Was it you?

BENEDICT: Yes. Music is a mystery. For reasons we cannot explain, it touches nerves and reaches emotions. And beyond all understanding, it catches fire. There are moments of Beethoven where the music bypasses the body completely and pours straight into the soul.

ANNA: Yes. I can't conceive of life without music. I read of people who have lost their mind, yet they remember a melody.

BENEDICT: A special kind of grace.

ANNA: Failsafe hard-wiring.

A moment.

BENEDICT: I see your German is as good as your English.

ANNA: Papa insisted.

BENEDICT: Of course. Your Uncle Helmut must be pleased too.

ANNA: Yes.

BENEDICT: And you must be proud of his appointment as Bishop?

ANNA: *He* certainly is.

BENEDICT: Oh I forgot - you converted to Islam.

ANNA: Yes.

BENEDICT: Hardly a fashionable move in Australia, I'd imagine.

ANNA: No. Not yet

BENEDICT: So you're a Muslim.

ANNA: Was. Was a Muslim. But now... I don't know.

BENEDICT: But you're writing a book about Mother Mary Mackillop....?

ANNA: 'Mary Mackillop - The First Australian'.

BENEDICT: A staunch Catholic.

ANNA: A woman behind a veil.

BENEDICT: The choice intrigues me. You're writing a book about Mother Mary Mackillop, a staunch Catholic woman behind a veil, but you "don't know" if you're Catholic or Muslim or *nothing*?

ANNA: I might be agnostic but I still care about history and justice. Especially justice for women.

BENEDICT: Then you've definitely moved on from Islam – though don't quote me.

ANNA: And if you moved things along a bit, Mary would be the first Australian saint by now. And I could finish my last chapter. I mean, here we are in the 21st century, she's been dead for a hundred years... so I was wondering how long...?

BENEDICT: (*Quoting St. Joan*) "How long, O God, how long"?

ANNA: It can't be all that hard?

BENEDICT: (*A little taken aback*) I don't make saints. God makes saints.

ANNA: You're the one with the hotline.

BENEDICT: (*taking up the mobile phone*) You want me to call him?

ANNA: Is he there, I wonder?

BENEDICT: Of course. I was only speaking to him this morning.

Silence. He puts the phone away.

ANNA: Can I start by asking... What exactly is a saint? The criteria, I mean.

An expansive pause. The POPE consults his watch.

BENEDICT: One chapter to go and you don't know?

ANNA: I think I know.

BENEDICT: Good. Tell me what you think you know.

ANNA: OK. Five things. First, she was a brave woman. Second, she was a revolutionary. Third, she fought the church. To be a saint, you have to fight the church, yes?

BENEDICT: The fourth point?

ANNA: Fourth, she was a patriot. Fifth, she suffered.

BENEDICT: Mmm.

ANNA: All her life she suffered. Like Jesus. She suffered both at the hands of God and of men. The male hierarchy.

BENEDICT: All of which, no doubt, makes her admirable. Like you.

ANNA: Me?

BENEDICT: You're a brave woman? Yes. You're a revolutionary? Of course. You're a fighter. Here you are fighting me - "the male church". You're a patriot. I can see you are. And I'm sure you suffer.

ANNA: (*Consults watch*) I don't want to waste the time I have.

BENEDICT: (*Consults watch*) Do you believe in miracles?

ANNA: If something can happen in the world, it may happen. If something can't happen in the world, it won't.

BENEDICT: I'll take that as no. (*a pause*) You are so like your uncle. You don't hold back. First the Nazis and then the communists - God knows how he kept his sense of humour.

ANNA: A survival technique, no doubt. (*a pause*) You were talking about miracles.

BENEDICT: Yes. You know, every time Mother Teresa fed a starving child, she experienced a miracle: suddenly she is no longer holding a starving child.

ANNA: I found her pro-life posturing deeply hypocritical.

POP: We'll agree to disagree.

ANNA: We don't agree on anything, and you know we don't.

BENEDICT: You're angry, Anna.

ANNA: Well, what do you personally expect of a saint? Why aren't all the popes saints?

BENEDICT: First things first. What do I expect? Persuasion. Why aren't all the popes saints? There's a limit even to miracles. Speaking as a pope.

ANNA: Australia is waiting. It's clear as daylight she's a saint. The rest is mere semantics and bureaucratic obstruction. You beatify fanatical fascists from Spain, but Mary Mackillop of the Colonies just isn't good enough!

