



Preview Script

*“The Magdalen  
Whitewash”*

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# **The Magdalen Whitewash**

By Valerie Goodwin

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# The Magdalen Whitewash

By Valerie Goodwin  
© April 2002

A two act play set in 1929 in the Magdalen Laundries of Ireland, to the south of Dublin.

## **Characters (in order of appearance) :**

Girl / Nancy	16 years old. Self-assured. American
Mary (old)	28 years old. Institutionalised and resigned to her fate.
Waitress	
Mary (young)	Nearly 13, a bit of an 'eejit'. lived alone with her father.
Sister Ignatia	About 40 years old. fairly kind natured.
Bernadette	A resident at the laundry for about 10 yrs. A natural poet. The identity of her child's father has been kept a secret.
Martha	Made pregnant by a married man. Resident for about 2 years.
Assumpta	Bitter. About 20 years old. Has only just had her baby. Father refused to marry her, and went off to England.
Angela	Had her baby a month ago. Is still hopeful about leaving. Her cousin got her pregnant.
Marie	Aged 64. Resident for about 50 yrs.
Pauline	The joker. 15 years old and nearly due. The boy has now married a rich widow.
Father Doyle	Early 30's, Very 'Stephen Tompkinson'. Believes in the sins and the penance. Tries to help the girls. Sincere.
Sister Margaret	A bit dithery. New to the Magdalen.
Father O'Connell	Mid-50's. A nasty, perverted type.
Jim	A delivery man.
Donal	Another delivery man.
Sister Gabriel	About 30 years old. Very cold and strict.
Mother Superior	Aged 60 plus. Distant and unyielding.
Mrs Doolan	Pauline's Mother.
Patricia	10 yr old orphan

NOTE : Doubling of roles is possible, for example Waitress/Pauline's mother. If a larger cast is available singers, other girls, café customers etc may be introduced

## **Synopsis**

The Magdalen laundries were set up in collaboration between Church and State in Ireland and were still going until the late 1990's. They were attached to convents and girls were signed in by their families. Once in there, they could not leave until their families came to get them out - which in some cases meant a lifetime of washing and virtual imprisonment. What was their crime? Pregnancy, in most cases; but some girls were transferred there from orphanages, some were deemed to be a threat, or at risk of falling prey to lust.

The play focuses on eight of these 'Maggies', their stories, and their attempts to leave the laundry. In their dealings with the few men they encounter within the steamy walls (priests and delivery men) and in their contact with their relatives, we see them through the eyes of the 'free'. Robbed of their lives because of events beyond their control, they were branded as 'sinners' and locked away to 'wash away the stain'.

How do they cope with the gruelling toil, and the stigma, the abandonment by their families and the sense of the passing years with no hope of reprieve? And how did they cope with the agony of losing their babies? This play is fictional only in the sense that the girls depicted are not based on actual women known to the author- however, any similarity to real persons living or dead is regrettable, but all too likely.

## **The Scenes**

Act 1	Scene 1	A Café
	Scene 2	A Hallway
	Scene 3	The Refectory
	Scene 4	The Dormitory
	Scene 5	The Nun's Parlour
	Scene 6	The Delivery/Hampers Room
	Scene 7	Mother Superior's Office
	Scene 8	The Dormitory
Act 2	Scene 1	The Visitors Parlour
	Scene 2	The Delivery/Hampers Room
	Scene 3	The Hallway Outside Father O'Connell's Office
	Scene 4	The Refectory
	Scene 5	The Visitors Parlour

# ACT 1

As the audience are settling, 'This Woman's Work' by Kate Bush is played (from the CD 'The Sensual World', EMI 1989).

## Scene 1 A Cafe

As the house lights dim, the cast sing 'Going To The Chapel Of Love' offstage and unaccompanied. If this is not possible, play a recording, (preferably an earlier version than the well-known 1960's recording by The Dixie Cups).

It is Spring 1946. Lights fade up to two women drinking tea in a café, suggested by a table and two chairs. The sounds of clinking cups are heard offstage. Both women are wearing nondescript shapeless coats, which could be from any era. Both are nervous. Mary is about 28, the girl is about 16.

