

The Martyr

A Play

By Leo Rose Rodriguez

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THE MARTYR

TIME AND PLACE: 1959, the American Midwest. Early spring.

The grounds of Saint Catherine's Academy, a boarding school run by the nuns of Saint Catherine's Convent.

CAST

PRISCILLA-JANE ALLAWAY-- Cis female, 15. A student at Saint Catherine's. Sheltered but not unintelligent. Passionate, fearful, exacting, slightly unstable.

SKY HENRIKSEN -- AFAB Nonbinary*, 15. A new student at Saint Catherine's. Self-possessed, blunt, tough with a gentle center, unconventionally spiritual.

SISTER BENEDICT-- Cis female, early 60s. Headmistress of Saint Catherine's. Still vital and lucid. Motherly-- in both positive and negative senses. Totally in control.

THE GHOST-- Cis female, teen. Has been dead for forty-five years. Disembodied and dislocated, trapped in the emotions of her last living moments.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA-- Cis female, 30s-40s. Deputy headmistress at Saint Catherine's. Timid and short-sighted, but sincere in her care for her students.

SISTER DOMITIA (EMILY)-- Cis female, mid/late teens. A former Saint Catherine's student turned nun, and also at times a hallucination. A gentle but conflicted soul.

HELOISE ADELARD-- Cis female, teen. A girl from the Academy's past. In love, and very afraid.

*The use of the term nonbinary, and of they/them pronouns throughout the text, is a bit anachronistic. I use them here for clarity's sake, but actual trans and nonbinary people of SKY's generation used a variety of identifiers and pronouns.

Playwright's Notes: The more spectacular/fantastical aspects of the show, including the Ghost's initial appearance, present a technical challenge. Be as creative as possible. Use projections, shadows, puppets, whatever your budget will allow; but however you choose to execute these visuals, commit to it.

Domitia is pronounced Doh-MISH-uh, Scholastica is pronounced like the word "scholastic" with an -a, and Heloise can be pronounced with or without the H.

Also, this should go without saying, but I find myself having to say it anyways because some people refuse to hear it: please, please cast an actual trans actor as Sky. There are plenty.

PROLOGUE: THE PAST

Darkness. Vocalizations. Hazy light filters through the high stained-glass window of a chapel, reveals the silhouettes of nuns at worship. The vocalizations crescendo as the light intensifies and sharpens.

And then the light is a wall of flame clawing its way up the window, tearing through the chapel. The voices become strident-- are they singing or screaming?

Blackout.

PRISCILLA appears, isolated in a pool of light, kneeling in prayer. She wears a classic Catholic school uniform-- jumper, white blouse, Mary Jane shoes. She rises, addressing God.

PRISCILLA

I hardly remember how it happened. Maybe I don't want to remember, and that's how I forgot.

Lights up on another scene, a memory. SISTER BENEDICT in her office, 1949. SISTER SCHOLASTICA enters Benedict's office with a letter.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

This is from a Hellen Craig. She has a niece, only five years old, orphaned by that horrible fire in the papers.

PRISCILLA

I only know that You spared me, You saved me, You plucked me from the ashes of the ordinary and set me on a path ordained to be different.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Mrs. Craig finds herself unable to care for the child in addition to her own.
(She reads from the letter)

“My sister and I have always respected the sisters of Saint Catherine’s. Our own aunt was the late Sister Priscilla. If our fortunes had been different, we might have attended the Academy ourselves. I can recall many times as a girl walking slowly past the convent to admire it.”

PRISCILLA

It is a beautiful convent.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

“I believe Jane”-- the writer’s late sister-- “would like to see her daughter raised at the Academy.”

It is a strange request, don’t you think, Headmistress? We aren’t an orphanage. Still, she does claim to be willing and capable to pay to keep the girl here all through the year.

SISTER BENEDICT

Then what reason would there be not to fulfill the request?

PRISCILLA

You brought me into arms that eagerly offered a home.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

I do wonder if it’s the right thing for a child who *could* have a family, not to have one. Oughtn’t we to consult the Reverend Mother?

Sister Benedict pauses for a moment, piqued by this suggestion.

SISTER BENEDICT

The Reverend Mother has granted me the authority to do what I wish as Headmistress of Saint Catherine’s Academy. I think there could be no better place for such a child than in our care. The Lord brings each of our charges to us for a reason.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Of course.

PRISCILLA

Headmistress was so certain of me. She was so certain that some grand purpose of Yours had let me survive and brought me here.

SISTER BENEDICT

Only time will tell what that reason is.

Scholastica disappears into shadow.

PRISCILLA

For so long, I thought I was certain of what that purpose is. From the window in my dormitory, I can look across the road and into the window of one of the convent's cells. I would wonder to myself, "will that be my cell one day? And will I look through that window into the dormitories?" But Lord, now--

SISTER BENEDICT

(To an unseen Scholastica)

What is this child's name?

SCENE ONE: THE PRESENT

A knock on the door. The office memory is gone. We are in Priscilla's dormitory room. It has two beds, one of which is bare. A half-finished sewing project, needle still stuck in it, sits somewhere prominently.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Priscilla-Jane!

Priscilla opens the door.

PRISCILLA

Good evening, Sister Scholastica.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

It's time for supper. Was I interrupting something?

PRISCILLA

Yes, I'm sorry. You can tell the other girls to hurry along without me. I won't be going.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Ah. Prayer and fasting, I presume?

PRISCILLA

I've consulted with Headmistress. There's been a change in me since Emily... There's some calling I need to answer, some revelation waiting to be uncovered. I just need the time to uncover it.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Yes. Well, good luck to you. Enjoy your meditation.

PRISCILLA

Thank you.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

And when should I expect you to join us again?

PRISCILLA

When...when I have found what I seek.

Sister Scholastica turns to leave.

PRISCILLA

Sister...?

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Yes?

PRISCILLA

Have you ever had a vision? Or have any of the sisters you've known? I would think with all those holy women, devoting themselves to God/ you would think He would answer, right?

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

/Oh, I don't know anything about that, Priscilla-Jane. God doesn't seem as theatrical as He once was.

PRISCILLA

It certainly would make it easier to know what He wants.

Scholastica has already begun to leave. Priscilla closes the door and kneels again. Behind her, another memory forms.

PRISCILLA

Lord, I went to see Emily-- I went to see *Domitia* today.

A group of nuns walk outside the convent, behind a gate. Priscilla rises, watching them, and curls her fingers through the bars.

PRISCILLA

Emily! Emily!

SISTER DOMITIA emerges from the shadows.

SISTER DOMITIA

That's not my name anymore.

PRISCILLA

Yes, but you did answer to it.

SISTER DOMITIA

What do you want?

PRISCILLA

I...I only wanted to see you. You have not come to visit since you made your vows. You are allowed to visit us, aren't you?

SISTER DOMITIA

Yes, I am.

PRISCILLA

Then why haven't you? We all miss you terribly.

SISTER DOMITIA

I've been busy. There's work to be done. Sister Mary Margaret and I are engaged in an extensive sewing project for--

PRISCILLA

Why weren't you assigned to work at the Academy? They must have known you wanted to. It was all you ever talked about.

SISTER DOMITIA

Yes, Priscilla, but things change.

PRISCILLA

What changed?

Sister Domitia begins to turn away.

PRISCILLA

Please, Domitia, at least answer that.

SISTER DOMITIA

I thought it would be best if I put the past behind me, all of it. Even the Academy. If I went back and saw all of you, it might make me regret my vows.

PRISCILLA

But...but even me? It won't be long before I join you here, you know that, and then...what? Will we pretend we never knew each other and are meeting for the first time?

Priscilla reaches through the bars and takes her hand.

PRISCILLA

Emily, I-- I'm your best friend, Domitia. I love you.

Sister Domitia walks away, and the memory fades.

PRISCILLA

It was me she was trying to forget. I always thought I had kept it secret. I thought that I could be content with being her friend, and she would never have to know. But she knew. And it disgusted her.

(She gets very worked up during the following, and begins pounding her fists on the floor.)

I'd see her every day, if I joined the sisters. It would be horrible, too horrible. And what if it happened again, if there was some other girl that I... What if I've been lying to myself for years, and I only ever wanted to join so I could be with her? What if I...I just...What am I supposed to do now?

The pounding isn't enough. She grabs the needle from her sewing project and starts to stab herself in the hand.

PRISCILLA

What. On earth. Am I. Supposed. To do. *Now*? Oh, God, I'm so sorry.

A knock on the door. Priscilla drops the needle and answers.

PRISCILLA

Headmistress!

SISTER BENEDICT

Good evening, my child. I have come to introduce the roommate I told you of.

SKY (OFF)

Get your paws off me!

Sister Benedict enters. Behind her, Sister Scholastica leads in SKY, whose hands she holds behind their back.

Sky has choppy, self-cut short hair and is presently covered in what looks like the debris of a food fight.

SISTER BENEDICT

(To Scholastica) Set her down on the bed.

(To Priscilla) This is Miss Tabitha Henriksen.

SKY

No, it isn't!

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

You're lucky you weren't at supper, Priscilla-Jane. What a commotion! She decided to announce her arrival by--

SISTER BENEDICT

No, Scholastica. Don't give her the attention she so clearly craves by repeating it.

SKY

I'll do it again! That's what you get for treating me like--

Scholastica covers their mouth. Sky bites her hand.

SISTER BENEDICT

Sister Scholastica, perhaps I should leave you to settle Tabitha into her room. I must speak to Miss Allaway.

The two of them step outside.

SISTER BENEDICT

I can see you're frightened, my dear. Tabitha is a troubled soul. That is why she was sent to us. But do you know why I assigned her to room with you?

PRISCILLA

Because my room has an empty bed?

SISTER BENEDICT

No, my child.

SKY (OFF)

Oh, you think you're tough, you goddamn termite?

SISTER BENEDICT

To tell the truth, I was afraid to take this girl on. I fear the corrupting influence she may have on the other students. But you are an exceptional young woman, devoted and pure. I believe your goodness can withstand Tabitha's influence. I believe you may, in fact, be an influence on her. I want you to keep close to her and guide her to goodness. Can you do this?

