

SIX SISTERS

by Deanna Jent

Inspired by the history of the Congregation of St. Joseph, a group of religious women dedicated to bringing help and hope to all persons. Where possible, direct quotes from historical figures have been used.

While there are 19 female characters and 5 males characters in this play, it was written to be performed by an ensemble of 6-7 women (one must be African-American) and 1-2 men.

Six Sisters premiered at Fontbonne College, St. Louis MO, in April, 1996.

CHARACTERS:

In the present -- Lynn, Sarah, Jessica, Julie, Charlene, Mark (all high school seniors), Doris (a homeless woman), a homeless man/woman, Mrs. Pratt (a high school teacher)

In 1845 -- Mother St. John Fournier, Sister Antoinette Kincaid, Ruth

1791 - 1830 -- Mother St. John Fontbonne, Soldier(s), Countess de la Rochejacquelin

In 1648 -- a young girl, a mercenary soldier, a prostitute, Father John Peter Medaille, Sister Marguerite, Sister Francoise

The original production used the following **Character/Actor breakdown:**

Woman 1: a young girl in 1648; Sister Marguerite, 1648; Lynn

Woman 2: a prostitute in 1648; Julie

Woman 3: Doris; Mother St. John Fontbonne; Countess de la Rochejacquelin; Mrs. Pratt

Woman 4: Mother St. John Fournier, 1845; Sarah

Woman 5: Sister Francoise, 1648; Sister Antoinette Kincaid, 1845; Jessica

Woman 6: Ruth, 1845; Charlene

*NOTE: If possible, a 7th woman would play only Doris, and woman #3 could play the prostitute in 1648.

Man 1: a mercenary in 1648; a soldier, 1791-1830; Mark

Man 2: Father Medaille; a soldier, 1830; homeless man

*NOTE: One man can play all the male roles -- in this case, the 2nd soldier in scene 7 would be eliminated.

Scene One

*As the houselights dim to half, SLIDE shows: **France, 1648, a side street.***

The PROSTITUTE enters and looks around for customers, then stands to the side. From the back of the house comes a cry for help (in French) from the YOUNG GIRL, who rushes up to the stage, being chased by the MERCENARY. The MERCENARY catches the GIRL and pulls her to him, but is interrupted by the PROSTITUTE.

PROSTITUTE: Monsieur? Excusez-moi, monsieur?

Distracted, the Mercenary lets go of the girl, who runs away.

PROSTITUTE: Si vous etes en train de trouver une bonne temps, il ne faut pas me chasser.

MERCENARY: Quoi?

PROSTITUTE: If you're looking for some fun, you won't have to chase me down to get it.

MERCENARY looks around, and seeing that the girl has escaped, advances slowly to the PROSTITUTE, who smiles at him (thinking she has a customer). HE strikes her and SHE falls to the ground. HE looks around, then exits.

*SLIDE: **The Present, a side street.** DORIS, a homeless woman, walks slowly down the theatre aisle and onto the stage as the PROSTITUTE rises, brushes herself off, and exits. DORIS selects a spot to be her "home" and begins looking through her bags for something to eat. LYNN (the same actress who played the Young Girl in 1648) appears and watches Doris. DORIS sees Lynn watching her, and becomes nervous. DORIS and LYNN stare at each other. DORIS grabs her bags and leaves at the same time that LYNN runs off in the opposite direction.*

HOUSE LIGHTS fade out completely as loud contemporary Rock Music begins to play and the scenery moves for Scene 2.

Scene Two:

*SLIDE: **The Present, Sarah's basement.***

SARAH, JESSICA, CHARLENE, and LYNN dance onstage to the music, putting the scenery pieces in place as needed. When the set is ready, the music fades and the lights come up on them, seated in various couches and chairs.

SARAH: So here we are. Now who's missing?

JESSICA: Julie.

SARAH: Oh yeah, right. Should we wait for her or just start?

JULIE runs in.

JULIE: I'm here, I'm here, I'm here! *(She collapses on a chair.)*

SARAH: *(With a look at Julie)* OK. Now, let's review our assignment.

JESSICA: Our stupid assignment.

JULIE: As if history class wasn't bad enough -- now we have to do all this extra outside work.

SARAH: But I want our project to be better than the other groups.

JESSICA: But Sarah, they all have more interesting topics. I mean, the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet -- how boring can you get!

JULIE: No kidding.

A pause. Sarah looks at Lynn and Charlene.

SARAH: It's Lynn, right?

LYNN nods.

SARAH: And Charlene?

CHARLENE nods.

SARAH: What do you think about our "assignment"?

CHARLENE: I don't know. I figure, let's just do it and get it over with.

LYNN nods in agreement. There is another uncomfortable pause.

CHARLENE: But writing a skit about the history could be fun. I had a good time in drama class last year.

LYNN: I'm in that now. Mr. Price is a funny guy.

CHARLENE: Did he do his imitation of the Principal yet?

LYNN: *(laughing with Charlene)* Yes!

JESSICA: *(ignoring Charlene and Lynn)* So, Sarah, what do you think we should do?

SARAH: Start with research, I guess. Jessica and I can find out about how the Sisters started. I think she said it was in France somewhere in, like, the 1600's or something. Lynn, why don't you work on the 1700's, and Charlene, you and Julie can work on the 1800's and see if anything interesting happened then.

JESSICA: But I just thought of something.

SARAH: What?

JESSICA: If the Sisters started in France, then won't we have to speak French when we're doing our skit?

SARAH: No -- when you do plays and stuff, you always just speak English. I mean, how would they know what you were saying if you spoke French?

JESSICA: Well, yeah, but -- shouldn't we at least do a French accent or something?

LYNN: I think if we just tell them it's in France, they'll understand.

JULIE: Yeah. We could make some signs, you know, showing the year and the place. I've got a bunch of poster board and markers left from our last protest march.

SARAH and JESSICA look at each.

CHARLENE: Protest march?

JULIE: Yeah, our environmental club marched around a store that sells furs -- you know, protesting cruelty to animals, trying to keep people from going into the store.

SARAH: *(Quickly)* Okay. So when should we meet next?

JESSICA: *(To Sarah)* We can't tomorrow -- Pep Club meeting.

SARAH: Right. How about Wednesday?

JULIE: Okay with me.

CHARLENE nods.

LYNN: Okay.

SARAH: Same time?

EVERYONE nods. LYNN and CHARLENE exit together, followed by JULIE.

JESSICA: So we're going to do "nun" research.

SARAH: That's right, "sister!"

THEY laugh as they exit.

Scene Three:

SLIDE: 1648, France. Father Medaille's study.

FATHER MEDAILLE sits at his desk, finishing a letter. He reads it back to himself.

FATHER M: Dear Bishop de Maupas:

For several years now I have had in my Congregation a number of devout women who desire a life of consecrated virginity and religious service. They are too poor to join the cloistered religious (they have not the required dowry). Yet their desire to serve God, must, I think, be answered.

I have prepared a "Little Design" which I hope serves us all well. I propose a secret religious congregation for these women -- to be known as the Daughters of St. Joseph. They will live in groups of three, following strict "Spiritual Maxims," and organize other lay women to do works of piety and charity.

I realize that this proposal is somewhat revolutionary, and know that you will raise important questions about this plan. Will simple vows be strong enough to offset woman's "natural tendency to instability?" This I cannot answer. Only God knows if this "Little Design" will take root and grow.

I eagerly await your reply.

Most humbly,

(he signs as he says his name) Father John Peter Medaille

Scene Four:

SLIDE: The Present, a side street

DORIS drags a large cardboard box to her "spot" and sets it up as a "house." While she's placing her belongings inside . . .

SLIDE: The Present, a park

JULIE and her boyfriend MARK meet at their favorite bench in the park. THEY kiss and sit down.

JULIE: A little chilly today!

MARK: *(Holding her closer)* Let me warm you up.

THEY snuggle for a minute.

MARK: Got my acceptance letter today from Cal State!

JULIE: Great! At least I think it's great -- as long as I get accepted there too!

MARK: You will. You had lots of good recommendations.

JULIE: Yeah, but not very good scores.

MARK: It'll be okay.

JULIE: Yeah.

MARK: Just imagine -- this time next year we'll be sitting on the beach together.

JULIE: Doing homework!!

MARK: Right -- but sitting on the warm beach, listening to the waves.

JULIE: Watching the sunset.

MARK: Planning our wedding.

JULIE: *(smiles)* Yeah. You know, I hear life as a doctor's wife can be lonely.

MARK: I know. There's lots of long hours during med school.

JULIE: And being an intern.

