

Father Mike

A comedy

By T J Edwards

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Characters (2M, 5W)

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|----------------------------|----|
| Agnes Francis | 56 |
| Mike Francis | 56 |
| Mrs. Alice Francis O'Dwyer | 25 |
| Angela Francis | 24 |
| Mikey Francis | 23 |
| Teresa Miller | 23 |
| Regina Francis | 21 |

Setting

The Francis family home in Paterson, New Jersey. The year is 1955.

SCENE ONE

SETTING: The Francis family home in Paterson, New Jersey.
The year is 1955. It is Saturday, about noon. At rise, MIKE and AGNES FRANCIS, mid-50s, sit and read their paper in a comfortable ritual.

AGNES. Bluejeans . . .

MIKE. Hm?

AGNES. Bluejeans. That's what it says here.

MIKE. What does it say there?

AGNES. Listen: "The newest trend among our youth is the bluejean. This scratchy canvas fabric is being worn by juveniles nationwide to encourage "dressing down"—that's in quotes—and replace the classic pleat-and-cuff. Look for them in a store near you soon." (*beat*) Can you imagine? The kind of thing worn by a hobo. That'll never catch on.

MIKE. Nope.

AGNES. You know what I'd do if our children came home in bluejeans? Put my foot down.

MIKE. First you'd have to lift it up. Your foot's always down.

AGNES. You joke. It's little things like this. Nobody's got respect anymore. Now it's fashion. Mercy.

MIKE. (*reads*) Hey, I wonder if Mikey'd like to go to Ebbets Field to see the Dodgers play. Be great if the Yankees and Bums played that World Series in New York again. Could be.

AGNES. Mikey doesn't like sports. You'd have a better chance getting him to the big St. Pat's Cathedral. Besides, it's a waste of money.

MIKE. Agnes, who earned that money?

AGNES. Who has to scrimp on that money? You could save half-a-dozen pagan babies for the price of those tickets. You should think of that instead of some whoop-de-doo afternoon with cussing and hot dogs and raspberries and belching.

MIKE. Well, it won't happen. Grandpa'd have to hold on a spell and that series'd be a good month away. Mikey won't be here that long. (*rising*) Now, where is that boy's bus? He's twenty minutes late.

AGNES. As if anything runs on time. You know what I'd do if I ran that transportation board?

MIKE. Put your foot down.

AGNES. Fire everybody. Make 'em walk. The way folks take these busses and trolleys, you'd think nobody had feet.

MIKE. That's called progress, Agnes. If it were up to you, you'd have banned the horse and buggy.

AGNES. What I've learned is that there's no such thing as convenience. Makes the world goes to Hades.

MIKE. Alright, alright, save it. The world's alright.

ANGELA, 24, the family darling, enters at the front door.

ANGELA. Hey there!

MIKE. Hello, lovely!

ANGELA. Mikey not here yet?

MIKE. Not yet, he's late.

ANGELA. Fiddlesticks. I picked this flower for him.

MIKE. That sure was nice.

AGNES. How was CCD?

ANGELA. Fine. I got Fifth Graders this year. The looks on their faces! You'd think they were dragged in manacles to sit in class for two hours to learn their catechism.

AGNES. Did those nuns give you a ruler?

ANGELA. For what?

AGNES. For when those children get out of line, for to give their knuckles a good hard crack.

ANGELA. Mama.

AGNES. They need it! If you don't teach children discipline now, you've lost them for the rest of their lives.

ANGELA. The point is to *teach* them. A lot of children do just as well with the lollipop as the cattle prod.

AGNES. The best way to straighten out a child is to bend them over.

ANGELA. No nun ever hit me.

MIKE. 'Cause you're the sweetest thing in the world.

ANGELA. Oh, I love you, daddy. Speaking of sweets, what smells so good?

MIKE. Alice is making a cake for Mikey.

ANGELA. Yum! Oh, here's the book Regina asked me to pick up at the library.

MIKE. Leave it. She's not up yet.

ANGELA. Not yet?

AGNES. One a.m. she came in! Mike, it's time to put your foot down.

MIKE. Once a week, a little fun. The kid works hard.

AGNES. Angela, you never stayed out like that, did you?

ANGELA. Leave me out of this. (*exiting up a staircase*)
I've got to change.

MIKE. Elmer coming for dinner?

ANGELA. Said he was. He sure wants to meet Mikey.

AGNES. Peek your head in on grandpa!

ANGELA. I will!

ANGELA is gone.

AGNES. Mike, I'm serious. You need to talk to your youngest. This has gone too far.

MIKE. What do you have against her?

AGNES. You spoil her. Here it is, past noon, your only son is making his first trip home in six months, and your precious baby is upstairs snoring.

MIKE. But what has she done *wrong*? The girl's got a little life in her. That makes you think she jigs with the devil.

AGNES. You don't think there's a Near Occasion of Sin? The next step is the sin itself when you're out till one a.m. I've seen it!

MIKE. Alright, alright. I'll have a talk with her. C'mon.

ALICE, 25, who's gone through a few rough years and wears it on her face, enters from the kitchen with a cake.

ALICE. Ta-da! Sound the trumpet! This one's a beaut!

MIKE. Lookee there. Now that's a cake fit for a prince.

ALICE. And *made* for a prince: Prince Michael the Second. Chocolate Cherry Cream.

MIKE. My favorite. Hey, lemme have a little piece before—

ALICE. Don't you dare! I'll cut your fingers off if I find the tiniest smudge of chocolate on your lips.

MIKE. I believe you would, too.

ALICE. I've got the sandwiches ready for lunch. And the percolator's set for a fresh pot.

AGNES. Did you put any Jell-o in that cake?

ALICE. Jell-o? No.

AGNES. You should put Jell-o in there. Make it creamy.

ALICE. Mama, you can put all the Jell-o you want in *your* cake. But in Mikey's favorite cake, there is no Jell-o.

AGNES. Be better with Jell-o.

MIKE. Lay off the gelatin. She gets a new cookbook with a hundred recipes for ground up horse-bone and thinks she's got to put it in everything cakes to corndogs.

AGNES. Corndogs. There's an idea.

ALICE. I thought I'd make an Irish meatloaf for dinner, one that Danny's mother taught me.

MIKE. There's no beer in it?

ALICE. No, potatoes.

MIKE. As long as there's no beer.

ALICE. They drink beer *with* their meatloaf.

MIKE. They drink beer with their beer. That's called a balanced diet for the Irish: a pint in each hand. (*phone rings*) I got it. Must be Mikey. (*phone*) "Hello? Oh. *You*. Now, look, I'm not gonna tell you again. If you want to work this out, we do it man-to-man, and that's all I'm gonna say." (*hangs up*)

ALICE. Who was it, daddy?

MIKE. Don't fret, Alice.

ALICE. Did he ask for me?

MIKE. Don't pay it a thought. We talked about this, right?

ALICE. Of course, daddy. Well. I better get to peeling those spuds.

AGNES. I invited Father Greg. There'll be eight tonight so I'll be in to help.

ALICE. Don't rush, mama. And if you . . . see me in the kitchen crying . . . it's only because I'm dicing onions.

ALICE rushes out in tears.

AGNES. Was it Danny?

MIKE. I could smell liquor on his breath right through the copper.

AGNES. Why can't she talk to him? He's her husband.

MIKE. Agnes, this is my roof and it'll be done my way. He's not coming over till he deals with me.

AGNES. I just wish you'd run it by Father Greg. There are rules between a husband and wife, things we don't know about.

MIKE. What don't know we know? We've been married 34 years. Besides, this isn't about the Church, it's about my family.

AGNES. I'm only saying, Mike.

MIKE. I don't want you saying, I want you hearing. Y'hear?

AGNES. Alright, Mike, alright, I hear. Mercy on Judas.

REGINA, 21, appears on the stairs. She is the youngest in the family: pretty, pert, fearless and fun.

REGINA. I heard the phone ring. For me?

AGNES. "Phone ring! For me!" The only thing to get her out of bed is a phone she hears through a door, around the corner, down the stairs. You could have an alarm on her pillow, clanging away, and she'd sleep right through.

MIKE. Aw, it was nothin', kiddo.

REGINA. I'm expecting a call. I got a date tonight.

AGNES. You miss Mikey's dinner, you're grounded.

REGINA. You can't ground me.

AGNES. Your father can. Mike?

REGINA. Don't be silly. Daddy wouldn't ground me. He's a pushover.

AGNES. A pushover!

MIKE. Agnes. (*to Regina*) Maybe we can make some time for a talk, hon. There're a few things I want to run past you.

REGINA. Well, just give me some notice. I'm getting my hair done, studying, and Mr. Simon has proofreading for me.

AGNES. Cleopatra! Maybe you should have thought of all that before the Sandman took the late shift.

REGINA. Saturday mornings are *made* to sleep in.

MIKE. Truce! Truce! Alright? (*beat*) Sometime today, kid, let's grab a few minutes.

REGINA. Sounds wonderful, daddy.

MIKE. Oh, Angela left you this book. (*reads*) "Evidence Analysis for the Uncommon Criminal Defense." Isn't that a little heavy? I never read this kind of stuff at your age.

REGINA. You didn't plan to be a big-time lawyer at my age. (*taking book, heading to stairs*) Thanks! Shout if the phone rings. His name is *Francois*.

MIKE. Will do.

AGNES. Don't forget September 7th is your name day!
Saint Regina! You better celebrate!

REGINA. (*exiting*) The Patron Saint against poverty.
That's something I'll *always* celebrate!

REGINA is gone.

AGNES. *Francois.*

MIKE. French Catholic. That's good.

AGNES. You embarrass me.

MIKE. How so?

AGNES. She runs all over you.

MIKE. She loves me.

AGNES. As long as she can run all over you. She called you
a pushover!

MIKE. She's the smartest chick in the roost and you're only
mad 'cause you can't keep up.

AGNES. She's smart alright: *smart-mouthed*. I told you
college would make her headstrong.

MIKE. You missed college. How'd you get so headstrong?

AGNES. My strength is rooted in my faith. Hers is rooted
in bobs, bobbysocks and nylons.

MIKE. Why are you so rough on her?

AGNES. Because the more you love a child, the more
you need to put the yoke on them. And don't make one of
your "yoke jokes." I got behind a cow in my day.

MIKE. "In my day." What are you gonna do when all the
children are gone? Not pick on me all the time?

AGNES. If I weren't the badger, how would this family have
turned out? Eight of our kids have been wonderful, but that
last one—*Queen Regina*—she'll cost us with Peter at the gate.

MIKE. The way I keep the peace around here, Pete'll fit
me with a jumbo wings in heaven.

AGNES. Don't be so sure. Mercy on Judas.

JUNIOR, 24, enters at the front door, with bags. He is a great
son—and a seminarian approaching ordination.

JUNIOR. I'm home! I'm home! Hello! Hello!

MIKE. Mikey! Hey! Son! Hello! Hey there!

AGNES. (*overlapping*) Mikey! Honey! Hi there! Oh!

JUNIOR. Ma! Pa! How are you? Wow, you look great!

AGNES. We couldn't be better since you're finally here. And look at you. You look . . . look *good*.

JUNIOR. Not so good as you two. You look younger.

AGNES. That's my baby.

MIKE. Come on in here. How was that trip? Your bus leave on time?

JUNIOR. (*stammering*) Oh. Uh. It was on time. I actually caught an earlier train into the city. A meeting came up at the last minute so it took a while to finish with that. Then I took the first bus out.

MIKE. A meeting in New York? For what?

JUNIOR. Uh . . .

ALICE enters from the kitchen.

ALICE. Mikey! Look at you! You are so handsome!

JUNIOR. Aw, shucks, sis, no. But you look, ah, you look *wonderful*, Alice.

ALICE. No, I don't. But you're the nicest brother for saying so. Hey, how about this cake I made you?

JUNIOR. Chocolate Cherry Cream?

ALICE. Better believe it.

JUNIOR. Oh, I love you.

ALICE. I've got sandwiches for lunch. Cake's for tonight.

MIKE. I'm not waiting that long for a piece!

ALICE. Daddy!

JUNIOR. Sounds great.

ANGELA comes down the stairs.

ANGELA. Mikey! I missed you so much! Brother!

JUNIOR. (*overlapping*) There's Angela. The angel! Could you look any nicer? Wow.

MIKE. She floated down from heaven, didn't she?

JUNIOR. Sure did. Hey, how're the wedding plans coming?

ANGELA. Um. They're coming.

JUNIOR. I'm going to meet him, right? Elmer, is it?

ANGELA. Right, Elmer. Like the glue. He'll be at dinner tonight.

JUNIOR. I've never met an Elmer before. I really look forward to that.

ANGELA. Elmer's very, ah—oh, what's the word?

MIKE. Cautious.

ANGELA. Yes, he's very cautious, Elmer.

JUNIOR. (*staying positive*) Well, the world needs more caution—and cautious people—these days.

MIKE. That's Elmer.

ANGELA. He'll say prayers to show you what he's learned.

JUNIOR. Great. Where's Regina?

ANGELA. I heard the bathwater running.

AGNES. In the tub. *The Queen*. Just as her brother arrives.

MIKE. How was she supposed to know?

AGNES. By the hands of the clock!

JUNIOR. Well. Uh, is grandpa upstairs?

ANGELA. In your old room.

JUNIOR. (*avoiding the family*) Hey, let me duck in, say hello, do a quick prayer. Then we'll catch up, okay?

ALL. Sounds great, Mikey. Perfect. Sure. Alright. Good.

ALICE. I'll bring the sandwiches out!

JUNIOR. Super. Be down in just a minute!

JUNIOR dashes up the stairs. The rest of the family watches, then speaks when he is out of sight.

AGNES. Well. What is going on *there*?

ALICE. I don't know. Wow.

ANGELA. What was that *look*? Worried?

