

The Cantor's Tale

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*“I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, oh, what black hours we have spent
This night! What sights you saw, heart, ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer lights delay.*

*With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas, away.*

*I am gall, I am heartburn, God’s most deep decree.
Bitter would he have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.*

*Self yeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves, but worse.”*

Gerard Manley Hopkins

*“How I pity the female sex! The woeful consequence of exclusion is always
the assumption of a deficiency, and how true is the maxim: ‘to exclude is to revile’.”*

Marcel Devereaux

CHARACTERS

FATHER PRUE DIMMS, a Catholic priest; mid-fifties to mid-thirties

DUPLE DIMMS, the embodiment of Prue's suppressed passions

MILDRED DIMMS MURKLE, Prue's sister; mid-fifties to mid-thirties

FRANCES MURKLE, Prue's niece, Mildred's daughter; early thirties to mid-teens

FATHER FIRMIN SAINT CLOUD, the novice master; mid-sixties

DUNCAN ALBRIGHT, the smitten seminarian; early twenties

FIONA ALBRIGHT, Duncan's mother; late forties

KATHERINE COYNE, Duncan's beloved; mid-twenties

NOTE: The Cantor's Tale can be performed by a cast of six (three men and three women) with Mildred Murkle, Fiona Albright, and Father Saint Cloud played by the same actor.

TIME

1993

PLACE

A small college township in New England.

A single unit set consisting of a table and several chairs will suffice to suggest a church, an office, three parlors, a courtyard, a painter's studio, and an art gallery.

PROLOGUE

(The seminary chapel in pitch darkness. Majestic choral music is heard as PRUE DIMMS speaks.)

PRUE DIMMS

Oh, Lord, open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise.

(Dim lights reveal PRUE kneeling at prayer by the altar; DUPLE DIMMS stands aside, skulking in the shadows. A WOMAN disguised as a bishop enters, gliding towards the altar. Suddenly the choral music is overwhelmed by reverberating rock music as SHE whips off her robe, revealing a scarlet corset, inflated breasts, and a garishly painted face. SHE dances seductively, thrusting her pelvis as DUPLE DIMMS gapes in horror and PRUE DIMMS points a trembling finger and shouts!)

PRUE DIMMS

Heresy! Heresy! Get out! Wicked! Heinous! The devil! Stop her! It's sacrilege! Desecration! No, no, it can't be! The Armageddon! Dear God, deliver me...

(The WOMAN flees laughing as PRUE DIMMS collapses, and FATHER SAINT CLOUD enters.)

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Prue! Prue! Wake up! You've fainted.

PRUE DIMMS

What? Where...? Did you see her?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Who?

PRUE DIMMS

There, at the tabernacle, a whore impersonating the bishop.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

I think you must be dreaming. You're flushed; you must be ill.

PRUE DIMMS

Ill? Am I ill? I can't be, not now. Tomorrow is the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Who will be the cantor? Who will lead the choir? Please, leave me alone, leave me with God.

(FATHER SAINT CLOUD departs as both PRUE and DUPLE DIMMS kneel, making signs of the cross in unison.)

PRUE DIMMS

I beseech you in your infinite mercy to absolve me from my wickedness, but Father, don't you see? We too can give birth to ourselves; we too can spring from our own founts. You were flesh and blood once; you knew my weakness; you knew my choice: to abandon dreams of sanctity and become my...

PRUE DIMMS

...troll...

DUPLE DIMMS

Troll!

PRUE DIMMS

...or forsake my...

PRUE DIMMS

...troll...

DUPLE DIMMS

Troll!

PRUE DIMMS

...and become Prue the Beatified: Patron Saint of Vengeance and Despair. Where once I trolled as a cantor to heaven, I thenceforth...

PRUE DIMMS

....trolled as a hellion to hell!

DUPLE DIMMS

Troll as a hellion to hell!

(DUPLE DIMMS stands, his voice deepening to a rasp.)

DUPLE DIMMS

Trolls have warts, stink to high heaven, are esteemed by none and esteem nobody. Most are kept low from fouling the air, but me! Me! Dear God, what a fiend, what a fableizer! Here, you see: (*pointing to Prue*) I never had much of a voice, but my ears -- a perfect sense of pitch! Can you hear me, oh, Lord? Hear the tale of myself before I knew myself. Listen: Once in the Kingdom of Sodom and Sloth, in the year of our Lord, nineteen hundred and ninety-three, Duncan came to tell me he was ruining his life.

SCENE 1: TROLL CAJOLERY

(DUPLE DIMMS continues speaking as the altar becomes a desk, and PRUE DIMMS confronts DUNCAN ALBRIGHT, a handsome seminarian.)

DUPLE DIMMS

He said, "I've met a woman. Her name is Kate. She's made me realize that..."

DUPLE DIMMS

...I'm not cut out to be a priest."

DUNCAN

I'm not cut out to be a priest.

PRUE DIMMS

It takes years, sometimes a lifetime.

DUPLE DIMMS

And just this morning everyone was saying how the choir was sounding...

DUPLE DIMMS

...inspired!

PRUE DIMMS

Inspired...

PRUE DIMMS

...men, even saints, have their trials.

DUNCAN

But you have to know, *really* know. If I knew, I wouldn't feel...

PRUE DIMMS

It isn't that simple! If you think, you have doubts. That's why you...

PRUE DIMMS

...pray.

DUPLE DIMMS

Pray!

DUPLE DIMMS

A regular clamor mounting up to God!

DUNCAN

I...I've tried, but I can't...

PRUE DIMMS

Then you haven't learned how. Praying is an art.

DUNCAN

We're always told how a priest renounces everything, how he becomes a man for others. Well, I'm not that kind of man. I thought I was, but I'm not. I can't give up everything.

DUPLE DIMMS

You can't give up Kate, that's what you can't give up!

PRUE DIMMS

You're giving up the greatest responsibility a man can have.

DUPLE DIMMS

You're giving up the choir, *my* choir!

PRUE DIMMS

The celebration of the Eucharist, the ministry of the word of God to man. You mediate between the human and the divine.

PRUE DIMMS

What could be more fulfilling?

DUPLE DIMMS

What could be more fulfilling?

DUNCAN

I'm sorry, Prue, it's just not enough.

PRUE DIMMS

Not enough...?

DUPLE DIMMS

Not enough?!

(The outraged DUPLE DIMMS shuffles off, hovering in the background.)

PRUE DIMMS

The mystery of Christ on Earth is not enough?!

DUNCAN

Yes, yes, of course, but a husband and wife reflect that same mystery.

PRUE DIMMS

A priest is married to his flock, to the church.

DUNCAN

But it's not my vocation.

PRUE DIMMS

A priest is *all* vocations!

DUNCAN

I thought you'd understand.

PRUE DIMMS

I think I do.

DUNCAN

No, no, you don't. Of course I wanted to be a priest, a good priest. I really tried; I thought I knew.

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, you knew when you entered the seminary; you knew for three years of study; you knew all along, and now, suddenly, out of the blue, you have an itch that's been scratched and you're greedy, you're impetuous.

DUNCAN

Prue, you're not listening! Look at me: I'm shaking. Do you think I haven't gone through hell before telling you this? How do you think I feel?

PRUE DIMMS

I know exactly what you feel and where.

DUNCAN

Apparently you don't think much of my intelligence.

PRUE DIMMS

No one's intelligent when it comes to women. Thank God I never went through this.

DUNCAN

Never? *(pause)* I knew you'd be disappointed, but when I met Kate, I...I tried to resist, but as I came to know her, I felt a sense of something inexplicable...

PRUE DIMMS

Hormones! It's called hormones! They induce an adrenaline effect on the brain which we call desire, passion, or lust. In the priesthood, lust is supposed to bow its head to something holier: self-sacrifice -- something your generation can't seem to comprehend.

DUNCAN

You're reducing everything to its lowest common denominator. I'm talking about my life and you answer with hormones. She said you'd react like this.

PRUE DIMMS

How clever of her.

DUNCAN

If it's all right with you, I'd like to leave next Monday.

PRUE DIMMS

Monday? Why the rush?

DUNCAN

I want to marry her soon.

PRUE DIMMS

Marry her?! She's not...?

DUNCAN

Of course not.

PRUE DIMMS

This is incredible! Just incredible! This girl's cast a spell on you. You're blathering like some goo-goo eyed pubescent! I've always admired you, gave you credit for being sensible and discerning...

DUNCAN

And not a bad tenor.

PRUE DIMMS

An excellent tenor -- a rare combination.

DUNCAN

You'll find another.

PRUE DIMMS

Duncan, I'm still your spiritual advisor, and speaking in that capacity, I must say you're rushing into this far too quickly. You're both young. She'll keep, and if you love her as you say you do...

DUNCAN

As I do!

PRUE DIMMS

In any case, you must appreciate the considerable investment the order has made in your education, and of course our concern for you personally, so before you make any definite commitment, I suggest you remain with us at least another month.

DUNCAN

I've made my commitment.

PRUE DIMMS

This is the rest of your life we're talking about! For godssake, you've only known her -- what?

DUNCAN

Six weeks.

PRUE DIMMS

Six weeks! And I suppose it was her idea to go running to the altar? *(pause, no response)*
And just what are you going to do when you get there? Well? Do you know anything?

DUNCAN

About what?

PRUE DIMMS

About "acts of kind."

DUNCAN

What?

PRUE DIMMS

About the libido. Coitus.

DUNCAN

(laughs!)

PRUE DIMMS

I have a book here: Random's Moral Biology. It's ancient history by today's standards, and Random's a Unitarian, but you might find it...educational. Personally, I think some of these would tax an acrobat -- God, will you look at that! This one's interesting, though you'd have to have the spine of an angleworm.

DUNCAN

Prue, I know what you're trying to do.

PRUE DIMMS

How are you going to support yourself?

DUNCAN

I'll give piano lessons, voice lessons, I'll sell shoes. I don't care; I'm not stupid.

PRUE DIMMS

No, indeed, but you're totally unprepared. I mean, have you seriously considered the incredible adjustments you'll have to make? -- living with a woman.

DUPLE DIMMS

(suddenly aroused) Living with a woman?

PRUE DIMMS

I know all about that. I have a sister and a niece and I can tell you they have a far greater share of the devil's heritage than men.

(PRUE and DUNCAN freeze as DUPLE DIMMS speaks.)

DUPLE DIMMS

Born trolls all of them, for a troll is one who goeth gaping and lures as a fish. For luring they knead themselves soft as a baby's bum, and for gaping they grease their lips, slippery red rings for their serpent tongues. (*snickering*) Being a troll myself, I see the adversary's face in my own mirror: a paradoxical advantage.

(PRUE DIMMS shows Duncan a photograph propped on his desk as lights reveal MILDRED MURKLE, and her daughter, FRANCES standing in a formal pose.)

PRUE DIMMS

There they are: the women of my life. That's my sister, Mildred. Our mother's maiden name was Prue, the source of my ludicrous praenomen. As a child it mortified me. "Pooh on Prue,/ Full of Stew," and so on. Strange how one remembers these things. And that's Mildred's daughter, my niece, Frances.

DUNCAN

She's very beautiful.

PRUE DIMMS

That was years ago. She must be thirty now, an editor for one of those art magazines, and more belligerent than ever -- a born heretic!

DUNCAN

Really? A heretic?

PRUE DIMMS

A deluded iconoclast. She says women are denied their ecclesiastical rights. She wants to start a church of her own.

DUNCAN

Seriously?