MARK: But you'll be busy too -- fighting for justice!

JULIE: I still don't know for sure that I want to be a lawyer. I don't think I can get the grades to get into law school.

MARK: I'll help you. You'll be great -- standing up for the poor, the mistreated.

JULIE: Yeah, I know. Maybe I should just open an animal shelter.

During the following pause, SARAH, JESSICA, CHARLENE and LYNN enter the basement,

MARK: Whatever. *(Pause)* Aren't you supposed to be somewhere now?

JULIE: I don't think so. What is this, Wednesday?

MARK: Yeah.

JULIE: No. Just with you.

MARK: My favorite. *(He looks at his watch.)* I don't have to be at work for another two hours. Let's go back to my house.

JULIE: When does your Mom get home?

MARK: *(with a smile)* She's working late today.

THEY smile, stand and exit as lights come up on Sarah's basement.
SLIDE: *The Present, Sarah's basement*

JESSICA: So I was surprised to find that some of this stuff is kind of interesting!

CHARLENE: What do you mean?

JESSICA: Well, these Sisters of St. Joseph started as a "secret society."

SARAH: Why would nuns need to be secret?

JESSICA: And also, they're not nuns!

SARAH: What are you talking about?

JESSICA: Okay, first, they're not nuns because nuns live in a cloister.

CHARLENE: A who?

JESSICA: You know, all by themselves. They just stay in one place and, like, pray all the time. They don't go out and meet with real people.

LYNN: So the Sisters of St. Joseph aren't nuns.

JESSICA: No -- they're Sisters. Sisters and nuns are two different things. And, like, Priests and Monks are two different things. I think.

SARAH: Whatever. What about the secret society stuff?

JESSICA: Okay, listen. There were some women who wanted to be nuns.

CHARLENE: Nuns, not sisters?

JESSICA: Right, because there weren't any Sisters yet.

LYNN: No Sisters?

- JESSICA: Just let me tell you! They wanted to be Nuns (*she looks around for any comments, then continues*) but they couldn't be because they were poor. See, you had to pay this, like, entry fee or something. They called it a dowry.
- SARAH: You had to pay to be a Nun?
- JESSICA: That's what the book said!
- SARAH: You'd have to pay me to **be** a nun!
- CHARLENE: No joke!
- JESSICA: So they couldn't be nuns, but they wanted to serve the Church. So this guy, (*she looks at her notes*) Father Medaille, started a secret society he called "The Daughters of St. Joseph".
- CHARLENE: The Daughters. Now are they related to Sisters or Nuns?
- SARAH: Looks like Julie forgot about us.
- JESSICA: I'm not suprised. Anyway -- these women -- there were 6, lived in groups of 3 and went out in groups of 3 -- so they wouldn't be conspicuous.
- SARAH: Like nobody would notice 3 women dressed like nuns walking around?
- JESSICA: But they didn't dress like nuns. They wore, just, like, a widow's dress -- something plain and ordinary.
- LYNN: So what did they do?
- JESSICA: They just helped people. Like poor women. And -- (*she pauses dramatically*) one book I read said they helped -- prostitutes!
- SARAH: Helped them what?
- JESSICA: Taught them how to make lace.
- Pause. SARAH, LYNN and CHARLENE look at each other.*
- LYNN: And why did they do that?
- JESSICA: So they could make money! Lace was, like, an expensive thing. And it was hard to make. So they taught these poor women and these prostitutes how to make it, so they could support themselves, without, you know . . .
- SARAH: Okay, I get it. But we can't -- I mean, I'm not going to play a prostitute in front of history class. I'd never live it down.

JESSICA: Well, we don't have to show that part of it.

CHARLENE: Although it is pretty interesting.

SARAH: I like the secret society stuff.

JESSICA: They weren't secret for very long -- as soon as the bishops and stuff saw that the women were doing good work, and that they could be "religious" and still work in the public, they made them official "Sisters" of St. Joseph. *(Pause)* So, what do you think?

SARAH: Well, it's a start.

LYNN: I think it sounds cool. I like the idea of them helping people who really needed it.

CHARLENE: Do you have their names? 'Cause if we're going to play these Sisters, we should know their names.

JESSICA: *(handing Charlene a list)* Here.

SARAH: You guys thirsty? There's some Cokes and stuff up in the fridge.

JESSICA: Yeah. I'll go get some. *(To Sarah)* Coke?

SARAH: Diet.

JESSICA: *(To Charlene)* Coke?

CHARLENE: Sure.

JESSICA: *(To Lynn)* Coke?

LYNN: Let me come help you.

JESSICA and LYNN exit. Charlene looks at the list. Sarah seems uncomfortable.

SARAH: So, you're a senior?

CHARLENE: Yeah.

SARAH: Oh -- it's funny -- I've never seen you around -- before now.

CHARLENE: Yeah? Well, I guess we just don't hang out with the same people.

SARAH: Yeah. *(Pause.)* I wonder if they need some help with those Cokes?

CHARLENE: I don't know, but, uh -- I need some help here with these names. Do you speak French?

SARAH: Yeah.

CHARLENE moves over to sit next to Sarah, bringing the paper with the names.

CHARLENE: Six sisters. In -- *(points to a word on the paper)* how do you say this name?

SARAH: *(looking at the paper)* Le Puy. Le Puy, France.

CHARLENE: Six sisters in Le Puy, France. *(As she speaks the line above, we see a SLIDE of Le Puy.)* Can you read these names? 'Cause it's all French to me!

SARAH gives her a look and takes the paper. As she names each of the sisters, we see a corresponding slide with their name and diocese on it. Music plays underneath, or perhaps a chime tolls with each name.

SARAH: Marguerite Burdier from St. Julien in Forez of the Diocese of Vienne. Anna Vey, from St. Jeures De Bonas, of the Diocese of Le Puy. Anna Brun from St. Victor Malescourt, of the Diocese of Le Puy. Clauda Chastel, from Langogne, of the Diocese of Mende. Anna Chalayer, from St. Genest-Malifaux, of the Diocese of Lyon. Francoise Eyraud from St. Privat d'Allier of the Diocese of LePuy.

Lights down on the basement. SARAH and CHARLENE exit as Scene 5 begins.

Scene Five:

SLIDE: 1648, France, a side street

The PROSTITUTE (the same one we saw in scene one) enters and looks around for customers. Seeing none, she stops and waits. SISTER MARGUERITE and SISTER FRANCOISE enter, see the prostitute, and whisper to each other for a few moments. The PROSTITUTE sees the Sisters, and nods politely to them, expecting them to move on. The SISTERS approach the Prostitute, who is wary of them.

MARGUERITE: Excuse me . . .

PROSTITUTE: Yes?

FRANCOISE: Would you like to . . .

MARGUERITE: *(interrupting her)* Sister . . . *(to Prostitute)* Good day to you. We are . . . friends of the church, working with women and children in this neighborhood.

PROSTITUTE: Doing what?

FRANCOISE: Providing food, shelter -- teaching . . .

PROSTITUTE: Letters and numbers are of no use to me. And I make my own way -- I don't need charity.

MARGUERITE: Do you like lace?

PROSTITUTE: Lace?

MARGUERITE: *(showing her a sample)* Lace.

PROSTITUTE: Of course. Has the church gotten into the dress-making business now?

FRANCOISE: No -- but we are teaching women how to make lace -- so they can sell it to the dress-makers.

The PROSTITUTE looks at the lace and the Sisters, then turns away.

PROSTITUTE: My hands are too clumsy for such work.

MARGUERITE: *(taking her hand)* They look adequate to me. Lacemaking is hard work -- but you seem intelligent enough to learn.

FRANCOISE: Lace brings a good price in the market.

PROSTITUTE: Where do you meet -- to teach this? If it's in the church, I . . .

MARGUERITE: We have a house, a few blocks away. Walk there with us.

PROSTITUTE: *(looking around)* I'm not sure.

MARGUERITE: Perhaps you need time to think. We can return . . .

PROSTITUTE: *(suddenly deciding)* No. I don't -- need time. I'll walk with you.

The WOMEN exit. Music for the next scene begins.

Scene 6:

SLIDE: The Present, Sarah's basement

Loud rock music (like we heard at the beginning of the show) plays. SARAH enters and sits, waiting impatiently. She begins to listen to the music, slowly starting to dance, moving into an all-out boogie. CHARLENE enters and sees SARAH, who suddenly becomes aware of CHARLENE and stops dancing. They both sit, uncomfortable, as the song ends.

SARAH: Do you want to listen to -- uh, what kind of music do you like?