AGNES. No, no, not worried. More like upset.

ANGELA. No, no, not upset.

AGNES. Well, it was something.

ALICE. Daddy, what was it?

AGNES. Yeah, come on, Mike, you saw it. What's the word to describe how Mikey looked?

MIKE. Well. *Conflicted*. If I could only pick one word. He didn't look bad but he sure looked conflicted.

ALL. Conflicted. Yeah. Yep. That's it. Sure. Boy.

The WOMEN nod and murmur as the lights fade.

SCENE TWO

Thirty minutes later. AT RISE: The happy family together with food and coffee.

ALICE. So how long then, Mikey? When'll you finish?

JUNIOR. Maybe just after Christmas.

REGINA. After Christmas? *What?*

JUNIOR. Seems there's work for some of us to do so there's talk they'll push a few of us through.

ANGELA. What great news! Then what'll we call you? Is it Father Mike? Or do you prefer Father Mikey?

REGINA. I like Mikey.

ALICE. Oh, he could pick any name, just like the nuns.

AGNES. You *will* consult us? Your sisters didn't even ask.

JUNIOR. Gertrude didn't ask?

AGNES. Nope, just wrote us. She could only send one letter a month from that convent, so before she took her vows, she wrote that we should start calling her Sister Ignatius Joseph.

REGINA. Sister Iggy Joe. Yep.

JUNIOR. What about Margaret?

AGNES. Same thing! Out of the clear blue our gorgeous little Maggie picked out Sister Daniel Thomas.

REGINA. Sister Danny Thomas. And she'd never even seen *Make Room for Daddy*.

ALICE. Mikey, how about Father Dwight? You'd get such respect if you were named after a president.

AGNES. Isn't that sacrilegious? I like Ike, but he isn't Catholic.

MIKE. Furthest thing from it: Presbyterian.

AGNES. Oh, no, Mike!

JUNIOR. Father Mike is fine with me. I like calling myself after my dear, old dad. If I'm half as reverent, they'll make me Pope in three years.

MIKE. Tell your mother that.

AGNES. Shush!

ALICE. Another egg-salad sandwich?

JUNIOR. I'm fine.

ALICE. Anyone?

MIKE. I'm a growing lad. But make mine Spam.

A bell is heard ringing from up the stairs.

AGNES. There's grandpa.

ANGELA. I'll check on him.

ALICE. Bring him a Velveeta on white. It's easy to gum.

ANGELA. Oh, he hates that. You know what he said about Wonder Bread: "It's a wonder they call it bread." I'll feed him an apple and say a rosary. Save some stories, Mikey!

JUNIOR. You're the sweetest!

ANGELA. No, you are!

ANGELA dashes up the stairs.

AGNES. How'd you think grandpa looked?

JUNIOR. Not good. What's the doctor say?

AGNES. He'll pass any day now.

JUNIOR. Has he had Last Rites?

AGNES. Won't let us. Says it's not time to go.

JUNIOR. If grandpa says it's not time, it's not time. He's a stubborn old thing.

REGINA. It's where mom got her better traits.

AGNES. Hey!

REGINA. It's a joke.

AGNES. Your jokes.

ALICE. Maybe he waited for you to come before letting go.

MIKE. Yeah, that wouldn't surprise me. When a man sees another man of his family, he gets some peace in that.

AGNES. So thank you for coming.

JUNIOR. Well, good thing they needed me in New York or I might not be here till *after* grandpa died.

MIKE. So what's all this about, in New York?

JUNIOR. Oh. Yeah. Well, you know, I had to ask permission to come, for grandpa's illness. And it's funny, but that's when I learned a lot of people have been reading my writing. We have classes at the seminary and I write papers, you know, and I'm pretty darn good.

MIKE. Don't tell us. A stringer here in town at seventeen. Best young writer Paterson ever seen.

JUNIOR. All because of you, dad. You helped me with everything I wrote.

MIKE. Aw, g'wan.

JUNIOR. Well. So some of my papers were sent from the seminary and read in New York, so that when I asked to come home for grandpa's illness, they told me to go to the big city first.

AGNES. What for?

JUNIOR. For . . . to meet the Archbishop.

AGNES. The Archbishop!

JUNIOR. There's a project they want me to work on. A book. It's already written but they like my style so much they want me to edit it.

ALICE. What's the book?

JUNIOR. (*gets it*) I got it right here. The manuscript. Here, uh, here's the title: *The Catholic Marriage Manual*.

MIKE. (*pause*) Huh?

AGNES. *You?* What do *you* know about marriage?

JUNIOR. Nothing. But I know a lot about writing. And the book's almost done. It just needs some touching up.

ALICE. Why can't the guy who wrote it touch it up?

JUNIOR. Um . . .

AGNES. Was it a priest?

JUNIOR. Well, yes.

ALICE. Will you be working with him?

JUNIOR. Um, no.

AGNES. Well, you should. It's only fair.

JUNIOR. I would, if he were around.

MIKE. Where is he?

JUNIOR. He's—. Um—.

MIKE. What is it? *What?* What're you trying to say, son?

JUNIOR. Okay. Whew. The priest who wrote this had to do all kinds of research on the subject of marriage. And for some reason—the Archbishop can't figure out why—as he was finishing the book, the priest ran off and got married.

ALICE. (*horrified*) What!

AGNES. (*mortified*) No!

REGINA. (*amazed*) To whom?

JUNIOR. Um . . .

MIKE. Who was it, Mikey? Come on.

JUNIOR. To the nun who was typing his manuscript.

AGNES. Mercy on Judas!

JUNIOR. So the Archbishop explained what a delicate situation this is. Can you imagine the scandal if that got out? He wants me to stay here 'til the book gets published and he doesn't want another priest working on it, because if another ran off he'd be in even deeper hot water. So I'm the perfect candidate. I'm not yet a priest, but once the book goes to print, I'll be ordained and they'll put my picture on the dust jacket as editor.

REGINA. That is a *huge* responsibility!

AGNES. So you'll be staying with us?

JUNIOR. If it's alright. I just need to shuttle into New York now and then for meetings.

AGNES. It's wonderful. I don't know how many indulgences you get for finishing an important book like that, but it's got to be hundreds of thousands of years.

REGINA. And if you need any help, you can count on me.

JUNIOR. I may, sis.

REGINA. Great. Hey, I need a quick smoke. Anybody—

AGNES. —Not in this house! You know grandpa chokes on smoke. You wait till he dies before you light up in here.

REGINA. I *know*. I'm going to the porch. Anybody else?

ALICE. I could use one. I'm beat.

AGNES. Because somebody worked this morning!

REGINA. I'm going to Mr. Simon's as soon as I finish this!

AGNES. Well, *walk*. Save that bus fare for a pagan baby.

REGINA. I'll *run*. Be back by six. And if *Francois* calls, tell him I'll be at the same place tonight.

AGNES. Mercy on Judas.

JUNIOR. See you, Gina.

REGINA. Love you, Mikey.

ALICE. Be right back. Don't let daddy near that cake!

MIKE. Fat chance! Ha!

REGINA and ALICE exit out the front door.

AGNES. Well?

JUNIOR. What?

AGNES. Did you see her?

JUNIOR. Uh, who?

AGNES. Stop it. *Alice*. What do you think?

JUNIOR. Hm. How long has she been here?

AGNES. Two weeks. Danny calls—four, five times a day—crying like a baby. Shameful.

MIKE. The Irish Drunk: you can mimeograph them.

AGNES. Does the Church say she has to go back to him?

JUNIOR. I'm not an expert.

AGNES. Well you better learn! What's that book say?

JUNIOR. Well, I've only skimmed it. But I know it's tricky because she is his spouse.

MIKE. He pushed her around, son. This isn't India, we don't burn our wives here. She's only going back if he comes to me on his hands and knees.

JUNIOR. Dad, I'm as troubled about this as you are. But Danny has rights. It says here the Church's whole purpose in marriage is bringing children into the world.

MIKE. Don't I know that? Didn't we do our job bringing in nine? And what'd we get for it? Not one grandkid yet.

JUNIOR. But you're blessed. You have two daughters who are nuns and I'll—

AGNES. Be a priest. Oh, we're delighted by that. But this womb did its heavenly duty and now we'd like one of ours to do theirs. I can't help feeling that when you raise nine children who don't have children you've committed some kind of a sin. And I don't mean *venial*.

MIKE. Yeah, I wouldn't mind carrying on the Francis family name. I half wish you'd forget about the priesthood and find some nice girl and settle down.

AGNES. Not that! Nothing's more blest than a son who hears The Calling. I'm the proudest mother in all St. Paul's.

ALICE enters at the front door with TERESA MILLER, 24. She is literally the girl next door—and an adorable beauty.

ALICE. Hey, all! Look who's here! Teresa just pulled up!

MIKE. Teresa! Whoa! Hey there! Hello!

AGNES. (*overlapping*) Hello, Teresa. Hi, dear!

TERESA. Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Francis.

AGNES. My, you look just wonderful.

TERESA. You are so kind.

MIKE. Are you in town?

TERESA. For the weekend. You know, my dad.

ALICE. I caught her driving up and pulled her over. Thought she might like to say hello to our special guest.

JUNIOR. (*stepping forward*) Teresa. Hello.
TERESA. Mikey. Alice didn't tell me you were here.
ALICE. My surprise.
TERESA. Did you graduate? I mean, get ordained?
JUNIOR. Not yet. They gave me sick leave for grandpa.
TERESA. Oh. How's he doing?
JUNIOR. Not very well.
TERESA. I'll say a prayer.
JUNIOR. Thanks.
MIKE. How's your pop?
TERESA. Coming along.
JUNIOR. Is he sick?
TERESA. I guess you didn't hear. Heart troubles. It was dicey for a while but he's on the mend. I drive in from New York to spend the weekends.
AGNES. Teresa, how about dinner with us? Father Greg's coming. Meatloaf.
TERESA. I can't, thanks so much. They need me at home.
MIKE. Of course.
TERESA. But maybe I'll come over later? If that's okay?
ALICE. I'll save some cake.
MIKE. Better not come late!
TERESA. Lovely. Well, nice to see you all. You too, Mikey.
JUNIOR. Uh, maybe we'll see you tonight?
TERESA. Sure. Bye.

TERESA leaves.

MIKE. Isn't she the sweetest thing in the world?
AGNES. If we had a tenth child, I'd want one just like that.
ALICE. She is so pretty. Don't you think, Mikey?
JUNIOR. Hm? Oh. Yeah. Uh, wasn't she . . . ?
AGNES. What?
JUNIOR. Engaged? Last Spring?
MIKE. Yeah, but she caught her fiancé—this big Wall Street bum—fooling around behind her back. So Teresa broke it off.
AGNES. That's what happens if you don't marry a Catholic. And you can put that in your book.
JUNIOR. Right. My book. Well. Why don't we all have some more coffee and talk about it? What say?

They all chime-in and move to their cups as the lights fade.

SCENE THREE

Later that night. AT RISE: JUNIOR and TERESA in the drawing room. They handle coffee cups and cake plates.

JUNIOR. There's one slice left?

TERESA. No, go ahead. Alice did wonderfully, but there must be a thousand calories in every bite.

JUNIOR. You're not worried about that?

TERESA. I have to. You should see the dresses next year.

JUNIOR. I *should* see the dresses next year. All the dresses I see are worn by men. (*beat*) That's a joke. (*they laugh*) So. So what *are* next year's dresses like?

TERESA. Well, you have to have nearly a twenty-inch waist.

JUNIOR. Twenty inches!

TERESA. I don't know why, but we can't seem to get away from the hourglass look. Even Coco Chanel, and if anyone should be breaking new ground, you'd think it'd be she. There are lots of soft shoulders, with crinolines and hoop skirts, pinched waists and spiked heels. It's all wonderful, but it demands incredible discipline when offered a Chocolate Cherry Cream.

JUNIOR. There's nobody with more discipline.

TERESA. One person: you.

JUNIOR. *Stop*. So who decides this fashion? Your editors?

TERESA. No, we only report on it. Most of the power is with those finicky Parisians. We need to find a fresh, new American designer to bring in the next wave of fashion. At least, that's what I think.

JUNIOR. Then it must be gospel, because I never known you once to be wrong.

TERESA. Mikey! (*beat*) So. Have that cake! Isn't this a sort of vacation for you? Oh, I don't mean it's not sad.

JUNIOR. Oh, I know what you mean. No, it's great. There's no place I'd rather be. And not because the food at the seminary is 90% lard. Did I fill out?

TERESA. No! (*laughs*)

JUNIOR. I never get exercise, except deep knee bends—*genuflecting*. That's why I hope to go to a parish with a large school. I love running around, playing with kids.

TERESA. You'd be—no, *are—will be* a great father. *Priest*.

JUNIOR. (*pause*) More coffee?

TERESA. Half cup.

JUNIOR. I can't drink it this late.

TERESA. Oh, this is early. When we're on deadline, I'm up till dawn. Do you remember how crazy it was when we put together the school yearbook?

JUNIOR. Do I? We practically slept in Sister Bart's office.

TERESA. That's what it's like every month. The copy comes in, then the pictures. We have to rework it in only days. It's like a crazy beehive, with coffee and bagels and cigarettes. But then it's over and you hold the magazine in your hand and you're so proud: you're with *Vogue*. It's art and beauty and trying to make the women of this world the glorious creatures God meant us to be.

JUNIOR. You are pretty glorious creatures.

TERESA. I couldn't be happier than when I'm at the magazine. You must feel the same at the seminary.

JUNIOR. Yeah. I know just what you mean.

ANGELA enters at the front door.

ANGELA. Hello!

TERESA. Hello, Angie.

JUNIOR. How was the walk?

ANGELA. Uh, fine. Mom and dad back yet?

JUNIOR. Not yet.

ANGELA. Have a good talk?