PRUE DIMMS

Oh, God, no. It's just talk to provoke me. She's made such a bedlam of her life: married, divorced, sleeping around like a common trollop.

(FRANCES steps out of the portrait pose to sing Shubert's "Ave Maria" as her adolescent self.)

FRANCES

*Ave Maria, gratia plena, dominus tecum,
benedictus tui in mulieribus, et benedictus, benedictus,
fructus ventris tui, benedictus, jesus, Ave Maria,
Ave Maria, mater Dei, Maria, mater Dei, Ora, ora pronobis,
ora pronobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostra, Ave Maria.*

PRUE DIMMS

(Overlapping Frances) When she was younger, I tried to interest Frances in a vocation. Oh, you should have heard her at Mass! Grown men wept. How she could have served God with that voice, but you just can't talk to Frances.

DUPLE DIMMS

"As a jewel of gold in a swine's mouth, so a fair woman without discretion."

FRANCES

(to Prue) Me? A nun?! No waaaaay, not till I've been neutered, tortured, lobotomized...

PRUE DIMMS

All right, all right!

FRANCES

Jesus! How can you even think such a thing?!

PRUE DIMMS

Temporary delirium. You obviously don't have the maturity or the discipline.

FRANCES

Chastity isn't discipline; it's bad luck! Look, if it weren't for my solos in the choir, I wouldn't set foot in a church. Whenever I'm there, I pretend I'm a pagan singing arias in the Temple of Aphrodite.

PRUE DIMMS

Please, spare me your boorish hedonism.

FRANCES

The world needs goddesses, brave, proud goddesses!

PRUE DIMMS

If you're going to be irreverent, at least be original.

FRANCES

I'll tell you what, Prue Perfect: I'll join your church when women can be priests, popes even.

PRUE DIMMS

Priests are men because Christ and his chosen apostles were men.

FRANCES

If Christ's penis was so important, how come he never used it? Anyway, he had to choose men because women were chattel.

PRUE DIMMS

The mother of God was chattel?!

FRANCES

Yes, like millions of women! If you look through your stained glass windows, you'll notice an ongoing revolutions. Face it, Prue, you're on a sinking ship.

PRUE DIMMS

I can't have a decent conversation with you. You're always shouting and barking propaganda like a typical hysteric!

FRANCES

What do you want? You want me to be one of your ass-kissing toadies? (*mimicking an old woman*) "Oh, wise Father Dimms, you're such the holy martyr, giving up your precious time to bless my Bingo cards!" You've got them all sucking up to you, even mother -- pathetic old lush.

PRUE DIMMS

How dare you?!

FRANCES

Well, it's true. She's miserable; she has nothing.

PRUE DIMMS

She has you. Her marriage was fruitful and fulfilling. She's grateful for that.

FRANCES

But it's over! Since dad died, all she does is rattle her rosary between martinis and naps. Christ, she sleeps constantly.

PRUE DIMMS

I'm afraid being a widow doesn't become her. Read First Corinthians: "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is the man."

FRANCES

Then what's a woman head of?

PRUE DIMMS

Of her family, her children.

FRANCES

What about women without children? What are they? Just sperm down the drain?! Oh, God, how could we be related?! Troglodyte!

DUPLE DIMMS

Brat!

PRUE DIMMS

I shall not resort to infantile name calling.

FRANCES

You'd have been great at the Inquisition!

DUPLE DIMMS

Grilling little heretics on my...

DUPLE DIMMS

...sticks!

PRUE DIMMS

Sticks...

PRUE DIMMS

...and stones, little Frances.

DUPLE DIMMS

The strap, you impudent chit!

FRANCES

Get off your glacier! Pig!

DUPLE DIMMS

Viper!

FRANCES

Virgin!

DUPLE DIMMS

Whore! Whore! Whore!

(FRANCES exits as PRUE turns to Duncan.)

PRUE DIMMS

We really can't have a decent conversation. Dear God, why Mildred didn't keep her at Saint Monica's where they'd have checked that blasphemous tongue. And yet, that voice. Why does God bestow his gifts on such wild little things like Frances? (*pause, picking up the photograph*) And then there's Mildred: Mildred is living testimony to the wisdom of Genesis:

DUPLE DIMMS

First the light, and then came man,/ But after Eve "The Fall" began.

(MILDRED enters, wearing a careworn housecoat and holding a cocktail.)

MILDRED

Prue, dear, I have a tummy ache. If George were here, he'd rub my tummy.

PRUE DIMMS

Well, he's not, so why don't you use a heating pad?

MILDRED

It doesn't work as well as a tummy rub. And I think I have a little sniffles. Everything happens at once.

PRUE DIMMS

It's too early for cocktails!

MILDRED

You wouldn't say that if you knew what I've been going through.

PRUE DIMMS

What?

MILDRED

It's Frances. She's...well, she's just not the sweet girl we thought she was.

PRUE DIMMS

Speak for yourself.

MILDRED

Something has to be done.

PRUE DIMMS

About what?

MILDRED

Well,...it's a secret.

PRUE DIMMS

Good, I don't want to know.

MILDRED

Frances is using certain..."products" and prescriptions that shall remain nameless for certain activities that shall also remain nameless.

PRUE DIMMS

How do you know?

MILDRED

I cleaned her room.

PRUE DIMMS

Apparently, little Frances has fleshed out, so to speak.

MILDRED

How do you think she learned such things?

PRUE DIMMS

I don't know. The girls' locker room. *(pause)* Didn't you tell her anything?

MILDRED

I'd die if she got one of those disgusting diseases or became an unwed mother.

PRUE DIMMS

You were the one who let her transfer to the public schools.

MILDRED

She's very fertile, you know.

PRUE DIMMS

No, I didn't.

MILDRED

She bleeds like Niagara Falls.

PRUE DIMMS

Mildred!

MILDRED

Remember, Frances developed early. Her breasts popped on overnight, and she had her period earlier than the other girls. Prue, there's only one way to say it.

PRUE DIMMS

Please don't.

MILDRED

She's hotter than a wood stove, and I think you should do something.

PRUE DIMMS

It's none of my business, and I don't want to hear any of this!

MILDRED

You want your niece sleeping with every Tom, Dick, and Harry?

PRUE DIMMS

You don't know that.

MILDRED

A mother has certain premonitions. I knew she was wild from the day she came out kicking. We were good children, Prue, but Frances -- Frances has a mind of her own.

PRUE DIMMS

Somehow, I don't take that as a compliment.

MILDRED

Frances should have been a boy and you should've been a girl.

PRUE DIMMS

What...?

MILDRED

You should have been a girl like me. (*she giggles*) Of course, then you'd be a nun!

PRUE DIMMS

Mildred, please.

MILDRED

(laughing) My sister, the sister!

PRUE DIMMS

For godssake!

MILDRED

(pause, she sighs) All I know is that I can't talk to her, but maybe you could. She's so young and could use a little fatherly advice.

PRUE DIMMS

I'm her *uncle*, not her father, and certainly not her priest. Besides, advice can only be given to a willing listener, and Frances never listens to anyone but herself.

DUPLE DIMMS

"A filthy mind dines best alone."

(MILDRED exits as PRUE returns to Duncan.)

PRUE DIMMS

My own experience with the sex has convinced me that they're -- figuratively speaking, of course -- plucked from the bent rib of man to nurture his infancy, socialize his childhood, and bring...

DUPLE DIMMS

...chaos!

PRUE DIMMS

...stability to his manhood. My first novice master, a brilliant theologian, was fond of quoting the old rubric: "While men, like reeds, rise to their fate, the female bends to procreate." He believed that in women the carnal impulses were more pronounced since they do carry the major burden of propagating the species whereas men carry the burden of society, of culture. He wasn't implying that they're innately less cerebral, but we have only to search the great chronicles of scholasticism to find them -- well, to put it frankly -- they're conspicuously absent! Well, aren't they? Think of it, Duncan: what have they contributed to the annals of science or art or philosophy?

DUNCAN

That's because...

DUPLE DIMMS

Nothing!

PRUE DIMMS

What great female historian, what composer, architect, or theologian comes to mind?

DUNCAN
But there was...

DUPLE DIMMS
None!

PRUE DIMMS
Could a woman ever aspire to be a....a Bach?

DUNCAN
Yes!

DUPLE DIMMS
No!

PRUE DIMMS
A Shakespeare?

DUPLE DIMMS
No!

PRUE DIMMS
Michelangelo?

DUPLE DIMMS
Never!

PRUE DIMMS
They simply have too much to overcome!

DUNCAN
Kate's an artist, a painter. She's the most gifted person I know.

PRUE DIMMS
(pause) Yes, well, I'm sure she's everything you say. I'm just playing devil's advocate, and the devil says wait. Have you told anyone else about this?

DUNCAN
No one except my mother.

PRUE DIMMS
Then don't tell another soul. Practice the virtue of forbearance. You owe it to yourself, to the order. You'll win my respect, and if Kate loves you as much as you apparently love her, I'm sure she'll understand. After a month, if you still feel the same, then she can have you. Tell her it was my suggestion; tell her I insisted.

DUNCAN
I won't have to.

PRUE DIMMS

Then, if you do get married, the entire seminary will sing at your wedding!

SCENE 2: NETHER NUPTIALS

(A funereal dirge resounds as DUPLE DIMMS is posed to perform the marriage ceremony.)

DUPLE DIMMS

If only Duncan could see his nuptials through troll's eyes.

(DUNCAN and a cartoonish BRIDE march in step like mechanized dolls with insipid smiles. THEY stop before DUPLE DIMMS who intones the rites in a rapid sing-song, evoking the rhythms of a Latin Mass.)

DUPLE DIMMS

(chanting) Look into her vacuous eyes. Dost thou, Duncan, take this troll to lead a low and baseborn life, a life profaned by foul, farting winds and the curse of rapacious desire. Desire will cling like a cancer, following her high and low, curdling her flesh with a drill full of swill. Look again! Behold her mouth: Desire's orifice, sucking away forever the slippery dew of youth, her youth, your youth, till death doth thee part.

DUNCAN

I d...d...d...

DUPLE DIMMS

(chanting) Wait! Wait! Look at her: think of her flesh pots, all boobs and buttocks! She'll hang her bloomers from the rafters!

DUNCAN

I.I...

DUPLE DIMMS

(chanting) Touch her, she's flaccid, fatuous, a thumb-sucking sow who smells of the nursery. Is this what you want? Is this what you're trading your sanctity for? Does she give you perfection? No! Does she offer you eternal life? No! Does she bring you the love of God? No! For the grace and indelible character of the priesthood you trade this wanton whore, this trifling trollop, this strumpet, this sleaze, this slut, this swine?!

DUNCAN

I...I...I do!

BRIDE

I do!

DUPLE DIMMS

Nooooooooooooo!!!

(The BRIDE leaps into Duncan's arms, and THEY dash off stage.)

DUPLE DIMMS

Foolish suckling. For this you bartered the sublime, for your pearls this pot of slime. No! Not if Dimms can save you. So once it befell that I invited the bride to tea. Her dazzling beauty was, by earthly standards, unrivalled, but her voice was like a chorus of bats. Her name was Kate and it rhymes with hate. Hate! Hate! Hate!!!!

SCENE 3: RECOIL, THE SHESPOUSE

(KATE COYNE, an attractive young woman, enters. PRUE offers her a chair as DUPLE hovers nearby.)

KATE

It was very thoughtful of you to invite me, Prue.