CHARLENE: *(playing with Sarah)* Got any rappers? Queen Latifah?

SARAH: Umm -- no.

CHARLENE: That's okay. Whatever you want is fine.

SARAH: Okay.

SARAH looks through a box of CD's as JULIE enters.

JULIE: Okay -- I'm here. I know I missed Wednesday -- it completely slipped my mind. Sorry. *(She sits.)* So what'd I miss?

CHARLENE: Let's see. The secret society of sisters -- not nuns. Prostitutes making lace. That about covers it.

JULIE: *(looking at Charlene, then Sarah)* Okay.

LYNN and JESSICA enter, talking.

JESSICA: So they cut their heads off?! *(LYNN nods)* Gross!!

SARAH: What are you talking about?

LYNN: The French Revolution.

JULIE: What does that

LYNN: See, there was a revolution in France -- they killed the King -- Louis the -- something -- 16th, I think.

SARAH: Yeah, and so?

LYNN: The new government wanted the church to break ties with the Pope -- they wanted to be in charge of the church. But only a few of the priests would swear allegiance to the state. So the rest of the priests became outlaws -- they were hunted down and put in prison.

JESSICA: They hunted down priests?

LYNN: And Sisters too -- see, the priests who did swear allegiance to the State needed the Sisters to help them at Mass, and to show them their support. But the Sisters of St. Joseph wouldn't do it. They tried to scare them, but the head Sister -- Mother Fontbonne -- she was pretty tough!

LYNN shows the group some information -- lights dim on the group in the basement as the slide below appears and lights come up on an area representing the Convent in 1791.

SLIDE: France, 1791. Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph

SOLDIER appears and knocks roughly on the door. MOTHER FONTBONNE opens the door.

FONTBONNE: What is wanted?

SOLDIER: Father Ollier says you must swear that you and the Sisters will obey the Constitution and assist at Mass in the parish church.

FONTBONNE: *(calmly)* We refuse.

SOLDIER: You cannot refuse! *(no movement from Fontbonne -- he tries to push his way in, then stands back and draws his weapon)* Let me in -- I will talk to each Sister privately.

FONTBONNE: "It is useless to present yourself to the community. Here the head speaks for the body."

The SOLDIER considers what to do, then walks away, muttering to himself. FONTBONNE closes the door as the lights dim on her and come back up on Sarah's basement.

CHARLENE: I guess she told him!

SARAH: So the Sisters stood up against the new government. Big deal -- I mean, people around here are always protesting what the government does.

LYNN: Yeah -- but we don't get our heads cut off for it!

JESSICA: Did they really do that?

LYNN: Well, some of the Sisters and the priests hid in the woods, or were hidden by people -- but if you got caught hiding a rebel priest, they'd put you in prison too.

JULIE: *(quietly)* Reminds me of . . .

CHARLENE: What?

JULIE: Hiding the Jews. You know, during I mean, it's on a much smaller scale. But still

Pause. Sarah doesn't like the silence.

SARAH: So get to the point. Did they really kill the Priests and the Sisters, or was it just a bunch of threats.

LYNN: *(Handing a piece of paper to Jessica)* Here. Read this.

As JESSICA reads the following, lights dim on the basement and backlighting comes up, showing 1 or 2 Sisters in silhouette behind prison bars. The Sisters will be kneeling, praying, until the story indicates that they leave for the guillotine. Perhaps we hear the sounds of the guillotine as appropriate.

JESSICA: *(reading)* "Not far from Le Puy lies the little town of Privas. Here, [on August 5, 1794], the vigil of the feast of the Transfiguration, five priests and three Sisters of St. Joseph went to the guillotine. A civil document records their names and their 'crimes.' The sisters were Sister Holy Cross, aged 63, superior; Sister Madeleine, aged 32; Sister Toussaint, aged 31. All were accused of 'having refused to take the civil oath, of having continued to live in community in violation of the law, of having given refuge to the priest Father Montblanc for several days and having allowed him to say Mass and perform other priestly functions in their convent, of having abetted his efforts to escape and of having hidden the sacred furnishings.' . . . Nearly two months of agonizing anticipation elapsed between the arrest of the sisters and their execution. For the elderly superior and Sister Madeleine, this delay was like a second novitiate during which they could purify their souls Sister Toussaint strove to imitate their courage, but her nerves were less robust than her faith. She was plunged into periods of dark depression. Her sleep was haunted by visions of the hideous blade of the guillotine and the leering eyes of the executioner. . . . On the fateful morning the sisters approached the place of the execution chanting a litany. With dignity and holy recollection Sister Holy Cross and Sister Madeleine mounted the steps of the scaffold and placed their heads upon the block. As Sister Toussaint prepared to follow them, her frail physique broke under the struggle of spirit against flesh. The sight of her dear sisters' heads, severed by the cruel blade, sickened her and she fell, unconscious, on the steps." They carried her, still unconscious, to the block.

Lights come back up on the basement. They are silent for a moment.

CHARLENE: I can't believe it.

LYNN: I know.

JULIE: That they would kill priests, and sisters -- I mean, people just trying to do good work.

CHARLENE: No -- that's not the part I can't believe. I can't believe they just went to their death like that! Why didn't they just swear the stupid oath -- they'd know in their hearts it wasn't true. Dying didn't prove anything!

JULIE: But they were doing what they thought was right!

CHARLENE: But they got killed for it. How does that help anything? Can they keep on doing good things if they're dead?

JESSICA: No, but, I guess they thought they had to take a stand.

SARAH: (*proudly*) Standing up for what you believe in!

CHARLENE: So you think that was right -- what they did?

JESSICA: Well . . .

SARAH: Sure. I mean, really, what does it matter what we think. They did it. We just have to report it as part of our skit.

CHARLENE: Would you do it?

SARAH: What?

CHARLENE: Die for something you believe in?

JULIE: I would.

SARAH: Sure. If I really believed it was right.

CHARLENE: Yeah -- like what. What could you possibly believe in enough to die for?

JESSICA: Well, like -- maybe if it was to save a friend.

CHARLENE: You really think so?

JESSICA: Yeah. Maybe.

JULIE: But see, if it makes a difference in the world, a difference for the good, then it's right.

CHARLENE: How do you know that those Sisters dying made a difference?

JULIE: Well . . .

LYNN: Because we're reading about it now.

CHARLENE: So what does that prove?

LYNN: Well, we're talking about it now -- if they'd just signed the oath and gone along with whatever, it wouldn't have been a big deal -- and we probably wouldn't be talking about it.

CHARLENE: *(shaking her head)* I just don't buy it. I mean, maybe a bunch of people, a big group, doing something together -- they can make a difference. One person -- she should just look out for number one

JULIE: You don't think we should try and help other people?

CHARLENE: No -- it's not that. I just think, if there are these huge problems, that what one person does isn't going to make much difference.

JULIE: So we just shouldn't even try?

CHARLENE: Try what?

JULIE: To make things better? To change things?

LYNN: You know -- I've been thinking about this kind of thing. I saw this -- homeless woman -- the other day. And I've been trying to figure out what I could do to help her. But I can't really think of anything.

CHARLENE: Exactly. It's a huge problem. One person can't change that.

JULIE: You can't change the whole problem, but you could help one person. And that's better than not helping one person.

LYNN: But how? I mean, I could take her some food, or try to find a home or a shelter or something for her. But that's just, you know, temporary. I mean, she needs . . .

SARAH: She needs to just get a job and work like everybody else does!

JESSICA: Sarah!

SARAH: Well excuse me -- I mean, I don't know her, I don't know her story, but it just seems like getting a job isn't that big of a deal. McDonalds is always looking for people. And there's factories and stuff. I mean, get a job, make some money, rent an apartment -- it's not that tricky!

LYNN: I was thinking about trying to talk to her.

JESSICA: Be careful. Some of those people are, well, you know, not all there.

SARAH: Well of course they're not all there -- you have to be a little crazy to decide to live on the street.

JULIE: I don't think it's necessarily a decision they make -- like they wake up one morning and say, "Gosh, what should I do today -- I think I'll give away everything I've got and go live on the street."

SARAH: I didn't mean it that way.

JULIE: Well that's what it sounded like.

SARAH: We're really way off the topic, anyway. We need to be talking about our history research.

Pause.

JESSICA: So -- um -- those sisters were killed. Was the other one, that Mother Fontbonne -- was she killed too?

LYNN: I don't know. I haven't read that far.

SARAH: Well, that will be the start of our next meeting. Okay? And then we'll hear about the 1800's and figure out what we're going to write about for our skit.

JESSICA: Okay. Monday okay with everyone? Same time?