- Mary** Well, well, this is nice isn't it? I'll not be late back though, or I'll be in trouble.....
- Girl** No need to worry about that. No need to worry about any of that, any more.
- Mary** Oh I'm not worried, for I'll not be late. I've not been late for...oh. For months. You soon learnt not to be late, oh, my word, yes, I learnt that very soon.
- Girl** Shush, now. I mean; don't let's talk about that. *(Pause. She watches Mary stirring and stirring her tea)*  
Have you enough sugar?  
*(Mary puts 3 more sugars in. Girl is amazed at how much sugar she is heaping in. Mary giggles and looks around guiltily.)*
- Mary** Don't tell- don't tell them how many I've had! *(she giggles, and slurps and laughs delightedly. Then she looks around furtively)* You won't tell will you? Will you ... what's your name again?
- Girl** Nancy.
- Mary** Oh, aye, Nancy. You told me. You're a very pretty girl. Your hair is so long. And your clothes ... they're very pretty. You'd need to be careful when you wash them, or they'd go out of shape, and then you'd catch it ... like the lace things ... from the Big House ... the silks and the voile, oh just imagine wearing those!
- Nancy** *(with tears in her eyes)* You shall have all the silk and lace you want. I'll get you whatever you want. And you'll never wash anything ever again.
- Mary** *(laughs)* Oh get along with you; whatever would I be doing wearing clothes like that? The other girls would only be at me for swank. And what would I be doing in clothes like that, sure they'd never let me. Anyway I'm not at the washing any more, they let me do the mending and the ironing now, and the re-packing, it's a holiday for me nowadays, though I do miss all the chat round the washboards.
- Nancy** Would you like another scone?
- Mary** Oh I would, I would, it was lovely, but hadn't I better get back? Sure it's nearly time for Mass. I'd a big pile of mending to do, and it's not done; and tonight is hot pot night. I love those dumplings, Pauline says they're even better than her Mammy's.
- Nancy** Now listen, listen ... I don't know what to call you.
- Mary** Mary is my name, pretty miss.
- Nancy** *(struggles)* Now listen. Its like I told you before, in there. You don't have to go back there. I've come for you. You're coming home, with me.
- Mary** Home? I remember home. The sound of the gulls, and the wind. The wind blew the dust in. It was hard keeping the floor clean. We had curtains with little checks, little green checks - that's gingham. Its not hard to wash, you can boil it. Sometimes the colour runs - and that's bad.
- Nancy** Listen. Listen M .. Mary. I've come such a long way, such a long way to see you. I wrote you a letter - did they give you the letter?
- Mary** The letter? From Boston. I kept the stamp. Such a lovely smell on the paper! Wasn't it lavender?  
*(Nancy reaches out to touch her hand, MARY stares down at the hand)* Oh look at your soft, soft hands, so smooth and smelling of lavender! Angela loves lavender best, but Pauline says she loves violets. I like roses, the pink roses smell ... *(Bells ring, Mary jumps up, and her cup tips over).*
- Mary** Oh by all the saints- now I'm going to be late, I'm late. *(the tea is spilt, Mary tries to mop it up and starts crying)*
- Nancy** Don't worry - leave it, it doesn't matter *(they are both talking at once and Mary tries to break free but Nancy won't let her go)*
- Nancy** You're not late, you're not going back!

**Mary** Look, you! Nancy, or whoever you are! Let go of me, let go! I shall be in trouble, I don't want to be told off, they'll make me miss breakfast!

**Nancy** *(crying)* You won't miss breakfast, or wash, or mend, or iron. And no one shall tell you off for being late ever again. You've had 16 years of hell, but its over now. You're coming home with me.

**Mary** I won't get told off?

**Nancy** That's right. I told them, they know, it's OK. Honest. Its all been settled.

**Mary** They said I could go back after Mass?

**Nancy** Sit down, sit down. I've sorted it all out with Mother Superior.

**Mary** But Sister Gabriel ...-

**Nancy** I told Sister Gabriel, it's all settled. Sister Gabriel, with the moustache, right?

**Mary** *(laughs)* We call her Clark Gable. *(hurriedly)* Don't tell .

**Nancy** Now come on, relax. How about an éclair, or a slice of Victoria sandwich? Huh? Or a toasted tea cake, or an ice cream?

**Mary** Oh I don't know, I don't know what to choose, what's a milkshake? It says 'milkshake' up there on the sign, doesn't it? Martha taught me to read - in the evenings, at recreation time. We read the life of Joan of Arc. I like that one. I miss Martha.

**Nancy** What happened to her? Did her daughter come and fetch her home? Or her son?

**Mary** *(shivers)* No. No one fetched her. No one. Pauline's Mammy came once, but she didn't come to fetch her. She went away, again, and Pauline cried. I'll have a strawberry milkshake please. Nancy.

**Nancy** Sure thing. *(she signals to unseen waitress.)*

**Mary** *(giggles)* You talk funny. Where are you from?

**Nancy** Boston. *(Mary is none the wiser)* In America.

**Mary** America is it? But that's away away, over the sea. That's a great big land isn't it? How did you get here? On a big ship?

**Nancy** I flew, on a plane.

**Mary** Get along, you're kidding me. I've heard of planes though, Pauline told me. And Bernadette, she's seen one she said. Right up close. But what was your mother thinking, letting you come all this way by yourself?

**Nancy** My ... adoptive mother. She's happy for me to come here, she knew it was real important for me, to find my real birth mother. *(There is a long silence and Mary seems to have a glimmer of comprehension. The waitress comes over)*

**Waitress** Oh will you look, it's one of those Maggies! Now then, you. Out of it! What'll the nuns say if they catch you in here? *(Mary has bolted before the waitress has finished speaking.)*

**Nancy** Come back! Wait. Come back ... *(she gathers together her things, but Mary has gone)*  
*(She turns and glares at the waitress)*

**Nancy** How dare you, how can you be so cruel?

**Waitress** Ah well miss, it's plain to see you're not from these parts, or you'd know better than to associate with the likes of them; they're a bad lot don't you know, and their own priests and families had them locked away so as not to contaminate decent folks like ourselves.

**Nancy** Well if that's the attitude of you people it's a damn good job I'm taking her home.

**Waitress** Is that right? To Amerikky is it? Sure and that's just as well, best place for her, I'm thinking. And she's your cousin, I suppose?

**Nancy** *(defiantly)* She's my mother. *(She storms out, leaving waitress staring after).*

## **Scene 2 A Hallway**

*(It is sixteen years earlier. Young Mary is scrubbing the floor, singing "Jesus Wants Me For A Sunbeam" or "What A Friend We Have In Jesus". She seems content and in a dream.)*

**Voice off** Mary?  
*(Mary stiffens, begins scrubbing furiously, guiltily. Enter Sister Ignatia).*

**Ignatia** Have you not finished that floor yet Mary?

**Mary** Ah ... not quite Sister, I'm afraid not.

**Ignatia** Well ... it'll be time for supper very soon; if you've not finished there'll be no morsel left by the time you get yourself down there.