DUPLE DIMMS

Prue!? I'm called "Prue" by my friends *when* I give them permission. To you I am "Father Dimms"! Impudent twat!

KATE

I've heard so much about you from Duncan.

DUPLE DIMMS

I could murder her here and now, pitch her head first out the window.

KATE

He's going to miss the choir. I think he loves singing more than anything in the world.

PRUE DIMMS

Does he?

DUPLE DIMMS

Poison! Ratsbane in her drink!

KATE

Especially Gregorian chants.

PRUE DIMMS

Our specialty.

DUPLE DIMMS

Yes, Gregorian chants and bubonic plague. I can't help it! I want her dead -- of boils, rabies, snake bite, anything!

KATE

Excuse me, did you say something?

PRUE DIMMS

I hope not. No, actually, I was...thinking. Would you care for a drink? I have tea and I have champagne.

KATE

Champagne, thank you.

DUPLE DIMMS

May she besot herself and slip down the priory steps. She'd land on her rump and have a brain hemorrhage!

PRUE DIMMS

Cookies?

DUPLE DIMMS

She could choke to death on the cookies! Choking's a major cause of accidental death.

KATE

No, thank you. I'd better not.

DUPLE DIMMS

Damn!

KATE

You're very generous to have me here. Duncan told me how sorry you are to...to lose him.

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, naturally. The church desperately needs new priests. In fact, we keep a constant vigil of prayers, but I've begun to realize... well, suffice it to say, there are certain

PRUE DIMMS (cont'd)

sacrifices not everyone is meant to make. Please, don't interpret that to mean I think less of him. Certainly not. He's a fine young man, but he's obviously not one of us.

KATE

Then would it be all right for him to leave now?

PRUE DIMMS

I'm not sure that's wise -- for his sake. He needs this time to prepare himself psychologically, to build new dreams and bid farewell to the old ones. As you probably know, I've asked him to keep you a secret -- to make his last days here easier on him. In fact, I'd advise you to have a long engagement, six months at the least, perhaps even a year. *(pause)* Apparently, you don't agree. Well, neither does he. By the way, has he decided what he intends to do once he's married?

KATE

No, but we're not worried about finding jobs. I'll be working as well.

PRUE DIMMS

At what?

KATE

I'd like to use my art in some way. If I can't sell my paintings, I could teach or be an illustrator.

PRUE DIMMS

Are you also calligrapher?

KATE

Well, yes, I could be.

PRUE DIMMS

Fascinating. That's related to a hobby of mine. I'm an amateur graphologist. I analyze personalities through their hand scripts. But where was I? Oh, yes, neither of you has any definite employment. It appears the only thing Duncan's really definite about these days is you. Father Cuthbert was just saying how he used to be so remarkably secure, so full of...I don't know...

KATE

Promise...?

PRUE DIMMS

Perhaps, though he might have meant faith.

KATE

He certainly hasn't lost his faith.

PRUE DIMMS

Perhaps not.

KATE

I know he hasn't. We talk about religion often.

PRUE DIMMS

Well, that's refreshing. One's religious beliefs are very important. In fact, when you come right down to it, what else is important? You are a baptized Catholic, aren't you?

KATE

Yes. *(pause)* You know, Prue, it's not that Duncan doesn't want to be a priest. He does, very much so, but since the Church continues to insist on celibacy -- well, I'm sure you understand.

PRUE DIMMS

Ah, yes, he wants us to relinquish our most distinguishing feature. For nearly a thousand years we've sought a complete dedication to our mission. When I lecture to the novices, I stress their roles as representative figures of Christ, lonely and crucified in the midst of a coupled humanity. You see, it's celibacy that deflects us from domestic pleasures so we can concentrate on the affairs of the Church and her teaching on divorce, birth control, etcetera. Priests suffer willingly so we can ask that others suffer.

MILDRED'S VOICE

Pruuuuuue!

DUPLE DIMMS

Yes, look at what we sacrifice.

(PRUE and KATE stand immobile as lights reveal MILDRED, besotted and holding a cocktail.)

MILDRED

(belching) Uuuurrrrrp!

DUPLE DIMMS

The softness, the grace, the dialectic of courtly...

MILDRED

Vagina...

DUPLE DIMMS

...love...

...which leads naturally to...
 DUPLE DIMMS

...infection!
 MILDRED

...the Virgin Mother.
 DUPLE DIMMS

(PRUE approaches Mildred.)

What did you say?
 PRUE DIMMS

Infectious vagina: your niece.
 MILDRED

What?
 PRUE DIMMS

I can't say it again.
 MILDRED

Fine, if you can't say it, then I won't hear it.
 PRUE DIMMS

Will you talk to her if I tell you?
 MILDRED

No!
 PRUE DIMMS

She scratches. I peeked. The keyhole.
 MILDRED

(MILDRED departs as the adolescent FRANCES enters,
 singing.)

FRANCES

*Veni Creator Spiritus,
 Mentis tuorum visita:
 Imple superna gratia
 Quae tu creasti pectora...*

PRUE DIMMS

Please, don't stop. It's quite wonderful.

FRANCES

Really?

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, really.

FRANCES

I'm singing for a special convocation next Sunday.

PRUE DIMMS

At the cathedral?

FRANCES

Yes.

PRUE DIMMS

Would you like some advice?

FRANCES

Sure.

PRUE DIMMS

You're blessed with such a pure and glorious voice, you shouldn't be afraid to reach the rafters. If you strengthen your vibrato, the bishop will probably levitate, but you'll need more breath control for the long notes. It's your posture: stand straight. Your shoulders shouldn't move so much when you sing.

FRANCES

I know, I'll work on it. *(she sighs)* I wish I were as disciplined as you. I waste so much time.

PRUE DIMMS

Well, your social life is more demanding.

FRANCES

(laughs) I doubt it.

PRUE DIMMS

You mean some poor, smitten Romeo isn't sweeping you off your feet?

FRANCES

No such luck.

PRUE DIMMS

Oh? You don't have a boy friend?

FRANCES

Not at the moment.

PRUE DIMMS

You mean you're not seeing anyone?

FRANCES

Oh, sure, but nothing serious. Just guys I know.

PRUE DIMMS

Are they nice to you?

FRANCES

Sure.

PRUE DIMMS

Do they ever make advances?

FRANCES

(laughs) Do you mean do they ever try to steal kisses in the moonlight? I hope so.

PRUE DIMMS

Do they ever try to steal more than kisses?

FRANCES

Oh, now I get what you're driving at, and if you really want to know, they don't have to "steal" anything because I'm giving it away for freeeee!

PRUE DIMMS

Aren't you being impertinent?

FRANCES

Aren't you?!

PRUE DIMMS

Look, I didn't want to ask you this. If you must know, your mother's worried about you. She's always thinking you're sick or pregnant.

FRANCES

Well, you can tell mumsy to relax. I come fully equipped with the latest arsenal of sperm killers in case somebody wants to desecrate my temple of the holy ghost -- if you get my drift.

PRUE DIMMS

Why are you so defensive? Can't we ever have a decent conversation?

FRANCES

But I'm not a decent person. I've committed mortal sins which result in the loss of sanctifying grace. Oh, Prue Perfect, you think you have all the answers.

PRUE DIMMS

And you?

FRANCES

I'm hotter than a wood stove!

PRUE DIMMS

She told you that?

FRANCES

Oh, yes.

PRUE DIMMS

(pause) Well...? Are you?

FRANCES

We all are. Check your sources; you'll see I'm right.

PRUE DIMMS

Good night, Frances. I'll talk to you again when you grow up.

FRANCES

Me?! You're the one who in a perpetual nursery! You're well fed, clothed, sheltered and waited on by servants! You live with other boys who never have to deal with wives, bills, laundry, never mind diapers and car pools! Christ, you're such a pampered prig! I can feel myself making you cringe; I can't even use certain words around you.

PRUE DIMMS

Good night, Frances.

Sex! Coitus!

FRANCES

(*groaning*) Ohhhhhhh...

DUPLE DIMMS

Clitoris! Vulva!

FRANCES

Shhhhhhhh!

DUPLE DIMMS

Penis!

FRANCES

Arrrrrrrrgh!

DUPLE DIMMS

Prick!

FRANCES

Ahhhhhhhh!!

DUPLE DIMMS

Asshole!

FRANCES

(FRANCES marches off as PRUE turns to Kate.)

PRUE DIMMS

Well, all theology aside, I want you to know I think the world of Duncan, of both of you.

KATE

I appreciate that, but I want you to know that whatever happens, Duncan makes his own decisions.

PRUE DIMMS

I'm sure.

KATE

I hope so.

PRUE DIMMS

You don't have any doubts?

KATE

Not about Duncan.

DUPLE DIMMS

Take your doubts and stick them up your pompous! Was this the rare bird whose plumage made her too extraordinary for the finite kingdom? Was this what made him weep in wonder at her smile and rejoice that such a vision had touched his cormorant heart? Bah! Hissss. I knew her for what she was: a sedative, an analgesic, a cunning little strumpet to be stripped, mounted, and taken like a bromide after meals. Yes, there was something menacing about her, a musky gynecomorphous stink that emboldened me to mount my next mischief: the seduction of Duncan's mother. The matriarch of our duped dumpling was nestled deeply to the bosom of Catholicism. Such a good girlie, she trussed herself up in her finest frock, stretched over a corset that made her waddle like a duck about to be goosed -- by a troll!

SCENE 4: THE WAGING OF WHEEDLE: THE MATRIARCH

(PRUE DIMMS is now seated with MRS. FIONA ALBRIGHT in her parlor. SHE has a slight Irish accent.)

PRUE DIMMS

Mrs. Albright, I'd rather not have our conversation repeated to Duncan. I'm afraid he might think I'm betraying a confidence, but I'm here because his future happiness is more important than any false sense of honor I might have.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Yes, father. Is anything wrong?

PRUE DIMMS

Well, the other priests and myself -- we feel the decision to leave a bit capricious, too sudden, shall we say. Before I wasn't certain, but now that I've talked with the girl, I'm convinced that she's...well, suffice it to say she's not what Duncan thinks she is.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Oh, dear. I...I've only met her twice. Once, she came to dinner, and another time Duncan took us to the zoo.

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, well. *(pause)* I find it difficult to say this without seeming... indelicate.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

It's not her family, is it? We've never met them, you know.

PRUE DIMMS

Ah, then her "breeding" remains a mystery? *(pause)* But actually, it's more a matter of... "domestication."

MRS. ALBRIGHT

I don't understand.

PRUE DIMMS

The zoo, Mrs. Albright. I'm thinking of analogies: the fox and the hare; the wolf and the lamb; the man-eating shark and the hapless polliwog.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

And Katie's...?

PRUE DIMMS

(nodding) Ummm.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

And Duncan...?

PRUE DIMMS

I'm afraid so.

DUPLE DIMMS

(snickers, delighted) Heh, heh.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Then she's...been around?

PRUE DIMMS

Well, let's just say she's a very calculating, very worldly young lady.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Oh, dear, my son seemed so happy with her. Well, she is a bit older.

DUPLE DIMMS

Older?!

PRUE DIMMS

Really? By how much?

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Only two years. She wrote the nicest thank you notes I've ever received, and she's very impressive, dresses very well, very tastefully.

PRUE DIMMS

Of course.

DUPLE DIMMS

Even a newt has its camouflage!

MRS. ALBRIGHT

But that's just the surface, isn't it?