TERESA. Oh, yes, yes.

JUNIOR. Elmer didn't want to come in?

ANGELA. He, um, was tired.

JUNIOR. He's quite a fellow. He has a wonderfully, uh . . .

ANGELA. Cautious.

JUNIOR. Cautious quality about him.

ANGELA. How were his prayers?

JUNIOR. Word perfect.

ANGELA. He works hard. Maybe too hard. Oh, I don't mean to be critical.

JUNIOR. Not at all. And in six weeks he'll be baptized and be one of us.

ANGELA. Then we'll marry and he'll *really* be one of us.

TERESA. He must love you so, to put in all that work.

ANGELA. I think he does, yes. (*beat*) Has grandpa rung?
JUNIOR. Not since dinner.
ANGELA. Well. I'm doing a *novena* over him and I'm at day five. Four to go. I'd better get up there. Goodnight.
TERESA. Goodnight, Angela.
JUNIOR. Sleep well, sis. Love you.
ANGELA. Love you, too. Don't let the bedbugs bite!

ANGELA is gone.

TERESA. I've never met anybody so kind.
JUNIOR. Yes. But something's not right.
TERESA. What?
JUNIOR. There's something about Angela. If souls could be measured, she'd have the biggest soul in the whole world. But it's like it's shrinking now. I guess you'd have to be born ten months apart to feel it. We're so close, it's like we're twins.
TERESA. You are. Irish Twins.
JUNIOR. What's that?
TERESA. An expression. When siblings are born less than a year apart, they're called Irish Twins.
JUNIOR. Don't tell my dad that. According to pop, the Irish world isn't round or flat. It's crooked, all of it.
TERESA. Glad *I'm* not Irish, then.
JUNIOR. Me, too.

AGNES, ALICE and MIKE enter and all shout out greetings.

MIKE. We're home! Hello! Hello!
JUNIOR. Hello. How was the movie?
AGNES. Aw, so-so.
ALICE. Kind of scary. I liked it.
MIKE. I was hoping for a Western with a title like, "Bad Day at Black Rock." It was too modern. And that Spencer Tracy sure is getting fat.
ALICE. But what an actor.
AGNES. I don't see what everybody sees in Spencer Tracy. He's a big man with a big face. There's lots of men like that in New Jersey. And most of the time he doesn't even seem to be acting. What kind of acting is that?

ALICE. Father Greg likes him because he's Catholic.

MIKE. Father Greg'd make Spencer Tracy Pope, if he could.

AGNES. Every time a Spencer Tracy movie comes out, we've got to treat. Do you know how many pagan babies we could have saved with that? It's a waste of money.

MIKE. It's not a *waste* of money, Agnes, it's a *use* of money. You spend so others can live. That's what's good about poor people. They spend and others earn a living. If this country ever goes to the devil, you can bet it's because the rich got so much of everything, they won't give it up.

AGNES. You seem glad we're not rich.

MIKE. But we are. You know our retirement plan is eternal. Now let's go to bed.

AGNES. Spencer Tracy. Mercy on Judas.

ALICE. Mikey, anybody call?

JUNIOR. Uh, yes, Alice.

ALICE. Was he . . . ? Crying . . . ?

JUNIOR. Yes, Alice.

ALICE runs up the stairs in tears.

MIKE. Idiot Irish bums. They won't eat meat on a Friday but they'll wake up to whiskey before breakfast.

AGNES. Mike! Please!

MIKE. Aw, sorry.

AGNES. Is Regina back?

JUNIOR. Not yet.

MIKE. The kid has till midnight. Now giddy-up, old lady.

AGNES. You! (*to Mikey*) Nine o'clock Mass. And say a prayer for those babies in Limbo.

TERESA. Goodnight, Mr. and Mrs. Francis.

BOTH. Goodnight, dear.

AGNES. (*moving up the stairs*) Did you smell liquor on Father Greg's breath? I swear he's a tippler.

MIKE. Shush, shush.

AGNES and MIKE are gone.

TERESA. Well. Better get back to the folks. Maybe I'll see you at Mass?

JUNIOR. Sure. Hey, thanks for coming.

TERESA. Better return the favor.

JUNIOR. Promise. Goodnight, Teresa.

TERESA. Goodnight, Mikey. Nice to see you back home.

JUNIOR. Uh, likewise. Goodnight.

TERESA exits. JUNIOR sighs, takes out a pencil, retrieves his manuscript, opens to a page and reads aloud.

JUNIOR. “Love, as usually thought of today, consists of a sensual attraction between a husband and wife. But when the grace of God enters, a man and woman become partners in married sanctity.”

JUNIOR pauses, gets on his knees, and crosses himself.

JUNIOR. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Holy Mary Mother of God. Help me, please. Because things aren't working out quite the way I thought. Is it alright for me to leave the seminary? Because there is nothing that would so break my mother and father's heart. And why have you brought Teresa back into my life? You know how much I loved her . . .

REGINA creeps in the front door. She notices JUNIOR kneeling and speaks in hushed tones.

REGINA. Oh, Mikey.

JUNIOR. Gina. (*rising*)

REGINA. You're saying prayers. I'll just—

JUNIOR. No. It was nothing. I can always pray. Always do.

REGINA. Mom and dad back?

JUNIOR. A few minutes ago.

REGINA. Then *sshhh*. I don't want her to spoil my mood.

JUNIOR. How was your dance?

REGINA. Oh, *heavenly*. For two hours I swear I went straight up to heaven. Zooom!

JUNIOR. It seems you really like this, uh, *Francois* fellow.

REGINA. *Like?* (*laughs*) Mikey, what's it say in that book of yours about love? Because nothing ever made me feel this good before.

JUNIOR. Where did you go?

REGINA. *Sh. Sh. Sh.* I'll tell you but it has to be a secret, alright? Brother and sister secret?

JUNIOR. Ah, alright.

REGINA. To the hop. But that was heaven. We dance, you know. And he rocks me, around the clock. "Da, da, da, 'til the broad daylight . . ." He puts his arms around me and I don't know where I am. And he asked me tonight. Frankie actually asked me.

JUNIOR. Frankie? I thought you were with *Francois*.

REGINA. Oh. *Francois* is French for Frankie. Or Francis. Hey, wouldn't it be funny if I married a *Francis*? Then if the laws changed so he could take my last name, we could call him Francis Francis. Ha! But that'll never happen, because I am definitely taking his last name. I am going to be an O'Malley. Regina Mary Monica O'Malley. Oh, there's poetry in that!

JUNIOR. Wait. You mean Frankie O'Malley?

REGINA. Yes! Mrs. Frankie O'Malley.

JUNIOR. *Little* Frankie O'Malley?

REGINA. Oh, he's not that little anymore. He grew.

JUNIOR. Frankie O'Malley whose pop owns that tavern?

REGINA. He's not like his pop. He hardly drinks. But can he dance! So I have confession. You're my confessor, right? You can keep a secret?

JUNIOR. I'm not—

REGINA. Mikey, he asked me. To elope. *Frankie*. Doesn't that sound romantic?

JUNIOR. But . . . but I thought you wanted to be a lawyer, like dad.

REGINA. I do. But not like daddy. All his clients are poor. I want to be an *important* lawyer.

JUNIOR. But don't you think—

REGINA. Oh, *please*, Mikey, *please* don't spoil my happiness. I finally feel good. And we know what mom and dad would say.

JUNIOR. We sure do.

REGINA. They live in a different time. That darn war's been over ten years, but to them you'd think it ended yesterday. Or that we're in the middle of another depression. They don't see that this is a new age, it requires new thinking. We have that, you and I.

JUNIOR. But mom and dad ought to know about this.
REGINA. Mikey, I'm twenty-one. Am I or am I not an adult?
JUNIOR. Uh, you are.
REGINA. And is or isn't Frankie Catholic?
JUNIOR. He . . . is.
REGINA. So in the Church's eyes, wouldn't you, a marriage expert, consider our bonds legal?
JUNIOR. I—. Guess.
REGINA. That's all I needed to know. (*kisses him*) I am going up to my heavenly rest. I've got dreaming to do, of Frankie, Frankie, Frankie! Come on up.
JUNIOR. I will. After I . . . look at my book a bit.
REGINA. (*moving to stairs*) Alright. But get some sleep. Mama's a hawk. We have to be out the door by 8:45.
JUNIOR. Right. G'night, sis. And . . . congrats.
REGINA. Oh, there is nothing like being in love. How I wish you knew. But I guess you *are* in love, in a way. With Jesus? Your own kind of marriage? Goodnight, my darling brother. And flights of angels guide thee to thy rest.
JUNIOR. Goodnight, sis. G'night.

REGINA exits upstairs. MIKEY gets on his knees. Lights fade.

SCENE FOUR

One month later. AT RISE: ANGELA is arranging settings for a buffet as AGNES comes down the steps.

ANGELA. So Mama, how's grandpa? Any better today?
AGNES. This has me out-and-out confounded. I don't know who's more surprised he's still alive, me or him. I swear he looks even better!
ANGELA. It's because of Mikey. Since he came home last month, his praying with grandpa's done wonders.
AGNES. It's also Alice's cooking and your care. I only wish Regina would get in on the act.
ANGELA. She has a lot going on.

AGNES. The only thing she has going on is fiddle-faddle. I'll tell you this: she'll never care for us like we do grandpa. She'll send us off to one of those cold, bare hospitals to die, with tubes and hoses and nurses who smell like Lucky Strikes. There's a natural way to live and a natural way to die. You live with God in your heart and die with your family at home. That's as old as Moses. But Regina's too modern for that! (*beat*) Angela, you'll see we die here, won't you?

ANGELA. If that's what you want, mama.

AGNES. Thank you. (*pause*) I don't think a buffet's a good idea. Juggling plates and silverware, it gives you gas.

ANGELA. Daddy wants to watch TV. It's the third game of the World Series and you won't let him go.

AGNES. I said he could go.

ANGELA. After all the tickets were sold out.

AGNES. Well, don't blame me because a lot of fools want to watch men run around a square and stamp their foot on a dirty pillow and cuss. That's not a game. It's what toddlers do on a playground.

ANGELA. It makes him happy.

AGNES. Show me in the Bible where it says: "Thou Shalt Be Happy." Nuh-uh.

ANGELA. Well, we're celebrating his name day: Michael the Archangel. We should do whatever he wants.

AGNES. I guess. It's a special day.

ANGELA. Think the eggs are done?

AGNES. I suspect they need another minute.

REGINA shows up on the stairs.

REGINA. Hello, all!

AGNES. Well! Look who finally decide to lift her lids.

REGINA. I was editing Mikey's book. Listen to this part on women: "The wife, all too often being human, *resists obedience.*" Us! Isn't that hilarious?

AGNES. No. And when *you* read it, it's sacrilegious. Did the Archbishop appoint you for that?

REGINA. No, the person appointed by the Archbishop did.

AGNES. Shameful. (*beat*) What are those? *Bluejeans*!?

REGINA. Don't they look great?

AGNES. On a train conductor.

REGINA. They're stylish.
AGNES. Stylish!? Angela, aren't those awful?
ANGELA. Leave me out of this.
REGINA. Mama, if you had your way you'd cloak us all in habits and bind us in cinctures.
AGNES. You're right, I would.
REGINA. (*sniffs*) What smells so funny? Eggs?
ANGELA. Mama wants egg salad.
REGINA. Again?
AGNES. It's easy to serve at a buffet. With Jello-o.
REGINA. So we have to eat eggs? Eggs!
AGNES. What do you have against eggs?
REGINA. Do you know how many eggs I ate growing up? Every morning, before school, we attended seven o'clock mass. And what was in our lunch pail for breakfast after that? Two hard-boiled eggs, which the nuns let us eat during first lesson. Two eggs a day, five days a week, is ten eggs weekly. So we each ate 400 eggs per year in class. Now, we all went to St Paul's for twelve years, so each of us ate 4,800 eggs in school. If you add the scrambled eggs we ate on Sundays, that comes to 5,000 eggs per child growing up. Times nine kids is 45,000 eggs. Then add what you and daddy ate and this family has devoured over 50,000 eggs in our lifetime. I'll tell you this: you are no friend of the chicken.
AGNES. They're good for you.
REGINA. No eggs for me. And frankly, I've had it with Jell-o.
AGNES. You can criticize, but can you cook? Angela, remember that time Regina made that tuna casserole? I thought Pygmies would show up at the door any minute to dip their spears in it.
ANGELA. (*laughing*) Mama.
REGINA. That was mean.
AGNES. All you understand is mean.
REGINA. You think I want to spend my life stirring a pot at the stove?
AGNES. You stir a pot of trouble around here, plenty.
REGINA. I'm going to work for a living, like daddy.
AGNES. Do that and you'll never get a husband. Who'd want to marry you?
REGINA. I've already got a husband, so—

AGNES. (*pause*) What? *What* did you just say?
REGINA. Nothing. I've got to get back to the editing.
AGNES. You stay here, young lady! You heard her, didn't you, Angela?
ANGELA. Yes, mother.
AGNES. What is this about? Don't you lie to me!
REGINA. I—. (*beat*) I'm not talking about it with you.
AGNES. Fine. Then you'll talk with your father when he gets home. You're grounded.
REGINA. You can't—
AGNES. You are grounded! You hear me!
REGINA. (*beat*) I'll talk about it with daddy.

REGINA runs up the stairs.

AGNES. You heard her, didn't you? A husband.
ANGELA. That's what she said.
AGNES. Devil has the ear of that child. So help me I'll cut that ear right off! Leave me alone in the kitchen. I'm so worked up, I need to say a rosary to St. Alnoth for patience.

AGNES exits to the kitchen. JUNIOR enters at the front door.