They all nod and begin picking up their books. CHARLENE, LYNN and JULIE exit.

SARAH: Did you think I was right?

JESSICA: About what?

SARAH: Those people -- living on the street. I mean, it looks to me like they don't do anything -- they just sit around all day, or look through garbage. I mean, if they'd just put a little effort into it, they could be a lot better off.

JESSICA: *(as they begin to exit)* Yeah.

Lights fade on the basement and come up on the alley as the next scene begins.

Scene Seven:

SLIDE: Present, a side street

DORIS enters, carrying newspaper and cardboard with her. She goes into her "house" and begins trying to fortify it with the paper and the cardboard. Her efforts knock the box over, and she tries several different ways to make it stronger and more airtight. She becomes more and more frustrated as the scene continues.

SLIDE: France, 1794. The Fontbonne home.

The SOLDIER from the previous scene with Mother Fontbonne appears, along with another soldier (he's brought help this time!). One of the soldiers bangs on the door.

SOLDIER 1: Citizen Jeanne Fontbonne -- you must come with me.

FONTBONNE opens the door. The second SOLDIER grabs her.

SOLDIER 1: You are accused of having refused to take the civil oath and of giving refuge to rebel priests.

SOLDIER 2 begins to put shackles on her wrists.

FONTBONNE: I will not run from you.

The SOLDIER 2 looks at SOLDIER 1, who gestures that he should leave the shackles on. He leads her away. As they are leaving, DORIS becomes so frustrated with her house that she begins to kick it and screams. Blackout.

Scene Eight:

SLIDE: Present, Sarah's basement

SARAH, JESSICA, CHARLENE, and LYNN are seated, listening to JULIE, who is excitedly telling a story.

JULIE: So I was at the convent in Carondelet -- it's a really cool place -- asking this lady -- *(to CHARLENE)* her name is Charlene too -- Sister Charlene -- about the history of the sisters and stuff. And I told her how we were supposed to write a skit about the history -- and she told me that she had some plays that were written by some Sisters about their history. She gave me a copy of one, from, like, 1945 -- *(she holds out the copy)*. It's called "Carondelet Flowers".

SARAH: Hey, maybe we could just use that!

JULIE: I made a couple of copies -- we could, you know, read through some and see what it's like. *(She hands scripts to everyone.)* This play starts when the Sisters arrive in St. Louis. Okay, I'll read Father Saulnier. Lynn, you read Sister Delphine; Sarah, you read Sister Felicite; Jessica, you read Mr. Napier and Charlene, you read Kahenta.

CHARLENE: Kahenta?

JULIE: She's an Indian woman.

CHARLENE nods. Everyone stands, scripts in hand. There is some confusion as they sort out where they should stand. The SISTERS (LYNN and SARAH) stand together, JULIE stands in the middle, and JESSICA and CHARLENE stand on the other side of Julie.

JULIE: *(reading Stage Directions)* Father Saulnier and the Sisters enter a log cabin. *(As Father Saulnier)* "Well, this is it. Of course it isn't furnished as nicely as the one you left in France, but remember 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'

LYNN: *(as Sister D)* Well, Father, our Sisters have never found poverty to be a barrier to happiness

JULIE: *(as Father S)* Let me tell you, dear Sisters, you will rejoice again and again when you realize the great privilege that is yours in being allowed to suffer your little privations. Embrace your little Sister Poverty as did St. Francis of Assisi and rest assured that God will bless your undertakings. *(JULIE Reads:)* He opens the door. *(Continuing as Father S)* Well, Mr. Napier, did you come to welcome the Sisters?

JULIE stares at JESSICA. CHARLENE nudges JESSICA.

JESSICA: Oh -- that's me. *(As Mr. N)* Bonjour. Welcome to our little settlement.

LYNN & SARAH: *(as sisters)* How do you do, Monsieur Napier. We are very glad to meet you. Thank you for your welcome. And we are very happy to be here.

JESSICA: *(As Mr. N)* I brought some fruit along with me. I thought perhaps you could use it.

JULIE: *(As Father N)* Well, that's wonderful. We might be poor but we're generous. *(She reads)* A knock on door. Enter an Indian woman, Kahenta.

CHARLENE: *(Moving to the Sisters. As Kahenta)* Many moons have we prayed you come teach. Much pleased you with us now. Me bring corn cake, thought maybe you might use.

(JULIE and CHARLENE begin to smile, trying not to laugh. As Sarah reads her line, LYNN and finally JESSICA join in the growing laughter.)

SARAH: *(As Sister F.)* How very kind of you, Kahenta. Indeed it is a wonderful spirit of Christian charity you show. I'm sure God will . . . "*(she stops)* What? Why are you all laughing?

CHARLENE: Wait -- let me read my next line: "Umph! Great Spirit send you to us. Kahenta full of thanks!"

(Everyone, including Sarah, laughs. They all sit and put the scripts down.)

JULIE: Well, I guess that wasn't such a great idea.

SARAH: I didn't think it was that bad.

JESSICA: It was just, you know, not very -- interesting.

LYNN: People just don't talk like that. When we write our skit, we should try to talk, you know, just like regular people.

CHARLENE: You mean I can't say, "Many moons have we waited you come to teach?"

LYNN: Well, if you really want to.

SARAH: But why did the Sisters come to St. Louis anyway. I mean, they were in France, right -- after the war and all that.

LYNN: Oh -- yeah -- I checked on Mother Fontbonne -- you know, about whether she was killed. And here's what happened: she was scheduled to have her head cut off -- and that very morning is when the guy who was in charge of the new government -- Robespierre -- was killed himself! So all the people in the prisons were set free.

CHARLENE: Talk about getting out just in the nick of time!

JESSICA: I bet she was thanking the Big Guy for that!

LYNN: The funny thing is -- she was sort of -- disappointed.

SARAH: What do you mean?

LYNN: Well, she thought that meant she wasn't good enough to be a martyr. She said something like -- "Since I haven't been chosen to be a blessed martyr, God must have more work for me to do here on Earth."

JULIE: So she really wanted to be killed?

LYNN: Well - sort of. I'm not sure. I don't really understand that part.

JULIE: Well, the part that I read about said that Mother Fontbonne reorganized the Sisters of St. Joseph, and the groups of sisters spread around France. Then there was this Countess (*as Julie continues, the COUNTESS appears in spotlight on the other side of the stage. SLIDE shows: France, 1835. Home of Countess de la Rochejaquelin*) -- um -- Countess de la Rochejaquelin -- she was crazy about the Sisters and thought some of them ought to go to America to, you know, help the pioneers and convert the natives and stuff like that.

Lights dim on the basement and come up full on the COUNTESS.

COUNTESS: (*reading letter*) To Monseigneur Rosati, Bishop of St. Louis.
 "Monseigneur: I think you have heard several times of the desire -- I might even say vow -- which I have made to send the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyons in America. Your silence on the subject would prove to me either that the letters have not reached you, or that you are not anxious for such a foundation . . . Protected by Divine Providence in a special manner in all the difficulties and reverses that I have experienced, I promised myself and promised to God that in as far as He will deign to bless this design, to send six Sisters of St. Joseph to North America, for the double purpose of converting the savages, of instructing their children, and instructing the Protestant families with the view of conversion Monseigneur, perhaps you do not know who the Sisters of St. Joseph are? . . . They devote themselves without restriction to all the works of charity . . . The east of France is filled with them and I have sent them in the West: their numbers do not suffice for the demand. . . . I know that you have admirable projects and your country is so vast and so new where there is so much to do. Do you not wish to sow all types of good seed? I beg you, Monseigneur, to answer us as soon as possible. I am anxious to hear your reply, anxious that this work be accomplished. . . . I am taking too much of your time, My Lord, which I know is so precious. Kindly remember me to Madame Henriette de Kersaint, my cousin, Religious of the Sacred Heart, in St. Louis. I ask her prayers and particularly of you."
 Most respectfully, Madame La Contess del la Rochejaquelin

(Lights down on COUNTESS, who exits. Lights back up on the Basement.)

JULIE: And at the same time as the Countess was writing this letter, there was an outbreak of scarlet fever in the St. Louis area, and alot of children were left deaf. So the Bishop wrote and asked if some of the Sisters could come and teach the deaf children -- and so that's why they came over!

LYNN: So the Countess got her wish.

JULIE: Right -- and I think she even sold, like, some of her jewels to pay for the trip for the sisters. (*JULIE hands a piece of paper to Jessica.*) Now here's

the names of the six sisters who came over to America -- and get this -- 2 of them were nieces of Mother St. John Fontbonne.