PRISCILLA

I can do it for you, Headmistress.

Sister Scholastica exits the dorm room, eager to leave it.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

She's making her bed now. Priscilla-Jane, we are all praying for you.

The nuns exit.

Priscilla returns to the dorm room. Sky broods atop a haphazard pile of bed linens.

PRISCILLA

You're not going to make your bed?

SKY

Don't want to, so I won't.

PRISCILLA

You're not going to wash all of that stuff off of you?

SKY

I'm proud of it. I threw the whole dining hall into chaos.

PRISCILLA

Why?

SKY

Because I was angry.

PRISCILLA

You just arrived. Nobody has done anything to make you angry.

SKY

You weren't even there, how would you know?

An awkward beat. Neither knows what to do with the other.

PRISCILLA

So. Your name is Tabitha?

SKY

Sky.

PRISCILLA

That isn't what the sisters said.

SKY

It's my name. What kind of name is Priscilla-Jane, anyhow?

PRISCILLA

Priscilla was a nun. Jane was my mother.

SKY

What a headache.

PRISCILLA

I've been told that it being odd and burdensome makes it a perfect fit for me. Just call me Priscilla. I like that better.

SKY

When you call me Sky.

PRISCILLA

Well I'm... I'm going to go to bed.

She begins changing into her nightgown, very modestly. Sky peeks at her. There's something they find fascinating.

Priscilla crawls into bed and turns out the light, but neither wants to sleep. Beat.

SKY

Do you believe in ghosts?

PRISCILLA

The sisters do.

SKY

I bet they do. I bet this school is lousy with ghosts, it's so old and creaky.

PRISCILLA

Ghosts only happen when people die badly, according to the sisters. When they aren't at peace. That wouldn't happen here.

SKY

You sure? You never heard the boards creak out in the hall when there was nobody there? You never thought someone was watching you from those arched windows up in the attic?

PRISCILLA

I've lived here as long as I can recall and I haven't seen anything like that.

SKY

As long as you can recall?

PRISCILLA

Since my parents died.

SKY

Lucky you. Was it murder, or something exciting?

Beat.

SKY

Want to know why my folks sent me here?

PRISCILLA

....Yes?

SKY

Because they think I'm possessed. They think I've got a demon in me that made me cut off all my hair and dress in boys' clothes.

PRISCILLA

A demon! Well...can you still say your prayers? The sisters say demoniacs can't say their prayers.

SKY

Sure I can. I think if anything, I've got an angel.

PRISCILLA

I don't think that's how it works, and in any case, you shouldn't say things like that. An angel would make you very well-behaved.

SKY

How do you know?

PRISCILLA

Good night, Tabitha.

Sky tosses a pillow at her.

SKY

Sky.

SCENE TWO: THE GHOST

The same night. The dark halls of Saint Catherine's. Sky appears with a flashlight and a ring of keys. They wander the halls trying keys at different doors, but nothing works. They get more and more frustrated.

Footsteps come down the hall. Priscilla catches up with them.

PRISCILLA

What are you doing out of bed?

SKY

What're *you* doing?

PRISCILLA

Following you. How did you get those keys?

SKY

Stole them from Sister Candy-Ass when we were tussling.

PRISCILLA

You still didn't answer my first question.

SKY

That was on purpose.

They try another door. Still no luck.

PRISCILLA

You're going to get both of us in trouble.

SKY

Go back to bed, if you're so worried.

Priscilla doesn't go.

SKY

Can you point me towards the library?

PRISCILLA

That's...*that's* what you want? The library?

SKY

The library. If you don't tell me, I'll find it myself.

PRISCILLA

Turn left and follow the hallway into the atrium. There'll be three doors across from you; take the left-most one.

Sky runs off in the direction Priscilla indicated.
Priscilla follows.

PRISCILLA

What will you do if someone catches you sneaking around at night with Sister Scholastica's keys?

SKY

I'll see if they can pry them out of my fingers, I guess. Not likely.

PRISCILLA

They'll make you kneel on the tiles for an hour or take away your breakfast. Do you want that?

SKY

If I get in trouble enough times, they'll have to throw me out, won't they?

PRISCILLA

They wouldn't.

SKY

How do you know?

PRISCILLA

I've never seen it happen. If they want to make you good, sending you out into the world would be the worst thing for it. They'll punish you, but they won't throw you out. But I don't know why you'd want to leave anyway. You've been here less than a day.

SKY

You really don't?

They reach the library and unlock the door. Sky shines their flashlight into the darkness. Besides the shelves, there is art on the walls and statues of saints in niches.

SKY

It's bigger in here than I expected. Kind of spooky.

PRISCILLA

Then go back to sleep. I can give the keys back to Sister Scholastica in the morning, she doesn't even have to know you took them, and everything will be nice.

SKY

I don't want everything to be nice.

PRISCILLA

But Tabitha...

SKY

Call me Tabitha one more time and you'll be sleeping with your teeth outside your mouth.

I was fighting three girls at a time at dinner, you know.

PRISCILLA

Why?

SKY

Because they insulted me.

You want me to go to bed? Show me where the maps are. Local maps-- the town, the county, that stuff. They've got to have it.

PRISCILLA

That's what you broke into the library at night for?

SKY

It's a simple thing. So why not get it for me?

Priscilla begins to guide them through the library. Sky swings the flashlight around. The moving shadows startle them, and they involuntarily grab Priscilla's injured hand. She yelps.

SKY

It was a statue. Good grief, it was a statue. Are you alright?

Priscilla's hand comes into the light.

SKY

What did you do? Is that another one of their punishments?

PRISCILLA

Oh, no. I was...this was a sewing needle.

Beat.

PRISCILLA

There's a big book with close-up maps of different sections of the state on that shelf.

Sky runs to the shelf and rifles through the book. They find a page they like and rip it out. As they fold it and stuff it in their pocket, Priscilla speaks:

PRISCILLA

I suppose next you'll want to be taken to the laundry room and the pantry so you can steal some supplies. And then you'd like some rope.

SKY

I would.

PRISCILLA

I won't do that. You don't need to run away. Give Saint Catherine's a chance. How do you know you won't like it here?

SKY

I already don't like it here! If this is a place my folks would trust to *fix* me, I don't need to spend one more second...

PRISCILLA

But isn't making trouble only proving them right? If I were you I'd act so good/that nobody could accuse me of having a demon in me.

SKY

/I can't be their idea of good. I can't sit and be quiet and pretend to be... You couldn't possibly understand.

PRISCILLA

I understand completely.

SKY

Really?

PRISCILLA

Well, I mean...the dressing like a boy...plenty of saints did that sort of thing. Saint Catherine cut off her hair because she wanted to make herself too ugly to be married, so she could devote herself to God. And her parents got angry at her, too.

SKY

That's not...I mean, yes, but it's more complicated... It's about *being*...

PRISCILLA

Being a boy? I can understand wanting that.

SKY

No you can't.

PRISCILLA

Well I've heard....apparently...sometimes girls want to be the boy because then they'd get to fall in love with a girl. And marry a girl. But then of course they realize it can't be done, and they grow out of it.

SKY

It's not really that I...I'm not...and anyway you don't have to be a boy to fall in love with a girl.

PRISCILLA

Of course you do.

SKY

Why?

PRISCILLA

Because...because that's how it is.

SKY

You can't just say "that's how it is" and leave it at that.

PRISCILLA

Well, have you ever heard of it being any different?

SKY

Yes, because I read books!

PRISCILLA

I read books!

SKY

Picked out for you by nuns! This is why I can't talk to you, you don't know what anything is because you've never looked outside Saint Catherine's. And now you're telling me you understand me when you don't, because how could you when half the time I don't even understand me, and it's so goddamn exhausting to have to--

At some point in this, they've stood up, and in their angry gesturing, they knock over a statue. The hollow ceramic breaks against the floor. Sky swears.

Priscilla starts gathering up the pieces.

PRISCILLA

This was Saint Agatha! It was a hundred years old.

SKY

Oh, just leave it...

Behind Priscilla, smoke rises from the darkness. A misty light appears, without any logical source, growing stronger and brighter, but still formless. The light-- THE GHOST-- screams, a heartbroken banshee wail.

SKY

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Let's beat it!

But Priscilla is transfixed. To her, this is the light from Heaven she's waited for.

PRISCILLA

You see it, too?

SKY

I told you this place was haunted! That thing's gonna suck out our souls or something if we don't split!

THE GHOST

WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY OOH

PRISCILLA

Its voice is so beautiful. I think it's a girl.

SKY

Oh, it's a girl ghost, that makes all the difference.

PRISCILLA

Aren't you supposed to be tougher than that? If you're scared, go back to bed.

SKY

Not without you.

(Beat.)

It wouldn't be very gentlemanlike, is all.

THE GHOST

Oh my statue my body all broken all broken naked alone why

PRISCILLA

Miss Spirit/ who are you? Are you here for good or bad?

SKY

/Don't talk to it! What are you doing?

THE GHOST

Am I bad am I bad am I bad oh my statue my body hide me hide

Priscilla goes back to gathering pieces of the statue.

PRISCILLA

Sky, can you shine the light over here? I need to make sure I get all of them.

SKY

What are you talking about?

PRISCILLA

She was attached to that statue. She only got out once we destroyed it.

SKY

I destroyed it.

PRISCILLA

Even more reason to help me put it back together again. There, I think that's everything. Miss Spirit! Miss Spirit--

The Ghost seems to truly notice them for the first time, and reacts like a wild, wounded animal.

THE GHOST

(Screams)

Don't don't look speak touch don't hide me hide me why

PRISCILLA

I'll come back to you tomorrow.

She gestures for Sky to follow her, and they eagerly leave the library with her.

SKY

You're nutty. You've lost every single one of your marbles.

PRISCILLA

This is something you don't know too much about, but I do. The sisters say that ghosts are souls that couldn't find peace. If I set her at peace, she won't scare you anymore.