PRUE DIMMS

I'm sure you were disappointed when he said he was leaving the seminary.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Well,...no, not really. *(pause)* You see, Duncan's my only child, and I was hoping for grandchildren. Of course, I must admit his decision to leave did seem a bit...hasty.

PRUE DIMMS

Exactly! We were stunned. That's what made us so suspicious. Any woman who could make a reasonable man like Duncan change his vocation so abruptly had to be using a bit of...well, shall we say...

DUPLE DIMMS

Witchcraft!

PRUE DIMMS

Witchcraft.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Witchcraft?!

PRUE DIMMS

That's only an expression, of course. We all go through periods of doubt when we're highly susceptible, and if someone senses that susceptibility and is clever enough to worm their way into our hearts when our minds are unsettled, well, you understand, I'm sure.

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Yes, I...I think so. *(pause)* What are you going to do, father?

PRUE DIMMS

I can't do anything alone, I'm convinced of that. But together we might manage to persuade him to at least postpone a fatal decision. If you could invite him home to dinner, this Saturday perhaps -- you might say something like...

(PRUE exits as DUNCAN enters.)

DUPLE DIMMS

(mimicking Mrs. Albright) I pray to God you know what you're doing, but...

MRS. ALBRIGHT

...I can't help it, son,...

MRS. ALBRIGHT

...I just have this strange feeling.

DUPLE DIMMS

...I have this strange feeling.

DUNCAN

What do you mean?

MRS. ALBRIGHT

I feel it, as my mother used to say, "in my marrow bones." Call it intuition or even superstition, but it's there all the same.

DUNCAN

What's there?

MRS. ALBRIGHT

I'm not sure you should marry Katie.

DUNCAN

What...? But you love Katie! You said she's a wonderful girl!

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Yes, she is, of course she is, but you don't know many girls. And how well do you know her? I mean *really* know her?

DUNCAN

Well enough to know I want to spend the rest of my life with her. What's wrong? Why this sudden change of heart? Are you afraid you're going to lose me?

MRS. ALBRIGHT

No, dear, of course not. It's just Katie, I just felt I had to warn you.

DUNCAN

“Warn” me? What’s gotten into you?

MRS. ALBRIGHT

Nothing, dear, but my feelings have proven all too true all too often.

(DUNCAN and MRS. ALBRIGHT depart as DUPLE leaps forward to speak:)

DUPLE DIMMS

Trolls are never idle, especially when vexed, so I sought yet another helpmate: the venerable Father Saint Cloud was too orthodox for gossip. Verily, he spoke the gospel, forsooth, the truth! So who better for spreading my cankers to the wagging tongues of our innocent brothers?

SCENE 5: THE WAGING OF WHEEDLE: THE NOVICE MASTER

(Now PRUE is in the seminary courtyard with FATHER SAINT CLOUD. THEY are pacing, prayer books in hand while DUPLE eavesdrops from the side.)

PRUE DIMMS

Firmin, I want you to do something for me. Unfortunately, I have to ask you in the strictest possible confidence.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

What is it, Prue?

PRUE DIMMS

I think you should keep an eye on Duncan, and I think you should keep him busy, very busy. “Idle hands are the devil’s playground.”

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

What?

PRUE DIMMS

He’s probably going through some sort of emotional crisis, but I think we can pull him out of it *if* we keep him thoroughly involved in the activities of the community.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Good heavens, Prue, what’s he done to give you this impression?

PRUE DIMMS

Well, apparently you haven't heard. And I thought I was the last to know.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Know what?

PRUE DIMMS

You really don't know?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

For godssake, what is it?!

PRUE DIMMS

He's being seduced by a pathetic middle-aged tart.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Oh...oh, dear.

PRUE DIMMS

Oh, yes.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

I had no idea. I never even...suspected.

PRUE DIMMS

Who did? I'm his spiritual advisor and I knew nothing.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

I'm very sorry to hear it.

PRUE DIMMS

Aren't we all? It's our own fault. The college is too damn close to the seminary. We thrust it under their noses, then wonder why no one's capable of self sacrifice anymore. It's not easy to watch a young man like that throw it all away for the proverbial picket fence and -- if you'll excuse the expression-- an easy lay. Maybe you could persuade some of the other brothers to say something to him, or maybe even...you.

(DUNCAN enters. Now FATHER SAINT CLOUD stands between DUNCAN and PRUE who speak to him exclusively, presumably at different times. DUPLÉ DIMMS stands aligned with PRUE.)

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Brother Duncan...?

DUNCAN

Yes, father?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Oh, nothing really, I...I just thought...well, I heard you might be leaving.

DUNCAN

What?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Leaving the order -- to marry. I don't know the girl personally, of course, but I've heard she's...taking advantage of you.

DUNCAN

Taking advantage of me? Father, forgive me, but that's simply not true. I'm perfectly capable of judging who is and who isn't taking advantage of me.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Duncan, please, it's just that you're inexperienced. I've only heard that she's one of those...you know.

DUNCAN

No, I don't. What?

DUPLE DIMMS

A whore!

PRUE DIMMS

A floozy.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

A floozy?

DUNCAN

A floozy?!

DUPLE DIMMS

A slut!

PRUE DIMMS

A seductress.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

A seductress?

DUNCAN

A seductress?!

PRUE DIMMS

Oh, she may not be in the true sense of what the word implies, but on the other hand...

DUPLE DIMMS

She's despicable, one of those depraved coquettes.

PRUE DIMMS

...she uses her sexuality to drive an innocent boy right out of his fool mind.

DUNCAN

That's absurd! Where did you hear such things?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

(to Prue) How do you know? Have you actually met her?

PRUE DIMMS

Do you think I'd be talking like this if I hadn't?

DUNCAN

You don't even know her!

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

From what I've heard, that's a blessing.

DUNCAN

And just what have you heard?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

That she's a shallow, empty-headed little...

DUPLE DIMMS

Demonist!

PRUE DIMMS

Demonist.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Demonist.

PRUE DIMMS

Demonist...?

DUNCAN

I've heard rumors could be malicious,...

PRUE DIMMS

I had a little chat with Duncan's mother. She says the girl's bewitched him.

DUNCAN

Bewitched me?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

(to Prue) Are you serious?

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, there's something...

PRUE DIMMS

...malevolent...

DUPLE DIMMS

Malevolent!

PRUE DIMMS

...about her.

DUNCAN

I wondered why you've kept me so busy, assigning me to serve Masses, cook, clean, anything just to keep me away from her.

PRUE DIMMS

The girl's elated, of course. She's got the whole town buzzing with the news.

DUNCAN

The whole town?

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

Apparently, she's telling...

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

...everyone.

PRUE DIMMS

Everyone!

DUNCAN

I don't believe it!

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

(to Prue) I don't suppose there's the remotest possibility that he's sincere and really loves this girl?

DUNCAN

Did it ever occur to you that I really love her? I'm the one who knows her...

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

(overlapping Duncan) After all, he must know her...

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

...better than anyone.

DUNCAN

...better than anyone.

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, one would think.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

All I can do is pray for you, Duncan.

DUNCAN

Please, father, just leave me alone.

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

My point exactly. You'd never have used that tone...

DUNCAN

Leave me alone!

FATHER SAINT CLOUD

I'll still pray for you.

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, all we can do is...

PRUE DIMMS

...pray.

DUPLE DIMMS

Pray!!

DUPLE DIMMS

Yes, pray! Pray! Pray till your rosaries rot! Mother Albright, Father Saint Cloud, and whole hoards of bees in my bonnet, buzz, buzz, buzzing, oozing their honey into the

DUPLE DIMMS (cont'd)

cauldron of my rage! Ha, ha! With revenge excess is essential! To strengthen resolve, a troll sweetens his brew with the selfsame delight he abhors. And what better way than to pilfer the mail?

SCENE 6: THE QUILLINGS OF KATE

(PRUE returns to his desk as DUPLE DIMMS speaks:)

DUPLE DIMMS

Poor Father Placidus managed the mail room. He's too decrepit for much else, and didn't bat an eye as I pawed a few missives to my chamber where I steamed them open one by one. Phew! The flowery stench of her vellum sent shivers through my craw.

(Music is heard as lights reveal KATE in a flowing negligee, speaking her letters as DUPLE and PRUE read.)

KATE

Dearest Duncan, will they never deliver you back to me? I have love dreams of us naked in starlit fields, reborn in each other's bodies, filling and refilling our souls like lost children beholding the beauty of all eternity. How can anything so precious be more than a bright dream? To be certain you're real, I sometimes visit your dear mother, but lately she seems so distant and preoccupied. Is anything wrong?

DUPLE DIMMS

(mimicing Kate) "Is anything wrong?" And here she writes a poem, a trite little doggerel of her very own.

KATE

Touch me touch, I'm spinning fire; I've caught you in my loom.
Love's a prison, love's a song: an echo from the womb.
Oh, I love you, my Duncan, my dream, my life.
Love, always, Kitten.

DUPLE DIMMS

"Kitten?" Kitten!! Hah! Ha, ha! How purrrrrfect! We'll bury her -- whiskers down -- in her litter box. Ahhh, and then there was that one letter. I read it a full dozen times!

KATE

Of course I didn't tell! If the brothers found out about us, they did so from someone else. Could your mother have told a friend who might have connections to the priory? Or what about Prue? I really don't trust him, you know.

DUPLE DIMMS

Perceptive little pussy.

KATE

Please, my heart, don't worry so. I have the same apprehensions, but we can endure any separation. How I wish I could take the portrait I'm painting and transubstantiate it to your sweet self so you could lie here beside me, touching, fondling, clinging, caressing,

DUPLE DIMMS

Great God, how she carried on! But more, reams more!

KATE

Oh, Duncan, my heart flutters at the very sight of your envelopes.

DUPLE DIMMS

Oh, pitty pat! Sounds like the heat flashes of early menopause.

KATE

Do my letters make you tingle as yours make me?

DUPLE DIMMS

Tingle? Ha! They make me vomit! They give me heartburn! Hemorrhoids!! Gasssssss!!!

KATE

Oh, my precious, my angel, my heart, how I long to sip the sweet sap of you and stir our strange juices in my womb. I wonder what sort of creature we'd make?

DUPLE DIMMS

A cretin! A dwarf! An addle-brained, fart-faced imbecile, that's what! Oh, I read the letters, every blessed one of them. At first I found them repulsive, a poetaster attempting to play the Jacobean, but later, I found them well phrased, perfectly punctuated, and finally...beguiling. Yes, I even felt an occasional blush as though I'd spied them tweaking tootsies through the keyhole. Alas, I couldn't intercept Duncan's letters. He mailed them through the post, the fox! Ah, but I quilled a few of my own -- anonymously, of course. I called myself "A Concerned Brother."

(PRUE DIMMS speaks while writing.)

PRUE DIMMS

My Dear Brother Duncan: Please forgive my anonymity for my motives are honorable even if my cowardice is not. I only wish to inform you that according to a credible source, Katherine Coyne is not the most virtuous of young ladies. Yours faithfully, A Concerned Brother.

DUPLE DIMMS

The Kitten's letters never mentioned "A Concerned Brother's" accusations which proved Duncan the noble prince I always knew him to be. Ah, yes, we knew, the Kitten and I. In her own way, she too was a bit of a troll. You see, I analyzed her hand script.

(KATE poses seductively as DUPLE DIMMS conjures her image.)

