

GEORGE. All right.

(He starts to exit.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. George! What's that in your pocket?

GEORGE. I almost forgot! Mother Superior got a telegram. From Rome!

(He holds it over.)

It's marked "Importante." That's Italian! I wonder what it means...?

(They stare at him for a second. He thinks really hard. Finally, he [thinks he] gets it.)

Ohhhh! "Imported!"

SISTER AUGUSTA. "Important," George. It means "important."

SISTER PHILAMENA. We'll see that she gets this right away!

GEORGE. Good! I'll see you in the vineyard!

(He rushes off.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. (Calling after him:) Orchard, George! Remember, Mother Superior doesn't like us to call it a vineyard.

SISTER PHILAMENA. (Placing the telegram on the trunk.) Once we pick those grapes, Augusta, we'll have to start making our... (Looking around and whispering:) ...wine. But we don't have enough bottles! Or space! Or time!

SISTER AUGUSTA. What choice do we have? Our... (From this point on, everyone whispers "you-know-what" or a similar euphemism instead of "wine.") ...you-know-what... is the only thing that keeps money coming in to this convent. Without it, the church would close us down for sure. Now, c'mon, Philamena, we have to go help George with that grape harvest.

(MOTHER SUPERIOR enters from her room, unseen.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Let what go bad, Sisters?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Mother Superior!

SISTER PHILAMENA. We didn't see you come in.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Let what go bad?

SISTER PHILAMENA. (Terrified:) ...uh...uh...

SISTER AUGUSTA. George, Mother Superior! We can't let George go bad.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What do you mean?

SISTER AUGUSTA. We were just talking to him, Mother Superior, and he seems to be treading the path of sin. Isn't that right, Sister Philamena?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What sin, Sister Augusta?

SISTER AUGUSTA. I saw him drinking...alco-

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Cutting her off sharply:*) Don't say that word, Sister Philamena! You know how much I despise that word!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Sorry, Reverend Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. But George lives here on the grounds. Where on earth could he get...you-know-what?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

SISTER AUGUSTA. He sneaks into town at night, Mother Superior, and buys bottles of that...devil's delight...that seems to be so popular among the locals. Sister Philamena and I were going to skip dinner and counsel him.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. This is terrible! George has been our groundskeeper for years. He's never once given me a moment's worry. Perhaps I should speak with him personally.

SISTER PHILAMENA. No, Mother Superior, you can't!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Why not?

SISTER PHILAMENA. ...uh...uh...

SISTER AUGUSTA. He doesn't know that you know, Mother Superior, and it might embarrass him. He so looks up to you. It would be much easier coming from Sister Philamena and me.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Perhaps you're right. But remember, you may counsel, but don't preach. Change must come from within. And hurry back: we're expecting that new addition to our convent tonight: Sister Mary, who has been sent to us by Cardinal Redding himself!

SISTER PHILAMENA / SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I see George has found a trunk to ship the robes off in. Oh, it's Father Chenille's old magic trunk. That man is the worst magician I've ever seen: the only thing he can make disappear is an audience.

(She sees the telegram on the trunk.)

What's this?

SISTER AUGUSTA. George brought in a telegram for you, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. From Rome!

(She starts to read. PHILAMENA and AUGUSTA look over her shoulder. She closes the telegram.)

I don't dawdle, Sisters! George needs salvation!

(She exits into her room, reading the telegram.)

SISTER PHILAMENA. You lied to Mother Superior!

SISTER AUGUSTA. What choice did I have? We couldn't let her know we've been making...Satan's mouthwash...instead of grape juice and selling it to save the convent.

SISTER PHILAMENA. I've never lied in my life, much less to a Holy Mother!

SISTER AUGUSTA. A lot of help you were! You just stood there with your mouth open!

SISTER PHILAMENA. I can't help it! I can't lie even if I wanted to! Whenever I try, all that comes out is, "...uh...uh..." That's why I became a nun: here my disability is actually an asset.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But still! You could have looked less guilty!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Why did you lie in the first place? Why not just tell Mother Superior about the frost? She'd think we were picking grapes for our juice.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I got flustered; it was the first thing that came to my mind. Now listen, we've got to press those grapes tonight or it will be too late! You remembered what happened last time we waited, don't you?

SISTER PHILAMENA. The mice came in and ate most of them.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Right! So we didn't have enough grapes to make both juice and...Lucifer's libation. So we only made juice, and we almost had to close our doors! You don't want that to happen again, do you?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Of course not! This convent is the only home I've ever known.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Then let's figure out a plan. How many empty...you-know-what...bottles do we have left?

SISTER PHILAMENA. None! They're all full. We were going to sneak into town this week to sell them.

SISTER AUGUSTA. It's past six so the store where we buy our bottles has already closed. Do we have any empty juice bottles left?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh, yes! At least a dozen. Plus two full ones.

SISTER AUGUSTA. So this is what we'll do: we'll fill the juice bottles with...the you-know-what that we press tonight.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But Mother Superior serves grape juice from those bottles. She'll find out!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Nonsense! You said there are still two full bottles of grape juice. We'll just make sure that we use those until we get the other bottles from town tomorrow. Tomorrow we can transfer the...you-know-what...back into the...you-know-what...bottles, and then fill the grape juice bottles with real grape juice.

SISTER PHILAMENA. That sounds awfully risky!

SISTER AUGUSTA. What choice do we have? Now, go grab some buckets and meet me in the orchard!

(out the front door.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Entering, nearly hysterical:*) Merciful heavens! What will we do? Sister Philamena! Sister Augusta!

SISTER AUGUSTA. (*Re-entering:*) What is, Mother Superior?

(PHILAMENA rushes back in carrying two buckets.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Rome has sent out a decree ordering all insignificant convents to immediately close! They'll be sending out someone—someone not in the church—to check each and every convent and report back to Rome.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But, Mother Superior, why are you so worried? Surely Rome doesn't mean us!

SISTER PHILAMENA. We've been entrusted with a sacred duty to the church!

SISTER AUGUSTA. How can we be considered insignificant?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sisters, I have a confession to make to you. All these years I have never told Rome how small our order is in fact. I've made it a point to disguise that fact. That's why you've all been trained to sew as fast as 20 nuns. And we certainly don't make enough money to be considered significant. One look at us and Rome