**Mary** Could I not finish it after supper Sister?

**Ignatia** Now Mary, Mary, what have we told you? All the day's tasks must be done before we ask the Lord's blessing at the meal. You know that by now surely.

**Mary** When can I go home Sister?

**Ignatia** Your family will come for you when they're ready. If that time comes ... best not to think of that. This is your home now, Mary. Now get on with that scrubbing. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, remember. It's a pity you didn't remember that before. *(Ignatia exits. Mary stares after her in open-mouthed amazement).*

**Mary** What did she mean by that? I was always the cleanest one, always on my knees at home, always washing the clothes there too ... I wish I knew why they have brought me to this place. *(Mary stands, and as she does we see she is pregnant. She wanders off. Her bucket clanking.)*

*As the lights dim, the cast sing 'Mamma, He's Making Eyes At Me', again offstage and unaccompanied. If this is not possible, play a recording, but NOT the 1970's version by Lena Zavaroni, or anything of a similar tempo or style.*

### **Scene 3 The Refectory**

*A procession of girls, some more pregnant than others cross the stage to set up the meal table; ie the set change is part of the action. They mutter and greet one another etcetera, voices hushed, and looking guiltily around for the nuns, they lay the table for the meal.*

**Bernadette** Now where d'you s'pose the penguins are?

**Martha** Have you not heard? The ould wan has up and died, or about to ... and the others are all rushed to be at her bedside when she pops off.

**Assumpta** Well what about the supper? I'm about ready to faint, me stomach thinks me throats been cut! That babby of mine takes some feeding, I'm starving! Sure I'll be glad when someone comes and buys him off the nuns and I can get some peace.

**Angela** Oh now Assumpta you cannot mean that now, sure he's a darling little babby with the bluest eyes I've ever seen.

**Assumpta** Oh those eyes! When I see them looking up at me, it's his father all over again; some other poor girls'll be brought here on account of those eyes, and that's no lie.

**Martha** Did you love him Assumpta?

**Assumpta** Ah now, love; that's the word isn't it?

**Bernadette** Aye, it's the word that got us all in this mess, for they use that word to unlock our hearts and make us forget our Mother's warnings ...

**Mary** *(coming in late)* Is supper over? Have I missed it?

**Angela** Ah don't fret yourself me darling, we're all waiting ourselves. Mother Superior is at the bedside of Sister Clare. We'll maybe have to say Grace ourselves tonight.

**Bernadette** How are you settling in Mary? And how do you feel in yourself? Are you feeling sick still ... is your babby kicking yet?

**Mary** My ... babby? I haven't got a babby.

**Angela** *(indicates Mary's bump)* And what d'you think is pushing your dress out there and giving you the heartburn? What has brought you here if not that?

**Mary** *(terrified)* What ... ? What do you mean? *(looks around at them all fearfully)* Daddy said I'd to come here to be cured. But I have stopped feeling sick, so maybe I'll be going home soon.

**Assumpta** *(whispering to Bernadette)* She doesn't know!

**Bernadette** How old are you my poppet?

**Mary** Thirteen. I'm thirteen ... in two days. They'll be fetching me back for my birthday, I'm sure of it. Da will fetch me back. It wasn't him that wanted me brought here ... it was that new wife of his.

**Assumpta** And who else lived with you before your Da got re married Mary?

**Mary** No one lived with us, I did it all for Daddy. I didn't need anyone, we managed by ourselves! Daddy drove the cart into town when we needed anything ... we were fine by ourselves!  
*(All the girls look concerned at each other)*

**Angela** *(to the others)* One of us must tell her why she's here.

**Martha** Go on then.

**Mary** What is it? What have I done? Why am I here?

**Bernadette** It's not what you've done ... but what's been done to you. It was not your fault Mary. Always remember that. We're all in the same boat, brought low by the lusts of men.

**Assumpta** Ah now you're confusing her. Tell her straight out. Tell her the truth, we're all sick of hearing the poetry of the prayer book, and the lyrical language of the Irish. *(takes a deep breath)* You ... you're pregnant, and there's an end of it.

**Mary** *(lips quivering)* I ... don't ... understand you, what is 'pregnant?' Do you mean ... locked away?

**Angela** Holy Mary mother of God, the girl's a complete ignorant!

**Martha** Do you know how babies are made Mary?

**Mary** *(sobbing now)* I'm hungry and I want my supper.

**Assumpta** Leave her be then, they say ignorance is bliss. It'll be more of a shock when she gets the pains, and her babby wants to be born to face the glorious life here that we are all gratefully enjoying.

**Marie** *(bringing in some baskets of bread)* Give her some crusts, she's near to fainting with hunger. *(They all fall on the bread.)*

**Martha** Won't you catch it, Marie, going in the kitchens and helping yourself?

**Marie** I've been here long enough not to mind them and their tantrums ... they've learnt not to try their rough treatment on me. Anyway there's nothing worse they can do to me. I was Mary's age when I came here ... and I'm sixty four this year.

**Pauline** Sixty four? We thought you was at least a hundred.

**Marie** Aye ... you'll be joking too when you've been here a few years more, and realise you're never getting out of here except in your long box.

**Mary** Why have your family never come for you to take you home ... did you do something very terrible? Did you kill someone?