BENEDICT: Stop! Stop! What's the rush? If your client's in heaven there's no hurry.

ANNA: When Mary Mackillop wanted to achieve something important, she acted.

BENEDICT: "In action, how like a god."

ANNA: Hamlet. Perfect training for a pope. The elegant art of procrastination.

BENEDICT: I'm usually accused of making up my mind.

ANNA: And have you? Off the record...?

MONSIGNOR KINSELLA *appears*.

KINSELLA: (*looking at his watch*) Santita.....

BENEDICT: (*Raises a hand . German accent*) Patience, patience, Monsignor.

KINSELLA: But....

BENEDICT: It's just getting interesting....

Blackout. Thunder and lightning.

SCENE FIVE**(a)**

A storm. Rain. A street in Adelaide, 1869.

Night. Two SISTERS, as shadowy forms, are begging. PASSERS-BY, PROSTITUTES... an element of sleaze. Furtive, silent soliciting. We make out MONICA.

MONICA: Spare a coin for Jesus. *(She moves about.)* Spare a coin for Jesus.

She approaches a PROSTITUTE ministering to a CLIENT. From the huddle comes a low moan and a wail.

MONICA: Spare a coin for..... *(She stops.)* Jesus!

PROSTITUTE: When Jesus has worked as hard as I have, then he can have it, and not a moment sooner. Now sod off.

MONICA: *(recognises her)* Rosie!

PROSTITUTE: Monica?! Christ, love! Whatever you're doing here, you won't fetch twopence in that outfit.

The SECOND SISTER, alarmed, drags MONICA away.

(b)

Rain. A wealthy area. Outside JOANNA BARR-SMITH's home. MARY, alone, with a begging box. JOANNA appears. A stunned silence. MARY rattles the box.

MARY: Good evening, Ma'am. Spare a coin for our work?

JOANNA: You call this work?

MARY: Schools, ma'am. *(beat)* For the poor.

JOANNA: Have you no shame?

MARY: *(laughs)* None, I'm afraid.

JOANNA: Am I mistaken, or are you a Roman Catholic sister?

MARY: Sister Mary of the Cross. How do you do Mrs...

JOANNA: Barr-Smith, if you must know. Joanna Barr-Smith.

MARY goes to shake hands, realises her hand is dirty, so wipes it on her habit.

JOANNA: This is not work, Sister Mary. This is begging.

MARY: *(laughs)* Afraid so.

JOANNA: *(about to go inside)* No self-respecting woman could do this – certainly not in Adelaide. Now if you'll excuse me, this rain is not good for our well-being.

MARY: *(not letting her go)* All life is begging, Mrs Barr-Smith.

JOANNA stops.

MARY: When we're born, don't we beg our mothers for treats? And as we live, don't we beg God's help for some purpose? And as we die, do we not beg a moment more of life to complete God's work?

JOANNA: There is no God, Sister Mary, and my suffering is proof of it.

MARY: Oh, each of us bears a cross, Mrs Barr-Smith, and God's will is merciful.

JOANNA: Mercy! If what you believe is true, then God's mercy is God's madness.

(turning) Goodnight.

MARY: I am doing this for children. You don't have children, Ma'am?

JOANNA: I've had seven children. All dead at birth. For each one of them I begged, but in my womb, each one was crucified.

MARY closes her eyes for a moment.

JOANNA: What are you doing?

MARY: Praying for your children. I won't be a moment. *(She opens her eyes.)* This may sound strange to you, Mrs Barr-Smith, but God especially loves those he allows to suffer.

JOANNA: *(A bitter laugh)* I'll give you Christians this: there's no calamity you can't turn to a blessing. It's no wonder persecuting you drove Nero mad. The more you suffer, the more you thank your insane God for the suffering.

MARY convulses suddenly in a spasm of pain. It grows worse.

JOANNA: Sister Mary..?

MARY: I.. must go... I'm sorry.

She picks up the begging box, but as the pain intensifies, it falls with a crash of coins.

JOANNA: You need a doctor.

MARY: No...

JOANNA: Yes!

MARY: ... Jesus help me...

JOANNA: Perhaps you'd better come in, out of the rain.

Thunder and lightning. Blackout. Sound of CHILDREN singing "Hail Queen Of Heaven".

