

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.

SHEIL: And was not this body of Our Lord bloodied and battered and broken for all to see? (*silence*) Well? Anyone?

ANGELA : Yes.

SHEIL: How then did this same body, witnessed as it was by the Magdalene and many others, become invisible for all to see?

Confusion

ANGELA: Maybe you can see him but not the other two?

A beat. He looks at her .

ANGELA: If only you knew where to look.

A helpless shrug at MARY

SHEIL: So somewhere in Heaven, then, there are two invisible Gods and one sorrowful, incapacitated invalid? (*a beat*) Sister Mary will explain.

Silence

MARY: It is a glorified body, Your Grace, in a state of mystical perfection.

SHEIL: Precisely. It is unfortunate that your sisters exhibit less expertise than you in matters of dogmatic accuracy.

MARY: The fault is mine, Your Grace. These are women of faith. I have been remiss in not encouraging a more technical approach to theology. In my mistaken view, I have not perceived God in terms of an examination - rather, as a source of infinite courage, inspiration and love. This is what we teach our little ones, and I pray they'll go on to develop the understanding so elegantly demonstrated by Your Grace.

SHEIL: The sisters may care to join their founder leading The Stations Of The Cross.

They go, leaving Sheil with Mary.

SHEIL: There have been complaints, Sister Mary. At first, I dismissed them as speculative prejudice. Adelaide is a small town. Misconceptions fester. Truth is elusive. But in the end, scandals - however distasteful - must be addressed. For me to ignore these would be to fail in my pastoral duty.

MARY: Scandals, Your Grace?

SHEIL: I'm afraid so.

MARY: Perhaps you might enlighten me as to the form these rumours take.

SHEIL: Your order increases by the month. One might say it's popular. Your schools are much in demand among our poorer children. You yourself are much admired. By many. But let us consider the sisters we've just examined. Sister Angela, for instance. What is her background?

MARY: Angela ? Optimism and hope. A good agricultural family, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Her capacity to farm is not in dispute. Sister Francis Xavier?

MARY: Oh, FX..? Domestic. Quite a governess, I'm told. Wonderfully practical. Breaks nothing but mends everything. Charity itself.

SHEIL: Which brings us to Sister Monica. Her background?

A silence

MARY: Urban, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Urban? In what sense "urban"?

MARY: Monica is a woman of faith, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Yes, yes... but "urban"... In what pursuit exactly passed she her "urban" days?

MARY: She was a fallen woman, Your Grace, but Our All Loving Lord raised her up.

SHEIL: A prostitute, then.

MARY: A woman of great faith, Your Grace.

SHEIL: That, too. But a prostitute.

MARY: Like St Mary Magdalene. She was a prostitute.

SHEIL: Oh, yes, Sister, but not a teacher. Nor, if I may say, a nun. All worthy causes have their teething pains. Religious orders are no exception. I, for one, rejoice in the ever-expanding work of The Sisters Of St Joseph Of The Sacred Heart, but in the exercise of my episcopal responsibility, I must intervene.

MARY: Your Grace?

SHEIL: The postulants are to go home.

MARY: Go...Go home?

SHEIL: Yes. They are to go home. Only those teachers trained in teaching are to remain. The rest must go back to school.

MARY: And Sister Monica? Is she to return to her urban pursuits?

SHEIL: The order cannot accommodate such persons, Sister Mary. She must be removed immediately.

MARY: Forgive me, Your Grace, I have allowed Your Grace to become misled as to our Rule.

SHEIL: Rule?

MARY: The Constitution by which our order is governed. Permit me to rectify my fault. Our Rule provides for the election of a Mother Superior to whom alone the sisters are answerable.

SHEIL: They are answerable to me!

MARY: Only in doctrinal disputes, which of course are in Your Grace's province.

SHEIL: I have known many orders of sisters in Ireland and Italy, Sister Mary, and in not a single one of them has such awesome authority been vested in a woman.

MARY: Father Woods drafted our Rule. Perhaps we should...?

SHEIL: Father Woods is English! The Church in this colony is not English - or Scottish. It is Irish. And Roman. You will obey your Bishop in all matters. This is revolutionary lunacy. Rome will never countenance it!

MARY: I have made Your Grace angry. My knowledge of the orders of Ireland and Italy is lamentable. Your Grace, aware that we are unique in the colony, endorsed our Rule, which lent our endeavours great encouragement. On a continent as vast as this, our order's work reaches over huge distances. It requires a strong central authority. The Superior must travel these distances, acquainting herself with each of the sisters. Your Grace's archdiocese consumes the very soul of your energy. How could I visit upon Your Grace the debilitating demands of such an office? Isn't it our divine charge to water this great desert with our

faith? This is a bloodied, battered and broken land - and ours is a mission of glory. It was in this spirit and possessed of this vision that Your Grace saw fit to endorse our Rule.

SHEIL: You would have your order of women govern itself regardless of the will of your Bishop?

MARY: No further than our Rule prescribes. And God will guide us in this matter, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Believe me, Sister Mary, in this particular matter, God and I act as one.

He holds out his hand. MARY kisses the ring. He leaves. Mary goes off in another direction. FRANCIS XAVIER appears with a vase. One by one, she places the wild flowers in the vase, smelling each one as she does. Andrew Lloyd Webber's Pie Jesu from Requiem grows in the space. It gives way to the sound of alarm.

Sample. Do Not Copy.

SCENE EIGHT

The Cortile del Rosario, the Vatican, 2008. An Alarm sounds. ANNA with POPE BENEDICT. Benedict sighs. He goes for his mobile, but KINSELLA appears in an agitated state. CHIEF of POLICE and GUARDS case the area.

KINSELLA: (*Exasperated*) Just what we needed. A security alert.

ANNA: What?

KINSELLA: Suspected bomb threat. It's the third time this month.

BENEDICT: Who is it this time?

KINSELLA: Anonymous. But with you, the General of the Jesuits and the Mufti of Milan all in the same place, it's a terrorist's trifecta.

CHIEF OF POLICE: I'm sorry, Holy Father. No one may enter or leave the precinct until further notice.

BENEDICT: (*sighs*) Wunderbar.

CHIEF OF POLICE: You are entirely safe here, and the guards are on full alert.

The POLICE CHIEF, talking Italian into a two-way radio, exits, and GUARDS follow.

KINSELLA: This has really stuffed the schedule.

He goes.

BENEDICT: Well. God must want us to spend a little longer together.

ANNA: Is it serious, do you think?

BENEDICT: Could be real. Could be a hoax. One never knows. I've got quite used to it.

ANNA: But you naturally assume it's an Islamic terrorist.

BENEDICT: These days, any outrage in the name of God is possible. For all I know, it's the militant wing of Nuns For Peace.

A moment passes.

They stand in front of a sculptured image of The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary, The Carrying of the Cross, depicting the agonising journey of Jesus to Calvary.

ANNA: It's beautiful.

BENEDICT: The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery - The Carrying of the Cross.

ANNA: Some scholars even say that Jesus was a political activist. Is that true?

BENEDICT: In a way.

ANNA: So was Mary Mackillop.

BENEDICT: Suffering is action, and action has a political dimension.

ANNA: It didn't matter that she didn't know she was a political activist. The point is that before the "founding fathers" beat the drum, she understood what was necessary to develop federation: central government. Yes, I know she was talking about an order of women, but her Rule was a metaphor for the whole of Australia. She was a visionary, a pioneer... the first "Australian". You want pain in the equation? She menstruated twice a month. Can you imagine that? Well, no, I suppose you can't. She probably had multiple sclerosis, though like political activism, it wasn't a familiar concept at the time. Crippling headaches... great

convulsions... Have you read her diaries? You should. And it wasn't as if she could grab a prescription for diacetyl morphine or order a Brompton Cocktail.

BENEDICT: What was that?