JUNIOR. Hello!
ANGELA. Mikey, you're early.
JUNIOR. Oh. Um. Yeah. I met Teresa. She was driving back out here to see her parents, so she gave me a lift.
ANGELA. That's so nice. She's given you a lift back every weekend for the last month.
JUNIOR. Uh, yeah.
ANGELA. How are things with her?
JUNIOR. Her dad had a relapse.
ANGELA. No. I'll say a prayer.
JUNIOR. Thanks. I asked her to come over this afternoon, since we're celebrating my name day. Hey, Elmer coming?
ANGELA. Well. Um.
JUNIOR. Angie? Are you alright?
ANGELA. Mikey, do you have a minute? I never seem to be able to get you alone.
JUNIOR. Of course. Come sit. What is it?
ANGELA. Well. Elmer's baptism is in two weeks.

JUNIOR. Yes, and we'll all be there.

ANGELA. I don't know if we'll *all* be there.

JUNIOR. What's that mean, sis?

ANGELA. Mikey, can I ask you something, as a marriage expert? I've been praying and praying, but I can't get any guidance. Usually a voice tells me what to do, like when it told me to marry Elmer.

JUNIOR. A voice told you to marry Elmer?

ANGELA. A rather low voice, yes.

JUNIOR. Hm. What happened?

ANGELA. Well, you weren't here when Elmer asked me to marry him. We met at the post office, you know. And I guess I was so nice to him that he did something he'd never done before: asked a woman for a walk. *Me*. And it was alright. Then for the next two days Elmer showed up after I finished teaching to walk me home. Then on the third day, out of the blue, Elmer proposed to me, saying that if I married him, he'd convert. What was I to do? I went straight to church and kneeled before the Virgin and asked for guidance, which is when a voice—rather low—whispered: "Marry Elmer." It said that because Elmer is Lutheran, he'd go to hell, but that I could save his soul. I was overjoyed! What can be better than saving a soul? I was so happy! (*beat*) But now that Elmer's soul is almost saved, I'm *not* happy. He's so *cautious*. And I've lit candles and prayed but the voice won't come back. Mikey, do I risk my soul if I don't marry Elmer? I'll do any penance to get out of it. Tell me, tell me, *please*.

JUNIOR. Oh, boy, sis.

MIKE FRANCIS enters at the front door carrying a grocery bag.

MIKE. Hello! Hello! Half-hour till game time. My gut tells me the Dodgers can pull this out. They may be down two games, but '55 sure feels like their year to me. (*seeing Junior*) Hey, you're back early.

JUNIOR. Teresa drove me out.

MIKE. You're making up for lost years not seeing her.

JUNIOR. I guess her dad took a turn for the worse.

MIKE. No. I'm going to have to visit ol' Bert.

A bell is heard ringing upstairs.

ANGELA. There's grandpa. I'll get it.
JUNIOR. Thanks, Ange.
ANGELA. We'll talk more later, Mikey. Down soon!

ANGELA runs up the stairs.

MIKE. The old boy just hangs on. Tough as bricks. Maybe I should have forgot law and been a stonemason like him. What were you and Angela talking about?

JUNIOR. Oh, girl stuff.

MIKE. Hey, speaking of girl stuff, did you—?

JUNIOR. —I got an hour with their chief priest today.

MIKE. And what's he say?

JUNIOR. Well, Alice has to appear before the Church's Matrimonial Court. (*reaches for papers*)

MIKE. Then she *can* get a divorce.

JUNIOR. An annulment. And this isn't easy, dad. She has to agree to it.

MIKE. How can she *not*? You can't call being tied to that Irish stewhound a marriage.

JUNIOR. Okay, here's what she has to do: she has to claim that the marriage never existed, because once a Catholic marriage *does* exist, it's on for all eternity. That means that one spouse has to claim that, before the marriage even started, they had doubts about it—because if you ever begin a marriage with doubts, you weren't truly committed, so you were never married in the first place.

MIKE. We have that!

JUNIOR. Dad, did Alice truly have that in her heart?

MIKE. You think she didn't have even a speck of doubt? I'll find that if it's the last thing I do.

AGNES enters from the kitchen.

AGNES. There you are, finally.

MIKE. There was a line at the store. Here's the eggs.

AGNES. Give me those.

MIKE. Look what else I got. A TV Dinner.

AGNES. What's that?

MIKE. It's new. A dinner to eat while watching TV. Steak.

AGNES. That's steak?

MIKE. So you never dirty a plate.

AGNES. How much was it? Twenty-nine cents! I can get five pounds of potatoes for twenty-nine cents! Who do you think we are, Rockefellers?

MIKE. Live a little, it's my name day.

AGNES. I don't have time to argue. I want you to call your daughter down. *Regina*. Angela, too. Call them.

MIKE. Why?

AGNES. Just call them. And see what she's wearing!

MIKE. Alright. Put it in reverse, lady. (*at stairs*) Regina! Angela! Will you come down? (*to Agnes*) What'd they do?

AGNES. Not they, *she*. Regina says she has a husband.

MIKE. *What?*

AGNES. Just ask her.

MIKE. She was ribbing you. Right, Mikey?

JUNIOR. Hope so. Ha, ha, ha.

REGINA and ANGELA come down the stairs.

AGNES. Angela, did Regina say she has a husband? And did she say she'd talk to your father about it when he got home?

ANGELA. Yes, mother.

AGNES. Regina. Here's your father. *Talk*. In bluejeans!

REGINA. I can't with you in the room.

AGNES. Oh! You're kicking me out of my own house?

REGINA. The room. If you want me to talk.

AGNES. I'm not leaving.

MIKE. Agnes, please go to the kitchen.

AGNES. What?

MIKE. As your husband, I ask you, in Biblical propriety, to please go in there and stay till I call.

AGNES. Well! As a good Catholic wife, I'll obey. But for once in your life, Mike, put your foot down. "Regina." You named her that. If I'd known she'd spend her life acting like a queen, I'd have called her Agatha!

MIKE. Don't forget your three-dozen eggs.

AGNES. (*taking them*) Hrumph!

ANGELA. I'll be with grandpa.

MIKE. Thanks, honey.

AGNES goes to the kitchen and ANGELA goes upstairs.

JUNIOR. Want me to leave?

MIKE. No, Mikey, stay. (*beat*) Kids wearing those now?

REGINA. That's the fashion, daddy.

MIKE. Beats the bustle. So, kiddo, what's this about?

REGINA. Daddy, I have never lied to you, so I have a confession to make.

MIKE. Terrific. You know you can always talk to your dear, old pop. Sit down. (*she does*) Do you have a husband?

REGINA. No.

MIKE. I said that. Didn't I, Mikey? It was a joke, right?

REGINA. Daddy, you know how wonderful I think you are. You're so esteemed in town because you're good and kind and do favors and help the poor and are nice.

MIKE. Cut the snow job. What is it?

REGINA. Daddy, I'm engaged. Secretly.

MIKE. (*beat*) Well, why didn't you say so! You know the thing we want most in the world is a grandchild! That's wonderful news. So who's the lucky fella? Someone said they saw you with that nice Harrison kid.

REGINA. (*pause*) Daddy. Frank. O'Malley.

MIKE. Who?

REGINA. Frank—

MIKE. —Little Frankie O'Malley? The drunk's kid?

REGINA. He's not a drunk. He just owns a tavern.

MIKE. So he makes people *into* drunks.

REGINA. Don't hold that against his son.

MIKE. Can I hold it against him that he's a snot-nosed little runt who once lived in a juvenile home?

REGINA. He's not like that now. And he got taller.

MIKE. I have one word for you: *no*. If you think I'll let another swill-faced Mick ruin another daughter's life—

REGINA. But he's Catholic! And he loves me!

MIKE. So do I, which means you're not leaving this house. Your mom was right. I gave you too much rope—because you were my special one. And what'd I get for it?

REGINA. But, but, he—

MIKE. No *buts*. I'm not letting you make this mistake. If you marry him, I promise you'll never hear from me again.

REGINA. —Daddy, you can't—!

MIKE. And you know nobody keeps a promise like me.
Now go to your room!

REGINA. Daddy, I love you!

MIKE. Then it's time to start acting like it.

REGINA. Daddy! Daddy! No! No!

MIKE. (*overlapping*) Go! Go! Go! Now! Now!

REGINA. Oh, daddy, daddy, daddy!

REGINA runs up the stairs in tears. A silence.

MIKE. Mikey, the Church can't approve of these sneaky marriages?

JUNIOR. I'm not sure that it—

MIKE. Well, you gotta *be* sure. You are literally writing the book for the Catholic Church. Billions of marriages are in your hands, maybe the future of the whole human race, if we can get them all to convert.

AGNES. (*enters*) Can I come out? I heard her run upstairs.

MIKE. She's not married.

AGNES. No?

MIKE. But she was *planning* to marry.

AGNES. Who?

MIKE. That pip-squeak O'Malley.

AGNES. Fergus O'Malley's son? What was she thinking?

MIKE. Whatever it is, she's done thinking it under this roof. She's grounded.

AGNES. Feels good, doesn't it? Putting that (*stomp*) down.

JUNIOR. Mom, dad, look, I feel terrible. This has made me realize there's something I also have to say.

MIKE. What is it, son?

AGNES. Mikey, we don't ever want you feeling terrible.

MIKE. (*doorbell rings*) Let me get it. Then we'll talk.

MIKE goes to the door and lets in TERESA.

MIKE. Teresa, hello! Good to see you. Come on in.

TERESA. Hello, Mr. Francis and Mrs. Francis.

MIKE. Mikey said your pop had a relapse. Tell Bert I'll be over to show him those new fishing lures. That'll pick him up.

TERESA. He'd like that, thanks. I know I'm early but I figured I'd better get a visit in while Dad is sleeping.

MIKE. We'll take you anytime, missy. But you better like the Dodgers in the World Series. Game starts in twenty minutes.

TERESA. Am I allowed in if I let out a root for Mantle and Berra and the rest of the Yanks?

MIKE. She even knows baseball! Lord, she's swell!

AGNES. I better get to the egg salad. Teresa, you like eggs, I hope? You didn't get too many growing up?

TERESA. I adore eggs.

AGNES. This is a good child.

MIKE. Hey, put in this TV dinner for me.

AGNES. That's all you need: some fancy twenty-nine cent dinner. If what you want is convenience, it's time to learn that the cost of your convenience is inconvenience to others. You know where the aprons are!

AGNES exits to the kitchen.

MIKE. Put it in your book, son, that there is no greater love than that for a strong woman of faith. Oh, hey, what did you want to talk to me about?

JUNIOR. Uh, it can wait.

MIKE. Sure, we'll jaw later. (*on an exit*) Hey, Teresa, if we get Jackie Robinson whirlin' round that base path, you can sound the death knell for your precious Yanks.

TERESA. Since the Dodgers lost the last five World Series against the Yankees, it'd be about time.

MIKE. She is amazing. Okay, where's that apron?

MIKE has exited to the kitchen.

JUNIOR. How you feeling?

TERESA. Alright. (*beat*) Listen, Mikey, there's something I have to tell you. The real reason I came over now.

JUNIOR. What's that, Teresa?

TERESA. It's . . . how much I appreciate your kindness in listening to me all this while.

JUNIOR. Oh. Well. They teach us that the better part of being a good priest is being a good listener.

TERESA. It's more than that. You wouldn't let me to talk about my troubles over the phone. You insisted on riding a

bus out every Saturday to meet me in Central Park. You sensed the pain of my broken engagement and knew that by letting me speak, you'd help me to heal. And what just happened when I got home? There was a letter waiting, from Basil.

JUNIOR. Basil? What's he say?

TERESA. Here. (*letter*) He begs for a second chance.

JUNIOR. A second . . . ?

TERESA. He says the woman I found him with took advantage of him. The only reason he went to that club was because he was dragged to it for a client's birthday. The girl who jumped out of that cake, Basil says he thought it was a prank by friends, even when she came to his home, where I found them. Normally I'd think that a lie.

JUNIOR. You don't now?

TERESA. Oh, Mikey, I don't know what to think.

JUNIOR. You shouldn't be with someone who lies.

TERESA. Then whom can I be with?

JUNIOR. Don't you meet men?

TERESA. I work in *fashion*, remember? All the men I meet are a little . . . *happy*. And I'm no spring chicken. I'm 24! A lot of career women are already married. And since you helped me heal by listening, shouldn't I help Basil heal?

JUNIOR. Healing is good.

TERESA. Then you think I should talk to Basil?

JUNIOR. (*flustered*) Teresa, I . . . I don't know what to say. Or *think*. Everybody keeps asking me for marriage advice.

TERESA. Because you're in charge of the book.

JUNIOR. The book, the book! What do I know about that? All I know about is gerunds and colons and dangling participles!

TERESA. Then you know nothing about love?

JUNIOR. But the book is really about *marriage*.

TERESA. And love has nothing to do with marriage?

JUNIOR. Of course, but—

TERESA. —And aren't you supposed to marry the person you love?

JUNIOR. Yes, as long as it doesn't get in the way of your duty.

TERESA. To the Church?

JUNIOR. To the Church, to God, to your family.

TERESA. And what about your *future* family? Doesn't the Church want strong families, if two people love each other for years and want to start one?

JUNIOR. Oh! Oh, I don't know, Teresa! I don't know what to think anymore!

MIKE enters from the kitchen and goes to turn on the TV.

MIKE. That TV dinner takes half an hour to bake, but your mom will have the egg salad out shortly. I just need to get the TV warmed up. Goooo, Bums! *Ha, ha, ha . . .*

A taciturn ALICE enters and slumps against the front door.

JUNIOR. Hello, Alice.

MIKE. Hi, honey. How'd those errands go?

ALICE. Huh? Oh, ah, fine, daddy. Fine.

MIKE. Didn't you do any shopping? You got no bags there.

ALICE. Huh? Oh, ah, no. I didn't . . .