DUPLE DIMMS

By her dark, cursive scribble she was bold as a slattern with a lower case conscience and an upper case brassiere; by the cross of her Ts as optimistic as a whore on Fridays; by her closed Os she picked her nose; by her colons she scratched her ass, and by her periods she was fertile as manure. Oh, she was a formidable foe, and the more formidable the foe, the more hatred required to rub her out!

(Lights dim as deep, menacing tones are heard.)

DUPLE DIMMS

I wrote her name on a piece of paper six times,...

PRUE DIMMS

No, scratch it!

DUPLE DIMMS

...six times,...

PRUE DIMMS

Rub it out!

DUPLE DIMMS

...six times,...

DUPLE DIMMS

...six!

PRUE DIMMS

Six...

PRUE DIMMS

...upside down is nine! The Trinity times three!

(During the following invocation, DUPLE increases in volume as PRUE subsides. The dialog is rapid and overlapping.)

DUPLE DIMMS

I invoked the great God of Trolls in all his glory by all his names!

PRUE DIMMS

Wait! No!

DUPLE DIMMS

I conjure your Chief Lords!

(Both PRUE and DUPLE fall to their knees.)

PRUE DIMMS

Oh, Saint Barnabas, I beseech you!

DUPLE DIMMS

Come Beelzebub!

PRUE DIMMS

Blessed Benedict the Moor!

DUPLE DIMMS

Moloch!

PRUE DIMMS

Saint Christopher!

DUPLE DIMMS

Chemos!

PRUE DIMMS

Saint Thomas!

DUPLE DIMMS

Thammuz!

PRUE DIMMS

Saint George...?

DUPLE DIMMS

Dagon!

PRUE DIMMS

John...?

Rimmon!
DUPLE DIMMS

Paul...?
PRUE DIMMS

Belial!
DUPLE DIMMS

Peter...?
PRUE DIMMS

Satan!!
DUPLE DIMMS

PRUE DIMMS
(whispering) I beseech the everlasting
Crowns of Heaven to deliver me from
discordant Earth and Satan's...

DUPLE DIMMS
(roaring) I supplicated in ashes;
worshipped in spittle; bartered my
soul for her demise and his...

PRUE DIMMS
...loyalty!

DUPLE DIMMS
...loyalty!

(KATE enacts her afflictions as DUPLE rages, and PRUE
watches with hypnotic fascination.)

DUPLE DIMMS
I gave her every carnal abomination possible: I pocked her skin, plucked her eyes,
snapped her spine, sheered her utters, extracted her teeth, split her tongue, and thrashed
her buttocks till she bled. Then, finally, finally! I douched her soundly with a poison so
noxious her children and her children's children would grow deformed and slither out all
buckled and humped, all warts and welts, all blotched and splotched, all trolls,...

DUPLE DIMMS
...TROLLS!! TROLLS!!!!

PRUE DIMMS
TROLLS11 TRILLS!!!!

(Blackout.)

SCENE 7: VOICE OF AN ANGEL

(At Mass, DUNCAN is seen singing the "Sancte Deus.")

DUNCAN

*Sancte deus, Sancte Fortis,
Sancte et misericors Salvator,
Amarae morti ne tradas nos.*

(DUNCAN departs.)

SCENE 8: GALLERY OF BLASPHEMIES

(DUPLE DIMMS appears, creeping aside, addressing the heavens.)

DUPLE DIMMS

So you see, dear Father, I drew my plot like Pluto's pitchfork: four prongs, all of them poised for prodding. "While Cupid armed with bow and quiver, pierced her heart, I pricked her liver!" Now all I had to do was wait, though it was already the Feast of Saint Theodosius and I had less than two weeks left. Then suddenly, out of the blue: an invitation.

KATE'S VOICE

"You are cordially invited to attend an exhibition of paintings by Katherine Coyne."

DUPLE DIMMS

Humph! So our little dilettante's exhibiting herself? Ah, I'll take Frances. She understands painting. She'll know if our Kitten has a talent for anything other than wagging her tail. After all, she is one of them; she knows how they think!

(PRUE DIMMS and the adult FRANCES enter the gallery, staring ahead, strolling past a wall of paintings. DUPLE DIMMS follows.)

DUPLE DIMMS

Good God, I could have guessed: pubic hairs, nipples, even her toenails are obscene. This isn't art: it's smut, filthy rotten smut!

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, well, it's quite...graphic.

FRANCES

Amazing! Notice how the brushstrokes make the skin seem veined like marble, only malleable, and almost transparent. I sense a fire glowing inside her and I'm drawn to its warmth, yet ultimately she's unapproachable, even cold.

DUPLE DIMMS

I wouldn't hang it in the toilet.

FRANCES

You wouldn't hang it in the toilet.

PRUE DIMMS

What?!

DUPLE DIMMS

Insolent hag!

PRUE DIMMS

There was a time, not that long ago, when paintings like these couldn't hang in a Catholic college.

DUPLE DIMMS

Oh, for those blessed times!

PRUE DIMMS

(sidling to another painting) I suppose that's the Virgin Mother?

FRANCES

I don't know. It's untitled.

PRUE DIMMS

Well, admit it: she looks like she's supposed to be the Virgin.

FRANCES

All right, she does.

PRUE DIMMS

I thought so. The model of all womanhood and she's naked as a plucked duck.

FRANCES

Please, Prue, if a virgin's the model of all womanhood, then it's time for a change. Why can't you look at it as any mother and child?

PRUE DIMMS

Because the pose is too traditional. She's as subtle as a bugle at Vespers.

FRANCES

Look at her expression. At first I thought she was proud, but now she seems distracted...

PRUE DIMMS

She's infantile and autoerotic with just enough talent to tie her sneakers and wiggle her ass.

FRANCES

You're obviously not talking about the painting.

PRUE DIMMS

I most certainly am.

FRANCES

All right then, listen to us, listen to how we're reacting. You've got to give Kate credit for evoking two opposite reactions.

PRUE DIMMS

Why? If you slapped mud pies on the wall, someone somewhere would call it art. Everything evokes opposite reactions.

FRANCES

Should we buy one?

PRUE DIMMS

What?!

DUPLE DIMMS

What!

PRUE DIMMS

Don't be ridiculous!

(DUPLE DIMMS strolls to the next painting and stares, agape. PRUE DIMMS follows.)

PRUE DIMMS

(pause) That's...

PRUE DIMMS

...Duncan.

DUPLE DIMMS

Duncan,...

DUPLE DIMMS

...the linear rhythms of his form, the chords of color in his voice.

FRANCES

Not bad.

FRUE DIMMS
 Frances, it's...

DUPLE DIMMS
 Enchanting!

FRUE DIMMS
 ...tawdry.

FRANCES
 I wonder why she painted him in the high baroque style?

FRUE DIMMS
 It's...

DUPLE DIMMS
 A tribute!

FRUE DIMMS
(overlapping)...a mockery!

(KATE COYNE approaches.)

FRUE DIMMS
 Hello, my dear. May I present my niece, Frances? This is Katherine Coyne, the artist.

FRANCES
 How do you do? I'm very impressed. Congratulations!

KATE
 Thank you. I'm so glad you came.

FRUE DIMMS
 Of course I'd come. I'm very interested in the young lady who swept Duncan off his feet.

KATE
 Has this changed your opinion?

FRUE DIMMS
 Most assuredly.

KATE
 I won't ask how.

PRUE DIMMS

I'm impressed, mostly because my niece is impressed and she considers herself a connoisseur. She says you have ability. It may seem to me to be somewhat misdirected, but it's there nevertheless, and I admire that.

FRANCES

It's more than ability; it's talent. And I don't think it's misdirected.

PRUE DIMMS

Has Duncan stopped by?

KATE

He was here earlier, but you keep him quite busy lately.

PRUE DIMMS

Patience, dear girl. You'll soon have him for the rest of your life. *(pause)* What does Duncan's mother think of your work?

KATE

I don't know really, but Duncan said she wouldn't care for my...style.

PRUE DIMMS

Or your subject matter.

KATE

Yes, except for the portrait.

PRUE DIMMS

Ah. *(pause)* Tell me, what does Duncan think of it?

(DUNCAN enters from the past. KATE leads him to the portrait, and HE stares, unmoved.)

KATE

You don't like it.

DUNCAN

Yes! Yes, I...I do, really, I do.

KATE

Duncan, I can tell you're disappointed. I...I guess it's impossible to paint my feelings for you. It's easier to tell you in letters with words than with paint.

DUNCAN

No, please don't think that. It's very fine...handsome I should say. It's just so...so strange -- looking at your own portrait.

KATE

I only captured your likeness. I wanted to do more, but I'll have a lifetime to try. I'll paint you straight through senility. You'll be the most painted man alive!

DUNCAN

You've made me so...large, larger than life.

KATE

I've tried to be honest, to paint what I feel.

DUNCAN

You've given me more hair, more height, and my eyes -- they're enormous.

DUPLE DIMMS

Why the little Gorgon! She's imposed *her* pride on him.

KATE

Don't you see how beautiful you are?

DUNCAN

No.

DUPLE DIMMS

No!

DUPLE DIMMS

He's too modest, too shy, too humble for the vanity of portraiture!

KATE

Don't you wish we could see more than we do? Don't you wish we could see our souls?

DUNCAN

We'll have to leave that to God.

KATE

Sometimes, when I'm with you, I sense something wonderful. I'm sure it's your soul.

DUNCAN

Maybe it's your own. I...I just don't think I'm this...colorful.

(DUNCAN departs.)

PRUE DIMMS

So Duncan feels he's been portrayed as vain?

DUPLE DIMMS

How could a Jezebel paint the virtues of faith and piety?

KATE

I think he feels I've...misrepresented him.

DUPLE DIMMS

How could she paint kindness, generosity, and the sweet sounds of his voice? How could she? *(pause)* How *did* she?

PRUE DIMMS

I'm not an authority, but I don't feel you've captured his...

DUPLE DIMMS

Somehow she's captured his...

DUPLE DIMMS

...depth.

PRUE DIMMS

...depth.

KATE

Well, I...I'll try again.

DUPLE DIMMS

Poor Duncan only sees through frail, human eyes, but a troll's sharp eye sees from all sides at once, inside and out. My niece had a troll's eye that penetrated my pith and martyred me to my cross. You see, after that Gallery of Blasphemies, Frances brought me to her cave and concocted a poison.

SCENE 9: THE QUILLING OF PRUE

(PRUE and FRANCES are in her apartment drinking cocktails while DUPLE lurks in the shadows.)

FRANCES

So that's the girl who stole the canary? You guys haven't got a chance.

PRUE DIMMS

She'll eat him alive, the boa constrictor.

FRANCES

You really can't believe he's in love with her?

PRUE DIMMS

It's an adolescent crush. It has to be.

FRANCES

Well, she's very talented.

PRUE DIMMS

Proof positive there's no correlation between the gifts God bestows and the characters he bestows them on. There's something about her, about this whole affair, that doesn't feel right. I don't trust things that aren't nurtured on some sensible timetable.

FRANCES

Ha! By your standards we'd all have to carbon date before holding hands.

PRUE DIMMS

At least I have standards. The point is Duncan was destined for the priesthood. He's expected to be...better.

FRANCES

"Better?"

PRUE DIMMS

We're supposed to transcend the sensual universe -- even if we're bound to it. That's the paradox, of course.

FRANCES

Why is it, whenever you say "the sensual universe" I imagine a nudist orgy? Everything's extremes with you: the male and female; the pious and perverse; the lily white choir boy and depraved nymphomaniac.

PRUE DIMMS

Your mother and I were raised on credos of sharp antitheses, with morals and ideals.