ANNA: Diacetyl morphine.

BENEDICT: No, the other.

ANNA: A Brompton cocktail. It's.....

BENEDICT: Yes, yes. I see.

ANNA: But for poor Mary, the best they could do was a spoonful of brandy.

BENEDICT: Lucky Australia wasn't under Sharia law.

ANNA: Well, some of your imams would have denied her even that in the cause of saintly temperance.

BENEDICT: My imams?

ANNA: All those bishops determined to deny her her proper place.

BENEDICT: I am not head of proper places. Nor, as you imply, do I stand in the way.

ANNA: You claim you need another of your miracles.

BENEDICT: I thought you didn't believe in them.

ANNA: I'm talking technicalities here.

BENEDICT: Ah.

ANNA: Isn't it enough for you that in 1961, a woman in Sydney with terminal leukemia was cured and, despite medical prognosis to the contrary, she went on to give birth to six children. Her family say they sought only the intercession of Mary Mackillop.

BENEDICT: Yes. It's debateable.

ANNA: So what's taking all the time?

BENEDICT: The debate.

ANNA: (*sighs*) Lawyers?

BENEDICT: Worse. Canon lawyers.

ANNA: But there was another miracle. A child in Melbourne cured of a disintegrated kidney. It dumbfounded all the doctors. Again, it was Mackillop they prayed to.

BENEDICT: Yes, but that happened after the case was put to us.

ANNA: So you're saying God's timing is bad?

BENEDICT: Bad? It's terrible! He'd make a lousy comedian.

ANNA: That from a German?

BENEDICT: It's a canon law technicality - and anyway, my job is to wish for miracles and then to be highly suspicious of them.

ANNA: Teutonic pragmatism.

BENEDICT: Roman Catholicism. But, yes, I'm suspicious of miracles, especially medical ones. We live in an age of science. We're the inheritors of the wonder drug. How do we know the miracle isn't the discovery of the drug, rather than the cure of the patient?

ANNA: Mary's whole life was a miracle.

BENEDICT: Anna, stop. Stop! (*indicating sculpture*) The Carrying of the Cross. Mary Mackillop was Mother Mary of the Cross. Let's call her by her correct title. A technicality. Like this man here, she carried her cross. Like this man, she understood why. It was because she desired to do God's will on earth. "Thy will be done." It was universal, not federal. She loved him. You must understand this. If she was an activist, let your revolutionaries pay homage. If she was a pioneer, let your historians celebrate her. If she was the symbol of a Founding Mother, tell your president.

ANNA: We don't have a Pres...

BENEDICT: If she menstruated twice a month and endured a litany of titanic suffering, let your doctors marvel and let your people praise her. This isn't a production line. We don't make saints that way. The halo doesn't come down like the cap on a milk bottle. For your hero to be a saint, we look for something no factory can manufacture. Something beyond this world. Something out of Heaven.

ANNA: At this rate, it'll be a miracle if she *ever* gets a gong.

BENEDICT: (*Shrugs*) Mmm. (*a beat*) Look, Anna: your Mother Mary of the Cross is a woman of heroic virtue. She is blessed. John Paul declared it. For the last chapter to be written... for that miracle, we must wait. But for lunch, we must not wait. You'll join us?

ANNA: I'm vegetarian.

BENEDICT: Good. Our wine is made from grapes. The Barolo Cooperative near Torino send it to us. And the good sisters at the Monastery of Santa Maria Goretti have baked us a pumpkin pie and a pear tart. All vegetarian. You'll come?

KINSELLA: (*Appearing*) Holiness.... the General of the Jesuits is waiting.

BENEDICT: (*German accent*) Move him to....

KINSELLA: Another working lunch?

BENEDICT: A working...cup of tea.

KINSELLA: He won't be happy.

BENEDICT: (*smiles*) No.

His mobile phone sounds. He answers it. A call to lunch. He leads Anna out, with a wave of his other hand.

BENEDICT: *Si, si. Andiamo, andiamo.* (*To Anna*) The Chief of Police has secured a safe passage as far as the dining room. So. Lunch.

Guards appear. Benedict leads the charge out.

SCENE NINE

Ave Maria, filling the space.

Inside the Franklin Street Convent, Adelaide.

Seated at a table is JULIAN, looking despondent. The SISTERS set a fairly bare table with bread and dripping. Julian picks up the bread, smells it, closes his eyes in horror. A moment. He smells the dripping. An even greater despondency comes over him.

JULIAN: Is this all there is?

MONICA: Do you mean that in a sort of, you know, philosophical sense, Father?

JULIAN: I was hitherto unaware of your philosophical meanderings, Sister Monica.

MONICA: You'd be surprised the byways I've meandered into, Father Woods. So when you say, you know, (*mimes a philosopher*) "Is this all there is?" (*Spreads her arms and looks to the universe*) do you mean in the universe or do you mean, as meals go, in this tumbled-down dump of a place, where the last rat left with a kind of sneering look of disbelief on its snout, is dry bread and fly-blown dripping all there is?

JULIAN: Is it all that hard to grow a banana?

FRANCIS XAVIER: The children steal them while they're still green.

MARY appears, returning from a journey. A sensation of chatter as they welcome her.

ANGELA: Mother Mary!

MARY: Hello! Hello! Hello!

JULIAN: Mother Mary.

ANGELA: Sit down here and tell us all about your travels! (*Calls*) FX!

MONICA: Are there really crocodiles up there, Mother Superior?

ANGELA: Apart from Bishop Quinn?

MARY: (*laughs*) Now, Now. Not in Brisbane, Sister Monica, but apparently further north, they say. It's safer here in Adelaide.

JULIAN: Is it?

MARY: What do you mean, Father Director?

JULIAN: His Grace, Bishop Sheil, has become the prisoner of clerical conspirators. Jealousy rides unbridled among the malevolent. The diocese is poised to fragment. Ecce dies irae! I myself have fallen prey to it.

MONICA: How so, Father?

JULIAN: I have been removed from my post as Superintendent of Education.

General consternation

JULIAN: I was asked a lot of questions.

MARY: Questions...?

JULIAN: About the order. About ... you.

MARY: What kind of questions?

JULIAN: There are those who would welcome a Mother Superior unaffected by ill health.

MARY: I'm happy to bear my cross.

MONICA: What was your response, Father? You spoke well of Mother Superior?

JULIAN: I explained...

ANGELA: Explained what?

JULIAN: That Mother Superior had appropriate medicine for her ailments.

An anxious silence. FRANCIS XAVIER enters with a splendid roast leg of lamb.

FRANCIS XAVIER: Welcome home, Mother Superior.

General good cheer and joy

MARY: FX ! All this splendour!

FRANCIS XAVIER: Don't worry. We've not spent our own resources. Dominic Hennessy's father is the butcher. This is his school fees.

MARY: God be praised. What a lovely surprise. Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy school fees, which of Thy bounty we are about to receive, through Christ, Our Lord...

ALL: Amen.

During the prayer, there is a knock at the door (off). ANGELA goes to attend. She reappears with a BEGGAR.

ANGELA: A beggar, mother. He's been dismissed from his employ. Has a family of seven. I told him we've nothing.

A dreadful silence

MARY: We have no money to speak of. It's not true to say we have nothing.

A gasp from the table. MARY picks up the roast and takes it to the BEGGAR.

MARY: It won't go far, but it's something....

The BEGGAR is delighted and goes off blessing himself. MARY addresses the others.

MARY: O blessed day! How wondrous His ways that sent us the roast and then the beggar, that we might be the instruments of God's grace.

MONICA: He looked alright to me. I don't believe he was a beggar. Seven children, my....

MARY: And Sister Monica will lead us in thanksgiving for the blessings we have this day received.

MONICA: *(a pause, then through gritted teeth)* Lord.... thanks...for nothing. Amen.