SARAH: She was still around?

JULIE: Yep. And a priest travelled with the sisters -- and he was Mother Fontbonne's nephew! So there's like this Fontbonne family thing coming over from France.

JESSICA: *(Reading the names. As each is read, **SLIDES** show the names.)* Sister Febronie Fontbonne, Sister Delphine Fontbonne, Sister Felicite Boute, Sister Febronie Chapellon, Sister St. Protaise Deboilee, and Sister Philomene Vilaine.

JULIE: Well -- that's all I've got. And I've gotta run -- doctor's appointment.

CHARLENE: But wait -- I did my research -- found some interesting stuff.

JULIE: Sorry -- can you fill me in on it later?

JULIE leaves.

CHARLENE: Okay.

LYNN: So what did you find?

SARAH: You know, I think we've got enough stuff already -- I mean, this skit is only supposed to be like 5 minutes long.

CHARLENE: But this is really dramatic -- I mean, we can write the skit on this!

JESSICA: What?

CHARLENE: *(getting out her notes)* Okay. See, the Sisters started a school for Colored Children in 1845.

JESSICA: Well -- that sounds -- like segregation -- I mean -- was that good?

CHARLENE: It was 1845! Before the Civil War. Nobody was teaching the colored children. But the Sisters started a school, and they had, like, around 80 students -- but then they got closed down.

LYNN: Why?

CHARLENE: People threatened them -- threatened to, like, burn down the convent and the school. And then, in 1847, Missouri passed a law making it illegal to teach black children!

SARAH, JESSICA and LYNN don't know how to respond.

- LYNN: Well that's, obviously, um, pretty bad.
- JESSICA: *(trying to lighten the conversation)* Boy, those Sisters sure knew how to get people mad at them!
- SARAH: Well, I guess we've got all the research we need -- now we just have to figure out how to write the skit!
- CHARLENE: I'm ready.
- SARAH: Let's wait until tomorrow -- Julie said she could be here tomorrow, right?
- JESSICA: *(checking her schedule)* Yeah. She's free after school till 6.
- SARAH: So let's wait till tomorrow and work it all out then.
- CHARLENE: *(gathering stuff, getting ready to go)* Whatever. Lynn, you need a lift?
- LYNN: No, I'm -- I've got my own car. But thanks!

LYNN and CHARLENE exit.

- SARAH: I should have known we'd get into some kind of "black" thing for this project.
- JESSICA: What do you mean?
- SARAH: Charlene -- I mean, it's all got to be about "her people."
- JESSICA: I don't think that's what she's trying to do. I think it just seems the most important piece of the history for her. I mean, it's where she, you know, connects.
- SARAH: Well I don't connect with any of this. I don't get what we're supposed to be learning from doing a project like this. I wish we could just write a research paper on our own.
- JESSICA: I don't know -- I think it's sort of interesting, you know, trying to work with some new people.
- SARAH: *(shrugging)* Whatever.
- JESSICA: I mean, yeah, a paper would probably be easier. But you know teachers, they gotta make things hard!
- SARAH: And speaking of hard, did you do your chemistry assignment yet?

JESSICA: Not yet.

(Lights out on the basement.)

Scene Nine:

SLIDE: Present, the Park

JULIE enters and sits on the bench. She is obviously upset, although she is trying to stay calm. MARK enters, a little out of breath.

MARK: *(going to Julie)* Hey! I got here as soon as I could. What's up?

JULIE: *(looking at him, speechless)* Hi.

MARK: *(sitting next to her)* What is it? *(JULIE looks down.)* Oh no. *(JULIE looks up at him.)* Did you get rejected by Cal State? *(JULIE is suprised, starts to laugh.)* What? Did you get accepted?

JULIE: No.

MARK: Well, it's okay -- we'll work it out. There's other schools in . . .

JULIE: No -- that's not it. I haven't heard from Cal State.

MARK: Oh. Well, what? I mean, I can't be gone from work very long -- I told the manager it was an emergency -- you said it was something

JULIE: *(overlapping)* I'm pregnant.

MARK: important -- what?

Pause as they look at each other.

JULIE: I'm pregnant.

*MARK stands, looks at Julie, then walks away. Lights dim slightly on them as a SLIDE shows: **The present, a side street.** Lights up on the alley as DORIS enters, dragging a new large box with her. She moves it to her "spot" and begins transferring things from her old box to her new one. LYNN appears, watching her from around the corner, carrying a bag which contains a blanket and some food. DORIS begins to sense that someone's watching her. DORIS stops working and turns to stare at LYNN.*

DORIS: *(A challenge)* What?

LYNN: *(stepping out of the shadows)* What?

DORIS: What do you want?

LYNN: I -- umm -- I don't want anything.

DORIS: Here to laugh at the funny lady living in a box?

LYNN: No! I mean, I was hoping -- I could help you? *(She holds out the bag to Doris.)*

DORIS: Yeah, right. *(She stares at Lynn, then grabs the bag and begins to go through it, eating some of the food as she goes.)*

LIGHTS come back up on the Park area and continue to stay up on the Alley. From this point on, both scenes continue in natural time (the actors do not "freeze" while waiting for their next line -- they play the tension of the moment).

JULIE: Say something.

MARK: Like what?

JULIE: *(crossing to him)* Like what you're thinking.

MARK: I'm just -- suprised! I mean, I thought we were careful.

JULIE: Mostly.

MARK: I guess mostly careful didn't cut it. *(Pause.)* Are you sure? I mean, maybe you're just a little late?

JULIE: I just came from the doctor.

MARK: Oh.

JULIE: Mark?

MARK: Yeah?

JULIE: I'm scared. I'm really scared!

MARK holds JULIE.

LYNN: Can I ask you something?

DORIS: It's a free country. Ha! *(She laughs at her own joke.)*

LYNN: How did you -- I mean -- what happened?

DORIS: *(stops working and stares at Lynn)* How old are you?

LYNN: 18.

DORIS: Uh huh. Rich?

LYNN: Well, no, I don't think

DORIS: Got your own car?

LYNN: Yeah.

DORIS: Do you have a job?

LYNN: No, I -- just go to school.

DORIS: *(nodding)* So you want my sad story, huh? What is this, a class project? Gonna go back and tell my tale to all your rich classmates? Have a good laugh at the scum that live on the street?

LYNN: No! I really just want to know. I want to help.

DORIS: I bet. *(She stares at LYNN for a minute, then decides.)* Okay. So you're in school.

LYNN: Yeah.

DORIS: Good. Stay there. Get that damn piece of paper that's so important. I quit. School. Thought I could just work, make my own way. Ha!

Pause.

MARK: Okay, listen. Let's just sit down and talk this out. We'll get it all figured out. Don't panic.

MARK and JULIE move to the park bench and sit.

DORIS: Got married -- we had some nice -- moments. Ran up the credit cards -- had some fun. 'Course when it came time to pay the bills -- well -- we couldn't.

LYNN: But you were working, right?

DORIS: Yeah. Factory job. Noon till midnight. Push the red button. Move the material. Turn it over. Push the green button. Push it down the belt. Repeat. Repeat.

MARK: Okay. Now it seems like we've got a few choices. First, which doctor did you go see?

JULIE: It was at a clinic.

MARK: Good -- so nobody else knows, right?

JULIE: *(a bit puzzled)* Right.

MARK: Okay. So what we have to decide is -- do you want me to find a private doctor, or do you want to go back to that clinic?

JULIE: What are you talking about?

MARK: You know -- *(he looks at her)* You weren't honestly -- thinking of keeping it, were you?

JULIE: *(stands and moves away)* Oh my

DORIS: Then they laid a bunch of us off. Times were -- rough. And, you know, he was frustrated. *(Pause)* And I got tired of him taking it out on me. So I left. Thought I might be safer -- here.

LYNN: But . . . don't you have, some family -- or . . .

MARK: I mean, what would we tell our families? My Mom -- your Dad will what were you thinking?

JULIE: This is our family -- now. How could you . . .

DORIS: *(quietly)* Yeah. I have family. But -- they don't have me. They won't have me.

LYNN: Why?

DORIS: Long story. You don't need to know.

LYNN: But why live on the streets -- I mean, aren't there, you know, some options?

DORIS: Oh sure, there's options. There's 3 really nice shelters. They're full. And the ones I can get into -- it's not worth the trouble. People take your stuff.

MARK: Look, I know how you must feel, but

JULIE: No you don't! You don't seem to have any idea what I'm feeling. I realize that this doesn't fit in your grand scheme, but we have to figure out what to do about this baby.