FRANCES

But isn't most of life the muck in-between? The trouble is you never learned to enjoy your contradictions without running to the confessional. Personally, I think you're missing out.

PRUE DIMMS

We have different goals in life, Frances, different values. In the priesthood, we seek a simple innocence you've long ago forgotten. You've put on the material world; I want to shed it.

FRANCES

You can't shed your body, Prue; you can't shed your feelings, and who the hell wants to? How could we live with ourselves if we didn't believe it was good -- even godlike -- to embrace, to need. Haven't you ever...?

PRUE DIMMS

No! I mean, what you're talking about -- between a man and a woman. God, why is it whenever you talk about love it seems trite?

FRANCES

(pause, offended) Why don't you like me, Prue? Because I'm a woman?

PRUE DIMMS

I *do* like women. Of course I like women. How can you dislike half the human race?

FRANCES

But you never showed any affection. I mean, I...I'm just trying to understand why I feel you're...repulsed by me. Do mother and I...? Do we repulse you?

DUPLE DIMMS

Yesssssssss!

PRUE DIMMS

No!

DUPLE DIMMS

Yes, yes!!

PRUE DIMMS

I don't know.

DUPLE DIMMS

Yes!

PRUE DIMMS

Yes,...

PRUE DIMMS

...Mildred does rather repulse me. She's like mounds of dimpled bread dough, and when she's pickled, her breath could grow worms. Her problem is she won't accept the loss of your father or her youth -- or the hope that any of her dreams might come true.

FRANCES

I...I never thought of mother as having dreams.

PRUE DIMMS

Oh, yes, big ones: law school, politics. She was everything I wasn't -- spontaneous, popular, happy. In high school she excelled in almost everything, and never got much encouragement. Our parents were kind but distant, and since we were always moving... Well, you know all this.

FRANCES

Did they love her?

PRUE DIMMS

Of course, but they never understood her -- or me either for that matter.

FRANCES

Maybe I understand you. I mean, I think I know what you're feeling.

PRUE DIMMS

Please, don't presume to know what I'm feeling.

FRANCES

You're obviously upset -- about Duncan.

PRUE DIMMS

Of course I'm upset; the whole seminary's upset. We don't want the Church to...to lose him.

FRANCES

He must be very...special. What's he like?

DUPLE DIMMS

A frail lamb in the mouth of Medusa!

PRUE DIMMS

Actually, he's a bit of an antiquarian like me.

FRANCES

Really?

PRUE DIMMS

Even more so. His manners are impeccable; his disposition gentle, compassionate even; and he's extremely intelligent. All that combined with his talent make him irresistible.

FRANCES

I've never heard you speak so glowingly about anyone. I...I'm actually envious. Does he feel the same admiration for you?

PRUE DIMMS

I thought so once -- well, more than once. *(pause)* He'd seek me out. I'd catch him staring at me -- as a sort of paternal figure, and several times during our singing lessons...

(DUNCAN enters.)

DUNCAN

I can't do it, I just can't.

PRUE DIMMS

Nonsense, it's just a simple round.

DUNCAN

But I haven't got the right sense of timing.

PRUE DIMMS

It's not the timing; it's concentration. Now, let's try again. I'll begin.

(DUNCAN joins in the song after the first line, but by the last line is singing the same words as Prue, thereby ending the round in unison.)

PRUE DIMMS

*All praise to God the Father be,
All praise eternal Son to Thee;
Whom with the Spirit we adore,
Forever and forever more.*

DUNCAN

*All praise to God the Father be,
All praise eternal Son to Thee;
Forever and forever more.*

DUNCAN

There! I did it again. I start listening to you and I forget where I am. It was the same with "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." It's a mental block. I never got the hang of it.

PRUE DIMMS

Never?

DUNCAN

Not unless I began and plugged my ears.

PRUE DIMMS

I can't believe it.

DUNCAN

Prue, I'm hopeless. Get Lucian to do it.

PRUE DIMMS

Nonsense. Maybe if you're actually reading the lyrics. *(handing Duncan the sheet of music)* Here, read while you sing.

(THEY sing again, performing the song correctly.)

PRUE DIMMS

*All praise to God the Father be,
All praise eternal Son to Thee;
Whom with the Spirit we adore,
Forever and forever more.*

DUNCAN

*All praise to God the Father be,
All praise eternal Son to Thee;
Whom with the Spirit we adore,
Forever and Forever more.*

PRUE DIMMS

Ha! There, you see! Now all you have to do is get a mental picture of the page and sing it. *(to Frances)* He finally got it! He grabbed me by the shoulders! Ha! I...I don't know, Frances, I felt very close to him then. He's better than I -- as much a beautiful artist as a beautiful soul. *(pause)* But he's so naive. I mean, he doesn't really know that the rituals of courtship have...

DUPLE DIMMS

Screw the shrew!

PRUE DIMMS

...well, they've changed. What he really needs is to...

DUPLE DIMMS

(whispering) Shag the hag,...

DUPLE DIMMS

...shag the hag!

PRUE DIMMS

...be shown, yes, he needs someone to show him...

DUPLE DIMMS

(softly) Shag the hag! Shag the hag!

FRANCES

Show him what?

PRUE DIMMS

He can...

DUPLE DIMMS

Hump the toad and hit the road!

PRUE DIMMS

...taste the icing without buying the cake.

FRANCES

Prue! I can't believe what I'm hearing!

PRUE DIMMS

Oh, I'm being facetious, of course, but if I weren't...? I mean, he would make a dashing suitor, don't you think? The portrait's a genuine likeness, especially the eyes. Frances, tell me, as a woman, do you find him appealing? Seriously, I mean, could you, you know, be attracted to him? Go out with him?

FRANCES

Jesus! You're really desperate, aren't you?

PRUE DIMMS

What do you mean?

FRANCES

I'm not a candidate for your little seduction scene!

PRUE DIMMS

God, no! I wasn't suggesting...

FRANCES

I don't sleep with men just because they're "dashing!"

PRUE DIMMS

Of course not! God, I hope not.

FRANCES

Pimp!

PRUE DIMMS

You've completely misunderstood...

FRANCES

Bullshit! It's your last ditch effort to "save him" from the clutches of...

FRANCES
...a female.

DUPLE DIMMS
...a fiend! (*he snarls*)

PRUE DIMMS
Don't be absurd! Besides, he's past saving. He's leaving in....

PRUE DIMMS
...three days.

DUPLE DIMMS
Three days!

FRANCES
Look, Prue, the Church may be losing a priest, but it isn't losing Duncan for loving Kate. Married love is more...accessible.

PRUE DIMMS
Why does everyone think that a man's making love to a woman is the one thing that makes him a man? Well, I don't,...do you?

FRANCES
No, of course not.

PRUE DIMMS
Once upon a time, the priesthood was considered a great vocation, something you weren't even allowed to imagine. Priests were supposed to save the world, to continue the work of Christ on Earth. We work for your redemption, and look at you.

FRANCES
Me?

DUPLE DIMMS
You're a whore!

PRUE DIMMS
(*overlapping*) You're a whore.

FRANCES
What?!

PRUE DIMMS
I meant Kate; Kate's a -- never mind.

FRANCES
(*pause*) You must really hate her.

DUPLE DIMMS

Hate rhymes with Kate.

PRUE DIMMS

(overlapping) Hate rhymes with Kate.

DUPLE DIMMS

Yes!

PRUE DIMMS

Yes!

PRUE DIMMS

No! No, I don't hate her...

DUPLE DIMMS

But you do! Hate! Hate! Hate!

PRUE DIMMS

No, no! I just hate what her presence has done to my life. I hate my life. God, we were such a happy family. The whole seminary was in harmony with itself. We had our feasts and rosaries, we sang, we studied. I thought everything was so wonderful, and now...

FRANCES

...Dunca's leaving. *(pause)* At least I know what he's going through. I'm always in love -- a pattern I can't seem to break. In fact, I can describe the condition in perfect detail.

PRUE DIMMS

Please, spare me.

FRANCES

But you really should know. I mean, I'm closer to him in age, and since it's never happened to you...

PRUE DIMMS

How would you know?

FRANCES

Because you said so!

PRUE DIMMS

Did I? Well, alright, it's true. I never felt what he feels for that...that girl -- puppy love.

FRANCES

Call it what you like, but when I was in love for the first time, I was only sixteen. His name was Louis, and he was the only thing I wanted in life. Everything that was missing

FRANCES (cont'd)

in me was in Louis. As long as I loved him, I wasn't hating myself or anyone else. The truth is I'd have gladly cut out my heart for the chance to drop it at his feet.

PRUE DIMMS

And Louie would have eaten it for supper -- so much for your fallible god.

FRANCES

For months I was gloomy or despondent or absolutely euphoric if he even nodded in my direction. I wore a perpetual gaze of numbed adoration, a sort of unfocused stare.

PRUE DIMMS

Like some poor drooling bloodhound.

FRANCES

Not exactly. It was more like the expression you had when you saw Duncan's portrait.

PRUE DIMMS

(pause) That "expression" was pity -- for a subject made victim.

FRANCES

Yes, and when you feel that deeply for someone, everything fades into the background, everything but him. He becomes the only real image in life, though it's not always definite, just vague, fleeting images...

(KATE speaks intermittently as PRUE recalls her letters.)

KATE

Love dreams...

FRANCES

...of the two of you, things he might have said or you might have said. When you sleep, you think of him;...

KATE

Fondling, caressing, clinging....

FRANCES

...you wake up with him, you laugh, you cry, you sing with him;...

KATE

Naked in star lit fields...

FRANCES

...because without him your life would be missing what it most needs. He's become as much a part of you as the nose on your face. In fact, he *is* your face: the image of yourself as you wish yourself to become.

KATE

Reborn in each other's bodies...

FRANCES

Oh, Prue, haven't you felt this way before? You're in love, in love!

PRUE DIMMS

I...I love our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

FRANCES

And you love Duncan, Duncan!

PRUE DIMMS

I love him certainly, as a fellow ecclesiastic, a brother, a friend.

FRANCES

No, it's more than that.

PRUE DIMMS

(pause) What are you suggesting...? That I'm one of those pathetic pedophiles always embarrassing the Church?

FRANCES

No!

PRUE DIMMS

Or like that queer Father Nealey soliciting boys on the beach. Did you know there's three priests with AIDS in this parish alone? All across the country they're being driven out of parishes -- sued and disgraced and costing the Church millions!

FRANCES

Prue...

PRUE DIMMS

No one trusts us anymore; no one wants to join us. You all think we're sick! Depraved! Predators!

FRANCES

No!

PRUE DIMMS

Now I'm afraid I'd better leave before I slap your insolent face.

FRANCES

Prue, please don't go...

PRUE DIMMS

Get the hell away from me!

FRANCES

Prue, please listen. Let me help you...

PRUE DIMMS

You!? Help me! A pathetic little whore whose marriage lasted all of three months before she jumped into another man's bed!

FRANCES

Yes! And you were asking me to jump again! Jump yourself!

PRUE DIMMS

Apparently that sex-obsessed little mind of yours thinks I'm doing something unnatural.

FRANCES

Not *doing*! God, no, not you! But *feeling*, feeling! And it's not unnatural; it's just being human.

PRUE DIMMS

How noble of you to declare such feelings human, but love can exist without lust for godssake! Not everyone's in perpetual heat!

FRANCES

No, just Duncan and Kate, and *you*, Prue, you!

PRUE DIMMS

How dare you!