A heavy knocking on the door

MONICA: There! I told you. The word's out.

ANGELA exits towards the door, only to confront BISHOP SHEIL, in full regalia with crozier. Accompanying him are two CHAPLAINS with lit candles. The sisters kneel in fear. JULIAN kisses SHEIL's ring.

JULIAN: Your Grace... ?

SHEIL: Father Woods. You will assist.

JULIAN *stands aside. To the SISTERS.*

SHEIL: Remain kneeling.

MARY: Your Grace?

SHEIL *lifts up MONICA's face.*

SHEIL: So it's true. Mother Mary, did I not explicitly command that this woman be instantly removed?

MARY: I acted immediately, Your Grace.

MONICA: I was taken off Geography.

SHEIL: It has become your mintmark, Mother Mary, to profess one thing and do another. You ignore the authority of your bishop. You've become a law unto yourself, recruiting whomsoever you please regardless of suitability. Despite the indignity of begging on the streets, your order increases its debts by the day. I even hear blasphemous rumours of visions. But worse still, against all direction and reason, you persist in the delusion of your "Rule". I can only conclude there is a measure of truth in what they say: your "medicine's" got the better of your judgment.

MARY: Your Grace...!

SHEIL: Do not speak. Yours is to obey. You will remove your veil.

She does so.

FRANCIS XAVIER: Father Founder, do something.

JULIAN: Ius non mihi est. It's a matter of authority.

SHEIL: Father Founder will do nothing. Now, Mary Mackillop. Prostrate yourself before the authority of Christ in your Bishop.

MARY *does so.*

ANGELA: (*terrified*) No !

FRANCIS XAVIER: (*under*) Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee...

SHEIL: Mary Mackillop, you are an obstinate and ambitious woman who would try the patience of a saint. On account of your disobedience and rebellion, I pronounce upon you the awful sentence of excommunication...

MONICA *screams.*

SHEIL: You are cast out from the community of the faithful and condemned forever as instrument of the devil ...

MONICA: No...No...No...

SHEIL: ...and enemy of God's holy church. You will go from this place into perpetual darkness, no longer a bride of Christ but of Satan. You are free to return to the world from

which, at the hour of your death, you will be sent into hell without last rites or Christian burial.

ANGELA: Save us! Jesus! Save us!

SHEIL: Thus have we commanded, let it be. (*Gregorian chant.*) Sit nomen Domini benedictus.

CHAPLAINS AND JULIAN: Per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.

The SISTERS cower in fear, attempting to follow FRANCIS XAVIER in the rosary.

SHEIL bangs his crozier three times. The CHAPLAINS upturn their candles and snuff them out on the floor. SHEIL sweeps out, followed by his CHAPLAINS. JULIAN looks at the SISTERS helplessly and goes to bless them but stops. He exits.

MARY: (*rising*) Be not afraid, my sisters. At this moment, I am intensely happy and I feel nearer to God than I have ever felt before. This sensation of calm and the beautiful presence of God I shall never forget. Oh, my Jesus! My sweet Jesus! I love you! I love you! I love you!

(There rises in the space the luminous and terrifying image of SATAN. Spasms of fire.

The Dies Irae blasts over. Screams in the dark as the SISTERS recoil in terror. But

MARY remains radiantly serene. End Act One.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

A pop song, like Cliff Richard's The Saviour's Day, fills the space. The rooftop terrace of the Papal Apartment, The Vatican, 2008. GUARDS pass through, checking all is secure. POPE BENEDICT and ANNA, with coffee. The music dies to the distant sound of birds and Vatican traffic.

ANNA: Your sisters do a good espresso.

BENEDICT: Strong. Yes. It's from the Scalibrini Sisters in Colombia. Papal Blend. They make it specially.

ANNA: They seem to make everything. Except, perhaps, the important decisions.

BENEDICT: (*winces*) Ooh!

ANNA: Nothing's changed.

BENEDICT: It may surprise you, but I'm in the business of things that don't change.

ANNA: Exactly the attitude Mary came up against. She was practical: a new land, new conditions, new approach. Any woman would see it in a flash. But the men - the bishops - just saw Australia as a vast southern county of Ireland. The only difference was gum leaves instead of shamrocks.

BENEDICT: We can adapt where necessary. As they say around here: when in Rome, do as the Germans do.

ANNA: The lunch was very good. You let the women run the kitchens.

BENEDICT: The dignity of service has nothing to do with their gender.

ANNA: No. It's just that women always end up doing the serving. You're happy for them to bake, but not to break bread.

BENEDICT: Anna, the church is eternal. We deal in immense time here. Truth has no epoch, no period. We cannot concern ourselves with the flavour of the century. Issues come and go. They're cultural. They're social. They're political. They're seldom theological. For centuries, it's been assumed that the obligation of women to render the marriage dues permitted husbands to use their wives. This was wrong. My holy predecessor spoke out. I'm sure you admire his insistence on the human rights of all women, veiled or otherwise. (*a pause as ANNA doesn't respond*) Well, I certainly did. And do. Women must be protected from the whims and fashions of the age. The church is not democratic. Heaven doesn't run on opinion polls. God isn't standing for election. We are different here. We seek to uphold eternal verities. We don't solicit temporal votes.

ANNA: But you were elected.

BENEDICT: Yes. By theocracy. Dictatorship of the Holy Spirit. But that's another story.

ANNA: No, it's the same story. The masculine story of the world. The same theocracy that bedevilled Mary. Men in frocks legislating on behalf of God the Father: the delusion... the arrogance that God only designs male institutions which speak in male voices to dictate the limits of female involvement.

BENEDICT: You must have loved Islam.

ANNA: When Islam was born, the Prophet said that a woman's role is not confined to prayer. She must live a life of action. In the time of the Prophet, there were powerful women. Women who fought for what they believed. Women were instructed not to be chattels, and the Koran encourages education for all. Women must work, fight and be

informed. Okay - in some places these scriptures are ignored. (*A moment*) Why can't your Holy Ghost communicate through a woman?

BENEDICT: He does. Frequently. He may be now.

A moment passes.

ANNA: Holy Father, there's a point in history where someone speaks a new language. Where a public movement distils a lasting truth. I call it progress. You call it prophecy or revelation. It's the same thing. Take slavery. Society accepted it. The church condoned it. St Paul even gave it his seal of approval. But new ideas changed it. People with new ideas. So although it was once 'right', we now know it was always wrong. The difference in our stance is that I am about justice, you are about paternalism.

BENEDICT: Well I am the Holy Father. You were even so kind as to call me that. Thank you, by the way. And I suppose now you're going to tell me about Galileo.

ANNA: Well I wasn't, but...

BENEDICT: Take it as read. Gregor Medel, Charles Darwin, Galileo. All victims of dogma. All mistakes.

ANNA: Mistakes?

BENEDICT: I'm sure you can think of others.

ANNA: Oh, just a few. One word from here could have dealt with Hitler. One miserable word! "STOP!". But what happened? Silence. While millions of Jewish men, women and children were sent to their deaths. Silence.

BENEDICT: I did live through it, you know. (*a beat*) We don't want to be wrong again.

ANNA: You are wrong about women? We are talking about fifty one per cent of the population.

BENEDICT: At one time in history, ninety nine point nine percent of the population believed in witches. Innocent women were burned. Beware of majorities, I say.

ANNA: In Mackillop's case, she was the point nought one percent with the new idea. She was the moment in Australian history that....

BENEDICT: White Australian history. Sorry. We think long term here.

ANNA: ... whatever.... She revealed a lasting truth: that women can rule.

BENEDICT: I'll say one thing for Mother Mary Mackillop. She is never short of friends. Not even when she was excommunicated.