SKY

How do you plan on doing that?

PRISCILLA

I...have no idea. But I will have to try, won't I? Don't you see what a wonderful task has been handed to me?

Footsteps. A very sleepy Sister Scholastica comes down the hall.

SKY

Penguin alert!

Sky ducks into hiding.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Priscilla-Jane, what are you doing up and about?

PRISCILLA

I saw a ghost.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

You saw...My dear, are you delirious? Have any headache?

PRISCILLA

I'm well, sister, I'm really well, I--

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Well, back to bed with you.

She turns back the way she came. Sky creeps just out of their hiding spot, makes eye contact with Priscilla, and drops Scholastica's ring of keys on the floor. They duck back just as the nun turns around.

PRISCILLA

You dropped these.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Was I...? Dear me, I ought to get to bed, too.

Sister Scholastica shuffles off with her keys. Sky is impressed that Priscilla lied to a sister's face. Priscilla is fixated on the shards of statue in her hands.

TRANSITION:
DARKNESS, AND A
CROONER SINGING.
LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE THREE: MEMORY GIRLS

A memory. Priscilla is mid-conversation with Emily, some time before she became Sister Domitia.

PRISCILLA

Maggie Callahan was saying that Saint Gerard is the handsomest saint, but Pollyanne was adamant that it's Saint Sebastian. Then Pollyanne got Betty on her side, but Caroline pointed out that the most attractive saints must be the angels since they have Heavenly beauty. And then Betty changed her mind and said that actually, there was no use comparing saints that nobody has photographs of, and so we should all just accept that Pier Giorgio Frassati will be the handsomest once he is canonized. Maggie said that Pier Giorgio didn't count, and then I was summoned to judge whether he counted or not.

EMILY

And what did you say?

PRISCILLA

I said that they should not be judging by appearances anyways, and the handsomest saint was whichever one was the most virtuous and only God knew that. It seemed like a silly conversation, but then I suppose that's what happens in a school full of girls who only ever see men on their prayer cards. Then Betty--

EMILY

I...I don't want to talk about this, Priscilla.

PRISCILLA

Oh. You're right. It's probably gossip, talking about them now like this, isn't it?

EMILY

That isn't why, I only...

I remember when my sister Peggy and I used to go to the five-and-ten during the summer, just because we were sweet on the boy who worked behind the counter. We would buy a single pack of bubblegum between the two of us, we didn't want anything, only to see him. But now even just looking at them--boys-- sometimes makes my stomach clench up.

PRISCILLA

Well, you're going to be a nun. Of course they aren't interesting anymore.

EMILY

No.

PRISCILLA

No?

EMILY

Do you ever feel...that you know what God wants you to do, but you wish He wouldn't ask it? I hear the girls talking about their boys back home, their sisters getting married, and I...it makes me feel sick, knowing it will never happen to me.

PRISCILLA

What do you need with a boy when you'll have me? You'll have all the sisters. We're going to be together forever.

EMILY

You don't feel a bit sad about what you're going to have to give up?

PRISCILLA

Not really. I think...I must be a born nun, because the thought of having a husband...it always seemed strangely lacking.

EMILY

I wish I were like you. Pure.

PRISCILLA

Headmistress always says serving God is hard work, and we should glory in our suffering. So really, if it's harder for you, you're the lucky one. It's like a gift.

EMILY

You really are a born nun.

The memory fades. Priscilla wakes, seated at a desk in the library. It is afternoon. She'd fallen asleep in the middle of gluing together the pieces of the statue.

The Ghost appears as Priscilla fits the last pieces together.

THE GHOST

Hide cover my heart my body broken oh why love why love hide

PRISCILLA

Miss Spirit! Come here, please.

THE GHOST

Oh open the window open the window why love no

PRISCILLA

Miss Spirit, I've fixed your statue for you.

She holds it out, and the Ghost, for the first time, draws closer.

THE GHOST

Agatha Agatha my body my statue my hiding place Agatha

PRISCILLA

Yes, it's Saint Agatha. You were hiding inside here, weren't you? For a long, long time.

THE GHOST

Long cold alone waiting I was gone the door was locked the window was I cannot return I cannot hide hairline cracks tiniest cracked bone oh give me bones to hide hide the years

PRISCILLA

You can't return to it, can you? Now that it's been broken. Miss, you were never meant to be inside this thing. Your soul is meant to be free. You must go to Heaven. Let me pray for you.

The Ghost starts to panic and drift away again.

THE GHOST

Prayers promises don't promise love oh darkness my body

Priscilla follows after her.

PRISCILLA

Miss! Miss! Please!

She extends a hand, reaching for the Ghost. They cannot touch.

PRISCILLA

My name is Priscilla-Jane Allaway. You have been entrusted into my care. I want to bring you peace.

The Ghost floats, not towards Priscilla, but towards the statue.

PRISCILLA

Will you let me know who you are--were--are, so that I can pray for you? Do you remember how long you were bound there?

THE GHOST

Darkness darkness nothing to tell I looked through the eyes Agatha I saw shapes no light
(Recognizing her surroundings for the
first time)

Why is this a library this was this is Saint Catherine's I was here but no here this was
grass no snow

PRISCILLA

You remember something. You're remembering! I suppose the more I know, the more I can help you. Tell me more.

THE GHOST

Saint Catherine's Saint Catherine's oh love where why I was here

PRISCILLA

I'll take care of you, Miss Spirit. I promise.

THE GHOST

No promises no prayers do not do not care for me not ask me not see me do not know me

PRISCILLA

But--!

The Ghost vanishes again, and Priscilla is left frustrated and alone. She breaks off a shard of the statue.

SCENE FOUR: THE RADIO

Same day. In the dorm room, Sky fiddles with a transistor radio. The window is slightly open. Bobby pins, many bent into experimental shapes, litter the room. Sky has altered their uniform to include pant legs.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

...temperature takes a sharp dip tonight, with freezing rain predicted...In Fairview...

They find a station playing upbeat dance music and start to get into the rhythm. It grows into full-on goofball dancing just as Priscilla enters.

PRISCILLA

Where did you get that?

SKY

Smuggled it. Wasn't hard.

PRISCILLA

And what are you wearing? I knew you stole my sewing kit!

SKY

Isn't it swell? Worth every lick with the yardstick Sister Mary Francis gave me. She tried to make me change back into a skirt, but I burnt all of mine up.

PRISCILLA

You're lucky it wasn't Sister Mary Clare. She was a baseball player during the war.

(Re: the radio)

Now, if you don't turn that awful machine in to the sisters, I'll have to take it from you.

SKY

You couldn't./You're just jealous of me because you can't dance.

PRISCILLA

/I will! I can dance. I know how to polka. I could polka circles around you.

SKY

Polka isn't real dancing. I mean...

They do a little Elvis move. Priscilla gets a bit flustered despite herself.

PRISCILLA

Is that how people do it nowadays?

SKY

You really don't know anything about anything, do you? Haven't you ever gotten out of here, gone to a picture, watched a television?

PRISCILLA

Well, I...I used to spend the summers with my aunt and uncle, sometimes, but...then I stopped.

SKY

Why?

PRISCILLA

Well, being here was...My aunt and uncle have eight children. And they're good, church-going people, my aunt's a good homemaker, my uncle provides, but...It's terrible of me to say this, but I don't think they like their children very much. Or each other very much. And they certainly don't care for me.

SKY

How can you tell?

PRISCILLA

I don't...I can't explain it, it's made of a million small things they do to sting each other. All I can say is I get the feeling that all of them are terribly unhappy. So, in any case, it just seemed better for all of us if I stayed here, with my...

SKY

The bright side to being an orphan, though, is you can imagine your folks any way you want them to be. You can dream up the best parents in the world.

The song on the radio changes to something soft, dreamy, crooning. Sky has an idea.

SKY

Let me teach you something. Polka's a partner dance, right? This won't be too different.

Priscilla hesitates, but finally joins them. Awkwardness ensues as both of them try to lead.

PRISCILLA

I'm usually the boy, when we dance in gym class.

SKY

That's alright, you can be the boy, once I show you how it's done.

PRISCILLA

You're not--?

SKY

I'm not a boy. Least, I don't think so.

The two hesitantly begin to slow dance. They touch each other as little as they possibly can. Priscilla struggles to process her feelings.

PRISCILLA

You're not...I thought that was your whole trouble?

SKY

My trouble is, I know I'm something, but the word for it hasn't been invented. Maybe I'm inventing the thing that I am right now.

PRISCILLA

That's a lot of power to give oneself. That's...that isn't how the world works. God made everything how it is, and He finished it. You can't just invent a new type of person.

SKY

No, what I mean is...My confirmation saint was Joan of Arc.

PRISCILLA

That's very modern of you. Mine was Francis of Assisi.

SKY

You know what Joan was burnt at the stake for?

PRISCILLA

Witchcraft. Because she had visions from God, and nobody believed her. I always thought--

SKY

No, it was because she dressed like a man. Even when she wasn't in battle, even when she was in church. And she said God told her to do it. She *had* to do it.

PRISCILLA

Even though it was wrong?

Beat. It is just the two of them and the music, and Priscilla is absolutely terrified.

She reaches over and pushes the radio out the window.

SKY

Son of a bitch, I ought to--

SISTER SCHOLASTICA (OFF/OUTSIDE)

Oh! Priscilla-Jane, what's this?

Priscilla leans out the window to speak to her.

PRISCILLA

Tabitha snuck it in with her luggage. She was listening to *rock and roll*!

SISTER SCHOLASTICA (OFF/OUTSIDE)

Oh, goodness! And it still looks able to play. I'll take this to Headmistress's office at once.

SKY

You rat! That was my Pop's radio! You'll pay for this!

They storm out and slam the door behind them.

PRISCILLA

I hope I do.

SCENE FIVE: THE DIARY

Benedict's office, that night. The rain has come, pounding against the windows. A large, imposing desk sits center in the office.