**Marie** No ... but I wished I had! If I had gone to prison for manslaughter I'd be out by now. *(a kitchen girl brings out more food, of the thin soup variety, and ladles it out for them; she is very pregnant indeed. They fall on it and wolf it down, although Mary, Angela, Pauline and Assumpta find the food very foul. After a few mouthfuls Mary rushes off to be sick. The others take no notice but share out her soup between them).*

**Angela** ... my Auntie'll come and fetch me soon. She said I only needed to stay here until the talk died down ... sure it won't be much longer ... my babby has been gone for nearly a month now ... and my cousin has gone to college in Dublin, so there's no chance of a ... of another mistake ...

**Marie** That's right, my girl, you keep telling yourself that, the way you'll keep your spirits up.

**Angela** Do you think those ould cows give our letters straight into the fire though? I've had no replies.

**Martha** Sure now, if you want to be certain of your letters being posted you've to ... 'make friends' with the delivery drivers. The van drivers. You know, a favour for a favour. *(she winks and laughs coarsely)*. How d'you think I get me fags? *(Angela looks appalled).*

*As the lights dim, the cast sing 'Hold Your Hand Out, Naughty Boy' (trad), again offstage and unaccompanied. If this is not possible, play a record of this song. This continues while the next scene is set up.*

#### **Scene 4 The Dormitory**

*In the Dormitory, a candle burns under the statue of Jesus, suspended over the girls beds.*

**Martha** Bernie! Are you asleep?

**Bernadette** Not any more, anyway!

**Martha** Will you keep a lookout for me, and call out the window if Gabriel comes round on the spy?

**Bernadette** What is it you are up to now, you eejit.

**Martha** Best not tell ... least you know, the less you can let slip, heh? And that way if Gabriel asks, your conscience is clear. But I'll just say ... I'm not spending the rest of me days here, if youse are all contented.

**Bernadette** Have you forgotten what it was like here before Katie did a runner? And what it's been like for us mugs in the months since? And how we have the doors locked to this room at night now, and have no Sunday walks along by the canal ever since, gazing at the reflection of the broken glass on the walls, in the dirty water?

**Martha** Do you begrudge me, Bern? I cannot stay here much longer, that way I'll go stark mad and murder somebody- or drink the bleach, or hang myself with a dressing gown cord.

**Bernadette** (*nods and smiles ruefully*) And what'll you do if you do get out from here Martha? Have you a wealthy Squire waiting for you? Has your man decided he'll leave his wife after all?

**Martha** I wish I'd never told you that. You've never told me why you're here ... don't you trust me Bernie?

**Bernadette** Go to sleep Martha- a relaxing day of back breaking scrubbing and blistering ironing for 12 hours awaits us, with some delicious morsels to nourish us into the bargain. Thank God for the benevolence of the kind Sisters of the Holy Saints, who took us in when our own devoutly Christian families turned their backs on us.

**Martha** How long have you been here Bernie?

**Bernadette** Now you can see why I never tell you anything, for your mind cannot retain it! As I have told you before, I came here in November of 1919.

**Martha** Ten years!

**Bernadette** All but two months. Do you think Sister Gabriel will throw me an Anniversary party?

**Martha** Why did you not get out- you could get a job- waitress? Cleaner?

**Bernadette** You know the rules- If your family doesn't come for you, you must have a job waiting. Or - or else you'll go on the streets; what job will you get without a reference? And who will have you if they know you're from here? Maybe you haven't heard what they call us.

**Martha** Aye, I've heard them. How is it the men who put us here are off free as air? No one is pointing the finger at them, or looking at them like they crawled out from the slime. I told my Priest who the father was, and he says ... "Martha, Martha, what for did you want to go tempting a married man and luring him away from his rightful lawful wife? Sure you're no better than a strumpet".

**Bernadette** Did you ever think, if Mary, the blessed Virgin had been born in Holy Bloody Ireland, she'd be scrubbing shitty sheets like us?

**Marie** Hush now Bernadette; if any of them sainted nuns hear you saying such things you'll have no food or rest for a week. Now to sleep, the pair of you. You're keeping the young ones awake.

*As the lights dim, the cast sing 'The Wild Rover' (trad), again offstage and unaccompanied. If this is not possible, play the recorded music.*

## **Scene 5 The Nun's Parlour**

*The next day at afternoon tea. Sister Ignatia is introducing Sister Margaret to Father Doyle.*

**Ignatia** And this is Father Doyle, sister, who has been with us for only 6 weeks. Father, this is Sister Margaret, who has come to us from Galway.

**Doyle** Ah Sister, Galway Bay ... I'm sure I've been there ... at some time...

**Margaret** Or else you saw it on a postcard, and feel as if you've been there?

**Ignatia** Sister Margaret is very jovial, isn't she Father? A few months here 'll soon settle her down. Sure we all felt much more skittish, the days before associating with the likes of these wore us down. Will you have some tea, Father? (*they all take tea*)

**Doyle** How is little Mary settling in Sister Ignatia? That poor wee girl ... she seems more of a victim than most of the ... er ... penitents, we have here.

**Margaret** Why do you say that Father?

**Ignatia** Oh well, they all do cry and take on a fair bit when they first arrive, and she is only thirteen ...

**Margaret** Holy Mother of God, thirteen! And how old is the father of her child?

**Doyle** That is the reason I said she was more of a victim than most. I have spoken with her, and it seems she had no idea that she was in fact with child. Or indeed where she is, or what for, or how she came to be in the state she is in.