SCENE SIX

Inside the first St Joseph's Convent, Adelaide. ONE SISTER is sweeping the floor, a SECOND SISTER is scrubbing. JULIAN passes the first, who does not look up.

JULIAN: Sister. (*Silence*) I take it you're too engrossed in your duties to acknowledge the priestly presence of your Founder.

SISTER: I'm sorry, Father, I.....

JULIAN: Don't answer back, Sister. No doubt if Our Blessed Lord passed you on his way to Calvary, you would ignore him.

SISTER: But, Father, you yourself said....

JULIAN:... for you to keep silence. Obedience, yes, but at all times, reverence and respect. Respect for the sacred office of the priesthood.

SISTER: Yes, Father, but ...

JULIAN: Silence, I say. For your penance, you will say the Five Sorrowful Mysteries - in reparation for the indignity.

She kneels, bewildered, and prays as ordered. JULIAN opens his breviary, walks on and reaches the SECOND SISTER. She stands up and greets him.

SECOND SISTER: Pax Christi, Pater.

JULIAN (*alarmed*) You were bidden to speak, Sister?

SECOND SISTER : I..

JULIAN: Yet more insolence ! Hold your tongue, Sister. It isn't enough for you to interrupt a priest saying his office, but you must bandy vanities with an alter Christus. Do you think we care for your scraps of Latin, your half understood fragments of disrespect?

SECOND SISTER: (*on the verge of tears*) If you please, Father, you told us we were always...

JULIAN: Silentio! The discipline of this community perfecta non est. There have been complaints. The Five Glorious Mysteries, Sister, and meditate humbly on the ever-glorious mystery of divine authority.

She kneels. He is about to go. MARY has entered.

MARY: (*to JULIAN*) Complaints?

JULIAN: About our standards.

MARY: Which particular standards?

JULIAN: The women....the teaching. If they reach the Bishop...

MARY: Our enrolments are increasing. I should think His Grace would be very pleased.

JULIAN: Let's hope so. For all our sakes.

He exits . MARY assesses the situation and kneels between the praying SISTERS.

MARY: Let's pray together.

SISTERS: (*tearfully*) Thank you, Sister Mary.

MARY: Almighty and Eternal God, we, your servants, beg forgiveness for our sins of pride and disrespect, for not always knowing when we are proud and disrespectful, and for our unsuccessful attempts to suppress our giggles in the face of humanitas confusio.

They all burst out laughing. JULIAN re-enters. He has a letter. He stands next to SECOND SISTER.

JULIAN: Pax Christi, Sister. How long is it since you've heard from your family?

SECOND SISTER: I've obeyed the rules, Father. Almost six months.

JULIAN: I have a letter here from them. For you.

SECOND SISTER: (*overjoyed*) Oh, praise be to God! Thankyou, Father. Deo gratias.

JULIAN: It will bring you comfort, Sister? Consolation in your suffering?

SECOND SISTER: Oh, yes, Father. Yes, it will! A letter for me!

She reaches for it. Almost ritually, JULIAN rips it up and scatters the pieces. SECOND SISTER is distraught.

JULIAN: What comfort, what consolation had Our Divine Lord in his suffering? Eli , Eli, lamma sabacthani. "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" Think on your vocation, Sister, and thank God for your agony. To deny comfort is to bestow grace.

SECOND SISTER weeps.

JULIAN: Weep not! For tomorrow is the feast of Our Lady, Queen of Heaven. Oh, happy day.

He goes.

MARY: Oh, happy day, indeed. We thank Our Lord for the challenge Father Woods has put before us.

SECOND SISTER: What challenge?

MARY: To restore this letter to its original form!

BOTH SISTERS: ?

MARY: How much more do we treasure that which was lost when it is restored to us! (*searching among the pieces*) What a privilege for us to bring order where there was chaos.

They all begin rearranging the scattered pieces.

SECOND SISTER: (*reading a fragment*) "Your sister's had a..."

FIRST SISTER: (*alarmed as she reads a fragment*) "...stroke.."

SECOND SISTER: Oh, no!

MARY: (*with another fragment*) "...of good luck!"

SECOND SISTER : Deo gratias!

Much excitement. MARY brings it temporarily to a halt.

MARY: Now before we go any further, a prayer of thanks for Father Woods and the grace he's brought us today.

They look at her as if she's mad. She smiles, prays. They join in. Lights change. The SISTERS leave.