There is a clicking sound by the door, and then it falls open. Sky, who has just picked the lock with a bobby pin, enters. They check over their shoulder and lock the door behind them.

SKY

Can't believe that worked.

They look around the office.

SKY

If I were an old hag, where would I put a radio?

They investigate the office, open and close desk drawers, find nothing of interest, then notice a lock on one of the lower drawers.

They pick the lock and start rifling through, scattering its contents on the floor. Still nothing. They reach the bottom of the drawer, and still no radio.

And then they notice something.

SKY

What in the...

They reach into the drawer and lift out a false bottom.

Underneath it is an old book, charred at the edges, blackened with smoke, falling apart at the seams. Sky opens and reads,

SKY

“December 28th, 1913.”

HELOISE (OFF)

My holidays have been a dismal affair and I desire nothing more than to pack my luggage and return to school at the nearest possible opportunity. I would much rather endure the trials of Sister Mary Teresa’s geography class than the tortures my real sisters inflict on me. The record of today’s woes begins with Cecile. The two of us spent the morning at backgammon and she beat me pretty soundly, which is bad enough as you know I cannot abide losing...

Sky skips further down the page.

HELOISE (OFF)

The snow was clear enough for us to go into town for the first time in some while, and I wore the white overcoat Mama and Papa bought me for Christmas. They were so pleased with how my marks in composition had improved that they surprised me with a hat and gloves to match. But of course, Ursule had to give her opinion of the ensemble and informed me that with all the white, and the way the bands lay across the chest, I looked like I had escaped from an institution. I know she only said so to be nasty, but I am taking precautions just in case she was right, and will not be wearing the aforementioned ensemble again until Agatha has seen it and given her opinion. Agatha has a great eye for beauty, which I attribute to being a great beauty herself. How it would relieve all my woes to have her with me now.

Now Sky is interested. They flip forward a few pages.

HELOISE (OFF)

January 11th, 1914. In reuniting with my dear Agatha, I feel as though a lost part of my soul has returned. Time moved at a pace of hours for every second as long as the two of us were parted, and what dreary hours they were.

Upon our reunion, dear industrious, tender-hearted Agatha presented me with a pair of slippers which she has cleverly embroidered with crocuses and hellebore. I am wearing them as I write this and do intend to wear them until the soles give out. Has any girl ever been happier?

Sky flips through rapidly. Entry after entry flies by.

HELOISE (OFF)

Agatha and I...my sweet Agatha said to me...Visiting Agatha...on a long walk with lovely Agatha... How I miss my dear Agatha...I truly feel that Agatha...

Sky tucks the diary into their clothes. Hurriedly, galvanized with energy, they put the drawer back together and leave.

SCENE SIX: A DIFFERENT PAST (PART 1)

1914. Daylight in a garden. It is full of orderly berry bushes, maybe a greenhouse in the distance. Two girls wear outfits recognizable as Saint Catherine's uniforms, but styled for the time. HELOISE sits eating an apple while AGATHA braids her hair.

Heloise bites the apple. Then she raises it up to Agatha, who leans forward and takes a bite. They got back and forth like this.

HELOISE

Has anyone ever imagined a day more beautiful than this one? If I had my wish, I would stop the clocks and keep us just this way forever.

AGATHA

Just this way, with my hands in your hair?

HELOISE

The perfection would be spoiled without the two of us exactly as we are.

Heloise gives Agatha another bite. A bit of juice dribbles onto Agatha's cheek. Heloise wipes it away with her finger. She licks her finger.
Agatha swallows hard.

AGATHA

You know, when we eat it like this, together, is it not...a bit like an indirect kiss? Having passed from my lips to yours?

HELOISE

Kissing is more than just touching lips. Otherwise the sisters would not make such a fuss over it.

Beat.

HELOISE

Do you think it feels good? Kissing?

Agatha leans over and kisses her on the lips.

AGATHA

Yes.

HELOISE

I suppose it does. I suppose it does.

AGATHA

You taste like apples.

They kiss again. Hesitancy falls away. Heloise takes Agatha's hands and laces her fingers into them. She brings them toward her body, making Agatha hold her. And then, slowly yet all at once, Agatha's hands are stroking and gently squeezing Heloise's breasts.

Heloise leans back against Agatha. She's delighted.

HELOISE

Heavens.

And then Heloise starts to cry.

Oh, darling, have I hurt you? AGATHA

I'm afraid. HELOISE

What, afraid of me? AGATHA

No. HELOISE

What are you afraid of, then? AGATHA

...I don't know. HELOISE

Shall I stop? AGATHA

Never stop. HELOISE

Agatha continues for a moment, but she can't go on with Heloise in this state. She holds Heloise while she cries.

Lights come down on the garden as they rise on Sky, in the present. They sit in bed reading the diary by flashlight, enthralled.

They turn a page to find the scrap of a letter buried between them

SKY

“My darling, my sweet girl, peerless, precious one, You have filled my head with--” I think that's *constellations*? “--constellations of sweet thoughts which I cannot begin to chart. Let me whisper them in your ear, burying my face in your hair and feeling the softness of your cheek against mine once more. As my words fall short of relaying to you the heighth and breadth and eternity of my devotion...meet me again, so that I may tender it to you another way. Let the wind and rain not part us, but meet me--”

And there, the paper is burned off.

LIGHTS DOWN ON
SKY AND UP ON:

SCENE SEVEN: THE MARTYR AND THE PROPHET

The same garden, in the present. Wind and rain
shake the leaves.

Priscilla stands barefoot in her nightdress,
soaked to the bone, shivering uncontrollably.

PRISCILLA

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Emily appears through the dark, holding an
umbrella.

PRISCILLA

Emily! Emily, you've come to see me!

(She takes in the fact that it's Emily, not
Sister Domitia.)

No...this isn't right. Is this a vision?

EMILY

It's a hallucination.

PRISCILLA

Is there a difference?

EMILY

Yes. A vision comes from God. A hallucination comes from you not having eaten in
days.

PRISCILLA

I was looking for clarity.

EMILY

You were looking for a mission, and hasn't that been handed to you? You have two souls
to save, a living and a dead one.

PRISCILLA

And I'm only in more need of clarity than I was before! I don't know the first thing I'm supposed to be doing, I have these thoughts-- I feel like I'm cracking apart piece by piece. I plunge deeper and deeper, trying to figure out what God wants from me, and the deeper I plunge, the murkier it gets.

EMILY

You said so yourself, it's supposed to be hard. Your mind takes you in strange places, so you have to surrender your reason. Your feelings and desires take you down the path of evil, so you must deny them. Even your body is an anchor, keeping you to the earth while you reach for Heaven.

She takes something from her pocket and hands it to Priscilla. The shard of the St. Agatha statue. Through the rest of this, Priscilla rhythmically jabs it into her hand. Emily watches with pleasure.

PRISCILLA

I grind myself down, hoping God will appear in the dust, but He doesn't appear in the dust, so I grind myself more, and He doesn't appear, and then I get this thought: *why* did God decide it needed to be hard? Why did He make me in such a way that I have to despise my feelings, despise my thoughts, despise this body with all its desires? Why didn't He just make me the person He wanted me to be in the first place? Does He... Does He *like* seeing me struggle and suffer and cry? *Does He like it? Does He like it?*

Priscilla collapses into the mud. She lifts her head, and Emily is gone.

Blackout on the garden, lights up on the dorm room. Sky is finishing their prayer before bed.

SKY

...And be with my little brother. Don't let him worry too much about me while I'm gone. And God...Give me another chance to find that radio. I don't think Pop even knows I took it.

Priscilla enters, hand bleeding, covered in mud, looking like a nightmare.

SKY

You owe me a goddamn apology--

(Sees her more clearly)

Jesus Christ, what happened?

PRISCILLA

It doesn't matter.

She starts taking the blankets off of her bed.

SKY

What're you doing that for?

PRISCILLA

I don't need them.

SKY

What do you mean you don't-- your hand! Priscilla.

PRISCILLA

It doesn't concern you.

SKY

Another sewing accident, huh?

PRISCILLA

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

SKY

Look, if you're gonna snoop into my business, I'm gonna snoop into yours. You know, you never do anything bad enough for the sisters to punish you, but it seems like you punish yourself. What's that about?

PRISCILLA

It isn't punishment, it's martyrdom.

SKY

What?

PRISCILLA

Dying to yourself. Martyrdom. You wouldn't understand.

The greatest love, the Godliest love, is sacrifice. If I go without these blankets, I can give them to someone who needs them. If I don't go to dinner, then there's more for the other girls, and the sisters can stretch what we grow in the garden further and give the extra money to the poor instead of spending it on me. If I don't buy new clothes, if I don't use much water...you can structure a life, Sky, so that you think about yourself as little as possible, and instead think of other people, and God.

SKY

You have to think of yourself at least a little bit if you want to survive.

PRISCILLA

I shouldn't want anything, except to be a tool in God's hands.

SKY

I-- I can't make any sense of that. I'm going to need psychoanalysis after what you just said. People who say things like what you just said, who do the things you do, do you know what happens to them out in the real world? You'd be sent to an asylum, and at the asylum they poke into your head with an icepick and drag your brain out of your nose like a mummy. I woulda been there, if my parents believed in psychology. I'd have to run from the orderlies with half my brain hanging out.

PRISCILLA

I don't care if it sounds crazy to you. I told you, you aren't capable of understanding.

SKY

Understanding what?

PRISCILLA

God's work, Sky! God's work!

SKY

Don't talk to me about God's work!

A blinding flash of light. A memory of a church.
A choir sings.

SKY

It was Easter Mass. I had on this awful dress that dug into my armpits, and tight patent leather shoes, and I was miserable. I'd been miserable for months, from the first time I got my friend. And I went up to receive the body of Christ like any Sunday, the priest placed it on my tongue and...

The ensemble forms a chorus which speaks as
one voice.

THE VOICE

BEHOLD THE WORK OF GOD!