SCENE TWO

An Australian bush ballad. Cross into sounds of Adelaide streetscape with horses. The 1870s. The drawing room of JOANNA BARR-SMITH's home. FATHER JOSEPH TAPPEINER stands. He is a middle-aged Austrian Jesuit.

JOANNA: Father Tappeiner, poor Mary hasn't eaten anything since yesterday. I gave her two spoonfuls of brandy. But that woman is unwell. It's that bully of a bishop brought this on. The man's insane.

TAPPEINER: No. His Grace is ill.

JOANNA: Yes, sick in the head. Why is it that whenever the clergy indulge in the most bizarre perversions, they're deemed to be ill? The rest of us are diagnosed as just plain old guilty or irrational.

TAPPEINER: We must see past the man to the office. We must understand that he is only a human being exhibiting weakness, albeit in a notable way.

MARY enters in a simple black dress and open short hair.

JOANNA: Mary, how are you faring?

MARY: Much better thank you, Joanna. Your kindness is healing.

JOANNA: Father Tappeiner is a Jesuit, here on a visit from Vienna. He heard about you and came to see you.

TAPPEINER: I would like to help, if I can.

MARY: You're very generous, Father Tappeiner.

JOANNA: We were just discussing that madman, Bishop Sheil.

MARY: He has excommunicated me. I must bear my cross.

JOANNA: I wouldn't mind shoving a load of wood on his back and kicking him up a hill.

TAPPEINER smiles.

MARY: I pray for him.

JOANNA: (*exasperated*) Oh, there you go again! Accepting what should be fought and defeated. Why do Christians do this? You defy logic.

MARY: It's all to do with Jesus.

JOANNA: It always is! You're besotted by this Jesus.

MARY: No, I'm in love with him. It's that simple. And when you're in love with someone, you'll do anything for them. And in my case, that someone happens to be God. All my life I've said the rosary. I have meditated upon suffering as expressed in the sorrowful mysteries of Our Saviour's life. And what is my suffering to his?

JOANNA: What are you talking about?

TAPPEINER: From meditating on the desolation of Our Lord's passion and death, the suppliant receives great consolation.

JOANNA: Balderdash! Suffering is something to avoid. It isn't rational to expel the pleasure and embrace the pain. Believe me. I know! What kind of father wishes his children to suffer? It is cruel and malevolent! It's certainly not godly.

MARY: Explanations are my greatest failure. It is a mystery, you see.

JOANNA: It most certainly is.

MARY: Mystery isn't explained. It's experienced. There's this thing.... I call it "the graced moment". You must know it.

JOANNA *shakes her head sceptically.*

MARY: It's when you're filled with wonder, body and soul. The storm rages round you, and it's not that you're in a warm place, but you are the warm place. In the dark night, all you see is the sun. Or on the sea, the waves crash and buffet the vessel, but you remain still. It's frightening. It's dangerous. It's beautiful. You taste despair. You clutch hope. You feel love.

TAPPEINER: I have rarely encountered such a woman of faith, Mrs Barr-Smith.

JOANNA: That's all very well, but where will all this suffering lead you? Who will protect you?

MARY: God will decide. God will provide. If I fail to carry out his will, then I'm doing something wrong.

JOANNA: You are the only one doing something right!

MARY: Then I am failing to communicate it.

JOANNA: Mary, your order owns no land. You have no money. Most of your sisters have gone home. Those that are left are bewildered and frightened, and you, their superior, you're excommunicated. And you tell me God will provide!

MARY: Well, he has. Look at me. You've found lodgings for my sisters. You've given me a roof over my head.

JOANNA: I do not act for God!

MARY: *(smiles)* I'm not so sure about that. And as a further blessing, I have an Austrian Jesuit to bring me words of comfort. Talk about the woman who has everything. *(She winces with terrible pain.)* Sweet Jesus, help me. Don't let me die in this darkness.

TAPPEINER: Mary, I've brought you Our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist.

MARY: *(amazed)* Communion ? But I'm cast out....

TAPPEINER: This need go no further than these walls.

MARY: But if the Bishop...

JOANNA: Leave him to me. Do as Father says. Doctor's orders.

He takes from his bag a small pyx in which there is a communion wafer. MARY kneels.

TAPPEINER puts on a stole then breaks the communion wafer in two and holds up both pieces. JOANNA is intrigued. A Gregorian Chant creeps up under the Latin.

TAPPEINER: *Ecce agnus Dei. Ecce qui tollis peccata mundi.*

MARY: *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo et sanabitur anima mea.*

TAPPEINER: *(putting the host on her tongue) Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiet animam tuam in vitam aeternum.*

MARY: *Amen.*

MARY prays as the Gregorian Chant intensifies.

SCENE THREE

A deep episcopal sanctum, Adelaide. BISHOP SHEIL lies on his deathbed, JULIAN in attendance. The Dies Irae continues under. In shadow, MONICA, in simple black civilian clothes, a scarf hiding her identity, quietly cleans a corner of the floorspace with a cloth, unnoticed. JOANNA comes in.

JULIAN: Mrs Barr-Smith, please. His Grace is very ill.

JOANNA: I wish to speak to him.

JULIAN: No one is allowed to speak to him.

JOANNA: I am.

JULIAN: Why should we make an exception?

JOANNA: He's my tenant. I own the building.

JULIAN: His Grace can speak to no one.

THE BISHOP mutters something.

JULIAN: You've woken him now.

SHEIL mutters again.

JULIAN: Did Your Grace say something ?

SHEIL: When a man is dying.... to be woken is rather a pleasant surprise.

JULIAN: Rest now, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Who's there ?

JULIAN: A... visitor, Your Grace.

JOANNA: I'm Joanna Barr-Smith, sir.

SHEIL offers his hand for JOANNA to kiss his ring.

JULIAN: *(helpfully)* It is customary to kiss His Grace's ring.

She does nothing.

SHEIL: What do you want?

JOANNA: I'm not a believer, sir.

SHEIL withdraws his hand.

JOANNA: But I've come to speak for Mary Mackillop.

SHEIL: The atheist comes to plead for the excommunicated. Has the world gone mad?

JOANNA: It is because I hold no brief for the Roman Church that my plea for justice may have some force, sir.

SHEIL: Justice? On earth?

JOANNA: As it is in Heaven, I believe you say.

SHEIL: And what kind of justice is that?

JOANNA: What results when you have the courage to think again, sir.

SHEIL: To think again?

JULIAN: That is quite enough, now...

JOANNA: *(To Sheil)* Yes, as if your whole being urges you to do one thing, but some small flame quietly stirs you to do another.

SHEIL: She disobeyed me.

JOANNA: Yes, but only because she believed that obedience to you was disobedience to her God.

SHEIL: *(spluttering)* How dare you speak of matters beyond your understanding. You believe in nothing. I was confronted with a cesspit of incompetence and infamy masquerading as a school and a convent.

JOANNA: Perhaps, sir, you mistook poverty for squalor.

SHEIL: Woman, you will not patronise me. It may be of little consequence to you to know that Christians were told to go forth and teach all nations. To improve the world, not to blemish it. And I tell you, woman, the unlearnèd cannot lead pupils. The incompetent cannot inspire.

JOANNA: And is your Heaven full only of saintly scholars? Is there no room for the simple, the practical, the good?

SHEIL: Go. Please. Go. We...have nothing in common. You are an infidel... and I am a dying and frightened man.

She takes his hand. He attempts to withdraw it. She holds on.

SHEIL: Bishop Sheil, please, please think again. You have a chance to do what we all so often long for. To correct a terrible injustice. That is a great power: to undo what you ought not to have done. In life, what greater power can there be? In death, even greater. What a golden opportunity it is to be able to undo a mistake.

Silence. SHEIL breathes hard.

JULIAN: Mrs Barr-Smith, please!

A moment, then JOANNA leaves.

JULIAN: Rest, Your Grace. She's gone.