FRANCES

No wonder you're the way you are. You hate the physical world; you hate being human!

PRUE DIMMS

I aspire to being divine!

FRANCES

Our bodies are divine! They're beautiful. Please, Prue, look at me, look at my hands.

DUPLE DIMMS

Paws with claws!

FRANCES

My arms are lean, my legs strong.

DUPLE DIMMS

Shanks like planks! Nutcrackers!

FRANCES

God loves me too.

PRUE DIMMS

Does he? Does he love your body?

DUPLE DIMMS

The mouth of your womb?!

PRUE DIMMS

(overlapping) The mouth of your womb?

FRANCES

Yes.

DUPLE DIMMS

Leaks and all?!

PRUE DIMMS

(overlapping) Leaks and all?

FRANCES

Yes, leaks and all! And look, Prue, these are breasts.

DUPLE DIMMS

Teats! Tits!

PRUE DIMMS

Cover yourself! I'm sorry, I can't,... I just can't! Not a single one of you has inspired so much as a backward glance.

FRANCES

That's not our fault!

PRUE DIMMS

You forced me into celibacy!

FRANCES

You forced yourself! We all had choices, and you chose the Church! Apparently, it's not enough for Duncan.

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, and you're gloating! Revelling in my pain!

FRANCES

Your pain? What about *his* pain?! And *my* pain? And what about the pain of every woman who ever wanted to be a priest? You and your masculine bastion that completely excludes us, reviles us! Just be glad you weren't born...

FRANCES

...a woman.

DUPLE DIMMS

A woman:

PRUE DIMMS

The last thing God created, and...

PRUE DIMMS

...and his biggest mistake!

DUPLE DIMMS

His biggest mistake!

FRANCES

Prue, that's terrible, wicked!

DUPLE DIMMS

(whispering to Prue) Hear Cato of Utica: "If the world were rid of..."

DUPLE DIMMS

...women...

PRUE DIMMS

Women!

DUPLE DIMMS

...we'd be with God in our intercourse!" Ohhhhhhhh...

PRUE DIMMS

(overlapping) Ever since Eve led Adam into sin, the world's suffered...

PRUE DIMMS

...the malice of women!

DUPLE DIMMS

The malice of women!

PRUE DIMMS

Troy for the rape of Helen;...

DUPLE DIMMS

(overlapping) Hear Saint Bernard: "Woman's face is a burning wind!"

PRUE DIMMS

(overlapping) ...the Kingdom of the Jews through Jezebel and Athaliah;...

DUPLE DIMMS

(overlapping) Woman's voice is the hissing of serpentsssssss!"

PRUE DIMMS

(overlapping) ...the Kingdom of the Romans through Cleopatra!

DUPLE DIMMS

(overlapping) Hear Tertullian:...

DUPLE DIMMS

"Woman is the devil's gateway!"

PRUE DIMMS

Woman is the devil's gateway!

DUPLE DIMMS

Hear Proverbs: "Her lips are like honeycomb, but her end is..."

DUPLE DIMMS

...bitter wormwood.

PRUE DIMMS

Bitter wormwood!

FRANCES

Stop it! You're filthy with hate! You hate women; you hate our bodies!

DUPLE DIMMS

Yesssssss!

PRUE DIMMS

No, no...

FRANCES

(grasping Prue's arm) Now I know why you never...

PRUE DIMMES

Don't you dare try to...

PRUE DIMMS

...touch!

FRANCES

...touch.

PRUE DIMMS

No, no, no!!!

(FRANCES and PRUE freeze as CHILDREN'S VOICES are heard.)

CHILDREN'S VOICES

(singing) Pooh on Prue, full of stew! Pooh on Prue, full of stew!

(PRUE covers his ears as DUPLE rises to play Prue's child-self. MILDRED also appears as a child, and the CHILDREN'S VOICES are loud, distorted by echoes.)

MILDRED

Nasty Prue! Mister Faine told mommy that the other students don't want you touching them! Or their belongings!

DUPLE DIMMS

(wailing, becoming childlike) But why? I was only playing...

MILDRED

He says if it happens again, you're to be punished; you're to wear mittens the entire week!

PRUE and CHILDREN'S VOICES

*(singing) Pooh on Prue, full of stew;
Split his pants, and sat in glue!
Sat in glue! Sat in glue!
Prue Dimms eats pins. Prue Dimms
eats pins. Pooh on Prue, full of stew;
Split his pants, and sat in glue!
Piggy Prue, Piggy Prue, Piggy Prue,
Piggy Prue, he's full of stew!*

MILDRED

Daddy says to keep your hands
by your sides like a good soldier.
Daddy says the standards of Saint
Anselm's are very high and he wants
Prue to measure up not out! And
we don't want daddy to leave us
again, now do we? Do we? Do we?

MILDRED

Now go and apologize like a good Prue.

DUPLE DIMMS

(sobbing) I...I'm sorry, sir, I...I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to hurt anyone, but please, sir, the mittens: I can't play the piano, I can't write, and my father won't come home...

FRANCES

Prue! Prue, stop!

PRUE DIMMS

Mister Faine made me wear them. I cried in front of everyone. He...he called me a little troll under his breath. Mildred and the others -- they heard him.

(PRUE covers his ears and sings with the CHILDREN'S VOICES.)

PRUE and CHILDREN'S VOICES

"Prue's a troll, see his belly roll!"

FRANCES

He was a cruel, sadistic bastard!

PRUE DIMMS

I hated the word; I hated my own shadow. I don't think I ever wanted to touch another living soul. *(pause)* Oh, God, how can he leave? The Church needs him; I need him.

FRANCES

Oh, Prue, I'm so sorry. *(pause)* Well, who knows? Maybe you're right.

PRUE DIMMS

Right...?

FRANCES

I mean, maybe it really is just an adolescent crush.

PRUE DIMMS

No. I hoped, I prayed, but her letters are so very...loving.

FRANCES

Duncan shows you her letters?

PRUE DIMMS

No.

FRANCES

You mean you open his mail?

DUPLE DIMMS

Here's where my nefarious niece hung me by my troll's tail; here's where she found me out and plucked me -- bone and muscle -- from the kingdom.

FRANCES

(repeating) You mean you open his mail?

PRUE DIMMS

Yes, God help me, I steam them open like a common thief.

FRANCES

Oh...

DUPLE DIMMS

No,...don't!

PRUE DIMMS

I even follow him; I spy on him from the vestry at Mass.

DUPLE DIMMS

Shush! Shush! Idiot!

FRANCES

Oh, Prue...

PRUE DIMMS

I've got the other brothers crusading to keep him in the seminary;...

DUPLE DIMMS

Stop it! Stop!

PRUE DIMMS

...I wrote anonymous letters; I even evoked the devil and prayed she'd die. Sometimes I look at what I'm doing and say, this is insane, unscrupulous, and yet I can't seem to...

PRUE DIMMS

...stop.

DUPLE DIMMS

Stop...

DUPLE DIMMS

...telling our secrets!

PRUE DIMMS

Sometimes I think of...

PRUE DIMMS
...suicide!

DUPLE DIMMS
Suicide!

DUPLE DIMMS
Homicide!

PRUE DIMMS
Deicide!

DUPLE DIMMS
Deicide!

PRUE DIMMS
I even kill God.

(PRUE glances up and sees DUPLE DIMMS visibly revealed for the first time. PRUE gapes, terrified, as FRANCES freezes.)

DUPLE DIMMS
Judas! You've whistled me out your nose!

PRUE DIMMS
Oh, God...

DUPLE DIMMS
Oh, Prue, treacherous, disloyal, quisling Prue. You've given us away.

PRUE DIMMS
What of it? I...I can't stand it anymore. I'm sick; you're my sickness.

DUPLE DIMMS
Come now, let's show her the profligate Prue!

PRUE DIMMS
No!

DUPLE DIMMS
Let me at her!

PRUE DIMMS
No!!!

DUPLE DIMMS
Yes!!!! Let me out! Out!! Ouuuuuuuuuuuuut!!!!

(DUPLE and PRUE grasp each other's shoulders, wrestling fiercely until DUPLE triumphs, pushing PRUE to the floor. Henceforth DUPLE addresses Frances.)

FRANCES

Prue, what's wrong? I want to console you, but I don't know how.

DUPLE DIMMS

No, you don't! But you know me, little Frances, you've stripped me bare!

FRANCES

I didn't mean to...

DUPLE DIMMS

Feast your eyes, Frances: I'm a troll! I stand for chaos and darkness!

FRANCES

Prue...

DUPLE DIMMS

Revenge is my canon law!

FRANCES

What's wrong with you?

DUPLE DIMMS

How does God see me, Frances?

FRANCES

I don't know. How would I know what God sees?

DUPLE DIMMS

How, Frances?

FRANCES

I don't know!

DUPLE DIMMS

(thrashing himself) As feculence! Filth! Vile! Obscene! The devil!

FRANCES

No, Prue, no. Please don't let this destroy you; don't hate yourself. Get some help...

DUPLE DIMMS

Help! Help?! You clod pated cunt!!! Don't you think I haven't tried? (*speaking rapidly, as if by rote*) "Lust is the third of the Seven Deadly Sins; lust is the inordinate desire for that which results in mental blindness, precipitancy, inconstancy, self-love, and hatred of God. The remedies are humble and frequent prayer, avoidance of idleness, and practice of temperance." And none of it works! None of it! I've tried; I've failed, so Lucifer strike me dead and deliver me to hell!

PRUE DIMMS

No!

FRANCES

No!

DUPLE DIMMS

Look at me: I'm half dead already. I thrived on repression, but I had dreams, wicked dreams! Whenever I sinned, whenever I rode to Babylon, it was always on a stud! At least the feelings you know...

FRANCES

They're the *same* feelings!

DUPLE DIMMS

They're not! They're against the laws of nature, of God!

FRANCES

God gave us our natures, and you're finally discovering yours.

DUPLE DIMMS

I'm hideous! A scourge! A garish geezer with craven cravings! Help hang me, Frances.

FRANCES

No.

DUPLE DIMMS

Then get me poison, some pills,...

PRUE DIMMS

No!

FRANCES

No!

DUPLE DIMMS

...or a gun.

FRANCES

Oh, Prue, I want you to live!

DUPLE DIMMS

Oh, Christ, my cock aches.

FRANCES

You're not alone, Prue. Why can't you be brave? Be proud!

DUPLE DIMMS

Now I know why people go mad. Oh, Frances, Frances, I feel so terrible... the pain. If only I could have continued to see him. I could have accepted his...his virtue; I could have offered my anguish to God. Oh, Frances,...

PRUE DIMMS

...I love him. Dear God...

PRUE DIMMS

...I love him.

DUPLE DIMMS

I love him.

DUPLE DIMMS

Is it true, Frances? Is my love no different from yours?

FRANCES

I think all love is a...a kind of blessing.

DUPLE DIMMS

Is it worth dying for?

FRANCES

Sometimes.

DUPLE DIMMS

How can I go through the rest of my life feeling like this and not let him know?

FRANCES

Come here, Prue, please,...please, let me hold you.

(FRANCES embraces DUPLE as PRUE speaks.)

PRUE DIMMS

And God, dear God, she took me in her arms, and I felt...yes, a vague tenderness that made me weak yet exhilarated me. There she was: my little shepherdess, my wise Minerva, telling me about her suffering, her loneliness; and there I was: unshackled, unbridled, a love-smitten fool who could let a young boy tear out my heart with the very sound of his footsteps. Oh, Lord...