Blinding light again. What follows is equal parts eerie and ethereal, overwhelming on a sensory level, the kind of experience that justifies why angels always begin with “Fear not.”

SKY

And I saw...I saw, I saw God creating the Heavens and the Earth. I saw the morning and the evening, and the times in between morning and evening, and the times when the sun and moon are in the sky at the same time. And I saw clocks and sundials and hourglasses and every chart of the stars. I saw the sea and the land, and beaches and deltas and estuaries. I saw plants and animals, fungi and lichen, microorganisms with my naked eyes. I saw mammals in the sea, birds on the land, fish growing legs and whales losing them. I saw tadpoles and caterpillars and frogs and butterflies. And God set me down and showed me the simplest thing: a field of grain, a vineyard of grapes, and let me press and mill them into bread and wine.

THE VOICE

WITNESS THE WORK OF GOD!

SKY

And then I went home. I cut my hair for the first time. And it was like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus: I needed a new name.

The memory fades. Priscilla stares at them.

PRISCILLA

You? He gave it to *you*?

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE ONE: AGATHA

A few days since the end of Act I. Early afternoon light streams through a window in the library, where Priscilla has once again fallen asleep. There are stacks of books around her, and her bandaged hand lays outstretched in front of her.

The Ghost floats in and is drawn to Priscilla's hand.

THE GHOST

Blood body is it not amazing how blood fixes how the body sews itself how the life in the hand the hand grows warmer with the life fixing itself

Priscilla has woken during this.

THE GHOST

The body fights it fights how hard to save itself so many tricks it knows to save the life the pain the cold the hunger all are tricks to save to stop the dying long after the mind is ready for dying dying is so hard because it fights it is so hard but it is so easy

PRISCILLA

I was looking for the right prayers for you. I wish I knew your name. Don't you remember what it was?

THE GHOST

I remember I remember stand in the light stand in the light I remember the light on my body the heat the soft of grass of hair stand in the light

Priscilla obeys, standing in the light of the window.

THE GHOST

Does the skin feel its heat does it the light

PRISCILLA

Yes. It's warm today. Spring is finally coming. The geraniums are beginning to bloom.

THE GHOST

Is it sweet oh is it sweet to the skin oh the skin I miss the body the breeze how good I miss to feel the earth to feel the time mending the body Agatha worm-tracked full of holes I miss her oh love

PRISCILLA

If I could give you my body, I would. But you won't need a body where you're going. I think it would be best to stop wanting it so much.

THE GHOST

Wanting does not stop

PRISCILLA

Of course it does. Headmistress says the worst sin is pride and willfulness, and wanting is willfulness... You just have to surrender what you want, let it float away. That's the trouble I have.

THE GHOST

It lasts it lasts oh love why

PRISCILLA

Is this what happens, then, to the soul that wants too much? If it is, there isn't any hope for me. All I have ever done is ask and ask for... Even wanting to be good, to do some great work for God, is pride. It's why I'm not of any use to you.

THE GHOST

Oh love oh why oh why

The Ghost, overcome with emotion, starts flickering, changing shape, rocking her incorporeal form with spasms.

PRISCILLA

What is it, Miss Spirit, what's keeping you from peace?/What is it you keep longing for day after day? Who is Agatha?

THE GHOST

/Oh why oh love the cold in the body in the window close the window broken goodbye goodbye my love alone Agatha the cold oh why oh why alone Agatha the body Agatha

PRISCILLA

You don't just mean the statue. *Who is Agatha?* Is it you? Agatha?

A blinding flash of light, and a sound like singing.

The Ghost settles into a definite shape: Agatha, though not as we saw her before. Cold, lacking solidity, ghostly in every sense. Barefoot and wearing only a World War One-era nightgown.

For Priscilla, it is love at first sight.

AGATHA

Agatha remembers I remember she was alone it was dark the dark before this library was built the library was somewhere else and this was an empty green space but it was not green below the open window Agatha fell out the window I fell but the fall did not kill me I lived through the fall broke both of her legs pain pain and it was winter and I fell into thick snow it was snowing and my legs were broken I couldn't move even if I and I wanted to but the snow kept falling and I wasn't dressed for it was so cold so cold and so much pain and nobody was there in the cold was the last thing I felt the last freezing oh why oh why

Priscilla reaches out to comfort Agatha, but still cannot touch her. Agatha still isn't really there, and the air around her has a bite.

PRISCILLA

Oh, Miss Agatha.

AGATHA

Yes yes I remember I remember my body my heart my name

PRISCILLA

So much pain for such a lovely girl. Agatha, what is it you want? What is it you need?

AGATHA

Why did all of this have to happen

PRISCILLA

That I don't have the answer to. Miss Agatha, you were alone when you...when your accident happened.

(Some sign of assent from Agatha)

You never received your last rites, or the sacrament, did you?

(More assent)

Maybe that's why you aren't at peace. Maybe that is what your soul is searching for. Well, that's simple enough! I will go to Headmistress and she'll contact the priest, and we'll get you what you need.

AGATHA

How can I receive the sacrament if I cannot eat

PRISCILLA

It isn't food for your body. Oh Agatha, I was beginning to worry that this was all impossible and I'd failed you. But Headmistress has got to know *something* we can do.

She begins to leave.

AGATHA

Don't leave oh love alone alone no don't yet

Priscilla gives her a last, longing glance.

PRISCILLA

You're lovely, Miss Agatha. But I have to help you go.

SCENE TWO: THE ADMONITION

Headmistress's office, the same day. A knock on the door, and Sister Scholastica enters.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Priscilla-Jane is here, Headmistress. She seems agitated. More so than usual, in any case. I do hope it isn't that girl we've put up in her room.

SISTER BENEDICT

That seems unlikely to me. The child is rarely one to complain, whatever the challenge set upon her is.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Still-- Tabitha's aggression hasn't shown any sign of abating. What if she's caused Priscilla harm?

SISTER BENEDICT

Priscilla would shoulder it, as an opportunity to be merciful. She isn't weak. Send her in.

Sister Scholastica leaves, and Priscilla enters.

SISTER BENEDICT

Have a seat, child.

PRISCILLA

I don't think I can, Headmistress. I'm energized. I'm nervous, honestly. I am in need of a favor-- not for myself, for someone else.

SISTER BENEDICT

I am in the habit of rewarding good behavior, not of bestowing favors.

PRISCILLA

I know, of course. But it's a very important matter, otherwise I wouldn't ask it. There's a soul on the line, you see--

SISTER BENEDICT

Tabitha's?

PRISCILLA

No...Agatha's.

SISTER BENEDICT

There is nobody named Agatha at this school.

PRISCILLA

But there was, once. A long time ago, before the library was built.

Memory cuts Sister Benedict to the bone.

HELOISE (OFF)

Headmistress! Headmistress, I'm frightened!

PRISCILLA

Headmistress, please believe me when I say I've seen a ghost. I haven't been doing anything occult or unseemly, I promise. It's just that she died on the site where the library was built and she's haunting it. And if her soul is here instead of in Heaven there must be something holding her down, and I think it's that she had nobody around to give her the last rites. So if we could only find someone to send her on her way...well, that would be a soul at peace. If anyone can set things right, it's you, isn't it, Headmistress?

Beat.

PRISCILLA

Please believe me.

SISTER BENEDICT

I believe you, my child. I am very sorry.

PRISCILLA

What could you be sorry for?

SISTER BENEDICT

It simply won't work. There is nothing to be done for this ghost.

PRISCILLA

But Headmistress, certainly--

SISTER BENEDICT

I know the Agatha of which you speak. We attended this school at the same time. She committed a grave sin.

PRISCILLA

What did she do?

SISTER BENEDICT

She threw herself from a window. She took her own life.

PRISCILLA

She only told me she fell.

SISTER BENEDICT

Perhaps she was ashamed of her death. I am deeply sorry, Miss Allaway, that you have evidently devoted so much hope to a hopeless case. She died with a mortal sin on her soul. You know what the fate of such persons is.

If absolution ever were possible for Agatha Strand, it is many years too late for it. I would suggest thinking no more on such an unfortunate happening.

PRISCILLA

I...that seems impossible, Headmistress.

SISTER BENEDICT

I know you have a tender heart, my dear. I hate to say these things to you.

PRISCILLA

It just doesn't seem fair.

SISTER BENEDICT

No, it isn't. If the Lord were dealing fairly with her, she would have been sent to Hell. Instead, she is confined in a hellish state.

PRISCILLA

I just don't understand. Headmistress...why is suicide a sin?

SISTER BENEDICT

Why on earth do you ask that?

PRISCILLA

Doesn't it seem like...like that's something God would want? I mean, it's the ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate self-abnegation. It's the ultimate penance, too, if I say that my sins are so great that I will no longer take advantage of God's mercy by breathing.

SISTER BENEDICT

Priscilla, you know very well what the church teaches.

PRISCILLA

But isn't that what Saint Catherine did? Saint Catherine survived solely on the Eucharist for as long as she could, until her body failed her. Wasn't that a suicide of sorts?

SISTER BENEDICT

Stop your tongue before it damns you.

PRISCILLA

Or what about Saint Francis? Francis treated his body so harshly that when an infection hit, he had no strength to fight it. Was that not an indirect suicide? So many saints did things like that. If you systematically weaken yourself by going without food and water and warmth and sleep, the end result is the same as jumping out a window. It's only slower.

People who kill themselves little by little become saints. It's their martyrdom. It's only the fast ones that are condemned.

SISTER BENEDICT

You are speaking sacrilege.

PRISCILLA

Maybe the only reason it's a sin is that God wants it to be slow and long and painful, and if you kill yourself too quickly, you're being selfish and robbing Him of the fun.

SISTER BENEDICT

Blasphemy and sacrilege!

PRISCILLA

But why is it blasphemy and sacrilege? It doesn't make sense!

SISTER BENEDICT

It simply--

PRISCILLA

How do we decide what kind of suffering is acceptable to God and what isn't?

SISTER BENEDICT

My child, who taught you to ask such questions?

Beat.