JUNIOR. Alice, are you alright?

ALICE. I'm alright. Just a little stunned.

JUNIOR. Why are you stunned?

ALICE. Huh? Oh, I'm not stunned.

JUNIOR. But you just—. Nothing. C'mere, sit down.

ALICE. I think I'll sit down. (*beat*) Teresa, you're here?

TERESA. Hello, Alice. You look . . . *nice*.

ALICE. Ha.

MIKE. You want a soda, honey? For the name day party?

ALICE. Name day? Whose?

MIKE. You joke. The fightin' Mikes of the Francis family! Celebrating God's warrior angel who saved all mankind! He's on the side of the Dodgers today. By the way, Alice, you and I are going to sit down with Mikey after the game. He's been doing a little research for you.

ALICE. Okay. After the game.

MIKE. Will you look at that picture? The antenna must've blown cockeye again. Anybody steady the ladder for me?

TERESA. I will, Mr. Francis.

MIKE. Lookee her. Tough as a May peach.

JUNIOR. I'll just sit with Alice for a minute. Okay, dad?

MIKE. Great. Come on, Teresa, we got work to do. Hold on for your life till I'm over that eaves. I'm no boy anymore.
TERESA. Rocky Marciano's got nothing on you, Mr. Francis!
MIKE. Aw, go on, kidder!

MIKE and TERESA laugh and exit out the front door.

JUNIOR. What is it, Alice? What's wrong?
ALICE. Where'd they go?
JUNIOR. Turn the antenna. Talk to me, sis.
ALICE. Daddy wants me to get a divorce, doesn't he?
JUNIOR. No.
ALICE. Good.
JUNIOR. Annulment.
ALICE. Great.
JUNIOR. He thinks it's best for you.
ALICE. Marrying Danny sure wasn't what I imagined.
JUNIOR. What did you imagine?
ALICE. That it'd be like when he dated me. That he'd open doors and talk so sweet and hold me nice. That didn't take long to stop. Mikey, why do folks get married? Is it supposed to be for love?
JUNIOR. Well, not *physical* love. See, God could have worked out his purpose for creation in many ways. But He figured the best way was through . . . ah, "increase and multiply."
ALICE. *Exactly*, children. I know I'm different from Danny. But God *made* us that way. He wanted men to be the head and women to be the heart. That's why women come from Adam's rib, near his heart, right? And wasn't it St. Paul who said that a woman shall be saved through childbearing?
JUNIOR. What happened, Alice?
ALICE. It's right there in the Good Book. I need to bear children and leave my earthly concerns behind.
JUNIOR. That might be going a *little* far.
ALICE. Can you go too far? See, when I get to heaven, God will ask, "Alice, why weren't you my good soldier who fought for what you loved?" But I can stand up to Danny. God *knows* that. And He knows that it's through His will that I can make Danny the man he's meant to be. Because the Holy Ghost is always right there, looking down, steadying me. I can do it! Yes! I can do it! (*with a hug*) Oh, Mikey,

you're just the one to write this marriage manual! You know everything! (*rising*) I've got to tell them. I can fight for this. Everybody! There's something I need to say! Angela! Regina! Mom! Dad! I need to talk to you all! I'm ready to fight! Everybody!

AGNES enters from kitchen with a platter. REGINA approaches from the stairs. MIKE and TERESA enter at the front door.

AGNES. What's the ruckus? The Jell-o nearly slipped off the platter from the commotion.

MIKE. (*holding a wire*) Some blasted squirrel nibbled off the antenna wire. Now I've got to run to the hardware store.

ALICE. If I don't say this now, I never will. Listen. Daddy, I know you don't like Danny or anything Irish. But I've talked to Mikey as a marriage expert and he told me to do what's in my heart.

MIKE. You did? And what's that?

ALICE. To go back to him.

MIKE. You are not going back to that punk drunk! *Y'hear?*

ALICE. Mikey said I am and I have to!

REGINA. And daddy, I am marrying Frankie O'Malley. It's 1955, not 1925. The kind of love we have is more important than the outdated prejudices of an old-fashioned father.

MIKE. *Old—!* Be careful, little girl. Under this roof—

REGINA. My mind's made up.

AGNES. And you said she wasn't strong-minded!

MIKE. Scripture says I am to be obeyed. Regina, you are not marrying Frankie "fast fingers" O'Malley. And Alice, you're not going to back to Danny "chug-a-lug" O'Dwyer. And when I'm dead and gone, you can all stand over my grave and sing a *hosanna*.

ALICE. Then I'll be standing over your grave with a little *B*-child. A child without a father. Because your *B*-grandchild will be there with me at your grave.

MIKE. Wh—what?

ALICE. They'll be a *B*-child with me. I just found out I'm carrying.

AGNES. Oh, goodness. Mike! A grandchild! We have—! Wait. We can't have a *B*-grandchild. That's worse than a *pagan*!

MIKE. But Agnes, we finally have a grandchild.
AGNES. But a *B*-grandchild? Mercy on Judas!
MIKE. Mikey, what do we do? How do we—?
JUNIOR. You're asking me?
MIKE. You're in charge of the book!
JUNIOR. The book! The book! There may be no book!
Everyone, there's something I have to say and say now!
MIKE. What is it, Mikey? *What?* Come on.
JUNIOR. I may not be going back to the seminary.
AGNES. Where's a chair?
MIKE. Wha—? When did this all come about?
JUNIOR. Before I came home. Partly *why* I came home.
Why I've been so *conflicted*.
AGNES. I feel faint. Get me a Jell-o.
JUNIOR. I'm just not sure anymore. And I have to be sure.
ANGELA. (*dashing downstairs*) Mom! Dad! Grandpa was holding my hand and he just asked for it! He just asked. He wants Last Rites and is ready to meet the angels!
AGNES. (*faints*) Ahhhhh . . .
TERESA. Mrs. Francis!
REGINA. Mom!
ALICE. Mama!
MIKE. Mikey, get up there and oil up gramps. You don't get many chances for a sacrament like that!

MIKEY dashes upstairs with ANGELA. The family circles AGNES.

MIKE. Agnes? Agnes? You alright?
ALICE. She's out cold, dad.
MIKE. Crud. And all I wanted was to watch the Dodgers play. You know, there are times in a man's life when he wouldn't mind being Methodist. (*kneeling*) Agnes? Agnes?

Family commotion as the lights fade. End of ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Days later. At rise, the FRANCIS FAMILY—without JUNIOR—sit together dressed in dark colors. The women wear veils.

AGNES. He looked so natural. Almost like he was alive. Did you see that pink on his cheek?

ALICE. That was makeup. When Danny's uncle passed, we had to meet the mortician, who asked us to pick out the color rouge he'd wear.

REGINA. Was it Revlon? They advertise Revlon on "The \$64,000 Question." It's good makeup, but expensive.

AGNES. That'd be just like Tom Greenley. He doesn't not scrimp. Everybody should be drained and filled by Tom.

MIKE. Can we stop this kind of talk? Why is it women love to rattle on about death after funerals and men hate it?

AGNES. But we *are* women.

MIKE. I didn't think he looked natural. I thought he looked awful, like he just ate a lemon. And his tie was crooked.

AGNES. Did you straighten it?

MIKE. Agnes.

AGNES. There's nothing wrong with touching the dead. Their souls have already flown upward.

MIKE. If the souls have already flown upward, then why even go to the wake?

AGNES. Because their souls look down to see if you're *at* their wake. That's why you should always go, because once you get to heaven you have something to talk about. You can say, "You know, I really enjoyed your wake." And the person can answer back, "Yes, I saw you there, thanks for coming."

MIKE. I think they'll be plenty else to talk about.

AGNES. Eternity's a long time, Mike.

MIKE. Well, the funeral's over. Now can we talk about something else?

ANGELA. Shouldn't we all say a prayer for his soul? We haven't done one together yet, not as a family.

AGNES. That'd be nice, dear. Go ahead.

The FAMILY kneels together and crosses themselves.

ANGELA. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Holy Mary Mother of God. I can't tell you how much we'll miss him. He was such a wonderful man. Please give him Your greatest care." (*the bell rings upstairs*) "And we'll keep him in our prayers forever. We ask You for Your eternal mercy on us all."

ALL. Amen.

ANGELA. (*the bell rings again*) There's grandpa. I know what he wants.

ALICE. Take him some cookies, he'll love those.

AGNES. And tell him I got a lemon Jell-o on my mind. That should be easy to slide down.

ANGELA. Will do. Coming, grandpa!

ANGELA dashes up the stairs. JUNIOR enters at the front door.

JUNIOR. Hello, all.

MIKE. Hey, Mikey. How's Teresa?

JUNIOR. Better. She might come over later. The doctor gave her mom a sedative to calm her down.

MIKE. I could kick myself. You're never sure what'll help a man hang on. Bert really wanted to see those fishing lures.

JUNIOR. Dad, I don't think new fishing lures would have kept Mr. Miller's heart beating.

MIKE. They were Canadian.

REGINA. Hey, I need a smoke. Anybody—

AGNES. Not in here with grand—!

REGINA. I *know*. Alice, want to come?

ALICE. Sure, nothing like an L&M to settle the nerves after a burial. Oh, and let's run this cake I made over to Mrs. Miller.

REGINA. Great, Alice.

ALICE. Got it. Let's go.

AGNES. (*hushed*) Patron Saint against poverty.

MIKE. Bye, kids.

REGINA and ALICE exit to the porch with the cake.

JUNIOR. When are Alice and Regina planning to move out?

MIKE. Oh. Uh, with all the commotion, and me needing to mow Bert's yard, I—

AGNES. He never brought it up. Won't talk about it.

JUNIOR. Yeah, I guess that's a conversation I wouldn't want to have.

AGNES. Your father is very good at avoiding conversations.

MIKE. Agnes.

JUNIOR. Well, I'm going to run up, check on gramps.

MIKE. Hey, is there a statute of limitations on Last Rites?

JUNIOR. I think every time he recovers he can have it again.

MIKE. Then let's pray for a few relapses. That's one whale of a sacrament.

JUNIOR. Sure. (*running up the stairs*) Be down soon!

MIKE. Right! Oh, I'm going to run out to the garage and—

AGNES. No, you're not! Get over here, Michael Joseph Francis. We're having our talk.

MIKE. Talk? What talk?

AGNES. Stop it. You've been keeping yourself so busy, you haven't let me have two minutes with you.

MIKE. When a neighbor dies, it's a man's duty to step in.

AGNES. That's not why you been running yourself ragged. It's because you don't want to do your *real* manly duty.

MIKE. Oh? And what's that?

AGNES. Talking to Regina and Alice, and especially your only son.

MIKE. And what should I say?

AGNES. First, you're going to tell Mikey that he's going back to that seminary. You're going to lay out very clearly for him why he has to take those vows. You're going to explain the Francis family honor, how he's not going to let the parish down, and how he's certainly not going to let the Holy Catholic Church down.

MIKE. Then you don't want me to tell him the truth?

AGNES. The truth?

MIKE. That your real concern isn't for Mikey, or the family, or even the Holy Catholic Church.

AGNES. And what does *that* mean?

MIKE. I know you, Agnes, after 34 years. What you're *really* worried about is yourself. You think you'll be a failure, that you'll have to hang your head when you walk into church around Ruthie Smith and Josie Brewer, because their two sons made vows and that lets them strut like peacocks in front of Father Greg, and now you can't.

AGNES. Mike!

MIKE. That's it, isn't it?

AGNES. No! A failure? You think I'd feel like a—

MIKE. Oh, why don't you just admit it?

AGNES. That's ridiculous.

MIKE. I don't think so. You talk so high and mighty about what's right. Well, maybe what the Lord thinks is right might, just for once, be a little different than what Agnes Constance Francis thinks is right.

AGNES. All I'm worried about is our son's soul!

MIKE. Are you telling me the truth? Agnes? Fess up!

AGNES. Oh, Mike, Mike!

MIKE. So help me, you are morally obligated to tell your husband the truth! And I want it *now*.

AGNES. Oh, alright, alright, *yes*, Mike, *yes*. I *would* feel like a failure. And you should, too. There is no greater gift than serving God and any parent who can raise a child for The Calling receives a special grace. And you—a failed seminarian yourself—should know that.

MIKE. Hush up! Agnes! Do you hear me?

AGNES. You talk so haughty about the truth. Then why are *you* so afraid of telling everyone the truth about your failing to be a priest?

MIKE. Failed? You think I failed?

AGNES. What else can you call it?

MIKE. That means you're sorry you married me.

AGNES. I only hope that when judgment day rolls around God understands all this a little better than I do.

MIKE. We've got nine wonderful children. You don't think that's one of the greatest gifts a man can give?

AGNES. Not when the only grandchild you have might be a little bast—! Oh, I can't even say it!

MIKE. You're making me wonder if we shouldn't get an annulment ourselves. If you had one spec of doubt about marrying me, our marriage wasn't legal. Then all nine of our children are bastar—. B-childs!

AGNES. Oh, Mike!

MIKE. Is that what you're telling me? Agnes?

AGNES. Oh, no, no, no! I love you, Mike! But I can't walk into church and have folks look at me like my motherhood is a failure! That's *shameful*. (*quietly*) Oh, how could you ever

know? You're just a man. How in the world could any man ever understand any of this!

MIKE. Agnes! Agnes!

AGNES leaves in tears. The phone rings. MIKE answers.

MIKE. "Hello? Oh, hello. Right, right. Half an hour. I'll be there. And should I . . . ? Whatever you say. Bye."

MIKE hangs up. JUNIOR comes down the steps.

JUNIOR. Dad, was the phone . . . ?

MIKE. For me. Expecting a call?

JUNIOR. Uh, Teresa, maybe. She's been pretty blue.

MIKE. Right. (*beat*) Mikey, you got a minute?

JUNIOR. Sure, pop. What is it?