**Margaret** But her family, her parents ...

**Ignatia** Precisely, a godless man, a widower. The new step-mother of the girl took one look at her and quite rightly ordered her out of the house. How could she share her house with such a one as that?

**Margaret** But the baby's father ... could he not be found?

**Doyle** The girl insists she never was alone with any man or boy, or even saw a man or a boy, for the past year. she was off school nursing her mother, who died about 6 months ago, and then she took care of the house and stayed on the farm, which was 12 miles from the nearest house.

**Margaret** But surely ...

- Ignatia** Oh it's all wickedness and lies and the girl is clearly tainted. We must pray for her soul, and the work here will be her penance. The family are well shut of her, and I'm sure by the letter I had from them a few days ago they have no intention of having her back. The little miss will soon tire of her innocent act.
- Margaret Sister, I haven't met her of course, but is it possible that she was telling the truth?
- Ignatia** When you've been here as long as I have ... sixteen years, you will know that the girls we get here have allowed themselves to forget the teachings of God and Jesus, and have sinned most heinously, and that depravity has tainted every part of their minds and souls, and they are corrupt and foul in every way, and have been responsible for what has happened to them and now try to blame everyone but them selves for their own evil acts.  
*(Father O'Connell comes breezing in)*
- O'Connell** What's all this about evil acts? Has Ida allowed the cake to burn on top again? *(he makes a greedy pile of cake on his plate, and slurps his tea)* Well, well now , what have we here? *(he looks out of the window)* Do I spy some new inmates in our little home from home?
- Doyle** Oh, Father O'Connell, may I introduce Sister Margaret to you?
- O'Connell** Oh begging your pardon, sister, I am most happy to make your acquaintance. And what do you think of our little Shangrila? Have you been shown the laundry, the birthing rooms and the nursery? Some of the girls do look their best when they are nursing their babies, don't you think, Father Doyle? *(Father Doyle looks shocked and embarrassed)* Some of them are most extremely young, most. Who'd have thought they were old enough to even be able to ...
- Ignatia** *(who is clearly deeply offended by Father O'Connell)* Father, *(indicating the new Nun)* Sister MARGARET ... Sister Margaret - this is her first day, and she, well, it all takes a bit of getting used to. She's from Galway.
- O'Connell** What has that to do with anything, Sister Ignatia? They have babies there too I suppose.
- Margaret** They do indeed. And if we don't want too many more we must begin a programme of education, so these poor girls are not caught out by ignorance.
- O'Connell** What heresy is this? Not some of your English nonsense, which is against the teaching of His Holiness the Pope?
- Margaret** *(blushing)* I said education Father, not birth control. And surely we don't want babies born out of wedlock.
- O'Connell** And if you had your way what would become of the Magdalen Laundries ... of which there are more than 50 throughout Ireland? But that Utopia will not come to pass, because there will always be sinful young girls succumbing to the temptations pounding in their loins, and their evil acts will bear fruit. It seems to me it's time you had the full tour, Sister. *(He opens the door for her to go out)* I suggest you start with the pressing rooms.  
*(The two ladies begin to exit)*
- O'Connell** Women! We are surrounded by women, Father! *(they have heard this)* They like to pretend they're not, they dress all in black, and hide their bodies, but they are women still. More tea?
- Doyle** No thank you, Father. I have letters to write. To some women. *(He goes to the door, then turns)* My mother and my sister actually.

*As the lights dim, the cast sing 'If You Ever Go Across The Sea To Ireland', again offstage and unaccompanied. If this is not possible, play a recording of the music.*

## **Scene 6 The Delivery / Hampers Room**

*If possible, steam, smells and sounds of the laundry. If smells can be managed it should be boiling bleach water, stale socks, really bad egg smells or nappy-type stinks. There is a sound of gushing water and hissing steam, bubbling, then voices, then praying, chanting over the top: "Holy Mary, full of Grace, The Lord is with thee, Blessed art thou amongst women, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" etc).*

*(Pauline and Mary enter dragging a huge hamper across the stage from SL to SR.)*

- Pauline** *(out of puff)* Slow down there, Speedy or you'll have me giving birth before me time. I'm not due for another three weeks. Here, let's be having a quick rest while Sister Iggy is showing that new one around upstairs.
- Mary** Pauline, is it true, that I have a baby growing inside of me, like you?

**Pauline** Looks that way, alright. Or else you're a snake and you've swallowed a goat, what do you think? Sure you must have known what'd come of all that kissing and carrying on with your man there, whoever he was. Was he handsome at least? Did you love him?

**Mary** I never kissed any man, except me Da. And what has that to do with this? (*pointing to her 'bump'*).

**Pauline** (*uneasy*) Now come on, joxer, enough of your playacting, surely even a young one like yourself knows how babies are made? We're on our own now, you can tell me, who's the babby's father?

**Mary** You sound like that knife-faced bag that's married me Da. She kept asking me that, with such a look on her face! The night before I came here, I heard that bitch talking, she was saying to me Da ... "Now I know why you was so keen for us to get married so quick, and bring the wedding forward, the way the town would think it was mine; you'd an idea to foist this on me, had you? You were going to ask me would I pretend it was mine?" I'm thinking, what's 'it'? Then I heard a sound, like a slap. I heard me Da say ... "I've agreed to her going, haven't I? I've married you, when no one else would look at you, an ugly widow with an uglier son! I've turned out me own daughter for you and it's still not enough! Do you not know how me heart is ripped out of me, losing the wife I loved and now the daughter I loved". And then her again ... " 'Loved her'? Too much! We can all see how you loved her!". I didn't know what she meant at all, but I knew me Da loved me, I saw it in his eyes, and the tears in them when Father Mac came in the trap to bring me here. I threw me arms round me Daddy's neck and begged him ... "Don't send me away!" And he says to me ... "Mary, as God is my witness if it was up to me it would be just we two, like it's been since your Mammy died. Now listen Mary", he says, ... "you'll go away for a while and I'll send for you. I promise I'll send for you when this trouble is over. The doctors will put you right and then you'll come back". And then he starts to kiss me, and cry, and kiss me, like he always does ...