Priscilla takes in the weight of what she has just done.

PRISCILLA

Headmistress. I'm...I'm so sorry, Headmistress. I shouldn't have answered back like that, I know better than to answer back like that, and to get angry, and...I am so sorry, I will do whatever I need to make amends, I...

Sister Benedict sighs, the type of disappointed sigh far worse than being yelled at.

SISTER BENEDICT

Priscilla-Jane Allaway. I thought I could rely on you to rise above corrupting influences. I suppose even my judgement lapses at times.

Priscilla sinks to her knees.

PRISCILLA

Punish me. Make me wear a sign saying what I've done. Lock me in a dark closet for hours.

SISTER BENEDICT

I don't need to.

PRISCILLA

Mother, give me some relief!

Sister Benedict stares her down for a long time. Priscilla crawls out of the office on hands and knees.

DARKNESS AND
HORRIBLE RADIO
STATIC. LIGHTS UP
ON:

SCENE THREE: THE TASTING

The garden, several days later. Sky enters dressed for gardening. They munch an apple and observe the day. We hear sounds in the distance of other students working the garden.

A rustle in the bushes. Priscilla emerges carrying a basket of berries and looking haggard. They stare at each other for a moment.

SKY

Sister Priscilla-Jane.

Priscilla goes on picking berries, not acknowledging Sky.

SKY

It's the first time you've seen me in days. You can at least say 'Hello.'

PRISCILLA

The entire reason Headmistress removed you from my room was so we wouldn't speak to each other.

SKY

Yeah, nice surprise that was. You look like hell.

PRISCILLA

Good.

SKY

Sound like it, too. Whatever you've been up to, you're gonna get sick as a dog.

PRISCILLA

Shouldn't you be making yourself useful?

SKY

As far as Sister Mary Joseph knows, I'm just taking a very long time to walk to the tool shed.

Beat. Sky remains there, watching the day. Watching Priscilla. Priscilla concentrates very hard on not noticing Sky, which of course means Sky is all she can think of.

Finally:

PRISCILLA

I'm not one for gossip, but Caroline says they put you up in the attic.

SKY

Yeah. It's Antarctica in there. A real cooler, you know?

(It doesn't land)

Cooler, like prison...oh never mind. You never were good for a joke. Anyhow, the window's got a nice view of the sky, once you look past the bars. What did you tell her about me to make her do it?

PRISCILLA

I didn't say anything about you. I didn't need to.

SKY

What's that mean?

PRISCILLA

What I mean, Sky--I wasn't a good person before, but you-- you've ruined me. You've infected me/ got me wondering all these wild things, for goodness' sake, I'm even calling you Sky!

SKY

/Infected!

PRISCILLA

If I'm not careful, I'm going to end up just like you, and then Headmistress will never have a kind word to say to me again and I'll deserve it!

SKY

'Headmistress' this and 'Headmistress' that! It's your problem for caring so much what that wet rag thinks of you.

PRISCILLA

You wouldn't understand because no adult has ever had something good to say about you in your whole life. Headmistress probably loves me a lot more than your parents love you!

SKY

Say one more word about my parents--

PRISCILLA

Fine, slug me.

(She pushes SKY)

You've been talking about doing it since we met, so slug me!

SKY

No!

PRISCILLA

Why?

SKY

Because...because you're too weak. I could break your arm just by looking at it. It's no fun fighting someone if there's no challenge.

PRISCILLA

No, it's because you're a big, uh, candy-ass!

She pushes Sky again, with force. Sky effortlessly shoves Priscilla to the ground. Her basket falls, scattering berries.

They wrestle. Someone falls into the berries now strewn across the ground. They slap each other with handfuls of berry. They roll around in the juice.

Priscilla isn't strong, but she gives it her all. Sky goes easy on her. They are both relishing the opportunity to touch each other, and try to prolong it as much as possible. Eventually, each realizes that this is what the other is doing. It becomes funny. It becomes a sort of game.

Finally, they are both on their knees, panting. They lock eyes for a long time. They want to kiss, though they lack the words to verbalize that request.

Sky flicks a bit of berry at Priscilla. Priscilla takes Sky's hand, draws it slowly towards her, and begins licking the juice from their fingers. Soon, all pretense is lost. She's sucking on them hungrily.

Sky laughs, but not from discomfort or embarrassment. After a moment, Priscilla sets their hand down again.

PRISCILLA

Why do you fight people?

SKY

Because they make me angry.

PRISCILLA

But why do you fight people?

SKY

Because girls don't do that.

PRISCILLA

Sky, when you had that vision... You learned a lot of things, didn't you?

SKY

Maybe I just made it all up. That's what most people think.

PRISCILLA

I saw it in your eyes. It was real.

Sky, you are a lot wiser than I am. Tell me, why is it that good things always feel bad and bad things always feel good?

SKY

I don't think they do.

PRISCILLA

(Teasing)

Of course you don't.

SKY

I don't think God would confuse us like that.

Look at this day. It's warm, and bright, and the flowers are swaying just slightly so you can pick up their scent. I imagine God likes making days like this.

And if God enjoys it, why shouldn't we?

PRISCILLA

Here's another question then: who's stronger, the person who can inflict pain, or the person who can endure it?

SKY

I...well rats, I'm not that much of a genius.

Beat.

PRISCILLA

I had an argument with Headmistress. That was why she separated us. It wasn't anything to do with you, really.

SKY

What could get you riled up enough to fight with her?

PRISCILLA

She told me Agatha-- my ghost-- couldn't be saved.

SKY

Agatha--!

PRISCILLA

She told me Agatha killed herself.

SKY

She couldn't have. She wouldn't.

PRISCILLA

Headmistress knows all about it, she was a student at the time. But I simply can't accept it. She's in such pain...

SKY

I can't either. Priscilla, you care about this ghost? This girl?

PRISCILLA

I think I...I think I love her.

SKY

Then you should fight for her. Nuts to what Headmistress says, we've got to find a way. We've seen miracles.

PRISCILLA

'We?' I have been paddling my own canoe this entire time, no thanks to you.

SKY

Well, you've got a second paddler. And you can blab all you want about it being your divine mission, I don't give a hoot.

PRISCILLA

That's all well and good, but I still have exhausted all my ideas of what we can do. Perhaps your vast prophetic wisdom could produce a plan?

SKY

I had *one* vision, P.J., I'm not some spiritual encyclopedia. But I do have somewhere you might want to start.

Someone offstage calls for Sky.

They and Priscilla realize they're both still covered in berry juice.

PRISCILLA

What are we supposed to tell the sisters about this?

SKY

Tell them the truth: I fought with you. And I had a swell time doing it.
(SKY begins to exit, then turns back)

And P.J.?

PRISCILLA

'P.J.'?

SKY

It saves time.

Priscilla likes it.

SKY

You're not a bad person. You're just insufferable most of the time.

SCENE FOUR: A DIFFERENT PAST (PART 2)

1914. Nighttime in a secluded corner of Saint Catherine's. Agatha waits beneath the watchful eye of the Saint Agatha statue.

Heloise appears out of the darkness.

HELOISE

Agatha, I'm frightened.

AGATHA

Did you have a nightmare? You've got such a look in your eyes...

HELOISE

I've not slept. I've not been able to for days, I feel...Something terrible is going to happen.

AGATHA

What sort of terrible thing?

HELOISE

But you must feel it, too! People are watching us/ waiting for an opportunity to hunt us down. They will come after us at night and tear us apart. *God* will hunt us down.

AGATHA

/What people? Heloise, don't be mad.

HELOISE

Somebody knows, Aggie, somebody will know, and they will expel us and disown us and cross our names out of the family Bible and we will wander the earth starving, homeless, ill, like Cain, and it will happen because God wanted it to.

AGATHA

Do not say such things!

HELOISE

I feel utterly wretched. I feel as though I am plummeting off some high ledge, and all that waits below is darkness and freezing cold.

AGATHA

Miss Heloise, you cannot go losing your mind now. I will not allow it. Nobody is watching us, and if they did, what would they observe? They would see two good friends. Many girls are good friends.

HELOISE

Not like...not like we are. Nobody in the world is like us, Aggie. We are utterly, completely alone.

Agatha wraps her arms around Heloise.

HELOISE

What if we are seen?

AGATHA

We have met here a hundred times and never been seen.

HELOISE

You want caution. You ought to learn before it becomes too late.

AGATHA

I know what the world thinks of...of what we do. I am not naive. But we have each other! I would rather be afraid with you, my love, than be the most spoiled girl in the world. I would rather have you than anything else. I am more afraid of what would happen if you turned away from me.

HELOISE

You should leave me. We should stop this, get out of the house before it burns down, wait until we are old and can do what we like without all these...eyes! Eyes! The eyes of God are bad enough, but there are so many...

AGATHA

I don't believe I ever could. After all that has happened, I could never pretend not to feel as I do...It was prison, before I told you what you are to me, do you not remember?

HELOISE

Please, Aggie, promise me you won't be so foolish. Promise me you will break my heart if need be.

AGATHA

You know that I can't. I cannot give up the most perfect thing in my life.

SCENE FIVE: DEMONS

Sky and Priscilla hide under a flight of stairs.
Priscilla reads the diary.

SKY

There's a name on the inside of the cover, Heloise. Heloise Something-With-An-A, the writing's too fancy to read in some spots. Do you think the Agatha she's writing about is your Agatha?

PRISCILLA

It's hard to say. It isn't the most unusual name, but the timing is right for Headmistress to have known her. And Sister Scholastica says the library was finished forty or so years ago.

SKY

That narrows it down, that's for sure. Only, the way Heloise talks about her, Agatha doesn't seem like the depressive type. I can see Heloise throwing herself out a window, but not her.

PRISCILLA

It's not as if she didn't have good reason to.

(She stares at the book)

These girls, they were...they really were...

(She starts to cry)

They were like...

SKY

I know. I know.

PRISCILLA

They could be our grandmothers. Do you think *they* had grandmothers, too, that...? Is this why one hardly ever hears about people like us, because they all kill themselves?