MIKE. Let's have a . . . little talk.

JUNIOR. Alright.

MIKE. Ahh. Gramps okay?

JUNIOR. Better every time I see him. Said he wants to get up and finish that wall out back.

MIKE. Hm. Brick-by-brick. Funny, that's how he lived his life. Plumbed a line down the straight and narrow.

JUNIOR. How you lived your life, too, dad. Down the straight-and-narrow.

MIKE. Yeah, uh, look, Mikey. I need to be straight now. This situation is breaking your mom's heart.

JUNIOR. It's breaking *my* heart.

MIKE. I can imagine.

JUNIOR. You can?

MIKE. Well. What does your confessor say?

JUNIOR. That this is normal, especially at the end of instruction. But that I shouldn't be one of those "Ye of little faith" types," and to remember when Peter was walking on the water, and sinking, and he cried out, "Save me!" and the Lord stretched out his hand, saying: "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" And Peter was held up. My confessor told me to hold out my hand now. But I *have*, dad, and all it does is ache.

MIKE. Yeah. You know, Mikey, doubt isn't *all* bad. I mean, certainty is okay for saints, but I've only met a couple of those in my life.

JUNIOR. You've never doubted, have you, dad?

MIKE. Son, I think anyone who is certain about nearly anything is either a liar or a fool. I remember when we started having babies. It was seven girls in a row. I doubted I'd ever have a son. But did that stop your mom and me from trying? No, we kept right on—. A-hem. And there you came.

JUNIOR. So you think I *should* go forward as a priest?

MIKE. Well, look at it this way. Take God. He could have made the whole world in one day, with the snap of His fingers. But He decided to take a week, think things through. "First day I'll make me some light, add some sky. Next day I'll put down an earth. Then build mountains, add a few trees, birds, dogs." See, every day He thought of something new. And only at the *end* did He decide to make Man. Oh, he knew the trouble we'd get into, but He figured we were worth it. *Then* He made women. The "Help Meet." Ha. Guess God had a sense of humor, too.

JUNIOR. Guess so.

MIKE. So deliberate, son. Take your time. That's Godly.

JUNIOR. I don't know what I'll decide, dad, but thanks.

ANGELA descends from the stairs.

ANGELA. Grandpa wants to play rummy. Just getting cards.

MIKE. You're an angel. Hey, I'm really looking forward to that dinner, Sunday next, at Elmer's.

ANGELA. So is he. He'll get baptized then we'll all go to his place for dinner.

JUNIOR. Any idea what he's serving?

ANGELA. He's . . . still thinking quite hard on it.

MIKE. That's Elmer.

ANGELA. Well, if anyone wants to join in . . .

JUNIOR. I'll be up.

ANGELA bounds up the stairs. The MEN pause.

MIKE. Something's wrong with her, huh?

JUNIOR. Real wrong. Looks conflicted.

The doorbell rings. MIKE looks at his watch.

MIKE. Eye-eye-eye. I'm late. I'll get that. Gotta go.

MIKE grabs a coat, goes to the door, opens it. TERESA enters.

MIKE. Teresa!

TERESA. Hello, Mr. Francis.

MIKE. You okay?

TERESA. Fine. And thanks so much for all your help.

MIKE. I don't want to hear about it. Whatever you need, whenever you need it, you come here first.

TERESA. You are so kind.

MIKE. I'll leave you two alone. I got a little, um, errand to run. Tell your mother not to hold dinner.

TERESA. Bye, Mr. Francis.

MIKE. (to Mikey) Deliberate.

MIKE steps out. JUNIOR and TERESA, alone, uneasy.

JUNIOR. You okay?

TERESA. I'm okay.

JUNIOR. That was a . . . nice ceremony. One of the best I've ever seen. And quite a good spot.

TERESA. For?

JUNIOR. An interment.

TERESA. Oh. Daddy picked that out years ago. He's got a spot for mother there, and he wanted me by his side, so there's a spot for me. And he bought one more spot.

JUNIOR. For?

TERESA. My husband. Daddy wanted me with him that bad.

JUNIOR. Your father always was a smart shopper. I noticed he did buy in bulk.

TERESA. (beat) Mikey, you know why I'm here. I didn't know Basil would come to the funeral.

JUNIOR. Who? Oh! *Basil*. The guy whose shoulder your mother cried on all day. The tall, elegant man whose chauffeur drove you all home from the reception. I see his limousine is still in your drive!

TERESA. He's entertaining your sisters.

JUNIOR. Basil is quite the entertainer. I loved his lecture on the future of space travel. "A monkey in space." Sure!

TERESA. He is a nice man.

JUNIOR. Who'd doubt it?
TERESA. You act like *you* doubt it.
JUNIOR. Nooo. I'm sure he is a nice, *rich* man.
TERESA. You're angry.
JUNIOR. I'm not.
TERESA. Mikey, I have known you since third grade, since Sister Leo used to stand us in the corner to stop us from giggling. There is nothing you can hide from me.
JUNIOR. Alright, then you also know there's nothing you can hide from *me*. I saw the way you looked at him, Teresa.
TERESA. You're jealous.
JUNIOR. *No*. Priests can't get jealous, remember?
TERESA. Well, if you decide *not* to become a priest, does that mean you *might* get jealous?
JUNIOR. Huh? Oh! I am so flustered! Why was he there, Teresa? I thought you broke off your engagement?
TERESA. I didn't know he'd come. But he had a right. He was close to our family at one time.
JUNIOR. Of course he had a right. And a right to send that mountain of flowers. And a right to buy everyone drinks at the reception. Don't you see, Teresa, he still loves you?
TERESA. Well, maybe he has that right, too. When you have feelings like that for someone, they don't die, not completely.
JUNIOR. They don't? Well, what happens to the feelings you have for people you once loved?
TERESA. They . . . change.
JUNIOR. To what?
TERESA. Depends on the direction your relationship takes.
JUNIOR. Do you still care for Basil?
TERESA. Of course.
JUNIOR. Do you still love him?
TERESA. Not like before.
JUNIOR. *Could* you love him like before?
TERESA. Why are you asking this, Mikey?
JUNIOR. Because—. I'm your oldest friend, remember? I'm supposed to care about you.
TERESA. You're worried that I might have married Basil, and he's the wrong man? So it's my happiness you're after?
JUNIOR. Yes.

TERESA. So if I told you the one thing in the world that'd make me happier than anything else, what would you do?

JUNIOR. Are you . . . asking me . . . ?

TERESA. What would you do?

JUNIOR. I'd do it.

TERESA. Even if it meant giving up what you've been working for the last few years of your life?

JUNIOR. In a second. Nothing has ever meant more to me, Teresa. Ask for it, *please*.

TERESA. (*laughs*) Oh, Mikey. I thought of becoming a nun! I really did, while you were away. I even got the application: "The Sisters of Perpetual Agony."

JUNIOR. You're not going to become a nun?

TERESA. *No*. But I was so miserable when I caught Basil cheating, all I could think about was *you*. And I figured I should do just what my best friend did and be more concerned with my spiritual than my earthly fulfillment.

JUNIOR. I've been so miserable, I thought I should be more concerned with my earthly than my spiritual fulfillment. And I'd always think of you.

TERESA. Is it possible for two people to just be so happy on earth that it spills over when they're finally in heaven?

JUNIOR. I've wondered the same.

TERESA. Well? What can we do?

JUNIOR. Two options. First . . . would you take my hand? The first is that I become a priest and you become a nun.

TERESA. Oh, then tell me the second! Because that's what I really want!

JUNIOR. Me too. Because then you and I will become—

AGNES rushes in from the kitchen.

AGNES. Mikey! Mikey! Son! Son!

JUNIOR. Ah. Um. Uh. Yes, mother?

AGNES. Oh, Teresa. I didn't know you were here. But I'm glad you are. I told your mother I'd make her a parfait but can't recall the flavor she favored.

TERESA. You mean of Jell-o?

AGNES. Of course! Would you mind running over and asking her for me?

TERESA. Right now?

AGNES. Right now.
TERESA. Oh. Oh, alright.
AGNES. No need to come back. Just call and tell Mikey.
JUNIOR. Maybe I can go along and—
AGNES. No, Mikey! You stay here. I want us both to get on our knees so that we can pray for strength.
JUNIOR. Right now?
AGNES. *Right now.*
JUNIOR. Well. Sure. Sure, mother.
TERESA. I'll just, ah, check on that flavor for you then.
AGNES. Thanks, dearie. Come on, Mikey, on our knees.
JUNIOR. Bye, Teresa.
TERESA. Bye, Mikey. I'll call.
JUNIOR. Right. Right.

TERESA leaves. AGNES and JUNIOR kneel.

AGNES. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Dear Michael the Archangel. There is no service greater than a boy's service to God. We pray that this boy gets the courage to smite the evil thoughts in his mind, and that you call him home, so that for all eternity he can wage war against Satan, by your side." Right, Mikey?
JUNIOR. Of course. Of course, mother.

Lights fade as they pray.

SCENE TWO

Later that evening. ALICE and REGINA come down the stairs carrying suitcases. ANGELA awaits them.

ANGELA. Sure you're all packed?

REGINA. Yep.

ANGELA. Toothbrush?

REGINA. Got it.

ANGELA. Tooth powder?

REGINA. Think so.

ANGELA. Well, make sure. Sometimes when you're in a rush, you forget toiletries completely.

REGINA. I'm not in a rush. I've been packed for three days. But I said I'd wait till after the funeral, and I did.

ALICE. Listen, can I give you girls some advice? Because soon you'll both be married like me.

REGINA. Oh, I don't need advice. Frankie and I get along like lovebirds. When our eyes meet, it says all there is.

ALICE. That'll change.

REGINA. You are sooo wrong.

ALICE. Am I? Remember when I was leaving to marry Danny, and Elizabeth came home and sat me down for a talk?

ANGELA. When she and Georgie were having all that trouble?

ALICE. Right. And I was just like Regina here: Danny was perfect, Danny was wonderful, Danny could do no wrong! So Lizzie sat me down and told me just what I'll tell you now.

ANGELA. Which is?

ALICE. That you are going to have two husbands in your life: The one you'll fall in love with, and the one you'll spend the rest of your life putting up with. See, while dating, a man is like an ice cream sundae: everything is sweet and gooey and you can never get enough.

REGINA. That's Frankie.

ALICE. But after marriage, a man is . . . like a *backache*, she said. You make the best of it, but he's a backache all the same. And he's there for the rest of your life.

ANGELA. *Alice*.

ALICE. Lizzie told me just to accept it, that a wife has a mission in life, to lead her husband upward, *morally*. And the

best way she can do that is to *inspire* her husband to be better than he really is.

ANGELA. How?

ALICE. By praising him.

ANGELA. For what?

ALICE. Everything, I guess. I guess men need it to be men. And if you praise a man, no matter what or how little it's for, it makes him feel proud, so he tries to be better than he really is. And that's how you tolerate your backache. Your husband.

ANGELA. The thought that Elmer could be inspired by anything seems strange.

ALICE. My inspiration for Danny is to make him believe that he'll be a wonderful father.

REGINA. Good luck. In my case, you don't need inspiration, because you'll always have love, for always.

ALICE. I hope you're right.

ANGELA. Thanks, Alice. Gosh, why would anyone want to spend their life with a backache?

AGNES enters.

AGNES. You're not even waiting for your father to come back before leaving? After all he's done for you?

ALICE. It's almost eight. Where is he?

AGNES. He—. It's private business.

REGINA. You don't know.

AGNES. Maybe not. But do you need to know everything every minute, your highness?

REGINA. Not every minute. But when my husband is on his way to pick me up, I get ready for him.

AGNES. "I get ready for him." The only thing you get ready for is your own selfishness. Is little Frankie about to learn a thing or two.

REGINA. I wish you wouldn't call him *little*.

AGNES. He comes up to my chin!

REGINA. Mother, I'm not here to fight. There is a type of love in the world that you know nothing about—a *modern* kind of love between men and women.

AGNES. I'm starting to appreciate your sense of humor.

REGINA. Oh, what would you know about anything?

AGNES. I been around the block!

REGINA. Around the bl—? You were born in 1899, back when McKinley was president. It was almost the Ice Age. You still live in the last century. You walk everywhere, won't use a telephone, the only gadget you'll use is turned by a crank. Mother, this is a modern world, with modern ideas—including modern ideas about love. And I'm not going to spend my life in a conjugal relation based on a time when half of humanity—we *females*—had to accept roles as slaves.

AGNES. Con-ju-*what*? Is that a dirty word? I swear I've still got the strength to wash your mouth out with soap.

ANGELA. No, mother, it means—

AGNES. And I'm not modern? Let me tell you, lady: Jell-o is one of the most modern things there is.

ANGELA. Mother, she was just—

AGNES. No, no, listen to me, all of you. In a very short time I'll have only one single child left, and I'm praying every minute I can hold on to him. You kids think you're so smart with all your *modern* ideas. Well let me tell you, I've raised nine children, and raised them well, despite some individual cases of selfishness. I've been married 34 years, none of them easy, but all of them fulfilling. You want to know what love is? You think it's this fifty-fifty thing. But what you'll soon find out is that every decent marriage is a hundred-hundred thing. It's doing things like changing diapers at three in the morning. Then changing them again at four. And again at five. It's putting a cold compress on an infant to bring down a fever; it's making a sick child laugh. It's trying to fill nine growling stomachs on the salary of a man who does most of his work for nothing, because his clients are too poor to pay him in anything but I.O.U.s. It's kneeling every night and teaching bedtime prayers so a new soul might have a little better chance of getting to heaven. And it's worrying, always worrying—about food, about money, about doing what's right. And you don't just worry for your own children, you worry for all the world's. So you can take your newfangled ideas on love and march them right out the door. The love I have for your father *isn't* modern. It doesn't make me giggle and dance, but it lets me lay my head on the pillow at night, when I *can* lay my head on the pillow, and sleep in peace. And I wouldn't trade that for all the bobs and busses and bluejeans in the world.