SHEIL: Am I alone?

JULIAN: Just myself and the cleaning woman, Your Grace.

SHEIL: What cleaning woman? *(He looks across to MONICA)* Come. Come here.

MONICA approaches shyly.

SHEIL: It's you!

JULIAN: Monica! You must go! You are an unclean thing in a holy place!

MONICA: Mary Mackillop sent me, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Mary Mackillop ...?

MONICA: Just to be with you, Your Grace. To pray for you.

SHEIL: *(softer)* She... she sent you...to be with me?

MONICA: Yes, Your Grace.

SHEIL: Is there no end to her insolence?

MONICA: (*innocently*) No, Your Grace.

SHEIL: (*Becoming weaker*) Bring her.... bring her to me.

JULIAN: No!

MONICA: Yes, Your Grace.

JULIAN: Your Grace!

MONICA: I will, Your Grace.

JULIAN: Your Grace, Mary Mackillop cannot enter this place.

SHEIL: Bring her!

JULIAN: Do you know what you are doing?

SHEIL: (*Bewildered*) Do we ever know, really, what we are doing?

JULIAN: But Your Grace...

SHEIL: Obey me.

The Magnificat, sung by a boy soprano. JULIAN and MONICA leave. At a powerful moment in the music, MARY appears in her simple black civilian clothes. SHEIL beckons her. She kisses the ring and kneels at the bedside.

SHEIL: Your friend says I must think again...

Trembling from weakness, the Bishop reaches his hand over MARY's head, muttering

SHEIL: *Absolvo te in nomine Domini....*

He lowers his hand and places it on MARY's head, blessing her. MONICA enters with Mary's Josephite habit over her arm. She stands motionless, overcome by the event. As the Magnificat rises to full, we glimpse the other SISTERS, restored, about the stage.

MARY kisses SHEIL's hand. As the lights fade, he sinks back, dead. The Magnificat continues.

SCENE FOUR

The far South Australian outback, bleak and sunbaked. Sounds of children on a picnic. Lights reveal the SISTERS around a billy fire.

FRANCIS XAVIER: (*holding the billy*) I polished it last night, and just look at it! I thought fire was supposed to cleanse.

ANGELA: Only in Purgatory, FX. (*looking off*) Paddy, get off the dray! And Annie, leave the horse alone! That girl's as bold as brass.

MONICA: Oh, well, it's their day. Look at Mother Mary! Just like one of the orphans!

FRANCIS XAVIER: Sometimes I think she loves their mischief.

ANGELA: I suppose this far out, they're happy to see anyone.

MARY *appears, laughing* .

MARY: Oh, that Annie Mulligan! What'll we do with her? The girl is a riot!

ANGELA: Are they all like that in Oodnadatta?

MARY: It's up to us to come out here more often. Heaven knows, Sister Ursula can do with a break.

FRANCIS XAVIER: (*looking off*) Everybody ! Sister needs a gumleaf for the tea. (*claps hands*) Prize for the cleanest one! (*aside*) Lord knows what the prize is.

ANGELA: (*looks off*) Bernard! Do that behind the tree!

MARY: (*laughing*) Angela, I'm sure the tree doesn't care which side.

FRANCIS XAVIER: (*looks off*) No! I said gum leaf!

MARY: Alright, now. There's the dripping. Where's the bread?

FRANCIS XAVIER: It's in the candle bag. Keeps it fresh.

MONICA: What? It'll taste of wax, FX.

FRANCIS XAVIER: I don't tell you how to sweep a floor, Monica. Don't you tell me how to clean a candle bag.

MARY: Come on, you two. Lunch time.

ANGELA: (*looks off*) Annie Mulligan! Stop swinging that rope. You'll hurt someone.

The SISTERS suddenly look alarmed.

FRANCIS XAVIER: That's not a rope.

MONICA: It's a...

SISTERS: ... snake!!

General consternation. The SISTERS scream. FRANCIS XAVIER has put her hands to her face, imprinting dirt or soot from the billycan. MARY dissolves into laughter, making them all helpless with laughter. Finally, she claps her hands.

MARY: Time for grace. We break the bread and we thank the Lord.

The SISTERS bless themselves.

MARY: Dominus vobiscum.

ANGELA: (*bewildered*) Dominus vobiscum?

MARY: Anything to make this barren land holier.

SISTERS: Et cum spiritu tuo.

They distribute the bread.

ANGELA: (*Refusing the bread*) This is wrong. We can't do this.

MONICA : Do what ?

ANGELA: Break the bread and pray. We're not...

FRANCIS XAVIER: What?

ANGELA:priests.

MARY: Angela, it's a picnic!

ANGELA: No. It's like a Mass.

MONICA: It's just bread with a bit of Latin.

FRANCIS XAVIER: (*rises*) How exciting!

MONICA: Sit down. The children are watching. It'll get around.

ANGELA: What have we done?

MARY: Angela!

ANGELA: What have we done?!

A frenzy of Julian's violin.

SCENE FIVE

A small chapel in the Convent of St Joseph, Adelaide. JULIAN is praying in an ecstasy of fervour.

JULIAN: (*Orgasmic*) 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.

A vision develops. It is the VIRGIN MARY. Strains of powerful music. ANGELS appear with shining eyes and exquisite wings. JULIAN becomes crazed.

JULIAN: Speak! Speak to your servant!

VIRGIN MARY: Julian, most holy. Julian, most wise. Julian, most prudent. Your work must flourish. Remember, you are the Founder of the order. Let no woman rule you. Be strong. The sisters must obey.

JULIAN: (*sotto voce*) Yes. Yes.

VIRGIN MARY: Beware the Devil in a sister's clothing! She will move you aside and raise herself up. Beware the ambitious woman whose disobedience so wounds my Blessed Son's Most Sacred Heart. Be it done according to my word.

ANGELS: The angels of the Lord declare unto Julian.

JULIAN: (*foaming*) Be it done! Be it done! Be it done according to thy word!

ANGELS: Julian!

VIRGIN MARY: Julian.

The vision dissolves. MARY MACKILLOP is standing where the vision was.

MARY: Julian .

JULIAN: What...?

MARY: What are you doing?

JULIAN: She warned me about you!

MARY: Julian?

JULIAN: Father Woods!

MARY: Father Woods. Is everything alright? I heard you calling out. Something about the devil in sister's clothing.

JULIAN: It wasn't I, Mother Mary. It was she! It was she! She knows you have tried to rule without me! With your pride and your vanity, you would push me out! I, your Founder! I, your Director! I, who drafted your Rule. I, who made you what you are! I, who created you! You have replaced me with another.

MARY: Father Tappeiner is a friend to the order.

JULIAN: (*Hissing at her, bitterly*) Tappeiner's a wog! Worse. A Jesuit! Get thee behind me, woman!

MARY: (*Frightened now*) Father Woods, should I call the doctor?

JULIAN: How dare you question my sanity? I, who have been entrusted by Our Blessed Lady to crush the serpent beneath my foot! I know about the orphans. I know about the bread and the Latin. I know about the brandy. Everything! I know! You will submit! Yours

is to serve! Yours is to obey! Holy obedience! Always the cross! Penance! Prayer! Poverty always. Always! I am your founder! I created you!

He grabs MARY and kisses her veil. He sinks down, kissing her garment with such violence that he at once recoils in deadly shame. He shrinks into himself, desperate.

JULIAN: *(Barely able to speak)* Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani! My God, My God, My God!

He convulses and collapses insensible. ANGELA enters.

MARY: *(Tears in her eyes)* Fetch the Doctor.

Angela goes to leave.

MARY: Oh, Angela. Father is a priest of God. We will not speak of this.

The Panis Angelicus rises gently

SCENE SIX

The Panis Angelicus, full, through the transition. Inside the Diocesan Chancery, Adelaide. BISHOP REYNOLDS, *an Irishman of elegance and charm.* MARY *appears.*

MARY: Bishop Reynolds.