SKY

Oh, don't be morbid. Some of them get their brains bashed out of them, too. How do you think I learned to fight in the first place?

PRISCILLA

Sky.

SKY

Maybe. That's what happens at the end of all the pulps: one of the girls realizes what she is, and then the next thing, she's buying rat poison or a revolver or whatever the author thinks will be the most dramatic. Either that or she gets married. Maybe the ones who survive all get married.

PRISCILLA

That's not much better.

SKY

But also...Heloise gets halfway through her diary, they've already kissed and gotten into all sorts of heavy petting that'd make your hair curl, before she even considers it might mean something. They couldn't barely imagine it. Sometimes I wish I had a little less of an imagination. That's what's always getting me into pickles.

PRISCILLA

Yes, but then you wouldn't raise half as much hell as you do, and you'd be awfully bored...And so would I.

Beat. The garden still hangs over them.

PRISCILLA

I...I keep thinking how impossible it is that Agatha was hiding in that statue for so long, that this diary was sitting in that drawer-- and Headmistress probably didn't even know it was there, she'd never have kept it-- and we just happened to find them. Or really you did, more than I.

I need to know if this Agatha really is my Agatha.

SKY

But what if it is? There's not much we can say that'll put her at peace.

PRISCILLA

We can tell her someone remembers them. We can tell her someone understands. Only, Headmistress has had the library locked up since I told her.

SKY

Haven't I told you I'm an expert lock picker? Meet me here tonight, I'll get us in.

PRISCILLA

Then it's a plan. Don't get into too much trouble before then.

She checks to see if anyone is around and exits with caution.

SCENE SHIFTS TO:

Sister Benedict's office, evening. Sister Benedict prepares sacramentals-- holy water in an aspergillum, blessed salt, a copy of the *Rituale Romanum*.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

I don't understand. You said yourself that there was nothing to be done for this spirit.

SISTER BENEDICT

Sister Scholastica, I have spent a great deal of time in thought over this, and I am not convinced this spirit truly is who it appears to be. Priscilla-Jane was likely deceived.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Then...you don't believe it could be...?

SISTER BENEDICT

A demon may take many forms.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

And this demon has taken the form of your old schoolmate? For what purpose?

SISTER BENEDICT

That I am not sure of yet. But it feels portentous. It might have chosen any form, but making itself up to be Miss Agatha Strand strikes me as a warning.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Really? Who was this girl?

SISTER BENEDICT

I won't spoil you with the sordid details. It is sufficient to say that Miss Strand developed quite the reputation during her time at Saint Catherine's. Her life as well as her death were a blot upon the Academy's record. It disturbs me that she has reappeared just at the time when we receive this confused wild animal of a girl into our halls, and when Priscilla, the best of our students, begins to act so strangely. Something sinister is hanging over us.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

We ought to tell Mother Superior. Better yet, let me send for a priest who can exorcise the presence.

SISTER BENEDICT

Let's not behave rashly. All that I have said is still theory. I won't trouble those above us until I am certain I must. I won't cry wolf.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

I would rather run straightaway to an exorcist and not give matters a chance to get worse.

SISTER BENEDICT

Yes, but the decision is not yours to make.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Of course. Only, I'm worried for the girls--

SISTER BENEDICT

It is as I have instructed you: keep the girls away from the specter until I have investigated further, and you should have nothing to worry about. That is as far as your responsibility extends.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

What are you going to do to investigate?

SISTER BENEDICT

If I told you, you would get in a fluster and want to interfere.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

A demon's a dangerous thing.

SISTER BENEDICT

As am I.

Demon or none, I have the situation under control. I am the headmistress of this school. Whatever is to be done, I will see to it myself. Keep the girls out of trouble. And do as you are told.

SCENE SHIFTS TO:

The same stairwell, now in darkness. Priscilla waits underneath it with a flashlight.

Footsteps. She flinches. But it's just Sky coming down the steps.

PRISCILLA

I was beginning to worry you'd been caught.

SKY

No, it's just so cold in the attic all my joints froze together. Feel my hands. They're like little dead fishes.

They thrust their hands into Priscilla's. She is suddenly shy.

PRISCILLA

Golly.

(She snaps herself out of it)

Now, come. Down this way is the fastest route to the library.

SKY

And to your dear Agatha.

PRISCILLA

Yes, my...my dear Agatha.

They travel to the library during the following.

PRISCILLA

So, an expert lock-pick. You can go anywhere you want now, can't you?

SKY

Sure can.

PRISCILLA

And you've had a lot of time to yourself. I suppose you've used it wisely and have stocked up all you need for your escape.

Sky

Everything but the train ticket.

PRISCILLA

What does Sky Henriksen need with a train ticket? I expected you to go freighthopping.

SKY

Oh. Well.

PRISCILLA

What?

SKY

Nothing.

PRISCILLA

Sky, do you really have everything you need to run away?

SKY

Yes. It's all tucked away under floorboards.

PRISCILLA

Then why haven't you gone yet?

SKY

I...I've never really been on my own. I was sort of hoping I could find someone to come with me.

PRISCILLA

You're afraid of going alone?

SKY

I didn't say that.

PRISCILLA

It's okay if you're afraid.

SKY

I'm not scared of anything. I can take care of myself just fine. I'm not a little kid. Only I was sort of, um, maybe hoping that...Once we've helped Agatha, of course... You just don't seem too happy here is all.

PRISCILLA

I...

SKY

I don't know why I asked. They're your...

PRISCILLA

My family, yes. Saint Catherine's is my home. I only wish...

SKY

What?

PRISCILLA

I wish God-- the God you know-- lived here.

SCENE SIX: THE REVELATION

The same night. Total darkness in the library, except for perhaps a mystic glow off of Agatha.

A candle appears in a hand, and the hand belongs to Sister Benedict.

SISTER BENEDICT

Bless me, she looks exactly as I remember.

She sets down the candle and takes out a crucifix and holy water.

SISTER BENEDICT

(to Agatha)

I command you: speak to me.

AGATHA

Who are you I wonder who

SISTER BENEDICT

I am Sister Benedict. I am the headmistress of this school. In the name of God, you shall tell me what you are, and whence you came from, and to what purpose.

AGATHA

I am Agatha I am what remains I am stuck in a doorway in a window open it please I have no purpose I have nothing left only a name

Sister Benedict sighs.

SISTER BENEDICT

Then it truly is you, Agatha. I would have preferred a demon.

AGATHA

Who are you know me how do you know me sister

Sky and Priscilla appear at the door to the library. Sky bends to pick the lock. They put their hand on the door handle and feel it move.

SKY

It's unlocked. It's already unlocked.

PRISCILLA

Could they have forgotten to lock it tonight?

SKY

It feels fishy to me.

PRISCILLA

There are no lights on. Nobody is there. Maybe it's...simple providence.

Priscilla enters the library, and Sky, exasperated, follows.

SISTER BENEDICT

I will be candid with you, Agatha: I have no inkling what is to be done with you. But I will not have the girls exposed to your spirit.

AGATHA

Let me free please let me forget open the window

SISTER BENEDICT

I know you too well to have any hope in that. The only way to remove you from this place is to destroy you, and I will find a way.

Priscilla and Sky come into the light behind Sister Benedict and freeze. They duck into hiding.

AGATHA

I do not understand why sister who are you know me how no no no YOU

HELOISE (OFF)

Headmistress! Headmistress, I'm frightened!

AGATHA

I remember what happened was

Heloise appears in a memory, sobbing.

HELOISE

It...it was Agatha! Agatha Strand! She-- she found me as I was organizing sheet music in the choir room. Sister Mary Magdalene had left me alone, and Agatha came in, and....

AGATHA

I remember the light streaming in but no no no no

HELOISE

She said the most unseemly things to me, things I dare not repeat. Then she took my hands and pressed me against the chalkboard and...she forced me to kiss her.

AGATHA

I never I only it's not true it's not it's not it's not

HELOISE

She touched me...here. She wants me in a sinful way.

AGATHA

I thought you wanted

HELOISE

I know that I should have run, but I was petrified in fear.

AGATHA

I thought you loved--HELOISE, WHY?

Heloise disappears.

SISTER BENEDICT

It needed to be done. Something had to be done, Agatha.

AGATHA

Why why oh love why did you lied you lied

SISTER BENEDICT

We could not have remained as we were. I was not about to resign myself to the fate that awaited us. As you were unwilling to do what was rational, you had to be dealt with.

AGATHA

You lied you ruined me and I was already half dead when I went to the window.

SISTER BENEDICT

Don't act as though I pushed you from it. I did nothing of the sort. You made your choice, as I made mine.

Priscilla stands up. Benedict doesn't notice her.

AGATHA

You killed me with your lies you ruined what did I do I thought all I ever did wrong was love you

SISTER BENEDICT

All these years later, did you think that you could reappear and spoil everything I have made for myself? I will not allow it. You ought to have stayed in the ground.

AGATHA

If you want me to go tell me just tell me you were wrong you love me you're sorry I will have all I need I know then I'll go

SISTER BENEDICT

No. It has served me well.

PRISCILLA

She loved you. She loved you, and you killed her.

SISTER BENEDICT

Priscilla. I can quite imagine what brings you here in the middle of the night.

Sky comes out of hiding and takes Priscilla's hand.

SISTER BENEDICT

And the little demoniac. Will nothing keep you girls apart from the each other?

PRISCILLA

You knew what would happen if you told, if you put it all on her. I can't understand how you could hurt someone that way, drive her to death and then condemn her for it, and all because-- what, because you were afraid of loving her?

SISTER BENEDICT

I will not be judged by my own child.

She grabs Sky by the shirt and drags them deeper into the light. From her collection of sacramentals, she takes a chain, and binds their hands. Sky puts up a fight, but Sister Benedict is still strong.

SISTER BENEDICT

You were such a lovely child, Priscilla, so devoted and pure. I had such high hopes for you. But ever since this wolf has entered our fold you've become rotten. I should never have allowed her in.