**Pauline** Did he so?

**Mary** Pauline, please tell me, I want to know, and we might not have long to talk, how did the baby get inside me? And how will it get out? Will it hurt me something terrible? Will I burst open like a ripe tomato?

(*Jim and Donal the delivery men enter, carrying a full hamper between them from SR. Jim's a bit of a 'jack-the-lad' type.*)

**Jim** Hello me darling girls, having a quick lie down? Sure and wasn't it lying down got you here in the first place.

**Donal** Great God, do you see the age of this one Jim? She looks younger than me daughter at home, who is safely at her school work, thanks be to God. And as innocent as a flower, not like this little trollop, who ought to be at her sums, not on her back with her legs in the air.

**Pauline** Shut your mouth you dirty pig, it's on account of a filthy pig like you that she's as she is...

(*enter Sister Gabriel*)

**Gabriel** Pauline! Go to the sink in there and fetch the soap. Your mouth must be washed. AT ONCE!! (*turning to the men*) I regret this outburst, Mr Docherty and Mr Maguire; rest assured it will not happen again, and the girl shall be punished.

**Mary** Please, sister- it wasn't her fault, she was trying to protect ...

**Gabriel** SILENCE, MISS! (*She grabs Mary by her hair and drags her away off SL.*)

(*The men sit at their ease while the sounds of washing, choking, retching can be heard and the pleas of the two girls. Sister Gabriel can be heard praying over them the whole while. The men smirk and light cigarettes. They smoke, and listen with enjoyment*)

**Donal** The Sisters here do their best, but , the damage is done. They're a bad lot altogether.

**Jim** Aye, it's right to keep them locked up here, away from the decent and the good, such as our own sisters and wives.

**Donal** And me own three daughters. I thank Christ I've brought them up righteous, to respect the teachings of the church ... (*Enter Angela who creeps up to them with her letters up her sleeve*). Well, who's this? If it isn't the little Angela.

**Angela** Please, will you post my letters for me, please, please Sir?

**Donal** And what's in it for me, my little darling? I see you've got your figure back, and a lovely shape you have, just right for the work I've in mind. Let's away to the store room and 'discuss the payment' for the favour, me angel. Well named, eh, with your sweet little mouth. (*As he is talking he hustles her off stage to his usual venue*).

(*Jim is laughing at this when Martha enters*)

**Martha** Can I smell fags? Where's Donal?

**Jim** Ah, Martha, Donal is engaged at the moment, will I do?

**Martha** Who with? (*Jim merely smirks*) Not that Angela! After the look she give me the other night when I told her how to get her letters out - the hussy has stolen me man!

**Jim** Well now me darling, I've some fags here you can have, for the usual 'favour'. You're a cute little piece, and I've had me eye on you for a while. That Donal should share you around a bit, I'm thinking, and let others have a turn. (*He tries to lead her off as he speaks*)

**Martha** No, you don't understand. Donal was going to help me get out of here ... I was special ... he was sweet on me.

**Jim** Now then, girl, you're talking soft, as if Donal would risk losing his job. What'd happen to his five children and his dear good wife, Nora, that would spit on you rather than be in the same room as a whore like yourself?  
(*Martha feels as if she's been slapped*)

**Martha** (*gasping*) Married? What for did he go with me then, if he's got such high principles and all?

**Jim** Now then, you know right well it was your luring him and tempting him with your soft mouth, just like you're doing to me, sure I can't resist your charms. (*He tries to kiss her*)

**Martha** Wait now, if I'm a whore, as you said just now, I'll get the payment I want and let's not call it by sugary names. I want money for it not fags, and promises which are lies, and the same damn talk that I believed about me soft eyes that got me locked up in this hell hole! Love! The father of me child told me he loved me and we'd be married when he came back, only he never did come back! He was already married, and he'd got a wife in Dublin. And I've been caught the same way again! And me, that was as pure a heart that ever wore the little white communion dress, I went to him as untouched as any bride ever did, and now because I believed him and trusted, I'm a whore. And what was *he* then? Why is he (*pointing towards Donal who now re-enters, tucking in his shirt*) not called names?

**Jim** Oh shut your trap, and stop shouting, you'll bring the Gabriel down on us, and then the jigs up, and no one gets anything. If it's money you want you've come to the wrong shop, for if we wanted high class goods we know where to get them, and it's not with you stinking, unwashed sluts.

**Donal** What's all the row? (*he sees Martha's face and looks slightly sheepish*) What's all the blarney about money? Sure you knew it was just a bit of fun, to cheer you up, and never meant a thing.

**Martha** Bit of fun? Whose fun? I'm not laughing. I want to get out of here, and you said you'd help.  
(*Donal shrugs and the men prepare to leave*)

**Martha** Alright then; if you don't help me I know your name and the name of your company, and your wife's name. I can write letters meself! Or I can tell the Mother Superior, and you won't be coming here again, and she'll complain, and you'll lose your job.