REYNOLDS: (*warmly*) Come in and sit down, Mother Mary.

MARY: Thankyou, Your Grace.

REYNOLDS: Everyone in Adelaide's telling me it's the work of God you're doing. Is there any corner of this benighted continent you've not conquered with your holy sisters? I don't know how you do it! I'm exhausted at the thought of it.

MARY: Your Grace's good will makes all the difference.

REYNOLDS: Well now, if there's anything I can do - anything at all - you know you've only to mention it.

MARY: Our sisters are grateful to Your Grace.

REYNOLDS: Not at all. A terrible thing about Father Woods. Didn't I hear it was... ?

MARY: Your Grace?

REYNOLDS: ... was he.. you know...ill.. or what ?

MARY: For some time, Father Woods has been overburdened.

REYNOLDS: Yes, yes, but did he, you know....?

MARY: Father Woods did nothing improper.

REYNOLDS: It's a funny thing. Just took him like that. Just like a little twig under foot. Snap. Terrible. Terrible. Well, he's gone to a happier place.

MARY *looks alarmed.*

REYNOLDS: Sydney.

Relief on MARY's part

REYNOLDS: Now it's wonderful work you're doing, Mother Mary. We've a letter here. A request. It's from Father Gogarty out in Ceduna. It's a kind of home for the needy. And there's a lot of them about there just now. I was thinking of Sister Monica. Wonderful woman. She's the light of God in her, I tell you. She's just the person.

MARY: Unfortunately, Your Grace, I've decided to send Sister Monica to Mackay.

REYNOLDS: Mackay?

MARY: In Queensland. It'll improve her Geography. But I'm sure I could spare Sister Bonaventure from Whyalla.

REYNOLDS: Ah, God bless you, Mother Mary, but I've got it in my mind that Sister Monica has the stamina for this particular flock. They're a tough lot out there. It's a hard place, Ceduna.

MARY: Your Grace, these postings are decided according to the constitutions that govern our Rule.

REYNOLDS: Oh, now, now. You're not going to let a bit of paper dictate to you the manner of your ways. Don't let it worry you. I'll tell you what: I'll inform Sister Monica myself and everything will be fine.

MARY: Nothing would please me more than to see Your Grace happy in this matter.

REYNOLDS: Good.

MARY: But it would be wrong of me to circumvent the process so carefully laid down in our Rule. My sisters have come to trust in the constitutions.

REYNOLDS: Oh, they'll trust their Bishop. They'll be obedient. You just see if I'm not right. So we'll take that as settled?

MARY: We cannot, Your Grace.

REYNOLDS: You know, Mother Mary, when I took up the burden of this high office from Bishop Sheil, God rest his soul, I said to myself, I said, "Christopher," I said, "we won't be having any of that kerfuffle with Mother Mary. She only wants to do God's will. As dictated to her by her superiors. So we won't want any of those... ugly "encounters" with the Church."

MARY: That's wonderful news, Your Grace. Thank you. The sisters have so much to thank you for.

REYNOLDS: So we're agreed?

MARY: On what, Your Grace?

REYNOLDS: That this time round, you'll listen to the voice of God and you'll accept the wisdom of your superiors.

MARY: Of course I shall consider the matter and write to Your Grace.

REYNOLDS: Consider??

MARY: Your Grace exhorts me to be guided by wisdom. Experience has taught me that wisdom follows reflection. Things settled in the heat of the moment so often have to be undone.

REYNOLDS: You'll do as you're told.

MARY: I must not stay any longer. I have angered Your Grace. I will discuss the matter with my sisters.

REYNOLDS: And I shall discuss it with my brother bishops. We gather here soon. Remember, Mother Mary: take on one bishop... you take on them all. You think your excommunication is the worst thing that could happen to you? Think again. *(pause)* Don't wait.

The Panis Angelicus resumes, filling the space.

SCENE SEVEN

Children chanting: "A noun is the name of any person, place or thing. A verb is a doing word. A pronoun stands in place of a noun."

A confessional in the Jesuit Church in the parish of Norwood, Adelaide. FATHER TAPPEINER hears MARY's confession.

MARY: ...and I fear I have caused His Grace much anger in not obeying his will. But our Rule is precious to me.

TAPPEINER: We must distinguish between pride and principle.

MARY: I took no pleasure in opposing His Grace.

TAPPEINER: You have to understand His Grace's position, Mother Mary. Orders of men have always enjoyed their autonomy, but in the Church's tradition, orders of women are governed by their bishop. What you're proposing is something unknown to the church in these parts. Bishops must proceed carefully in case they mistake innovation for disruption.

MARY: If only I could believe that in this matter God and the bishop speak as one, then I would joyfully renounce my position, but in all my prayers and reflection, I cannot discern God's will in the Bishop's purpose. Father, do I sin in this action?

TAPPEINER: Listen to your heart, Mary. Pray to Our Blessed Lord for guidance. Seek with confidence the intercession of His Holy Mother.

MARY: You mean stick to my guns?

TAPPEINER: You're a good woman, Mary, and for your penance say the Five Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. And now, make an Act of Contrition.....

As scene fades

MARY: Oh, my God, I am sorry for all my sins because they have offended Thee Who art so good and I resolve with the help of God's grace.....

SCENE EIGHT

Bruckner's Prelude, blasting full in the space.

A Conference of Bishops, Adelaide. Dinner has concluded. The company has mellowed. There is port and cigars. The bishops are dressed easy in view of the heat: shirt, collar, stock, braces, trousers. Amongst those present are CARDINAL MORAN, BISHOP QUINN and BISHOP REYNOLDS.

MORAN: I have to confess I think she's brave. There's no denying that.

QUINN: Brave be blowed. She's a blessed nuisance. She's a pestilence upon us. We learnt that in Brisbane - to our cost

REYNOLDS: She won't be told. She's a cunning, wilful, dangerous, unladylike, unscholarly, stubborn, conniving, slippery and infectious peasant.

QUINN: A true Scot.

They laugh

MORAN: Well let me tell you a little story. I was met off the boat from Sydney by a fellow here not long back. Not a Catholic. A sort of jack of all trades. Odd job man. You know? He'd repaired a window for the sisters. The story given out was how a thief - some homeless and jobless fellow from the port - had broken through the window. Smashed the glass, he did! And didn't Mother Mary surprise him? In the dark. Caught him red-handed. She's standing there with a candle. Does she scream and send him running? Not a bit of it. The thief makes for a hurried departure back through the shattered window. Blow me down if Mother Mary doesn't say, "Don't be silly, now. You'll cut yourself on that. There's a much safer way out." And she leads him through the convent to the front door and packs him off with a blanket, a cup of tea and half a loaf of bread. So this other fellow who fixed the window, you know, he says to me, "They're saying she's a saint, Father." Now I ask you, has anyone ever heard that word said about any person in this part of the world? It's just not a concept that sits well - not with the heat and the desert and the bush and the light.

QUINN: And the locals.

MORAN: It's uncolonial.

QUINN: It's un-'Australian'.

REYNOLDS: (*Chuckles*) It's unimaginable.

QUINN: This is all very colourful, but the matter must be resolved. Once and for all.

Here's a woman who dances to her own tune. She simply will not submit to her Bishop. We must act together. Sink or swim. Or every wild woman who wants a place in the Church will presume to insist on a share in divine authority. The institution of the Church will surrender its link with Christ and the apostles. The lawful tradition which has always united us will disintegrate. Is this the legacy of a saint?

MORAN: And yet, was the Church ever stronger than in her medieval times? Wasn't it the women then, the abbesses, who enjoyed the jurisdiction of bishops?

REYNOLDS: Yes, but they were noble and scholarly. That was a time ago. Things were different then.