MARY *alone, praying* . A YOUNG SISTER *runs in, frantic with ecstasy.*

YOUNG SISTER: Sister Mary! Sister Mary!

MARY: What is it?

YOUNG SISTER: I've seen her!

MARY: Her?

YOUNG SISTER: Our Lady!

MARY: Oh? And where was she this time?

YOUNG SISTER: In the park, by the jacarandah tree.

MARY: Last week in the dormitory. Yesterday on the window sill and now in the park by the jacarandah tree. She does get about.

YOUNG SISTER: Father Woods believes me.

MARY: Father Woods is under some strain. Now why don't you be a good girl and help me peel the chokos?

Sound over of SISTER announcing "The Fourth Joyful Mystery, The Presentation of the Child Jesus In The Temple."

CHILDREN'S VOICES *respond in chanting the Pater Noster, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..."*

JULIAN *alone, praying. Near him, a flagellation birch.*

JULIAN: Lord, attune the discord in my heart, restore harmony to the humble instrument of your service. Why, O God, do I mistreat these women? They are good women. I...like them. I love them...as you have commanded me to love. In their own way, they try to do your holy will. I am ever conscious, in their presence, to keep purity uppermost in my heart... I burn with the consolation of chastity. But how shall I make reparation for what I have done to them?

A servant brings him a cake box.

SERVANT: I'm sorry Father Woods. I'll wait till you've finished...

JULIAN: No, it's alright. What is it?

SERVANT: Mrs Mills, Father. She baked this for you. It's an apple pie.

Julian is delighted. He smells the closed box with deep joy. A moment passes. Before he opens the box, he stops.

JULIAN: Would you be so kind as to take this to the Sisters with my blessings?

SERVANT: But, Father, it's your favourite...

JULIAN: Obedience in all. Thank you.

The servant takes it. Lights transfer to the Sisters. They receive the cake with excitement. They open it. MARY appears.

ANGELA: Apple pie!

FRANCIS-XAVIER: Ooh, look, there's a card inside.

MONICA: *(reads)* "Dear Father Woods, my children and I owe our lives to you. This is all I can manage by way of a small token of deepest gratitude. Mrs Doreen Mills."

ANGELA: He's a dark horse, that one.

MARY: Judge not, lest ye be judged.

MONICA: Please, Sister Mary, *please* don't make us give this to the poor.

MARY: And why should we not?

MONICA: Because we *are* the bloody poor!

MARY: *(Reflects for a moment)* It is a gift from God. Let's enjoy it!

She goes. They open the box with delight.

SCENE SEVEN

A school, Adelaide. A bell rings. Activity erupts, as the SISTERS prepare to teach. JOANNA BARR -SMITH appears with a DOCTOR. MARY enters, then stops.

JOANNA: This is Doctor Fraser. (MARY frowns.) I can be as determined as you.

MARY: I have important classes to attend to this morning. We're expecting Bishop Sheil.

JOANNA: All the more reason to have a doctor on stand by.

FRASER: Good morning, Sister Mary.

MARY: I know how busy you must be, Doctor Fraser. Will five minutes be sufficient?

As they repair in conference.

JOANNA: And remember, Mary: obedience.

MONICA reveals a hand-drawn map of Australia. She is teaching Geography.

MONICA: Now, repeat after me. "Australia is the largest island but the smallest continent."

Voices of CHILDREN off repeat the line.

MONICA: The largest city in Australia is... ?

Various voices off suggest different cities.

MONICA: That's right, Patrick, Sydney. Bridget, get that cicada off your face. Yes, Sydney. And where do we find Sydney?

Utter silence

MONICA: (pointing to map) Sydney is...(vaguely searches) ... here.

The action crosses to MARY, holding a bottle of brandy, seeing DOCTOR FRASER out.

FRASER: Two spoonfuls when necessary.

MARY: We have a vow of temperance, Doctor.

FRASER: Brandy in these doses is medicinal, Sister Mary. You'd do well to take my advice. I've known such pain to become disabling.

MARY: But...

FRASER: Obedience, Sister. Doctor's orders.

MARY: We can only repay you in prayers, Dr. Fraser.

FRASER: Oh, you've no need. I have an arrangement with Mrs Barr-Smith.

MARY: Ah. Well, in that case, while you're here, we've had a small outbreak of lice. Could you manage a quick look at Sister Francis Xavier's class?