MARK: That's exactly what I'm trying to do. But what do you think our options are? Getting married now?

JULIE: Why not? Weren't we going to?

MARK: Of course -- but later. I mean, how can I go to school and support a wife and baby?

JULIE: Well I'm sorry to be causing you such a huge problem. Maybe you should just go on with your life and I'll take care of this myself.

LYNN: I thought those places were, you know, safe.

MARK: No -- Julie -- it's just -- I don't think you've thought this all the way through. It's not really a baby yet. And we can have more -- later -- when we can afford it. What kind of life do you think we could give a baby right now?

DORIS: Sure. Of course they're safe. All of us homeless people could live peacefully together in our nice roomy shelters if we just wanted to. What a pretty kind of life you must lead. *(She shakes her head and goes back to working on her box.)*

JULIE: I don't know. I don't know.

MARK: *(crossing to her)* Listen. Please. I love you. I do. I want us to be together. But we can't have a baby right now. It would ruin us.

LYNN: I'm sorry. I can't help the way I live.

DORIS: *(looking at her)* Yeah? Well, me neither.

LYNN: But there's got to be something. Can't you get another job?

JULIE: I could get a job.

MARK: And who would watch the baby? And what about your education?

DORIS: Think about it! When you fill out those little job applications, what's the first thing you have to write? Name -- Address!! Phone number!! You don't fill those in, they don't even look at you.

JULIE: I don't know.

MARK: Listen, we don't have to decide right this second.

LYNN: Well, can't you find a temporary place -- you know

DORIS: Have you been listening? Do you think I would be here if I could find a temporary place?

JULIE: I guess not.

LYNN: So what would help?

DORIS: A bunch of money wouldn't hurt. Got a few hundred to spare?

LYNN and DORIS stare at each other. JULIE and MARK stare at each other.

MARK: Let's just, sleep on it. Okay?

LYNN: Maybe.

JULIE: I guess.

DORIS: Maybe what?

LYNN: Maybe I have some money.

MARK: Come on. I'll call in to work and tell them I can't come back. Let's go get something to eat.

MARK and JULIE exit.

LYNN: If I brought you some money, what would you

DORIS: Spend it on drugs, of course. What do you think?

LYNN: I don't know.

DORIS: Look. I don't do drugs, as hard as you may find that to believe. I've got enough trouble trying to scrounge some food. You get me some money, and I can rent some dive for a month, try to get a job.

LYNN: Okay.

DORIS: Okay what?

LYNN: I'll bring you some money.

DORIS: Yeah? Well, I won't hold my breath.

LYNN: Tomorrow night. I'll be back tomorrow night.

DORIS: Uh huh. Well I'll be here.

LYNN looks at Doris, then leaves. DORIS watches her go, shaking her head. She picks up one of her nearly empty bags and leaves.

Scene 10

SLIDE: 1845, ST. LOUIS, St. Joseph's School for the Colored

MOTHER ST. JOHN FOURNIER and SISTER ANTOINETTE KINCAID move a blackboard into place. SISTER A begins to sweep, while MOTHER F wipes the board.

SISTER K: The children did so well with their sums today.

MOTHER F: They seem to enjoy learning. You do well with them.

SISTER K: Thank-you, Mother St. John. When you lead them in singing, their faces light up.

MOTHER F: Now if we could just convince Susan to sing a little closer to the right key!

They both smile. RUTH (a middle-aged black woman) enters, out of breath.

RUTH: Sisters! Quick -- you got to leave!

MOTHER F: Ruth, calm yourself. What is the problem?

RUTH: I heard some folks talking at the store. Saying they gonna come here and burn the place down!

SISTER K drops to her knees and begins praying with her rosary. MOTHER F goes to Ruth.

MOTHER F: Don't be alarmed. They've been threatening us since we began this school. People talk loudly when something frightens them.

RUTH: They mean it -- they really do. This ain't just talk.

MOTHER F: Thank you for your concern. We will be fine.

RUTH: But Sister, you're in . . .

MOTHER F: You go home now, and say a prayer for our safety. The Blessed Virgin will protect us!

RUTH leaves. SISTER K rises and walks over to MOTHER F.

- SISTER K: I don't understand these people, Mother. The natives and the blacks are treated so differently.
- MOTHER F: They have forgotten their own revolution, Sister Antoinette. But we will not forget ours.
- SISTER K: Do you think they will burn down the school?
- MOTHER F: They may. Only God knows. We must trust His plan. Come, it's getting late. We must prepare the evening meal.

They exit.

Scene 11

SLIDE: THE PRESENT, a side street

DORIS enters with a full bag. She sits in the "door" of her box and begins going through her findings. She eats some pieces from the bottom of a box of cookies. She pulls a tattered doll from the bag, considers tossing it away, and then looks at it more closely. She holds the doll close and begins to rock it.

- DORIS: *(singing softly, with some irony)* Hush little baby, don't say a word.
 Momma's gonna buy you a mocking bird. If that mocking bird don't sing,
 Momma's gonna buy you a diamond ring. If that diamond ring turns brass,
 Momma's gonna buy you a looking glass . . .

DORIS stops, hearing something. She quickly tosses her things into the box and runs off just as a MAN enters. He has the appearance of a homeless person, but is actually a con artist and thief. The MAN walks over to the box.

- MAN: Doris, are you home? Got any goodies for your friend?

HE pokes through her belonging, grabbing a few boxes of food, and tossing the rest of her things out of the box. HE leaves. After a few seconds, DORIS returns. She sees the mess and begins putting her things back into the box. When she is done, she climbs inside the box, covers herself with a blanket, and rests.

SLIDE: THE PRESENT, Sarah's Basement

The 5 girls enter and get ready to work.

- SARAH: Okay. We present this tomorrow, so we've got alot of work to do! Now I think we should focus on the story of Mother Fontbonne and her going to jail. It's the most dramatic part.

CHARLENE: I think we should focus on the School for the Colored Children. Now that was a radical thing for the Sisters to do -- and it will be more interesting to the students in the class than watching some nuns in jail.

JESSICA: Sisters.

CHARLENE: Whatever.

SARAH: *(To Julie)* What do you think?

JULIE: What?

SARAH: Hello! About what we should focus the skit on.

JULIE: I don't care.

JESSICA: Wait -- I've got an idea. Why don't we do both? *(SARAH and CHARLENE look at her skeptically.)* We could call it, "Moments of Choice" -- and do this, like, split-stage thing, where Mother Fontbonne is in jail is on one side, and the School for the Colored Children is on the other side, and both are illustrating important Moments of Choice for the Sisters of St. Joseph.

LYNN: Yeah! I like it.

SARAH: But won't it be confusing? I mean, will they be able to understand two different stories going on at the same time?

JESSICA: If we do it right, they will.

CHARLENE: Sounds okay to me.

JESSICA: Sarah?

SARAH: Okay. But I still think it's going to be confusing.

JESSICA: We'll make sure it isn't.

LYNN: And this will be good because it shows them working with two different kinds of issues -- you know, showing how they tried to help in a lot of different ways.

JESSICA: Yeah. We should -- hey, Lynn -- did you ever go back and see that homeless lady you were talking about?

LYNN: Umm, yeah.

SARAH: I don't believe you did that. You could have gotten mugged or something.

CHARLENE: What did you do?

LYNN: I just took her, you know, some food. And a blanket.

JESSICA: Were you scared?

LYNN: Sort of. But when she got talking, it turns out she's just -- you know, a regular person.

SARAH: Who happens to live on the street.

LYNN: But it's not really her fault. I mean, she had some bad things happen.

CHARLENE: Stuff happens. So did your little visit change her world?

LYNN: What do you mean?

CHARLENE: Did you solve all her problems? I mean, you're the one who was talking about how one person can make a difference. Did you?

LYNN: Not yet, but maybe . . .

CHARLENE: Maybe what? What are you going to do?

JESSICA: Are you going to see her again?

LYNN: Yeah. I'm going back tonight.

SARAH: Why?

LYNN: I'm going to -- give her some money.

CHARLENE: Oh man -- she's really got you going.

SARAH: She's scamming you. She's probably not even poor. I've heard that some people just put on this act and get money, and then they go home to their big houses and fancy cars.

LYNN: I don't think she's faking this.

JESSICA: I think it's great that you're trying to help, Lynn, but I think they're right. I mean, you don't really know anything about her. How do you know she'll do something useful with the money?

LYNN: Maybe I don't care what she does with it.

SARAH: *(looking at Julie)* Julie -- are you okay? You've been like, a zombie all afternoon.

JULIE: Yeah. Sure. *(She looks away.)*

The other girls look at Julie.