ANGELA. (*pause*) We're sorry, mama.

ALICE. You know we love you.

AGNES. Oh, I know you do. And I *do* want that grandchild. Your father is too hard on Danny, but a wife has to listen to her husband, that's in the Bible.

REGINA. Is it also in there that a husband can smack up his wife?

AGNES. It's in there that a parent can smack up a child, something I should've done a lot more of.

REGINA. Oh, can't you ever be rational?

AGNES. As if that ever did the world any good!

ALICE. Regina, this might be a good time to leave.

REGINA. I will, believe me, as soon as Frankie pulls up.

AGNES. *Little* Frankie. Who leads when you dance?

ANGELA. Mother! Regina! Please! I love you both but I can't take this anymore!

MIKE enters at the front door. He's been drinking heavily.

AGNES. About time, mister. You have two daughters here ready to leave without even a goodbye, if you can believe it.

ANGELA. Go easy, mama. He was probably at court bailing someone out. Was that it, daddy?

MIKE. Huh?

ANGELA. Did someone in jail need your help?

MIKE. Oh. No. I wasn't at jail. I . . .

AGNES. Well, where—? (*beat*) What's that I smell? Oh, Mike! That's not *liquor* on your breath!

MIKE. Oh, I, ah—

AGNES. Have you been tippling? Michael Joseph Norbert Francis! What's gotten into you?

MIKE. (*car horn beeps*) Somebody outside for you, Alice.

ALICE. (*looking out*) Danny? In his Rambler?

MIKE. He's waiting for you.

ALICE. Were you drinking with Danny?

MIKE. (*after a car beep*) Better go, hon.

ALICE. (*thrilled*) Alright, I'm going. Goodbye, everyone. You know I love you and will miss you all, but I'll only be three blocks away, so maybe I'll come over tomorrow.

MIKE. Take care of that bun in the oven. We need 'em.

ALICE. Sure. And Danny'll take care of my bun, too. The Lord hath giveth me the strength to whoop him if he doesn't.

Bye, all. Bye, mama. I love you all so much. Bye! Bye! (*exits out the door*) Danny! Here I come! Here I come, hon!

FAMILY says goodbye. ALICE dashes off.

MIKE. They come and they go. (*to Regina*) You next?

REGINA. Frankie's coming at eight.

MIKE. The way of the world.

REGINA. I'm not going against you, daddy, but everyone needs to find their own happiness.

MIKE. I think what you'll learn, kid, is that people don't *find* happiness, they *earn* it.

AGNES. Mike, where were you? Have you become a drunk? Mercy on Judas!

MIKE. No, Agnes. I haven't become a drunk. *Yet*. I got a call from Father Greg. I guess Alice did a confession and told him everything, so Father wanted to meet me in the rectory to square things with the Church. But what he didn't tell me was that I wasn't the only one he called. Danny was there, too.

ANGELA. Danny?

MIKE. Sat across from me, ballin' his eyes out. Well, the look on my face showed I was none too happy. Father saw that and let me have it. "Don't you know, Mike," he says in that accent of his, "That you're not to judge or ye yourself shall be judged?" "I know that, Father." "And ye shan't condemn or ye yourself shall be condemned?" "I know." "And ye'r to forgive to be forgiven. And love to be loved." (*beat*) He shamed me, Agnes, in front of Danny. And I so deserved it. I have been so un-Christian. I tried to tell him what *my* fatherhood meant, to which he scolded: "Mike, you know a woman's to mind her husband. That's Biblical." I felt so ashamed . . .

ANGELA. Daddy.

MIKE. Then he had me shake hands with Danny and tell him he had my blessing to come and get Alice.

REGINA. Is that when you went drinking with him?

MIKE. Oh, no. Father had a bottle on the table. And the longer we talked, the more he poured.

AGNES. I told you he was a tippler!

MIKE. Well, it helped loosen the tongue. Besides, Christian charity comes a lot easier after the third scotch. Danny had some good jokes. There was one he told about—

AGNES. That's shameful.

MIKE. Oh, let it go, Agnes.

AGNES. I'll not. Shameful, shameful, shameful.

MIKE. Am I supposed to turn down a drink from a priest?

AGNES. Leviticus: "Do not take wine nor strong drink when thou enterest the tabernacle."

MIKE. We weren't *in* the tabernacle, it was the rectory.

AGNES. Splitting hairs is a sacrilege.

MIKE. You know, Agnes, if anything on earth could drive a man to drink, it'd be you!

AGNES. (*pause*) Oh, Mike. That is the cruelest thing you have ever said to me.

AGNES turns and climbs the stairs. A silence.

MIKE. *Demon rum*. Now look what I did.

REGINA. She's been so emotional, it's not your fault.

MIKE. There's no excuse for cruelty. I got to apologize.

REGINA. But, daddy, next time you see me I'll be married. Isn't there anything you want to say to me?

MIKE. Sure. I hope you change your mind. But I'll still love you if you don't. And beware all that moth and rust stuff.

Earthly treasures, lay 'em not up.

REGINA. Is that all?

MIKE. That's enough. Angie, you or Mikey get the lights?

ANGELA. Mikey's on a walk, but I'll get them.

REGINA. I love you, daddy.

MIKE. (*exiting up the steps*) You, too, kiddo. You, too.

ANGELA. Well. I'll check on gramps. You'll wait for Frankie?

REGINA. He'll honk any minute.

ANGELA. You know I never thought he was that small.

REGINA. We're honeymooning in Albany.

ANGELA. That's exotic.

REGINA. That's Frankie. Well, kiss grandpa.

ANGELA. (*walking up steps, out of sight*) Love you, sis.

REGINA. You, too. Don't let the bedbugs bite.

REGINA moves her suitcases to the door and looks out. She sits on the suitcase, lights a cigarette, and waits. Lights.

SCENE THREE

Six hours later, in darkness. AGNES creeps down the stairs and turns on a light. She will find REGINA, weeping.

AGNES. Who is it? Who's here? You're not a burglar, are you? This is a Christian household! (*stops*) Regina? Is that you?

REGINA. (*sobbing*) Um. Yes.

AGNES. Goodness, what time is it? It's late. No, *early*. Are you . . . crying?

REGINA. I . . . ah . . . Frankie's a little late.

AGNES. I'll say. Did he call?

REGINA. He . . . um . . .

AGNES. He didn't even call?

REGINA. He *will* call. Things come up. You know. *Men*.

AGNES. Don't I know. *Men*.

REGINA. Mama, please don't look at me like that.

AGNES. Like what?

REGINA. Like you pity me. He'll be here. He didn't answer the phone so I know he's on his way now. He . . . (*sobbing*)

AGNES. (*slowly, hugging*) Oh, honey, honey.

REGINA. (*completely broken*) Why, mama. Why?

AGNES. Oh, honey. (*quietly*) I never said a bad word, you know, about Frankie. That was your father.

REGINA. You said he was *little*.

AGNES. That was a statement of fact. But you never heard a bad word out of my mouth against the Irish. Even if they are a race of tipplers. I don't judge.

REGINA. You judge me.

AGNES. Well, that's *Proverbs*: "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from them."

REGINA. Then how come you put the rod to *me* so much, and not the others? Ever since I was a kid, all you've ever done is pick on me! (*weeping*) Why, mama? *Why? Why?*

AGNES. (*moving to sit*) I want to tell you a story. A little secret. Between us. When I was a girl, even younger than you, eighteen, I met a boy. I was working in a hospital then, volunteer work, helping soldiers who came back from the first war. And there was a soldier I met. This was before I met your father. Well, this boy had been wounded in France

and was sent home. And he, um, this boy, he swept me up. Just swept me up. Oh, it was wonderful. I couldn't get enough of him. Spent every minute with him. My mama saw he was trouble and she . . . she tried to put the yoke on me. But I had a mind of my own. Well, he asked me to marry him and I . . . couldn't resist. And then I— I did a few things with him that I wish I wouldn't have. And just as I was waiting to elope, he disappeared. Not a word. He went off, California or someplace, without even a goodbye. And I had to face my mother, who'd been right all along, and who I realized only had my best interests at heart. But I *did* face her. So shamed. And what I couldn't know then was that all that turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me. That doughboy, with the devil in him, put me in the greatest misery of my life. But he also brought me closer to God. I prayed so hard for someone like your father to come into my life, which he did, at a church social later that year. And had that soldier not left me, I'd never have had all you children. Never have been so deeply happy. You see, that boy was, I'm ashamed to say, Unitarian. (*pause*) So if I'm hard on you, Gina, I want you to know it's only because you're so much like me, and I want you to be happy, like me. Don't fret, remember your *Psalms*: "In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst and strengthenedst me." (*moves to stairs*)

REGINA. Mama? (*pause*) Thank you.

AGNES. Come on up whenever you're ready. Oh, and Daddy doesn't need to know about this. Some secrets should stay between the girls.

AGNES continues up the stairway.

SCENE FOUR

Next morning. MIKE, alone in the room, reads his paper.

ANGELA enters from the kitchen stirring a bowl.

MIKE. Will you look at that? There couldn't be a worse time for a neighbor to die. Eye-eye-eye.

ANGELA. What's that, daddy?

MIKE. There ought to be a law against funerals during a World Series. It says here, in yesterday's game, while Bert was being dropped into the ground, that Whitey Ford pitched a four-hitter and the Yankees beat the Dodgers five-to-one.

ANGELA. That's good.

MIKE. No! If the Dodgers won yesterday, there wouldn't be a game seven today, and Brooklyn would have the title. Now the championship game is this afternoon at Yankee Stadium, and all we got is that little Johnny Podres to pitch.

ANGELA. Sorry about that.

MIKE. Oh boy, so am I.

ANGELA. Well, I got to get back to breakfast. It's ten o'clock and Elmer called saying he wants to go for a walk.

MIKE. Shouldn't your mother be helping you with that?

ANGELA. Sure, but where is she?

MIKE. Dunno. She was out of the sack before I got up. Ou, this achin' head. The Wrath of Grapes.

ANGELA. If you want to eat, I better get to it.

MIKE. Better do. (*reading paper*) Aw, Spooner got nailed.

ANGELA returns to the kitchen. MIKE reads his paper. A bell rings upstairs.

MIKE. Hey, Angie, can you—? Hey! Oh, heck. Alright, grandpa. I'm coming, I'm coming. Keep your pants on.

MIKE goes upstairs to tend to grandpa. The beater stops.

JUNIOR and TERESA enter at the front door.

JUNIOR. Come on in.

TERESA. Thanks.

JUNIOR. Hey, where is everybody?

TERESA. Would they go out?

JUNIOR. I wonder. But that'd be fine with me. I could use a minute to steady the nerves.

TERESA. Mikey, you'll do fine.

JUNIOR. You have not faced down my mother before.

TERESA. All you have to do is tell her the truth.

JUNIOR. Teresa, getting my mom to see any truth other than her own is like pulling a bone from the mouth of a bulldog.

TERESA. Look me in the eyes. Are you nervous?

JUNIOR. Yes.

TERESA. Were you nervous when you came to my door?

JUNIOR. This morning? Yes.

TERESA. What did you do?

JUNIOR. But I *expected* you to say *yes*. My mother won't—

TERESA. You *expected* it? You think you know me that well? And suppose I'd told you, "No, Michael Joseph Francis, I will not spend the rest of my life with you. I don't adore you and I haven't loved you since the third grade." What would you have done?

JUNIOR. Called you a liar.

TERESA. Oh! You know me too well. We're joined at the hip, aren't we?

JUNIOR. We are. (*beat*) Wait. I just thought of something.

TERESA. What?

JUNIOR. You're a woman of the world: sophisticated, cosmopolitan. You've had boyfriends, you've—

TERESA. What?

JUNIOR. *Kissed*. I never did that. Except with my sisters and mother. And I can't imagine you'd like kisses like that.

TERESA. You're worried.

JUNIOR. Of course! What if I'm a rotten kisser and you have to spend the rest of your life with me?

TERESA. You *can't* be a rotten kisser.

JUNIOR. How do you know?

TERESA. Because the best part of any kiss is the affection. And, Mikey, you're *all* affection. So don't worry about kissing, you'll be great.

JUNIOR. Sure you don't want to check me out?

TERESA. No! Or not 'til you come back from resigning at the seminary, or I'd feel like I was kissing a priest.

JUNIOR. I only bring this up so you know I'm no Basil.

TERESA. And thank heaven for that.

JUNIOR. Alright, no kissing.

TERESA. But who said I couldn't enjoy a hug? I even like those with priests.

JUNIOR. Oh, I am a champion hugger. Here comes one just for you. Oh, I love you.

TERESA. And I love you.

JUNIOR and TERESA hug, oblivious to AGNES entering at the front door, carrying a handbag. She stares at the couple.

JUNIOR. No, no, not as much as I love you.

TERESA. More. So much more.

JUNIOR. No, no. That's not possible.

TERESA. It's certain because— (*sees Agnes*)

JUNIOR. (*hugging*) Well, you have to prove it by giving me a tighter squeeze. Come on!

TERESA. Mikey. Mikey!

JUNIOR. *Squeeze me*. I'll bet you've hugged priests *way* harder than that. And that's all the squeeze you've got for the priest you love? C'mon!

JUNIOR turns and sees AGNES. Silence.

AGNES. I don't know what that was about but it sure didn't look Biblical. Let's pretend I didn't see what I just saw.

JUNIOR. Mother, it was—

AGNES. I don't want to know. But someone needs to visit a confessional, and soon.

JUNIOR. I do need to make a confession, but not one that requires going to church.

AGNES. You better make it lawful.

