

SISTER PHILAMENA. Mother Superior!

SISTER AUGUSTA. Who...?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Augusta...!

(PAUL enters from closet.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Cardinal Redding?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. (Confused:) Cardinal Redding?

ALL. Cardinal Redding!!!

PAUL. My children!

(lights blackout.)

Scene 2

(Later that evening. A small party has been organized. The sewing has been replaced with a table cloth, and a punchbowl partially filled. MOTHER SUPERIOR, PHILAMENA, and AUGUSTA are putting plates, napkins and cups on the table. It is clear they are anxious to talk. After a moment, the bells chime.)

SISTER AUGUSTA. How is it possible that we didn't even know he was coming?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Perhaps they sent a telegram, but George forgot to give it to us. It's happened before.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Father Chenille's to blame! If he hadn't convinced George to pretend to be a priest then George would have remembered things like delivering telegrams and none of this would have happened. Oh dear, I wish we had more time to put together a proper reception for Cardinal Redding.

SISTER PHILAMENA. It's too bad Sister Paula left this afternoon.

SISTER AUGUSTA. I found it very strange that she left without saying goodbye. Just that note left in the kitchen.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm sure she had things to do.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Still, it kind of makes me wonder...

SISTER PHILAMENA. Wonder what?

SISTER AUGUSTA. Is it possible Sister Paula was the spy?

SISTER PHILAMENA. Do you think?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Nonsense! Mary Catherine is the spy sent from Rome. Sister Paula had nothing to do with it.

SISTER AUGUSTA. But how can you be sure, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I just am. Let's leave it at that.

SISTER PHILAMENA. But still, it does seem awfully suspicious...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Less chatter and more work! Now get back to the kitchen and finish the appetizers. Cardinal Redding will be back from saying afternoon mass with Father Chenille soon, and I want everything ready for his arrival.

SISTER AUGUSTA. Yes, Mother.

(She and PHILAMENA start to exit.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Philamena, I want you stay. I need to talk to you.

SISTER PHILAMENA. (Nervously looking to AUGUSTA as AUGUSTA exits.) Yes, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Philamena, what was in that box you brought in earlier today?

SISTER PHILAMENA. The box, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. The cardboard box that made the sound of shattering glass.

SISTER PHILAMENA. Those were just bottles of grape juice, Mother Superior.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. From where?

SISTER PHILAMENA. George's cabin.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What were you doing with juice from George's cabin, Sister?

(PHILAMENA starts to sweat.)

Sister, I asked you a question. Why did you take his juice?

SISTER PHILAMENA. I took it because...because...because...we needed to replace the bottles in the kitchen.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Why? What's wrong with the juice in the kitchen?

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

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister, answer me!

SISTER PHILAMENA. (In agony.) ...uh...uh...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I've asked you a question!

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Barely able to stay standing:*) ...UH...UH

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What's wrong with the grape juice in the kitchen?

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Finally breaking, unable to lie:*) It isn't grape juice, Mother Superior! It's wine! Yes, wine! The devil's hair tonic! Satan's aperitif!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. (*Unable to say the word:*) Wi-wi-wi...

SISTER PHILAMENA. Now please don't ask me any more questions!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How did our grape juice come to be replaced with wi-wi-wi...you-know-what?

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Struggling:*) ...UH...UH...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Tell me this instant!

SISTER PHILAMENA. (*Pouring out of her:*) Sister Augusta and I have been secretly making wine for years and selling it to the locals to make money for the convent! We knew you'd stop us if you found out the truth, so we've been lying to you all this time! We're horrible, disgusting liars!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How dare you! You know how I feel about... you-know-what!

SISTER PHILAMENA. If there were any other way, we would gladly have done it. But there wasn't! We were only selling so many bottles of juice, but once we started selling the...you-know-what... well, it was a miracle. People bought it by the case! We were going to stop at some point, but it proved to be the only way to keep the convent open! Oh, this all would have been so much easier if I was able to lie!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. After Cardinal Redding leaves I will dole out punishment for both you and Sister Augusta! In the meantime, keep your mouths shut! I don't want anyone to find out the truth, especially Sister Mary Catherine. Rome will close us for certain if that sneaky little spy finds out! Tell no one! Do you understand?

SISTER PHILAMENA. I'm so sorry, Mother!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Now, go help Sister Augusta. We'll talk about this later!

SISTER PHILAMENA. Oh dear! (*She starts to exit, then sneaks back in and whispers:*) You will forget what I just told you! You will forget what I just told you!

(MOTHER SUPERIOR *glares at her and PHILAMENA runs off screaming.*)

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Saints forgive us!

(GEORGE enters, no longer dressed as a priest.)

Well, well, well. I suppose you're French too?

GEORGE. What do you mean, Mother Superior?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Kissing Sister Mary Catherine like that! Shameful!

GEORGE. But she's not—I mean...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Save your breath, George. I know Sister Mary Catherine isn't really a nun!

GEORGE. You do?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Of course! But that still doesn't give you any right to do what you did! And in front of Cardinal Redding!

GEORGE. Begging your pardon, Mother Superior, but don't you find it odd how much Cardinal Redding looks like Father Paul?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I hadn't noticed.

GEORGE. Hadn't noticed?? They could be twins!

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I suppose they do bear a slight resemblance.

GEORGE. It's more than just a resemblance. And, besides, we've never actually seen the two of them together...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Sister Mary Mary did. She told me Father Paul was taking a nap in your cabin when the Cardinal arrived.

GEORGE. Still...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. What are you saying, George? That Father Paul dressed up like Cardinal Redding?

GEORGE. Not at all. I'm saying that maybe Cardinal Redding dressed up like Father Paul. Maybe Cardinal Redding's the spy...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Preposterous! I hardly think Rome would send someone as prestigious as a cardinal to spy on us.

GEORGE. Maybe not...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Now listen, George, when Cardinal Redding gets back I don't want you spouting any more of your crazy theories about him being a spy! It would be incredibly insulting!

GEORGE. Yes, Mother Superior...

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'm going to go finish up the food. I need you to pour cups of punch.

GEORGE. Yes, Mother Superior.

(She exits. GEORGE tastes a little punch.)

A little bland... Maybe if I add a little grape juice from the pressing room.

(He enters the pressing room, and comes out with two bottles of wine. He adds half a bottle, pauses, and decides to add the rest of it. He pours himself a glass and drinks it down.)

Better.

(He adds the other bottle. He pours another glass and chugs it down.)

Twice as better! Wow, this grape juice makes all the difference!

(He pours three or four glasses, drinking more of the punch between each pour. Soon, he is drunk. MARY CATHERINE enters as GEORGE continues to pour.)

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. George! Oh George! What are we going to do?

GEORGE. What do you mean?

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. We were caught kissing! I can't lie any more. I've got to tell Mother Superior everything!

GEORGE. Don't get so worked up. Have some punch.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass and refills it.)

Oh, George, this isn't at all how things were supposed to go!

GEORGE. I know, I know. Here, you look thirsty.

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass and refills it.)

I didn't know what to do so I just ran off and prayed. Now I know that I need to tell Mother Superior I'm really still a novice.

GEORGE. Ok, ok, whatever you say. Are you sure you don't want to try any punch? It's really good!

SISTER MARY CATHERINE. No, thank you.

(He downs the glass.)

I'm going to go find her right away. Wish me luck, George.