FRASER: Er... yes.. How many are there?

MARY: Only sixty.

They go. Cross to MONICA with her map.

MONICA: No, it's in Tasmania. And where is Tasmania?

VOICE: *(off)* Brisbane.

MONICA: Michael O'Flaherty, leave Nora Kelly's plaits alone.

JULIAN, MARY and ANGELA arrive with the formidable presence of BISHOP SHEIL.

MONICA: Strewth! He's early!

MARY: Stand up, boys and girls. Say good morning to His Grace and Father Woods.

VOICES: *(off)* Good morning, Your Grace, and may God bless you. Good morning, Father Woods, and may God bless you.

SHEIL: Thankyou, children. And what aspect of our holy faith are we studying this morning?

MONICA: *(brightly - to cover)* Geography.

SHEIL: *(a beat)* And what is it I see here?

MONICA: Australia, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Yes, Sister, but where exactly did you acquire your knowledge of Australia ?

MONICA: Here.

SHEIL: Here??

MONICA: Here, Your Grace. In the colony.

SHEIL: Perhaps you'd be so kind as to erase the map.

MARY: Your Grace...

SHEIL stops her with a gesture. MONICA looks to MARY for guidance. MARY remains calm. MONICA erases the map.

SHEIL: Good. Now, Sister, if you wouldn't mind drawing for us a map of Italy...

MONICA: *(Alarmed. Hesitates.)* Italy...? *(painful pause)*

SHEIL: Go on, Sister. We're waiting.

MONICA: *(after a time)* I cannot, Your Grace.

Laughter from the CHILDREN off

SHEIL: I see. And this, Sister Mary, as I understand it, is your teacher of Geography?

MARY: *(pause)* Australian Geography, Your Grace.

SHEIL: If I may assist.

He takes the chalk and draws a map of Italy.

SHEIL: And what, my dear children in Christ, is the capital city of Italy. That boy.

(Silence) Anyone?

No reply. SHEIL turns in time to see the SISTERS mouthing "Rome." They freeze with their mouths open. They variously try to convert their expressions to yawns, face exercises etc.

SHEIL: Not one. Not one child here is aware of the seat of all divine authority on earth. Not one. So much for Geography, Sister Mary. What then can I assume of their knowledge of Christian Doctrine ?

MARY: Oh, the children are well versed in their catechism, Your Grace.

SHEIL: It's not the children that concern me. It's their teachers. Perhaps in the circumstances it's they I should examine. Father Woods, would you be good enough to supervise the children ...?

Sounds of the class dissolving

JULIAN: Come with Father. If we're lucky, there'll be time for The Stations Of The Cross before recreation.

He goes. SISTER FRANCIS XAVIER arrives with a posy of wild flowers.

FRANCIS XAVIER: Some fresh flowers for Your Grace...

She gives the flowers to SHEIL, who looks at them, considers them vulgar, and hands them to MARY.

FRANCIS XAVIER: Hope I'm not...(senses the tension) ...disrupting anything... So I'll just...disappear...(Attempts to creep out)

SHEIL: A most opportune moment, Sister. Please join us. I have one or two questions of a fundamental nature to ask you all. Sister Monica, how many persons are there in God?

MONICA: Three, Your Grace. Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

SHEIL: Excellent.

MONICA: *(elated at getting something right)* Good-oh!

SHEIL wipes the smile off her face with a withering look.

SHEIL: Now, Sister Angela. What happened to Our Blessed Lord on the third day after his suffering?

ANGELA: He rose from the dead, sir. *(correcting herself)* Your Grace.

SHEIL: What part of him, exactly, rose from the dead?

A silence

SHEIL: Anyone?

MONICA : The works. Lock, stock and barrel.

SHEIL: I beg your pardon ?

MONICA: Well, up went the lot.

MARY: Sister Monica refers to Our Lord's whole body and spirit, Your Grace.

SHEIL: I see. And is God visible or invisible?(to FRANCIS XAVIER) Sister Francis Xavier ?

FRANCIS XAVIER: Oh, invisible, Your Grace.

SHEIL: All thee persons?

FRANCIS XAVIER: Rath-er !

SHEIL: Good. But Sister Monica, did you not agree that Jesus' body rose from the dead?
MONICA : That I did, Your Grace.

Sample. Do Not Copy.