MORAN: And isn't she for making them different again now?

QUINN: Which reminds me. I have it on good authority that when she and her sisters thought they was far enough away to be safe from view, she spoke Latin and broke bread - and within the sight of orphans. So much indeed for your saint!

REYNOLDS: Are you saying that Mother Mary was out in the bush offering mass like a priest?

QUINN: I'm saying what I'm saying. And what a lot of other people are saying.

MORAN: Had she wine in her cup?

REYNOLDS: (*Laughing*) Or brandy?

QUINN: Well, you can laugh, but something must be done. She's already driven poor Father Woods out of his mind.

REYNOLDS: Do you think Father Woods might've been... how shall I put it... led astray by the charms of the woman? To the point where he...

QUINN: No, no no. He's English.

They laugh, knowingly.

MORAN: But aren't we ignoring the good work of this woman?

REYNOLDS: Good work it might be, but at what cost? She's opening convents at the drop of a hat.

QUINN: Yes. She mightn't be answerable, but her debts are.

REYNOLDS: And they land on our doorstep.

MORAN: She says God will provide. Perhaps she's right. We must be careful in this. The church has already done her one great wrong. It mustn't happen again.

QUINN: Very well. We'll send her to you in Sydney.

MORAN: You mean expel her from South Australia? Her own territory? Drive her from her home? Can this be done?

QUINN: Why not? Anything can be done.

MORAN: What if she appeals to Rome?

REYNOLDS: She's not the funds for that. She can beg her way to Sydney, but Rome's safely out of the question.

SCENE NINE

MARY's cubicle in the dormitory of the Convent of St Joseph, Adelaide. MARY is placing a few spare belongings into an old suitcase. JOANNA is with her.

JOANNA: The heat's got to them. They can't do this! It must be against the law! Doesn't the church know the law?

MARY: It has its own law.

JOANNA: And who are the judges?

MARY: The bishops.

JOANNA: You call that 'justice'?

MARY: I must accept that I have failed to impress them.

JOANNA: It goes against every principle of justice! It's everyone's right to live where they belong. The very people who should protect you persecute you! The institution which should support you obstructs you! How can you trust in a God responsible for this?

MARY: These people are not God!

JOANNA: Then why do they behave as if they are?

MARY: I have failed them. I have failed to inspire them. I seem to have been struggling with this all my life. I see clearly before me the work to be done and the way to do it. I've *always* seen it clearly. Yet they see something else. The order is my home. The sisters are my family. Now for some transgression I cannot comprehend, I am sent into exile. Why, God, why have you forsaken me? I love you! I love you! *(She weeps)*

JOANNA: *(sits with her)* That's it! You love the God. The bishops - they love the institution. You're at cross purposes. Who is there to appeal to between these false judges and your God?

MARY: No one. And I'm sure they mean well.

JOANNA: No one at all?

MARY: Only the Pope.

JOANNA: The Pope?

MARY: His Holiness Pope Pius the Ninth.

JOANNA: Rome.

MARY: Rome, yes.

JOANNA: Then Rome is where you must go.

MARY: Rome? It's the other side of the world! And who am I to go bothering the Holy Father?

JOANNA: You have every good reason. You are doing his work, as you say, on the other side of the world!

MARY: God is bountiful, Joanna. True, He manages to get me around the continent of Australia quite well. But Rome! God won't provide for a journey like that, Joanna.

JOANNA: No. *(Pause)* But I will.

SCENE TEN

Bruckner's Ecce Sacerdos Magnus, with full power.

The Cortile del Rosario, The Vatican. An audience with POPE PIUS IX . It is unbearably hot, so the Pontiff fans himself with an ornate feather fan. MONSIGNOR KIRBY (Irish) enters with MARY and whispers to her to wait. PIUS yawns, and we hear the roar of a lion emanate from his throat. As the yawn fades, we hear low, guttural growls.

PIUS: Avanti.

KIRBY: (*translates*) "Come forward."

MARY *approaches.*

PIUS: (*bored*) Che cosa mi vuole benedire?

KIRBY: (*translates*) "What is it you want me to bless?"

MARY: (*producing her crucifix*) My crucifix.

KIRBY: (*translates*) Il crocifisso.

PIUS: Grazie.

KIRBY *hands him the crucifix. PIUS examines it carefully.*

PIUS: Nessun artista in.... ?

KIRBY: Australia.

PIUS: Australia?

KIRBY: (*translates*) Are there no artists in Australia?

MARY *looks down, embarrassed.*

PIUS: Maria della croce. Bene. Bene.

KIRBY: (*translates*) Mary of the Cross. Well, well.

PIUS: La scomunicata, eh?

KIRBY: (*translates*) The excommunicated one.

MARY: Si, Santita.

KIRBY: (*confused but still translating*) Yes, Holiness.

The language switch now serves to free us of translation as follows:

PIUS: I didn't know you were so pretty.

KIRBY: I didn't know you were so... young.

MARY: I didn't know you were so friendly.

KIRBY: I didn't know you were so old.

Silence

PIUS: Mmm. Touché.

KIRBY: Touched.

KIRBY *gradually retreats during..*

PIUS: So is that all?

MARY: There are one or two things, Holiness.

PIUS: You'd better sit down. Oh, be careful. That seat has a wobble. I must get it fixed. Well?

MARY: Perhaps Your Holiness could assure me that my excommunication was invalid.

PIUS: It was. In foreign climates, the Irish have a tremendous capacity for invalidity.

KIRBY: (*reappearing and translating*) In foreign climates, the Irish are occasionally mistaken.

He retreats.

PIUS: Now, if you'll excuse me...

MARY: Er, one other thing, Holiness.

PIUS: Yes?

MARY: Would you give official papal recognition to the Rule of my order?

PIUS: (*alarmed*) Don't frighten me. You sound like Garibaldi! What order?

MARY: The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. In Australia.

PIUS: The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Australia?

MARY: I sent documents. Has Your Holiness read them?

PIUS: (*impatient*) I've had the Spanish here all morning claiming visions of Saint Jose Camillo at an inn near Barcelona.

MARY: I didn't know there was a Saint Jose Camillo.

PIUS: There isn't. Now you know why they were here all morning. (*beat*) I read some documents. Something struck me as strange.

KIRBY *hands him the documents.*

MARY: The excommunication, you mean?

PIUS: No. No. Not that. Something.... strange.

MARY: Our order seeks self-rule.

PIUS: You mean no bishops?

MARY: The right to govern ourselves.

PIUS: (*nods*) No bishops. (*beat*) Australia. It's a big place, isn't it?

MARY: The largest island and the smallest continent, Holiness.

PIUS: You're a teacher.

MARY: Thankyou, Holiness.

PIUS: Then what's the problem?

MARY: Holiness, with the best intentions in the world and doubtless with good faith in their hearts....

PIUS: Yes, yes. I'm the Pope. You can get to the point.

MARY: No matter what I do to fulfil God's purpose, I fail to inspire the bishops to understand me.

PIUS: I know the feeling. So?

MARY: I believe that it is the sisters who are best suited to choose the person to regulate them in their labours.

PIUS: You want to be the boss?

MARY: Someone with the vision...

PIUS: You want to be the boss.

MARY: Yes, Holiness.

PIUS: Good idea. Where's your headquarters?

MARY: There is a small problem here. You see.... I've been expelled from South Australia.

PIUS: Popular, aren't you?

MARY laughs. PIUS laughs with her. It develops.

PIUS: Is there anything else you haven't told me?

MARY: I don't think so.

PIUS: And what did they do with your land?

MARY: Our order owns no land. It's in the Rule.

PIUS: Ah!! That's it! That's what struck me as strange! All that land in your country and you have none! Most unwise.

MARY: But our vow of poverty?

PIUS: What about it?

MARY: Property is of the earth, not of Heaven.