**Donal** (*uncertainly*) Ah, who'd believe a trollop against the word of a decent upstanding man. But here, just to show there's no hard feelings, have a packet of fags. (*He throws them at her*) And let's call it quits, after all, it was you dragged me in there - you strumpets are always wanting it. I could complain meself, for it's every time I come here one or other of youse is after getting me trousers off.  
(*Angela enters as they both exit laughing*).

**Angela** Don't forget about me letters!  
(*Martha turns and stares at her in rage. Donal throws the letters back at Angela. There is a short silence.*)

**Martha** Well, that went well, didn't it? Did you enjoy your 'bit of fun'? I hope you liked it better than I did.  
(*Angela stares at her, unsure whether to laugh or cry*)

**Martha** Now then, girl, no tears. At least we're not married to the bastard!

*As the lights dim, the cast sing 'Whiskey In The Jar' (trad), again offstage and unaccompanied. If this is not possible, play a recorded music version.*

## **Scene 7 Mother Superior's Office**

*A very cosy little parlour, with an armchair and a 'warm fire burning'. Mother Superior, who is a bit like everyone's favourite grandmother, is talking to Sister Margaret.*

**Superior** Now then, Sister, how are you settling in? Have another slice of the madeira cake.

**Margaret** Mother- I wanted to ask you; can none of the girls here be allowed to leave? Some of them, like wee Mary, have done nothing wrong.

**Superior** (*Has been through this a few times, sighs ...*) Now then, Sister. I'm sure you have had the situation explained to you. What will Mary do if we 'let her out'? Her family are more than welcome to come for her at any time. We're not a prison here, but a refuge - the girls are brought here by their families.

They have no homes to go to. WE are their families now, and they are safe in the care of Jesus and his Eternal Love.

**Margaret** Could she not maybe get a job outside?

**Superior** In the town? They know she's from here, for they require a reference before they will give her a job. What decent family would want a girl like her as a servant in their homes?

**Margaret** But Mother, could we not make clear in the reference that it was as a total innocent she came here, and had no more idea of sin than a new born babe?

**Superior** Dear Margaret, you're quite an innocent yourself. We are not creating the Ireland we live in, but are helping the girls who have fallen victim to the world as it is. Is it our fault that there is sin in the world and in the minds of the unholy? If it was not for us and places like us, what would become of the likes of Mary? Turned out by their own families remember. She would be dead in a ditch by now, or turned to the most shameful ways, living on the streets, begging, or worse.

**Margaret** Marie has been here 50 years Mother. Could not she have been allowed to leave when she was past childbearing, with maybe a small amount of money, to start a little shop or ...?

**Superior** (*tetchily*) To start with Margaret, we have no money to spare. Any money made by the laundry supports the orphanage, the doctors bills, the supplies, the children's school books, food, the clothes, the heating ... I can show you the account books if you wish, but I can assure you we are not making money here!

**Margaret** I'm sorry Mother, please forgive me, I didn't mean to anger you.

**Superior** Tush dear, I am not in the least angry. As for Marie, she has been here so long now that the world outside would be a strange and frightening place; and she would miss all her friends. We are her true family here.

(*Enter Father O'Connell noisily and rather the worse for drink*)

**O'Connell** Ah, here you are Sister Margaret. They've all been shouting their heads off for you this hour, for one of them lassies is having her babby, and what a roaring and a bleating and a bellowing she's after making. Who'd have guessed it's the most natural thing in the world, to hear her carrying on? (*Sister Margaret rushes out during this blustering*) And there was I, in the middle of decanting the communion wine, when wasn't it that wee Angela comes running in to find help, her face all flushed pink and her eyes sparkling with the tears in them.

**Superior** Who is it?

**O'Connell** Angela, like I 'm telling you.

**Superior** No, Father, you ... (*controls herself*) ... which of the girls is having her baby?

**O'Connell** (*laughing immoderately*) Ah, I see what you mean now, I do, I see it, I thought you meant ... I thought ... Angela, says I! When all the time you were wanting to know ...

**Superior** I suppose it's Pauline, for she's the only one that's near her time. And her not even sixteen herself. The poor child.

**O'Connell** Ooh, madeira cake! My favourite. Now will I have a slice, do you think? As it's Sunday, I think maybe half a slice.

**Superior** I had a letter from the family just yesterday, the boy has married a widow in the district, so no chance there I'm afraid. And he was only eighteen himself, and the widow was fifty nine if she was a day, the letter says. Now why could he not have wed Pauline?

(*waits for Father O'Connell to ask, but he is not interested*)

**O'Connell** Ida does make a lovely madeira cake. The fruit cake now, that's a wee bit dry.

**Superior** Well, the boy, Jack, he had no land of his own, and Pauline's family of course, the father had died of T.B, and Pauline's brothers were trying to keep the farm going. Their cottage full to the brim as it was with the brothers wives and children.

**O'Connell** Yes, terrible, terrible. Is there any sherry to go with this cake now?

*As the lights dim, the cast sing 'Oh Dear, What Can The Matter Be?' (trad), again offstage and unaccompanied, to cover the scene change. If this is not possible, play a recording.*

## **Scene 8 The Dormitory**

*The girls sit on Bernadette's bed under the candle-lit statue, huddled under a blanket. A bell in the town chimes five.*

**Assumpta** Five- was it?

**Bernadette** Aye.

**Mary** Does it always take this long to get the baby out of you?

**Angela** I was ten hours. How long were you, Bern?

**Bernadette** Eight hours. She was a dear sweet baby too, with all her hair, and just that little birth mark on her face, like a strawberry. She'll be ten now, in three month's time. December 10th she was born.