JUNIOR. We *will* make it lawful, in about six months. Right, Teresa?

AGNES. What does that mean?

JUNIOR. It means I want a talk with you.

AGNES. I don't have time. I fasted all night, went to Mass, and did a Devotion already. Three candles, if you care to know.

JUNIOR. Funny, I want to talk about a little devotion of my own.

AGNES. After what I saw, you could use it.

JUNIOR. Not that kind. Can we have a moment, please?

AGNES. Mercy on Judas, you're acting strange.

The doorbell rings. ANGELA runs out from the kitchen.

ANGELA. Oh, hey, everybody! That's Elmer for me. The griddle's going and the hotcakes are on. Mama, can you finish? Elmer wants a walk, he says it's important. I'll bring him in when we're done. Where's daddy?

JUNIOR. Haven't seen him.

ANGELA. Well, he's around. And hungry. Got to run. Bye! (*opening the door*) Oh, Elmer, right on time, as always. My, my, that same suit again . . .

ANGELA pulls shut the door on an exit.

AGNES. I've got to get to those hotcakes.

JUNIOR. *No, mother.* My future wife will tend to those.

AGNES. (*pause*) Excuse me?

JUNIOR. Teresa and I got engaged this morning.

AGNES. Priests can't marry.

JUNIOR. Exactly.

AGNES. You need to talk to your father about this.

JUNIOR. I will. But you and I will talk about it now.

AGNES. I've got to get to that griddle!

JUNIOR. *Mother, stay.* Teresa, get the hotcakes, please?

TERESA. Of course, Mikey.

AGNES. She doesn't know how your father likes them!

JUNIOR. She'll do fine.

AGNES. He likes them thin and brown, a little spongy, with two scrambled eggs on the side, but not dry.

TERESA. Will do, Mrs. Francis. I'll be right in here, Mikey.

TERESA goes into the kitchen.

AGNES. You got three minutes. I'm starving.

JUNIOR. I'm marrying Teresa.

AGNES. You're not.

JUNIOR. *Listen.* Last night I had one of those "dark nights of the soul." You know what I mean?

AGNES. Don't I. I have 'em every night.

JUNIOR. Not like this. I took a walk. And as the sun rose, I had a talk with God, and He—

AGNES. My son is no quitter.

JUNIOR. It's not about that.

AGNES. Get out your Bible: "He that shall endure to the end shall be saved." I can quote you—

JUNIOR. Don't quote me anything, not *Revelations* or *Philippians* or *Thessalonians* or *Corinthians*!

AGNES. Are you talking sassy to me?

JUNIOR. Yes! For once in my life I am talking sassy to my mother!

AGNES. Mikey!

JUNIOR. *Quiet*. You always wanted me to be a priest. You will go to your grave wanting me to be a priest.

AGNES. I didn't—

JUNIOR. *Please!* You started working for that the moment you learned you had a son. Remember how, as a child, you made me learn every prayer before every other child so you could show me off as the youngest altar boy ever in the diocese? Which I was. And how on Vocation Days I had to report to you on all the orders visiting our school so you'd help pick where I'd go to be your good, little soldier of the Lord? You took me to every seminary around and would constantly ask: "Do you hear it, Mikey? *The Calling*? Has it reached you yet?" Well, how was I to know if I heard *The Calling*? The operator was always on the line, and that operator was *you*. Well. I've changed. I've decided I'm not going to be a priest. I love a woman. We're going to have a family. And I'm going to be a model for the community, like my own father, Mike. That's my *true* Calling. So if you and dad want a son who'll be a priest, you two are just going to have to make one last attempt at a child, and hope this one, your tenth, turns out to be a boy like me.

AGNES. You have puny spiritual muscles.

JUNIOR. Not as big as yours, true.

AGNES. How do you know it wasn't the devil who spoke to you and not God?

JUNIOR. Trust me.

AGNES. So said the serpent to Eve: "Trust me."

JUNIOR. That's all I'm going to say. I'm calling my fiancée.

AGNES. No! Mikey! Don't! You'd make such a *good* priest. And someone has to make up for your father's leaving the seminary. That's a curse on us only you can break!

JUNIOR. What? Dad was in the seminary?

AGNES. Oops. Did I say that?

JUNIOR. He was almost ordained? *Tell me*, mother.

AGNES. Mum, mum, mum.

MIKE appears on the stairway.

MIKE. It's true, son. No hiding it now. Thanks, Agnes.

AGNES. It slipped, Mike.

MIKE. Sure. I'm used to your boners.

JUNIOR. Dad, you were in the seminary? How come you never told us?

MIKE. Because, Mikey, when people learn you were *almost* a priest, they *see* you different, like maybe you weren't holy enough, or you couldn't resist the temptations of the flesh. If I told you kids, you'd have told your friends, then nobody in Paterson would have seen me for who I was. Your mother thinks it's shameful.

AGNES. Not shameful, just—

MIKE. *Weak*. Well let me tell you: If I'd wanted an easier life, I'd have *been* a priest. Leading a congregation of 900 has to be easier than raising a brood of nine.

AGNES. You think I'm against you because you weren't a priest. That's ridiculous.

MIKE. Then don't you think our son should make up his own mind?

AGNES. No. Because the Church needs servants.

MIKE. They got two of mine already. That's not enough?

AGNES. If they had all nine, it wouldn't be enough. God's the only reason we're here. Use some Common Sense.

MIKE. If everybody became priests and nuns, there'd be nobody left on earth in fifty years.

AGNES. Now, *there's* a ridiculous statement.

MIKE. It's not. God told me to bring more Catholics into the world, and I did a pretty good job of that.

AGNES. Hey, who did the heavy lifting?

MIKE. Well. I was told to be a family man. I did that while being a lawyer. And not one of those fancy-pants, Cadillac-driving lawyers. A lawyer for the poor.

REGINA appears on the stairway.

REGINA. And I couldn't be prouder of you, daddy.

MIKE. Regina?

REGINA. I watched you growing up and I wondered how you did it: working hard for poor folks while holding this family together with band-aids. You had to work like a dog just to live like one. That made me want to be a rich lawyer, but I don't want that now. Last night I had a "dark night of the soul."

AGNES. You, too?

REGINA. When I woke up, I still wanted to be a lawyer, but now I want to practice with you.

MIKE. What are you doing home?

REGINA. Taking your advice: *Earning* my happiness. I realized that I'd never find it with Frankie O'Malley. The shrimp.

AGNES. Don't condemn.

REGINA. That's a statement of fact.

AGNES. Oh, okay.

MIKE. That's my girl!

ALICE enters at the front door with a cake.

ALICE. Hey, everybody. Good morning! Hi, hi!

ALL. Alice, hello. Hi, honey. Hey, sis. Good to see you.

MIKE. What are you doing home?

AGNES. You have a "dark night of the soul" too?

ALICE. Dark night, no! I had the best night of my life. Danny was just wonderful. I couldn't sleep so I stayed up and baked you all a Chocolate Cherry Cream and, you'll be happy to know, mother, I *did* put in Jell-o and it's scrumptious.

AGNES. You sound surprised.

MIKE. Danny treating you okay?

ALICE. Perfect. He didn't touch a drop last night. And it'll last, daddy, or we'll all go over there and rough him up.

MIKE. Right! Now let me have some of that cake—

ALICE. (*with cake*) Don't you dare. This is for lunch!

TERESA enters from the kitchen in an apron.

TERESA. I got a mountain of hotcakes! Who's hungry?

FAMILY. Hey, Teresa! Hello, Teresa! Miss Miller!

JUNIOR. Oh, we're not going to eat quite yet. Not till everyone hears my news.

MIKE. What's that, son?

JUNIOR. I want everyone to know that I've made my decision and I *am* going back to the seminary.

AGNES. What?

JUNIOR. I'm going back to resign.

AGNES. Mercy on Judas.

JUNIOR. This morning, while out on a walk, a line from *Proverbs* came to me: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing." I found myself in front of Teresa's house, so I knocked. She answered. I asked her to marry me and she agreed.

FAMILY. (*joyful clamor*) What? Mikey! Son! Oh! Great!

TERESA. (*stopping them*) No, no! Wait! I *didn't*.

JUNIOR. What?

TERESA. I didn't agree. I enthusiastically, ecstatically, and wholeheartedly agreed. Oh, I love you, Michael Joseph Norbert Francis!

FAMILY. That is great! Congrats! Fantastic! Oh! Love you!

ANGELA enters at the front door and leans against it, silently.

JUNIOR. Angie! Oh, have we got some news for you!

TERESA. Where's Elmer? He should hear this, too.

ANGELA. Elmer, he—. He's not coming in.

AGNES. Doesn't he like hotcakes?

ANGELA. (*joyously*) No! And isn't that the most wonderful thing you ever heard?!

MIKE. Maybe not the *most* wonderful.

ANGELA. No, that he's *not coming in*. Because Elmer just broke our engagement! Ended it! Let me be freeeee!

REGINA. Then why are you so happy?

ANGELA. Because prayers *can* be answered. You know, Elmer is a man of few words, so he got right to the point. He told me last night he had a “dark night of the soul.”

AGNES. Another one!

ANGELA. He realized how many sacrifices he’d have to make for a family and added up how it would affect his accounting career and decided it cost too much.

MIKE. That lout!

ANGELA. *No. I don’t care.*

MIKE. You don’t want to get married?

ANGELA. Well, I wanted to save Elmer’s soul, but he says he’ll still get baptized. See, I was willing to spend my life with a backache, but I never wanted to marry a man. Except one.

MIKE. Angie? You haven’t been cheating?

ANGELA. Not with Him, never.

MIKE. Who is he?

ANGELA. Don’t you know, daddy? It’s *Jesus*. Oh, I so want to be a nun. I hope you don’t mind, mother. I know you want grandkids, but now all the children of the world can be mine.

MIKE. You said you’d give all nine to the Church.

AGNES. I need to learn to zip it.

ANGELA. I already have my name picked out. I’m going to be Sister Michael Agnes, after the two biggest saints I know.

AGNES. Your *father*?

ANGELA. Or Sister Agnes Michael.

AGNES. That’s better.

ANGELA. Can we go tell grandpa? He’d so love to know.

JUNIOR. Sure, let’s all go up. We’ve got some news of our own to give him, Angie. And you, too.

ANGELA. Great!

TERESA. I do so love your grandfather.

JUNIOR. He’ll try to kiss you when he hears about this!

TERESA. And what a kiss I’ll give him back.

JUNIOR. Him and not me? Hey!

MIKE. Hey, Mikey, what about your book? What’ll you do?

JUNIOR. (*stopping*) Actually, with Gina’s help, the book’s done. I’m taking my name off and putting on another editor.

MIKE. Who?

JUNIOR. The Holy Ghost. Come on, let’s go on up!

ALICE. Let’s. Then we can have a smoke, eh, Regina?

REGINA. No way! I've given up smoking. All that money is going to pagan babies.

ANGELA. Come on! Last one up's a rotten egg!

REGINA. No, not a rotten egg! Nothing rotten about eggs. I want *three* this morning.

AGNES. Mercy on Judas.

ALICE. Mom, dad, you coming?

MIKE. You kids go ahead. We'll be right up.

ALICE. Keep your paws off that cake, daddy!

MIKE. No promises!

The CHILDREN laugh and scramble up the stairs, talking excitedly. MIKE and AGNES are left alone in the room.

MIKE. I had a "dark night of the soul" myself last night.

AGNES. The way you snore, I've had 34 years of those.

MIKE. No, just . . . my dark night was scotch induced. I'm sorry, love. You know I'm no tippler.

AGNES. Oh, what does it matter now.

MIKE. Are you worrying?

AGNES. Of course!

MIKE. Don't. Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere.

AGNES. We failed, Mike. We just failed.

MIKE. Why do you say that?

AGNES. We never raised a priest. Only one grandchild. The years in purgatory we have coming . . .

MIKE. Maybe not. Maybe Mikey is cut from my cloth. I sired nine. Maybe he has that kind of *oomph* in him.

AGNES. You think nine children are worth one priest?

MIKE. We can never know till Judgment Day.

AGNES. Oh, *why* did we have to be born Catholic!

MIKE. Yep, that God is one tough guy to figure out.

AGNES. (*to herself*) Alright, Agnes, *faith*. Remember your Psalms: "Children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward."

MIKE. Yeah. It'd only make it easier if every now and then some small miracle showed up. Just a little something to let you know the Big Guy up there is listening to you.

The phone rings.

AGNES. I'm not touching that contraption.
MIKE. (*answering*) "Hello . . . Yes . . . What? . . . What? You're kidding . . . Okay . . . Lickety-split." (*hangs up*)
AGNES. What was that?
MIKE. A miracle. A true miracle.
AGNES. Another one of our daughters is having a child?
MIKE. Way bigger than that! It was Father Greg. He got two tickets to game seven of the World Series today and asked me to Yankee Stadium this afternoon! Wheeee!
AGNES. That's a miracle?
MIKE. If only you *knew*, Agnes.
AGNES. Well, how about a little something for a long-suffering wife? Baseball? Pah! Can't the Heavenly Father do anything for me?

MIKEY appears at the top of the stairs.

JUNIOR. Mom, dad. You're not gonna believe it. Grandpa just got out of bed. He's walking. Shaky, but he's walking. He wants to come down and eat at the table with us!
AGNES. What? My father? Walking?
JUNIOR. He's on his way down now.
MIKE. Agnes.
AGNES. Mike.
MIKE. It's a miracle.
AGNES. Maybe. Or maybe it was that last batch of Jell-o. It was very, very good.
MIKE. Agnes.

The CHILDREN show up on the stairs, encouraging grandpa as he begins an unseen descent.

ALL. Come on, grandpa! Easy now! You can make it! We have you! It's not that far! Steady as she goes! This way!

Before GRANDPA is seen, the curtain falls.