CHARLENE: Come on. What's bugging you?

JULIE nods her head "No".

JESSICA: Look -- if she doesn't want to talk about it, maybe we should just --

JULIE begins to cry. LYNN goes to comfort her. JULIE whispers in her ear. LYNN looks at her, then around to the group. LYNN puts her hand on her stomach, indicating to the group that Julie is pregnant. The girls react.

CHARLENE: Oh, Julie. I'm so sorry.

JESSICA: Wow.

LYNN: *(To Julie)* It's okay. What can we . . . what are you going to do?

JULIE: I don't know.

SARAH: What do you mean, what is she going to do?

CHARLENE: Well there are -- options -- you know.

SARAH: Are you talking about abortion?

JESSICA: It's an option, Sarah. It doesn't hurt to talk about it.

SARAH: I can't believe you would even consider it.

LYNN: What are you thinking, Julie?

JULIE: Don't know. Mark thinks I should -- you know -- and I guess he's probably right. I mean, we can't afford this right now. And my Dad will kick me out of the house if he finds out.

JESSICA: Mine would too.

SARAH: But it's wrong! How can you just talk about it like, like you're going to the store for a loaf of bread or something.

JESSICA: It's her choice -- it's her body. I mean, I wouldn't do it, but that doesn't mean it's wrong for somebody else to do it.

SARAH: Either it's right or it's wrong. How can it be right for one person but wrong for another?

JESSICA: Different circumstances.

CHARLENE: It's her life, not yours.

LYNN: But it's more than just her life.

SARAH: I can't believe you guys. I don't want to discuss this any more. Let's either get on with writing this skit or end this meeting.

Pause.

JULIE: Sarah's right. Let's just get this written. Whatever I do, it's my problem, and I'll figure it out.

LYNN: Are you sure you want to -- I mean, we could maybe get an extension on this assignment -- we could tell Mrs. Pratt that you're sick.

JULIE: *(shaking her head)* No. I'm fine. Really. I'll work it out with Mark. It's my own stupid fault -- no reason you guys should get a bad grade because of me.

SARAH, anxious to get through this emotional moment, looks around as she tries to reconvene the group and get them focused on the "project".

SARAH: Okay. *(She makes eye contact with Jessica and perhaps a few others.)* So -- we need two people to play Sisters in 1794 and two people to play Sisters in 1845.

JESSICA: *(looking at her notes)* Right. So, 1794 -- who will play Mother Fontbonne?

Pause. Nobody volunteers.

JULIE: *(trying to lighten the mood)* Well I'm obviously the top choice to play a nun.

JESSICA: Sister.

JULIE: Whatever.

Everyone smiles.

CHARLENE: I'll do it.

JESSICA: Okay. Julie -- seriously, you can play the other Sister -- I mean, she won't have very many lines -- and we're all pretty much going to play Sisters.

JULIE: Okay.

SARAH: Wait a minute. Charlene can't play Mother Fontbonne.

LYNN: Why not?

SARAH: Well -- she wasn't -- I mean -- she was white!

CHARLENE: I can act white!

SARAH: What?

JESSICA: Wait -- I don't think it really matters for this -- I mean -- everyone will know that Mother Fontbonne the historical person was white. But Charlene can say her lines as well as any one of us could.

LYNN: Yeah -- It's what's on the inside of a character that counts -- not what she looks like.

JESSICA and LYNN look at Sarah.

SARAH: Well, okay, if that's what you guys want to do. But I still think it will look weird.

JESSICA: Okay. And then we need two people to be the Sisters in 1845, and then a narrator

Lights down.

Scene 12

SLIDE: ***THE PRESENT, a side street***

Later that night -- the side street is dimly lit by streetlights. We may see headlights from occasional passing cars. LYNN enters and walks over by Doris's box. She looks around.

LYNN: Doris?

DORIS jumps and scrambles out of the box.

DORIS: Oh. It's you.

LYNN: Sorry. Were you asleep?

DORIS: Doesn't matter. Too late to be sleeping anyway.

LYNN: What do you mean, too late?

DORIS: Can't sleep at night -- too dangerous. Got to be moving around. Besides, you find the best stuff at night. *(Lynn looks confused.)* Trash. Sometimes those office buildings throw out boxes of donuts, leftover sandwiches from meetings.

LYNN: Oh. Okay. I -- um, brought you that money.

DORIS: *(suspiciously)* Yeah?

LYNN: *(pulling an envelope out of her pocket)* I hope it helps.

DORIS: Couldn't hurt.

LYNN holds out the envelope. DORIS reaches for it, pauses, then takes it. She turns and quickly counts the money. From the side, the MAN (previously seen in Scene 11) emerges from the shadows, where he has been watching the transaction.

MAN: Evening, ladies.

LYNN turns to face him. DORIS stiffens and hides behind Lynn. She stuffs the envelope into a pocket. The MAN walks closer to them.

MAN: Give me the envelope, Doris.

LYNN: Go away!

MAN: *(pulling a knife out of his pocket and exposing the blade. He advances with the knife, backing Lynn and Doris up against a wall.)* Give me the Goddam envelope.

DORIS hands it to him. He opens it and smiles at the amount of money inside.

LYNN: No!

She grabs the envelope and he grabs her, putting the knife to her throat. She drops the envelope. He steps on it, dragging her with him. He slowly turns her so she's facing him.

MAN: Got anything else to say?

He smiles. LYNN knees him in the groin. As he steps back, in pain, two things happen simultaneously. DORIS grabs the envelope and runs away, and JESSICA and CHARLENE come running down the theatre aisles (or from side entrances), screaming.

JESSICA/CHARLENE: Get away from her! Call 911. Hey, guys, over here. Help! (*ad lib as appropriate*)

*The MAN is startled and runs away (in the opposite direction from where Doris ran.)
JESSICA and CHARLENE run to Lynn.*

CHARLENE: You okay?

JESSICA: Did he hurt you?

LYNN: (*catching her breath*) I'm okay. I'm okay. (*Pause, looking around*)
Where did Doris go?

JESSICA: I don't know. All I saw was you and that guy. Let's get out of here.

LYNN: Wait -- Why are you guys here?

CHARLENE: I had a feeling you'd be getting yourself into trouble.

JESSICA: Charlene called me a little while ago. Asked me to come on a little adventure.

LYNN: Thanks.

CHARLENE: You sure you're okay?

LYNN: Yeah. I just feel, sort of -- stupid.

JESSICA: Why?

LYNN: You know, thinking I was Wonder Woman or something. (*to Charlene*)
You were right. One person can't change anything.

CHARLENE: Now wait. You just did this really nice thing for that lady. Just because there's some jerk doesn't mean what you did was wrong. I mean, there's always gonna be jerks.

LYNN: Yeah, but Doris is gone. And who knows what she'll do with that money. I was hoping I could, you know, help her find a place, make sure she was moving in the right direction.

JESSICA: You gave her some help. Maybe she'll be better for it -- maybe not. But at least you gave it a shot.

LYNN: I guess.

CHARLENE: It's alot more than I'd ever do.

LYNN: You came here. You helped me.

CHARLENE: Yeah.

LYNN: *(smiling)* Yeah.

CHARLENE: *(in agreement)* Yeah.

JESSICA: Come on -- let's go. Come over to my house?

LYNN: Okay.

They exit.

Scene 13

SLIDE: THE PRESENT, High School class

Mrs. Pratt, the High School history teacher, pushes on a blackboard and writes a history assignment on it (something like "Chapter 12 due on Friday"). She turns and talks to the class (the audience).

MRS. PRATT: Okay. Just a reminder about your next reading assignment. Now. We have time for one more "history skit" today -- and *(she looks offstage)* are you girls almost ready?

SARAH'S VOICE: We're ready.

MRS. PRATT: Great. Well, class, here is our skit about the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

Mrs. Pratt sits in the audience as the girls enter. They carry poster-board signs, veils, and index cards on which they have written their lines. Jessica carries a boom box, and starts some baroque music as they line up to begin their skit.

LYNN: The Sisters of St. Joseph started as a secret society in 1648 in Le Puy, France. They were unique in that they were religious women who worked in the community.

JESSICA: After proving that they could maintain their vows while working among the people, the church named them the Sisters of St. Joseph.

CHARLENE: They continued their work through the 17th and 18th centuries, helping the poor and the sick, doing a variety of charitable works.

SARAH: The congregation continued to grow until the time of the French Revolution, when the Sisters refused to honor the new government, which had broken ties with the Pope.

CHARLENE and JULIE move out of line and put on two veils. During Lynn's next lines, they move to a spot on one side of the stage and kneel.