**Mary** What did you name her?

**Bernadette** Patricia.

**Marie** The father's name was Patrick.

**Bernadette** Who says so?

**Marie** Wasn't it?

**Bernadette** Might have been.

**Martha** Tell us, Bernie. Why won't you?

**Bernadette** Nothing to tell.  
*(a scream is heard from far away)*

**Mary** What ever was that? Why is she screaming? Was that her?

**Marie** Quiet now, Mary, quiet yourself down, shh ...

**Mary** Will it hurt me like that? Did it hurt you, Assumpta?  
*(all the girls look at Assumpta, warning her not to tell)*

**Assumpta** What was the pain I had bringing my son into the world, to the pain I felt when I saw those blue eyes of his fathers staring into my own, telling me I could cut my throat before he'd marry me?

**Angela** He never said that, did he Assumpta?

**Assumpta** He told me I was trying to ruin his life and he didn't want a wife and baby round his neck. He'd got to make his way in the world. He had his old mother to care for, too, and all the little ones his father left when he died of the drink. I asked him, would he give me the money I'd away to Liverpool and get rid of the shame. He said if he had that kind of money, he'd go to England himself! And didn't I get the letter from my old school teacher just the other day telling me that the blue eyed lad had got the money together at last, and gone.

**Marie** Sure you're better off without such a one as that: if his Daddy died of drink it's likely he will too. For it's in the blood, you know. Now then, girls, let's all try to sleep, for it's been nearly twelve hours now that Pauline's been at it. I've known it go on for thirty six hours sometimes. You can't tell.

**Martha** They should get the doctor in, or take her to the hospital. Shouldn't they Marie?

**Mary** Will she die?  
*(more looks exchanged)*

**Mary** I don't want her to die. She's the only friend I've ever had.

**Marie** We're all your friends Mary, we all love you already, don't we girls?

**Angela** That's right Mary, you lie down now and we'll sing to you. What'll we sing?

**Mary** I know - it's the song my Daddy sang to me.

**Assumpta** Huh. That one!

**Mary** Why are you so cross with him. You all sound like it whenever I talk about him. I love him! And he loved me.

**Assumpta** Didn't he just!

**Marie** *(hastily)* Come on now, let's have that song. What was it?

**Mary** "My love is like a red, red rose ..."  
*(They all sing it, Mary drifts off to sleep.)*

**Marie** The poor wee lamb, was there ever such a sin and a shame and a desecration.  
*(Sound of car or van drawing up outside. They rush to the window, except Mary, who sleeps on)*

**Bernadette** The ambulance.

**Martha** By Christ, I've never seen an ambulance here before, have you Bernie? This must be bad.

**Marie** Aye. They're not over keen in paying for medical attention. Maybe it's a breech birth? Although when that happens they usually use the forceps and turn it ... maybe she needs a caesarian. If her heart is weak, she might need a caesarian, or she might have lost a lot of blood, I wish we knew.  
*(Enter Sister Gabriel)*

**Gabriel** I thought I heard your voices - get to bed, you have a normal day's work tomorrow. You will be hearing the rising bell in less than two hours...

**Marie** Sister, what's happening to Pauline?

**Gabriel** Pauline is being cared for. You must all sleep now. Some might say she brought this on herself.

**Assumpta** *(savagely)* Who says so?!!

**Gabriel** The inescapable facts are that all you girls had a choice. To sin, or to follow the teachings of the Church.

**Bernadette** Doesn't the church teach us that Jesus loves us, as he forgave and loved Mary Magdalen? Does Jesus want us to be locked up here for the rest of our lives? What about Mary here, she doesn't even know how she got her baby!

**Gabriel** These are all fascinating theological questions and I suggest you take them up with Father O'Connell. In the meantime I intend to do the work Jesus has given me to do, which is to care for you poor fallen women. Now to bed, or there will be no breakfast or tea breaks tomorrow. *(They reluctantly drift to bed, giving her glances of hate the while)* Let us all pray for Pauline. Dear Lord, you have seen fit to take the soul of the child spawned by sin and delivered by your servant Pauline O'Malley this night *(all the women gasp)* but we hope and pray your forgiveness and the shining light of your love will spare the life of the misbegotten sinner, even though she has cursed you out loud this very night and used language I was almost fainting from hearing. It is our hope and wish that she will one day see that your divine purpose was being enacted, in taking the child to you and saving that child from this world of base sin and depravity... *(her voice fades out as the song below is played over the top of her chanting)*

*As the lights fade, the cast sing the chorus of 'A Pair Of Brown Eyes', again offstage and unaccompanied, to cover the scene change. If this is not possible, play the recorded music (from 'The Best Of The Pogues', WEA 1991).*

~~~=== INTERVAL ===~~~

## ACT TWO

*As the audience are settling, the music of 'The Irish Washerwoman' (a traditional jig) is played.*

### Scene 1 The Visitors Parlour.

*December. 'Silver Bells' is playing on a radio, or 'Away In A Manger' is being practised by the orphans choir. Pauline's mother is visiting her daughter, restlessly pacing up and down while she waits for her to arrive. The only furniture in the room comprises of two hard chairs. Pauline enters. She looks absolutely awful and shuffles in like a ghost.*

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... in this Preview Script, the remainder of the play has been deleted from here ...

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