

ACT I

Scene 1

(Later that day.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Please know, Father, that I'm not a rude, but I was shocked seeing Sister Mary Mary and Sister Paula kissing like that.

GEORGE. But, as Mother Superior explained, Sister Paula is from France.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I suppose they do greet people differently there. I wonder if that's what they call a French kiss?

GEORGE. Oh, no, a French kiss is with tongue. I mean, so I've been told. In confession. I don't know myself. I'm a priest.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I just hope Sister Paula doesn't greet all of us that way.

GEORGE. Sister Mary Catherine, may I ask you something? Something...personal?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Certainly, Father.

GEORGE. Have you ever been in love?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What do you mean?

GEORGE. Before you became a nun, wasn't there someone in your past to whom you felt the least bit of attraction?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Why, yes there was, Father. At the orphanage I grew up in, there was a groundskeeper who had a son, a beautiful young man with whom I was quite smitten. He used to read books on his breaks: Tolstoy and Shakespeare and Bronte.

GEORGE. Charlotte or Emily?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Both. I used to watch him for hours on end, but I was too shy to ever talk to him. Then one day he was gone. A new groundskeeper came. I never knew what happened to that boy, but I've always felt in my heart that if he were to ever return to me, I would remember what it's like to be in love once more. It's a silly memory, Father. Why do you ask?

GEORGE. It's not a silly memory at all! The boy—did you ever know his name?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No. But he had his initials monogrammed on his shirt: GD. *(Reverently.)* If you try to pronounce it, it sounds like "God."

GEORGE. Perhaps that boy is still out there, looking for you. Perhaps he always knew he was being watched, because he was always watching you too. Perhaps he remains a groundskeeper to this very day, searching every window for signs of that lovely young girl!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Perhaps. But I suppose I'll never know for certain. Besides, it's too late now. I'm a nun. *(Beat.)* Almost.

GEORGE. Almost?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Father, there is something I've wanted confess to you. I'm not really a nun.

GEORGE. You're not? That's wonderful! I mean, what do you mean?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I'm just a novice. Cardinal Redding has allowed me to finish out my time here, since I'm so skilled at sewing. I'm not really supposed to tell anyone. But I've been plagued with guilt ever since I arrived. I feel sacrilegious wearing these garments before I've officially taken my vows.

GEORGE. I have something to confess to you as well: I'm not really a priest! I've just been telling you I was!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. What!?!?

GEORGE. Father Chenille put me up to it. He's worried that Father Paul has been sent to take over the parish. I'm supposed to spy on him, and report what I see. So, you see, I'm not really a priest at all!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Then who are you?

GEORGE. I'm the groundskeeper!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. The groundskeeper? But I just gave you confession!

GEORGE. I know. And it was just wonderful!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. So you're just pretending to be a priest? You're a sick man!

GEORGE. I only did it because Father Chenille asked me to.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I don't care! You should never have agreed to it!

GEORGE. You don't understand, Mary Catherine...

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. I trusted you with my most private secret. I thought you were bound by the Church to keep my confession confidential. But now you'll tell everyone!

GEORGE. No I won't! I swear!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. How do I know that's not just another lie?

GEORGE. Mary Catherine!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. You're perverse! You and Father Chenille both.

FATHER CHENILLE. *(Entering:)* Did I hear my name?

(MARY CATHERINE glares at him.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. Shame on you, you...you... *(Unable to think of an insult:)* You!

(She storms out.)

FATHER CHENILLE. What was that all about?

GEORGE. She knows I'm not a priest!

FATHER CHENILLE. You told her? But it was supposed to be a secret! Oh, well, as long as she doesn't go telling anyone. Now, what have you found out about Father Paul?

GEORGE. I haven't got time now, Father! I've got to go convince Sister Mary Catherine not to become a nun!

(He exits.)

FATHER CHENILLE. But she's already a—oh, never mind. Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. *(Entering:)* Yes, Father?

FATHER CHENILLE. I trust you're feeling better?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Fully revived, Father.

FATHER CHENILLE. Good, then I wonder if you'd mind telling me what in Heaven's name is going on? Who is this Sister Paula? Where did she come from? Is she the spy sent by Rome?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No, of course not!

FATHER CHENILLE. How can you be certain?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Well, she's... That is to say, she's...my sister.

FATHER CHENILLE. You have a sister?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes. My sister is also a Sister. She's in town for a few days.

FATHER CHENILLE. Quite a coincidence your sister knowing Sister Mary Mary.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes. She's French.

FATHER CHENILLE. Who, Sister Mary Mary?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No, my sister, Sister Paula. That's why she kissed Sister Mary Mary like that. She's French.

FATHER CHENILLE. But you're not.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. No. (*Struggling to form a lie.*) But I was. I... grew out of it.

FATHER CHENILLE. I don't understand.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm afraid I don't either, really.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well, regardless, have you seen Father Paul around? I've been looking for him all day. I wanted to ask him if he'd like to say late afternoon mass with me. You know what they say: keep your enemies close.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm sure he's around here somewhere.

FATHER CHENILLE. Well if you see him, please send him over to me at the church.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Will do.

FATHER CHENILLE. Oh, and Mother?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, Father?

FATHER CHENILLE. (*Calling her out on her obvious lie.*) I expect I'll see you in confession tomorrow?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I expect you will, Father.

(FATHER CHENILLE exits. MOTHER SUPERIOR enters.)

Father Paul, I must speak with you at once!

PAUL. Please call me Sister Paula while I'm dressed like this. I don't want to have to make up another lie!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Very well, Sister Paula, your discovery has forced me to commit a grave sin. I've lied to a priest! To save you embarrassment, I must inform you of the circumstances I have created. You are my sister, you're French, and you're everyone like that when you first meet them.

PAUL. I do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Now, Father, I realize no one in this matter is to be reproach, but what in Heaven's name were you doing kissing Sister Mary Mary in the pressing room?