LYNN: Mother St. John Fontbonne and other sisters were arrested and sentenced to the guillotine. We imagine what it might have been like for them on the morning before their scheduled execution.

*SARAH holds up a sign reading: **A Prison in France, 1794.** JESSICA fades out the baroque music and puts in a tape for the next sound cue.*

JULIE: *(As the Sister)* Mother St. John, are you cold?

CHARLENE: *(As Mother)* No, Sister, I am well.

JULIE: *(As Sister)* How can you stay so calm, in the face of . . .

CHARLENE: *(As Mother)* I count it a privilege to be chosen for the blessing of martyrdom. God will welcome us with great rejoicing.

JESSICA starts the next sound cue: shouts of "We're free!" "Robespierre has fallen!", etc. (NOTE: the girls have recorded all these "sound cues" on tapes – they should sound appropriately amateurish.)

CHARLENE: *(As Mother)* What is that shouting?

LYNN: Just before they were scheduled to go to the guillotine, Robespierre, the head of the new French government, was killed -- and all the prisoners were set free!

JESSICA: *(as a jailor, opening the door)* All the prisoners may go free! Robespierre has fallen!

JULIE: *(as Sister)* Praise be to God! Mother St. John, let us leave this place.

CHARLENE: *(as Mother, rising slowly)* Yes, Sister.

JULIE: *(as Sister)* You seem troubled, Mother St. John.

CHARLENE: *(as Mother)* I was not worthy to be chosen as a martyr. God must have further work for me here.

CHARLENE and JULIE return to the "line" and take off their veils, handing them to SARAH and JESSICA. JULIE moves to the tape player, turning it off and putting in the next tape.

LYNN: Mother St. John Fontbonne reorganized the Sisters of St. Joseph, and many years later sent six Sisters of St. Joseph -- two of which were her nieces -- and her nephew, a priest, to St. Louis. In addition to founding a school for deaf children, the Sisters opened a school in 1845 for colored children -- the first school of its kind in the area.

CHARLENE holds up a sign that reads: 1845, St. Louis: St. Joseph's School for the Colored.

SARAH: *(as Mother St. Fournier)* How goes the teaching, Sister?

JESSICA: *(as Sister Kincaid)* Very well, Mother St. John. I am preparing lessons for tomorrow.

LYNN: But angry mobs were gathering outside the convent.

JULIE starts the tape, which has mob voices on it: "Don't teach the colored children." "Stop the Sisters' work with coloreds." "They don't need to know reading and writing." etc.

JESSICA: *(as Sister)* Mother St. John, what will we do?

SARAH: *(as Mother)* The blessed Virgin will protect us. Let us not fear. We are doing the Lord's work.

LYNN: But the crowd's anger increased.

JULIE turns up the tape, which adds the following chant: "Let's burn them out!" "That'll stop 'em." "Burn the convent!" "Burn the convent!"

LYNN: At the height of the anger, the police arrived and broke up the crowd.

CHARLENE: *(as a police officer)* Break it up, everybody go back to their homes.

JULIE turns off the tape.

LYNN: And the Sisters were unharmed. They were, however, forced to close the school on the following day, and were unable to teach African-American children until after the Civil War. The Sisters of St. Joseph continued establishing schools and colleges around the United States, and continued to send more Sisters to other places in America and around the world. Today, the 9500 Sisters of St. Joseph in the United States form part of a world-wide body of twenty thousand Sisters of St. Joseph in every continent around the world.

JESSICA gives one veil back to CHARLENE. CHARLENE kneels and JULIE holds the "France" sign over her head. SARAH kneels and JESSICA holds the "St. Louis" sign over her head.

LYNN: In moments of choice, the Sisters of St. Joseph remained true to their beliefs. In spite of threats of death, they remained faithful to God and to the people they served.

ALL: In our own moments of choice, we hope to be as courageous as these women were.

They hold the final pose. MRS. PRATT realizes that it's over and stands.

MRS. PRATT: Excellent! *(turning to the audience)* Please give your classmates a round of applause.

As the applause ends, Mrs. Pratt walks toward the chalkboard. The bell rings, signalling the end of class.

MRS. PRATT: Class dismissed. See you all tomorrow.

MRS. PRATT exits. JULIE smiles at everyone, squeezes LYNN's hand, then leaves.

JESSICA: Did she say anything?

LYNN: No. She did a good job in the skit, you know, considering.

SARAH: Yeah, she did.

CHARLENE: *(to Lynn)* How are you doing today? Any bruises?

LYNN: No, I'm okay.

SARAH: Bruises?

CHARLENE: Yeah. We all had quite an adventure last night.

SARAH: We? *(She looks questioningly at Jessica.)*

JESSICA: Yeah. We, uh, got together last night and decided to work on helping the homeless here in St. Louis.

SARAH: Oh really?

JESSICA: We're volunteering at a soup kitchen tonight. Want to come with?

SARAH: A soup kitchen. What does that mean?

LYNN: It's a place that gives meals to people who need them.

SARAH: You mean I'd be, like, a waitress?

CHARLENE: No -- you'd be, like, a dishwasher, or a cook. This is cafeteria style, not like a restaurant.

JESSICA: We're all going.

SARAH: Is it dangerous?

CHARLENE: Lynn will protect us. She knows some fancy moves.

JESSICA: Sometimes you gotta take some risks, Sarah.

SARAH: Well -- maybe I could. When are you going?

JESSICA: We're leaving at 4. Meet me at my house and we'll all ride in together.

CHARLENE: Got to get to class. See you later.

LYNN: Me too. Bye!

JESSICA: *(to Sarah)* What do you say?

SARAH: *(softly)* Okay. *(more in charge)* But I'm not sweeping any floors. I'll wash some dishes or cook, but no sweeping.

JESSICA: *(as they exit)* Okay, Sarah. I'll sweep.

Lights dim.

Scene 14

SLIDE: ***THE PRESENT, a park.***

MARK enters and sits on the bench, tapping his foot nervously. JULIE enters. MARK stands, and they awkwardly come together, briefly hugging.

MARK: How are you feeling?

JULIE: A little shaky.

MARK: Let's sit. *(They do.)* I have, uh, some names of doctors, and places where we can go.

JULIE: I have a different idea.

MARK: What?

JULIE: I talked to someone last night -- about adoption.

MARK: Adoption?

JULIE: Yeah! It's sad, but in a way, we're lucky -- that we're white. I mean, there's thousands of couples trying to find white babies to adopt. We could even pick the adoptive parents.

MARK: What are you talking about?

JULIE: I'm talking about doing what's best for this baby. You don't want it, right?

MARK: Well, I wouldn't put it that way, exactly.

JULIE: Well what way would you put it? You're right. We can't afford the baby - - it messes up all your plans.

MARK: All our plans.

JULIE: Okay. Then let's give the baby to some couple that really wants it. Some couple that can love it and give it everything it needs.

MARK: You mean you'd go through -- the whole pregnancy -- I mean, everybody would know.

JULIE: Yeah. It's called taking responsibility for your actions.

MARK: But why go through all that -- hassle? I mean -- the other option is so much easier.

JULIE: Of course it is. But does that mean it's the right thing to do?

MARK: I -- don't know.

JULIE: *(after a pause)* I've decided to do this.

MARK: I see.

JULIE: You can decide whether you're with me -- or not.

MARK walks away. JULIE looks at the ground.

MARK: I need to think. This is not how I -- I just don't know.

MARK exits.

As JULIE sits, music begins: (Group: 4 Him, Song: "When it Comes to Livin'"). Behind her and around her, the following characters appear and take a position in tableau around the stage: SISTER MARGUERITE (1648), RUTH (1845), SOLDIER (1794), MOTHER FOURNIER (1845), DORIS, MOTHER FONTBONNE (1791), FATHER MEDAILLE, and SISTER ANTOINETTE (1648). When they are all in place, JULIE stands, and turning, looks at each of them. When she has come full circle, the group moves until they are all standing in a circle around Julie. They invite Julie to join the circle. She does, and they begin to walk slowly around to the right as the lights fade. (The song should be through the first verse and chorus by this time.)

(MUSIC LYRICS: There's only one thing that matters in life, is spite of the way it might seem. It's not when you're born, it's not when you die, but what you have done in between. So don't spend your time in a useless parade of momentary matters, when we can change what forever remains. CHORUS – When it comes to living, we've only got one life. When it comes to dying, it's just a matter of time. But everybody's got a choice to make, for we all can make a difference in life. Are you gonna take a stand for what's right when it comes your time?)