SKY

No, you shouldn't've. You gonna send me home now, you old bat?

SISTER BENEDICT

No. I promised your parents I would save you from the evil inside you. Waiting for you to learn goodness from the other girls has not worked. We shall have to take more forceful measures.

Priscilla is shaking.

PRISCILLA

What are you going to do to Sky?

SKY

Calm down, P.J. I'll be just peachy.

PRISCILLA

What are you going to do?

SISTER BENEDICT

I am going to exorcise the demon from this school.

She leads Sky away kicking and screaming.

PRISCILLA

Don't touch her--him--Sky! Don't touch Sky!

She tries to follow, but she can't. The room is turning, her breath comes too fast. Priscilla drops into a faint.

SCENE SEVEN: A DIFFERENT PRESENT

We seem to be in the dormitory. Sister Domitia sits on her own bare bed. Priscilla opens her eyes.

PRISCILLA

And here I am with you again.

SISTER DOMITIA

You have got to do something about these fainting spells.

PRISCILLA

I was doing penance. I disrespected my mother.

SISTER DOMITIA

She's not your mother.

PRISCILLA

She's the closest thing I have. That's why it hurts so awfully. Has she really always been this way?

But I've got to get up. I've got to--golly, it hurts so much.

SISTER DOMITIA

Rest a while here. You never let yourself rest.

Sister Domitia comforts Priscilla.

PRISCILLA

This is so different from the last time I saw you.

SISTER DOMITIA

That's because it's all in your head.

PRISCILLA

Emily-- the real Emily-- I loved her.

SISTER DOMITIA

I know.

PRISCILLA

I never could hide it well, could I?
I wish you could have loved me.

SISTER DOMITIA

You'll find somebody who can love you someday.

PRISCILLA

Agatha--

SISTER DOMITIA

Agatha isn't really a person. She's a memory of a person, a shadow. You must love somebody flesh and bone.

PRISCILLA

But I'm...but I'm...Can I really have that?

SISTER DOMITIA

You will know love. Others', God's, your own.
You don't need to place all your love on an altar and burn it up. You don't need your own spirit cast out.
Only one thing I ask: that you would let me go.

PRISCILLA

I will, Emily. Domitia. Domitia. Domitia.

The scene fades away.

Priscilla wakes up in the library, just as
Scholastica enters.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Headmistress said I would find you here. Come, let's put you to bed.

PRISCILLA

Where did she go? Where is Sky?

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

You must not concern yourself with Tabitha anymore, Pri--

PRISCILLA

Sky. Not Tabitha, Sky.

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Priscilla-Jane, you are ill.

PRISCILLA

Yes, I am. But you must tell me what's happened to Sky. Headmistress/is going to do something terrible. Believe me, just this once!

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

/Headmistress is addressing the situation as she sees fit, which is well within her rights.

Agatha swoops into sight, bright, full of energy, more present than we've ever seen her.

AGATHA

The attic the attic doors are locked chains are tight biting and sister exorcist prepares

Agatha makes for the door, and Priscilla follows, but Sister Scholastica blocks the way. Priscilla goes for Scholastica's keys. Scholastica won't let her steal them.

PRISCILLA

You heard what she said--

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

What who said? Everyone at this school seems to have lost their heads.

PRISCILLA

Is Headmistress going to perform an exorcism, or is she not?/ Sky isn't possessed. What is she going to do when there is no spirit to drive out?

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

/That isn't for you to trouble yourself with. I cannot allow you to interfere in this.

AGATHA

When it does not work the chains will tighten on bones will break spirits when the spirit does not leave then the child's spirit will leave she will wait she will wait til breaking she will do anything til breaking

Agatha continues babbling under the following.

PRISCILLA

I thought only priests could perform exorcisms. Won't you all get in trouble if someone finds out about this?

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

Nobody will get in trouble if nobody knows a thing about it. I certainly don't. Whatever Headmistress decides to do, it will be for Tabitha's own good.

PRISCILLA

Sister, just once, can't you do something?

SISTER SCHOLASTICA

I vowed my obedience.

AGATHA

THE SPIRIT MUST NOT BREAK

Agatha rattles the library. She glows with fury. Even Sister Scholastica cannot ignore this, and she ducks away in shock, giving Priscilla an exit.

SCENE EIGHT: THE PRISONER

The attic. Sky has been forced into a kneeling position on the bed, their hands and feet bound with rope and tied to the frame. They look defeated.

A clicking sound begins by the door.

SKY

Back so soon, Headmistress? I've had a lot of time to think, and I've changed my mind: it *is* fair to wrestle an old lady. Want to set up a ring?

PRISCILLA (OFF)

It's me, Sky!

SKY

Well, hot dog! You were out cold. Are you trying to pick the lock? Start with the pick at the very back and tap until you find the pin that's tighter than the others. And you don't have to jab at it! It's gotta be nice and gentle.

(More clicking)

God, wish I could get my ear right up to the door and figure out what you're doing wrong. How much time've we got?

PRISCILLA (OFF)

I don't know. I thought Agatha was...where did Agatha go?

Lights up on Sister Benedict's office. Votive candles burn. Agatha lurks in the doorway, watching the headmistress unlock the bottom drawer of her desk and take out the false bottom.

Sister Benedict notices Agatha, but does not look at her.

SISTER BENEDICT

I thought you were confined to the library.

AGATHA

So did I but I wondered tested stepped forward and brought myself free found in my memory a power

Benedict cannot find the diary.

AGATHA

Why Heloise love did you not destroy the singed falling thing you look for

SISTER BENEDICT

I would not have mislaid so poisonous a thing. Perhaps I did destroy it sometime in the past decades, and I have simply forgotten about it.

AGATHA

But why keep it did you read love remember treasure it love

SISTER BENEDICT

Stop speaking of love. What passed between us cannot be called that.

AGATHA

Not anymore

SISTER BENEDICT

What I have planned for Tabitha, *that* is love. If I have to keep her locked there, parched and famished until this willfulness leaves her, I will. I will not let these girls destroy themselves.

In the attic, Priscilla picks the lock and tumbles into the room. She unties Sky's ropes.

SISTER BENEDICT

And I am no hypocrite. You cannot accuse me of that. There is no punishment I lay down that I would not gladly take upon myself.

AGATHA

Except for mine

Freed, Sky digs through the hiding places (in the floorboards, in drawers, behind furniture) where they have put their escape supplies. Priscilla removes the ropes from the bed and, if necessary, ties them into one long line.

SISTER BENEDICT

I am not responsible for what you chose. You escaped.

(She's still looking for the diary. It's getting to her.)

If you think I haven't paid for what I did, you are sorely mistaken.

AGATHA

What a payment what a payment what a knot you have lived in what a life was it worth it

SISTER BENEDICT

Yes.

Sky sorts everything into a bag. Priscilla opens the window, ties the rope, and drops one end down.

She sits waiting for Sky, watching them.

PRISCILLA

Are you ready?

SKY

Are you-- You're coming with me?

PRISCILLA

I spent most of my life in Saint Catherine's and not once did I meet God. If I'm going to find Him-- if I'm going to find all the things there are to find in this world, it will have to be outside.

SKY

It's spooky out there.

PRISCILLA

I know. I'm spooked. But I've got to do it.
Sky, where are we going?

SKY

I...I had kind of hoped I could find my way back to my parents.

PRISCILLA

The parents who sent you here in the first place?

SKY

It was a rotten idea, I know that! I just...sometimes you hope for impossible things.

PRISCILLA

Who could you be, there? Wherever we go, it has to be a place we can invent ourselves. And if such a place doesn't exist, we'll have to invent that, too.

Sky takes Priscilla's hands. Behind their heads,
the sun is rising.

SKY

I can do that wherever, long as I'm with you.

Benedict has started tearing apart her office
looking for the diary.

AGATHA

Still not sorry after everything after all the years

SISTER BENEDICT

How could I be? What would that make my life? Look at what I have made for myself, Agatha. Would I have any of this, if not for what I did to you? What do you want me to say: that I was wrong, that I should have accepted the lot of the leper, that I loved you when the thing you call love is repugnant, that I did us an injustice when in fact I gave half of us what we deserve? That I lied? I never lied. If I had lied, then all that followed after would have been a lie, this would all be a lie, and it is not! In God's Name, it is not!

In her hysterical gesturing, she knocks over a
votive candle, which catches on the papers
strewn around the room.

In the attic, Priscilla and Sky are having a silent
conversation. They grow closer, and silhouetted
by the rising sun, they kiss. Lights down on the
attic.

AGATHA

Do you know what martyr means

SISTER BENEDICT

Of course I know what the word “martyr” means. A martyr is one who dies for the sake of Christ.

AGATHA

Martyr from the Biblical Greek *martureo* a word meaning *to bear witness* how did that word come to mean death does not life bear witness

SISTER BENEDICT

Do not speak to me about martyrdom. Get out of this place. Free me of your haunting. Has my whole life not been enough? Leave me!

AGATHA

Those children those children they are living the way we could never imagine they are putting bones to rest they are living in newness that fills me with light that scrapes away the cobwebs it makes me feel it makes me feel it makes me feel

Agatha’s soul reaches peace, and with that, she vanishes.

Sister Benedict is left alone in her office, with the flames steadily growing higher. She does not stop them.

EPILOGUE: THE FUTURE

Inside of a freight train car. Sky and Priscilla lay side-by-side, Sky asleep and Priscilla awake.

The train creaks and bumps, and Sky flinches awake.

PRISCILLA

Nobody’s caught us.

SKY

(Sleepily)

How long to California?

PRISCILLA

A long time yet.

(She rummages in the bag)

When we do get there, the first thing we’ll look for is a repairman.

She takes out Sky's radio and sets it aside. It's worse for wear, but operable. Then, she fishes out an apple.

SKY

Get some sleep, P.J.

PRISCILLA

I will, I will.

She kisses Sky on the head. She looks at the apple in her hands...

PRISCILLA

Witness the work of God.

...and eats it.

END OF PLAY