PIUS: You must be Scottish.

MARY: Australian now.

PIUS: To do God's will on earth, you have to have some earth to do it on. You have a job to do. You need a place to do it in. Somewhere inviolate - so no one can kick you out. Take it from me. I should know.

He indicates the surroundings.

PIUS: In order to rule, you must have a base. In a country as immense as yours, there'll always be plenty of poverty. I shouldn't worry yourself about that. "In my Father's House, there are many mansions." You need a house. A mother house. They're sending you to... ?

MARY: Sydney, Holiness.

PIUS: Sydney. Let's see if we can't arrange a house for you in Sydney. Then you're the boss. So. We're agreed?

MARY: I'm most grateful to Your Holiness for directing me to an interpretation I must in obedience accept.

PIUS: *(waves his arms and nods his head with impatience)* So we're agreed.

KIRBY: *(re-entering with translation)* Dunque siamo d'accordo ?

MARY: *(laughs)* Si, Santita.

KIRBY: *(great relief)* Yes, Your Holiness.

MARY: Can I have it in writing?

KIRBY: *(translating)* Mother Mary respectfully enquires whether Your Holiness would be disposed to commit to a document your decision to recognise the Independence of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart for the benefit of Their Graces, the bishops of Australia?

PIUS: She wants it in writing. Yes. Very well. Let it be.

MARY: *(withdraws, ecstatic)* Grazie, Santità.

(She rises, bows, blesses herself and goes)

PIUS: Good. So who's next?

KIRBY: The General of the Jesuits, Holiness.

PIUS: Ask him to wait.

KIRBY and PIUS exit in different directions as POPE BENEDICT appears with MONSIGNOR KINSELLA.

KINSELLA: Where is Miss Detweiller? We have strict instructions that no one may leave the precinct...

BENEDICT: Yes, yes. She has gone to the bathroom. Perhaps she's not well.

KINSELLA: God, I hope it's not food poisoning. A journalist with food poisoning could give us a very bad press.

BENEDICT: (*Pensive*) I don't think so.

KINSELLA: Holiness, I hope she realises how lucky she is to have so long an audience.

BENEDICT: Yes. Events have conspired to her benefit.

KINSELLA: Even Cliff Richard didn't get this long!

BENEDICT: Miss Detweiller needs this time.

KINSELLA: Don't they all?

BENEDICT: There's something – I don't know – fragile about her. Behind all that aggression. I know her uncle.

KINSELLA: So she said.

BENEDICT: He asked me to let her speak – to listen to her. He has a higher regard for my pastoral skills than any of my German parishioners of old.

KINSELLA: Did he say why?

BENEDICT: No. But she represents a great many people the world over. They do not believe but at a certain moment, they do not want to be alone.

KINSELLA: She's an *atheist*?

BENEDICT: She's polite enough to say agnostic.

KINSELLA: Then what the hell...?

BENEDICT: She's searching. You see I ponder this question, and it never really leaves me...

KINSELLA: Question?

BENEDICT: Why does God make so many atheists? And so many excellent ones?

Kinsella goes to answer, but nothing comes. ANNA appears. Kinsella shrugs. His mobile activates with the theme from Jesus Christ Superstar. He takes the call.

KINSELLA: (*exiting*) Hi, mom.

ANNA *re-appears*.

BENEDICT: You come from Sydney?

ANNA: Yes.

BENEDICT: Then you've been to Mother Mary's house. In North Sydney. The sisters are still there. You would have visited her grave.

Short silence

ANNA: Yes. The sisters have been hard at work on her cause.

BENEDICT: There and everywhere else. New Zealand, Vietnam, Canada, Pacific Islands, India...

ANNA: Yes, I even visited their mission in a favella in Peru.

BENEDICT: So did I. It's something I have in common with Australians. We travel a lot. Mother Mary travelled enormous distances. Apart from my holy predecessor, no other saint covered so much ground.

ANNA: Saint?

BENEDICT: *(Smiles)* Candidate. *(A moment)* Peru? Isn't that a little off the usual tourist track?

ANNA: Like yourself, I enjoy exotic places. I was travelling the world.

BENEDICT: As a tourist... or as a pilgrim?

ANNA: I was researching.

BENEDICT: What, cultures?

ANNA: Religions.

BENEDICT: All of them?

ANNA: Some alternative to ...to...*this*. *(She gestures around the space)*.

BENEDICT: And you found Islam.

ANNA: Yes.

BENEDICT: So. You thought the search was over?

ANNA: For a time.

BENEDICT: Good.

ANNA: You don't really think that.

BENEDICT: If it worked for you. Another version of scripture from the Angel Gabriel.

ANNA: It wasn't just that.

BENEDICT: No? What else? You thought Islam was more, what, spiritual?

ANNA: Maybe it is.

BENEDICT: Or is it that it was more... aggressive?

ANNA: Yes! It's louder and yes, it's angrier and, and more defiant! I liked the structure and completeness of Islam, along with the amount of actual regular prayer time. Yes, especially the prayer time. The way I was, it really worked for me.

BENEDICT: *(Quietly)* You're dying.

Silence. Then the "ALL CLEAR" alarm siren sounds. Neither moves.

BENEDICT: Cancer, is it?

His phone rings. He ignores it. It eventually stops.

BENEDICT: I've been in this job a while now. You pick up the clues.

ANNA: Clues?

BENEDICT: One, I have a brave woman with a quest for meaning. Two, everything is urgent as there is a last chapter to write. Three, she knows her drugs - her diacetyl morphine and her Brompton Cocktail, both prescribed for terminal patients. And in the footsteps of her saint, she makes a pilgrimage to Peru. And in Sydney, she stands at the holy grave of Mother Mary Mackillop, longing for her to enter the canon of saints. Flirting with religions and searching for a miracle.

Silence. Anna cries. Benedict places a hand on her shoulder. She rejects the consolation.

BENEDICT: You are right to honour Mother Mary. Like her, you suffer as you live. But what do you want from her? A cure? Is that why you came here? To speed up your cure?

ANNA: You know, when I was born, Papa apparently said, 'Look Mama, Look at our little miracle!'

BENEDICT: Everyone cries 'miracle' at the way we come into the world but never at the way we leave it. But that is just as extraordinary.

ANNA: Is it?

BENEDICT: But in between, come all our vicissitudes. And there are no magic spells, Anna. Miracles take place in the heart. The saint is not what you do, but what you're like. In the end, there is only one great miracle. It's not a cure or a vision or defying the laws of nature. It's peace. Peace deep in our heart. And all the rest is... *(He looks around)* painted dust.

A moment passes.

ANNA: I must go. There's much to be done.

BENEDICT: The final chapter to be written.

ANNA: Can I send it to you?

BENEDICT: I would like that.

BENEDICT goes to the piano. He plays a piece from Beethoven.

As he plays, ANNA is alone in her own space. As she speaks, KINSELLA brings the POPE Anna's book open at the final chapter. He nods, keeps playing, Kinsella leaves the book on the piano.

ANNA: The miracle did take place. But not at all as I had expected. And no, it was not a cure. It was something far more extraordinary. After my visit to Rome, I returned to the shrine of Mary Mackillop, not in search of belief but in an explosion of anger. A terrible anger that such suffering as hers - or mine - could bear the name of any God. There was my useless rage, erupting like a wild hell at her holy grave. But then I suddenly felt her presence and I was changed by it... no, transformed ...as if my heart were the hard land and she was the watchful moon. And her words came back to me: 'Make my love burn fierce as the outback sun... Dare me to cross this great continent and open its heart.' In place of anger, she gave me acceptance. In place of pain, she gave me courage. In place of doubt... hope. And at her grave, I discovered myself alive with her miracle....the inner peace that came from - her holiness.

BENEDICT plays as the lights fade.

Curtain.

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