PRUE DIMMS

...what will I do?

DUPLE DIMMS

What will I do?

DUPLE DIMMS

I have to do something -- this obsessive hate; this obsessive love.

FRANCES

Well, sometimes -- you won't believe this -- but I pray.

DUPLE DIMMS

Pray? You?

FRANCES

Yes.

DUPLE DIMMS

And does God answer you?

FRANCES

I think so.

DUPLE DIMMS

Look at you. You're quite attractive, really, even beautiful. Your mother was beautiful and your grandmother. I've never had your gift for finding pleasure in life. I wanted to care for women, but... *(pause)* Did I blame you for that? *(pause)* Tell me, Frances, can men like me love women too?

FRANCES

Yes, yes, of course -- as friends, the very best of friends.

DUPLE DIMMS

Will admitting I love men help me love women?

FRANCES

Maybe. How do you feel about me -- now, at this very moment?

DUPLE DIMMS

I don't know. I...I've never been this close to...to anyone.

FRANCES

We're alike, you and I. You'll see, Prue, you'll like the whole world better once you've touched someone.

DUPLE DIMMS

I don't want just "someone"-- only Duncan, my sweet, my precious, my dearest Duncan.

DUPLE DIMMS

Should I tell him?

PRUE DIMMS

Should I tell him?

DUPLE DIMMS

Would you?

FRANCES

I think so,...yes.

PRUE DIMMS

But the consequences -- think!

DUPLE DIMMS

Suppose he tells?

PRUE DIMMS

Suppose he tells?

DUPLE DIMMS

Supposes he despises me?

FRANCES

Is it any worse than what you're feeling now?

PRUE DIMMS

Yes!

DUPLE DIMMS

No!

DUPLE DIMMS

God, no, and by telling him, I'll know. I'll know if he ever loved me, and I'll know I can never hope, and it will be...

PRUE DIMMS

Reckless! Rashhhhh!

DUPLE DIMMS

...hell. *(he sighs)*

FRANCES

I love you, Prue; I'm proud of you. Someday the world may be different. People might accept, even celebrate loves like yours.

DUPLE DIMMS

You think so...? Then I'm going to do it! I'm going to tell him he can marry Kate. Then I'm going to say: Duncan, I love you.

PRUE DIMMS

No! It's madness! Don't do it! Fooooooooo!

(PRUE scurries aside; FRANCES exits.)

SCENE 10: DUNCAN'S FATE

(DUNCAN is reading in the seminary courtyard. DUPLE DIMMS approaches him as PRUE listens.)

DUPLE DIMMS

Duncan!

DUNCAN

Prue?

DUPLE DIMMS

Duncan, you can go -- with my blessing. Marry Kate and have the two most joyous lives on God's green earth! I love you dearly, my friend, more than you know, and I hate to see you leave, but I wish you well, believe me, I truly do.

DUNCAN

That's very...kind of you.

DUPLE DIMMS

It would have been kinder to have accepted the inevitable from the beginning, to forget my own selfishness and let you go in peace.

DUNCAN

I've tried to use the time to...to pray and make plans, though the brothers say I'm going through some kind of phase.

DUPLE DIMMS

What brothers? What do they know?! They're all gossips, bigots, small-minded mill town toadies! Take their advice and you're courting the devil!

DUNCAN

Prue!

DUPLE DIMMS

Trust yourself! You're ripe for marriage, and this one was made in heaven.

DUNCAN

Well, you're the only one who thinks so. I'm sure you've heard how she's corrupted me.

DUPLE DIMMS

Ridiculous! Who says so?

DUNCAN

Everyone.

DUPLE DIMMS

Never listen to spiteful gossip!

DUNCAN

Even from your mother?

DUPLE DIMMS

Especially from your mother! She doesn't want to lose her son and those brothers don't want to lose a friend. They're jealous, possessive -- don't believe a word they say.

DUNCAN

You've certainly changed your tune. You acted like I'd betrayed the entire order. You were begging me to stay! What is this: a new tactic?

DUPLE DIMMS

No! God, no. I'm just admitting I was wrong: Kate's a fine girl, a beautiful girl, and a true artist.

DUNCAN

Yes, I know, but listen, Prue, I...I'm not leaving.

PRUE DIMMS

Not leaving?!

DUPLE DIMMS

(pause) What...what happened?

DUNCAN

Everything's... fallen apart.

PRUE DIMMS

Fallen apart?

DUPLE DIMMS

Fallen apart?

DUPLE DIMMS

But...but what about Kate? She needs you and you need her; she'll inspire you, give you children, a family,...

DUNCAN

But I don't want that. Don't you see? I...I don't love her anymore.

(Pause as DUPLE and PRUE stare, stunned.)

DUNCAN

I think it was her letters. They were overwhelming -- weren't they?

(Pause as PRUE and DUPLE cower, mortified.)

DUNCAN

You're unique, Prue, you have a way about you, even in the rumors you spread. We knew what you were doing.

DUPLE DIMMS

You knew? Both of you...? All along?

DUNCAN

Eventually.

DUPLE DIMMS

You knew?! And yet you let me rave on! You let me destroy...

DUNCAN

It wasn't just you.

DUPLE DIMMS

But it was! If I hadn't kept you here -- with my despicable machinations -- she wouldn't have had to write and frighten you away.

DUNCAN

Prue, listen: I admit, I found you deceitful, even repugnant, but other things have happened.

DUPLE DIMMS

What?! What other things?

DUNCAN

Just being here, day after day, helping to serve Mass -- it made me realize how well suited I am for a life of ritual, how much the choir and sacred music mean to me, how it makes me feel the presence of God, and at peace in a way I could never be with...with Kate. So you see, I...I'm grateful.

PRUE DIMMS

Grateful!?

DUPLE DIMMS

Grateful,...

DUPLE DIMMS

...but she *loved* you!

(Lights reveal KATE as DUPLE envisions her anguish.)

KATE

I love you.

DUPLE DIMMS

You were her life.

KATE

(overlapping Duple) You're my life. I'll do anything for you, anything!

DUPLE DIMMS

I know because...because I love you the way she loves you.

(DUPLE gestures to embrace DUNCAN who backs away, repulsed.)

DUNCAN

Prue, don't!

DUPLE DIMMS

You don't feel...?

DUNCAN

No!

PRUE

(shivering) Ohhhhhh...

DUPLE DIMMS

Is it me?

KATE

Is it me...?

KATE

Is it my body? My paintings?

KATE

I'll change.

DUPLE DIMMS

I'll change.

DUNCAN

No! I...I'll never feel what you feel.

KATE

But you....

DUNCAN

You'll find someone else.

DUPLE DIMMS

I found you.

KATE

You didn't give us a chance.

DUPLE DIMMS

You didn't give us a chance.

DUNCAN

This is my life; *our* life; this is enough.

DUPLE DIMMS

You fool!

DUNCAN

Prue, please...

DUPLE DIMMS

You might have been something; you might have loved someone!

(DUNCAN starts to walk away.)

DUPLE DIMMS

Dear God, who did we think you were?

PRUE DIMMS

The only living voice in my choir of saints. All I ever heard,...

KATE

...all I ever saw,...

KATE
...all I ever wanted,...

DUPLE DIMMS
All I ever wanted...

...was you.
PRUE, DUPLE, KATE

I never meant to be cruel.
DUNCAN

(DUPLE DIMMS towards KATE.)

It's easy to be cruel,...

KATE

Dear Kate, forgive him,...

DUPLE DIMMS

...you just have to stop loving.

KATE

...forgive me.
DUPLE DIMMS

SCENE 11: PRUE'S FATE

(KATE exits as DUPLE DIMMS moves to where he
fainted during the "Prologue.")

DUPLE DIMMS
Once, in the Kingdom of Sodom and Sloth, there dwelt a certain troll who willed himself
transfigured by a rapturous love. Deep, deep, from his bowels rose the bittersweet taste
of all he might have missed, of all he'd never known. Yes, now he knew something,
something very painful, and it didn't have a name except Dimms,...

DUPLE DIMMS
...Dimms, Dimms.

PRUE DIMMS
Dimms, Dimms.

PRUE DIMMS
Now you've heard my confession; now you know why I beseech your everlasting mercy.

(DUPLE and PRUE make the sign of the cross in unison.)

PRUE DIMMS

I'm frightened. I've made a muddle, a bedlam, a great God awful mess of everything. Look at me: I'm fainting like an anorexic school girl. I can't even remember what feast day it is.

DUPLE DIMMS

What difference does it make?

PRUE DIMMS

This is my life: my order, my sanity.

DUPLE DIMMS

It's time to climb these walls.

PRUE DIMMS

No! I'll hold you back! I'll hold you where you were!

DUPLE DIMMS

Oh, yes, it was simpler when we hated. We loved hating; it's loving we hate! We hate loving!

PRUE DIMMS

Stop it! It's *you* I hate! I hate you!

DUPLE DIMMS

But to love you had to want me!

PRUE DIMMS

No!

DUPLE DIMMS

You had to know my other face!

PRUE DIMMS

How could I want you? You took their innocence, their love, and twisted...

DUPLE DIMMS

No! *You* twisted!

PRUE DIMMS

You tricked me! Before you came, I was good.

DUPLE DIMMS

I existed before you knew the word!

PRUE DIMMS

Now I'm sick. I feel this pain. I still have this feeling. I...

DUPLE DIMMS

...miss him.

PRUE DIMMS

Miss him.

PRUE DIMMS

I loved his beauty; I loved...

PRUE DIMMS

...his voice.

DUPLE DIMMS

His voice.

DUPLE DIMMS

Take this feeling. It's yours; it's ours. It could make you see things differently. You could even put it to music.

PRUE DIMMS

Music?

DUPLE DIMMS

Yes, yes, I'm not utterly useless. Put me to work! You know, you've never really appreciated me.

PRUE DIMMS

But you're so...so evil, so dangerous.

DUPLE DIMMS

So human! So glorious!

PRUE DIMMS

Look at you: you're so...loud.

DUPLE DIMMS

Without me voice has no conviction!

PRUE DIMMS

Or arrogance!

DUPLE DIMMS

Without me arrogance has no wit!

PRUE DIMMS

And me? Without me?

DUPLE DIMMS

Pedantry has no art; ceremony no respect...

PRUE DIMMS

And fear no trembling! Fear no trembling!

DUPLE DIMMS

You're equal only to yourself, Prue. Fear needs trembling just as passion needs...potency.

PRUE DIMMS

But what shall I do? Where will I go?

DUPLE DIMMS

Courage, Dimms, move on.

PRUE DIMMS

But I...

DUPLE and PRUE

...I'm a cantor.

PRUE DIMMS

I wave my arm and God listens!

(PRUE lifts his arms as choral music fades in, building to a crescendo.)

PRUE DIMMS

Even when I'm groping, they're singing. Listen! His voice: Duncan, Duncan!

DUPLE DIMMS

There are other voices too: Frances and Kate...

PRUE DIMMS

I only hear Duncan. I'll never forget.

DUPLE DIMMS

Mercy, Prue, forgive him.

PRUE DIMMS

I can't.

Forgive yourself. DUPLE DIMMS

I... PRUE DIMMS

Absolve yourself... DUPLE DIMMS

I... PRUE DIMMS

Raise your hand! DUPLE DIMMS

(PRUE raises his hand in a gesture of self-absolution.
DUPLE, posed beside him, adjoins his own hand.
Fade to black.)

End of Play